

# Establishing a Friends & Relatives Center and/or Family Assistance Center

## Why This Matters

In the immediate aftermath of a mass violence incident, law enforcement, first responders, victim assistance professionals, and other partners must coordinate quickly to ensure an effective and compassionate response.

| Friends & Relatives Center (FRC)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Family Assistance Center (FAC)                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Purpose:</b> Immediate, short-term location for people evacuated from the scene and those seeking information about loved ones.                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Purpose:</b> Broader range of support for families and survivors addressing short-and mid-term needs.              |
| <b>Core functions:</b> Centralize communication, provide updates to families, reconnect loved ones when possible, gather information for victim identification, and provide basic support services (psychological first aid, spiritual care, and assistance with immediate needs such as food and transportation). | <b>Core functions:</b> Includes FRC services plus expanded social services, victim compensation, and other resources. |
| <b>Typical duration:</b> Up to 48 hours.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Typical duration:</b> Generally 7–10 days beyond closure of the FRC.                                               |



Planning in advance for both FRCs and FACs helps ensure that compassion is coordinated, information is accurate, and services are delivered in a way that is dignified, trauma-informed and sustainable.



## Site Selection & Physical Setup

*Where should the FRC/FAC be located and how should it be set up?*

### 1. LOCATION

Select a safe, welcoming, and accessible site. When feasible, locate it close to — but not within sight or sound of — the incident scene to promote safety and reduce additional trauma. Hospitals, schools and other community locations may become natural gathering points.

### 2. CAPACITY

Plan for a large volume of visitors and choose more space than anticipated whenever possible. Planning guide: expect approximately 8–10 people for every person directly impacted. Prioritize facilities that can accommodate parking, food service, and other logistical needs.

### 3. PRIVACY & SAFETY

Prioritize privacy, controlled access, and security. Designate separate areas for families based on circumstances to reduce emotional distress. Protect people arriving and leaving from media and general public access.

### 4. PRIVATE & FUNCTIONAL SPACES

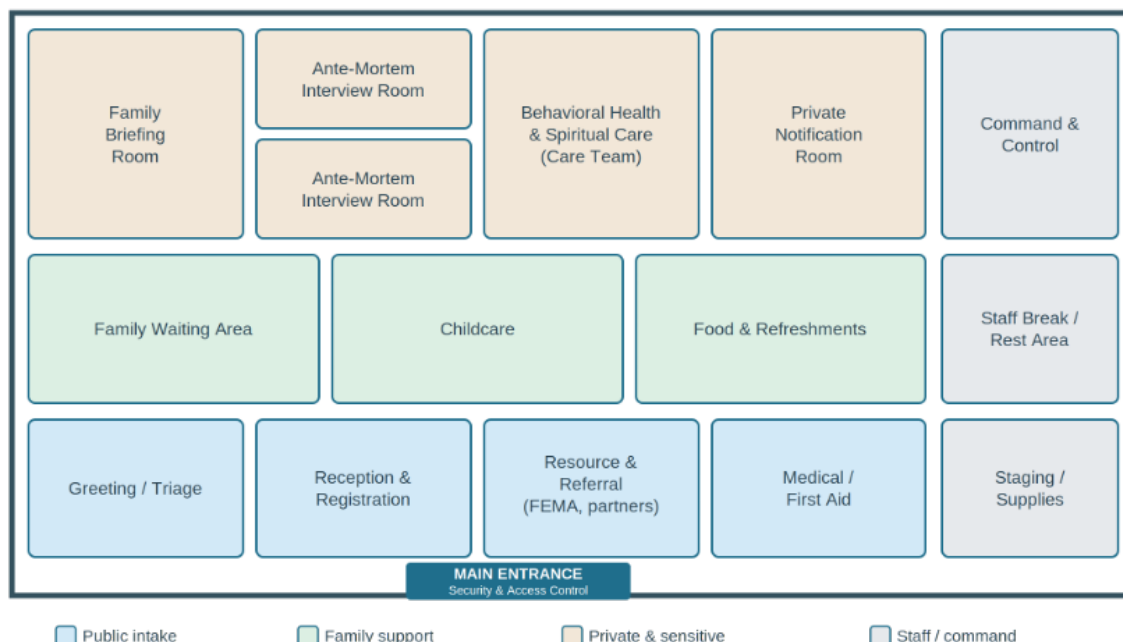
Private spaces to consider are family briefing rooms, notification rooms, interview rooms, and a room for command and control. Use clear, visible signage clearly identifying key services—registration, restrooms, food, childcare, first aid, and resource area.



