



Starting a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Guidelines and Recommendations

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Table of Contents

Purpose and Background	1
Purpose.....	1
Scope and Applicability.....	1
What is the Purpose of the CERT Program?.....	1
Document Management and Maintenance	1
Use of this Document	1
Starting a CERT	2
Why Start a CERT?	2
Before You Begin.....	2
Step 1: Identify a Program Sponsoring Organization and Build Partnerships	4
Creating a Program Description	4
Developing a Plan for Contacting Each Partner	5
Holding One-on-One Meetings.....	6
Keeping in Contact.....	7
Gaining Support from Local Leaders	7
Register Your Program.....	8
Step 2: Secure Resources	9
Budget	9
Funding and Resource Procurement.....	9
Step 3: Develop a Set of Goals and Objectives	12
Setting SMART Program Goals and Objectives	12
Drafting a Program Plan	13
Step 4: Develop a Training Plan.....	14
How to Choose Objectives	14
Considering Risk to Members	14
Reducing Risk and Liability During Training.....	14

Training Curriculum.....	15
Training That May Be Arranged by Local Program	16
Exercises.....	16
Reducing Liability: During Exercises	16
Tailoring Training Activities.....	17
Evaluation and Annual Review of Training Plan.....	18
Step 5: Market Your Program and Recruit CERT Volunteers	20
Recruiting Volunteers.....	20
The Recruitment Message	21
The Role of CERT Basic Training.....	22
CERT Instructors.....	22
Step 6: Deliver CERT Training.....	24
Overall Tips:	24
<i>Start Slowly</i>	24
<i>Allow Plenty of Lead Time</i>	24
<i>Conduct a Pilot-Test Session</i>	24
<i>Arrange Facilities</i>	25
<i>Start on the Right Track</i>	25
Step 7: Run Your CERT Program.....	27
CERT Program Personnel Resources.....	27
CERT Program Manager	27
Step 8: Track and Evaluate Your Program	30
What Do You Want to Learn?	30
Create a Strategy for Getting Information	30
Who Needs the Information?	31
What Types of Data are Needed?	31
Planning for an Evaluation	31
Get the Information.....	31
Analyze the Information and Decide on Next Steps	32
<i>Analyze data</i>	32

<i>Consider options</i>	32
<i>Take corrective action if needed</i>	32
Reporting Evaluation Results.....	32
Use the CERT Registration Website to Complete the CERT Annual Survey	33
Appendix	34
CERT DRAFT PROGRAM PLAN.....	35
Unit 1: Program Goal and Objectives.....	35
Unit 2: Program Partners.....	37
Unit 3: Promoting to Target Audiences.....	39
Unit 4: Working with Volunteers.....	40
Unit 5: Working with Instructors.....	43
Unit 6: Procuring and Managing Resources.....	46
Unit 7: Training and Exercises.....	48
Unit 8: Policies and Procedures.....	52
Unit 9: Program Evaluation.....	54
Unit 10: Keeping the Program Going.....	56

Purpose and Background

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide information and helpful advice to those looking to start a CERT in their community.

Scope and Applicability

This guide focuses on starting a new program. First, a brief background of the CERT Program is provided, followed by a step-by-step introduction on starting a CERT Program. Then, the processes for monitoring and evaluating a CERT Program are outlined, concluding with an appendix of relevant worksheets and references. Additional information on CERT Programs, including how to build on an existing program, can be found in the CERT Program Guide available at https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US.

What is the Purpose of the CERT Program?

The CERT Program was first piloted in 1986 when the City of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) recognized that citizens very likely would have to respond on their own in the early stages of a disaster or emergency. The purpose of a CERT Program is to train and organize community members:

- To prepare individuals to help themselves and their families during an emergency or disaster;
- To be a response asset in an emergency or disaster; and
- To be an extension of first responder services until professional responders arrive.

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Starting a CERT

Why Start a CERT?

FEMA established the National CERT Program to address preparedness and response capabilities within communities throughout the Nation. The program educates people about preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, and team organization. Using skills learned in classroom training, drills, and exercises, CERT volunteers can help their community prepare for disasters and assist immediately after a disaster before first responders arrive on scene. In addition to disaster response, CERTs are involved in other volunteer services, including helping with traffic management at large community events, giving presentations on emergency preparedness to community groups, installing smoke detectors for low-income residents, staffing medical aid booths at events, and more.

When deployed appropriately, CERTs can complement and enhance the first-response capability in neighborhoods, campus environments, workplaces, and more. If deployed by the Sponsoring Organization, CERTs can assist the community until first responders arrive. CERTs can then assist first-response personnel as directed.



Questions to Consider: Assessing the Need for a CERT Program

Think through the reasons why a community may need a CERT before continuing to progress through this document. When assessing your community's need for a CERT program, consider the following:

- Determine if there is training in your community that teaches citizens about ways to prepare for hazards. Providing training will not only benefit the citizens but the entire community.
- Conduct a risk assessment detailing the hazards your community is likely to face and the potential impacts that result from these hazards. Being informed can help drive training and preparedness actions within the community and in the CERT.
- Talk with your local emergency management agencies and community organizations, and ask if there are ways in which a CERT can assist them. Emergency managers may need volunteers when conducting exercises and extra staff during community events like parades.

Before You Begin

There may already be a CERT Program serving your city, town, area, county, or even region. Ensure that there is not already a CERT Program serving your community by searching the FEMA program listing at <https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/cert-find-a-program>. If there is not

already a program in your community, you may proceed. If there is already a nearby program, please contact them to ensure they are active. Not all CERTs that appear on the listing are active. If the program is active, consider joining, or working with that program to establish a local team that is part of their existing program, which is a much simpler process than starting a program from scratch. Even if existing programs are not in close enough proximity for your community to regularly participate, or are in separate jurisdictions, it is recommended that you maintain good relationships with nearby programs, as programs can support each other with trainers, materials, sharing best practices, and potentially coordinate during disaster responses with the agreement of both Sponsoring Organizations.

Refer to the CERT Program Guide available at https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US to understand FEMA's basic requirements for CERT Training and CERT Program maintenance, and the roles and responsibilities of CERT Program Managers, Sponsoring Organizations, State Coordinators, and other essential CERT facts.

The following chapters cover eight steps that build on each other to start a CERT Program.

1. Identify a Program Sponsoring Organization, gauge initial community interest, and forge crucial partnerships.
2. Develop a set of goals and objectives that will define and guide the operations of the CERT Program in the context of the local community.
3. Secure resources to run the program.
4. Develop a training plan to equip members with the necessary skills.
5. Market your program and recruit CERT volunteers from the community.
6. Deliver CERT training to recruited participants.
7. Run your program.
8. Track and evaluate your program.

