

The Role of Victim Assistance Professionals in Preparing for Mass Violence Incidents

This tip sheet clearly defines the crucial role of VAPs in the **readiness** phase of a mass violence incident.

Please note that this document offers recommendations for a variety of professionals who support victims of mass violence. While some of the tips may apply to all victim assistance professionals, others may only be relevant to a specific subset i.e. victims compensation professionals, court based victim advocates, community based victim advocates, etc.

- Contribute to the creation of state- and local-level emergency response plans that express the important role of VAPs in preparing for MVIs.
 - Coordinate victim/survivor/witness responses to MVIs among international, federal, national, state, Tribal and local agencies and organizations that assist survivors
 - Help create plans and develop agency/organizational and inter-agency policies that promote collaborative responses to MVIs
 - Participate in coordinated drills and disaster response exercises to prepare for MVI
 - Encourage the presence of a state's or jurisdiction's victim assistance leader in the Joint Operations Center (JOC) and/or Joint Information Center (JIC) during the initial response to a MVI
 - Clarify the role of VAPs and coordinate with allied agencies to identify and fill gaps in services to victims, survivors, witnesses and first responders
- Develop and update a roster of VAPs who are trained to respond to MVIs that can be used to mobilize volunteers for round-the-clock shifts for the Response Center (RC) and Family Assistance Center (FAC).
- Educate state victim assistance (VOCA) administrators, state victim compensation administrators, and agencies involved in MVI responses about the USDOJ Anti-terrorism and Emergency Assistance Program (AEAP) that provides long-term support to communities affected by MVIs. (<https://www.ovc.gov/AEAP/>)
- Educate VAPs and partner agencies that respond to MVIs about federal and national sources for victim/survivor assistance in the aftermath of MVIs, including but not limited to:
 - USDOJ Office for Victims of Crime: <http://www.ovc.gov>
 - FBI Victim Services: <https://www.fbi.gov/resources/victim-services#For-First%20Responders>
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): <https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness/samhsas-efforts>
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): <https://www.fema.gov/>
 - National Compassion Fund sponsored by the National Center for Victims of Crime (<https://nationalcompassionfund.org/>)
 - American Red Cross: www.redcross.org

- Conduct training sessions that are evidence-based and trauma-informed to prepare VAPs to respond to MVIs.
- Help develop cross-training curricula and programs that educate partner professionals about the role of VAPs in MVI response, and educate VAPs about the role of coordinating with allied response agencies
- Prepare “go kits” from victim/survivor assistance agencies that include relevant victim information and forms, supplies, and technology support for initial RCs and FACs
- Publicize the availability of the USDOJ Office for Victims of Crime “Helping Victims of Mass Violence and Terrorism” Toolkit that can enhance readiness and planning activities: <https://www.ovc.gov/pubs/mvt-toolkit/>
- Publicize the availability of the International Terrorism Victim Expense Reimbursement Program (ITVERP) for MVIs caused by terrorism outside of the United States that can provide assistance to U.S. citizens who are injured or killed abroad: <https://www.ovc.gov/itverp/>.
- Proactively promote the availability of victim compensation for violent crime victims to increase general knowledge about this important victim right and service *prior to* a MVI
- Develop and implement plans to be able to provide quality services to victims who have disabilities, who are deaf, do not speak English, or who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

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