MRC Unit Leader Guide to Youth Engagement in the Medical Reserve Corps

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Why Engage Youth?

Young people make important contributions to communities in many ways, and an increasing number of youths want to participate in public health initiatives and activities. Youth engagement considers the perspectives and ideas of our future generations, and it involves taking risks, listening, sharing and working together for the greater good. Their participation can not only improve the health and preparedness of your community, but also help them develop leadership, service and other skills. Allowing youth to participate in activities with your Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit is a fantastic way to engage and expose these future generations of volunteers, leaders and health professionals to public health, as well as a great way to increase the outreach and impact of your unit.

Many organizations, such as HOSA—Future Health Professionals, Boy and Girl Scouts, and 4-H (see Appendix A for a list of other organizations), are looking for opportunities to learn and serve in their communities. These organizations frequently require their students to engage in community service projects, and some have even trained their youth in HIPAA and OSHA guidelines. Many of these students are ready, willing and able to serve their communities—and they are ideal candidates to support the mission of the Medical Reserve Corps.

Why Should Youth Engage in Public Health and with the Local MRC

The field of public health can offer great personal fulfillment to young people: working towards improving the health and wellbeing of their community is quite often a rewarding endeavor. As an MRC unit leader, you play a key role in encouraging student volunteerism efforts both as youth and later as professionals in their chosen fields. Helping youth become involved with your local MRC unit is a fantastic way to utilize existing infrastructure to allow them to have "real world" experience within public health while still in school.

Benefits of Youth Engagement for MRC Units and the Community

- More volunteers for non-emergency events
- Increased public health initiatives and preparedness events
- Learning from youth
- Youth bring energy and excitement to assigned tasks
- Youth who volunteer are more likely to be actively involved in community projects as adults, that means you are developing the future pool of MRC volunteers!
- Bridging the "generation gap"
- New perspectives and increased awareness
- Increased sense of community
- Renewed motivation and commitment to the MRC after witnessing passionate youth

Testimony from an MRC Unit Leader

"Working with this group from Middleton High School this year has been an incredible experience. As the Hillsborough County MRC Coordinator, I watched them grow from curious students into confident leaders who fully embraced the mission of the MRC. They consistently reached out for guidance, asked meaningful questions, and applied every piece of feedback with real purpose and maturity.

Seeing them take our planning sessions and turn them into impactful, community-centered projects was truly inspiring. Their dedication, creativity, and teamwork set a new standard for youth engagement in the MRC. I am proud of everything they accomplished and honored to have supported this team whose passion and hard work led them all the way to first place at ILC." Angela B. Minzer, Hillsborough County Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator, Florida

What the MRC and Youth Do Together

There are a variety of activities that youth can be involved with in the MRC. Below are a few examples of such activities. For a more extensive list, see the Youth Engagement Toolkit, Section 3: Activity Bank.

Participate in MRC Disaster Drill

Youth members and partners can act as injured patients in full scale exercises and drills. Not only will they get the opportunity to learn about preparedness and emergencies, but they will also gain an understanding of the issues that disaster survivors and victims' face. Participating in a local MRC Disaster Drill will improve their ability to perform under pressure and promote safety in communities across the country.

Volunteer at a Local MRC Flu Shot Clinic

Students could participate at a local MRC flu shot clinic by educating patients about hand washing and disease prevention as they wait for their vaccinations and shots. This can improve the health literacy of the patients.

Lockdown Video

Write, record and edit an informative video that outlines what a school should do in case of a lockdown. This will improve public health preparedness and educate members on how to act under pressure.

Elementary School Visit

Visit the local elementary school to teach younger children about a variety of public health topics, such as healthy eating and exercise, avoiding tobacco use, safety, hygiene, and proper hand washing. This will promote good health and wellness in the younger generations.

Connect on Social Media

Young members could create Facebook, Twitter (X), and/or Instagram for your MRC unit. This will promote interest in and raise understanding of the MRC and could possibly assist with recruitment. Please note that all social media posts must be approved by the MRC unit.

How to Engage Youth in Your MRC Unit

There are three different ways that your MRC unit can engage with local youth, including allowing youth to join your unit, partnering with a local school/community youth organization, or supporting the creation of a Junior MRC unit. Below is an overview of how to implement each option, though the experience of each organization will vary.

