



# Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders

## Medical Reserve Corps Technical Assistance Series

*Produced by the MRC Program  
Technical Assistance Team*

[www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov)

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The **Medical Reserve Corps** is a specialized component of **Citizen Corps** and the **USA Freedom Corps**.



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

# Medical Reserve Corps Technical Assistance Series



Produced by the **MRC Program Technical Assistance Team**  
Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

As part of its effort to support the growth of **Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)** units across the United States, the MRC program office—headquartered in the office of the U.S. Surgeon General—is developing a series of technical assistance booklets. Each one will address a topic considered important for MRC units. As each booklet is completed or updated, it will be available at: [www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov). Following are some of the topics covered:

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

*Every 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 will be 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. Drilling with response partners will be necessary, as will close communications during and after an actual crisis or engagement.*

- **Developing Volunteer Relationships and Capabilities**

*Developing volunteer capabilities is a key mandate for every MRC unit. The process begins by getting the word out 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 will have to 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 to the evolving technical nature of the MRC's work. For example, legal liability is something every unit member should know about. Other issues pertain to verifying volunteer credentials. Special booklets will be produced to address these and other emerging topics.*



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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MRC Program Technical Assistance Team  
**Office of the Surgeon General**  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**The information in this booklet is intended as a general guide to establishing and operating a Medical Reserve Corps unit. It is not meant to discourage local initiative. For any of the issues addressed in this booklet, we strongly encourage communities to consider alternate approaches that may offer a better fit for their local conditions, resources, and needs. We also welcome learning from those successes.**

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

Published by the Medical Reserve Corps Program Office  
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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 in this booklet on starting an MRC unit is intended to support the following ongoing efforts:

1. **Assessing your community's needs** for medical and health volunteers throughout the year, as well as during times of special need.
2. **Planning** activities that support those community needs, as well as your MRC's mission and objectives.
3. **Promoting your vision for the MRC** by talking with potential response partners and community champions to secure broad-based support for the MRC.
4. **Identifying and pursuing financial and other resources** to make your MRC a reality.

## Getting Started: A Guide for Local Leaders

### How This Booklet Is Organized

The information in this booklet is presented so that you can access it in a variety of ways. How you do so depends on how you learn best and what your immediate needs are.

#### **At-a-Glance**

A quick look through the contents will illustrate what we consider to be the main issues for this topic. What we propose by way of action is summarized on the preceding “Key Activities” page.

#### **Sequentially**

Some of us want to know the whole story, whether we read through all the text systematically or simply browse to get a basic sense of it. The material is sequenced so that it follows a logical progression, with each subtopic building on those that came before.

#### **Hitting the Key Points**

You can get the main points by reading only the boxes that highlight the ideas under each subtopic. If you need or want more, read through some of the nearby text.

#### **By Subtopic**

Each subtopic section is designed to stand alone. Look through the contents page in the beginning and find the section that addresses your current concerns.

#### **Focused on Action**

Since you may need to hit the ground running, each subtopic in this booklet features a list of suggested action steps. You can go directly to the subtopic that most immediately addresses your concerns, or you can work through the whole “Action Steps Checklist” featured in the back of this booklet.



## Covered in This Booklet

Assessing Your Local Situation

≈

Securing Broad-Based Community Support

≈

Matching Resources to Operational Needs

## Quick Facts About The MRC

- ❖ The **Medical Reserve Corps (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 purpose 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, as well as during times of community need.
- ❖ The **MRC** program is a specialized component of Citizen Corps, a national network of volunteers dedicated to ensuring their families, homes, and communities are safe from terrorism, crime, and disasters of all kinds. Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Peace Corps are all part of the President's USA Freedom Corps, which promotes volunteerism and service throughout the U.S. and abroad.

## An Introduction to the MRC

The Medical Reserve Corps 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, every community's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) will function somewhat differently. In this booklet, we consider some of those differences and suggest ways that you, as a community leader, can envision forming an MRC unit in your area.