Step 1: Identify a Program Sponsoring Organization and Build Partnerships

A successful CERT Program addresses the needs of the local community and works with existing organizations to complement their work. To identify community needs and gauge potential interest from other organizations on supporting a CERT Program, this information-gathering stage includes the following six components:

1. Creating a Program Description
2. Developing a Plan for Contacting Each Partner
3. Holding One-on-One Meetings
4. Keeping in Contact
5. Gaining Support From Local Leaders
6. Register Your Program

Creating a Program Description

Before reaching out to the community and local organizations, take some time to prepare a program description that can introduce what a CERT Program is. Refer to **Table 1: What to Include in Your Program Description**. As you consider your community's needs, you may decide to cover other topics as well.

Table 1: What to Include in Your Program Description

Category	Considerations
Current Situation in the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Threats the community faces▪ Community needs▪ Number of professional responders▪ How CERTs can aid in response

Category	Considerations
Program Goals and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of what CERTs will do in an emergency or disaster. Visit https://training.fema.gov/emi.aspx and take IS-317: Introduction to Community Emergency Response Teams. ▪ How CERTs will work with professional responders ▪ Number of people trained in the first year ▪ Estimated number of people trained over the first five years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to maintain skill levels
Training Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training curriculum (Note: A CERT may add to the FEMA curriculum if the community faces other threats or unusual conditions.) ▪ Training methods
Team Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Types of teams: Community, Workplace, Teen, Campus ▪ Use of the Incident Command System (ICS) to manage the CERT response. Visit https://training.fema.gov/emi.aspx and take IS-315: CERT and the Incident Command System.
Links with the Existing Response System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protocols for deployment ▪ Steps for communicating with professional responders ▪ Level of control by emergency responders

Developing a Plan for Contacting Each Partner

You should carefully plan your approach to any external group that you have identified as a potential partner. **Table 2:** Three-Part Approach to Forming a Targeted Outreach Plan outlines promising practices for developing a partnership approach plan.

Table 2: Three-Part Approach to Forming a Targeted Outreach Plan

Action Step	Action Items
Research the Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does the group do? ▪ What are its concerns about disaster and community preparedness? ▪ How does it link to emergency response? ▪ What motivates the group? ▪ Who in the group might be a supporter of CERT?
Identify How You Can Help Each Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can CERT benefit the group? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What can the group offer the CERT Program and Team(s)?
Create Talking Points from Your Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Define the CERT Program. ▪ Explain what the CERT program can accomplish when supported. ▪ Give a clear message about why the group should join and how its support will help. ▪ Explain what the CERT Program can do for the organization—e.g., training, materials.

Before a partner commits their time or money, you should be ready to provide them a full understanding of your CERT program. A partner will want to know, “What’s in it for me?” and “What makes CERT so important?” Have an answer ready, including some success stories.

Holding One-on-One Meetings

Once you have identified potential sponsors, schedule time to meet with one or more people from the group. The reason for the meeting is to present your talking points.

Here are some reminders about good meeting protocol:

- Be on time.
- Be well prepared (your presentation, copies of an agenda, materials to leave behind).
- Be clear and brief.
- Make sure to listen as well as talk.
- End the meeting on time.

Follow up the meeting with a letter/email that:

- Thanks each individual you met with;
- Briefly repeats your key points; and

- States when you will contact them again.

Keeping in Contact

Program Managers should find a contact person within the group and speak regularly with that person. The frequency of communication depends on the type of partnership.

Make it a win-win relationship:

- Think of ways that you can promote your partners as you promote the CERT Program. For example, if the CERT Program has a media opportunity, give credit to the partners.
- Offer services to the partner (e.g., training for their members or employees, access to information on emergency preparedness).
- Make it easy to do business with the CERT Program.

Gaining Support from Local Leaders

No matter how much funding your program has, you need the support of local elected and appointed officials. In most communities, you will need the support of local leaders before you start the program.



Words of Advice: Gaining Support from Local Leaders

Think about which members of your community and local government can support your CERT. When searching for support to meet your program's needs, consider the following stakeholders:

- Elected officials generally can be an asset when promoting a CERT.
- Local businesses and industry leaders have resources and influence within a community.
- Civic and service organizations may have goals or missions that overlap with that of a CERT.
- Emergency responders living in or near your community can be great assets. They are already dedicated to creating safer environments, and their expertise can lend itself to the efficacy of the CERT's training programs and implementation.

Develop a business plan for your CERT. 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 associated financial costs. This plan can be used to demonstrate that your CERT is well organized and worthy of the support of your local leadership.

In order for individuals or non-governmental groups within communities to establish a CERT Program, they must identify and secure the support of a CERT Sponsoring Organization in the form of a governmental organization. A Sponsoring Organization helps support many CERT Program functions, may provide funding and facilities, and adds to program credibility. Potential sponsors may not be aware of the CERT Program or the benefits it can provide to the community, so follow the tips and steps outlined for securing program partners when conducting outreach. Governmental organizations starting a CERT Program are their own Sponsoring Organization. See the *CERT Program Guide* for more details.

Register Your Program

Once you have secured a Sponsoring Organization for your CERT Program, you need to register your program with FEMA at <https://community.fema.gov/Register>. Registration is how your program will be counted among the Nation's CERT Programs, be listed on the national Find a CERT Tool and gain access to tools and resources for running and tracking your program. See the *CERT Program Guide* for more information.

Step 2: Secure Resources

With a program plan in place, it is now time to secure the funding resources required to run a CERT Program. It is important to note that successful CERT Programs do not necessarily require significant budgets. Program goals will determine program costs. CERTs that only seek to provide training to community members and meet FEMA's three basic annual program requirements can achieve that goal if they can secure a low or no-cost training location, such as a community center, equipment loans or donations, and qualified volunteer instructors. Securing program partners as outlined in Step 1 is essential to keeping program costs low.

Budget

The amount of funding required to start and run a CERT Program depends on the goals and mission of the CERT Program and the resources needed to accomplish them.

What Does the CERT Program Want to Do?

- Figure out the number of CERT volunteers that will be trained initially and yearly.
- Decide on the role that CERT volunteers will play in the community.
- CERT volunteers who have roles not covered in the CERT Basic Training curriculum will need other training and supplies.

What Funding Resources are Needed?

Consider the resources that your program may need to operate. Examples include:

- Equipment that the CERT Program will supply to each team (e.g., hardhat, vest, ID, gloves, goggles, medical kits);
- Costs for instructors, training facilities, and equipment; and
- Costs for supplemental training, exercises, and team maintenance activities.