If transitioning an FRC to an FAC, it is best practice to establish the FAC at a different location. Families who received difficult or traumatic news at the FRC may not wish to return to the same setting for ongoing services. The two sites may operate concurrently for a brief period during the transition to help ensure families and survivors clearly understand the shift from the FRC to the FAC.

## Sample Family Assistance Center Layout

Key functional areas to plan for — adapt to the chosen facility



Sample functional layout adapted from the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency, Mass Fatality Plan Template (Feb. 2018), Appendix E — Victim Information Center facility checklist. Functional areas are illustrative; adapt placement and size to the chosen facility.



## Operations & Systems

*What infrastructure is needed to function effectively?*

### Information & Documentation Management

- **Maintain a real-time tracking system** for victims, survivors, and family members, including intake forms and needs assessments.
- **Implement systems to reduce duplication** of effort, including minimizing repeated interviews and ensuring information is shared efficiently across authorized partners.
- **Maintain both electronic and paper-based systems** in case of technology disruptions.
- **Prepare and organize essential documents in advance**, including intake forms, victim compensation applications, and information about victims' rights and services.
- **Establish procedures** for managing, storing, and securing sensitive information.

### Technology & Operational Equipment

- **Provide necessary technology**, including:
  - \* Mobile phones
  - \* Tablets or laptops
  - \* Portable printers
  - \* Reliable internet connectivity
- **Provide ample charging stations and backup power sources** to maintain operations during outages or disruptions.

### Registration & Access Control

- **Establish clear check-in and registration procedures** for families and responding personnel.
- **Maintain sign-in systems and a visible method** for identifying individuals who have been vetted for access to the site.
- **Consider color-coded wristbands**, with colors changed daily, for responders and families.
- **Avoid using red wristbands.**

### Communications & Operating Procedures

- **Establish reliable communication systems** among FRC/FAC personnel, partners, and the call center (if applicable) to ensure **families receive timely and consistent updates.**
- **Set defined daily operating hours**—post and communicate them clearly with families.
- **An FRC/FAC is not expected to operate 24 hours** a day; committing to continuous access creates expectations that cannot be sustained.
- **Develop an after-hours plan** so families know whom to contact and how urgent notifications will be handled when the FRC/FAC is closed.

### Supplies & Family Support

- **Stock essential operational and family-support supplies**, including:
  - \* Office materials
  - \* Hygiene items
  - \* Basic first-aid supplies
  - \* Items for children
- **Coordinate with NGOs and community partners** in advance for food, comfort items, and other donated supplies.
- **Kitchen equipment can be helpful but is not essential.** Meals are typically brought in rather than prepared on site.
- **Affected communities should never be expected to provide these supplies themselves.**



### Plan for the Unexpected

#### Technology disruption

Paper forms  
Manual tracking

#### Power loss

Backup power sources  
Charging capacity

#### After-hours need

Named contact  
Urgent notification protocol

#### Resource surge

Pre-identified NGO/  
community partners



## Services & Resource Navigation

### What support should be available?

| Friends & Relatives Center (FRC)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Family Assistance Center (FAC)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration / intake</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Spiritual care</li> <li>• First aid</li> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Basic sustenance</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Victim compensation</li> <li>• Language &amp; cultural services</li> <li>• Consular services</li> <li>• Information briefings</li> <li>• Return of personal effects</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All FRC services</li> <li>• Legal &amp; financial advisement</li> <li>• Hot meals</li> <li>• Replacement of documents (e.g., government ID, death certificates)</li> <li>• Funerary support</li> <li>• Additional social services</li> <li>• Referrals to longer-term support</li> </ul> |

