

Best Practices for Exercise Volunteer Coordinators

This summary identified best practices on volunteers serving as live mock patients in full scale and functional exercises in Arizona. The list has been developed as a result of participation in and observation of exercises occurring in Arizona since 2006. More than 2,000 volunteers are considered in the analysis, including more than 800 used in the November, 2011 statewide exercise.

1. Recruitment – It is preferable to begin recruitment early (up to three months prior to an exercise) in case authorities must sign off on approvals, such as in the case of a school. In addition:
 - a. Excellent pools of volunteers may be found in universities and colleges (especially nursing and emergency management schools and theater classes), Emergency Medical System companies, high schools, and technical institutions.
 - b. Employees may be paid or asked to volunteer. It is vital that volunteer supervisors clearly understand and support commitments.
 - c. Be sure to recruit more volunteers than needed to accommodate drop-out. In the event excess volunteers are recruited, they may serve as assistants.
2. Assembly Meeting Space – Locate a space that may be dedicated for volunteer assembly and moulage. Unless the room is located in close proximity to the exercise site, it is also necessary to identify a separate staging area (see below). The space:
 - a. Needs to be lockable to store purses, backpacks, clothing, and phones.
 - b. Should contain chairs and tables for refreshments, food, and sign-in sheets.
 - c. Should be handicap accessible and near restrooms.
 - d. Needs to accommodate potable water, electrical outlets, chairs, and tables if moulage will be done.
 - e. Needs to be eyeballed the day before use to check for unexpected obstacles.
3. Staging Area – Volunteers may be staged in buses, under shading, or in rooms near the exercise area. If the space is outside or in rooms, it should offer chairs and tables. If the space is outside, it should be used a minimal amount of time during harsh temperatures. This is particularly the case if moulage is to be reapplied since it can sag and fall off with sweating.
4. Moulage – Make-up application elevates the experience for the volunteer as well as the exercise participants. Pertaining to moulage:
 - a. Do not moulage volunteers anticipated to be used in decontamination.
 - b. Do not moulage volunteers with latex allergies. Ensure collection of volunteer information ahead of time pertaining to allergies.
 - c. Have a sufficient number of trained artists to apply moulage. Sources for artists include theater departments and military bases.
 - d. Be sure to order ample supplies.
 - e. Carry moulage kits to the staging site so items may be reapplied as necessary.
 - f. Allot sufficient time for application. Heavy moulage depicting large burns and wounds with trajectories can require up to an hour and a half. It is preferable to

- created heavy moulage prior to exercise day. Light moulage application can take 2 to 20 minutes.
- g. Use “assembly line” strategies for application of heavy versus light moulage, for certain types of wounds (burns and large, complex wounds), and when moulage is being applied to more than ten volunteers.
5. Symptomology Cards – These can be used multiple times with volunteers. However, it is a good idea to shuffle and randomly assign the cards. In addition:
 - a. Do not assign cards with disabilities to disabled volunteers that have different disabilities than the symptomology card mentions.
 - b. Avoid detailed information, since this can cause clinical staff to pay more attention to the cards than to the volunteers. If there is less interaction, the volunteer will most likely feel a diminished contribution to the exercise.
 6. Decontamination – List expectations (including swim suits), locations, and accommodations (including showers and locker rooms). Be clear about the water temperature and duration of the decontamination.
 7. Refreshments – It is beneficial for the volunteers to have a good experience during the exercise, and refreshments can play an important role in their happiness. If coffee and/or other refreshments are not to be provided, this should be conveyed. Furthermore, if volunteers will be kept over meal time, it is critical to consider providing a meal or offering gift certificates to a local restaurant.
 8. Transportation – Vehicles may be needed to transport volunteers to and from a staging site. Pertaining to transportation:
 - a. Arrange for pick up and return of volunteers.
 - b. Identify back-up and emergency plans.
 - c. Be sure to gather driver contact information in case the exercise plans are altered the day of the event.
 - d. Ensure accommodations are in place for disabled populations and service animals.
 9. Documentation – While the exercise planners and organizations may require certain documentation, it is a good idea to collect the following pertaining to the volunteers:
 - a. Contact information (email and phone).
 - b. Parent/school permission slips.
 - c. Photo waivers.
 - d. Emergency contact information.
 - e. Insurance/allergy information, as necessary.
 - f. Surveys after the exercise.
 10. Communications – Be sure to have a clear understanding of communication strategies to use with the Controller the day of the exercise and test this/these; it is preferable to use radios. Also, be sure to continue communications periodically with all volunteers to ensure the greatest likelihood of appearance the day of the exercise.

