



# Guide to Volunteer Recruiting

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*A Guide for Local MRC Units*



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## Guide to Volunteer Recruiting

Volunteers are the basis of the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). This nationwide, community based movement exists because of the willingness of volunteer medical and public health professionals to serve their communities in times of need. Without this generous service there would be no MRC.

Ideally, the basic structure of your program will be in place before you bring in volunteers. Volunteers, particularly those who have extensive volunteer experience, may have high expectations of their MRC experience. It helps to anticipate what will come next and be prepared when volunteers are ready to take their next steps. For example, you might make a rough plan for conducting outreach to prospective volunteers as you begin organizing materials for the interviewing and screening process. Likewise, as you prepare for the interviewing process, you may want to consider possible volunteer training activities.

The most important part of planning your approach to the volunteer experience is having a clear, compelling vision of your unit's role in the community. Without this vision, you will have difficulty attracting volunteers, designing training, attaining support from response partners and keeping your volunteers engaged. Refer to the [Guide to Developing the MRC Purpose](#) for help with developing a vision for your unit.

Once you have determined what the MRC unit's primary roles will be, you can identify the number and types of volunteers that will be needed to fulfill these roles. This process will help you to further tailor your recruiting plans.

Identifying and recruiting volunteers is an essential task of the MRC unit. You must first develop a clear idea of your MRC unit's role in the community and then craft a message to help you communicate this vision to potential volunteers and partners. Once the message is crafted, you can begin advertising your MRC unit to your community.

The MRC unit concept is a complex one; many people do not have a full understanding of public health or emergency management, and the development of an MRC unit involves both. There are many common misconceptions about emergencies, the role of volunteers and the role of medical professionals in emergencies. In presenting information about your MRC unit to the public, it is important to have a clear and concise description of the unit and its role in the community. Although it may seem obvious, the first step in creating this description is for you to understand this role. People volunteer for many reasons, and you will want to understand and appeal to them. You can accomplish this by mentioning the advantages of volunteering for the MRC, such as the following:

- It is a way to offer your skills as part of an organized response effort.
  - It is a significant benefit to your community because skilled volunteers offer services during the year to augment existing public health efforts or provide emergency backup that would not otherwise be available.
  - It is a chance to belong to a group with a strong sense of mission and purpose.
  - Volunteers sometimes qualify for special incentives, such as free training.
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If you can provide a clear, concise, 30- to 60-second description of your MRC unit to someone who is not familiar with the program, you have made significant progress toward developing effective messages for marketing, public relations, and volunteer recruiting. Although you cannot fully explain the MRC concept in 30 to 60 seconds, your brief description will stimulate interest in potential volunteers. Having a clear understanding of the unit also makes it easier for your partners and stakeholders to describe your unit to others. For more information on developing this message, see the [Guide to Creating Your Elevator Speech](#)

Be patient and be persistent—with the messages that bombard us every day, people may need to hear your message several times before they will act on it.

There are multiple venues that can be used as recruitment tools. Because every community is different, what works as an optimal recruitment method in one community may not be as effective in another. Listed below are some examples of recruitment options:

- Flyers
  - Presentations
  - Mass mailings
  - Local radio and television spots
  - Newspaper ads
  - Housing organization Web site publicity
  - Letters of introduction to various health fields (practicing or retired)
  - Referrals from other volunteer centers
  - Media attention given to exercises with response partners
  - Face-to-face approaches
  - Presentations to professional organizations and schools
  - Professional newsletters and journals
  - Brochures
  - Word-of-mouth through existing networks
  - Coordinated recruitment with other partners (e.g., Citizen Corps, Community Emergency Response Teams)
  - Press releases
  - Offering a license renewal option to retired volunteers
  - MRC booths or tables at fairs
  - MRC unit profile
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It has been shown that word-of-mouth is a very effective recruitment tool. After an initial volunteer base has been established, identify volunteers to go out into the community and share their stories. Personal experiences make the deepest impact.

Outreach to volunteers largely overlaps with public awareness campaigns and other public relations efforts. Even when your public message may be intended to generate support from other constituents in your community, each public communication made on behalf of your MRC unit is also an opportunity to attract future volunteers. The importance of volunteers should remain central to all MRC unit communications.

Your public communications strategy will differ based on local resources and needs. Nevertheless, there are standard options to pursue, which include the following:

- Find local media outlets (newspapers, radio, television, Web sites, etc.) that are willing to provide free or low cost print space or air time. Build relationships with reporters and other individuals in these media outlets. If they know who you are, they are more likely to seek information from you. If your agency or organization has a Public Information Officer, enlist their help with identifying and reaching these key individuals. You also may find a local public relations firm willing to donate time to helping you determine the most effective and efficient ways to disseminate information in your specific community. See the [Guide to Media Relations](#) for more information.
- Identify and contact local corporations or organizations—hospitals, emergency management agencies, government health offices, even businesses—that might sponsor your message in exchange for a media mention.
- Seek opportunities to speak at local conferences, professional meetings, organizational gatherings, medically related benefits, and special events.
- Establish ties with local elected officials by informing them of MRC activities and by assessing how the MRC can support their objectives. You can encourage them to mention the MRC in their speeches and at other public appearances as a way to advertise the MRC.
- Sell your message to the recognized leaders of the volunteer groups that you would like to target (e.g., if nurses, the president of their local association; if medical students, a respected faculty member or student representative; if veterinarians, the head of their local professional association).
- Update your unit profile on the MRC Web site on a regular basis.
- Consider using social media, if permitted by your organization, to share regular updates on your MRC unit's activities.

Some of your public messages will describe your MRC unit in general terms and will be suitable for the general public. Other messages may be more targeted, based on your assessment of local needs for medical and other public health volunteers. You may want to reach individuals

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with certain skills (e.g., doctors with particular specialties, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, chiropractors, other public health professionals, support staff, students, practicing professionals, or retired professionals).

While basing your messages on the core message you crafted earlier, you can modify your appeal for different volunteer types. Determine how to best reach these individuals via the type of media they use.

Creating public awareness of your MRC unit is the first step toward guiding prospective volunteers. Verify that you:

- Clarify your MRC's mission and focus
- Explain the community's need for the unit
- Clarify the skills you need for the unit to be most effective

Using public relations effectively can strengthen relationships with volunteers and partnering organizations because it shows that the MRC is part of the community. This can have personal significance to many of your volunteers. It also will be crucial to partnering organizations seeking to sustain a strong community presence.

When recruiting, it is also important to remember that U.S. citizenship is not required. Non-citizens who live in the United States legally are encouraged to volunteer and contribute their time, knowledge, and skills to protect and improve the communities in which they live.

### ***Checklist for Volunteer Recruiting***

- Identify your MRC unit's purpose.
- Based upon the identified roles of the unit, determine the number and types of volunteers you wish to recruit.
- Develop your core message.
- Identify the media outlets and other venues that you will use to reach potential volunteers.
- Tailor your message based on the audience you plan to reach through the outlet/venue.
- Consider engaging your existing volunteers in recruiting efforts.

### ***Additional Resources***

Toolkit for Recruiting Letters:

<http://www.medicalreservercorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=ResourceDetails&ResID=222&RefID=Category&Category=25>

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Toolkit for Marketing and Promotion:

<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=BrowseByCategory&category=24>

MRC Resources for Volunteer Recruiting, Screening and Selection:

<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=BrowseByCategory&category=25>

Energize, Inc

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

Volunteer Match Learning Center

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/learningcenter/>

Volunteer Today

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

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