After you have identified the resources you will need, along with the associated costs, you can begin creating a budget and identifying ways to procure resources.

Funding and Resource Procurement

While all local CERT Programs must be recognized by a local government agency in their area, this does not guarantee that the CERT Program will receive full funding from them. The local Program Manager should be well connected to the Sponsoring Organization, but also keep the following tips in mind:

- FEMA does not provide direct funding to CERT Programs at any level.
- Many local governments that sponsor or operate a CERT Program give some local funding or may allocate some portion of Federal funding to support CERT and other similar programs.

- Only governmental agencies may receive the Department of Homeland Security funding that supports CERT. Most of this funding comes through the states or, in some urban areas, through the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) region. For more information, contact your State Office of Emergency Management/Homeland Security, or visit www.fema.gov/grants.
- If you are starting a CERT Program in partnership with a school district, grant money may be available under the Federal Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools Program. "Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools" (REMS) grants are awarded on a competitive basis to local school districts and encourage partnerships with other programs to promote school safety. For more information, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dvpemergencyresponse/index.html>.

The Program Manager, along with the Program Sponsor, should plan how to fund the program. There are multiple ways to fund or procure resources for the program.

Ask for donations. This is where your program partners from Step 1 may be helpful. Some corporations, businesses, and service clubs have a history of supporting community programs and include it in their donations plan. Try to figure out how CERT can benefit them and can fit into their donations plan before you approach them. The worst thing that can happen is that they will say no. When asking for donations, make sure that you recognize business contributions on your website or in your newsletter.

Fundraise. The tried and true methods of the community car washes, bake sales and other traditional fundraisers are simple, time-proven, and provide avenues to inform your community about your program. These methods also provide an opportunity to establish a public face for the organization and its volunteers, recruit more volunteers, and spread the word about emergency preparedness.

Charge a fee. Some communities may charge a fee to cover the costs of their materials and equipment. This is *not* the preferred method for funding CERT Programs and can prevent volunteer participation as well as reflect negatively on the CERT Program. Charging a fee requires Sponsoring Organization approval. This may be a suitable avenue in some private communities. Regardless, the Sponsoring Organization should support the CERT by applying, or assist in the application for grants and other avenues of funding.

Ask for in-kind contributions. Corporations may be more willing to donate materials or supplies for CERTs, rather than money. In such cases, try to get donations for items needed for the program. Utility companies have a track record for providing the mockups you'll need to show how to turn off gas and electrical utilities.

Apply for a grant. Grants may come from government or private sources. Some public sources include your State Office of Emergency Management/Homeland Security and www.fema.gov/grants. Remember, though, that grant funding is temporary. Even if you get a grant to get your program started, you will have to find a permanent source of money for program maintenance.

Start or partner with a not-for-profit organization. Some CERT Programs have established themselves as not-for-profit organizations, which are also called 501(c)(3) organizations. Organizations need to complete and submit an application for 501(c)(3) status. Typically, CERT Programs that have done so are well established, rather than new groups. However, when CERT Programs organize as 501(c)(3) organizations, they can raise money through tax-deductible contributions from donors. CERT Programs that establish 501(c)(3) must still have a governmental sponsoring organization.

Getting and maintaining 501(c)(3) status requires a lot of work, documentation, a fee, potentially significant legal expenses, and an annual filing with the Internal Revenue Service after tax-exempt status has been given. There are two other options:

1. Rather than becoming a 501(c)(3) organization yourself, look in the community for an existing 501(c)(3) organization that could become a financial agent for you.
2. Check with your local jurisdiction's attorney to find out if the CERT Program could use the jurisdiction's tax ID number to get tax-deductible contributions from donors. This would have the same benefit as 501(c)(3) status.

Step 3: Develop a Set of Goals and Objectives

Once a general idea of community needs and interest in a CERT Program has been established, the next step is to set some tailored goals and objectives for the program. The Program Plan is a document you may use to organize these goals and objectives.

Setting SMART Program Goals and Objectives

Each local CERT Program should have an overall program goal and one to two achievable and appropriate objectives. These will be a starting place for the discussion you will have with program sponsors and stakeholders. A guiding principle behind setting overall goals and objectives is to make them SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

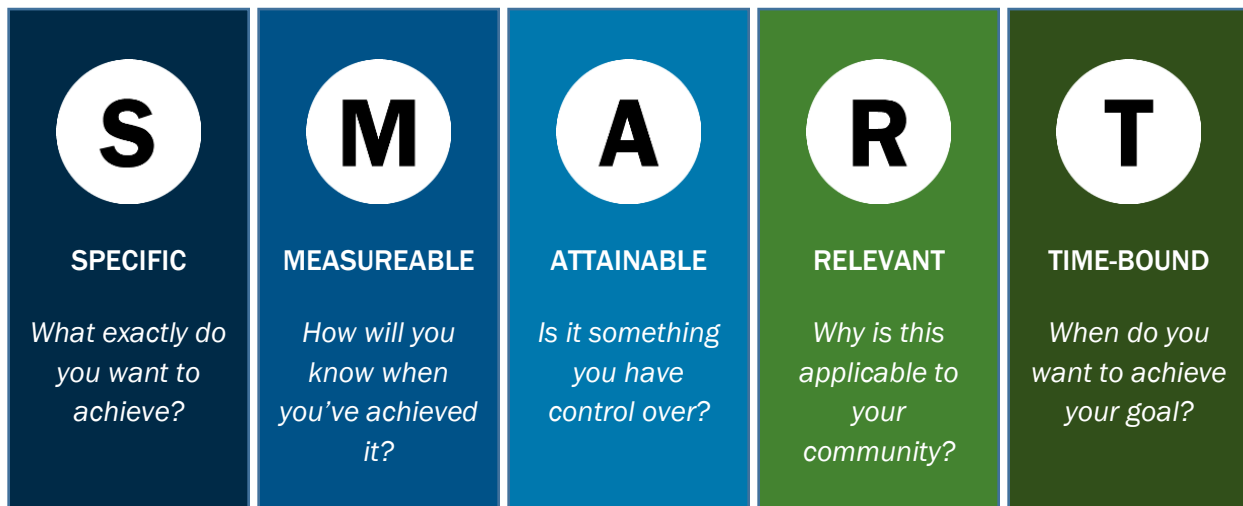


Figure 1. Planners can use the SMART Goals method to design concrete goals for their program.



Words of Advice: Goal Setting

When setting your goals, be sure to consider the hazards present in your own community. Recognize that there are multiple variables related to hazard mitigation, and set your goals around these varied outcomes and possibilities. Communicating with your community is a critical step in assessing potential hazards and the needs of the CERT. Start small and make your goals achievable. Ensure that the start-up phase is manageable so that you can execute it properly.

