

The Role of Victim Assistance Professionals in Responding to Mass Violence Incidents

This tip sheet clearly defines the crucial role of VAPs in the **response** 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.

- Partner with allied agencies to provide centralized, collaborative leadership and communications in the immediate aftermath of a MVI.
- Offer the capacity to be physically present at the Joint Information Center and Joint Operations Center to enhance the accuracy of information and communications relayed to victim assistance professionals (VAPs) at the Response Center (RC)
- Help set up, organize and staff the initial RC and Family Assistance Center (FAC) with “go kits” prepared in advance that include relevant victim information and forms, supplies, and technology support for RCs and FACs
- Contribute to the creation of accurate lists of victims and survivors by working with law enforcement, medical examiners, and other first responders and hospitals
- Help law enforcement establish an area within the RC and FAC that is separate by sight and sound for victim/survivor and witness interviews and victim identification
- Help facilitate the return-of-property that was lost or damaged during the MVI
- Demonstrate best practices to enhance victim/survivor privacy and confidentiality, both on-site at RCs and FACs and through all communications and case work
- Conduct victim/survivor needs assessments and establish case management protocols that are survivor-centered and trauma-informed
- Help survivors understand and apply for crime victim compensation on-site at the RC and FAC and online:
 - Provide shortened or abbreviated application forms
 - Create a secure area for law enforcement and victim compensation staff to facilitate the expedited documentation and completion of applications
 - Help coordinate victim compensation benefits with other public benefits available to MVI survivors, and public charitable initiatives that seek to help MVI victims and survivors
 - Rapidly create a MVI-specific page on the victim compensation agency website that provides important information about victim compensation, coordination within/among states, and the overall application process
- Provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) and victim advocacy support to victims, survivors, witnesses, first responders and community members who are directly affected by the MVI

- Provide trained VAPs who can partner with law enforcement and medical examiners to conduct sensitive death notifications; and provide important follow-up support and services to families of those killed in MVIs
- Provide support to and coordinate with allied MVI responders at the RC and FAC to help create a survivor-centric response, such as:
 - Hospitals
 - EMTs
 - Mental and behavioral health professionals who can provide counseling and support
 - American Red Cross (to address immediate needs for shelter, food, clothing, etc.)
 - Transportation (public or mass transit, ride-hailing services, taxis, airlines, trains, etc.)
 - Department of Motor Vehicles to facilitate the rapid replacement of lost drivers' licenses
 - Lodging and hospitality industry to secure food and lodging in the immediate aftermath of a MVI
 - Child care
 - Assistance with employer intervention and advocacy
- Provide support to RC and FAC leadership and law enforcement to help survivors locate their loved ones
- Offer support and referrals for victims who reside in states, communities or countries that are separate from the site of the MVI
- Promote cultural competence in overall service delivery and, in some jurisdictions, provide access to language translation services, on-site and by telephone
- Offer information to survivors about their statutory rights as victims of crime within the jurisdiction where the MVI occurred
- Provide information about and referrals to legal professionals who can provide advice and counsel to survivors
- Contribute to effective media relations and public outreach that reflect and respect survivors' privacy by advocating for individual victims in the media, as needed and upon request
- Publicize social media links that provide timely, accurate information to survivors and communities affected by MVIs

The NMVRC is grateful to the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators, the Orlando United Assistance Center, and many survivors and victim assistance professionals who contributed to this tip sheet.