

Medical Reserve Corps
Office of the Surgeon General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Technical Assistance Series
Getting Started:
A Guide for Local Leaders



Revised: August 2006

www.medicalreservecorps.gov

Medical Reserve Corps Technical Assistance Series



Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

As part of its effort to support the growth and sustainability of **Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)** units across the United States, the MRC Program Office—headquartered in the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General—has developed a series of technical assistance documents. Each one addresses topics considered important for MRC units. The Technical Assistance Series is available at: www.medicalreservecorps.gov. Some of the topics addressed are as follows:

- **Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders**
Each MRC functions differently. The first step in forming a unit is to carefully evaluate your local situation. It is important to secure a broad base of support from others in your community. Identifying and acquiring resources is essential to meeting your MRC's operational needs.
- **Organizing an MRC Unit: Operational Components and the Coordinator's Role**
The coordinator's main job is matching community needs for emergency medical response and public health initiatives with local volunteer capabilities. Establishing and sustaining the unit's internal organization also is a priority.
- **Coordinating With Your Local Response Partners**
MRC units supplement a community's existing emergency medical response capabilities and public health infrastructure. Coordinating with local response partners is critical, as is developing and nurturing a broad network of partners. Conducting exercises with response partners will be necessary, as will close communications during and after an emergency or engagement.
- **Developing Volunteer Relationships and Capabilities**
Developing volunteer capabilities is a key mandate for every MRC unit. The process begins by advertising your MRC unit to the community. As volunteers are screened and matched with existing needs, they must be informed of any risks associated with their MRC activities. They also will require additional training.
- **Establishing and Maintaining Your MRC Unit's Organization**
A well-run organization is the foundation for every successful MRC unit. Information must be tracked and updated for volunteers and local partners. Policies must be established and followed. Operating funds must be solicited, along with leveraged public- and private-sector resources. Planning—strategically, financially, and operationally—is an essential, ongoing function of the MRC unit's administrators.
- **Special Topics**
Some of the more complex aspects of operating an MRC unit are related to differences in local laws and the evolving technical nature of the MRC's work. For example, legal liability is something every unit member should know about. Another special topic of interest to MRC units is sustainability. Special publications address these and other emerging topics.
- **Action Steps Checklist**
Each subtopic in this publication features suggested action items that can be found at the end of each section.



The **Medical Reserve Corps** program is sponsored by the U.S. Surgeon General's Office in cooperation with the White House's **USA Freedom Corps** and the Department of Homeland Security's **Citizen Corps**.





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**Getting Started:
A Guide for Local Leaders**

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The information in this publication is intended as a general guide to establishing and operating a Medical Reserve Corps unit. The MRC Program Office encourages communities to consider alternative approaches that may offer a better fit for their local circumstances, resources, and needs. The MRC Program Office welcomes learning from these successes.

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MRC Technical Assistance Series
Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders

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Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders

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Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders

Key Activities

The information on starting a Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit in this publication is intended to support the following ongoing efforts:

1. **Assessing your community's needs** for medical and health volunteers throughout the year, and during times of special need.
2. **Planning** activities that support community needs and your MRC's mission and objectives.
3. **Promoting your vision for the MRC** by securing broad-based support for the MRC with potential response partners and community champions.
4. **Identifying and pursuing financial and other resources** to sustain your MRC.
5. **Action items for these activities** can be found in the Action Steps Checklist.



An Introduction to the Medical Reserve Corps

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is a national program with a local, community-based emphasis. Its mission is to support community efforts to utilize local medical and health volunteers during emergencies and at other times of community need.

Based on local needs and available resources, each community's MRC will function differently. This publication addresses these differences and suggests ways that you, as a community leader, can envision forming an MRC unit in your area.

Topics Addressed in This Publication

This publication discusses topics related to starting an MRC unit, including the following:

- Assessing your local situation
- Securing broad-based community support
- Matching resources to operational needs

A Brief History

In his January 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush asked all Americans to offer meaningful volunteer service in their communities, in whatever ways they could.

Many medical and health volunteers offered their skills in response to the September 11, 2001, attacks. These attacks underscored the need for a more organized approach to using medical and health volunteers during an emergency.

Medical and health volunteers can provide highly technical skills and services. As volunteers, they often must coordinate their efforts with complex medical emergency and public health response systems. To protect emergency responders' safety, it is critical to prepare volunteers prior to an emergency response effort.