Join

- The most inclusive way to engage youth is to allow them to **join** your MRC unit. This allows them to be members of the MRC and function alongside your adult MRC members
- Youth are directly involved with the mission of the unit and can support or attend any appropriate MRC activities
- Note: some MRC units are not allowed to accept members who are under 18 years of age

Partner

- Another way (or something that can be done in addition to allowing youth to join your unit) is to **partner** with a local health or service-oriented school or community organization. This allow youth who are not members of your MRC unit to participate in certain MRC unit activities
- The MRC has a well-established partnership with HOSA-Future Health Professionals, and many units are currently partners with HOSA chapters and making a large impact in their communities. See Appendix A for other possible partner organizations

Create

- Another option is for your MRC unit to support the **creation** of a Junior MRC unit
- A Junior MRC unit goes through the MRC application process, and must remain active and fulfill all standard MRC unit requirements
- Your MRC unit can support the Junior MRC unit by inviting them to attend various preparedness exercises, public health initiatives, training sessions, and more

Join an MRC Unit

If your MRC unit allows volunteers under the age of 18, consider these strategies to establish and sustain youth engagement:

Partner with Local Youth Organizations: Connect with school advisors or leaders of community-based youth organizations. Introduce the MRC, explain opportunities for youth involvement, and request an opportunity to present at a meeting or invite them to attend an MRC membership meeting.

Recruit and Onboard Youth Members: Provide interested students and their parents with a Parent Information Handout outlining the MRC's mission, expectations, and benefits. Ensure all prospective youth volunteers complete the MRC membership application, obtain parental consent, and submit any required liability or permission forms.

Engage Youth in Meaningful Activities: Encourage youth to plan and participate in projects that align with community health and emergency preparedness priorities. The **Youth Engagement Toolkit** offers recommended topics and activity ideas to help youth develop leadership skills while serving their communities.

Foster Long-Term Engagement: Continue building relationships with youth volunteers and partner organizations by providing meaningful roles, leadership opportunities, and ongoing recognition. As trust and experience grow, expand youth involvement in MRC initiatives and community outreach efforts.

Partner

1. Reach out to the student advisor of a local school or community-based youth organization (see Appendix A for some suggestions). Explain what the MRC is, why you want to engage their organization in the MRC, and what role the youth could have within your unit. See if you can attend one of the organization's general body meetings to introduce the MRC and gauge interest.
2. Another simple way to get your foot in the door is to extend an invitation to the student advisor to your next general membership meeting. Ask them to attend and then explain where the students could help the MRC unit as well as benefit from it.
3. Once both parties decide to go forward with involving youth in your unit, create an agreement and a plan. Who carries liability? What are the roles that the youth will have in MRC activities? What are the requirements for students to be involved? How will the leaders communicate?
4. Once partnership terms are established between you and the advisor, provide parents with Medical Reserve Corps Parent Information Handout (see Appendix B for a sample handout).
5. Have the youth and their parents complete any liability waiver/consent forms that are necessary (see Appendix C for a sample).
6. Start the engagement process by participating in events or any trainings that are already being implemented by your unit.
7. Propose activities that youth can plan and participate in. The Youth Engagement Toolkit Section 2: Quick Start Topic Guide has a few "hot topics" that youth can learn and educate the community about. Section 3: Activity Bank also contains a list of successful activities conducted by MRC units and youth in the past.
8. Grow and expand the partnership as the MRC unit and the youth become more familiar with each other!

Creating a Junior MRC Unit

1. Contact your MRC Regional Coordinator (contact information can be found on the at the following site: https://www.aspr.gov/readiness-response/join-train-respond/mrc/contact-us
2. If necessary, help the youth find a housing organization for the Junior MRC unit
3. Assist them with the application process for starting an MRC unit
4. If the Junior MRC unit is approved, partner with them. Invite them to attend various preparedness exercises, public health initiatives, training sessions, and any other activities conducted by your MRC unit. Some additional possible activities and project ideas can be found in the Youth Engagement Toolkit under Section 3: Activity Bank

These are very general guidelines for creating a working relationship between a youth organization and your MRC unit. The most important steps to be successful are to go into the process with a plan and be persistent. There is a list of potential barriers that you may encounter, and some possible solutions, in Appendix D. If you have a question that has not been answered, contact your MRC regional/state coordinator or the MRC program office for help (MRCcontact@hhs.gov)or at https://www.aspr.gov/readiness-response/join-train-respond/mrc/contact-us . They can also put you in contact with student organization chapters or MRC units that have been previously successful in this endeavor.

How to Further Existing Youth Organization Relationships

To have a successful and sustainable partnership, strive to have the youth participate regularly in community events with your local MRC. Encourage members to take initiative within the unit by offering youth the opportunity to take a leadership role in larger projects. They are very capable of helping with lead projects and can exceed expectations when given the chance.

