



So You Want to Organize Local Scientists to Fight COVID-19?

Why start a group

You've read the headlines – COVID-19 is sweeping across the country. Many workers are on lockdown, including thousands of capable scientists who have been forced out of their labs but have the skills to help in the fight. The COVID-19 National Scientist Volunteer Database coordination team has assembled over 8,000 of these scientists with key laboratory and computer skills into one place. **It is our mission to disperse this database to those who can turn our collective energy into concrete action at the local level, including you** and other organizers around the country.

How to start a group

The first step is to check to see if a group is already up and running in your community by checking our [updated list of active groups](#). You can reach out directly to their leadership to find ways to get involved.

If there is no active organization in your area, then it is time to get to work and build your team. You can start by reaching out to your immediate professional or social network to identify passionate and like-minded individuals such as yourself who want to help launch anti-COVID-19 measures in your area. As a team, **identify a few key problems you want to tackle first**, whether it be coordinating reagent donations, helping to inform the decisions of local leaders, or getting skilled volunteer scientists into testing facilities.

From there, we suggest adding to your ranks by requesting full access to our national database of scientist volunteers (if you don't already have it) and contacting potential new team members in your area. At some point, you may also want to **create your own volunteer intake form and send an email blast to your expanded team**. Examples of each of these communications were kindly provided by the Biomedical Technician Rapid Response Team of Madison, WI and can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

You will see that as your numbers grow, you can no longer use email or text to keep in contact with your team. We suggest creating a Slack group that holds regular Zoom meetings.

Finally, once you feel ready to start solving some problems, please send us your group name, location, leaders, and contact information so we can add you to our updated list of active groups. You could also create a Twitter account to advertise the existence of your group and communicate with the public.

Finding your 'champion'

To be successful, you at some point will need to connect with leaders in your local or state government. It is critical to quickly identify which agency is in charge of the COVID-19 response and who are the key contacts at those agencies who could benefit from your organization. Scientist volunteer groups across the country have made significant connections with the people in positions of power through a variety of methods, but **finding a champion makes the task much easier**. You could also find a local champion by (1) looking up contacts on your city/county .gov website, (2) searching for local non-profits who may



COVID-19 National Scientist Volunteer Database

be involved in COVID-19 related endeavors, (3) finding your elected representatives through the [Common Cause](#) website, or (4) reaching out to university officials, directors, and professors.

These champions could help you directly connect with health officials in your area and initiate collaborations. For example, the aforementioned Madison, WI group found a champion in Dr. Jo Handelsman, Director of the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and former Associate Director for Science at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy under President Barack Obama. Dr. Handelsman has worked closely with this group and put them in contact with decision-makers at various levels of the government.

Can't find a champion? No worries. It will take a little more work, but we are confident that you will make contact. As your team grows, so will your potential to bring someone in who has direct contact with a decision-maker in your area. Additionally, **it's ok to cold email someone in a city or county health department and tell them about your group.** More often than not, these people are excited that you are ready to help. However, we urge you to be patient--these contacts are under extreme pressure and they may not be able to utilize or help your group at this time.

How to connect with local leaders

When reaching out to local leaders, it is important to clearly and succinctly introduce your group, your mission, and your specific asks. If you are advocating for a relaxation of state laws that would allow non-certified bench scientists to perform COVID-19 tests in CLIA facilities, then you should highlight how that change in policy would allow your volunteer workforce to mobilize. If you are coordinating PPE or testing reagent donations, then identify your group as a resource for the official and emphasize how you are there to make their lives easier. **The ultimate goal is to create a connection that will result in action.** A sample introductory email can be found [here](#).

How to work with the national database team

We invite all local organizers to join our Slack channel (email COVID19SciVolunteers@gmail.com, hosted by EndCoronaVirus.org) where you can connect and strategize with other community team leaders. **We also need assistance notifying people in positions of power that the national database exists.** If you wish to help spread the word about our efforts, we ask that you send [this email](#) to your contacts.

Other helpful links

Visit the COVID-19 National Scientist Volunteer Database website at Covid19sci.org for more information.

Distribute the [Volunteer intake form](#) to add yourself and others to our cause.

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