To support this effort, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson officially launched the MRC in July 2002. Congress allocated funds to establish the MRC Program Office in the U.S. Surgeon General's Office to initiate an MRC demonstration project and to provide national technical assistance.

Since the MRC initiative began in 2002, units have been formed in nearly every state, and thousands of individuals have signed up or have expressed interest in volunteering. Local communities also have worked diligently and creatively to establish the foundation of community support and planning necessary for their units to function effectively.

As a result, this national movement adds unique capabilities and increased strength to communities nationwide. We hope you will consider making your own contribution.



Facts About the Medical Reserve Corps

- The MRC program was launched officially as a national, community-based movement in July 2002. It was formed in response to President Bush's call for all Americans to offer volunteer service in their communities.
- The objective of the MRC program is to strengthen communities by establishing a system for medical and public health volunteers to offer their expertise throughout the year and during times of community need.
- The MRC is a partner of the White House's USA Freedom Corps and the Department of Homeland Security's Citizen Corps. Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Peace Corps are part of the President's USA Freedom Corps, which promotes volunteerism and service nationally and internationally.



The Medical Reserve Corps Program Office and Regional Contacts

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program Office is headquartered in the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. Ten Regional Coordinators are also housed in the 10 Regional Health and Human Services (HHS) offices. The Office is responsible for facilitating the development, implementation, and integration of MRC units nationwide. To accomplish this, MRC Program Office staff provide technical assistance to all communities establishing or maintaining a local medical or public health-related volunteer corps. The MRC Program Office functions as a clearinghouse for community information and best practices. Its role is to help communities achieve their local visions for public health and emergency preparedness and response.

For more information about the MRC Program Office's activities or to request assistance, please visit our Web site at www.medicalreservecorps.gov, or contact us at:

MRC Program Office

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Technical Assistance Regional Coordinators and U.S. Public Health Service Regions

The following table contains contact information for the Regional Coordinators in each of the 10 Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) regions.

Technical Assistance Regional Coordinators	
<p>Region I: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT Jennifer Frenette John F. Kennedy Federal Building, Room 2100 Boston, MA 02203 Office: (617) 565-1492 Fax: (617) 565-1491 Home Office (603) 788-2769 Home Office Fax: (603) 788-2032 E-mail: jennifer.frenette@hhs.gov</p>	<p>Region VI: AR, LA, NM, OK, TX Stacy Sayre 1301 Young Street, Suite 1124 Dallas, TX 75202 Office: (214) 767-3182 Fax: (214) 767-3617 E-mail: stacy.sayre@hhs.gov</p>
<p>Region II: NJ, NY, PR, VI Bruce Marganoff 26 Federal Plaza, Room 38-100 New York, NY 10278 Office: (212) 264-3508 Fax: (212) 264-1324 E-mail: bruce.marganoff@hhs.gov</p>	<p>Region VII: IA, KS, MO, NE Gary Brown 601 East 12th Street, Room S-1801 Kansas City, MO 64106 Office: (816) 426-2829 Fax: (816) 426-2178 E-mail: gary.brown@hhs.gov</p>
<p>Region III: DE, DC, MD, PA, VA, WV Carla Holder The Public Ledger Building 150 South Independence Mall West, Suite 436 Philadelphia, PA 19106 Office: (215) 861-4624 Fax: (215) 861-4623 E-mail: carla.holder@hhs.gov</p>	<p>Region VIII: CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY Gail Newell 1961 Stout Street, Room 498 Denver, CO 80294 Office: (303) 844-7848 Fax: (303) 844-2019 E-mail: gail.newell@hhs.gov</p>
<p>Region IV: AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN Elizabeth Fitch Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center 61 Forsyth Street, Room 5B95 Atlanta, GA 30303-8909 Office: (404) 562-4276 Fax: (404) 562-7899 E-mail: elizabeth.fitch@hhs.gov</p>	<p>Region IX: AZ, CA, HI, NV, Guam, American Samoa, CNMI, FSMI, RMI, Palau Jill Littlefield 50 United Nations Plaza, Room 327 San Francisco, CA 94102 Office: (415) 437-8071 Fax: (415) 437-8004 E-mail: jill.littlefield@hhs.gov</p>
<p>Region V: IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI Gary Brown (Acting) 601 East 12th Street, Room S-1801 Kansas City, MO 64106 Office: (816) 426-2829 Fax: (816) 426-2178 E-mail: gary.brown@hhs.gov</p>	<p>Region X: AK, ID, OR, WA Jesús Reyna 2201 Sixth Avenue, M/S RX-20 Seattle, WA 98121 Office: (206) 615-3678 Fax: (206) 615-2481 E-mail: jesus.reyna@hhs.gov</p>

