Starting a Program

Purpose and Scope:

Provides an overview and guidance for the implementation of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs and teams.

Definitions:

This section lists the standard definitions of some terms that will be used in this document.

Term	Definition
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CERT Program	The structure to provide CERT training and / or the sponsoring of teams operated by a public safety agency.
CERT Team	A group of people who perform tasks to work toward accomplishing a common mission or specific objective.

Reference Documents:

This section lists reference documents that may be used with this document.

File Title	Description
Starting and Maintaining CERT.pdf	Starting and Maintaining a CERT Program
Workplace CERT Starter Guide.pdf	Workplace CERT Starter Guide, March 2016
Campus CERT Starter Guide.pdf	Campus CERT Starter Guide, October 2015
Teen CERT Launch Maintain Training.pdf	Teen CERT Guide Launching and Maintaining the Training, March 2012
CERT Liability Guide.pdf	Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Liability Guide

Related Training:

This section lists available training that may be used with this document.

Training Title	Description
Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program Manager	This course prepares participants to be CERT program managers to effectively manage a CERT program. Various aspects of CERT management, including managing volunteers and developing a program plan are covered.

Background:

When starting any new project, the chance of it being successful is proportional to the amount of planning that was completed before starting. The same is true when starting a CERT program or team. This document provides a high-level overview of some of the considerations and planning tasks recommended to be performed when starting a CERT program or team. Also read and use the various reference documents listed. They provide additional ideas for starting programs in their various target areas.

CERT programs and teams can provide support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. They also can help with non-emergency projects that help improve the safety of the community. Examples include supporting special events and providing preparedness education classes to the public.

Starting a CERT Program:

A CERT program is the local, community level structure that provides training for teams and/or for personal preparedness. Programs are established by a public safety agency, typically the county Emergency Management agency. They also work with others within their jurisdiction that may establish any of the various CERT team types.

Team members are invited by their sponsoring agency. They are not compelled to support agency tasks until after they

have tended to their own families, neighborhoods and only if it is safe for them to deploy.

Programs develop standard operating procedures and/or policies that govern activation, deployment, volunteers, manage liability, marketing CERT, specialized training, etc. They also establish how the team can work with neighboring programs and team deployment outside the agency's jurisdiction.

Before you start a program, you need to have clear plans of what you want to accomplish with the program.

1) Community's Hazard Analysis

Before you launch a new CERT program you need to establish goals of what the program wants to achieve and tasks the program will perform. One way to capture areas the program may support the community is to conduct a Hazard Analysis. A Hazard Analysis assesses the disasters and associated risks that may happen in your location. For instance, is your city susceptible to flooding? Wildfires? Hurricanes? A Hazard Analysis may have already been completed for your area. By using the Hazard Analysis as your guide, you can identify your program's role in a disaster and help tailor your team training to make the biggest impact.

2) Determine Your Community's Needs

Your starting point in setting up a new program should be to complete a community disaster preparedness assessment.

-What role will the team play in the community; how will it best complement the community's existing capabilities?

-How will your CERT team perform alongside emergency personnel?

-What types of hazards does your community face?

Remember, CERT members are not only helpful in an emergency situation; they can also play a crucial role in special community projects, such as distributing disaster supplies, staffing a first aid station during local events and assisting community members by providing preparedness training.

3) Set Program Goals

It is important to establish clear programs goals for your new CERT program. Talk to citizens, employers, first responders, community leaders, and other program to see how you could make the greatest impact in times of disaster. Some examples of clear goals are:

-To prepare a workplace CERT to administer basic medical attention until first responders arrive

-To disseminate basic flood preparation knowledge to citizens within a specific geographic location.

-To enable neighborhood or workplace teams to prepare for and respond effectively to an event until professional responders arrive.

Reevaluate Goals Annually

As the needs of your community evolve and you begin to obtain feedback from team leaders, trainers, and participants, be willing to pivot and adjust your goals and strategies to optimize the effectiveness of your program.

