

Chapter 5: Managing Donations and Volunteers

“It’s about the community having a place to put their pain.”

– Mayor Nan Whaley, Dayton, OH

Chapter Summary

After a mass shooting, people want to help. Financial donations pour in from across the country and around the world. Community members show up to lend their support to the victims and families. People donate food, teddy bears, and other items, and leave flowers and letters at a makeshift memorial area to remember the victims. To be fully **prepared**, you should plan how you will manage donations and volunteers.

Despite the intense pressure in the first 24 hours following the shooting (**response**), mayors recommend establishing a fund right away for the benefit of the victims and families. Tell the public where they can safely direct their donations. Mayors offered the following lessons learned: (1) create a fund immediately, (2) establish a community oversight board for it, (3) encourage the public to give only to the established fund to avoid scams, and (4) determine a protocol (in advance, if possible) to guide the distribution of donations to victims and families.

Managing volunteers and non-financial donations can be another challenge. For example, after the shooting in Las Vegas, the local public health agency had to provide food inspectors to handle perishable items, which posed potential food safety concerns. After the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting, organizers had to ask the public to stop donating teddy bears after they filled a warehouse with 67,000 stuffed animals.¹ Yet some of the items left at the scene or other memorial sites may have value for future commemorations and historical purposes, so you may need to coordinate with community partners to document and catalog items left by the public.

In the long-term **recovery**, your staff may continue to coordinate donations and volunteers for events, including one-year remembrance events and donations for permanent memorials. While community organizations and foundations often take the lead, you may designate staff to serve on community boards or oversee key events.



Preparedness

Develop A Victims' Fund Strategy

Determine your strategy in advance so that you can immediately establish a victims' fund if a mass shooting takes place. The strategy will also be useful if you must respond to other extreme emergencies, such as a natural disaster or terror attack. Even though you have many other aspects of the response to attend to, do not leave the fund management to private organizations. You will want to ensure the city is doing everything it can to help the victims and families, including by ensuring the fund is properly managed (which may even reduce the city's potential liability).

As part of your strategy, determine the funding vehicle you will use to receive donations. In Orlando, the city already had a 501(c)(3) charitable entity for managing donations for events. With a few tweaks, the city was able to use that entity to accept donations for the Pulse victims right away. However, there are other good options. Dayton relied on a relationship with a community foundation to establish a fund. San Bernardino used a crowd-funding website (GoFundMe). El Paso used the National Compassion Fund, a national organization that provides pro bono services after mass shootings. Both Dayton and Orlando used the services of national expert Kenneth Feinberg for help setting up their funds and determining protocols for distributions.

In addition, you should determine who will manage the fund, how funds will be distributed, and who will provide oversight. Determine whether you will need authorization to establish a fund. For example, in Pittsburgh the mayor's office had to seek permission from the city council to establish a special trust fund where donations could be deposited. The National Compassion Fund can help you develop your strategy, whether or not it is done in advance.

Best Practice Tip



Plan how you will manage a victims' fund *before* a mass shooting happens.

– **Heather Fagan, Chief of Staff to Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer:** “Distributing the funds is a major process that required multiple community meetings and translation services. We established a board to manage the process. I think mayors in other cities need to consider how they would approach the establishment and management of a victims' fund ahead of time.”



Key Resources: The National Compassion Fund and Kenneth Feinberg

The National Compassion Fund accepts public donations for victims of a mass casualty event. Developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime in partnership with victims and family members, it offers tax deductibility to donors, no administrative fees, and a transparent process for distributing the funds. Staff from the National Compassion Fund can provide technical assistance to your local community foundation or directly set up a fund to provide assistance to the victims and family members.

<https://nationalcompassionfund.org/>

Several mayors consulted with attorney/consultant Kenneth Feinberg, who provides *pro bono* assistance to establish a victims' fund so long as the envisioned fund meets certain conditions.