Assessing Your Local Situation

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units serve local needs. The first step in establishing a unit is to evaluate your local situation. MRC volunteers are intended to supplement existing capabilities in your area.

Your first task will be to assess how volunteers can help during the year and during times of community need. To accomplish this, you will need to understand your community's particular risks and needs.

Assess how your MRC volunteers can supplement existing medical emergency and public health response efforts in your area.

Conducting a Risk and Needs Assessment

As you begin, it is crucial to conduct a risk and needs assessment. A risk and needs assessment is a study of a particular situation to determine which risks or problems are likely to occur and which resources would be required or desirable to address them. In the case of the MRC, your community is being examined.

Before proceeding, determine if a community agency has conducted a risk and needs assessment in your area. Many community agencies have already conducted risk assessments, and therefore a community's needs may be identified already.

There are many ways to conduct a risk and needs assessment. Some community MRC leaders have assessed the likelihood of disasters or other health-related emergencies in their area. They have considered the ideal response to these risks and have assessed how medical or health volunteers might assist local hospitals, their public health offices, emergency medical teams, first responders in disaster situations, underserved communities, populations facing certain health risks or hazards, etc. The role of your MRC unit may change as new community needs are identified, and as volunteers bring new skills to your unit.

Some leaders have broadly examined the ongoing public health needs of their area. Other communities have examined the makeup of potential volunteers in their area to evaluate their skill sets. Each community situation is different, and you will have a unique perspective on your community situation.

Begin with what you know about your community. The MRC does not have to answer every possible need in your area—it only must help local volunteers begin to make a difference. The differences they make can continue to grow.

No risk and needs assessment addresses all needs, and there always will be additional factors to consider. Assessment is a continuous, dynamic process. As such, it is more effective to conduct a limited risk and needs assessment and work with what you have than wait until you have considered each possible risk or need.



Your risk and needs assessment has to include enough information so that you can imagine possible solutions. The initial assessment is a starting point and is updated once your community's needs are reassessed.

Role of the Medical Reserve Corps in the Local Community as a First Step

Before getting started, it is important to research existing emergency operation plans in your jurisdiction to see which response role might be appropriate for your MRC unit and where the MRC can help to fill gaps.

As a prospective unit, unit coordinator, or sponsoring agency, identify the role that the MRC will play in the local community. Identify how the MRC fits in to the existing local infrastructure to guarantee that there is a role for your MRC to play. In addition to helping evade turf battles, knowing where your MRC fits will help with volunteer recruitment, retention, and training.

Considering the Components

Once you have identified possible risks and needs in your community, you will begin to formulate possible solutions. As the process may become more complicated, one suggestion is to consider your MRC unit in terms of three primary and interrelated components critical to operations. These components are:

1. External coordination
2. Volunteer relations
3. Internal organization

External Coordination

External coordination involves working closely with partnering organizations and groups that will engage and utilize your volunteers. Your MRC unit will be supplementing existing local emergency medical preparedness and public health capabilities. These activities provide volunteers and staff valuable opportunities to become acquainted with members of other organizations with whom they may respond in an emergency situation.

Coordinating with local response partners in developing and nurturing a broad network of partners will be critical. They may have existing procedures in place. Exercising disaster scenarios with response partners and maintaining close communications during and after an actual emergency or engagement will be necessary. Considering the overall picture can help you plan ahead.



Who Can Partner With the Medical Reserve Corps?

