Starting a CERT Program - Step 3: Gaining Support and Recruiting

Overview

Regardless of how well you organize your CERT program, it can't succeed unless you have the support of the key stakeholders in your community. These stakeholders range from the chief elected and appointed officials to professional responders to the citizens whom you want to recruit. This step presents some issues that you may need to address and provides suggestions for gaining the support of all program stakeholders.

Contents

This step includes the following resources:

- Developing Your Program Strategy
- Developing CERT Partnerships
- Developing Partnerships Checklist
- Marketing CERT
- Gaining Support From Local Leaders
- Tips for Gaining Support & Recruiting
- Marketing Contacts Worksheet

Web Resources

- Volunteer Recruitment: Tips From the Field, Texas Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service
  Web Address: http://www.txserve.org/mgmt/volrec/recruit.html

- Volunteer Recruitment Tips
  Web Address: http://www.cmsa.org/meminfo/VolunteerRecruitment.html

- Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media
  Web Address: http://www.benton.org/Practice/Features/stratcommrevw.html

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How To: Developing Your Program Strategy

Before you begin marketing your CERT program, you will need to develop an overall strategy for the program.

Why Develop a Strategy Paper

Experienced CERT Program Coordinators suggest that a good way to develop the program strategy is by preparing a "white paper" that presents an overall approach to CERTs within the context of the community, its hazards, and its response requirements. After development, you can use the information from your "white paper" to market your program.

What To Include in Your Strategy Paper

The "white paper" should include the information listed below. As you consider your community's needs, you may find other topics that should be included in the "white paper" as well.

Topic	What To Include
Current Situation in the Community	▪ Threats faced by the community ▪ Population needs ▪ Number of professional responders ▪ How CERTs can augment the response
Program Goals and Expectations	▪ An overview of what CERTs will do in an emergency or disaster ▪ How CERTs will complement professional responders ▪ How many people will be trained in the first year ▪ An estimate of how many people will be trained over the first 5 years ▪ How skill levels will be maintained
Training Strategy	▪ Training curriculum (Note: The FEMA curriculum can be augmented if the community faces additional threats to unusual conditions.) ▪ Training methods
Team Organization	▪ Types of teams: Neighborhood teams, rural area teams, workplace teams, non-profit organization teams, and others ▪ How ICS will be used to manage the CERT response
Linkages With the Existing Response System	▪ Protocols for "self-activation" and "call out" ▪ Procedures for communicating with professional responders ▪ Level of control by emergency responders

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How To: Building CERT Partnerships

For your program to be successful, it will be critical for you to identify potential partners and to form and maintain partnerships.

Identifying the Benefits of Partnerships

In building these partnerships, it is important to determine how the features of the CERT program can benefit the stakeholders and the community. Potential benefits include:

- Better individual and family preparedness,
- Increased neighborhood and workplace involvement with public safety,
- Support of emergency management and its agencies,
- Businesses investment in community safety, or
- The positive perception that the government is reaching out to help the people it serves, etc.

Every member of the community—from private citizens to businesses to government officials—holds a vital stake in preparedness and response. As you build partnerships, you will gain knowledge and a better understanding of the risks affecting your community and the roles that CERT volunteers can play. Even better, you will identify and build resources as you meet knowledgeable and enthusiastic people, gain ideas, and obtain financial assistance.

Identifying Partners and Stakeholders

One of the most important steps you need to take is to identify key stakeholders in your community and recruit individuals, businesses, government officials, service groups, and others to support the CERT program. While every citizen is a potential stakeholder, some will be more willing or able to form partnerships than others.

Take some time to identify potential partners and stakeholders in your community. Some partners, such as homeowner's associations, Neighborhood Watch groups and school groups are "ready-made" partners. The Checklist for Developing Partnerships provides additional partnering suggestions, and you may add other potential partners to the list. After you have identified potential partners and stakeholders, review the questions that follow the checklist. It should get you started on assessing their stake in the CERT program.

How To: Building CERT Partnerships (Continued)

Recruiting Partners

Recruiting partners is like assembling a successful team—it takes thoughtful planning. Chances are that you will have only one opportunity to introduce CERT to many potential partners, so you will want your approach to be well thought out. There are ample materials and success stories available about CERT programs, especially if you network with other CERT Program Coordinators.

