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## Guiding Those Following In Our Footsteps

A **vision** is the centerpiece of a program. You can put together all the ins and outs for the developmental stage, but with a clear vision you soon find yourself awash in great ideas. A vision was precisely what **Minnesota's Reservist Program** mapped out in the program's early organizational stage. They took time to set the direction in which they wanted the program to move and then brought together a group of **ready** and **prepared** individuals to successfully enter the workforce as emergency management professionals with hands-on experience. Experience which is difficult to obtain inside a classroom but vital during an emergency response.



Funded by management costs, the program focused first on **public assistance** with the eventual goal of assisting in response and recovery efforts, in the **EOC** and with **EMAC**. In the beginning, most candidates did not have the experience required to put the program on the map. However, one distinguished individual met the criteria and potentially shaped the program for years to come. An engineering position opened within the agency for which one individual qualified, and after thorough training, the individual joined the agency. This first success solidified the main goals of the program: **providing the courses and information necessary to prepare the younger generation for the field of emergency management.**

Minnesota's Reservist Program seeks to provide the necessary resources to intermittent employees to streamline their **"Intermittent Employee Program"** and execute networking opportunities through the **Minnesota Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management** that will set this group up for success. The resources provided include:

- FEMA **training courses**;
- Courses offered by the **state of Minnesota certificate program**;
- On-site **experiences**;
- Various exercises, such as a **Radiological Emergency Preparedness drill**, that allow members to experience a communications exercise in which they establish the entire platform and set up breakout rooms.

These types of training opportunities are vital aspects of this program that point to another main goal of increasing expertise in emergency management.

When asked about the most challenging aspects of managing and establishing a program like this, **Brian Olson, Director of Preparedness and Recovery for MN HSEM**, described how it is often challenging to work through the HR system. The shape can be foggy at first, and it is tough to recruit intermittent employees under the limitations of state pay scales versus the private market. Also, being funded by disaster management costs poses a bit of a restriction on the program. Utilizing these funds is an innovative and forward-thinking idea; however, with management costs currently being tied to specific disasters, the flexibility to train and maintain the program across disasters is an issue the state faces. Olson emphasized, **"There needs to be direction when establishing a program like this – you need to have an end state in mind. That allows you to look at what steps are needed to achieve that end state"**. While taking the first step can be the hardest, he portrayed it as almost necessary to hit the ground running and strive toward the program's vision.

While some aspects can be difficult to navigate, Olson is very passionate about the goals of the Minnesota Reservist program as it truly allows members to have **exposure** within the **Minnesota Emergency Management community** that can significantly prepare them for their future. Programs like this one are extremely valuable to the younger generation of emergency managers as the transition from education to the workforce can often be challenging. When asked what advice he would give to other states considering a program like this one, Olson emphasized that these **initiatives** are **needed** and that the most crucial part is establishing **your end goal from the very beginning**. The states have a lot of opportunities through programs like this to allow emergency management professionals to "try out" the profession and gain experience in it. Through this training and experience, he spoke on how the intent of creating a **bench of experienced workers who are prepared to enter the workforce** should be the entire shape of the program.

Programs like **Minnesota's Reservist Program** truly are designed for the next class of emergency managers as we look toward the **future** and create a group of individuals who will eventually be vital players in our nation's **response, recovery,** and **preparedness efforts**. From the developmental stage to the final result, your vision will guide your entire process to success.

**What could be more important than equipping the next generation with the character and competence they need to become successful.**

- Colin Powell

If you have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this series, please contact [Jamie Logan](mailto:jamie@nemaweb.org).

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