Your CERT plan should have both emergency and non-emergency functions, a commitment to continuing education, and a strategy for sustaining the program.

Drafting a Program Plan

The *CERT DRAFT PROGRAM PLAN* provided in the annex is a useful framework for organizing a CERT Program's goals and objectives. Both new and old CERT Program Managers alike should take time to go through the Draft Program Plan and evaluate the scope of their respective CERT Programs.

Step 4: Develop a Training Plan

With funding and resources in place, you are now ready to create a training and exercise plan informed by objectives for the CERT Program. An objective is a statement of a goal that you would like a CERT Program to meet that year.

How to Choose Objectives

Choosing objectives should not be a random process. Your program's annual training and exercise objectives are tied to and compatible with your program's goals as well as the community's most recent risk assessment.

Do your homework before deciding on annual objectives:

- Go over your program's goals.
- Talk to the local emergency manager about the hazards that are a priority for your community and about resource gaps your CERT volunteers might help fill.
- Talk with your Sponsoring Organization. Make sure your program's training and exercise objectives are in line with what that agency is doing and what the agency needs from your CERT Program.
- Ask CERT volunteers what additional training will make them more effective in a disaster. Remember that one size does not fit all. A team of senior citizens needs different types of continuing training than does a student team at the local high school.

After the research is done, you should look at the options and set priorities for what your program can realistically do.

Considering Risk to Members

Include a "Risk to Members" section where you can weigh risk versus benefit of training activities. You should especially consider any safety concerns.

Managing liability is a serious concern for CERT Program Managers. Addressing safety concerns during training and exercises is a good way to reduce liability through risk management. There are several resources available to you on the CERT website, including the *CERT Liability Guide* and *CERT Program Guide* at https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US.

Reducing Risk and Liability During Training

Actions that you can take with your instructors to help reduce liability include:

- Setting training standards and safety requirements for training;
- Briefing all instructors on their responsibilities to lead safe and effective training;

- Making sure that all instructors are ready to meet the objectives for their sessions;
- Bringing in co-instructors to assist in instructional activities; and
- Making sure that all instructors model proper safety behavior, such as safety gear for all demonstrations.

Also, make sure that your instructors understand that they may permit participants to not do an activity if they have a condition that could impede or be exacerbated by participation. It is important to note here, that there is a place for everyone in CERT! If a volunteer has a condition that prevents participation in certain activities, they can contribute in other ways. You must work with these volunteers to find meaningful roles consistent with their abilities.

Measures that you can take with CERT participants to help reduce liability include:

- Ensure that participants understand that they may choose not to do activities if they have a condition that may impede or be exacerbated by participation.
- Have all participants sign a membership application and waiver form.

Explain the possible hazards that participants may face in-class activities, during exercises, and activation.

- Give copies of all CERT safety rules and requirements to each participant. Have them sign one copy and return it to you before class begins. Ask the participants to keep the other copy for their records. These documents are not provided by FEMA and should be developed with the assistance of your Sponsoring Organization.
- Have all participants wear appropriate safety gear for all activities.
- When you see an unsafe act, intervene, and correct it immediately.
- If someone is injured during class, document it, and make sure that the participant gets proper medical care.
- Emphasize that rescuer safety is the main concern in training and deployment.

Actions that you can take to make sure that the CERT classroom and exercise area are safe include:

- Walk through the classroom and exercise area(s) before each class to find and correct unsafe conditions.
- Check all equipment to make sure that it is in good working order.

Be sure to make these checks **before every class begins**.

Training Curriculum

See the *CERT Program Guide* for an outline of FEMA provided training directly related to CERT.

Training That May Be Arranged by Local Program

Local public and private groups, such as utility companies, Humane Society, ARES/RACES (amateur radio), fire departments, police departments, National Weather Service, mental health departments, and more may have training that, if modified, would be useful for CERT volunteers, such as, but not limited to:

- Advanced first aid techniques
- Advanced search and rescue
- Community relations
- Damage assessment
- Debris removal
- Donations management
- Shelter management
- Concerns of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- Utilities control
- Wildland firefighting assistance

Exercises

After training, skills require practice to be maintained. Skills can be practiced at:

- Periodic CERT team meetings;
- An annual refresher training with multiple CERTs;
- Exercises of all types held specifically for CERT volunteers and teams; and
- Large-scale municipal or regional exercises.

All types of exercises will help maintain and grow CERT volunteers' skills and team abilities.

Exercises include:

- Discussion-based exercises
 - Tabletop exercises
 - Functional exercises
- Operations-based exercises
 - Drills
 - Full-scale exercises
- Gaming exercises (e.g., "CERT rodeo")

For more on CERT exercises, see the CERT Supplemental Materials available at

https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US.

Reducing Liability: During Exercises

Always take the actions below to reduce liability during exercises:

- Give a pre-exercise briefing in which you go over the objectives (including safety objectives) for the exercise.
- Treat all drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises as the real thing.
- Enforce all safety rules strictly.
- Emphasize teamwork, safety equipment, and the use of the buddy system.
- If you see an unsafe act, intervene, and correct it immediately.
- Have a post-exercise debriefing that includes safety issues.
- Emphasize the need to document everything using the forms approved by the jurisdiction.

If someone is injured, document the injury, and make sure that the volunteer gets proper medical care.

Tailoring Training Activities

The CERT Basic Training materials use an all-hazards approach meant for a national audience. To make the materials relevant for situations that local CERTs will face, you can tailor them to situations that your CERTs may encounter. Tailoring the training does not mean getting rid of topics. New content may be added, and existing content should be tailored, but all existing CERT Basic Training topics *must* be covered.

Table 3 outlines how materials can be tailored:

Table 3: Tailoring Training Materials

Type of Training	Components
Local Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use the threats facing your community. If the program is in Missouri, for example, hurricanes are not a concern, but flooding is, and earthquakes might be. Refer to and utilize the CERT Basic Training Hazard Annexes at https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US. These annexes educate volunteers about a variety of common hazards and include the latest protective actions for both people and property.
Local Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn about the first responder resources available to the community, and refer to them correctly.
Local Protocols, Procedures, Terminologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because teams are local resources, they need to interact effectively with local agencies using local standards, protocols, and terminology.
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn the audience’s concerns and abilities, and modify the training to fit them. The best teaching method will differ for a group in a retirement community, a university campus, or young professionals at a corporate headquarters. Other considerations should be culture, age, language, or venue (e.g., neighborhood, workplace, school).

Type of Training	Components
Training Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some facilities do not have all the space that would be best for the hands-on exercises. You may need to be creative in how space is used.