### What do families need when they arrive?



**Protection & Privacy**  
from the media and general public



**Timely Information**  
updates about loved ones



**Compassionate Engagement**  
active listening without intrusion



**Consistent Contact**  
a reliable point of contact

## Sensitive Situations & Trauma-Informed Practices

### How are the most difficult moments handled?

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trauma Notifications</b>            | Ensure trauma notifications are delivered in a private, quiet setting by law enforcement/coroner/medical examiner (state statute or local law can dictate this) in coordination with a trauma-trained victim assistance professional, allowing space for immediate emotional support and questions.                                                                                                         |
| <b>Family Reunifications</b>           | Facilitate reunifications in a private and supportive environment, with staff present to assist and provide emotional support as families reconnect with their loved ones.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Separating Families</b>             | Designate separate areas for families based on their circumstances (e.g., deceased, missing, reunited) to reduce additional emotional distress and protect the privacy of each family's experience.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Guidance on Emotional Reactions</b> | Provide information and support that helps normalize a range of emotional responses to trauma, offering reassurance and practical guidance while avoiding overwhelming or unnecessary information.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Avoiding Harmful Exposure</b>       | Take steps to minimize exposure to distressing media, language, or environmental stressors within the space, creating a calm, supportive setting that reduces the risk of additional trauma for families and staff.                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Closing the Site</b>                | Communicate the closing date to families as far in advance as possible and explain what support continues afterward. Before closing, ensure every family has a named contact for ongoing services, written referral information, and a clear way to reach someone. Closure can reactivate the distress of the incident, so treat it as a transition to be supported rather than an administrative end date. |



## Staffing, Roles, & Coordination

### Who is responsible for running the FRC/FAC?

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FRC/FAC Director                           | Provides overall leadership and coordination of the center(s), including decision-making, resource allocation, and partner integration. A designated backup ensures continuity of operations at all times.                                                                                                                                  |
| Registration & Intake                      | Serve as the initial point of contact for friends and relatives, collecting essential information and documenting needs to then share with Case Managers/Victim Liaisons.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Case Managers<br>Victim Liaisons           | Serve as the primary point of contact for individuals and families, providing ongoing support, sharing updates, and helping navigate the services and resources at the FRC/FAC and referrals to other agencies.                                                                                                                             |
| Medical Examiner & Coroner Liaison         | Coordinates antemortem interviews and the collection of identification information from families, in partnership with the medical examiner or coroner and supporting federal victim services. Ensures these interviews occur in a private setting and that families understand their purpose.                                               |
| Liaison to Partner Agencies                | Coordinates the presence and activities of partner organizations (mental health, spiritual care, victim and social services) to ensure FRC/FAC services are aligned, information is shared, and efforts are not duplicated.                                                                                                                 |
| Staff/Volunteer Coordination & Supervision | Coordinates and manages volunteers from pre-identified partner agencies, ensuring they are appropriately assigned and integrated into operations. Maintains oversight of volunteer roles and responsibilities and helps manage or redirect spontaneous or self-deployed volunteers to ensure a safe, organized, and controlled environment. |
| Site Security & Facility Management        | Manages controlled entry and egress, the vetting and identification process for everyone entering the site, and the secure perimeter. Coordinates with jurisdictional law enforcement and the facility's own staff on space, access, and hours.                                                                                             |



### CARE FOR THE PEOPLE PROVIDING CARE

- Provide services for staff, volunteers, and first responders as well as for friends and relatives, recognizing the impact of vicarious trauma and ensuring access to mental health resources, rest, and relief.
- Qualified and trauma-trained mental health and spiritual care professionals should be available to provide psychological first aid, emotional support, and crisis intervention.
- All staff and volunteers should wear visible credentials to promote safety, clarity, and trust.



## Information Sharing & Communication

### *How is information delivered and managed?*

#### Coordinated Messaging

- To ensure consistent and accurate information, **coordinate information-sharing and communication strategies** across partner agencies, including law enforcement, hospitals, the coroner/medical examiner, and victim service providers.
- When possible, **establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) and designate a lead Public Information Officer (PIO)** to manage messaging.
- Use the **JIC to support public communication** about FRC/FAC services and location.

#### Family-First Communication

- **Prioritize family briefings and timely updates** for relatives and friends before releasing information to the public or media.
- Ensure families receive important information directly rather than learning about developments through news or social media whenever possible.
- **Designate a point of contact for each family**, typically their case manager or victim liaison.

#### Media Access & Family Privacy

- **Limit media access** to victims and families.
- Have the family's **designated point of contact receive and screen media requests** in coordination with the PIO.
- Require the **specific permission of the victim or family member** before allowing any media access or contact.
- When feasible, **establish a secure perimeter** to prevent media from approaching individuals entering or leaving the FRC/FAC.

