

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Community Emergency Response Team

Background

- The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is a nationwide program that educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains members in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. To learn more about CERT and how to get involved, visit <https://www.ready.gov/cert>
- This document describes how community leaders can best use CERT volunteers to respond to coronavirus (COVID-19). These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute or should be considered as guidance in any way.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 pandemic operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.

Key Considerations

- Leaders have leveraged CERT volunteers' training and expertise in unique ways to respond to the needs of their community during a public health emergency, by providing aid to vulnerable populations, supporting healthcare facilities, and educating the public.
- CERT Program Leaders and their Sponsoring Organizations should always work together to determine how CERTs can best support local response efforts. CERT volunteers are only deployed by their Sponsoring Organization.

Lessons Learned Related to COVID-19 Operations and CERT Volunteers

Providing Services to Vulnerable Populations

- **Potential Best Practice:** After a practice drill and with guidance from local government officials and medical providers, CERT volunteers in New Jersey established a hotline to answer COVID-related questions from



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citizens and field requests for assistance from those residents most vulnerable to the coronavirus, including seniors, children, expecting mothers, and the immunocompromised.^{1 2}

- **Potential Best Practice:** CERT volunteers in multiple jurisdictions have established programs to deliver pre-packaged meals, groceries, and other basic goods to vulnerable residents, including the elderly and children. The Cummington, Massachusetts CERT is completing a community needs survey to match individuals and organizations in need of support with CERT volunteers.³ Additionally, CERT volunteers have managed traffic control for public schools' "grab and go" meal deliveries.^{1 4 5 6 7}
- **Potential Best Practice:** CERT volunteers in New Jersey are aiding the distribution of food to residents in need by delivering pre-ordered groceries to senior centers, lunches for children in need, and free packaged meals offered by local governments.^{5 6 7} Additionally, according to the [Region II Newsletter](#), CERT volunteers are supporting delivery of homework packets and laptops for K-12 students completing distance learning.
- **Potential Best Practice:** CERT volunteers provided psychological first aid for individuals staying at a shelter during Hurricane Sandy.⁸ CERT volunteers are trained to provide comfort to affected individuals during the stressful time of a disaster.⁹

Supporting Healthcare Systems

- **Potential Best Practice:** CERT in California offered support to first responders by donning protective gear and transporting COVID patients to medical facilities.¹⁰

¹ 2020 The Van Wert Independent, CERT ready to aid county during shutdown,

<https://theywindependent.com/news/2020/03/22/cert-set-to-aid-community-during-covid-19-shutdown/>

² 2020 Hudson Reporter, Hoboken declares state of emergency, <https://hudsonreporter.com/2020/03/12/hoboken-declares-state-of-emergency/>.

³ 2020 Cummington CERT CV Help, Cummington CERT COVID-19 Help, <https://sites.google.com/view/cummington-cert-cv-help/home>

⁴ 2020 Martha's Vineyard Patch, Coronavirus: Island Compiling Emergency Health Worker List,

<https://patch.com/massachusetts/marthasvineyard/coronavirus-island-compiling-emergency-health-worker-list>

⁵ 2020 The Daily World, Ocean Shores closes beach approaches, imposes curfew, may shut down hotels,

<https://www.thedailyworld.com/news/ocean-shores-closes-beach-approaches-imposes-curfew-may-shut-down-hotels/>

⁶ 2020 App, Coronavirus in NJ: Howell OEM needs masks, CERT volunteers could soon deliver groceries through senior center, <https://www.app.com/story/news/local/western-monmouth-county/howell/2020/03/23/howell-video-update-covid-19/2901094001/>.

⁷ 2020 Cape Cod Times, As Cape Cod shuts down, residents reach out to help neighbors,

<https://www.capecodtimes.com/news/20200317/as-cape-cod-shuts-down-residents-reach-out-to-help-neighbors>

⁸ 2014 FEMA, Lessons Learned by CERT Volunteers During Sandy Activation, [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1410972738212-](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1410972738212-81f62d206e57b3a3a1e83ecd0de11e24/20140908_Lessons_Learned_by_CERT_Volunteers_During_Sandy_Activation_Final_Draft_v4.pdf)

[81f62d206e57b3a3a1e83ecd0de11e24/20140908_Lessons_Learned_by_CERT_Volunteers_During_Sandy_Activation_Final_Draft_v4.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1410972738212-81f62d206e57b3a3a1e83ecd0de11e24/20140908_Lessons_Learned_by_CERT_Volunteers_During_Sandy_Activation_Final_Draft_v4.pdf)

⁹ 2019 FEMA, Community Emergency Response Team Basic Training Participant Manual, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1448917365279-3a7949605bd9e03633af2473a5741aa9/Section_0_PM_Combined.pdf

¹⁰ 2020 Cloverdale Reveille, Neighborhood preparedness groups are trying to find their role in COVID-19 response, http://www.sonomawest.com/cloverdale_reveille/news/connecting-is-key-to-community-groups/article_b07138a0-6ea5-11ea-ae4c-93c816f8e35b.html

- **Potential Best Practice:** Volunteers in California donated excess masks to a hospital and the Fire Protection District. Additionally, CERT volunteers have also been activated to manage donations and volunteers.^{10 11}
- **Potential Best Practice:** Many communities, including Washoe County, Nevada; Amherst, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire Regional Public Health Networks have trained CERT teams to assist in managing operations at screening, testing, and vaccination sites along with staging and equipping facilities.¹²
- **Potential Best Practice:** CERT volunteers in Arizona processed, repackaged, and delivered personal protective equipment allocated by the Strategic National Stockpile from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to two of the county's healthcare providers and one tribal nation.¹³
- **Potential Best Practice:** Citizen Corps volunteers in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, are helping to staff a respite center for first responders who have COVID-19 exposure concerns and do not want to go home. ¹⁴

Educating the Public

- **Potential Best Practice:** Chicago CERT is educating the public on basic disaster response techniques and life-saving skills to use in their homes and neighborhoods under the direction of the Office of Emergency Management and Communications.¹⁵ The San Francisco Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) has been activated to go door to door and distribute information to households in a designated area assigned by the City's Emergency Operations Center.¹⁶

Topics for the "Best Practices" series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

¹¹ 2020 Montgomery County CERT, Important Message from our Program Manager Greg St. James, <http://montgomerycert.org/important-message-from-our-program-manager-greg-st-james/>

¹² 2020 The Laconia Daily Sun, Regional health networks lay groundwork for virus response, https://www.laconiadailysun.com/news/covid-19/regional-health-networks-lay-groundwork-for-virus-response/article_b8c3e376-6dd9-11ea-8bf5-df4bc849f417.html

¹³ 2020 Daily Independent, Pinal County receives personal protective equipment from Strategic National Stockpile, <https://www.yourvalley.net/stories/pinal-county-receives-personal-protective-equipment-from-strategic-national-stockpile.148998>

¹⁴ 2020 The Philadelphia Inquirer, Restless and eager to help, residents in the Philadelphia region are joining volunteer groups aiding coronavirus response, <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/delaware-county-citizen-corps-volunteer-coronavirus-20200324.html>

¹⁵ 2020 Chicago Tribune, As the number of coronavirus cases grow, here's how to prep your pantry for a pandemic, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-food-pandemic-pantry-prep-water-food-coronavirus-0306-20200306-dzfadzi2dfhjokqucwcwaczy-story.html>

¹⁶ 2020 7 News, Coronavirus preparedness: NERT volunteers distribute COVID-19 health, safety flyers throughout San Francisco, <https://abc7news.com/5985244/>