Establish Protocols for Volunteer and In-Kind Donations Management

In collaboration with public safety, public health, and emergency management staff, develop protocols for managing volunteers and in-kind donations in the event of a mass shooting. These protocols can be included in the city's emergency preparedness plan and tabletop exercises. Protocols can address where food and other types of donations might be stored, which staff are trained to accept and inspect donations, and which staff might manage volunteers in coordinating in-kind donations.

Response

Establish a Fund Right Away

Establish the victims' fund as quickly as possible in consultation with your C4 team. Mayor Whaley established the Dayton Oregon District Tragedy Fund the day after the shooting. Mayor Dyer used a pre-existing city-owned 501(c)(3) to establish the OneOrlando Fund. See Chapter 8 for information about the legal considerations involved in establishing the fund.

It is important to ensure there is only one fund. This will help prevent confusion, promote transparency, ensure consistency in the distribution of the money, and limit the opportunity for scammers to capitalize on the public's grief. In addition, because there *may* be a liability reduction component to such a fund, it may be in the best interest of the city to establish the fund rather than waiting for another entity to establish one. For these reasons, Mayor Dyer and his staff convinced other groups that had established their own funds to merge them with the OneOrlando Fund.



Best Practice Tip



Ensure that the establishment of the fund is transparent.

– **El Paso Mayor Dee Margo:** “Once the Fund was set up, I provided weekly status updates for city council members and the public. Every two weeks I brought members of the oversight committee to the council to answer questions and encourage eligible victims and family members to apply for funds.”

Keep the Public and City Officials Informed About the Fund

As soon as the fund is established, make regular announcements at press conferences to inform the public how to make donations and warn of potential scams. Provide information about how victims can apply to receive compensation from the fund. Include the information in social media channels and in the languages most likely to reach the affected community.

Mayors in Action: Victims' Fund Management

In Orlando, donations poured in from around the world following the Pulse shooting on June 12, 2016. At first, city officials expected the fund to be managed by an external organization, but after receiving calls from Disney and Universal Studios pledging large donations, the City needed to find a way to accept these funds.

In consultation with the Mayor, Orlando's CFO Christopher McCullion opted to use the City's existing not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, Strengthen Orlando, as the repository for the donations. They quickly obtained a “doing business as” (DBA) license in order to prevent commingling of funds with other Strengthen Orlando monies. City staff acquired a website domain for the fund and activated online credit card processing and text-to-donate functions. Although the city did not have protocols for handling the donations, the fundamentals of funds management, record keeping, fraud prevention, and transparency were familiar to city officials.

McCullion sought guidance from Mitch Weiss, who served as Chief of Staff to Mayor Thomas Menino during the Boston Marathon bombing. Weiss advised McCullion to work with attorney Kenneth Feinberg on the distribution protocol. Feinberg agreed to assist pro bono on the condition that all donations would be directed to one funding vehicle.

Uniting the funding streams was needed because several organizations established funds in addition to the city's fund, including Equality Florida, the GLBT Community Center of Central Florida, and the National Compassion Fund. These organizations agreed to partner with the city to merge the funds into the OneOrlando Fund, “to ensure all funds collected for victims [were] disbursed in a unified process that [would] expedite funds, ensure transparency and safeguard against fraud.”²²



Mayor Dyer appointed a board to oversee the distribution of donation funds. Board members were selected to represent the LGBTQ+ and Hispanic communities affected by the tragedy, and also included leaders from local foundations and philanthropies, city staff, and Orlando Magic CEO Alex Martins.

The distribution board considered two strategies: give 100% of the donations directly to the victims and families or retain a portion of the funds to provide long-term services for victims, including mental health and rehabilitation.

A group of victims and families from other shootings closely aligned with the National Compassion Fund urged the board to give 100% of the funds to the victims and families of the Pulse shooting. They had seen other cities retain funds for service-providing nonprofits, only to lose a sizable portion of those funds to administrative costs. McCullion learned that “there’s a strong feeling among past survivors that fundraising that uses pictures of the deceased and then directs the money to anything other than direct support re-victimizes people who have already been victimized.”



