

Empowering Maryland Responds Medical Reserve Corps (MRC): Leveraging the STTRONG Grant for Impactful Initiatives



Maryland Responds
Medical Reserve Corps

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Background & Introduction:

Maryland's population exceeds 6.16 million and showcases a rich tapestry of landscapes, from vibrant urban centers like Baltimore, Washington DC, and Philadelphia to tranquil rural and coastal communities. Despite the diversity in preparedness levels for emergencies across regions, the consistent statewide need for volunteers remains evident. Administered by the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Preparedness and Response (OP&R), Maryland Responds Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) comprises 24 local units within the state's health departments, supplemented by two specialized units focusing on the Animal Response Team and Board of Pharmacy Emergency Preparedness Taskforce (BOP EPTF). Volunteers for Maryland Responds MRC encompass a wide array of individuals, including medical and public health professionals and community members. In 2019, Maryland Responds had a volunteer force of 11,500 members, but only 2,000 were considered deployable. This discrepancy highlights the challenges in ensuring a readily available workforce for emergency response. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization experienced a surge in demand, showcasing its vital role in addressing public health crises. Despite the strain, Maryland Responds handled the increased workload efficiently, leading to significant cost savings for the state through reduced personnel and overtime expenditures.

Maryland Responds MRC was able to secure a substantial two-million-dollar grant from the HHS Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response. With these significant funds, we gain newfound momentum in our mission to elevate Maryland's Medical Reserve Corps network. Our focus is on fortifying emergency preparedness, fostering a swift and effective response, and championing health equity in all initiatives.

MRC STTRONG Funds Objectives:

1. Enhance Volunteer Recruitment and Retention:

- Increase the number of fully registered MRC volunteers through targeted community outreach and recruitment events.
- Implement advertising campaigns across various media channels to attract potential volunteers.

2. Update Plans and Training Cycles:

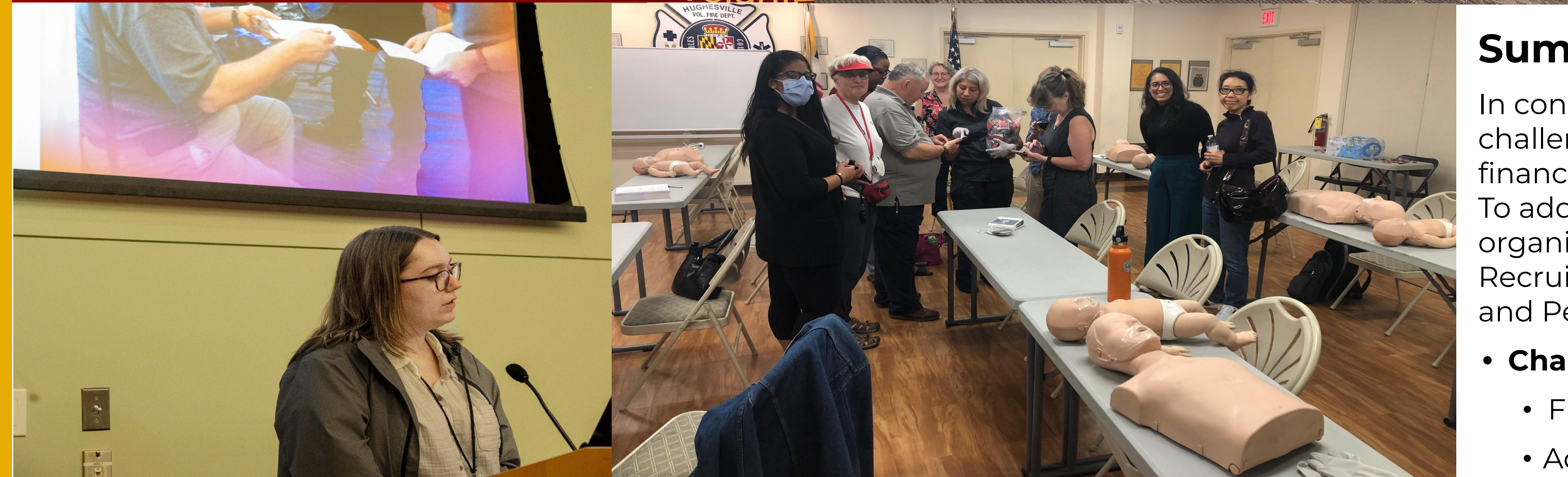
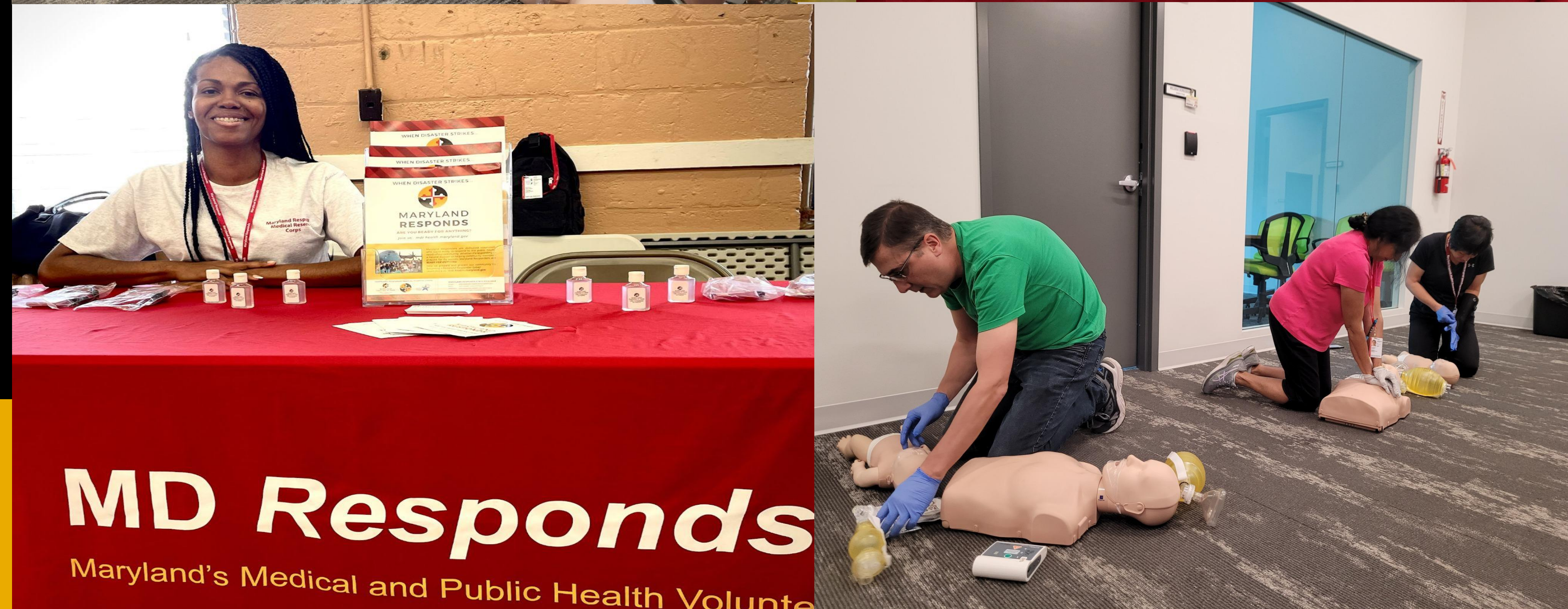
- Review and update existing response plans to incorporate MRC personnel and ensure comprehensive preparedness.
- Conduct regional training on essential response skills and refreshers for all registered MRC volunteers.
- Facilitate drills and exercises, including call-down drills and scenario-based exercises, to test response readiness and coordination.