MRC units collaborate with various local organizations, such as:

- Departments of public health
- Health care systems, hospitals, and clinics
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Medical retirement groups
- Medical societies
- Medical examiners' offices
- Healthcare outreach coalitions
- Retired and senior volunteer programs
- Nursing and medical schools
- American Red Cross
- Emergency medical services
- Metropolitan Medical Response System
- Local and state emergency management agencies
- Emergency planning committees
- Voluntary organizations active in disaster
- Police and fire departments
- Community-based disaster preparedness groups
- Military organizations and National Guard
- Public schools
- Universities
- Citizen Corps councils
- Neighborhood associations
- Volunteer centers
- Faith-based organizations
- Nonprofit community organizations
- City attorneys' offices
- Local government offices and departments
- Regional commissions and planning groups
- Corporations

Volunteer Relations

Volunteer relations require developing a strong and committed volunteer corps. Developing volunteer capabilities is a key mandate for each MRC unit. Important aspects of building a strong MRC team include:

- Advertising your MRC unit to the community
- Informing volunteers of any risks associated with their MRC activities as they are screened and matched with existing needs
- Verifying volunteers' credentials
- Providing additional training, post-response activities, and recognition

Who Can Volunteer for the Medical Reserve Corps?

MRC volunteers may include medical and public health professionals, such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, emergency medical technicians, dentists, veterinarians, epidemiologists, and infectious disease specialists.

In addition, volunteer interpreters, chaplains, amateur radio operators, logistics experts, legal advisors, and others may fill key support positions.

Internal Organization

Internal organization requires establishing the administrative systems and supports necessary to achieve your mission. A well-run organization is the foundation for each successful MRC unit, and the foremost, ongoing function of the unit's administrators is planning. Successful MRC units:

- Track and update volunteer and local partner information
- Establish and follow policies
- Solicit operating funds
- Leverage public- and private-sector resources

Although these are challenging tasks, they do not have to be learned and applied immediately. These guidelines should help you consider how to establish an effective unit in your community. As you become familiar with the MRC and with the work it will undertake in your community, you will understand the overall role of the MRC.

What Resources Do You Need?

MRC units need internal leadership, clear policies and procedures, operating funds, office and meeting space, information technology systems for tracking data, access to services for volunteer credential verification and background checks, specialty expertise, in-kind donations of supplies and services, etc.

What Do Medical Reserve Corps Volunteers Do?

- MRC volunteers work with existing local emergency response programs
- MRC volunteers supplement existing local emergency response activities, such as:
 - Shelter/alternate care facility staffing
 - Hospital surge capacity support
 - Mass prophylaxis clinic staffing
- MRC volunteers support community preparedness activities, such as:
 - Dispensing clinic exercises
 - Family first planning
 - Personal preparedness education
- MRC volunteers supplement existing local public health initiatives, such as:
 - Outreach and prevention (e.g., West Nile virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, smoking, substance abuse, diabetes detection, cardiac rehabilitation and screening, physical fitness, domestic violence, injury, vehicle safety, women's health, and prostate and other cancers)



- Immunization programs (e.g., childhood diseases, influenza, smallpox)
- Blood drives
- Case management and care planning (for families, special needs populations, high-risk infants, adolescents, the elderly, women, and others)
- Pandemic influenza planning

Note: Many of these initiatives coincide with the Surgeon General’s Priorities of Eliminating Health Disparities, Public Health Preparedness, and Addressing Health Literacy.

Developing a Draft Plan

After brainstorming for the components that likely will affect the operations of your MRC unit, it can be useful to organize them into a draft plan.

Some of the possible planning elements are described below. These serve as a guide to developing your key issues.

Components of a Draft Plan

The following items are the components of a draft plan:

- Mission statement (supporting identified community risks/needs)
- Objectives (supporting mission)
- Action plan (supporting objectives)
- Organizational chart (supporting planned activities)
- Budget (supporting planned activities and organizational structure)
- Potential response partners
- Other organizations supporting the MRC
- Advocacy issues (including liability protection for volunteers, integrating MRC volunteers into existing systems, credential verification procedures, etc.)

Mission Statement

Effective organizations have a concise statement about the purpose or mission of a particular organization or group. This statement can help focus the decisions that develop in support of the mission. Some also include a vision statement as a way to maintain the effort’s focus. Regardless, a mission statement should be linked to the risks or needs identified in your initial assessment.

A mission statement should be a one- to two-sentence statement of your unit’s purpose and values. It should answer the following questions:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?

- Why does it matter?