On that basis, the board decided to follow the group’s recommendation to give 100% of the donations to the victims and their families. There were no administrative costs relating to the fund itself: credit card companies waived their fees and all other services were provided pro bono or by the city. The city resolved to seek funding elsewhere to provide the long-term services needed by the survivors.

The distribution protocol was developed with public input from two town hall meetings and by circulating a draft distribution protocol for comment. The final protocol provided payments according to the extent of loss or injury: families of victims who died received the highest payments. Victims who sustained injuries received payments according to the length of their hospital stay. Victims who witnessed the attack but were uninjured received lower payments than the first two groups.

Using this approach, the OneOrlando Fund distributed more than \$31 million to 308 claimants, representing 100% of the donations.³

Direct Volunteers to Where They Can Help

The American Red Cross and the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program provide aid after a disaster, including a public mass shooting. As mayor, you can recommend that these organizations be contacted immediately to help guide the establishment of the Family Assistance Center, advise on the services needed by the victims, and provide skilled volunteers trained in psychological first aid, grief counseling, and other first responder skills. These volunteers can be coordinated at the scene via the National Incident Management System and also provide services directly through the Family Assistance Center.





Image 8: Los Angeles Fire Department CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) Unit volunteers organized in Sylmar, CA in response to an earthquake (LAFD Photo by Cody Weireter).

Community members and people from around the country may appear at the site of the shooting or the Family Assistance Center offering to help. It can be challenging to properly manage these untrained volunteers. To the extent possible, they should be directed to where they can provide the most benefit and have the least chance of inadvertently interfering with the investigation and efforts of first responders. In the past, untrained volunteers have helped set up public spaces for a vigil or public event, helped process in-kind donations such as food and flowers, and delivered food to first responders. See the resources listed below for suggestions on managing volunteers.

In your press conferences and on social media, tell the public how they can help, including by directing volunteers to where they are needed. You may need to announce that volunteers are *not* needed, and that people can best help by staying home, avoiding the area, or making a financial donation.

An important way the public can help is by donating blood. In Orlando, people began donating blood within hours after the Pulse shooting, with blood banks working overtime to ship the blood collected from other cities to Orlando.⁴ The response was so great that the need was met the following day. El Paso Mayor Dee Margo spoke of blood donors standing in long lines for hours under the hot sun, which required the distribution of bottled water to those waiting in line. Consult with the American Red Cross or your local blood bank to ensure the safety of blood donors.



Key Resources: Volunteer Management

FEMA, Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster: The Synergy of Structure and Good Intentions: This publication offers a basis for developing a national strategy on working with unaffiliated, often spontaneous, volunteers. It is an outgrowth of an earlier publication, *Preventing a Disaster Within the Disaster*, which outlined the challenges involved in working with unaffiliated volunteers and offered recommendations on how to develop a national strategy.

<https://www.fema.gov/pdf/donations/ManagingSpontaneousVolunteers.pdf>

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters: This organization serves the volunteer-based organizations that respond to disasters, allowing them to share knowledge and resources during preparation, response, and recovery efforts.

<https://www.nvoad.org/>

Points of Light Foundation, Preventing a Disaster Within the Disaster: The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers: This report addresses disaster volunteer management and provides recommendations for engaging volunteers more effectively in times of disaster.

<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Archive/202852NCJRS.pdf>

Strategies for Managing Volunteers during Incident Response: A Systems Approach:

This article describes how to plan for and manage spontaneous volunteers using a systems-based approach. <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/684>

HandOn Network, Top 15 Things to Know When Managing Volunteers in Times of Disaster: This list outlines the basic steps involved in managing volunteers during a disaster.

https://www.kalhd.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Top_15_Things_to_Know_When_Managing_Volunteers_in_Times_of_Disaster.pdf



Recovery

Fund Distribution to Victims and Families

The process of developing a distribution protocol can be time-consuming. Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto emphasized the importance of consulting with family members of victims when determining how the funds will be distributed. Other mayors echoed his recommendation. Family members from other mass shootings offered their advice in some cases. Feedback was solicited from the public in community meetings and city council sessions. Although every case is different, it may help to consult with mayors and staffers who have established a victims' fund to avoid re-inventing the wheel.

