

Keys to a Successful Community Cloth Mask Program - Notes from Waterbury's MakerSphere

There are lots of communities making cloth (non-medical grade) masks, and Waterbury's MakerSphere team is not claiming to be the experts! But we have had some success in our first several weeks, and we want to share what we've learned.

1. **Make your priority clear to the public - #healthcarefirst.** We focused first on the need to provide our area health care workers with masks. While we all feel that those working in essential jobs (like grocery stores, hardware stores, delivery workers, etc.) need masks, and our community members also need masks, our focus has been on keeping healthcare staff and the vulnerable people they serve well-defended against this virus.
2. Have a **small group** of folks working to coordinate this - you can work together to make decisions, source materials, and communicate with your community. (See below for Volunteer Roles.)
3. **Define a goal**, such as XX number of masks, masks specifically for a local care home by X date, or other concrete and specific goals. Specific numbers and timeframes help motivate fast action. MakerSphere aimed to provide 2 masks per health care worker.
4. **Share your project widely** on social media and via email, word of mouth, and phone calls. For this effort to work, you need to activate people who sew (or people with sewing machines to loan) in your community. Let them know you are sewing for your neighbors who work in healthcare, and that you are making it easy with kits of materials. **Find your pattern(s) and make it available online.** Your local hospital will have one (along with instructions) on their site - if it works for you, it can be helpful to use that one. Our pattern (no filter pocket or nose wire) is attached and [available on our website \(https://www.makerspherevt.com/covid-19-projects\)](https://www.makerspherevt.com/covid-19-projects) -- it has the advantage of being easy to make kits for and fast to sew. Whatever you choose, we recommend you use ties instead of elastic.
 - A. NOTE: There are zillions of patterns and cases for using one or another - finding the "right" one can suck up a lot of time. What's most important is that you pick a good one approved by the medical folks in your target area and stick with it!
 - B. You will get requests for kits for personal use - direct them to your online pattern and empower your community to make from the pattern using acceptable materials they have at home. Stay focused on your goal - every day counts for these healthcare workers and the people they help.

5. **Be specific about acceptable materials.** Our pattern, and many others, call for 100% woven cotton for the mask and either ½ inch ribbon, DIY cloth ties or bias tape. Encourage people to use materials they might have at home, but stick with a single type of fabric.
6. **Create kits.** This is hugely effective - those less experienced at sewing, or people with limited time to help, are more likely to volunteer and it builds momentum fast. It means you need to source fabric (see below) and have one or two volunteers (or someone like an upholsterer who can cut fabric in bulk) cutting the pieces and assembling into pre-made kits of materials for 10 masks. This speeds production and makes it easier for your volunteers to focus on sewing. Encourage your volunteers to keep 1 or 2 masks for themselves.
 - A. Kits include: Instructions and materials for 10 masks - rectangles of fabric and ribbons or strips of material to make the cloth ties.
7. **Use simple instructions.** The more complicated your pattern, the longer it takes to create kits and the longer it takes for folks to sew them.
8. **Contact quilters or fabric stores for fabric sourcing,** not the general public. You don't want to make a blanket call for fabric from the community as that typically leads to a wholesale dumping of junky fabric that now you need to deal with. Serious quilters often have a network of people that have quality material they could ask to donate.
9. If you need to buy fabric, **don't be afraid to ask your community for the money to help** - and ask the store for a discount.
10. **Identify a drop-off location** where a) you'll leave kits assigned to a specific volunteer for pick up and b) they will leave finished masks for you to pick up. Assigned kits and completed masks should be labeled with the volunteer sewer's name. Ideally it's at a business that is still open (we have a special box in our local hardware store's lobby, to limit contact with other people). Pick up several times a week and distribute to the groups/facilities in order of priority and per their instructions.
11. When you distribute masks, **include a note** instructing the recipient to hot water wash/dry before using, unless that has already been done.
12. **Maintain a spreadsheet of your volunteers** with their contact information so you can reach out to them when you need to. Keep track of kits you've provided and kits returned. Track sewing machine loans as well.
13. **Record donations and take photos!** Share along the way - post your progress on your social media pages, Front Porch Forum, your local radio station, newsletter, etc.
14. **When you meet a goal, announce the next goal!** Once the healthcare community is covered, essential workers and volunteers need masks too. People delivering

Meals on Wheels, grocery store staff, delivery workers - they all need masks to stay safe. We encourage you to help these folks after you have met your goal of masks for healthcare workers. People will keep sewing if you keep providing kits.

15. If your group needs help or advice on your project, please email masks.makersphere@gmail.com. We're happy to help answer questions or brainstorm ideas to help mobilize your community to make masks!

16. Good luck! This is a hugely positive and valuable project in your community. Many more folks than you may realize have sewing machines at home and the basic skills to use them (or the willingness to loan them out). Healthcare workers at residential care homes and visiting nurses are grateful for every mask you make for them - you are helping protect their patients, families, and the dedicated healthcare staff who are showing up and putting themselves at risk every day.

Social Media:

Social media is really necessary to help spread the word, so make sure someone in your small group is willing to push your project info out through every medium.

Here's a sample post: We are sewing masks for healthcare workers, and we need your help! Workers at (local care home name) and (local VNA) desperately need cloth masks, and we are answering the call! Our group (name) is assembling and distributing Cloth Mask Sewing Kits that include materials for 10 masks. Do you have a sewing machine sitting around at home to use or lend out? Do you want to help our friends and neighbors on the healthcare front lines? Email (address) to request your mask kit. Our goal is XX masks in XX days! To do that, we need XX sewers from our community to step up and make masks!

- Messages like the one above, along with progress updates, can be posted on your organization's or town's website, be sent out via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Front Porch Forum and NextDoor if your community uses these forums. Send to your paper and radio station if you have one. Post multiple times - people need to see something a few times before it registers. Be sure to include a nice photo of masks with the social media posts - posts without photos get much less engagement. Also links and tagging @ all parties associated.
- For update posts, have volunteers share photos of themselves making the masks/delivering to a certain facility etc... or anything to keep the photos and posts different and fresh, so followers continue to stay engaged and aren't seeing the same exact post again and again. Call and email people you know who sew. Professional seamstresses/tailors may not be able to donate their

time or materials, but they may recommend other hobby sewists to call. Quilters often have quality fabric to donate or sell at a discount; fabric shops, while closed, know the sewers in the community. Crafters know other crafters!

- Get your volunteer request emailed to members of groups in the community - local business groups, store email lists, community organizations, church groups - widen your net of volunteers!

Volunteer Roles:

1. **Project champion** - The organization or individual leading this effort (could also play the communications role). Organizes the team, the meetings and the project.
2. **Communications person** - One or more individuals who participate in meetings and push out social media posts, etc.
3. **Volunteer Coordinator** - Point person providing info and materials/machines to volunteers* answering their questions, and tracking their activities.
4. **Materials/Logistics** - Gathers needs from organizations/suppliers, estimates and sources materials, gets materials to Volunteer Coordinator.
5. **Distributor** - Picks up and drops off completed masks to facilities/organizations and tracks that activity.

*We are fortunate to have an upholsterer who cuts all fabric and 2 kitters who put together the packs of ten. For communities without a bulk cutting resource, we recommend having volunteers who both cut and assemble kits.