3. Professional Standardization:

- Provide standard uniforms, badging, and deployment supplies to ensure clear identification and professionalism among MRC volunteers.
- Conduct background checks for new volunteers to maintain safety and security standards.
- Distribute Narcan sets to regional jurisdictions to replenish or establish supplies for response efforts.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establish performance metrics for each objective to measure effectiveness and progress.
- Implement a quarterly digital newsletter to report on outcomes, share updates, and communicate with stakeholders.
- Conduct regular reviews and assessments to identify areas for improvement and adjust strategies accordingly.



Challenges:

- Varied Jurisdictional Support & Involvement:
 - Turnover in Unit Administrators.
 - Decreasing public health funds.
 - Conflicting job duties of the Unit Administrators.
- Recruitment:
 - Misperception: Medical background requirement.
 - Competition from other volunteer organizations.
 - CERT, VOAD, American Red Cross.
- Time constraints:
 - Time away from clinical practice.
 - Lack of administrative support for volunteer.
 - Lack of awareness and understanding.
- Retention & Preparedness:
 - Incomplete registration.
 - Failure of volunteers to complete the registration process.
- Engagement:
 - Lack of engagement in trainings, deployments, and informative outreach.



Summary:

In conclusion, the Maryland Responds Medical Reserve Corps faces significant challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers, exacerbated by factors such as financial instability, administrative changes, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19. To address these challenges and enhance emergency response capabilities, the organization has outlined a comprehensive strategy organized into four pillars: Recruitment and Retention, Training and Exercises, Professional Standardization, and Performance and Evaluation.

• Challenges:

- Financial instability.
- Administrative changes.
- Impact of COVID-19.

• Strategy Overview:

- Recruitment and Retention: Focus on outreach and targeted ads, enhancing volunteer readiness.
- Training and Exercises: Provide advanced training, integrate into exercises, and conduct statewide events.
- Professional Standardization: Utilize ESAR-VHP for efficiency.
- Performance and Evaluation: Regular evaluations, surveys, and meetings for accountability.

• Key Success Factors:

- Overcoming financial challenges.
- Adapting to platform changes.
- Streamlining administrative processes.
- Managing COVID-19 impact.