Go over the CERT Basic Training materials carefully, both to become familiar with the course content and to find areas that need tailoring. Make sure to look over the Instructor Guide, the Participant Manual, and the course presentation materials to consider any adjustments that may be appropriate.

Materials can be customized with local:

- Case studies
- Scenarios
- Photographs
- Anecdotes
- Examples
- Success stories
- Handouts



Words of Advice: Tailoring Training

The basic CERT class is an effective tool for sparking interest in further training for new members. It is important to remember that not all communities are vulnerable to the same types of hazards. Access to resources can greatly differ dependent upon location. Localize the FEMA curriculum to match your communities' vulnerabilities.

Training should be tailored not just to meet the specific hazards of an area, but the audience to whom it will be presented. Faith-based groups, neighborhood groups, school groups, and work groups all operate differently. To be effective when the disaster strikes, fit the training to the group; don't try to fit the group to the training.

Evaluation and Annual Review of Training Plan

In the Evaluation of Objective column, enter your observations, lessons learned, and recommendations after the event has happened. Use this information to write an After-Action Report/Improvement Plan for the next event.

Planning for training and exercises is a recurring process. Once a year the training and exercise plan should be revised.

- Measure the level of achievement of last year's objectives.
- Review successes and "less than successes."

- Set new objectives.
- Write a plan for meeting the objectives.
- Work out the logistical needs for meeting the objectives.
- Evaluate the risk to members.

Step 5: Market Your Program and Recruit CERT Volunteers

Recruiting Volunteers

Outreach to both individuals and groups can be effective, including:

- Word of mouth;
- Existing groups: Homeowners' associations, community and neighborhood groups, faith-based groups, parent-teacher groups, senior groups, ethnic and cultural groups, workplaces;
- Groups with similar interests: Disaster response, emergency preparedness, amateur radio clubs; and
- Anyone or any group you speak to.

Reaching out to “established” groups is easier than trying to recruit people one at a time because:

- Established groups already have their own reason(s) for working together; and
- CERT can become part of their mission.

Keep in mind that part of the idea behind CERT is that teams form based on location, and members of some groups may not be geographically connected.



Words of Advice: Recruitment

There is no one single correct method for recruiting. Potential members may come from varied backgrounds and, accordingly, may have varied motivations for joining a CERT. Using multiple methods to advertise your CERT affords you greater opportunities to reach new members. The more exposure to CERT information and activities that community members have, the more likely they will be to pursue CERT membership.

Make members responsible for assisting in the recruiting process. Create a culture in your CERT that informs members that in order for the team to grow, every member needs to contribute. Encourage them to create flyers and spread information about CERT opportunities via word of mouth and provide the administrative support that they need to accomplish this.

There are a variety of groups from which to recruit. No group should be overlooked, regardless of size. Some of these groups may 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; and
- Anywhere people live and work!

The Recruitment Message

Once you have found groups to target, a recruitment message must be created. This message is different from general program promotion and is specifically meant for acquiring new volunteers. The recruitment message should have these parts:

- An opening that will catch the reader's attention;
- A statement of need: what the problem is that needs to be solved;
- A statement of solution: how volunteers can help solve the problem;
- A statement that speaks to the volunteer's question of whether they can do the job;
- A statement of benefits: what is in it for the volunteer; and
- Who to contact about getting involved: name, phone number, email.

These parts should be included no matter which medium is used (e.g., broadcast public service announcement, social media, public speaking event, or newspaper article).

Be very clear and upfront about the program's expectations. What are you asking volunteers to do?

- Take CERT Basic Training? Are there any limits such as minimum age?
- Join on a local team?
- Help build a local team?
- Get a background check?
- Help with other non-disaster activities?



Words of Advice: The Importance of People

A successful CERT requires enthusiastic volunteers to accomplish the mission of the CERT, and enthusiastic trainers who will make the community volunteers feel like respected partners in disaster preparedness and response.

Community members are the driving force behind a successful CERT. People organize teams, support the program administratively, support training, and carry out the mission of the CERT. Without dedicated members, a CERT will never get off the ground. The same dedication that is necessary to start a CERT is the same dedication that is required to sustain it.

Remember some key messages:

- Safety, safety, safety; “safety first”
- Teamwork
- Community members helping each other in the neighborhood, workplace, school, and other venues
- Valuing volunteers and CERT as an asset to the community
- Preparedness
- Importance of each person’s contribution
- Practice, practice, practice
- Self-sufficiency and problem-solving
- Leadership

The promotional message a CERT Program uses and how it communicates it depends on the needs of each target audience. For example, the content and method of communication that would be well-suited to an audience of corporate employees and large employers may not be effective for a parent-teacher group.

The Role of CERT Basic Training

The main way to get into a CERT Program is through CERT Basic Training. This helps participants figure out whether they want to become an active member of the program or just want the information without making a large time commitment. Strong instructors are needed to conduct effective training.

It is suggested that at least two instructors run each session together:

- At least one should be a subject matter expert who knows the detailed content of the session.
- At least one should be an instructor with full knowledge of the CERT model and the whole course.
- Refer to the *CERT Program Guide* for more information on requirements and recommendations for training, instructors, and the role of the Sponsoring Organization in supervising and facilitating training.

CERT Instructors

Good instructors are essential. Each program should have a qualified instructor that has completed CERT Train-the-Trainer, either at a local FEMA delivery, or at the Emergency Management Institute (includes virtual deliveries) or at a state or locally sponsored Train-the-Trainer course, but every instructor who delivers some portion of the training does not necessarily have to be certified. For your first deliveries, securing qualified instructors can be a challenge. This is where good relationships with nearby programs may be useful. Their trainers may be willing to assist you. Your Sponsoring Organization can also help secure qualified trainers by contacting your State CERT Coordinator. See the *CERT Program Guide* for more information and requirements on CERT training and instructors, and refer to the *CERT Program Manager Course* materials (available at

https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US) for more details on recruiting and managing instructors.

Step 6: Deliver CERT Training

If you have delivered CERT training in your community, you understand how critical that initial delivery is. If you are getting ready to deliver CERT training for the first time, you may want to review the following advice from experienced CERT Coordinators.

Overall Tips:

Start Slowly

Don't take on too many instructional commitments in the beginning. Identify a target audience, and deliver the training to that group. Then, evaluate the training results and consider practicing it again before opening the program to the larger community.

Allow Plenty of Lead Time

You will have a lot of logistical arrangements to make before you're ready to deliver CERT for the first time. The CERT Basic Instructor guide includes the recommended delivery time for each module. Be sure to allow enough lead time for the first delivery to ensure that your training is not affected by issues that could have been resolved had you not been in such a rush to get the program started. When in doubt, schedule more time rather than less time. Everyone is happy when the class ends early. No one is happy when the class ends late and many participants may have to leave at the originally scheduled end time.