### 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.

Especially after the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York City and Washington, DC—when so many medical and health volunteers offered their skills and expertise—it became apparent that a more organized approach to utilizing such volunteers would be needed—particularly in the event of a similar crisis.

This is especially true because medical and health volunteers can provide highly technical services. And, as volunteers, they often are required to coordinate their efforts with those of complex medical emergency and public health response systems. In order to protect the safety of everyone involved in a response effort, preparing volunteers ahead of time is critical.

To support that preparedness effort, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy G. Thompson, officially launched the Medical Reserve Corps in July 2002. Congress then 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 technical assistance nationally.

Since the MRC initiative was started 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 hard and creatively to establish the foundation of community support and planning necessary for their units to function effectively.



As a result, this national movement is already adding unique capabilities and increased strength to communities across the United States. We hope you will consider making your own contribution.

### **The MRC Program Office**

The national MRC program is headquartered in the office of the U.S. Surgeon General. The MRC program office is responsible for facilitating the development, implementation, and integration of MRC units across the country. To accomplish this, the program office provides technical assistance to all communities working to establish or maintain a local medical or public health-related volunteer corps. The 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 assistance, or for answers to questions that arise, please visit our Web site at [www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov), or contact us at:

#### **MRC Program Office**

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

## Assessing Your Local Situation

Since Medical Reserve Corps units are meant to serve local needs, the first step in creating a unit is to evaluate your local situation. MRC volunteers are intended to supplement existing capabilities in your area.

Your first job will be to figure out how those volunteers can be of help during the year as well as during times of crisis. To do that, you'll need to understand your community's particular risks and needs.

### Conducting a Risk and Needs Assessment

Whether you're the kind who jumps right in and starts making decisions, or the kind who thinks through your options before taking action, everyone conducts some form of a risk and needs assessment. Everyone tries to consider the nature of the problem to be solved in order to determine the best course of action.

A "risk and needs assessment" is a study of a particular situation to determine what risks or problems are likely to occur and what resources would be required or desirable to deal with those risks or problems. In the case of the MRC, your community is being examined.

Those of us who are inclined to "jump right in" usually operate with some sense of what is needed. We may assume we have enough information to get started and that we will adjust our course as we go. Others are more methodical and may believe in doing things more slowly. They are likely to review the situation before taking action.

There are many different approaches to conducting a risk and needs assessment. With respect to the MRC, for example, some community leaders have assessed the likelihood of disasters or other kinds of health-related emergencies in their area. They have considered the ideal response to those risks and have asked in what ways 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, and so on.

Some leaders have taken a broad look at the ongoing public health needs of their area. Other communities have

### Conducting a Risk and Needs Assessment: Action Steps

- *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 those risks and needs that will involve your MRC volunteers.*
- *Start with what you know best about your community. You don't have to tackle everything at once. Your MRC's contribution can grow over time.*



### **Considering All the Components: Action Steps**

- *Always keep the big picture in mind. Even if it's impossible to handle all at once, you'll still be better prepared to meet 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. What resources will you require to sustain your MRC?*

looked first at the makeup of potential volunteers in their locality to understand their available skill sets. Every community situation is different. You undoubtedly will have your own unique perspective on your community situation.

Start with what you know best about your community. The MRC doesn't have to answer every possible need in your area. It just has to help local volunteers begin to make a difference. The differences they make can continue to grow over time.

Remember, no risk and needs assessment will ever cover all the bases. There always will be room to take additional factors into consideration as you go. Assessment is a continuous, dynamic process. As such, it is better to conduct a limited risk and needs assessment—and then get to work with what you have—than to wait until you've factored in every conceivable risk or need.

A risk and needs assessment for your locality simply has to include enough information so you can begin to imagine possible solutions. It's a starting point. But also think of it as a "living document" that remains open to reassessment of your community's needs.

### **Considering All the Components**

Once you've identified possible risks and needs in your community, you'll begin to formulate some possible solutions. This is where the process can get complicated.