Mayors told us they did not get involved in the actual distribution of funds to victims and families. However, they took actions to ensure the process was transparent. In some cases, a member of the mayor's staff participated on the board that oversaw these distributions. That allowed them to keep the mayor apprised of the process, liaise with victim services organizations to ensure victims were heard throughout the process, and keep the City Council, local agencies, and the public informed on the process and timeline of distributions.

Mayors in Action: Fund Distribution Protocol



In Dayton, the victims' fund established by the city distributed more than \$3.8 million to victims and their families (47 applicants) in an initial payout⁵ and around \$150,000 in a second payout.⁶ Approximately 70% went to families of the deceased, 20% went to injured victims who were hospitalized for 48 hours or more, and 10% went to victims who were treated and released in less than 48 hours.

Several of the funds researched for this Playbook distributed 100% of the funds to the victims and their families (as recommended by families of previous mass shootings). However, not all of them did. For example, in Pittsburgh, \$6.3 million was raised according to press reports. Most of the money, \$4.8 million, was distributed to victims and family members. However, \$500,000 was provided to injured police officers and their families, \$450,000 went to the Tree of Life congregation to rebuild the severely damaged building, and some funds went toward memorials and education connected to the massacre.

Although 100% of the donations to the OneOrlando Fund were distributed to the victims and their families (see vignette above), Orlando Mayor Dyer recommends that distribution boards consider withholding a small percentage of the donations to pay for mental health services, not only for the victims and their families, but also for other members of the community who were not directly affected but are traumatized.

The best practice is to closely consult with the survivors, families of the victims, and members of the affected community and use their input to establish a distribution protocol that is appropriate for your community.



Endnotes

¹ CHRIS MURPHY, *THE VIOLENCE INSIDE US*, 128-129 (2020).

² Natalie Bednarz, *OneOrlando Fund Update*, ONEORLANDO FUND (2017), <https://www.oneorlando.org/oneorlando-fund-update-april-7-2017/> (last visited May 27, 2021).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Paul Brinkmann, *How blood banks handled Pulse shooting, 28,000 donors*, ORLANDOSENTINEL.COM (2016), <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/pulse-orlando-nightclub-shooting/os-oneblood-ceo-pulse-20160629-story.html> (last visited Apr 15, 2021).

⁵ Joshua Richardson, *Tragedy Fund distributes \$3.8 million to Oregon District shooting victims*, WRGT (2019), <https://dayton247now.com/news/local/tragedy-fund-distributes-38-million-to-oregon-district-shooting-victims> (last visited Jun 2, 2021).

⁶ John Bedell, *Disbursements of money in ODS Tragedy Fund to end Sept. 30*, WHIO (2020), <https://www.whio.com/news/disbursements-money-ods-tragedy-fund-end-sept-30/L4IY5NNDV5AKTFKU4VTCHUIBOE/> (last visited Jun 2, 2021).



DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS CHECKLIST

Preparedness

- Plan the vehicle needed to accept donations for a victims' fund. Meet with your local community foundation or establish a nonprofit for this purpose.
- Establish a victims' fund protocol.

Response

- Establish a victims' fund right away, ideally the day of the shooting.
- Communicate with the public about the fund and warn about possible scams.
- Direct volunteers as appropriate, understanding the distinction between trained volunteers and spontaneous, untrained volunteers.
- Work with the American Red Cross and local blood banks to direct blood donors and volunteers for blood drives.

Recovery

- Promote transparency. Consider appointing a member of you staff to serve on community oversight board for donations management.