Conduct a Pilot-Test Session

Conduct a real-life run through. Conducting a "pilot session" of the curriculum with the instructors will provide the opportunity for them—and you—to identify issues with the curriculum, the facilities, or the instructors before they are identified by the class. A dry run also provides an opportunity for instructors to ask questions and for you to coach them in their presentation skills. Conducting a dry run will make the instructors feel more comfortable and allow the class to run more smoothly during the first actual delivery.

Observe and evaluate the pilot session. Your first offering of CERT Basic Training will set the tone for future deliveries—and the continued growth of the entire program. Set yourself, your instructors, and the CERT volunteers up for success by planning a thorough, "fearless" internal review of the initial delivery with the entire instructor team. This review should include:

- **The curriculum.** What worked well? What parts of the curriculum need some revision to make them more effective? As developed, the CERT materials present the critical content for CERT Programs. However, local procedures and practices, as well as community needs, may mean you need to tailor the content to address your local requirements.

- **The delivery.** Even experts may need your help to be good instructors. Be sure to monitor the class and get feedback from the participants on how the materials were delivered. This will help you and the instructors refine the training delivery and assist you in selecting future instructors. (If you use multiple instructors—and most CERT Programs do—be sure to structure your feedback form by topic so that you can identify the individual instructor, what he or she is doing well, and where he or she may need help.)
- **Instructor Guide** – Each instructor should have a personal instructor guide that they add to after each delivery. These can include notes, activities, anecdotes, etc.



Words of Advice: Instructor Recruitment and Training

Establishing partnerships can greatly aid in building your CERT cadre. Local fire departments are an excellent resource, as they are already experts in various aspects of emergency response and preparedness. Some fire departments may already have experience working with CERTs in the past.

Having a plan for how to develop your CERT trainers is critical. Sending volunteers to the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) can help CERTs gain valuable trainers until they can develop their own in-house train-the-trainer program.

Arrange Facilities

You may not be able to change poor facilities, but there may be actions you can take to improve the facilities you have. Take the time to get feedback on the facilities from the class. Be sure to include factors, such as accessibility, parking, restroom/break facilities, lighting, temperature, visibility, and ability to hear the instructors on the feedback form.

When planning for training facilities, you may want to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of using a fixed facility versus taking the training on the road. A fixed facility limits your logistical challenges but may be inconvenient for the participants. One CERT Program held the training in different fire stations throughout the community. This approach was convenient for the participants from that area and introduced firefighters from the station to the CERT volunteers and the program.

Start on the Right Track

Check the classroom and materials before the session begins. It can be very disruptive for participants to watch an instructor try to figure out how the projector works or need to wait for required materials that weren't prepared before the course starts. Be sure to check out everything before the class begins. Show your instructors how to operate all equipment during the dry run. Use the materials checklists at the front of each unit in the Instructor Guide to ensure that everything that will be needed for each session is in the classroom, accessible, and working.

Make a good first impression. CERT participants are making an investment of time and energy in CERT and the community. Make them feel welcome. Have signs that help them with parking,

bathroom facilities, etc. Greet them when they arrive. Consider having snacks and break food available. One CERT Program provided snacks for the opening session and asked for volunteers to provide goodies for the next sessions. Try to involve volunteers with the program early.

Take time to learn the students' motives. Make time in the training (e.g., during the icebreaker, after the first session, after the last session, or during breaks) to talk to the students about why they enrolled. Find out:

- What prompted them to enroll;
- How they found out about the training;
- Their satisfaction level with the program, the schedule, and the training intensity;
- Their suggestions for improving future deliveries; and
- What you can do to sustain their interest in participation.

Gaining this information from the students themselves can tell you more about the volunteers' needs, changes you need to make in the future, whether your marketing program is working, and what you need to do to maintain and grow the program.



Words of Advice: Delivering CERT Training

CERT training may be delivered in a number of formats. Initial training is critical. If the training isn't effective and engaging, you risk losing potential members forever. Lectures along with slides, videos, and projected materials are the most basic training delivery tools. These can be easily combined with practical tabletop exercises, teambuilding exercises, and disaster simulations that allow them to apply their newly acquired skills in a realistic environment.

One of the greatest benefits that members will receive from CERT training is a chance to interact with their neighbors. Teach volunteers that during a disaster, it is their neighbors whom they will have to rely on to pool resources and mitigate risk. This training creates a sense of community and unites CERT members toward a common goal.

Step 7: Run Your CERT Program

CERT Program Personnel Resources

As the CERT Program Manager, you will not be able to make the program successful if you don't have help. To run a healthy, growing CERT Program, you will need:

- Administrative assistance (you might check with groups, such as Senior Corps or AmeriCorps for volunteers).
- A cadre of well-qualified instructors.
- Volunteers who take responsibility for parts of the program.

Use this information to determine your personnel needs and decide how you will staff the program.

Your CERT instructor cadre is another critical resource. The section titled "Establishing a Training Cadre" provides resources on recruiting, selecting, and preparing instructors.

CERT Program Manager

As the CERT Program Manager, you are responsible for the overall success of the program for your community. But what does a Program Manager do? Some of your key responsibilities are listed below in **Table 4: Program Management Responsibilities**. As you progress through program development and introduce program maintenance, you will identify other responsibilities. When you do, add them to this list as a reminder of what it takes to run a CERT Program.

It is important to note the administrative organization of a CERT Program will have different positions and functions than when the CERT organization is deployed by the Sponsoring Organization for training support or emergency response. When deployed, CERTs are organized per the team organization portion of CERT Basic Training, which corresponds to the organization used in the Incident Command System. See CERT Basic Training and IS-315: CERT and the Incident Command System, to learn more about CERT organization during a response.

A CERT, depending on the size, setting, and audience of the program, can generate a lot of telephone calls and a lot of paperwork. Some programs may serve one small town and have a handful of volunteers, while other programs may serve major American cities with large populations and many component teams in different neighborhoods, wards, or boroughs.

FEMA does not dictate the administrative organization of CERT Programs beyond requiring a Program Manager. A CERT Program should build its leadership structure to accomplish all administrative tasks required to keep the program running efficiently and meet FEMA requirements, as well as state or local rules and regulations.

