

Implementing MRRP: Creating an Advisory Committee Task Force



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One of the most valuable assets of an effective program is a MRRP Task Force. Task Force members not only provide creative thinking and input for the program but also can be your greatest advocates. A strong Task Force should include members that hold varying interests within your community, such as representatives from environmental and beautification organizations, anglers and fishing interests, environmental educators, wildlife rehabilitators, boaters, business owners, endangered species scientists, teachers, students, civic groups, and retired persons.

Task Force Member Selection

An individual's reason(s) for joining the Task Force will vary from person to person. Some individuals may join for professional growth and networking opportunities while others may commit the time because they believe their efforts will result in a quality program. It is important that task force members are utilized for their talents and rewarded for their efforts! The selection of committee members should be based on the type of contributions (skills, special expertise) that each member can bring to the program as well as the satisfaction the member will receive for participating. Because MRRP involves many elements (cleanups, recycling, education, public outreach, etc.), it is important that task force members are selected that represent areas of expertise in each area. Before selecting a task force, consider the work that needs to be conducted and select people with expertise to assist with specific tasks.

There are several different methods of contacting potential task force members for the committee. You may choose to use one or a combination of different methods.

- ❖ **Hand-selection** of task force members involves the selection of members that you have had previous contact with and knowledge of their professional or personal interests. The advantage of hand-selecting your committee is that you may already have their support for the program. The disadvantage is that you might miss out on possible new information or viewpoints that could improve your education program. Recommendations by peers and other selected members can be an efficient way of expanding the number of "hand-selected" task force members while providing opportunities for new viewpoints.
- ❖ **Open invitation** for task force members can be announced as a public service announcement on the radio or in the newspaper. The broad distribution of the invitation is likely to reach all facets of the target group and provide you with a more diverse committee. However, your group may become too large to effectively work together and not everyone on the committee may be supportive of your program.

- ❖ **Letters of request** for participation as a member of the task force may be sent to various local agencies/organizations. These letters are usually read and discussed at the organizational meetings. Although you can target organizations you wish to be represented on the committee, you typically will not have a choice of who will be assigned to attend your meetings.

A chairperson (usually the project manager) should be designated to keep meetings on track. An agenda should be prepared and the chairperson should be responsible for returning discussion to the agenda topics if things start to go astray. The chairperson is also responsible for tactfully breaking up arguments while encouraging individual opinions. It can be a challenging role! Good communication skills are a must for the chairperson, as he or she could “make or break” the effectiveness of the task force. In addition to the chairperson, someone should be designated to take attendance and record minutes at each meeting. Sometimes taping the meetings is helpful so that no valuable information is missed. Minutes can be prepared from the notes and sent to all Task Force members to remind them of the discussion, commitments and future dates.

Task Force Role

To clarify the role of the task force and keep the project running smoothly, the project manager should clearly understand the role the task force will play in program development and implementation. A program implementation plan that includes a task list and timeline for completion should be created that outlines the tasks with which task force members can assist. If needed, the task force may assist with the planning of these tasks as well.

The MRRP task force can be instrumental in assisting with volunteer coordination, recycling bin construction, education materials development, program evaluation, and dissemination of materials. Additionally, partnering organizations can assist with fundraising, grant procurement, and donations. Knowing the needs and weaknesses of your program helps to determine how best the task force members can assist.

The key to an effective task force is keeping members informed and actively involved in the program. It is best to conduct at least quarterly meetings throughout the duration of the program and may be necessary to meet monthly at the beginning to get things started. The frequency of meetings and total commitment time (one year, 6 months, etc.) should be clearly understood by the task force and adhered to.

Email can be a valuable communication tool between face to face meetings to touch base, provide updates, and suggest topics for the next meeting agenda. Members need to constantly review program initiatives and accomplishments and evaluate successes and failures. The involvement of many facets of your community throughout the entire educational process will keep the program fresh, coherent and effective.

At the completion of the task force regular meetings, members should be released from service and if needed, requested to serve another term. It should not be assumed that task force members will serve the program indefinitely. A final “appreciation” meeting should be held during which the project final report and success should be shared and task force members should be rewarded for their commitment. Providing a benefit lunch or small gift of appreciation is a nice method to thank them for their invaluable commitment and contribution.