We've found that it helps to think of your MRC unit in terms of three primary and interrelated components that are critical to its operations. We call these: **External Coordination**, **Volunteer Relations**, and **Internal Organization**.

#### **EXTERNAL COORDINATION**

### **Who can partner with the MRC?**

**MRC** units work collaboratively with a broad range of local organizations, such as:

- Departments of Public Health
- Health Care Systems, Hospitals, and Clinics
- Centers for Disease Control
- 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
- Police and Fire Departments
- Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Groups
- Military Organizations and National Guard
- Public Schools
- 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

### Who can volunteer for the MRC?

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

### 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, and so on.

**“External Coordination” involves working closely with partnering organizations and groups that will be making use of your MRC volunteers.** Your MRC unit will be supplementing existing local emergency medical preparedness and public health capabilities. Coordinating with those local response partners will be critical, as will developing and nurturing a broad network of partners. They may have special procedures already in place. Exercising disaster scenarios with response partners will be necessary, as will close communications during and after an actual crisis or engagement. Keeping this “big picture” in mind can help you plan ahead.

**“Volunteer Relations” considers how to develop a strong and committed volunteer corps.** Developing volunteer capabilities is a key mandate for every MRC unit. The process starts by getting the word out to your community. As volunteers are screened and matched with existing needs, they must be informed of any risks associated with their MRC activities. Their credentials will have to be verified. They also will require additional training, debriefing, and recognition. All of these are important aspects of building a strong MRC team.

**“Internal Organization” requires establishing the administrative systems and supports you’ll need to achieve your mission.** 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 will have to be solicited, and public and private sector resources leveraged. Planning is an essential, ongoing function of the unit’s administrators.

This may seem like a lot to keep in mind, and it is. But you won’t need to master it all at once. These are just points to begin considering. Then, as you develop familiarity with the MRC and with the work it will undertake in your community, inevitably you will, with confidence, take up more and more of that “big picture.” Let your MRC grow at its own pace.

## What do MRC volunteers do?

**MRC volunteers supplement existing local public health initiatives, such as:**

- *Outreach and prevention* (e.g., West Nile virus, SARS, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, smoking, substance abuse, cardiac rehabilitation and screening, physical fitness, domestic violence, injury, vehicle safety, women’s health, prostate and other cancers)
- *Immunization programs* (e.g., childhood diseases, flu, smallpox)
- *Blood drives*
- *Case management and care planning* (for families, special needs populations, high-risk infants, adolescents, the elderly, women, and others)

**MRC volunteers also work in coordination with existing local emergency response programs.**

### **Developing a Rough Plan: Action Steps**

- *Sketch out a plan that touches on all the key points. You can always revise it.*
- *Include a mission statement, objectives, an action plan, an organizational chart, and a budget.*
- *Make a preliminary list of potential response partners and other organizations that might be willing to champion your MRC. Who can you count on?*
- *Note any ongoing issues that will require advocacy (i.e., liability protection for volunteers, integrating MRC volunteers into existing systems, credential verification procedures, etc.*

## **Developing a Rough Plan**

Once you have an idea of all the components that likely will affect the operations of your MRC unit, it can be useful to organize them into a rough plan.

A plan doesn't have to be anything elaborate to begin. Some people use white boards or flip charts to brainstorm. Other people type lists or outlines. And still others work best with more visual diagrams, like flow charts, that show the different elements of their plan. All of this can become material that you incorporate into a more formal document down the road.

Some of the possible planning elements are described below (as well as in the box on the next page). Feel free to use these as a guide to developing your own list of key issues.

**A Mission Statement:** Many plans begin by making a concise statement about the purpose or mission of a particular organization or group. Such a statement can help to focus the decisions that develop in support of that mission. Some people also include a statement of vision or values as a way to keep the effort on track. In any case, a mission statement should be linked to the risks or needs identified in your initial assessment.