Emergency preparedness and response is not just an issue for public authorities or first responders. Disasters can occur unexpectedly and overwhelm the response system.

Your stakeholders will come from every segment of the community that can be impacted by a disaster. Recruiting these capable and committed individuals will be key. Let your own enthusiasm and commitment show. It will be contagious!

All partners will want to know how they will benefit from CERT and if the program has elements of success. After all, committing personal time and, perhaps, financial resources requires a full understanding of the importance of CERTs.

Because many of your potential partners will be community leaders who are constantly bombarded with requests for financial and personal support, anticipate the question, "What makes CERT so important?" Be sure to have a response ready, and share some success stories.

Schedule and Prepare for One-on-One Meetings

Schedule individual meetings with the organizations you have targeted for participation. Here's where you will need to give careful thought to your approach. Consider how the organization will benefit from participation. You may need to do some research into the organization to discover motivating factors and leveraging points, such as protection of future profits or safety of employees. For some, a connection with damage prevention may be obvious, and community goodwill is always an important motivating factor.

For neighborhood partners, you will need to learn about any specific hazards faced (is the neighborhood located along a stream that is prone to flooding, for example?) and the makeup of the neighborhood. Try to find a "champion" in the neighborhood who can promote the program to his or her neighbors.

After you have identified the factors you want to stress, develop talking points for one-on-one meetings. Be sure that you develop a clear message on why they should participate, what CERTs can accomplish if supported, and how they can help with the process.

How To: Building CERT Partnerships (Continued)

Bringing Partners to the Table

It is important that potential partners realize that beyond the basic training, CERT is a unique program that will be developed based on local needs, and that it is up to the partners to help create the strategy to implement a program that improves community preparedness. You can customize CERT materials to meet the community's specific hazards, demographics, and response needs.

Every community has dynamos in the public and private sector who can lead with powerful effectiveness. The job of recruiting partners will be ongoing, so keep notes of contacts you make and the possible resources they can provide. Also, as you recruit partners, encourage them to identify others who can contribute, personally or financially, to the program.

Developing Win-Win Relationships With Partners

In recruiting partners and forming partnerships, you're looking to build long-term relationships. Anything less will limit the program's effectiveness and increase its operational costs. You should have a clear vision of how your partners can help you in the short- and long-term development of the program.

To benefit your partners as well as your program, take advantage of each partner's normal function in the community. For instance, the media is constantly looking for good stories. The media has the potential to be of critical assistance in promoting the CERT program and community preparedness because:

- The community relies on TV, radio, and the press for news.
- The media has a responsibility for gathering and disseminating critical information to the community.
- Media personnel are part of the community that you are trying to prepare to protect.

Because the media can be a great way to disseminate information about the benefits of CERT, perhaps local stations or newspapers would be willing to broadcast or print program information and announcements. As a result, information about CERT is disseminated more widely and in a more sophisticated way, while the public receives correct information about the program.

Leveraging resources in similar ways with organizations, such as utility companies, hospitals, volunteer organizations, and educational institutions strengthens both the CERT program and the organizations. However, these partnerships involve a high-level, long-term commitment to the program. Your potential partners are investing time, experience, creativity, and money. True partners will embrace CERT and create momentum that inspires and encourages others to participate as well.

Besides financial and personal support for implementing the CERT program, businesses, media, neighborhood organizations, and public safety agencies benefit from the actual CERT program. Their families, loved ones, and employees receive the training that prepares them for hazards, which results in a long-term improvement in public safety.

Developing Partnerships Checklist

The list below provides some suggestions for developing CERT partners. Use this list to help you determine whom you should approach to sell your program.

