

In responding to this prompt, I believe I have immense experience. During the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, my mom, the town clerk at the Town of West Bend, had a lot on her plate. She was forced into a brand-new situation where she could not deal with the general public quite as easily as she did before, and elections, already a big to-do, became an almost insurmountable peak.

So, she enlisted me, a junior at West Bend East, who was glad at the time to have two weeks off of school. There wasn't much for me to do, since I couldn't hang out with my friends and my workload at school became increasingly small. I was stuck at home all day with very few things to occupy me.

So, I began volunteering at the Town of West Bend most days of the week. I helped with stuffing absentee voting envelopes and doing other miscellaneous clerical things. It was a big time commitment as I spent hours at the Town that spring. To put it simply, this experience was beyond chaotic. There were more absentee voters than ever before. There were more emails and phone calls than ever - and not even close to enough fingers to type responses and dial the numbers.

As school got pushed back further and further, I continued helping my mom at the Town of West Bend and really learned what local governments need in times of crisis and disaster: just more people who are actually willing to *help*.

When this crisis hit, it just became more and more apparent how few back-ups we *all* have in general and not just in that of local government. Also, in the majority of towns in Wisconsin, most helpers are definitely older, more established citizens and would not want to put themselves at risk.

In my town especially, we have learned that we need more back-ups. We need more younger people who can step up. No one was prepared for what happened, but I feel that many local governments were more than not prepared. There was no back-up team, it was just my mom and her deputy clerk. They did almost everything themselves and didn't have much help. My mom was working 11-hour days and her deputy clerk was coming into work at five in the morning. It wasn't fair for it all to be put on the two of them, and it caused some things at the Town of West Bend to slow down. The biggest lesson in my town is definitely that there always needs to be *someone* who can respond, who has emergency training, and who can help split up the work. In the event of another crisis, we just need more help.

Further, the April 7th election truly demonstrated how little assistance we had. My mom and her deputy clerk were the only ones trained on the election system and it was hard to find anyone who could help, since many of the town's poll workers were elderly and did not want to put themselves at risk. Also, there were so many absentee voters and not enough people to stuff envelopes. Even with the copious amount of poll workers and other miscellaneous employees, there still wasn't quite enough help for the Town of West Bend. In the event of another disaster, towns need to make sure that they have enough willing and able people behind them.

A second lesson that can be taken away from this crisis is that they need to keep up with the changes in technology. In many towns around Wisconsin, it is likely that not many young people work for townships in their local government office. This results in the ignoring of many technological changes that could help their township in decreasing their workload and becoming more efficient. Also, since the majority of towns are quite small, they will often vote the same chairmen and mayors back into office every time, since they have the name recognition, and few people are interested enough in their local government to run again. This results in incumbents

being in office for decades. According to [opensecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org), in 2018 91% of incumbents were elected back into the House of Representatives and 84.4% in the Senate. This is a pattern that can definitely be traced back to town offices, as name recognition is very powerful.

While it is no doubt that these incumbents can do a good job, the majority of the time very little progress is made having the same people and ideas in office. This results in less consideration of the changes in society since the incumbents are so comfortable in their jobs. They assume everything is running well because it always has. But they need to update systems and make things easier for their ever-changing civil service employees.

To summarize, a lesson that can be learned from this crisis is that towns need new people and ideas in office. Things can't run like they did in the 1970s, they need to run like it's the 2020s. By taking any technological advancements into account, the transition made during this crisis would have been much simpler. But it was not for many towns. In these townships, we need new ideas and people who are focused on making changes that will make the government run faster and better. We need to modernize our systems by inviting in new ideas, not shying away from them.

Overall, the lessons that can be learned from this crisis all fall under the category of just finding people who can help and make things simpler. Because, if this ever happens again, it is not okay to push all the work on one person who in reality does not have the training to deal with such an extreme crisis. Our local governments need to run smoother and have more professionals who can help to make our emergency systems run faster and more efficient.

Works Cited

“Reelection Rates Over the Years.” *OpenSecrets*,
www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/reelection-rates.