A specific way to further the relationship with HOSA-Future Health Professionals is to participate in the HOSA competitive events. There is an MRC Partnership competitive event (guidelines of which can be found at www.hosa.org/node/117), which allows HOSA members to further develop their relationship with your MRC unit. All HOSA chapter activities planned and implemented for this event MUST be done in partnership with your unit.

There are also Public Health, CERT skills, and CPR/First Aid competitive events, which relate to the overarching mission of improving community health and preparedness. The MRC Volunteer Recognition Award also exists to recognize outstanding youth volunteers for their service in supporting the mission of the MRC, HOSA, and Office of the Surgeon General. These are great ways for students who work with the MRC to be recognized for their hard work throughout the year.

Don't forget to report all your activities, including those that involve youth, on your MRC unit profile! This helps share your successes and spreads great ideas to others looking to engage youth!

Next Steps

Establishing a relationship with your local student or community organization can be beneficial to the youth, your MRC unit, and the community. MRC volunteers increase the preparedness and resilience of their communities, as well as educate and inform through supporting numerous public health initiatives. The experience can be incredibly rewarding and beneficial to everyone involved.

HOSA-Future Health Professionals is an international student-led organization which has historically had successful relationships with MRC units. HOSA state advisor information can be found on the HOSA website at www.hosa.org/node/.

Appendix A

Possible Partners - School and Community-Based Organizations

School-Based and Career and Technical Student Organizations

HOSA—Future Health Professionals	www.hosa.org
Business Professionals of America	www.bpa.org
DECA (Marketing)	www.deca.org
Future business Leaders of America	www.fbla-pbl.org
Future Educators Association	www.fea.org
Family, Career & Community Leaders of America	www.fccla.org
National FFA (Agriculture)	www.ffa.org
SkillsUSA (Trades and Industrial)	www.skillsusa.org
Technology Student Association	www.tsa.org
National Association of Student Councils	www.nasc.org
National Honor Society	www.nhs.us
Key Club (affiliated with Kiwanis)	www.keyclub.org

Also consider any pre-medicine clubs, service clubs, etc.

Community-Based Organizations

Boy Scouts of America	www.scouting.org
Girl Scouts of the USA	www.girlscouts.org
Boys and Girls Clubs of America	www.bgca.org
National 4-H Council	www.4-h.org
Civil Air Patrol Cap Teens	www.gocivilairpatrol.com/teens.htm
Camp Fire USA	www.campfireusa.org

Also consider any other youth groups, church groups, etc. that may be involved with service.

Appendix B

Sample MRC Parent Information Handout

*Please note that this handout will have to be tailored to each specific unit depending on the unit/organization collaboration mission and agreement

A partnership has been formed between the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), HOSA—Future Health Professionals (HOSA), and the Mid-Missouri Area Health Education Centers (MAHEC) to form a Junior Medical Reserve Corps (Junior MRC). Provided is information regarding the organization, mission, frequently asked questions, required forms, and some examples of volunteer activities that may be organized throughout the year.

Mission of the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC): To engage volunteers to strengthen public health, emergency response and community resiliency.

Mission of the Junior MRC: To encourage students to develop the skills and expertise needed to improve the health of their community and train them to be Missouri's future health leaders.

About MRC:
The MRC network comprises more than 270,000 volunteers in roughly 700community-based units located throughout the United States and its territories. MRC units organize and utilize local volunteers who want to donate their time and expertise to prepare for and respond to emergencies and to support ongoing preparedness initiatives. MRC volunteers include medical and public health professionals as well as other community
members without healthcare backgrounds who want to improve the health and safety of their communities

Junior MRC:
Plan: Working in partnership with HOSA, MAHEC, the local MRC and the newly formed Junior MRC, students will be encouraged to be involved in improving their community and its citizens. During this partnership, the students will have opportunities to actively participate in health campaigns, clinics, emergency preparedness drills, and work to disseminate important health information to various individuals from the youth to the elderly.

With the foundation of this program in volunteerism, it has a focus that promotes emergency preparedness and response. During non-emergent times, the focus is on encouraging healthy practices, promoting disease prevention, and improving health literacy.

Appendix C

Sample MRC Unit/Housing Organization Consent Form

This form must be returned to *MRC Unit/Housing Organization* prior to participating in any Medical Reserve Corps activity if you are under 18 years of age.

