

# North Carolina Community Emergency Response Teams

## *Standard Operating Guidelines*



**2026**

NC CERT Program  
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## Mission

The primary mission of the North Carolina Community Emergency Response Team Program (NC CERT) is to assist communities across the state in being self-sufficient in the aftermath of a major disaster when professional first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond. When deployed by their sponsoring agency, NC CERT volunteers can augment and support local public safety and first responder agencies when additional staffing is needed for crowd or traffic control, search operations, shelter staffing, volunteer and donations management, special events, and other public safety activities.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish standard operating guidelines for NC CERT volunteers and their training, activation, activities, and coordination with North Caroling Emergency Management (NCEM). No manual can anticipate every circumstance or question, and as the NC CERT Program continues to grow, the need may arise, and NCEM reserves the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any policies, procedures, practices, or benefits from time to time as deemed appropriate, in its sole and absolute discretion. Such changes will be communicated through official channels and will be posted online. The NC CERT Program webpage can be accessed [here](#).

## Starting a CERT Program

For individuals or non-governmental groups within communities to establish a CERT Program, they first need to identify a Sponsoring Organization.

A Sponsoring Organization helps support many CERT Program functions and adds to its credibility. The following organizations are preferred as sponsors for a CERT Program:

- State, regional, local, territorial, unincorporated or tribal government-operated first-responder agencies, including law enforcement, fire, or EMS
- State, regional, local, tribal, or territorial emergency management agencies
- Departments under the authority of local, municipal, or tribal governments, including health departments, fire protection districts, regional planning districts, and city councils
- Elected officials or their offices and other government organizations, provided that they can ensure the program can interface with emergency service organizations
- Houses of worship
- Homeowners' associations
- Non-profit organizations that are registered as 501(c)(3)s with the Internal Revenue Service
- High schools and institutions of higher education

## Responsibilities of a Sponsoring Organization

CERT Sponsoring Organizations have many responsibilities that help their associated CERT Programs stay active and engaged while helping the program meet the CERT requirements and serve their communities. Sponsors should take an active role in the training of the program, at the very least by supervising the quality of instruction and exercises being delivered. Sponsors should make sure that all members and instructors meet training standards. They should assist with credentialing instructors and volunteers by helping with recruitment, screening, background checks (if required), acceptance, supervision, termination of members, and ensuring that personnel information is kept confidential. It is recommended that CERT sponsors help develop supplemental training materials to address local hazards, potential volunteer personnel needs, and unique events.

Sponsors should also take part in shaping and monitoring CERT Programs. They should make sure that CERT members take part in drills and exercises, such as those that allow volunteers to train with full-time responders. Sponsors handle the activation, staging, deployment, and operational activities of their teams. They should develop policies, procedures, and documentation practices to support these activities.

### **Sponsoring Organization Point of Contact**

The Sponsoring Organization must provide a Point of Contact (POC) for the state CERT Program Manager. This POC:

- Should be the interface for the local Program Manager with the Sponsoring Organization
- Assists the local Program Manager with integrating CERT into operations
- Helps coordinate and provide resources and facilities
- Keeps the Sponsoring Organization officer (e.g., Mayor, Chief) informed about CERT Program status
- Communicates with the State CERT Program Manager and other State, local, tribal, territorial officers as needed. (i.e., State Training Officer)

Frequently, one of the above governmental organizations is the entity seeking to organize a CERT Program. In this case, the local Program Manager and the Sponsoring Organization POC may be the same person. While the Sponsoring Organization may be an elected official or other government body, it is not typical that the senior executive of that agency serves as the Point of Contact (POC) for the local CERT Program Manager.

Once the Sponsoring Organization has been established, the local Program Manager must register with NC Emergency Management via the Recognition of New CERT Program Form (NC CERT Program [website](#)).

## **Training**

*CERT Basic Training* classes consist of approximately 21 hours of training. The lesson plan is based on FEMA's curriculum, with additions as provided by NC CERT. To be a qualified NC CERT member, an individual must complete the entire program. It is the responsibility of each local CERT Program Manager to maintain records of training and team membership for local meetings and training events.

### **Offering *CERT Basic Training* Classes**

Each CERT Program is required by FEMA to attempt to offer at least one *CERT Basic Training* class every calendar year, and all *CERT Basic Training* classes must be taught by a CERT Trainer who has been certified by the NC CERT Program. If a Program cannot supply their own trainers, they can be requested through the NC CERT Program at no cost. All *CERT Basic Training* classes must be advertised and recorded in [TERMS](#).

- To request a class, or to have a local class advertised on TERMS, Program Managers may use the CERT Class Request Form on the NC CERT [website](#).
- Teams may choose to utilize online training that is approved by FEMA and the NC CERT Program, such as the *CERT Basic Training Class* offered by the University of Utah, which can be found at [OnlineCERT.org](#). Once the individuals have completed the online training and submitted their certificates to [cert@ncdps.gov](mailto:cert@ncdps.gov), training for the hands-on portion will be scheduled with an NC CERT Program-approved CERT Trainer.
- *CERT Basic Training Classes* in Spanish are managed by NC CERT Latino and may also be requested via the CERT Class Request Form on the NC CERT [website](#).