11. Assistants – It is desirable to have help from individuals in moulage, as noted. However, it is also beneficial to have assistance from:
 - a. A subject matter expert that can convey behaviors associated with information the day of the exercise. This individual should be a motivator.
 - b. Volunteers or colleagues who can help with communications, volunteer tracking, and other issues that may arise (food pick up and so forth).
 - c. Another/other Site Coordinator(s) when more than one exercise site is used.

12. Training – It is vital volunteers understand exercise expectations and rules prior to an exercise. Training may be supplied in writing, in person, or via web, although it is preferable to offer this in person. While some of the training items should be revisited the day of the exercise – such as safety topics – initial instruction should NOT be done at this time. If students are recruited, it is also necessary to convey information to instructors. Among the topics conveyed prior to the exercise day are:
 - a. Scenario summary (brief)
 - b. Meeting, staging area, parking, and transportation site locations.
 - c. Time – Assembly time, exercise start time, transportation timing, food times, breaks, and end times. To determine assembly timing, work backwards from the exercise start, ensuring allotted timing for moulage, final instructions, and movement of the group to the staging area.
 - d. Maps displaying relevant sites, including parking and meeting areas.
 - e. Safety:
 - Emergency contacts that others may use to reach the volunteer the day of the event in case of an emergency.
 - Emergency words and hand signals, to be employed when a real-life threat has arisen and exercising must stop. Also share meeting locations in case volunteers are forced to leave planned exercise areas.
 - Who to notify if dangerous conditions are noticed, such as unexpected pools of water in an emergency department.
 - Liability coverage.
 - f. Clothing:
 - Describe whether vests or other easily-discernable attire will be worn by the Site Coordinator the day of the exercise.
 - Identify preferred clothing for the exercise, which may be items that can be picked up at used clothing stores and discarded later.
 - If moulage is to be applied, notify volunteers of how to wash their clothing after the exercise.
 - If decontamination will be conducted, note that swim suits and/or a change of clothing and towels may be needed. Under no circumstances should volunteers be stripped naked.
 - g. Reimbursements for travel, clothing, and food.
 - h. The use of props, such as ear plugs or blindfolds. Offer samples if props will be used.
 - i. Phone use. It is preferable to ban phone use in an exercise, although some may actually require this.

- j. Permission slips, including those for photo use and parent authorization.
- k. Accommodations for functional needs populations and languages. If translators are needed, information should also be clarified about this.
- l. Symptomology cards.
- m. Script cards denoting behaviors associated with injuries and illnesses and or characteristics important to the role being played (age, gender, and so forth).
- n. The expectation to be treated with respect. If they are not shown respect, they should report this to the Site Coordinator.

It is equally imperative to gain a clear understanding of what volunteers expect from the exercise. For example, if student volunteers anticipate a grade, it is necessary to know this ahead of time. Ensuring symbiotic and realistic expectations will improve the likelihood the volunteer will have a good experience and want to volunteer again.

- 13. Volunteer Use During the Exercise – It is extremely important to understand where volunteers will be used by an organization and who will serve as a preferred contact for each exercise site. This enables volunteer tracking.
- 14. Final Details the Day of the Exercise – Be sure to get to the meeting room the day of the exercise at least 30 minutes early to set up food, sign-in, and communication checks. Also, speak with the Controller to ensure understanding of any exercise plan changes.