



Guide to MRC Unit Organization

A Guide for Local MRC Units



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Background

There is no typical Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit. Each unit organizes in response to the needs of the area. A region's hazards, health concerns, and the organization in which the unit is established (e.g., health department, emergency management agency, university) will dictate an MRC unit's composition. With community resources and partners ranging from local voluntary organizations to private corporations, the face of each MRC community is unique. However, the goals of each unit are similar: all units work toward improving a region's public health infrastructure and strengthening their response capabilities in the event of an emergency. The differences exist in how each community reaches these goals.

Despite these differences, it may be useful to evaluate the similarities among MRC units. For example, each MRC unit contains leadership and management, whether it is a coordinator, leadership team, or advisory board.

Each MRC unit, regardless of its organizational structure, must address three primary operational issues:

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

These components address the majority of activities that an MRC unit coordinator encounters and oversees.

External Coordination

MRC volunteers are intended to supplement existing public health efforts and emergency medical capabilities in their communities. Regardless of how sophisticated your community is, the term *supplement* is used because volunteers always add to existing capacity. Generally, volunteers cannot replace professionally organized and staffed efforts. However, by serving the community, they can enhance your community's responsiveness to various public health and emergency medical needs.

When working with local response partners, external coordination may include the following:

- **Developing a community network consisting of groups that can use MRC volunteers.** Your network may include partners in your local community, county, state, and region, depending on your range of engagement. You will work with these partners to determine their needs for volunteers and conduct exercises and other preparatory requirements. Working with your local Citizen Corps council, if one has been established, may also be invaluable.
- **Working with response partners to understand risks, resources, and needs, and to plan for emergencies and determine other ways your volunteers can help.** This is also an effective way to maintain communication with response partners throughout the

year and to remain focused on the objectives. See the *Guide to Developing the MRC Purpose* for more information on assessing risks and needs.

- **Communicating during and after response activities after an emergency or non-emergency event.** This is essential to facilitating information transfer between your unit's volunteers and response partners. It also helps you learn from the methods that succeeded during the most recent engagement or emergency. Clear communication improves your unit's responsiveness and effectiveness and builds an understanding of your unit's role within the community.
- **Identifying activities during non-emergency periods.** This allows you to engage your volunteers in meaningful ways throughout the year and may strengthen your MRC unit's relationship with its existing partners. Identifying these activities can extend and further develop your community network by involving new partners whose needs are less disaster oriented. This additional effort will strengthen your unit and your community by ensuring broad-based participation.

Volunteer Relations

In small MRC units, all volunteer-related activities likely will be managed by the individual who oversees the external coordination activities and internal organizational tasks. In larger units, these activities may be dispersed among several individuals. Nonetheless, they support the development of the volunteer corps, an important mandate for each MRC unit.

Volunteer relations can involve:

- **Recruiting volunteers** by advertising in your community and informing prospects of your unit or of the types of skills the community needs. Each public relations or public awareness opportunity—even if intended for other community constituencies—is an opportunity to reach volunteers.
- **Interviewing and screening volunteers** to ensure that you have a complete understanding of their skills and credentials and that they understand the facts and risks associated with working as an MRC volunteer.
- **Training volunteers** so that they have the skills and information necessary to be effective when working with your local response partners, whether in emergency medicine or in public health.
- **Retaining volunteers** who need:
 - Regular communication from the unit's leadership so that they feel connected, not only to the local MRC unit but to the activities of the MRC program as a whole
 - Activities between engagements to stay connected to the unit, including specialized training, exercises, public health initiatives, and community preparedness activities

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- Appropriate protection of their physical and mental health during all MRC activities, but especially during and after emergency operations
 - Recognition for their contributions
 - **Advocating for volunteers** by being proactive in your community, county, or state concerning increased legal and disability protection for volunteers (who assume considerable risk in giving their time and expertise to the community). Other advocacy issues also may arise.