Type of Organization	Contacts
Business and Industry	❏ Large employers ❏ Housing authorities ❏ Utility companies ❏ Other:
Communications/Media Organizations	❏ Telephone companies ❏ Television stations ❏ Radio stations ❏ Cable providers ❏ Daily and weekly newspapers ❏ Other:
Not-for-Profit Organizations	❏ Civic and service organizations ❏ Benevolent groups (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Jaycees) ❏ Other:
Public Interest Groups	❏ The American Red Cross chapters ❏ Neighborhood Watch groups ❏ American Association of Retired Persons chapters ❏ Parent-teacher organizations ❏ Chambers of commerce ❏ Homeowners' associations ❏ Environmental groups ❏ Other:
Health Care Providers	❏ Hospitals ❏ Medical clinics ❏ Managed-care facilities ❏ Emergency medical services ❏ Other:
Local Government Agencies	❏ Local authorities ❏ Elected and appointed officials ❏ Police departments ❏ Fire departments ❏ Public works departments ❏ Planning and zoning boards ❏ Other:

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Developing Partnerships Checklist (Continued)

Type of Organization	Contacts
Medical Supplies	❏ Union locals ❏ Professional groups ❏ Other:
Education Groups	❏ School superintendent ❏ School board members ❏ University and community colleges ❏ Vocational and technical schools ❏ Daycare, childcare, and elderly-care providers ❏ Other:

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Marketing CERT

In many communities, once started, CERT has sold itself as a valuable program. As a new CERT Program Coordinator, you need to determine how will you initially "sell" your program to local elected officials, employers, and citizens. As you consider the tips provided below, think about other ways that you might market the CERT program. For example, you should consider:

- What internal support is needed?
- What external support is needed?
- Are there ready made groups for this training?

Overall Marketing Steps

Listed below are suggested steps for marketing your CERT program:

- **Step 1: Identify Potential CERT Partners.** There are some "ready-made" partners for CERT in nearly every community. The groups listed below are good examples of "ready-made" CERT partners. (See the checklist for Developing Partnerships.)

  - Homeowner associations
  - Neighborhood associations
  - Communities of faith
  - Business district associations
  - Grange associations
  - Schools or PTAs
  - Scouting organizations
  - ARES/RACES/Amateur radio associations

  Identify the "ready-made" partners in your community. They may be perfect as model CERTs.

- **Step 2: Develop an Outreach Program.** After identifying audiences that could benefit from CERT training, figure out a way to reach them. Arrange to speak to potential audiences. Explain the issues involved in emergency response and explain how CERT training can improve preparedness and enable neighborhoods or workplaces to take care of themselves.

- **Step 3: Develop and Disseminate Marketing Materials.** Get your message out! Prepare media releases, distribute flyers in target neighborhoods, place articles in neighborhood association newsletters, or distribute information at community events. Think creatively about how to let your potential audience know that CERTs exist, what they do, and how to participate. Include a contact phone number or email address in case people have questions- and respond to inquiries promptly! When you do this, make sure the people who will receive these inquires know about CERT. If they do not handle the inquiries deftly, it will reflect badly on your program.

- **Step 4: Pitch to the Media.** Go public! Provide the media with footage or photo opportunities involving CERTs in action. Ask CERT volunteers to speak to the media about the benefits they've received through CERT training. Develop media releases that send the message about CERTs. Be prepared for the results of media coverage!

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Marketing CERT (Continued)

Marketing CERT to Employers

Employers can be a huge asset to your CERT program. (Your "white paper" will be a critical tool for gaining the support you need.) Aside from the benefit of increased preparedness to the entire community, employers are a major source of contributions to CERT programs nationwide. To gain the support of employers in your community:

▪ **Arrange a Meeting.** Meeting with business leaders face to face shows your commitment to the CERT program. It also provides you with an opportunity to:

  ▪ Identify potential threats to the community and the business.
  ▪ Emphasize the benefits to both the community and the business.
  ▪ Develop trust that a partnership with the CERT program will create benefits for them. For example, CERT may become part of their business continuity plan or may meet some of their OSHA requirements for training employees.

▪ **Conduct the Meeting.** When meeting with business leaders:

  ▪ Spell out **what** you can offer them and **how** they can assist you.
  ▪ Present a **complete** plan (your "white paper," including goals and objectives, the respective roles of all partners, your proposed timeline for implementing the program, and how business leaders can evaluate the benefits of the program).
  ▪ Stress **what's in it for them**. Emphasize the benefits of increased preparedness and of having trained response teams onsite. Point out the benefits to the larger community as well. Bring examples of how CERTs have been used in the workplace to demonstrate your points.