**CERT Train-the-Trainer Classes** will be offered at least three times each calendar year, once in each of the three NCEM Regional Branches, as the State budget allows. These classes are offered only by the NC CERT Program. To be a CERT Trainer in NC, an individual must have completed *CERT Basic Training*. Graduation from the *Train-the-Trainer* class alone does not authorize an individual to teach the *CERT Basic Training* class. Trainers must be approved by the NC CERT Program Manager.

Many additional classes may be requested from the NC CERT Program Office, including but not limited to:

- *CERT Animal Response*
- *CERT Program Manager*
- *The First Ten Minutes: Patient Assessments*
- *Points-of-Distribution (POD) Operations*
- *SAR for CERT, an Introduction to Wilderness Search and Rescue*
- *Shelter Operations*
- *Volunteer and Donations Management*

These classes can be requested on via the CERT Class Request Form on the NC CERT [website](#).

## CERT Missions

NC CERT volunteers are trained to first help themselves and their families, then their communities, and ultimately, the State during times of emergencies and/or disasters. The training they receive allows NC CERT volunteers to perform essential functions, and to assist first responders as needed within the scope of their training. With the goal of supplementing local response entities when needed and maintaining good partnerships, it is expected that NC CERT volunteers do not self-deploy. The way CERT volunteers are called out is different for local and state missions, as follows:

### Local Missions

The Sponsoring Agency is responsible for local callouts and local operating guidelines will be followed. CERT programs that are sponsored by a church, school, or workplace shall operate only on their own property.

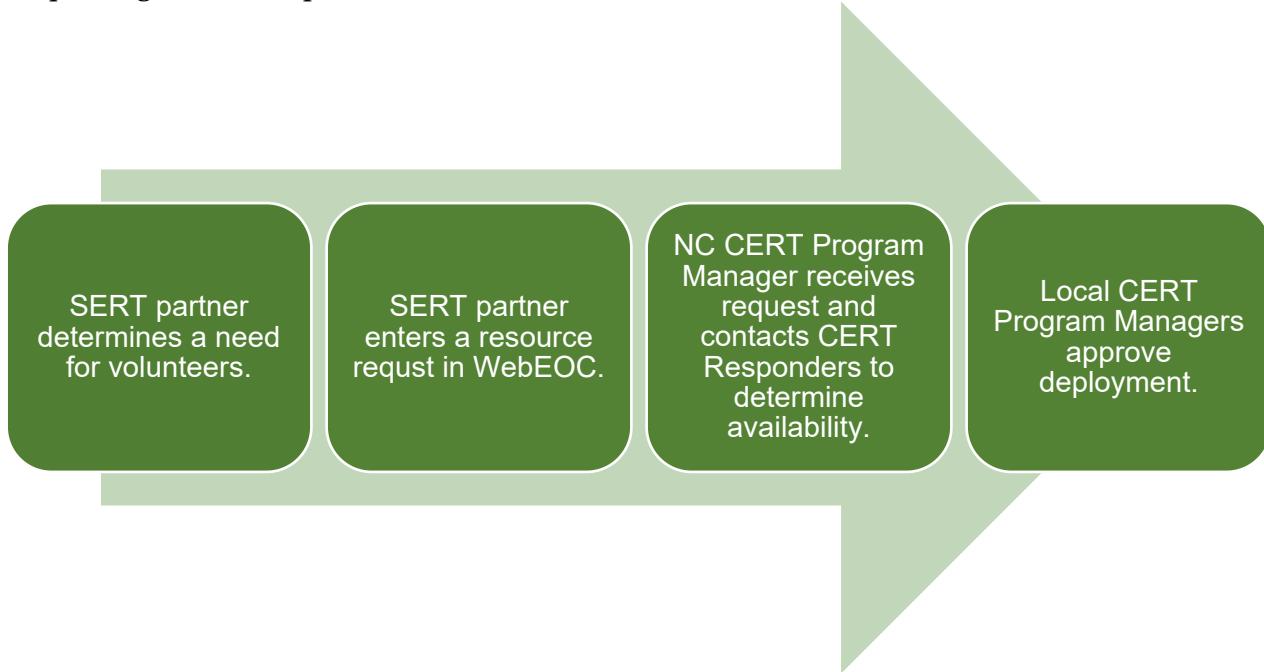
### State Missions

Any local jurisdiction or State Emergency Response Team (SERT) partner may request NC CERT volunteers via WebEOC when volunteer help is needed. These tasks are primarily completed by individual CERT volunteers, with the permission of their local CERT Program Managers. When officially activated, NC CERT Responders may be asked to perform any of the following tasks, or other assignments:

