

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.

- Research and write an “After-Action Report” that is specific to the overall effectiveness of victim assistance professionals (VAPs) response to the MVI, and identify gaps and strengths to inform and improve future responses to MVIs.
- Provide a strong leadership role in applying to the USDOJ Anti-terrorism and Emergency Assistance Program (AEAP) that provides long-term support to communities affected by MVIs. (<https://www.ovc.gov/AEAP/>); and providing responsible stewardship of the funds that are received.
- Define the scope of long-range services to help victims and survivors, their family members, witnesses, and first responders and community members affected by MVIs.
- Contribute to the creation of a Resilience Center in the community affected by an MVC that is centrally located, safe and secure to:
 - Continue to identify and address survivors’ needs.
 - Provide a wide range of survivor services (sometimes available in multiple languages) such as:
 - Victim/survivor hotline
 - Website
 - Victim/survivor intake and needs assessments
 - Coordinated case management
 - Victim advocacy
 - Support groups (including for specific communities affected by the MVI, i.e., immigrants, LGBTQI persons, students, etc.)
 - Mental health counseling
 - Behavioral health support
 - Life coaches
 - Financial literacy support
 - Vocational rehabilitation
 - Resume building and employment assistance
 - Coordination and (if needed) interventions with:
 - Employers
 - Schools
 - Public systems that provide support to MVI survivors
 - Offer conference and meeting space for individuals and organizations who were affected by or responded to the MVI

- Conduct workshops for impacted persons, i.e. Psychological First Aid, Mental Health Stigma in the African-American community, how to identify trauma cues
 - Provide a strong presence on social media to share and disseminate information for survivors and community members (including the establishment of “closed” or “private” groups within social media platforms)
 - Publicize the services of the Resilience Center to the affected community, with an emphasis on reaching marginalized, vulnerable or traditionally-underserved victims, survivors and community members.
- Offer trained “navigators” to help victims access services and support across systems and physical jurisdictions.
- Sponsor peer support groups for victims, survivors, witnesses, VAPs and first responders.
- As needed and upon request, advocate for victims/survivors in the news media.
- Continue to provide information to victims and survivors about their statutory rights under law.
- In cases that result in criminal prosecutions, provide victim/survivor advocacy, accompaniment to all relevant hearings and meetings that they have the right to attend and assistance in exercising their rights.
- Educate others about “trauma cues” that emanate from MVIs and provide support to address them in the community where the MVI occurred, as well as across the nation to other MVI survivors, VAPs and first responders.
- Provide training and guidance to leaders of all agencies that were involved in responding to the MVI about vicarious trauma, how to identify and address “trauma cues” and stress reactions among their staff members, and strategies to promote individual and organizational wellness.
- Provide tip sheets to MVI survivors and first responders (including VAPs) about the challenges they may face, and resources to help them cope:
 - Online links to self-help resources, including normalizing responses
 - Online links to resources to promote resilience
- Provide tips to community members (and for children and adolescents) about practical strategies to help them feel safer and address any trauma reactions they may experience.
- Provide information about and referrals to services for children and other more vulnerable populations who are affected by MVI.
- Provide information about public and private sources that provide financial support to survivors, along with information about any fraudulent schemes that are harmful to victims.
- Help organize and publicize memorial events (including anniversary tributes) and physical memorials in the community that are survivor-centric and guided by the wishes of survivors.
- Provide guidance and support to victims and survivors who seek to become activists, establish nonprofit organizations or foundations effect changes in laws, or improve future coordinated responses to MVIs.

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