4) Identify Your Resources

Create a plan on what your program will cost. Factors affecting cost can include training materials, facilities and equipment required, possible funding for events and program maintenance activities, etc. The role that the program plays in the community will tie directly to operational costs.

A detailed budget should be developed. The cost amounts can be best estimates, but take the time to create a complete list all the various costs the program will incur.

When it comes to funding, there are a few avenues to explore:

Local funding
Grants

o Forming a 501(c)3 organization for non-profit status may assist with securing grants.

5) Engage Elected Officials

Develop a strategy for engaging your elected officials. Who is on-board and how do they plan to support your efforts? Gain approval from appointed and elected officials to use CERT as a means to prepare citizens to care for themselves during a disaster when services may not be adequate. This is an excellent opportunity for the government to be proactive in working with its constituency. Identify and recruit potential participants. Naturals for CERT team members are community groups, business and industry workers, and local government workers.

6) Understand Your Programs Liability

Talk to your legal counsel to understand the liability that individual volunteers and your administration may face relative to dispatching team members into the field during a disaster. Your legal counsel can help you create

any waivers or legal documents that may be necessary to protect all those involved. A CERT liability guide is available from FEMA.

Tip - As part of your preparation strategy, be sure to create a crisis communication plan.

7) Recruit Volunteers

The success of your program can hinge on getting support from the right people, such as local officials and community stakeholders. Potential candidates may come from industry, government workers and community groups. Be upfront about team requirements when recruiting participants. Identify a volunteer's needs and expectations. Never underestimate someone's abilities. Every volunteer can contribute to a program, and you should try your best to match those skills with team roles before, during and after a disaster.

Promote your program using multiple communication channels to recruit potential participants. Focus your recruitment efforts on community groups, business and industry workers, and staff within your local government administration.

Getting the support of local stakeholders and local officials will enhance the success of your program. By first developing an overall approach and documenting the plan, you can more easily communicate the project's worth and gain community support through marketing efforts.

8) Obtain Training Materials and Tailor

Your program can be useful for anyone who wants to become more involved in making their community a safer place. All programs should attempt to tailor trainings to anyone who wants to participate. This includes finding reasonable accommodations for volunteers with special needs.

CERT training requires a broad range of materials beyond just the basic student manual. Plan for the materials you need and where you can get them. The Basic Training Instructors Guide provides a list of material needed for each unit.

Most core CERT training materials take an all-hazards approach; however, it's important to revise or update them to reflect your community's specific needs. You may add to the FEMA training materials, however, you may not remove anything from them. Updating the power points with photos of your team gives the presentations a local flavor.

9) Establish a Training Framework / Cadre

CERT courses are given by a team of subject matter experts who have the proper knowledge, expertise and familiarity with the training materials. All courses shall have a lead instructor that is required to have completed

CERT Train-the-Trainer course to learn appropriate training tactics.

10) Train Volunteers and Define a Maintenance Strategy

Preparation for training students is not as simple as just providing lectures. CERT training requires student registration, tracking systems, materials copied, equipment purchased, properly trained trainers and hands on exercises.

When the initial training is over, CERT members should receive recognition (communities might issue ID cards, vests, and helmets to graduates, for example).

Keep your volunteers engaged with periodic refresher courses and educational events. Provide drills and workshops so team members can practice and improve their skills and training. Exercises should reflect real-life events that can happen within your community.

Local First responders need to be educated about the CERT program and its value to the community.

11) Prepare for Potential Roadblocks

Anticipate the challenges the program may face, such as recruitment, marketing effectiveness with a minimal budget, or long-term program enthusiasm. Incorporate into your planning ways to mitigate your identified challenges to set your program up for long-term success.

12) Register Your CERT Program and Team

FEMA is requesting that all existing CERT Programs and Teams register on FEMA's Citizen Responder Registration page. These registries will collect over 100 data points for each registered CERT program, which will help in the sharing of accurate information with state and national organizations. Accurate, evidence-based information is at the heart of the disaster preparedness movement; do your part by registering your CERT team.