

Medical Reserve Corps: Shelter Operations Support



As part of Emergency Support Function 6 (Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services), sheltering is one of many ways that Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers regularly support their communities; some MRC units even manage entire sheltering operations. Support activities vary widely, from identifying appropriate sheltering facilities and assessing community needs to on-site logistics and community outreach activities. The MRC Challenge Awards projects highlighted in this fact sheet demonstrate how MRC units can prepare for and support sheltering operations.

What Can MRC Units Do?

1. Assess community needs, including access and functional needs.

MRC units support local emergency management by identifying community needs to inform shelter operations planning. Volunteers can support door-to-door efforts to conduct surveys, such as the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) or other assessments, to identify targeted needs in their community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information about CASPER at <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/disaster/casper/>.

Comprehensive sheltering operations plans should also employ inclusive, whole-community approaches that consider access and functional needs (AFN), which encompass at-risk, vulnerable, and special needs populations. Potential AFN accommodations may be necessary for dialysis patients, elders, substance-dependent individuals, pets and service animals, and other populations with specific needs.

- Access-based needs require linkages to universal resources such as social services, accommodations, information, transportation, regular use medication, etc.
- Function-based needs are an individual's restrictions or limitations that require assistance before, during, or after a disaster or public health emergency, such as physical or behavioral disabilities.¹



Spotlight on MRC Shelter Operations Support: Assessing Community Needs

The Cannon Beach, Oregon MRC Unit #2628 administered a disaster health and wellness survey to identify unmet emergency preparedness and public health needs. By surveying 1,705 community members, the MRC identified their community's need for special evacuation procedures, dementia assistance, and at-home care protocol, which informed city and county sheltering plans. The survey is available online at <https://www.ci.cannon-beach.or.us/emergencymgmt/page/cannon-beach-health-preparedness-survey>. The MRC also developed a map of neighborhoods and resources for volunteers and first responders to improve resource-sharing and better assist residents with special needs during evacuations.

The Western Nevada MRC Unit #488 developed the Northern Nevada Functional Assessment Service Team (FAST), which works side-by-side with shelter personnel to assess and meet essential functional needs so that shelter clients are able to maintain their health, safety, and independence during disasters. While the FAST Program was originally developed and implemented by the California Department of Social Services (<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Mass-Care-and-Shelter/FAST>), Western Nevada MRC hopes to make FAST teams a function of local MRC units, creating yet another key role for MRC volunteers during shelter operations. The MRC also developed an AFN support team training participant guide, available in the NACCHO Toolbox.



“General sheltering is a community event involving multiple emergency partners. MRC members provide an integral support system for supplemental staffing needs in support of public health goals.” – Member of Person County MRC Unit #2424

2. Build response capabilities using the Mission Ready Package model.

Mission Ready Packages (MRPs), a concept developed by the National Emergency Management Association, are specific response and recovery capabilities that are organized, developed, trained, and exercised prior to a disaster or public health emergency.² Developing MRPs allows MRC units and communities to better mobilize their personnel and resources when needed, especially since they go beyond resource typing to include pre-scripted mission statements, limitations, required support from other sources, time to readiness, and costs for personnel, equipment, travel, and other necessities.³ For more information, visit <https://www.emacweb.org/index.php/learn-about-emac/module-positions/mission-ready-package>.



Spotlight on MRC Shelter Operations Support: Building Response Capabilities

Massachusetts Region 5 MRC units collaboratively developed Sheltering Go Kits that encompass tools for registration, medical support, dormitory, shelter managers, behavioral health, food services, and pet sheltering. The Registration Go Kits, for example, include supply and staffing lists, job action sheets, occupant intake form, shelter rules, disclosure forms, and multilingual communications sheets. The MRC units used flu clinics and actual shelter operations to practice plans, train volunteers, strengthen existing and develop new partnerships, and increase emergency dispensing and sheltering capacity. The region's extensive resources can be found at <http://www.mrcvolunteer.org/mrc-sheltering-station-go-kits.html>.



3. Identify training and continuing education for MRC volunteers.

To ensure volunteers are well versed in their roles and responsibilities during shelter operations, MRC units should plan regular training and continuing education opportunities, particularly those that build hands-on experience. Trainings, such as Psychological First Aid and First Aid/CPR, can also enhance overall MRC unit capabilities for sheltering operations.

Get Connected

MRC volunteer capabilities expand far beyond the aforementioned examples. MRC units are integral to the continuum of public health preparedness, response, and recovery support. For more information on the MRC or to connect with specific MRC units, visit the MRC website at <https://mrc.hhs.gov/HomePage> or NACCHO's MRC webpage at <https://www.naccho.org/programs/public-health-preparedness/medical-reserve-corps>.

References

1. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. (2018). At-Risk Individuals webpage. Retrieved August 6, 2018, from <https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/abc/Pages/atrisk.aspx>
2. Emergency Management Assistance Compact. (2018). Mission Ready Packages webpage. Retrieved August 6, 2018, from <https://www.emacweb.org/index.php/mutualaidresources/emac-library/mission-ready-packages>
3. Emergency Management Assistance Compact, National Emergency Management Association. (2018). Frequently Asked Questions about MRPs webpage. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <https://www.emacweb.org/index.php/learn-about-emac/module-positions/mission-ready-package>



Spotlight on MRC Shelter Operations Support: Training and Continuing Education

Person County MRC, North Carolina, Unit #2424 hosted an AFN-focused regional general shelter intake and assessment training after conducting a gap analysis that identified the following capability shortfalls: lack of equipment and knowledge of AFN needs; lack of staff and volunteers trained for shelter operations; and inconsistent intake and assessment processes. The training brought together 30 MRC volunteers, unit leaders from seven surrounding counties, and their five corresponding MRC units to interact with AFN cots and communications kits. Training participants reported improved confidence in shelter operations, greater willingness to serve at an emergency shelter, increased knowledge of AFN needs, and an additional openness to further training.

Capital Area MRC, New Hampshire, Unit #1898 tested a Regional Sheltering Toolkit by exercising shelter activities with local partners to review plans and identify necessary adjustments. The plans were developed by local government agencies from Massachusetts and New Hampshire, in coordination with the American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency, and aim to narrow gaps, build capacity, and train staff for effective and efficient all-inclusive shelter, including shelter activation, operations, demobilization, and continued training. The MRC is also developing a Shelter 101 training to accompany the plans. A member from the MRC unit shared that "[exercising the new regional shelter plan and training] has empowered shelter staff, particularly those newer in their position and volunteers. . . and overall invigorated the region's partners."

[FACT SHEET]

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Resources

Be sure to also check the NACCHO Toolbox periodically for updates to MRC Toolkit resources.

- NACCHO Toolbox - <http://toolbox.naccho.org>
- Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response: Mass Care and Emergency Assistance - <http://bit.ly/2N4CXVI>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Emergency Shelter Operations - <http://bit.ly/2wrXWYC>
- Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters - <http://bit.ly/2NuU7ID>

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