

Unexpected Challenges for Communities In the Aftermath of a Mass Violence Incident

The aftermath of a mass violence incident (MVI) is often chaotic and difficult for most communities, with new challenges arriving daily. Many of the challenges that appear during the immediate response and long-term recovery periods are somewhat expected, and plans may be in place to manage them. However, many communities experienced surprising challenges after an MVI and struggled to manage them. Below is a listing of some issues that many communities experiencing an MVI say caught them by surprise and suggested solutions for how to manage them.

Offers of Help

Be aware that governmental leaders, leaders of the site where the incident occurred (e.g., school district, church, business, etc.), and others in the community likely will receive hundreds, if not thousands of emails, phone calls, social media posts, and other forms of communications offering some form of help from other communities, organizations, governments, centers, universities, “experts,” past MVI victims, and citizens. These offers will come from all over the world. Communities report that these offers can be overwhelming and problematic. There is so much to be done in the response phase that simply examining and responding to these offers can take a substantial amount of time and may hinder response efforts. Communities report that they frequently did not know how to decide if an offer of help was genuine and likely helpful, or not.

Solutions:

- Communities should be prepared to receive, vet, manage, respond to, and sometimes ignore these offers as necessary.

Governmental and community organizations may want to collaborate to establish a single point of contact to receive and manage these offers. This will require adequate staffing and equipment, access to information, and communication lines to community leaders. For example, after the mosque shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Office of the President established a new government office to receive and respond to the thousands of offers of help.

Offers to Help or Assist

Included in the offers of help will be offers from those who provide consultation, training, programs, interventions, psychological treatments, products, and other wares and services. The individuals will be seeking contracts from governmental and community organizations to provide their services. Most will tout their experience responding to many other MVIs and suggest that their service or products is essential to a positive recovery. Most of the individuals

will be legitimate and have the experience they claim. However, some may overstate their expertise and the impact of their service or product.

Solutions:

- Communities should have a process for receiving and vetting these individuals first to insure their legitimacy and their claimed expertise and experience.
- Second, communities need to assess the worthiness of the services, programs and products in terms of their form a scientific or evaluation support, utility to other communities who have used them, applicability to their community situation, cost, sustainability, and other factors.
- A collaborative approach between governmental and community service agencies can be helpful in making these decisions.

Frauds and Scams

Unfortunately, some people seek to take advantage of victims, survivors, community members, and the public in the aftermath of an MVI through frauds and scams. Many communities report problems with fake donation appeals for victims' healthcare costs, funeral expenses, housing, transportation, clothing, college costs, employment and other items that may be particularly challenging or emotional for victims. They play on the perceived needs of victims and the compassion and sympathy of people who want to help. These fraudulent solicitations may be conducted by telephone, by email or mail, through social media, or online. For example, despite the best efforts of the company to identify and quash them, fake GoFundMe accounts are often a problem.

Solutions:

- Widely disseminate information to victims, survivors, and the public about the true needs of victims, legitimate fundraising channels that can be used, and cautions against possible scams.
- Actively seek information about fundraising campaigns and determine if they are legitimate.
- Work with online companies to identify fraudulent websites and accounts.
- Report all fraudulent activity to law enforcement.

Well-intended, but Unnecessary Fund Solicitation

Out of their desire to do something to help victims and survivors of an MVI, some people and organizations may conduct fundraising campaigns or solicit goods and services for victims. They

are developed independently from government or community agencies in charge of MVI response or the victims and survivors affected. These campaigns are genuine efforts to help victims and at times can be helpful. However, they also can be problematic, since they are not coordinated with the organized response effort. For example, a church in another city may raise funds for the funeral costs of deceased victims, not knowing that such costs are covered by existing programs, such as victims' compensation funds. They may send these funds to organizations that are unprepared to receive them, do the necessary accounting or distribute them in a fair, equitable and timely manner. Legal problems and community conflict may be the result. In fact, many communities who experienced an MVI frequently report conflicts over the management, accounting, and distributions of donations.

Solutions:

- Widely disseminate information about approved fundraising channels.
- Direct unsolicited funds to these channels for proper accounting and distribution.

Hoaxers, Deniers, Conspiracy Theorists

Unfortunately, MVIs often attract the attention of so called, "false flag" conspiracy theorists who claim the MVI never happened, the victims never existed and never died, and the whole episode was a hoax put on by the government. They may say that all involved are "crisis actors" and claim the MVI is a Homeland Security exercise designed to take away citizens' rights. These people may confront survivors, family members and others in-person, by telephone, by email or through social media and berate them for being crisis actors, cooperating with the government, deceiving the public, and lying about the MVI and their loved ones. These confrontations can be extraordinarily upsetting and threatening for the targets.

Solutions:

- Watch for social media campaigns, email campaigns, and in-person confrontations with people. Report confrontations to law enforcement.