

Tips for Civic Leaders: Supporting Your Community's Remembering of Mass Violence Victims

In the immediate aftermath:

- Make public spaces available for gatherings
- Provide appropriate security
- Focus on events that will include everyone
- Invite speakers, local musicians and artists from all parts of the affected community to participate
- Address any community suspicions directly
- Offer updates on any emerging information
- Correct any false media narratives as soon as possible
- Leave flowers, notes and gifts at the temporary memorial site for a few days and then find a place where the nonperishable items can be displayed for a few weeks.
- Keep condolence notes indefinitely for victims to read at a later date

During the first year:

- Encourage sharing about what happened and what it meant to people. Everyone has a different story to tell. These narratives help people remember loved ones and are an important part of healing and recovery.
- Encourage musicians, artists, writers and the general public to honor and remember the event. Stories will be told over and over again in different ways, by the media, by your citizens, by those interested in political gain. Some people will not want to be reminded as they need to process things more slowly in their own way. Recognize these individual needs. However, it is important to correct false narratives as soon as possible.
- Promote ongoing events to bring communities together
- Encourage survivors to rebuild and enhance their social connections and community supports
- Ensure that victims feel connected to their communities and that they know ongoing support is available to them even if they never take advantage of it. People are less anxious if they know help is available.
- Publicize public health announcements about flashbacks or other emotional reactions to trauma. Information helps to normalize feelings and identify risks such as increased alcohol or drug use, misplaced anger or prolonged sadness and depression. Include contact information for free services through the established resiliency center and local mental health centers.

Long-term:

- Balance small and large events. Balance reflective events with community discussion. Some towns have had so many events that people got burnt out.
- Create scholarships, mental health programs, parks, foundations with a specific purpose related to the attack. These programs will continue into the future.
- Sponsor projects such as portraits, public installation of art, music compositions, academic books, documentaries, memoirs, theatre creations.
- Support development of civic groups focused on prevention of violence (groups may differ on how they see that to be done)
- Support a new sense of purpose for individuals and groups through civic engagement or political activism to make the community a better place