**Objectives:** Conceivably, there are many ways to fulfill a mission or vision. You will decide what you think is preferable or realistic to accomplish in that regard. Some people use the word "goals" interchangeably with the word "objectives." Either way, 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:** This is where you consider the details of how you will achieve your objectives. Depending on the ambition of those 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 within a year, while others find it helpful to establish long-term objectives as a way to keep an effort moving forward. You may want to include both.

For example, a plan for your first year of operation may include some of the issues described earlier, such as how you are going to: 1) coordinate with external partners; 2) recruit and train volunteers; 3) utilize volunteers in ways that will include promotion of public health; 4) establish a communications system for use with volunteers and

### **Components of a Rough 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 MRC**
- **Advocacy Issues** (including liability protection for volunteers, integrating MRC volunteers into existing systems, credential verification procedures, etc.)

response partners; and 5) address other organizational development needs and issues (such as data tracking systems, policies and procedures, scope of operations, criteria for mobilizing and demobilizing, verification of volunteer credentials, fundraising, etc.).

**Organizational Chart:** In order to support all of these activities, what kind of organizational structure will need to be in place? Be sure to include in your chart other resources or partnering organizations as a way to keep the larger system in mind. You also will want to update the chart over time to reflect how your unit functions in practice, not simply how it should operate in theory or ideally. A thorough and up-to-date organizational chart can play an important role in ongoing planning activities.

**Budget:** What is it going to cost you and what resources will you need to support your organization and all of your planned activities? Your budget should include needed as well as already available resources, including funds, specialty expertise, in-kind donations of supplies or services, strategic community partnerships, etc. If you cannot determine how to get the resources you need, you may have to go back and modify your plan. Or, it may be an opportunity to challenge your community to develop those resources. Don't give up until you've looked everywhere and asked everyone for help. Knowing your budget will allow you to justify your unit's solicitations for support and to know how best to make use of resources as they come available.

**Potential Response Partners:** This is a list that likely will grow over time. Keep track of the 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 one has been formed. Make note of the specific activities relevant to each partner, along with any other pertinent information. This will help with more detailed planning as you go forward. Such information also will be useful when soliciting support for resources. In particular, potential funders often want to know that an effort is well connected to other resources in its larger community.

**Other Organizations Supporting Your MRC:** In addition to having response partners with whom your MRC unit will likely work closely, there also will be other community players—including government offices and private sector businesses—that gladly will support your MRC's activities and presence in the community.



**Advocacy Issues:** What are the tough issues affecting your MRC and its volunteers? Some of these will have to be addressed and worked out 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 will be issues that are not likely to be resolved soon. But it helps to keep them in the picture and to plan to address them as you go.



Remember, your planning process may begin in a less structured way, but the goal is to move toward a formal document that is understandable to other parties and with which they can agree. 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.



**Get others in your community to buy into your vision for the MRC.**

**You cannot achieve it alone.**

### **Negotiating With Response Partners: Action Steps**

- *Identify partners with a shared mission or who are engaged in work that complements what your MRC volunteers can provide.*
- *Make sure your MRC activities don't conflict with other organizations' domains. Negotiate workable compromises.*
- *Come to a solid agreement to work together, even if you still have to iron out the details.*
- *Get letters of intent. Use them to continue building your network.*
- *Stay in touch with the prospects that are more difficult to cultivate. It can take time to understand the MRC's role in any community.*
- *Keep the conversations moving forward.*

## **Securing Broad-Based Community Support**

Once you've "sketched out" some possibilities for your MRC unit, it will be necessary to solicit support across a broad base in your community. The success of the MRC is dependent on a variety of resources (funds, in-kind donations, and volunteers of all kinds). It is especially dependent on cooperative arrangements with a variety of response partners and other community supporters.

Even a rough plan can go a long way toward helping others see what you envision for your MRC and how you think that vision realistically can be achieved. A plan also can be a great ice-breaker when starting conversations and negotiations.