Objectives

Conceivably, there are numerous ways to fulfill a mission. You will decide what you think is preferable or realistic to accomplish. Some use *goals* interchangeably with *objectives*. Regardless, you want to identify key outcomes that will substantially support your MRC unit's mission. Ultimately, these will be your measures of success.

Action Plan

The action plan outlines how you will achieve your objectives. Depending on the ambition of the objectives, your action plan may extend many years into the future.

Some people find it helpful to establish short-term objectives that can be reached in a year, while others find it helpful to establish long-term objectives as a way to maintain an ongoing effort. You may want to include both.

For example, a first-year operation plan may include some of the issues previously described, such as how to:

1. Coordinate with external partners
2. Recruit and train volunteers
3. Utilize volunteers to include public health promotion
4. Establish a communication system for use with volunteers and response partners
5. Address other organizational development needs and issues (e.g., data tracking systems, policies and procedures, scope of operations, criteria for mobilizing and demobilizing, verification of volunteer credentials, fundraising, etc.)

Organizational Chart

Consider the type of organizational structure necessary to support these activities. Include other resources or partnering organizations in your chart to keep the larger system in mind. Update the chart to reflect how your unit functions in practice, in addition to how it should operate in theory. A thorough and up-to-date organizational chart can play an important role in ongoing planning activities.

Unit Budget

Determine what your MRC unit will cost and which resources you will need to support your organization and your planned activities. Your budget should include needed and available resources, including funds, specialty expertise, in-kind donations of supplies or services, strategic community partnerships, and other diverse support streams. If you cannot determine how to access the necessary resources, you may have to modify your plan. Conversely, you can challenge your community to develop these resources. Verify that you have sought assistance from all potential resources before quitting. Knowing your budget will allow you to justify your unit's solicitations for support and to know how to use resources most effectively.

Potential Response Partners

1. Maintain an ongoing list of potential resource partners.
2. Track names and contact information for all response partners and other key community-based organizations, including any possible sponsoring organizations and your local Citizen Corps council, if applicable.
3. Note the specific activities relevant to each partner, with other pertinent information to help ensure detailed planning as you progress. This information also will be useful when soliciting support for resources. In particular, potential funding sources often want to know that an effort is well connected to other resources in its larger community.

Other Organizations Supporting Your Medical Reserve Corps

In addition to having response partners with whom your MRC unit will likely work closely, there are other organizations—including government offices and private-sector businesses—that will support your MRC's activities and presence in the community.

Advocacy Issues

Challenging issues will affect your MRC and its volunteers. Some of these will be addressed in a more public forum. Many communities are addressing legal liability and disability protections for their MRC volunteers. You may need to educate potential response partners about how your volunteers can be integrated into their existing systems. You also may need to promote more efficient credential verification procedures. These issues may not be resolved in a timely manner, but it helps to consider them and to address them as you proceed.

Remember—your planning process may begin in a less structured way, but the goal is to develop a formal document that other parties will support. As you develop your MRC, you also may have your response partners contribute to your planning process. Eventually, they may include your MRC plan in their own plans.



Securing Broad-based Community Support

Once you have outlined some possibilities for your Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit, you will need to solicit broad-based community support. The MRC's success depends on diverse resources (funds, in-kind donations, and volunteers). The MRC's success also depends on cooperative arrangements with response partners and other community supporters.

Your draft plan can assist others see your vision for your MRC and how you think it can be achieved realistically. This plan also can be an effective method to start conversations and negotiations.

Invite suggestions and feedback from others, within the limits of your resources and mission. Where possible, expand your mission to meet unanticipated needs and adjust it to overcome barriers or community conflicts.

Each MRC unit begins as an idea, typically in the heart and mind of a community leader with vision. When this vision becomes a reality, it may look very different. Your MRC unit may change as you involve others in its development.

Obtain community support for your vision of the MRC.

You cannot achieve it alone.

Negotiating With Response Partners

You and your local response partners must address several topics, which include, but are not limited to:

- Responsibilities
- Jurisdictional and other boundaries
- Reporting structures
- Utilization procedures
- Communications protocols and systems

However, prior to these discussions, you and the local response partners must collaborate and consider what potentially will be required. Specific details will follow from this basic agreement.

Identifying Partnership Opportunities

- Which local efforts are underway that the MRC can help support?
- Which ongoing community needs might your MRC volunteers usefully respond to?
- Which vulnerable populations of your community—low-income groups, non-English speakers, individuals with disabilities, etc.—could utilize your MRC volunteers' services?