- Assist at the State Emergency Operations Center in a breakout room, or serving meals, or other duties as assigned by the SERT Leader and/or senior leadership
- Conduct damage assessments of storm-affected areas
- Assist in staffing shelters and/or reception centers (*specialized training required*)
- Assist with first aid/medical treatment of survivors
- Assist with communications
- Assist with staffing Points of Distribution
- Assist with Volunteer and Donation Management
- Assist with Firefighter Rehab

- Assist with vaccine clinics
- Other duties within the scope of CERT training and capabilities

Requesting a CERT response:



### **NC CERT Responders:**

To be eligible for these missions as a CERT Responder, individuals must:

- Be a graduate of *CERT Basic Training*
- Be a member in good standing of a recognized NC CERT program
- Have a current Response Team Profile on [TERMS](#)
- Complete IS-100, IS-200, and IS-700
- Be over the age of 18
- Submit the NC CERT Code of Conduct from the NC CERT [website](#)
- Submit the NC CERT Responder Application from the NC CERT [website](#)

## **Commitment**

All NC CERT volunteers are asked to maintain contact with the NC CERT Program Office via [cert@ncdps.gov](mailto:cert@ncdps.gov) and advise immediately of any change of leadership, contact information, or availability for deployment. Local CERT Program Managers should maintain a roster of their volunteers as well. We understand that volunteers cannot respond to every requested mission. NC CERT volunteers are, however, expected to be members in good standing of their local CERT programs, and to attend regular local training and events.

## **Safety**

The safety of NC CERT volunteers is of primary importance during all disasters, incidents, and training situations. The CERT Program Manager and Team Leader(s) must account for and ensure the safety of their team members.

### **Clothing**

All NC CERT volunteers should consider location and type of incident or event, time of day, weather variations, and lighting conditions during all activities. NC CERT volunteers will wear proper clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE). No shorts, sleeveless shirts, or flip flops will be allowed in disaster response. Shorts may be approved for some publicity events during the summer months. The dress code applies to training as well as activation. A reflective vest should be worn at all times during outdoor operations around traffic. Any variations for special circumstances will be communicated to the team members by the NC CERT Program Manager. During pandemic times, NC CERT volunteers are expected to wear appropriate PPE according to current state mandates and recommendations.

### **Protections for Disaster Volunteers**

The Volunteer Protection Act (VPA) of 1997 is a Federal law that protects volunteers from liability as long as they are acting in accordance with the training that they have received. VPA protects CERT volunteers during a disaster, and volunteers may also have further protection under relevant state statutes where they reside. North Carolina's "Good Samaritan" laws generally protect CERT volunteers who provide care in a prudent and reasonable manner.

The North Carolina Emergency Management Act (*N.C. Gen. Stat. § 166A-60*) also grants broad qualified immunity to volunteers performing emergency management functions.

### **Weapons Policy**

NC CERT volunteers are forbidden to carry guns or other weapons during training or activation.

### **Alcohol/Drug Use**

At no time should alcoholic beverages be purchased or consumed while representing or wearing CERT equipment or clothing. NC CERT volunteers must never arrive at training or deployment under the influence of alcohol or drugs/medications that alter mental status.

## **Social Media, Digital Images, Communications**

Use of social media can pose legal and ethical risks to members and the organization and can impact the NC CERT Program's reputation and good will. It can also erode trust among community members and jeopardize the privacy and safety of members, survivors, and/or their families. Any communications online may be seen by others as a reflection or representation of character, judgment, and values, and, in some instances, may be perceived by others as an indirect extension of the NC CERT Program regardless of intent. Only recognized NC CERT teams may use the CERT logo. In the context of these realities, the NC CERT Program has enacted the following policy:

**Allowed:** Sharing pictures/videos from training events, special events, safety fairs, recruitment drives, *CERT Basic Training* classes, continuing education classes, monthly meetings, celebrations, and volunteer recognitions.

**Not allowed:** The taking or sharing of photos or videos at any disaster incident, call-out, emergency response, or other critical incident. NC CERT volunteers need to remember that at such scenes, all photography/videography is considered evidence and may be seized by on-scene authorities. Further, the sharing of this type of media on *any* social media platform or via email could result in civil and/or criminal legal action.

## Additional Opportunities for NC CERT Volunteers

The **Radiological Emergency Volunteer Corps (REVC)** is a group of trained volunteers who are prepared to respond to radiological emergencies in North Carolina. In the event of such an emergency, they will assist with setting up and/or operating population monitoring points at community reception centers. Our volunteers go through significant training to join REVC. Once they are approved, they can participate in drills and exercises to help test the abilities of emergency management agencies to respond to radiological emergencies and respond to actual incidents. Volunteers must complete a matrix a training to be accepted into REVC. See application below.

Contact the NC CERT Program personnel:

[cert@ncdps.gov](mailto:cert@ncdps.gov)

919-906-4941

[website](#)