Internal Organization

Substantial organizational resources will be devoted to volunteer relations and external coordination, but it is equally important to maintain a viable internal organization for your MRC unit. Many ongoing administrative tasks will be required to serve both volunteers and response partners adequately. A healthy, well-run organization is the foundation of every successful MRC unit.

Internal organization activities that have particular relevance for MRC units include:

- **Tracking and updating information related to volunteers, local contacts, partners, and specific emergencies or engagements.** Volunteer records allow you to:
1) ensure that credentialing information is current; and 2) track volunteer activities when soliciting operating funds and communicating success to your larger community. Current and accurate volunteer information will be essential for distributing identification cards and other necessary information during an emergency or engagement. See the *Guide to Managing MRC Volunteer Information* for more information.
- **Developing policies, procedures, and strategic priorities.** The MRC unit's volunteers will find themselves in difficult situations. As such, it is important to define and communicate policies related to risk management, liability, the use of MRC identification cards, communications, and incident reporting and post-response activities. Your unit also will be operating in a continually evolving community context; navigating the complexity will require clear, strategic priorities. Planning will be an ongoing part of your unit's operations, not an annual activity.
- **Achieving long-term sustainability.** This is an administrative activity involving a particular type of networking, which includes grant writing and other solicitations of funds, updating local officials on your unit's activities, and leveraging existing community resources. The unit coordinator will function as an ambassador who strengthens the unit's foundation and administrative structure. As always, the emphasis will be on asking others to support the highly complex work of utilizing medical and healthcare volunteers in a coordinated fashion.

The Coordinator's Role

Similar to most organizations, the leadership function of an MRC unit is aligned with the organization's mission or function. The primary mission of an MRC unit is to facilitate

maximum utilization of medical and healthcare volunteers in the community. The unit leader's first responsibility is to remain focused on the mission and ensure that all organizational activities support it.

Management Structure

A local MRC unit should have a core leadership and management structure to function effectively. Some key positions that might be useful to an MRC unit, whether managed by one or several individuals, include:

Unit Coordinator	Public Information Officer
Assistant Coordinator	Communications Officer
Supervisory Physician	Volunteer Recruiter/Coordinator
Supervisory Nurse	Training Officer
Supervisory Pharmacist	Chaplain
Public Health Specialist	Legal Counsel
Mental Health Specialist	Financial Specialist
Logistics Officer	Administrative Support

Checklist

- External Coordination
 - Developing a community network
 - Working with response partners
 - Communicating during and after response activities
 - Identifying activities during non-emergency periods
- Volunteer Relations
 - Recruiting volunteers
 - Interviewing and screening volunteers
 - Training volunteers
 - Retaining volunteers
 - Advocating for volunteers
- Internal Organization
 - Tracking and updating information
 - Developing policies, procedures, and strategic priorities
 - Achieving long-term sustainability

Coordinator's Role

- Drafting a management plan to include objectives, action steps, a timeline, and resources necessary to achieving the plan
- Applying for and managing grants to secure additional funding
- Addressing political, jurisdictional, and intergovernmental agency issues
- Matching community resources and needs
- Attracting volunteers after obtaining buy-in from organizations or groups from which these volunteers will be drawn
- Documenting unit achievements and writing reports as needed. In particular, informing public officials of MRC activities
- Using multiple resources
- Mentoring others seeking to contribute to the MRC

Additional Resources

Examples of Unit Profile Descriptions developed by the MRC:

<http://www.medicalreserv корпус.gov/File/Unit%20Descriptions.doc>

Toolkit Resources for Unit Administration and Operations:

<http://www.medicalreserv корпус.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=BrowseByCategory&category=22>

Guidelines for Developing and Managing an MRC Unit:

[http://www.medicalreserv корпус.gov/File/TASeries/5-5_Special_Topics_Guidelines_\(FINAL\).pdf](http://www.medicalreserv корпус.gov/File/TASeries/5-5_Special_Topics_Guidelines_(FINAL).pdf)