Identifying potential partners can stem from recognizing a shared mission or complementary function. For example, your MRC may be committed to promoting public health, similar to your public health department or other community health-focused organizations. Your MRC may be dedicated to supplementing emergency medical capabilities, similar to your area's hospitals or emergency medical offices. If these shared missions are not in conflict with one another and do not duplicate services, there may be a natural fit between those organizations and your MRC volunteers.

You also may identify partners whose mission is similar and may want your volunteers to fill niches not addressed in their system. For example, MRC volunteers staffing an influenza clinic in a low-income neighborhood could attract buy-in from neighborhood residents—for the MRC and for public health initiatives. Conversely, a local group may utilize volunteer public health nurses. These volunteers might become part of your MRC during emergencies.

There may be a local volunteer or health exposition in which the MRC can participate in outreach efforts with other groups. Another volunteer group in your community might have developed a database to track volunteers, which can be used as a template to develop your own.

Local businesses also may recognize that your MRC's ability to augment triage capacity at local hospitals during a complex disaster may expedite community recovery and minimize the long-term economic losses that often follow the immediate losses of any disaster.

If you encounter resistance as you network, consider whether this resistance refers to issues the MRC unit has not adequately considered or addressed in its vision or plan. Adjust accordingly and resubmit your modified proposal for review.

Regardless, agreeing to collaborate can be time consuming. Follow up first with the prospective partners with whom collaboration seems most obvious and easy to negotiate. Meanwhile, maintain communication with prospects that are harder to cultivate. It can take time for some people and organizations to understand how the MRC can benefit them, as it will take time to realize the different ways that MRC volunteers can contribute to your community.

To begin, all you need are statements of substantive interest from prospective partners and agreements to discuss the details of your collaboration. If possible, ask for letters of intent from these partners, which will promote clarity in your dealings with one another and show possible funding sources and other community champions that you have progressed toward developing your MRC. Others are more likely to support an effort if they see that there is buy-in from members of your community.

These agreements will be the strongest indicators that you are on the right track for your MRC. You also will be able to use these interactions and their outcomes to adjust and strengthen your overall plan. The basic idea is to maintain communications and discussions.



Enlisting Champions for Your Medical Reserve Corps Unit

In addition to having partners with whom your MRC will work closely, it also helps to have other individuals or organizations in your community support your effort. These individuals and organizations do not need to have any obvious relation to the work your volunteers are performing. They may recognize its value for your community and may want to help it succeed by using their connections or influence to draw positive attention to your work.

Typically, champions for any cause have ties to the larger community or to specific segments from which your MRC may be attempting to solicit support. Often, they are charismatic individuals whose enthusiasm spreads easily to those you may have targeted for outreach. They also may be connected to elected officials, top health administrators, private-sector leaders, or to other groups. Their connections and enthusiasm can improve an MRC unit that is otherwise struggling to advertise.

Government officials also are a good place to seek support. They will have connections with many community organizations and will be tasked with maintaining many of your community's services and resources. Government officials may recognize the contribution of your MRC to their own objectives, particularly if you can illustrate incidents that have received significant media attention in recent years (e.g., the 2005 hurricanes, 2004 tsunami in Asia, the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in Canada, or the fires that have so often swept through the western United States). Once you have gained the support of local government officials, you can ask them also to mention the MRC in their speeches and other public appearances.

In addition, corporations and private businesses often have access to resources that can directly benefit your MRC, such as direct funds, in-kind support, media exposure, and particular areas of needed expertise, similar to prominent individuals and community leaders. Enlist their sponsorship—their letters of support also will show funding sources and other potential champions that you are well connected and networked in your community. People are most likely to support causes that demonstrate broad community support and relevance.

Matching Resources to Operational Needs

Developing your Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit will require locating the resources to meet its operational needs and goals for recruitment, training, volunteer utilization, administrative support, etc.

Once your plan is prepared for execution and you are aware of the budgetary needs, you will be ready to begin acquiring the necessary resources.

Determine how to attain the resources necessary to develop your MRC.

Developing Monetary Resources

Although much of your operational needs may be met by various in-kind donations—through bartering and pro bono specialty services—some of your needs will require funding.