I grant approval for my child, _____, Age _____, Grade Level _____, Date of Birth_____, to participate in *MRC Unit/Housing Organization*-sponsored classes and Medical Reserve Corps activities and release *MRC Unit/Housing Organization*, the Medical Reserve Corps and any instructors, activity leaders, and assistants from any liability arising from his/her participation in said activities. I understand *MRC Unit/Housing Organization* does not provide health or medical insurance for participants. Consent is hereby given to the *MRC Unit/Housing Organization* and Medical Reserve Corps instructors, activity leaders, and supervisors to give or seek medical aid required in the case of emergency.

My son/daughter has permission to participate in the following activity:

_____ on this date: _____

Health Insurance Company: _____

Policy Number:_____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent's Name (print): _____

Phone: (_____) _____

Name and Phone of additional person who may be contacted in case of emergency:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Please return to: *MRC Unit/Housing Organization address* Or fax to: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
You may also bring this consent form the day of the activity.

NOTE: This form was developed by the University of New Mexico (UNM) Center for Disaster Medicine (CDM) for youth participating in MRC activities. The CDM is the housing organization for the Albuquerque-UNM MRC, which works with youth by partnering with youth organizations.

Appendix D

Potential Barriers/Solutions

Who is responsible for the liability or risk that comes with including youth members?

- Many school/community organizations already have youth liability forms/waivers/insurance policies for their members. As the MRC unit leader, contact the organization advisor to discuss liability and options
- Check to see if your MRC unit housing organization provides any coverage for youth volunteers
- Always obtain parental permission for volunteers younger than 18 years old
- Always consider if MRC activities are appropriate to involve youth
- A sample consent form is included in Appendix C

What if the parents or guardians are worried about letting their child join an MRC unit?

- Provide parents a fact sheet of possible activities that their child may be participating in and/or a "parent information handout" (sample in Appendix B) before the child registers or partners with your MRC unit. Also let them know that their child will not be "deployable" in emergency or disaster situations
- Require a parental permission slip for each event that the child participates in
- Hold a parent information/question session in conjunction with the student organization advisor and explain the roles and duties that the youth may have
- Ask the parent to join the MRC as well!

I don't have enough time or money to coordinate youth volunteers on top of my regular duties.

- Organizing volunteers takes time and resources (either or both of which an MRC may be lacking). One solution is to see if any adult MRC members want to take charge of being a youth volunteer coordinator
- You can also try finding a student "chapter liaison" from the youth organization and have them act as a bridge between you and the student organization advisor, while having them coordinate the students' involvement with the adult MRC members

I am worried about communication with the youth and their organization.

- This is an opportunity! Talk to the young members about the best ways to communicate with them, and conduct some tests to be sure all are comfortable with the process. This is also another possible responsibility for the student chapter liaison
- Some possible routes: texting, Facebook (creating a group, page, or message thread), Twitter (X). Please note that all social media posts must be approved by the MRC unit.

Students joining and leaving the MRC unit every year will be disruptive and/or a waste of my unit resources.

- Some MRC units have trained students to *be* trainers of certain modules: this can help reduce some training costs incurred by the need to train new students every year. Advisors/sponsors can also be trained as trainers, and can train students within the classroom or organization meetings
- Students can volunteer for multiple years, especially if they start early! This is also a great way to increase your unit's future adult healthcare professional participation

Youth have erratic schedules that are not conducive to partnering with a MRC unit (which mostly only includes adults)

- If the youth school schedule is a barrier to coordinating events, there is plenty that can be accomplished on weekday evenings or during the weekend. In fact, that is when most adult MRC members can help as well!

It is not convenient to partner youth with an organization that is not located on school grounds.

- Coordinate activities that are located around or convenient to the school
- Discuss with the student "chapter liaison" to organize possible carpooling options for students whose parents may not be able to provide transportation for them. Adult MRC members may be able to help as well
- Activities done with your school organization may be considered a field trip by the school. School may cover the transportation costs for these 'real-world' experiences with the MRC

Can I trust youth to get the job done?

- Start off the youth with small, simple tasks. Involve them in events that are already planned where they can succeed easily. As you and your unit get to know them and their abilities, discuss with the student advisor to increase their responsibilities accordingly. This will help raise their credibility not only to your unit, but also to the community

Can I trust the youth to keep sensitive matters confidential?

- Require all new youth members to complete a HIPAA training module
- Have youth sign a confidentiality agreement upon joining the MRC and explained the significance
- Avoid assigning youth to tasks that involve confidential or sensitive information

How do I make sure that the youth are accountable?

- Be sure to emphasize that students must show up to events that they sign up for, and not being responsible for their actions will result in consequences and possible removal from future activities
- If necessary, have the youth sign a contract before engaging them in your unit