#### Media Presence & Exposure

- Media may be invited in the FRC/FAC **before it officially opens** to photograph the physical space and the services offered.
- **Do not permit media access during operational hours** when victims and families are present.
- **Limit exposure to television and media** in shared spaces.
- Be mindful that news coverage may contain **distressing images, language, or information** that can further impact friends, relatives, and staff.



## FRC/FAC Site Selection Considerations

| FEATURE                                                                                       | FRC  | FAC  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>Location</b>                                                                               |      |      |
| Accessible to major roads/highways                                                            | Nice | Nice |
| Accessible to public transportation                                                           | Nice | Must |
| Affords privacy                                                                               | Must | Must |
| Near to scene (but not direct line of sight)                                                  | Nice | Nice |
| Parking area                                                                                  | Must | Must |
| Proximity to hotels                                                                           | Nice | Nice |
| Proximity to restaurants and other services                                                   | Nice | Nice |
| Different location from FRC                                                                   | —    | Must |
| <b>Basic Facility</b>                                                                         |      |      |
| Climate-controlled                                                                            | Must | Must |
| Accessible (ADA compliance)                                                                   | Must | Must |
| Controlled entry/egress                                                                       | Must | Must |
| Available for duration of need                                                                | Must | Must |
| Available on short notice                                                                     | Must | Must |
| Religiously/Politically neutral                                                               | Nice | Must |
| Secure perimeter                                                                              | Nice | Nice |
| Affordable                                                                                    | Must | Must |
| <b>Spaces</b>                                                                                 |      |      |
| Food service area                                                                             | Must | Must |
| Break room (staff only)                                                                       | Nice | Must |
| Eating area (clients)                                                                         | Must | Must |
| Reception area                                                                                | Must | Must |
| Childcare area (with emergency exit and single-point entry/exit) within eyesight of caregiver | Nice | Nice |
| Private rooms for trauma notification and counseling                                          | Must | Must |
| Private rooms for antemortem identification and witness interviews                            | Must | Must |
| Private rooms for personal effects return                                                     | Nice | Nice |
| Sleeping area (clients)*                                                                      | Nice | Nice |
| Sleeping area (staff)*                                                                        | Nice | Nice |
| Bathrooms                                                                                     | Must | Must |
| Evidence/Personal Effects Control Room                                                        | Must | Must |
| Common area                                                                                   | Must | Must |

## FRC/FAC Site Selection Considerations (continued)

|                                                                     |      |      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| Auditorium/Client briefing room                                     | Nice | Nice |
| Meeting room                                                        | Nice | Must |
| FAC Team office                                                     | Nice | Must |
| Laundry*                                                            | Nice | Nice |
| Storage area                                                        | Nice | Nice |
| Liaison/Communications office                                       | Nice | Nice |
| Emergency medical treatment area                                    | Must | Nice |
| PIO office                                                          | Must | Must |
| Victim Services office                                              | Must | Must |
| <b>Technology</b>                                                   |      |      |
| Internet connectivity                                               | Must | Must |
| WiFi                                                                | Nice | Nice |
| Television (in a compartmented area)                                | Nice | Nice |
| Cellular reception (FirstNet)                                       | Must | Must |
| Power outlets, extension cords, and cell phone chargers             | Must | Must |
| Method to identify vetted responders and families for repeat access | Must | Must |
| <b>Food</b>                                                         |      |      |
| Refrigerator                                                        | Nice | Nice |
| Stove                                                               | Nice | Nice |
| Microwave                                                           | Nice | Nice |
| Vending Machines                                                    | Nice | Nice |
| Coffeemaker/Hot water dispenser                                     | Nice | Nice |
| <b>Furniture</b>                                                    |      |      |
| Tables and chairs                                                   | Must | Must |
| Waiting area seating (comfortable chairs/couches)                   | Must | Must |
| Childcare equipment                                                 | Nice | Must |

\*Sleeping areas and laundry facilities are generally not provided at an FRC/FAC established in response to a criminal mass violence incident. These are typically available only for federally declared disasters under the Stafford Act.

Version: September 1, 2026

Suggested citation: National Mass Violence Center. (2026). *Establishing a Friends & Relatives Center and/or Family Assistance Center [Tip sheet]*.