

**INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS – SPREADING INFORMATION WITHIN THE EMB SYSTEM – COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER STATE BODIES AND STAKEHOLDERS**

Greetings from St. Louis, Missouri USA! I hope you enjoy the picture of my great city and our beautiful Gateway Arch on the Mississippi river as my Zoom background. It is wonderful to see so many friends from around the world live on my computer screen. It would have been so much better to see all of you in Tbilisi, one of my favorite cities, and be enjoying the amazing Georgian hospitality, and especially the wine and kincali. But this pandemic has of coursed changed all that, as it has changed the course of history and democracy.



Before I begin my presentation, I want to take a moment to honor Istvan Zuffa, who died earlier this year and was just named an honorary member of ACEEEO posthumously by the General Assembly on Tuesday. I met Istvan at my first ACEEEO meeting in 1995, and many more after that. He was very instrumental in its success through his many years of involvement. In 2000, I was honored to host Istvan and former Secretary General Zoltan Toth at my home in St. Louis as they observed the contentious 2000 presidential election. I urge all of you to read the In-Memoriam of Dr. Zuffa that can be found on the last page of the new Elections in Europe publication to find out more about this great man.

We are all dealing with this pandemic in our personal and professional lives, and perhaps for most of us it is the most challenging event of our lives. Since earlier this year I have participated in several U.S. and global webinars—including the excellent webinars of ACEEEO—that have focused on providing ideas and best practices on how election officials can conduct elections during these trying times. Indeed, this is not the first pandemic in the world, and there has certainly been elections conducted during the time of war, civil strife, bad weather and other pandemics. However, this pandemic is truly global and has affected the lives of everyone on the planet.

I probably do not need to remind you that the United States in the epicenter of the pandemic and also in the middle of a fiercely competitive and perhaps unprecedented presidential election. Election officials and the voting process are under unprecedented attack. Voting methods are being questioned and it could well be that the results may not be known for some time after November 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is likely that there may be a large segment of the population who may not believe or trust the results. I know my good friend Tom Hicks will likely talk more about this in the next session.

As the honorable chair of this conference indicated in her remarks, “this Pandemic has caused election officials to become creative and flexible”. What have I have seen is that election officials have stepped up to address this crisis in such a way that elections can have continuity to allow democracy to prevail. In previous ACEEEO webinars and in other sessions we have and we will learn from real life examples of how elections have been conducted this year.

All of this points to the important need for constant communication between the EMBs at all levels and with all the stakeholders involved in their election. While this is true for EMBs that are in the middle of conducting an election, it is also true for those who will have elections next year, because voters and policy makers can see what is going on in other democracies.

If there is one good thing that is coming from this pandemic, it is that stakeholders—and especially voters—are paying attention to the electoral process like never before.

So, like the other 28 ACEEEO conferences that came before, the theme of this conference is timely and helpful. My focus for the next few minutes is within the topic of communicating with other state bodies and stakeholders. We have heard excellent information on communicating with voters and the public, but intra communication is equally important.

Whether the election management body structure is central and top down, as in most countries, or decentralized as in the USA, communicating needs and information is crucial for elections to be successful. EMBs in all democracies depend on other state bodies to succeed. That can include using public buildings for polling sites, civil servants for poll workers or other assistance, government agencies for internet access and cybersecurity or to provide protection, and of course to obtain the necessary funds to conduct an election. With a pandemic going on, this communication is more vital than ever. Each country is providing a directive to its citizens—most often at the advice of an internal or global health agency—on what citizens can or cannot do during the time of the pandemic. Of course, this affects the work of the EMB in many ways, including how employees of the EMB do their work and how voters can cast their ballots.

When EMBs and the voting process are under attack from various political actors and social media, democracy is also under attack. Social media is certainly one method EMBs can use to communicate broadly to get out your message and counter false information, but social media does not really lend itself to communicating internally with your regional and local election bodies and other state bodies whose help you need to succeed. You cannot tweet, send a TikToc or Facebook shame a staff member or public agency you work with to get something done or earn their respect.