  Remember, the end result must be tangible for you to gain corporate support.

▪ **Follow Up.** Send a letter to thank the business leaders for allowing you to speak to them. Use the thank you as an opportunity to market your key points one more time. Indicate a timeframe when you will contact them again to see how you can work together.

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Marketing CERT (Continued)

Marketing CERT to Responders and Bargaining Unit Employees

In the past, there has been some misunderstanding of the CERT program by first responders and other bargaining unit employees. While these misunderstandings have not stopped CERT programs, it is good to be aware of the potential issues and address them early. Some tips for working with responders and other bargaining unit employees include:

- **Early Involvement.** It is important for responders and other bargaining unit employees to understand the strengths and limitations of CERTs and to be reassured that CERTs are not intended to take the place of trained first-response personnel. CERTs supplement their capability and can be a resource to them.

- **Continuous Involvement.** Provide courtesy copies of the CERT curriculum for review. Ask responders to provide feedback on the materials, and solicit suggestions for "customizing" the program to better meet the community's needs. Use response personnel as trainers and coaches during the training. Feedback from many CERT programs indicate that department personnel involvement during training is a very positive experience for participants and responders.

Marketing CERT to Citizens

If you have been approached by local employers or citizens' groups about establishing a CERT program, your marketing requirements may be limited. But if your community has little experience with CERT and is unaware of the benefits that CERTs can provide, you will need to market the program more intensely to these potential stakeholders. To gain the support and involvement of local employers and citizens:

- **Select "Pilot" Groups.** Review the demographics of your community to identify the employers and citizens' groups that you think would serve as the best models for CERT. Then, limit your initial marketing (you can expand your marketing later) to the leaders of these groups, expanding within the groups after you get "buy-ins" from the leaders. Members of these groups can join you after the training as spokespersons for the program.

- **Emphasize the Benefits of CERT.** Enabling private citizens or workplace teams to prepare for emergencies and take care of themselves is a powerful enticement for CERT. You may also identify other benefits for initiating a CERT program based on how CERTs will be used in your area. CERT participants:

  - Maintain a high level of home and workplace preparedness.
  - Are more informed about risks and vulnerabilities in the community or workplace.
  - Are committed to the safety and well-being of their neighbors or coworkers.
  - Increase the credibility of neighbor-to-neighbor information, which helps to limit rumors and directs energy toward a positive response.

  Be sure to stress that disasters can happen and that the government may not be able to meet their needs immediately, but that there is something that community members can do about it—they can become trained CERT volunteers.

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Gaining Support From Local Leaders

Regardless of how you fund your program, the support of local elected and appointed officials will be necessary, even if only to support the time that you will spend as Program Coordinator. In most communities, however, you will need the support of local leaders prior to startup because, ultimately, local leaders control program funding.

To gain the support of local leaders, try the tips listed below:

- **Do your research first.** The more knowledgeable you are about CERTs, what they can do, how much they cost, and the benefits they can provide the community, the more credibility you will have with those who control the decisionmaking and the purse strings. Use the "white paper" you developed to support your program strategy as your basis to ensure that you can answer as many questions as possible about what CERTs can do for your community's response efforts. Provide several success stories about how CERTs have been used in other (preferably similar) communities.

- **Determine your approach.** As with nearly any program, CERT can be approached in terms of, "It's a real resource!" or "It's another new program!" Undoubtedly, the first approach will bring you more success. Be ready to provide examples of how CERTs supplement local response resources, and be prepared to explain how you can make that happen in your community.

- **Offer CERT as a potential resource for multiple agencies.** CERT personnel are able and willing to help in a variety of settings. Suggest that they can help with tasks, such as installing smoke detectors and batteries, providing medical assistance at local parades and community events, or helping staff fire safety awareness booths at fire station open houses. The more versatile you can show CERTs to be, the more likely it is that you'll gain approval for the program.

- **Keep elected officials in the loop.** Include local elected officials on emailing lists or newsletter mailing lists so that they are aware of what you're doing to make CERTs successful and how CERTs are benefiting the community. Keep them aware of the progress you're making—how many CERTs you've trained, how often they've been activated, and whether there's a backlog of requests for training—so that the program stays "on their desks." When your program demonstrates its worth, let the elected officials take the credit. Invite local elected officials and chief officers to hand out certificates at graduation. Look for opportunities to make elected officials a visible part of the program to the community.