Within the limits of your resources and mission, leave your plan open to input and suggestions from others, too. Where possible, allow it to stretch to meet unanticipated needs, and let it adjust to barriers or community conflicts.

Every MRC begins as just an idea, usually in the heart and mind of a community leader with vision. But by the time that vision becomes a reality, it may look very different. Once you start to involve others in shaping your MRC, it begins to take on a life and purpose all its own.

### **Negotiating With Response Partners**

There is a great deal that eventually will have to be worked out between your MRC unit and your local response partners: responsibilities, jurisdictional and other boundaries, reporting structures, utilization procedures, communications protocols and systems, and so on. But first you have to agree to work together or to seriously consider what potentially will be required. The particulars will follow from that basic agreement.

Identifying potential partners can come from recognizing a shared missions and/or complementary function. For example, your MRC may be committed to promoting public health, just as your public health department or other community health-focused organizations are. Or, your MRC may be dedicated to supplementing emergency medical capabilities, just like your area's hospitals or emergency medical offices. If these shared missions aren't in conflict with one another and don't duplicate services, there may be a natural fit between those organizations and your MRC volunteers.





### **Identifying Partnership Opportunities**

- What local efforts are already underway that the MRC can help support?
- To what ongoing community needs might your MRC volunteers usefully respond?
- What vulnerable segments of your community—low-income groups, non-English speakers, individuals with disabilities, etc.—could use your MRC volunteers' services during non-emergency times as well as during crises?

You also may identify partners whose mission is similar and may want your volunteers to fill niches not already covered in their system. For example, MRC volunteers staffing a flu clinic in a low-income neighborhood could attract buy-in from neighborhood residents—for the MRC but also for public health initiatives in general. Or, there may be a local group that already makes use of volunteer public health nurses. Those volunteers might become part of your MRC during emergency periods.

Perhaps there is an upcoming local volunteer or health expo in which the MRC can participate in outreach efforts with other groups. Or, perhaps another volunteer group in your community already has developed a database to keep track of volunteers that you can use as a template to develop your own.

Even local businesses may recognize that perhaps your MRC's ability to augment triage capacity at local hospitals during a complex disaster may speed up 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, it is important to consider whether that resistance points to issues the MRC unit has not adequately considered or addressed in its vision or plan. Make changes accordingly and bring your modified proposal back to the table.

Whatever the possibilities, coming to some agreement to work together can take time. So, follow up first with those prospective partners with whom collaboration seems most obvious and easy to negotiate. Meanwhile, stay in touch with prospects that are harder to cultivate. It can take time for some people and organizations to understand how the MRC can benefit them, just as it will take time to realize all the different ways that MRC volunteers can contribute to your community.

To get started, all you need are statements of substantive interest from prospective partners and agreements to work out the details of your collaboration. If possible, ask for letters of intent from these partners. This not only will promote clarity in your dealings with one another; it also will show possible funders and other community champions that you have made progress toward making your MRC a practical reality. Others are more likely to support an effort if they see that there is buy-in from members of your community.

Above all, the agreements you negotiate with response partners will be the strongest indicators that you are on the

### **Enlisting Champions for Your MRC: Action Steps**

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

### **Community Champions**

- Local, county, and state government officials.
- Corporations and other private sector businesses.
- Prominent individuals and leaders in your community.

right track for your MRC. You also will be able use those interactions and their outcomes to adjust and strengthen your overall plan. The basic idea is to keep the conversations moving forward.

### **Enlisting Champions for Your MRC**

In addition to having partners with whom your MRC will work closely, it also helps to have other individuals or organizations in your community behind your effort. These individuals and organizations don't need to have any obvious relation to the work your volunteers may be doing. They may recognize easily 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.

Champions for any cause typically have ties to the larger community or to specific segments from which your MRC may be attempting to solicit support or buy-in. 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 make a big difference for an MRC unit that is otherwise struggling to make itself known and to be taken seriously.