Activities for acquiring funding may include:

- Grant applications to national and local foundations, state and Federal government programs, and corporate charitable offices
- Direct appeals to donors, either via mail or personal contacts
- Special fundraising events

You may want to ask a fundraising or development specialist in your community to consult with you (at little or no cost) to determine which combination of activities will be most effective.

At the Federal level, determine which funded efforts also might be relevant to your MRC. For example, some MRC units have collaborated with bioterrorism preparedness programs; this allows them to share monetary resources and to dovetail outreach, training, and community coordination efforts.

Inform your partners and community champions of your financial needs. They may or may not be able to contribute financially, and they may be aware of other sources. Financing can be accomplished through various methods—allow others to help you with this process.

Soliciting In-Kind Donations

Funds may not always be available, but a donor may provide you with other necessities. For example, a donor may not have funds to pay for your monthly rent, but he or she may have office space available that you can use at no cost.

In-kind donations may include actual goods or supplies and using someone's time and services for free or at little cost. Some examples include:

- Bookkeeping or software programming skills on an ongoing or part-time basis
- Computers or other office equipment may be donated by companies that have upgraded to newer machines
- Air time for public relations messages may be broadcasted by local media
- Materials may be developed by communications professionals

Inform your partners and community champions that you are challenged with acquiring in-kind donations, as they may help you obtain them. Maintain records of in-kind donations, similar to other transactions. Individuals and organizations may be more willing to support your MRC if they see it has effectively leveraged resources from various sources.

Seeking Specialty Expertise

Running an MRC unit can be a highly complex endeavor. Some activities require specialized skills sets; many of which you may not have at first, but you may acquire them in time.

One option is to seek pro bono help from area experts—on legal issues, financial matters, emergency response, logistics, medical practice concerns, public health issues, volunteer relations, credentialing practices, etc. Often, people are willing to donate their time to an important cause, particularly on a one-time or short-term basis.

Do not hesitate to ask—access to expertise that you would otherwise be unable to afford can make a substantial difference in your MRC's success. Inform your response partners and community champions of your needs so they can direct you to their network of professional resources.

Optimizing Strategic Partnerships

Many of your requests for resources will be granted by appealing to a desire to give to a worthwhile community effort. However, contributions from your response partners should be considered an exchange. You are providing them something valuable as a committed volunteer corps.

In exchange for what your MRC might offer their organizations, your response partners may be willing to offer:

- Training (free or low cost)
- Access to legal and other expertise
- Access to office space or other administrative resources
- Credentials verification or background checks for volunteers



The more others see the benefit of your volunteers, the more they will see what they are receiving in return.

Your partners will appreciate recognition for their contributions. It is appropriate to include their names on your brochures, newsletters, or other forms of public communication. When you recognize your partners' contributions, it shows that you appreciate their efforts and informs the community of your partners' good stewardship.

Potential Deployment Opportunities

Most MRC response and recovery assignments are secured through local and state channels, which is how the MRC program is designed. However, opportunities for MRC volunteers to assist outside their local jurisdiction may arise. Although opportunities for MRC volunteers to leave their local jurisdictions to help in areas affected by disaster may exist, all MRC leaders are encouraged to ensure that local and statewide needs are met prior to committing to national-level deployments. MRC leaders are asked to inform all local and state response partners of MRC activities and any potential activation plans outside of their local jurisdiction.

It is essential that MRC volunteers are not deployed outside of pre-established response mechanisms. Also, it is equally important that volunteers do not self-deploy, under any circumstances.

During the 2004 hurricane season, MRC volunteers were asked to support the American Red Cross (ARC) response activities in Florida. This was the first deployment of MRC volunteers outside of their local jurisdiction.

During the 2005 hurricane season, the MRC strengthened its partnership with the ARC that was initiated in 2004. Prior to Hurricane Katrina's landfall, the ARC disaster operations staff requested MRC support for their sheltering operations. Policies and processes were developed to identify, assign, and activate MRC members willing, able, and authorized to respond. ARC provided transportation, logistical support, and supervision for the deployed MRC members who supported ARC health services and mental health and shelter operations.

