



Massachusetts Medical Reserve Corps “Best Practices” Conference

Problem and Strategic Goals: In 2007, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health wanted to hold a “Best Practices Conference” for the almost 40 Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units in the Commonwealth. The federal MRC system brings together people who have skills related to health care with citizen volunteers. They serve as a team during times of emergency or need in their own community. MRC units are trained and prepared to respond to emergencies and they provide education, outreach and various health services throughout the year. They function as part of their local emergency preparedness teams. This conference would provide a unique opportunity for MRC leaders across Massachusetts to share techniques about volunteer recruitment, call-down procedures and how to partner with other community groups. Representatives of the public health coalitions would also be able to learn more about the many skills that MRC units can offer in times of community need.

Event Planning: RVA worked with representatives of MRC units to form a Conference Planning Committee. Through meetings and conference calls with the Committee, RVA assisted in program concept and development, including speaker invitations and site selection. The conference was designed to include 12 breakout sessions: six in the morning and six in the afternoon. RVA provided all support services for this event, including: all printed and web materials (Save the Date email, registration brochure, event materials and signage), registration and providing for any public access accommodations. RVA made the arrangements for the keynote speaker (including travel and lodging requests), as well as coordinating all of the outside vendors (catering, audio/visual, printing).

Conference: On March 20, 2007, over 200 MRC leaders and members of the public health coalitions in the Commonwealth attended this event. RVA provided all on-site coordination and staffing for the event, including registration, VIP escort, audio visual coordination, and moderation of a plenary session.

Evaluation: RVA developed an evaluation form that was distributed to all conference attendees. This form was completed by attendees and turned in at the event. Attendees were asked to rate the speakers and conference features, including breakout sessions. RVA then compiled the results in a report form and presented it to MA Department of Public Health.

Results: The overall conference evaluations were very strong (92% rated the event as Very Good or Excellent). Keynoter Commander Joe Leonard, US Coast Guard, garnered very positive reactions (more than 80% rated his presentation as Excellent). Attendees said they particularly enjoyed the networking opportunities and the individual breakout sessions. The MRC participants are already talking about the issues they want to address in next year's conference. The state Department of Public Health, which would work with the units in the event of a call down, was pleased with other conference outcomes, such as disseminating core competency goals and strategies and improving communication between the units and regional public health entities.