Local government officials also are a good place to look for support. They will have connections with many organizations in the community 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, especially if you can illustrate incidents that have received lots of media attention (such as the SARS outbreak in Canada, or the fires that have so often swept through the western part of the U.S.). Once you've 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, local corporations and other private businesses often have access to resources that can directly benefit your MRC (funds, media exposure, and particular areas of needed expertise). The same may be true of prominent individuals and leaders in your community. Don't hesitate to enlist their sponsorship. Their letters of support also will show funders and other potential champions that you are well connected and networked in your community. It cannot be emphasized enough that people often are most likely to put their resources behind causes that demonstrate broad community support and relevance.



**Determine how to get the resources necessary to make your MRC a reality.**

### **Developing Monetary Resources: Action Steps**

- *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 making personal contact.*
- *Plan special fundraising events.*
- *Ask a fundraising specialist for help with determining what activities will work best 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.*
- *Let your response partners and community champions know what you need financially so they can direct you to other sources.*

## **Matching Resources to Operational Needs**

Making your MRC a reality will require locating the resources to meet your MRC's operational needs and goals for recruitment, training, volunteer utilization, administrative support, and so on.

Once you have a pretty solid plan for moving forward and a realistic sense of what that plan will cost to implement, you will be ready to begin acquiring those necessary resources. Following are some general guidelines to consider.

### **Developing Monetary Resources**

Though a great deal of your operational needs may be met by a variety of in-kind donations—through bartering, and from being offered pro bono specialty services—some of your needs will require you to have access to funds.

Activities for acquiring monetary resources can include grant applications (to national and local foundations, state and Federal government programs, and corporate charitable offices), direct appeals to donors (either through the mail or through personal contacts), and special fundraising events. You may want to ask a fundraising or development specialist from your area to consult with you at little or no cost to determine what mix of activities will work best in your community.

At a Federal level, find out what funded efforts also might be relevant to your MRC. For example, some MRC units have joined forces with bioterrorism preparedness programs, which allows them not only to share monetary resources but also to dovetail outreach, training, and community coordination efforts.

It also may be possible to receive limited funding from some of your response partners because they may already have budgeted for certain activities that your MRC unit may take on as responsibilities. Shifting those funds to you will remain consistent with their original purpose.

Always let your partners and community champions know of your financial needs. Even if they aren't in a position to make a financial contribution themselves—or they can, but it falls short of your needs—they may be aware of other sources. Financing can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Let others help you with this process.

### **Soliciting In-Kind Donations: Action Steps**

- *Identify resources that might be attained through a direct gift rather than by paying for it with funds.*
  - ⇒ Your list might include office space, office equipment, a computer, software, programming and other support services, media placement, communications materials, etc.
- *Let your response partners and community champions know what you need so they can direct you to possible donors.*

### **Seeking Out Specialty Expertise: Action Steps**

- *Identify the time-limited expertise that would help move your MRC forward.*
- *Don't be afraid to ask for help if you don't know how to do something. Many people are willing to help a worthy cause.*
- *Let your response partners and community champions know what you need by way of expertise so they can direct you to their contacts.*

## **Soliciting In-Kind Donations**

Funds may not always be available, but a donor may be able to give you exactly what you need. For example, a donor may not have the money to cover your monthly rent, but he or she may have office space available that you can use at no cost.

The term “in-kind donations” can mean anything from receiving actual goods or supplies to making use of someone’s time and services. For example, individuals in the community may have bookkeeping or software programming skills you need on an ongoing, part-time basis, and they may be willing to offer it to you for free or at a very reduced cost. A computer or other office equipment may be donated by companies that have upgraded to newer machines. Local media may be willing to broadcast your public relations messages for free; communications professionals may be willing to develop your materials at cost. The possibilities are endless.

Let your partners and community champions know what you are having trouble acquiring because they may know how to help you get it. Also keep records of in-kind donations as you would all other transactions. Individuals and organizations may be more willing to support your MRC if they can see that it has effectively leveraged resources from a variety of sources.

