



Guide to Recognition of MRC Volunteers

A Guide for Local MRC Units



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Volunteering can be its own reward—it's the opportunity to give back and make a difference. However, many volunteers also find motivation in the recognition that they receive. Volunteer efforts need to be recognized and celebrated, but how you recognize volunteers will vary based on the personalities of the individuals in your Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit. In addition, some volunteers will not respond well to public recognition, yet they may appreciate recognition from their group. Volunteer recognition can range from informal contact with volunteers (one-on-one or in groups) to formal recognition ceremonies that feature awards and public statements. You will need to choose the combination of volunteer recognition activities that responds best to the needs of your MRC team members. Recognizing volunteers for their service does not have to be expensive or time consuming. The best recognition efforts are those that genuinely express the importance and impact of the volunteer's efforts.

Informal Recognition

The most important type of recognition that you can give volunteers is regular communication about the impact of volunteers' efforts. This can take the form of a newsletter or a regular e-mail update. When communicating with volunteers after an activity (e.g., training, exercise, public health activity, emergency response), be sure to describe the impact of the activity.

Do not forget to update your unit's online profile with recent activities. These activities are reported to the Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps (OCVMRC) and shared with MRC partners, giving your MRC and its volunteers the opportunity for national recognition.

Never forget the power of just saying "Thank you." After every activity, be sure to thank the participants.

Formal Recognition

Most volunteer groups also engage in formal recognition of volunteer efforts. This serves a dual purpose—the volunteer feels appreciated, and the MRC unit has the opportunity to gain publicity.

Awarding certificates is one common method for formally recognizing volunteers. Another option is to send the volunteer's employer a letter commending the volunteer for his/her service and thanking the employer for his/her support.

More substantial awards, such as plaques, are a great way to recognize an outstanding commitment to the MRC. These can be given to recognize the number of hours volunteered, service on an advisory board, or participation in response activities.

Certificates and plaques can, of course, be given directly to the volunteer in private. However, many groups choose to give their volunteers awards in a more public setting. Annual gatherings, whether billed specifically as awards banquets or as part of another event, are a great opportunity to show your appreciation to volunteers. These events can be expensive and are not always well-attended, so it may be helpful to survey volunteers to find out what type of

event they would prefer. Instead of a typical “rubber chicken dinner,” they may prefer to gather for a more informal and less expensive gathering.

Another more public form of volunteer recognition involves contacting local media about your unit’s activities. Exercises and emergency response activities may be considered newsworthy by local media and are a great opportunity to showcase the volunteers’ contributions to local public health and safety. Reporters and editors like to illustrate articles with photographs whenever possible, so be sure to take photographs of your volunteers in action (and be sure to have photo release forms from your volunteers). Local professional societies sometimes like to showcase the volunteer activities of their members, so if your local Medical Society or Nursing Association has a newsletter, you may want to contact the editor about providing a spotlight on their members’ activities with your MRC unit.

There also are established volunteer recognition programs that provide an opportunity for MRC volunteers to receive local, state, and/or national recognition. Some examples include:

- Annual Office of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps Awards (presented at the Integrated Training Summit)
- Daily Points of Light Awards
- President’s Volunteer Service Award
- Recognition through community awards programs (e.g., those sponsored by local media outlets)
- Many states have their own volunteer recognition programs, usually sponsored by the Governor’s Office or a Commission on Volunteer Services.

Additional Resources

Energize, Inc.—for leaders of volunteers:

<http://www.energizeinc.com/>

VMWeb—the online community for volunteer management:

<http://www.vmweb.org/>

Daily Points of Light:

<http://pointsoflight.org/recognition>

Presidential Volunteer Service Award:

<http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov/>

National Volunteer Week:

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/nationalprograms/signatureevents/nvw>

MRC Toolkit for Recognition Letters and Certificates:

<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=ResourceDetails&ResID=225&RefID=Category&Category=25>