To illustrate how a program may have one or more teams of different types, consider this example. If the City of Newville wants to establish a CERT Program, or already has a program, it may offer CERT

Basic Training in one location, and maintain CERTs for response in each ward, borough, or neighborhood of the city. Each of the CERTs can have unique leadership structures and even sponsoring organization. If a high school within the City of Newville has, or would like to establish, a CERT, a Teen CERT could be an independent program sponsored by the school. Or as another option, the school and city could establish the Teen CERT as a part of the overall city program. Many programs around the Nation are set up this way. For program organization during exercises and mobilization, see the CERT Basic Training and Supplemental Materials available at https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US.

A successful Program Manager should seek and cultivate good help. The table below covers just some of the possible program responsibilities that fall under a Program Manager. However, attempting to do all of these alone could result in volunteer burnout and program failure. CERT is a team effort and Program Managers should always strive to get interested volunteers to help run the program.

Table 4: Program Management Responsibilities

Type of Responsibility	Components
General Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop the initial plan for implementing a CERT Program in the community. ▪ Develop forms and records or a database to track the roster, financial, inventory, training, program participation, exercises, mailings, etc. ▪ Develop a budget and obtain funding or resources. ▪ Coordinate a CERT electronic newsletter or other mailings to maintain contact with current CERT volunteers. ▪ Establish standard operating procedures for the use of CERT in disaster and non-disaster situations in coordination with the CERT Team Leader. ▪ Evaluate the overall program.
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gain support by marketing the plan to local leaders, unions, first responders, citizens, employers, and potential partners. ▪ Pitch to the media to gain public recognition for the CERT's capabilities and accomplishments.

Type of Responsibility	Components
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Schedule training, follow-up training, exercises, special events, etc.▪ Arrange all program logistics, including classroom setup.▪ Recruit class participants.▪ Identify, recruit, train, and schedule instructors.▪ Provide an orientation at the beginning of each course (this is very important for new programs and less important in well-established programs).▪ Monitor classroom delivery.▪ Maintain the course content. Evaluate training and results.▪ Arrange for speakers at graduation.▪ Develop supplemental classes, exercises, and projects to keep CERT volunteers involved and improve their skills.

A CERT, depending on the size, setting, and audience of the program, can generate a lot of telephone calls and paperwork. Some programs may serve one small town and have a handful of volunteers, while other programs may serve major American cities with large populations and many component teams in different neighborhoods, wards, or boroughs. Ensure you have adequate support from both volunteers and your Sponsoring Organization to fully serve your community.

Step 8: Track and Evaluate Your Program

Program evaluation is an ongoing process that asks and answers three questions:

1. What are we doing now?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. Do we need to do something differently? If so, what?

The results should be recorded in a Program Report.

What Do You Want to Learn?

Since the CERT Program depends heavily on the clear and defined program goals and objectives established by the Program Manager, it makes sense to evaluate your program by determining if those objectives are being met.

Remember Figure 1: Planners can use the SMART Goals method to design concrete goals for their program.

During a program evaluation, you should critically review all elements of your program and consider them against the goals and objectives. Did you do what you set out to do? What are the specific program elements that did or did not help meet those goals?

Here are some of the elements of a CERT Program you should evaluate:

- CERT Basic Training;
- Other training;
- Program: volunteers, resources, funding;
- Exercises and drills completed;
- Community activities; and
- CERT partnerships created for program support.

Create a Strategy for Getting Information

The next step is to create a strategy for getting the information you want to learn.

The strategy should include answers to these questions:

- Who needs the information being collected?
- What types of data are needed?
- Where will the data be found?

Who Needs the Information?

Every program has partners and stakeholders who will want to know how the program is doing. See the discussions in Unit 2 (Setting a Program Vision) and Unit 3 (Promoting Your Program) about partners and stakeholders.

What Types of Data are Needed?

Program evaluation data will fall into one of two categories of data: quantitative or qualitative. The kind of data that a program will need for its evaluation strategy is determined by what the program is trying to learn.

Qualitative data include comments, stories, testimonials, and observations, for example:

- Numbers;
- Ratings;
- Rankings; and
- Yes or no answers to specific questions.

Quantitative data are everything else, such as stories, anecdotes, and opinions.

Planning for an Evaluation

- What is/are the reason(s) for doing the evaluation (i.e., what do you want to be able to decide because of the evaluation)? For example:
 - What progress is your CERT Program making toward meeting its set goals?
 - Do CERT volunteers have enough resources (equipment, facilities, training) to meet the program goals?
 - Should priorities change to focus more on meeting the goals? (Note: This question could be considered as a program management decision rather than an evaluation question.)
 - How should goals be changed, or should any goals be added or removed? Why?
- Who are the stakeholders that should get information from the evaluation (e.g., emergency services personnel, community support partners, CERT volunteers)?
- What information is needed to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program, benefits to the community, other outcomes, how the program succeeded or failed, and why?
- What sources should the information be collected from (e.g., program documentation, CERT volunteers, community partners)?
- What are the best available ways for getting the information (e.g., questionnaires, looking over documentation, observing CERTs)?

Get the Information

Take time to collect information from sources identified in the *Create a Strategy for Getting Information* section of this document.

Analyze the Information and Decide on Next Steps

Analyze data

When you analyze data, always start by reviewing your evaluation goals (i.e., the reason for the program evaluation). This will help you organize your data and focus your results, analysis, and conclusions.

For example, if you wanted to improve your program by finding its strengths and weaknesses, you can organize data into program strengths, program weaknesses, and ideas for improving the program.

Compare the results you get to what you were expecting.

Consider options

Consider:

- **What?** Conclusions from the data that can be drawn about program operations and the status of goals and objectives;
- **So what?** Impacts that these data may have on current or future operations, goals, and overall CERT functionality;
- **Now what?** Specific suggestions that may help improve the program;
- **What's the gap?** Consideration of the choices and limiting factors for applying those suggestions; and
- **When?** The estimated time it would take to apply the changes.

Take corrective action if needed

If the results show that changes are needed, create a plan for making the changes. The plan should include new objectives (see Unit 2: Program Partners) and may involve new policies and procedures (see Unit 7: Training and Exercises).

Reporting Evaluation Results

You are responsible for making sure your program evaluation results are properly recorded and shared. This is done with the use of a Program Report. This particular report is not a requirement by FEMA, but a best practice for your program to provide to your Sponsoring Organization, community partners and donors or future partners and donors to quantify the success of the program and help justify further support.

Here are some things to keep in mind when creating the Program Report:

- Justify your conclusions or suggestions using your program evaluation data results.
- Translate suggestions into specific action plans, including who, what, when, how, and any other “need-to-know” details.

- The level and scope of content depending on who is getting the report (e.g., funding agency, community supporters, state office).
- Keep in mind the intended audiences for any Program Report. Every Program Report needs to cover the specific interests of the audience while still staying neutral.
- Keep the Program Report as brief as possible.

