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# GOOD STORY

## New Jersey's State Citizen Corps Council

### SUMMARY

The New Jersey State Citizen Corps Council (NJSCCC) serves as an umbrella organization to coordinate all Citizen Corps programs in the state. The NJSCCC funds and oversees all local Citizen Corps programs from the state headquarters. This promotes statewide consistency in training, resources, and public awareness initiatives for all New Jersey Citizen Corps programs.

### BACKGROUND

In 2002, President Bush established Citizen Corps within the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the USA Freedom Corps initiative. Citizen Corps assists communities in efforts to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from all hazards. Citizen Corps consists of five program partners: Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Fire Corps, Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Neighborhood Watch, and Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS). These programs prepare communities for emergencies and provide disaster response support through education and training.

Citizen Corps Councils are typically established at the local level before state level councils are formed. These local Councils operate independently and manage their resources according to the needs of the jurisdiction. In 2003, New Jersey took an alternate approach and initiated a statewide model for Citizen Corps. New Jersey formed the NJSCCC to coordinate all resources and to ensure New Jersey residents receive a coordinated community preparedness message.

### GOALS

The NJSCCC creates effective and uniform citizen preparedness programs throughout New Jersey by coordinating the efforts of local Citizen Corps Councils and program partners. The NJSCCC strives for strong citizen involvement, inclusion of all relevant New Jersey emergency management entities, and public awareness of the programs.

### DESCRIPTION

The NJSCCC manages local Citizen Corps Councils and programs from the state headquarters. Using a state-centered model, the NJSCCC ensures that all Citizen Corps programs in the state have consistent resources and training. This approach enables the NJSCCC to promote public preparedness through a coordinated public relations campaign.

#### ***State-Centered Model***

The state-centered model uses a state Citizen Corps Council with centralized decision making, resources, and public awareness messages that are distributed to local Citizen Corps programs and partners. Decisions regarding Citizen Corps programs in New Jersey

are managed by the NJSCCC at regular meetings. The NJSCCC meets quarterly to discuss funding, new local Citizen Corps Councils, goals for new programs, and other relevant topics. During the meetings, all members are encouraged to suggest program ideas, materials, and resources for consideration and to inform the NJSCCC of the preparedness programs and activities of their organizations. The NJSCCC's members distribute preparedness messages and program activity updates to their organizations and members. This centralization ensures a consistent preparedness message and increases program awareness throughout the state.

The NJSCCC includes representatives from key public, private, and non-profit stakeholders involved in community preparedness statewide. Members include representatives from the New Jersey State Police, the Office of Emergency Management, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, the New Jersey County Emergency Management Coordinator's Association, The American Legion, the New Jersey Grants Management Bureau, local community colleges, the Commission on National and Community Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Business Executives for National Security, and local police and sheriffs. Personnel from fire, medical, and local emergency management organizations are also represented. Each organization has one member serving on the NJSCCC. Members relay the NJSCCC's message to their organizations' membership.

### **Centralized Resources**

The NJSCCC manages all Citizen Corps funding and resources from their state headquarters. In many states, city and county Citizen Corps Councils and programs receive funding from the state and use the funds to purchase their own equipment. In New Jersey, Citizen Corps funds are managed from the state headquarters and used to buy equipment, training materials, and public awareness materials for Citizen Corps programs throughout the state. Purchasing large quantities of equipment from one central location rather than from several localities decreases the total cost. The centralized purchasing of resources lessens the financial and logistical burden on local teams and ensures the materials are consistent across jurisdictions.

### **Resource Distribution**

The NJSCCC works with local Citizen Corps Councils to provide them with the resources necessary to operate their Councils. After local Citizen Corps Councils or program teams assemble their core personnel, a representative from the NJSCCC meets with the local Council to ensure it has the equipment and materials necessary to run its program. The NJSCCC representative works with the local Council to ensure it has the resources necessary to address the specific hazards of its geographic location. For example, the NJSCCC works with county and local program coordinators to provide trainers for the CERT courses on basic first aid, family disaster preparedness, disaster fire suppression, medical operations, CERT operations, disaster mental health, basic emergency management, and disaster simulations.

### **Spreading the Preparedness Message**

The NJSCCC uses several methods to increase public preparedness and awareness of Citizen Corps programs. These methods include attending conferences and establishing public-private partnerships. An NJSCCC representative attends all major emergency management and citizen preparedness events in New Jersey to speak with interested residents about Citizen Corps and to distribute relevant literature. Working with New Jersey Network Public Television & Radio (NJN), the



NJSCCC produces public service announcements that highlight the work of the NJSCCC with CERT, Neighborhood Watch, and MRC. These announcements help disseminate the message of Citizen Corps and offer citizens volunteer opportunities.

A key public awareness initiative for the NJSCCC is the “Join Our Team” campaign. In the “Join Our Team” campaign, Citizen Corps partnered with the National Football League’s New York Giants. The partners distributed training cards featuring ten Giants players on the front and important citizen preparedness messages on the back. The New York Giants players possess high name recognition in New Jersey, creating a demand for the cards, particularly among middle school children.

### **Program Scope and Successes**

The New Jersey Citizen Corps program is the largest in the country. As of March 2007, New Jersey led the nation with 185 local Citizen Corps Councils that serve 100% of the state’s population. The state has 351 CERTs with approximately 10,000 CERT volunteers, 53 specially equipped CERT utility trailers deployed statewide, 23 Fire Corps teams, 84 VIPS teams, 26 MRC teams with over 3,000 members, and 629 Neighborhood Watch groups.

New Jersey measures the success of Citizen Corps by the deployment of its programs during emergency situations. New Jersey emergency responders routinely utilize CERT for search and rescue operations, community relations, and shelter operations. In 2005, New Jersey CERT and MRC teams participated in the TOPOFF 3 full-scale exercise that simulated a bio-terrorism attack. During the exercise, 1,000 CERT and MRC volunteers portrayed victims and staffed the Emergency Operations Center and Points of Dispensation where they dispensed immunizations to counter the simulated bio-terrorism threat. After Hurricane Katrina, New Jersey CERT members used their 2004 Gulf hurricane response experience to deploy to the Gulf Coast to act as community relations officers.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Keys to Success**

#### **State-Centered Organization**

By operating from the state level, the NJSCCC creates a consistent and coordinated Citizen Corps program. The NJSCCC eases the financial and logistical burden of forming local Citizen Corps Councils by providing support, including all necessary resources and training, to Councils throughout the state.

#### **Public-Private Partnerships**

The NJSCCC utilizes public-private partnerships to help spread knowledge of its programs to a wider public audience. The NJSCCC partnered with both the NJN and the New York Giants to promote its preparedness message.

### **Resources**

The Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Grants and Training provides the funding used for New Jersey Citizen Corps. The NJSCCC uses this money to fund training and equipment for local Citizen Corps programs throughout the state.

## **REFERENCES**

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