MRC members also participated in response activities outside of their local/state jurisdiction through a mission to support HHS response and recovery efforts. The first Federal activation of MRC volunteers occurred on September 15, 2005, when HHS needed staffing support for three special needs shelters in Louisiana. Subsequent mission assignments allowed MRC members to fill positions in Community Health Centers and health clinics on cruise ships housing evacuees in Mississippi and to perform health assessments in Texas.

The MRC Program Office is working to strengthen these partnerships and solidify the policies and processes for future responses.



Action Steps Checklist

The checklist of possible action steps below follows the basic outline of this particular technical assistance topic. It is important to remember that these are only suggestions. They serve as a quick reference guide to stimulate your thoughts of the complexities you may face in your Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit. You may choose to follow a different approach. If so, the MRC Program Office welcomes your best practices.

Assessing Your Local Situation

- Determine how your MRC volunteers can supplement existing medical emergency and public health response efforts in your area.

Conducting a Risk and Needs Assessment

- Consider the specific medical and public health-related risks and needs that affect your community.
- Interview potential response partners and other community organizations to learn more about their work and where they see needs for volunteer support.
- Identify some possible approaches to these risks and needs that will involve your MRC volunteers.
- Begin with what you know best about your community; you do not have to address all issues immediately. Your MRC's contribution can grow over time.

Considering the Components

- Maintain a vision of the overall picture continuously, regardless of whether or not you can address multiple issues simultaneously. You will be better prepared to address your next challenge.
- Explore ways to coordinate with local response partners.
- Consider what your volunteers will need to develop capabilities and commitment to your MRC.
- List the things you will need to establish and maintain a strong administrative organization. Which resources will you require to sustain your MRC?

Developing a Draft Plan

- Draft a plan that addresses the key points and revise if necessary.
- Include a mission statement, objectives, an action plan, an organizational chart, and a budget.

- List potential response partners and other organizations that might be willing to champion your MRC. Who can you rely on?
- Note any ongoing issues that will require advocacy (e.g., liability protection for volunteers, integrating MRC volunteers into existing systems, credential verification procedures, etc.)

Securing Broad-based Community Support

- Seek support from others in your community regarding your vision for the MRC, as you cannot achieve it alone.

Negotiating With Response Partners

- Identify partners with a shared mission or who are engaged in work that complements what your MRC volunteers can provide.
- Ensure that your MRC activities do not conflict with other organizations' domains. Negotiate workable compromises.
- Agree to collaborate, even if the details have not been addressed yet.
- Obtain letters of intent and use them to continue building your network.
- Continue communicating with the prospects that are more difficult to cultivate. It can take time for them to understand the MRC's role in any community. Keep the conversations moving forward.

Enlisting Champions for Your Medical Reserve Corps

- Identify champions who will actively support your MRC.
- Approach local government officials, corporations, other private-sector businesses, prominent individuals, or leaders in your community for letters of support. Use them to continue building your network.
- Continue communicating with the prospects that are more difficult to cultivate. It can take time for them to understand the MRC's role in any community. Keep the conversations moving forward.

Matching Resources to Operational Needs

- Determine how to acquire the necessary resources to establish your MRC.

Developing Monetary Resources

- Apply to grant programs (national and local foundations, state and Federal government programs, and corporate charitable offices).
- Appeal directly to donors through mail or by personal contact.
- Plan special fundraising events.

- Ask a fundraising specialist for help with determining which activities will be the most effective in your community.
- Ask your response partners if they have access to funds that might be applied to cover the contributions made by your MRC.
- Inform your response partners and community champions what you need financially so they can direct you to other sources.

Soliciting In-Kind Donations

- Identify resources attainable through direct gifts.
- Include office space, office equipment, a computer, software, programming and other support services, media placement, communications materials, etc., in your list.
- Inform your response partners and community champions of what you need so they can direct you to possible donors.

Seeking Specialty Expertise

- Identify the time-limited expertise that would help establish your MRC.
- Ask for help if you do not know how to do something. Many people are willing to help a worthy cause.
- Inform your response partners and community champions whose expertise you need so they can direct you to their contacts.

Optimizing Strategic Partnerships

- Clarify the benefit your MRC volunteers bring to others, particularly to your response partners.
- Determine which resources or expertise your partners have that they might be willing to share or give to you for free or at a low cost.
- Assess whether partners will share training, access to legal and other expertise, office space or other administrative resources, the ability to conduct verification of credentials or background checks for volunteers, etc.