Use the CERT Registration Website to Complete the CERT Annual Survey

One of the three requirements to be a registered CERT Program is to take the CERT Annual Certification each year. You can update the Certification at any time during the year by logging into the program profile you established when you registered in Step #2. This survey helps tell the story of your program's success.

By updating the survey with your program activity information, including training events, preparedness activities, deployments, and exercises, you'll have a record with FEMA about your contributions throughout the year and can track your progress from year to year. Your state and local governments, as well as FEMA, will use this data to tell the story of CERT's contribution to preparedness and recognize the efforts of local programs nationwide.

Appendix

This appendix is comprised of sample forms—aligned to the steps outlined in this document—to help you manage your CERT Program. Do not hesitate to modify these forms to best support your team.

CERT DRAFT PROGRAM PLAN

Unit 1: Program Goal and Objectives

Instructions:

1. New Program Managers: Draft an overall program goal and one to two objectives for your program. These will be a starting place for the discussion you will have with program sponsors and stakeholders.
2. Existing Program Managers: Enter your program's overall goal and two objectives. Ask yourself if the objectives are achievable and appropriate. If not, how might the objectives be revised?

Overall Program Goal:

Objectives:

Remember to make them SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

- 1.
- 2.

People who should review the goal/objectives:

Complete **Table 5** below by naming people and organizations to review your goal/objectives.

Table 5: List of Goal/Objectives Reviewers

People who should review the goal/objectives:	
1.	7.
2.	8.
3.	9.
4.	10.
5.	11.
6.	12.

Unit 2: Program Partners

Instructions:

1. All Program Managers: Identify organizations in your community that could be targeted for partnership.
2. Existing Program Managers: Identify organizations that already provide important partnerships.

Complete **Table 6** below by naming current or potential partners.

Table 6: List of Current or Potential Partners

Current Partners	Potential Partners
1.	11.
2.	12.
3.	13.
4.	14.
5.	15.
6.	16.
7.	17.
8.	18.
9.	19.

Current Partners	Potential Partners
10.	20.

Unit 3: Promoting to Target Audiences

Instructions:

Complete **Table 7** below with ideas for your CERT Program.

Table 7: Promoting to Target Audiences

Stakeholder/Partner	Promotional Message	Promotional Strategies

Unit 4: Working with Volunteers

Recruitment

Instructions:

Complete **Table 8** below with ideas for your CERT Program. Do not include “word of mouth.”

Table 8: Working with Volunteers

I could try to recruit volunteers here:	I could use these elements in the recruitment message:
	Opening: Statement of need: Statement of solution: Why volunteer could do job: What’s in it for the volunteer:
	Opening: Statement of need: Statement of solution: Why volunteer could do job: What’s in it for the volunteer:

I could try to recruit volunteers here:	I could use these elements in the recruitment message:
	Opening: Statement of need: Statement of solution: Why volunteer could do job: What's in it for the volunteer:

Retention

Instructions:

Record ideas for retaining volunteers. Add to the list as you think of new ideas throughout the course.

Unit 5: Working with Instructors

Instructions:

Complete **Table 9**, **Table 10**, **Table 11** with ideas for your CERT Program.

Table 9: Known Instructors

These are great instructors I use or would like to use:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Table 10: Potential Instructors

I could also look for instructors from these organizations:
1.
2.
3.

I could also look for instructors from these organizations:

4.

Table 11: Instructor Retention

Ideas I want to remember for retaining instructors:

Unit 6: Procuring and Managing Resources

Instructions:

1. Complete **Table 12** by considering management issues related to procuring program resources.
2. Complete **Table 13** by considering data collection and record keeping requirements.

Table 12: Program Resource Procurement

Resources	Factors to Consider

Table 13: Data Collection and Record Keeping

Data or Records to Collect	Best Ways to Collect and Access Data Records

Unit 7: Training and Exercises

Instruction:

1. Draft the scenario for training below.
2. Complete **Table 14** with ideas to tailor training to your community.
3. Complete **Table 15** with the sample training schedule.

My draft scenario for *CERT Basic Training*, Unit 7:

--

Table 14: Training Ideas for Your Community

Some ideas for tailoring training to my community:
1.
2.
3.
4.

Some ideas for tailoring training to my community:

5.

Table 15: Sample Training Schedule

Week Before Training	Description
8	
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	

Table 16: Draft Training and Exercise Plan

Topic	Description
Objective	
Plan for Meeting Objective	
Logistical Needs to Meet Objective	
Risk to Volunteers	
Evaluation of Objective	

Unit 8: Policies and Procedures

(Experienced Program Managers) Do your policies and procedures need to be revised? Consider these indicators:

- An increase in the number of injuries or ineffective team operations;
- More questions on what are “normal operations” or a sense of general confusion;
- Requests from CERT volunteers for more training on a procedure;
- Inconsistent performance of CERT volunteers;
- Increase in the stress levels of CERT volunteers; and
- Complaints about poor performance from the Sponsoring Organization, partners, or the community.

Instructions:

Complete **Table 17** by considering ways to inform new policies and procedures.

Table 17: Potential Policies and Procedures

Potential Policy/Procedure	Description
Topic of Policy/Procedure	
Research Needed	
Individuals to Consult	

Complete **Table 18** by filling out the spaces with thoughts you had about the policies and procedures.

Table 18: Policies and Procedures (cont.)

Learning Objectives
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Unit 9: Program Evaluation

Instructions:

Complete **Table 19** with your program’s specific goals and objectives.

Complete **Table 20** with your ideas on how to evaluate each goal and objective.

Table 19: Goals and Objectives

Goals	Objectives
Goal #1	Objective #1:
	Objective #2:
	Objective #3:
Goal #2	Objective #1:
	Objective #2:
	Objective #3:
Goal #3	Objective #1:
	Objective #2:
	Objective #3:

Table 20: Evaluation of Set Goals

Goals	Ideas for Evaluation
Goal #1	Evaluation Idea #1:
	Evaluation Idea #2:
	Evaluation Idea #3:
Goal #2	Evaluation Idea #1:
	Evaluation Idea #2:
	Evaluation Idea #3:
Goal #3	Evaluation Idea #1:
	Evaluation Idea #2:
	Evaluation Idea #3:

Unit 10: Keeping the Program Going

Complete **Table 21**, **Table 22**, and **Table 23** with your program's strengths, future training, and involvement opportunities.

Table 21: Strengths

Three areas where I do well (strengths):
1.
2.
3.

Table 22: Training Opportunities

Three areas where I want additional training:
1.
2.
3.

Table 23: Involvement Opportunities

Three areas I might want to delegate or share:
1.
2.
3.