Finally, if your CERT program is established but doesn't have the support from local leaders that it needs, try scheduling an exercise or other event to demonstrate how CERTs operate and the benefits that a CERT can offer to the community. Invite local officials to an exercise involving CERTs—or schedule an exercise in a public place that will gain the attention of the media.

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Words of Advice: Tips for Gaining Support & Recruiting

Dale Kleos - Whatcom County, Washington
Get Buy In From Community Leaders

Get elected officials and businesses and industry leaders involved, get their buy in—civic organizations and other service organizations. Encompass as many groups as you can mobilize.

Joe Lowry - Memphis, Tennessee
Get Buy In From Emergency Operations Personnel

The emergency operations people in the community must be committed to making it happen. They've got to support the program. These are the experts and their support is essential.

Frank Lucier - San Francisco, California
Develop a White Paper

Develop a "White Paper" on the program. It's essentially a business plan for the first year or two. It should include an outline of the program, training goals, refresher and advanced training, CERT operational issues, CERT management issues, training issues specific to the community, and the financial costs associated with all this.

Rachel Jacky - Portland, Oregon
Have Enthusiastic Citizens Pitch CERT

Always try to "let your citizens do the talking." It works to have enthusiastic neighbors make the pitch about the CERT program. They simply have great credibility in recruiting their neighbors and friends. Citizens can advocate as well as, or better, than a bureaucrat can when trying to get support for the program from elected officials.

The single most effective technique for us has been to make the people who join the program responsible for recruiting others. Participants know from the start that it's their job to work with us to build their own team, and they are great recruiters.

They contact their own community groups (e.g., neighborhood associations) and make presentations or get announcements in the neighborhood newsletter. We provide support when needed—flyers, a display board that team members can check out for a neighborhood block party, etc. Sometimes the program coordinator attends a neighborhood meeting that team members have set up. But word-of-mouth, neighbor-to-neighbor, seems to work very well.

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Words of Advice: Tips for Gaining Support & Recruiting (Continued)

Tom Weaver - Florida Division of Emergency Management
Expand Your Concept of Neighborhood

CERT Programs over the years have branched out from the traditional "neighborhood" oriented team to a variety of team orientations. Newer orientations include "Academic" CERT units, teams that are based in school systems. Florida has several approaches to "Academic" CERT units.

"Academic CERT" applies the sound principles of CERT to the "neighborhood" of the school environment. After all, schools represent large "neighborhood" clusters of students housed together five days a week that require disaster preparedness capabilities, response and recovery if disaster occurs during the school day.

Stew Anderson - Natrona County, Wyoming
Use the Media

When we recruit we run press releases, newspapers, local television and radio announcements. We also use ads at local movie theaters. However, the best advertising is word of mouth from previous students.

Joe Lowry - Memphis, Tennessee
Don't Overlook Any Group

When recruiting go to all the groups you can—there's no group that should be overlooked. These groups can include:

- Neighborhoods/homeowners' associations.
- Graduates of the citizens' fire and police academies.
- City and county employees.
- High-rise apartments and office buildings.
- The hotel/motel industry.
- Businesses/civic groups.
- Schools, religious groups, and retirement communities.
- Homes for the elderly.
- **Anywhere people live and work!**

Frank Lucier - San Francisco, California
Try Using Anything and Everything

It would be nice if there was one technique for recruiting, but there's not. Try using anything and everything. People come to the program for many different reasons. You have to appeal to them at every level you can. It's like advertising. The more they see and hear about CERT the better chance you have seeing them in one of your classes.

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Marketing Contacts Worksheet

You may want to use a spreadsheet to help you track your marketing contacts. A sample spreadsheet is shown below.

CERT Marketing Contacts								
Last Name	**First Name**	**Organization**	**Street Address**	**City**	**Zip**	**Phone**	**Email**	**Meeting Date**
Gould	Alisa	Volunteer Alliance	123 Main Street	Riverside	12222	540-790-8321	Agould@ va.org	03/21/03