



Starting a CERT Program - Step 1: Assessing Needs

Overview

Where should you begin? Just as in emergency planning, you should begin by assessing your community's disaster preparedness.

How can CERT augment your community's response capability? The answer to this question will help you determine the role CERTs should play. Many communities are forming Citizen Corps Councils. These councils can be a partner in helping you start a CERT program.

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Web Resources

- CERT Program Coordinators: Networking Contacts
Web Address: <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/cert/dir.htm>
 - Citizens Corps Website
Web Address: www.citizencorps.gov
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How To: The CERT Role in Your Community

It is too cost prohibitive for response agencies to staff for major disasters or even for large emergencies. One way that response agencies seek to solve resource shortages is through mutual aid agreements and other cooperative efforts. But in a disaster setting, mutual aid partners may be unable to provide support or there may be damage to transportation routes, communication links, or other critical infrastructure that prevents a rapid response.

Your Community's Hazard Analysis

To determine what could potentially affect your community's response capability—and, therefore, the potential roles for CERT teams, it is good to start by reviewing the community's hazard analysis.

Your local Emergency Manager probably has already done one. He or she should be able to provide you with the analysis and any background information you need about the hazards facing your community.



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How To: Developing Program Goals and Objectives

Clear program goals establish the basis for the CERT program in your community. Therefore, one of your first tasks as Program Coordinator will be to develop goal statements that reflect what you want the program to do.

Avoid General Goals

Often, Program Coordinators start with an overall goal for the program, such as . . .

". . . to improve the overall preparedness and response capability in the community."

However, such a general goal will not be enough to develop your program. You will need to develop one or more additional goal statements that will describe just how CERTs will accomplish the general goal.

Establish Specific Goals

Some examples of more specific goals for CERTs are:

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

Set Other Goals

You may wish to develop other goals, depending on how you intend to use your CERTs. These goals may include functions, such as:

- To improve community preparedness by improving the credibility of neighbor-to-neighbor information.
- To support the community's public safety efforts (through such efforts as installing smoke alarms or by providing standby medical support at community events, etc.).

Review Goal Setting Resources

Take time to browse the CERT website, talk to responders, citizens, and employers to see how CERTs could be used to the greatest benefit in your community. Then, develop one or more goals for your CERT program.

Acknowledgment: This job aid has been developed from materials and guidance provided by Rachel Jacky, Portland Fire Bureau, Portland, Oregon.

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Questions to Get You Started

Take a few minutes to review the questions below. Answering these questions will help you determine your community's strengths and challenges and your strategy for implementing the CERT program.

Category	Questions
Baseline of Community Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How would you assess the community's awareness of risk? ▪ Have there been community-based public safety efforts? ▪ Have some homeowners and businesses implemented preparedness measures?
Industry and Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What businesses have a history of actively preparing for emergencies? ▪ What businesses are required by law to maintain response plans? ▪ What are the most influential employers in your community? ▪ Which businesses have a corporate culture that encourages volunteerism? ▪ What are the prominent business organizations or associations in your community?
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which of the television, radio, or print media in your community are more community-service oriented? ▪ Are there journalists or reporters who have prepared stories on natural hazards, emergency preparedness, or emergency response exercises? ▪ Which local media outlets have the greatest potential to be effective partners? ▪ Can you encourage the favorite local weather forecaster to be an active participant?
Health Care Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which health care providers are most active in promoting public safety? ▪ Can you encourage medical professionals to participate actively to promote preparedness?
Community Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which community leaders might champion this initiative? ▪ Which community organizations are typically active in community initiatives or events? ▪ Can you get explicit support from local public officials?
Educational Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have any educational institutions participated in any type of natural hazard preparedness or response activities? ▪ Are there any existing initiatives at area colleges and universities that would make a natural partner with CERT (e.g., programs in emergency planning or public education)? ▪ Does the local school district require its students to perform community service?



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Words of Advice: Tips for Assessing Needs

Joe Lowry - Memphis, Tennessee **Assess Risks and Develop a Plan**

Make sure you do a risk assessment, look at the events that could possibly affect your community, and then use that as a starting point for teaching citizens how to prepare themselves to survive.

Community demographics are very important to consider when planning a CERT program. A great benefit to the program is knowing the people and their vocation so that you know who you can count on for CERT resources and community volunteers.

Develop a written response plan. A written plan enables the team to become a self-sustaining entity even after the team's founders have moved away from the neighborhood. A written plan also allows the team to respond effectively if the team's leaders are unable to respond. Any team member should be able to open the plan and implement it.

Don't limit yourself. Look at the resources you have available and utilize them. Undeniably the program evolves: if people stay with the program and identify with it, it takes on a life of its own. If you stick to the rigid idea of the class itself you're limiting yourself.

Rachel Jacky - Portland, Oregon **Begin By Setting Goals**

Spend time up front to figure out what your needs are and how you're going to address those needs.

It may be tempting to simply start training teams with the material available from FEMA, but it's good to spend some time figuring out your program goals and how you'll address those goals.

There are a number of groups (for example, neighborhood associations, fire department, law enforcement, and transportation department) in any community for whom the CERTs could be a real resource. And, there may be other groups who aren't sure about the CERT model. It's good to talk with representatives of all of these groups when setting program goals.



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Words of Advice: Tips for Assessing Needs (Continued)

Joe Lowry - Memphis, Tennessee **Consider Hazards, Communications, and Logistics**

It is so very important to consider the hazards that are possible within the community and then plan accordingly. Recognize all of the variables that can take place during the event of a specific emergency and then set your goals around these variables and possibilities.

It is important to consider the communications available within the community. Communications is such an integral part of the program and knowing the community's capabilities is a critical first step.

All the logistical aspects of the community response must be considered when setting goals for the CERT program. These logistics play a key role in what can be utilized during an emergency situation.

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

Dale Kleos - Whatcom County, Washington **Allow for Growth**

Don't be afraid to let your CERT program develop at the hands of its volunteers. As your program evolves it will take on a life of its own. If people stay with the program and identify with it, then they will have ideas for improving it. Don't be limited by your original plan.

Frank Lucier - San Francisco, California **Determine Deployment Procedures**

It's important to first decide how CERT teams will operate in a real disaster prior to starting the program. What will cause them to self-activate? How will they be called up? What will be their area of responsibility? How will they communicate with emergency services? Get the operational questions answered.

Start small! Make your goals achievable. The program will take on a life of its own once it's up and running. Make sure that the start-up phase is manageable.



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Community Hazard Analysis: Review Worksheet

Review your community's hazard analysis, and consider how CERTs could contribute in response to your community's high-risk and high-impact hazards. Some items to consider as you complete your review are listed below.

1. Complete the matrix below to determine if the risks posed by your community's highest-risk hazards can be met by CERTs, given their areas of training, level of training, and experience.

Hazard/Event	CERT Training Area						
	Emergency Preparedness	Fire Safety	Emergency Medical Ops	Light Search and Rescue	Team Organization	Disaster Psychology	Public Safety
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							

2. In addition to the basic CERT training for response in neighborhoods or workplaces, what other ways could CERT assist your organization?
3. What other roles could CERTs play (e.g., distributing smoke alarms, providing medical support at community events)?
4. What additional training would be required?
5. What equipment will you give CERT and what will they have to supply on their own?
6. What is the minimum number of CERTs that would be required to make the program viable?
7. How will you divide your community to make CERT team assignments (e.g., by neighborhood, fire district, police precinct)?