



Mass Casualty Preparation

V i c t i m S e r v i c e P r o v i d e r s



The effectiveness of response and recovery efforts in a mass casualty event can be greatly enhanced by establishing victim assistance protocols that focus on providing support to victims and their families after an event. It is important for emergency planners and victim service providers to plan and coordinate efforts to ensure victims and their families receive important victim services that will help them and affected communities recover from an incident involving mass casualties. Below is a list of important efforts victim service providers can take to prepare for victims and their families during a mass casualty incident.

1. Identify Local, State, and Federal Contacts: Victim service providers should know and document key local, state, and federal partners tasked with providing onsite assistance to victims. Building relationships with those key partners will help victim service providers prepare recovery efforts and assist in crisis response. A list of contacts should include: Department Crisis Management Coordinators, Public Information Officers, FBI Victim Specialists, Regional Victim Assistance Coordinators, Emergency Managers, etc. These contacts should be identified by name, position, and title. Additional information can be found at:

- https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ovp/TRAC/FormsChecklists/FBI_Pre_incident_list.pdf
- <https://www.ovc.gov/pubs/mvt-toolkit/PartnershipsPlanningChecklist.pdf>

2. Identify Existing Response Plans: Victim service providers should identify and review existing local, state, and federal crisis response plans and current Incident Command System protocols. This will assist emergency planners identify existing victim assistance response plans, if any, as well as understand the importance of victim assistance response within a response protocol framework. Victim service providers should work with public safety stakeholders within their jurisdictions to build victim service response efforts into those plans and ensure victim assistance leaders have a seat within the Incident Command System.

3. Plan and Exercise: Victim service providers should be included in local, state, and regional emergency preparedness, active shooter and Incident Command System drills and exercises when they occur. After an Emergency Action Plan is approved and disseminated, organizations should train their personnel so they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform tasks to help victims and their families recover. Training can be accomplished in a variety of ways including "all hands" meetings, conferences, tabletop exercises, workshops, newsletters, and online courses. Additional information about planning and exercising can be found at:

- https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/documents/1269813/1269861/HSEEP_Revision_Apr13_Final.pdf/65bc7843-1d10-47b7-bc0d-45118a4d21da
- <https://www.ovc.gov/pubs/mvt-toolkit/ResponseChecklist.pdf>

4. Identify Potential Locations for Family Assistance Centers: Victim service providers should partner with their community stakeholders to identify locations for Family Assistance Centers or Reunification Centers. These locations may be large hotels, churches, schools, and convention centers that can be used for managing the responses to victims and families and can provide a temporary safe location for families of victims and missing persons to gather as they await information.

5. Prepare and Train Victim Service Liaisons: It is necessary to prepare and train victim service liaisons or case managers to provide support and psychological first aid to victims and families (including hospitalized victims and those who are not present). Victim service providers and emergency planners should ensure victim service liaisons receive the necessary training and support to meet the comprehensive and short and long-term needs of victims and family members. Additional information about victim service liaisons can be found at:

- <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma17-5036.pdf>

- 6. Identify High Risk Populations:** The capacity to reach every person in a community is one of the major goals for emergency preparedness and response. It is important for victim service providers to identify special populations and high risk populations that may require specific victim services after a mass casualty incident. Victim service providers should consider populations that have economic disadvantages, language and literacy barriers, medical issues and disabilities (physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory); cultural, geographic, or social isolation; and age.
- 7. Prepare to Track Victims for Identification and Reunification:** It is imperative that victim service providers work with their emergency planners to ensure a process of identification and reunification is in place that can identify, verify, and track the identity of victims and their family members. This should include the ability to track victims with injuries not requiring immediate medical attention, victims who were exposed to but not injured during the traumatic incident, and missing persons. Planning should include working with medical examiners and trauma centers to understand their intake capabilities/triage plans and their ability to provide information for reunification. Also, the reunification process should include a plan for managing and releasing personal effects (cleaning and return of personal effects), and assigning case managers to provide services to victims and their families.
- 8. Anticipate Victim and Family needs:** Victim service providers should to provide local, state and federal resources to victims and their families. This should include counseling costs, medical expenses, travel arrangements, emergency expenses, funeral/burial funds, and arrangements. Victim service providers should be familiar with federal and state victims' crime compensation programs and important finance officials assigned to the Incident Command System.
- 9. Plan Communication Efforts for Victims and Families:** Victim service providers should verify with public safety stakeholders that a system is in place to provide incident updates and communicate accurate information. This should include planning communication through various media, multilingual formats, and alternative sources (e.g., smart phone emergency text alert programs, social media, apps) and ensuring a website and phone bank are ready to be stood up at any given time to assist in pushing information out to the community during an incident. Emergency planners should also consider including the Family Assistance Center Coordinators in briefings within the Incident Command System.
- 10. Plan to Assist in Death Notifications:** Victim service providers should work with emergency planners to determine who will be part of the notification team (LE/OME/VA/Religious Clergy, etc). A team with training in notifying family members needs to be identified to coordinate with law enforcement and faith leaders in providing information on fatalities, injuries, recovery, temporary identification, missing persons, and the release and disposition of personal effects. Training/Certifications for death notifications can be found at:
 - www.deathnotification.psu.edu
- 11. Prepare to Assist Law Enforcement in the Investigation:** Victim service providers should assist law enforcement officials in the investigation of a mass casualty incident. Victim service providers can assist in the coordination of interviews (wounded), coordination of dignitary visits, designate law enforcement points of contact to correctly identify, develop victim list, and assist with ante-mortem info collection.
- 12. Plan Responder Wellness Efforts:** Victim service providers need to understand the importance and prepare to provide mental wellness efforts to first responders of a mass casualty event. Victim service providers should coordinate with emergency planners to require mandatory debriefs when officers return from command areas and emphasize the importance of continued attention to wellness for first responders in the months and years following an incident. Additional information on responder wellness can be found at:
 - <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>