As other speakers have noted, technology has helped in methods of communication. Citizens in most countries can go online at any time and get an update of the state of the coronavirus in their country and locality. Technology can also help with intra communications.

I would like to give some examples and recommendations of techniques and best practices I have learned in recent months on how election officials are communicating internally during this crisis.

1. **Daily internal communication with staff.** Do not assume staff reads EMB social media updates, twitter feeds or Facebook posts. Ensure that your staff is informed and aware of what is being said publicly. Designate a competent staff member to focus on internal and intra communications. If your staff is working from home, video conferencing is important. An email or text is one thing, but like this conference, engaging visually can communicate concepts that often get lost using impersonal methods. Remember that communication is a two-way street, so feedback is important.
2. **Have daily communication with the government health department** or official that gives daily coronavirus updates. Their advice and directives affect your staff and the staff of other state actors as well as stakeholders. In short, it affects everything you do.
3. **Frequent communication with other state actors who assist you with elections.** EMB coordination with state agencies is crucial to success. As an example, in the USA, because there has been a tremendous move towards voting by mail, where perhaps 50% or more might use that method in November, the U.S. post office has come under intense scrutiny. Election officials are now in near daily contact with the post office and how it is going to handle election mail.
4. **Use all technology available to communicate.** In the USA, most of our poll workers are over 60 years old, a very vulnerable group. Some election officials have taken to text messaging to communicate with their poll workers. One election jurisdiction sent a phone text survey in April to poll workers asking if they would work in future elections. The response was quick and overwhelming. They found out within hours that over 70% indicated they would not work again until a vaccine was available. Sending a postcard or calling them would have taken weeks to obtain the same information. Of course, this shortage of poll workers has caused a major crisis and as a result most U.S. election officials have significantly cut back on the number of polling sites.
5. **Do not forget your vendors.** If using vendors to supply equipment, ballots or other items needed to administer an election, communicate your needs early and stay in touch. Remember that they have been affected too, and that supply chains, staffing and other aspects of business could impact they support they provide. Vendors are also creative and responsive, and can also have easier access to experts, personal protective equipment, and methods that can help you do your job better during times of crisis. Ask how they can help you.

- 6. Be informative and transparent.** With so much disinformation being spread, it's important that your staff and those you are working with to conduct the election are giving out correct and transparent information, especially when seeds of doubt are planted by fake news and bad actors.



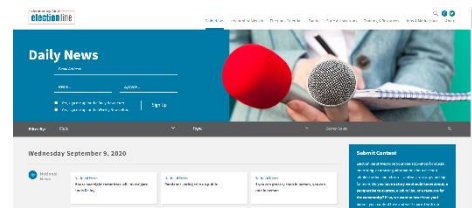
These are just a few of the recommendations that I thought I could pass on today. There are plenty of good ideas and best practices out there that are worthy of your consideration and review. Of course, I would start with reading the latest Elections in Europe edition issued by ACEEEO just yesterday. I had a chance to read it yesterday and it is a wealth of excellent information.



In the United States, where the spread of misinformation, fake news and doubt about the election process is now a daily occurrence, many private organizations are providing election officials with support. Sports teams are offering their stadiums for large polling sites so that there does not have to be crowding of voters. Starbucks and other businesses are encouraging their workers to be poll workers, and many are giving them paid time off to do so. Just last week Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and his wife donated \$300 million dollars to be send as grants to local U.S. election officials to spend on improving election administration. Of course, some folks are skeptical of such support from private

organizations, believing that everyone has an agenda.

If you want to follow what is going on daily in the USA in election administration and find good links to best practices, go to [www.electionline.org](http://www.electionline.org) and explore their offerings.



Finally, I want to thank all of you for your efforts to serve your voters during these difficult times, and especially to our host the Georgians, who were willing to conduct a meeting of this organization while preparing for an election next month. I look forward to another trip to Tbilisi someday and an in-person ACEEEO so that I can greet all of you in person.