## **Seeking Out Specialty Expertise**

Running an MRC unit can be a highly complex endeavor. Some of its activities require specialized skills sets, many of which you may not know at first, but that you can learn in time.

Sometimes it can help to ask for pro bono help from experts in your area—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, especially on a one-shot or short-term basis.

Don't hesitate to ask. Having access to expertise that you would otherwise not be able to afford can make a substantial difference in the success of your MRC. Also keep your response partners and community champions informed of what you need so they can link you to their network of professional resources.

### **Optimizing Strategic Partnerships: Action Steps**

- *Be clear about the benefit your MRC volunteers bring to others—especially to your response partners.*
- *Look to see what your partners have that they might be willing to share or give to you for free or at a low cost.*
  - ⇒ Partners may be willing to 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.

## **Optimizing Strategic Partnerships**

Many of your requests for resources will be granted by appealing to a desire to give to a worthwhile community effort. But contributions from your response partners should be thought of more as an exchange. After all, you are giving them something valuable in the form of a committed volunteer corps.

In exchange for what your MRC might bring to their organizations, your response partners may be willing to offer free or low-cost training, access to legal and other expertise, access to office space or other administrative resources, the ability to conduct credentials verification or background checks for volunteers, and so on.

The more you can help others see the benefit that your volunteers can bring, the better able they will be able to see what they are receiving in return.

Ultimately, your MRC is only asking for help to the extent that it has something truly valuable to offer your community. A large part of your job will be to help others see that contribution, too.

All of your partners will appreciate recognition for their contributions. It is always appropriate to include their names on your brochures, newsletters, or other forms of public communication. Doing so not only will show your partners that you appreciate their efforts, but it also will inform the community of their good stewardship.



## Action Steps Checklist

*The checklist of possible “action steps” below follows the basic outline of this particular technical assistance topic. Remember: these are only suggestions. We offer them as a quick reference guide and as something to stimulate your own thinking through some of the complexities you may face in your MRC unit. You may choose to follow a different approach. If so, we hope you’ll share your “best practices” as you go along. We all have a lot to learn.*

### ASSESSING YOUR LOCAL SITUATION

- Find out 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 those risks and needs that will involve your MRC volunteers.
- Start with what you know best about your community. You don’t have to tackle everything at once. Your MRC’s contribution can grow over time.

#### Considering All the Components

- Always keep the big picture in mind. Even if it’s impossible to handle all at once, you’ll still be better prepared to meet 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. What resources will you require to sustain your MRC?

#### Developing a Rough Plan

- Sketch out a plan that touches on all the key points. You can always revise it.
- Include a mission statement, objectives, an action plan, an organizational chart, and a budget.
- Make a preliminary list of potential response partners and other organizations that might be willing to champion your MRC. Who can you count on?

- Note any ongoing issues that will require advocacy (i.e., liability protection for volunteers, integrating MRC volunteers into existing systems, credential verification procedures, etc.)

## **SECURING BROAD-BASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

- Get others in your community to buy into your vision for the MRC. 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.
- Make sure your MRC activities don't conflict with other organizations' domains. Negotiate workable compromises.
- Come to a solid agreement to work together, even if you still have to iron out the details.
- Get letters of intent. Use them to continue building your network.
- Stay in touch with the prospects that are more difficult to cultivate. It can take time to understand the MRC's role in any community.
- Keep the conversations moving forward.

### **Enlisting Champions for Your MRC**

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

## **MATCHING RESOURCES TO OPERATIONAL NEEDS**

- Determine how to get the resources necessary to make your MRC a reality.

### **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 making personal contact.
- Plan special fundraising events.

- Ask a fundraising specialist for help with determining what activities will work best 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.
- Let your response partners and community champions know what you need financially so they can direct you to other sources.

### **Soliciting In-Kind Donations**

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### **Optimizing Strategic Partnerships**

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