

# Seven Things to Do Now to Prepare for Mass Violence

1. **Consider a shorter application form for large-scale crimes:** Multiple mass-casualty crime victims don't need to "describe the crime," and there may be other parts of your form that can be eliminated for these victims. Short-form applications have been developed by some of the states that have responded to these crimes, so that victims can more easily complete forms and begin your process. But some states prefer to use the regular application, and simply process it differently, without needing some items, like a full individual police report on each victim.
2. **Review your benefits:** You can pay for medical, counseling, funerals, lost wages for those injured, all the usual things. What about travel expenses for family members who travel from out of town to visit their loved ones in the hospital? Knowing what your law allows in advance will help prevent confusion.
3. **Examine eligibility issues:** Who will be eligible for compensation? The physically injured, and the families of those who don't survive, of course. What about people who were threatened in a zone of attack or danger, in close proximity to the crime, but weren't physically injured? People who know the victims, like employees at a school, who might not have been present during the attack? Are first responders eligible? Better to know now what your law allows, or what your interpretation of it will be.
4. **Check your accounting system:** Can you segregate payments for the mass-casualty crime, so that you can track how much is spent on those victims? This may be something you need to provide to state officials, or to federal officials if you seek emergency grant funds from OVC. Those funds, if you need them, may take many months to arrive, and you'll have to have accurate records to reimburse the funds you used on this crime.
5. **Get to know your state emergency management team:** You'll want to establish a relationship with your state emergency management authorities, so that you can respond effectively. Typically, a Family Assistance Center is set up near mass-crime locations. A presence there could facilitate victims seeking help from your program, and you'll want to know how such a center operates, and how your program would gain access. Do those who control the response to mass violence know who you are, and what you offer? Are local victim-witness staff familiar with you and your program?
6. **Plan for how your staff will respond to a mass-casualty crime scene:** Most states responding to mass-casualty crimes stress the importance of establishing a presence at the crime scene. If it's appropriate for you to send staff to a Family Assistance Center, which staff members will be sent to provide information and assistance in filing claims? Are they trained sufficiently in trauma reactions, so they can work directly with victims? You'll need to manage practical issues like travel expenses and overtime, and office supplies to take with you. Some programs have "Go-Packs" ready in office closets.
7. **Consider collateral resources:** Large-scale incidents often result in a significant number of resources becoming available to victims. Private donations may pour in to a designated fund. Victims may set up their own online accounts to accept donations. Are these considered collateral resources, reducing your payments? The Red Cross and Salvation Army, and FEMA, may provide some benefits, as well. Some compensation programs that have responded to mass-casualty incidents say their approach is to provide help as fast as they can to help with immediate needs, until other resources become available. "We stand up until the big funds kick in, and then we stand back," one manager said. Practically speaking, it may be impossible to track individual donations through online victim accounts, or to ascertain donor intent. Was the money for the hospital bill or to help the family with other expenses your program doesn't cover? Many managers say they don't want to get into these issues. Again, thinking this through in advance may help you handle questions when they arise.