



Wilderness Medicine Regional Group Toolbox
Tools for developing a regional wilderness medicine organization

1. Identify wilderness medicine leaders in your region

- a. *Researchers, academicians:* contact local medical schools and universities. Researchers and academicians involved in wilderness medicine are often found in Departments of Emergency Medicine, Family Practice, Sports Medicine, and Recreation (this may be known by many different names at different institutions).
- b. *Outdoor experiential educators, camp leaders, guides:* contact independent institutions such as wilderness schools, survival schools, summer camps, and experiential education programs such as Outward Bound or Boy Scouts. Many times leaders in these organizations have interest and experience in wilderness medicine.
- c. *Practitioners:* national organizations like the Wilderness Medical Society (WMS) may be willing to give you names of their members in the area. Fellows or Fellow candidates in the Academy of Wilderness Medicine (run by WMS) are particularly likely to be motivated and active in wilderness medicine. Contact leaders of wilderness EMS teams. These would include national or state park responders, technical rescue teams (may be independent or part of local fire/rescue/EMS squads), or federal teams such as Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Teams or Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs).
Locate US&R teams: www.fema.gov/emergency/usr/locations.shtm
Locate DMATs: www.dmat.org/teamlinks.html
- d. *Local vendors:* outdoor equipment stores frequently have personnel interested in wilderness medicine, particularly those that sell wilderness medicine products.
- e. *Local wilderness medicine institutions:* clearly wilderness medicine institutions already operational in your area would be stakeholders in a regional organization. Locating and collaborating with these organizations is critical to building an organization that is representative of its region. Partial lists of wilderness medicine schools and institutions can be found in the following publications:
Conover K in Kuehl A, *Prehospital Systems and Medical Oversight* 3rd edition, 2002
Hawkins S in Aehlert B, *Paramedic Practice Today: Above and Beyond*, 2008
Hubbel F in Auerbach PS, *Wilderness Medicine* 5th edition, 2007

2. Identify regional assets and deficiencies

- a. This analysis should drive your decisions about what activities are needed in your region, what activities could use your support to improve, and what programs are either not necessary or already fully functional.
- b. Our conviction has been that a regional organization should support and not compete with wilderness medicine institutions already operational in a region.

3. Establish your organization

- a. Determine how you will operate. Organizations can be established in many different ways. We recommend establishment as an independent, non-partisan institution to remain neutral among stakeholders in the region. However, regional groups can also be formed as affiliates of other organizations, such as universities or wilderness medicine schools. Care should be taken if an organization depends on student leadership, since this population is by definition migratory.
- b. If organizing as an independent organization, determine if you will operate as a for-profit or not-for-profit corporation. For us, a non-profit model best fit our mission to be a service organization to our region. Non-profit status also helps address questions of conflict of interest when finances are concerned. The remainder of this discussion covers non-profit organizing. Note that this discussion is only anecdotal and relevant only to our experience; state laws and circumstances differ, and if you have any questions you should seek professional counsel. This should not be construed as legal advice. Some states have organizations which help with this process, such as the NC Center for Nonprofits (www.ncnonprofits.org) in NC.
- c. To establish as a non-profit corporation, you need to start by registering yourself as a non-profit with the Department of the Secretary of State for the state in which you will incorporate. Be sure your articles of incorporation include the following provision, which is necessary to qualify as a section 501(c)(3) exempt organization when you register with the federal government: “Said organization is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code.” At this time you should also write bylaws. The ACWM bylaws are posted on our website (www.appwildmed.org) if you would like to use these as an example. Make sure, at a minimum, your bylaws cover who will serve as directors, how often you will meet, how those meetings will be scheduled, and how votes for important decisions regarding the organization will be run. It is also helpful to have a discussion of how you will reduce potential conflicts of interest, especially in an organization such as this where everyone usually has “another” primary affiliation/for-profit employment in the wilderness medicine world.
- d. Once you are registered as a non-profit corporation in your home state, you will need to get an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS):
<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=98350,00.html>
- e. Finally, you will need to complete Form 1023 for the IRS to confirm your tax status. This is a long and complicated form which will probably be the most difficult step; establishing with the state and getting an EIN are usually not too difficult. You will probably want to establish yourself as either a 509(a)(1) or 509(a)(2) corporation, depending on your expected revenue sources. 509(a)(1) corporations are supported by “gifts, grants, and contributions from the public”. 509(a)(2) are supported by “fundraising activities in which they sell various items, receive income from admissions, sales of merchandise or services, or furnish

facilities”. We are a 509(a)(2). To download IRS form 1023, go to www.irs.gov and search for “1023”. The Center for Participatory Change has a website with advice about completing this form, available at www.cpcwnc.org/Toolbox/irsforms.html