

Appendix A: Training and Preparedness Recommendations

"Training is important. And it shows."

– Former FBI Special Agent in Charge Robert Jones, Pittsburgh PA

Overview

This appendix compiles the trainings, best practices, and resources described elsewhere in this Playbook. It is intended to put them all in one place to help you plan the steps you and your team can take to be prepared to respond to a mass shooting. We suggest that you also review the six Case Briefs as part of your planning, as they provide key takeaways from the six mass shootings we researched.

The mayors we interviewed stressed the need for training. They were unaware of trainings specifically for mayors to prepare them to respond to a mass shooting. Our research revealed that this remains an unmet need. Nevertheless, many mayors had engaged in related trainings or had experience handling other types of emergencies that helped prepare them for responding to a mass shooting. While you will rely on trained professionals in many aspects of the response, there are still things you can do to prepare yourself and support your staff in their continuing education efforts.

Training options you can consider as part of your emergency preparedness include:

- Tabletop exercises focused on responding to a mass shooting.
- Crisis communications training.
- Emergency preparedness training, such as FEMA emergency operations training (see below).
- Observing or participating in active shooter training (including scenarios involving a shooter that targets municipal staff).
- Continuing education is available for every discipline: encourage your staff to participate in trainings that could help them respond to an emergency.

Training typically happens in advance of a crisis, but there are training-related actions you can take during the response and recovery phase. For example, you can consult with mayors who have responded to a public mass shooting at any stage to benefit from their experience. One mayor recommended documenting the decisions you make during the response for use by the response team to help coordinate their efforts (particularly when standing up something as complex as the Family Assistance Center), and for use in the recovery phase by the team that develops the after-action report. This documentation in turn can guide your future trainings and are vital for other communities seeking to better prepare for an evolving threat environment.

Also, during the recovery phase, you can review the after-action report to determine best practices for training your staff to respond to future disasters, whether mass shootings, civil uprisings, terror attacks, or natural disasters. You can share your findings with other mayors. You can also use them when advocating for policy and program changes to address challenges you encountered.

Finally, you can benefit from your experience responding to other emergencies in your community, such as tornados, fires, gas main leaks, police-involved shootings, and civil disobedience. Documenting best practices from those responses can help you plan the response to a mass shooting.

Mayors in Action: Training and Experience That Were Helpful

Mayor Nan Whaley, Dayton OH: “Responding to a natural disaster, in our case a tornado, proved to be good experience for responding to a mass shooting.”



Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich, Pittsburgh PA: “Pittsburgh’s public safety personnel received active shooter training. The Mayor’s chief of staff attended one to understand what is involved.”

Heather Fagan, Chief of Staff to Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orlando FL: “The mayor hosts a tabletop exercise every year. The year before the Pulse shooting, the theme for the tabletop was civil disobedience. That tabletop provided an opportunity for agencies to think through how they would respond to a crisis similar to a mass shooting.”

Preparedness Actions and Trainings

Tabletop Exercises

Hosting a tabletop exercise with the appropriate city and county agencies is perhaps the most important thing you can do to prepare yourself and your city for a mass shooting. The tabletop exercise will give you and your team an idea of what to expect and prepare agencies about their role in responding to a public mass shooting.¹

Best Practice Tip: Organizing a Tabletop Exercise

Whom to include:



- At a minimum, key elected officials, chief of police or county sheriff, legal counsel and “C4” team (see Chapter 8 on Legal Considerations), and department heads responsible for decision-making during an emergency.
- If your city is a commission-manager form of government, include your city manager, city commissioners, and county officials.
- If you are planning a tabletop focused on a school mass shooting, include school officials.

- Always include local public health officials.
- Consider including a representative of the American Red Cross.

Issues to be considered:

- Define roles of elected officials, agencies, county officials, and potential partners (including the FBI and the American Red Cross).
- Develop a communication protocol for press briefings.
- Develop other protocols that will be needed: *e.g.*, social media, family reunification, coroner’s protocol for identifying victims in an extreme emergency, victims’ fund and distribution, hosting vigils, VIP visits, and managing public records requests.
- Identify key points of contact for each mass shooting scenario.
- Identify potential locations for a Family Reunification Center (it should have a secured perimeter and separate from the press).
- Discuss the services that may be required by victims and families and how the city will provide them.
- Identify potential liability for the city and develop a plan to address.
- Consult chapters in the Playbook for best practices and resources for each of these topics.



The mayors who did engage in tabletop exercises told us they did not plan the recovery phase, which left them unprepared to address community trauma when a shooting took place. Therefore, consider including trauma and mental health experts—including public health officials, victim services providers, and the American Red Cross—in your planning exercises to assist you with appropriate messaging and to help you better understand what victims, family members, first responders, and members of the greater community will need during the recovery phase.

A tabletop exercise will also help you identify mutual aid agreements and protocols you may need (such as protocols for managing the victims’ fund, establishing the family reunification and assistance centers, and making timely death notifications). It will help you identify relationships you may need to cultivate or strengthen. Ideally, the exercise will reveal areas where you or your staff could benefit from additional training.

Crisis Communications Training

You will rely on your communications experience when speaking to the public during an emergency. However, if you have limited experience speaking to the national and international press, you may benefit from media training. The National Press Club, the FBI Academy (in Quantico, VA), local universities, and consultants may be able to direct you to—or provide—training appropriate to your individual needs.

In addition, crisis communications training can help you understand how to communicate effectively to a traumatized community. As described in Chapter 1 on Communications, the CDC has prepared a manual and trainings to help you.

Emergency Preparedness Training

Training is an important component of emergency preparedness. Consider completing the trainings FEMA recommends for elected officials.

Key Resource: Recommended FEMA training

G-402 Incident Command System (ICS) Overview for Executives/Senior Officials: FEMA recommends elected officials complete this course, which covers the basics of what you need to know about the National Incident Management System, Multiagency Coordination Groups, Incident Command Systems, and Emergency Operations Centers. The course also summarizes the chief elected official's role in emergency preparedness, which may be applied to preparedness for a public mass shooting.

[https://training.fema.gov/gstate/downloadmats.aspx?rd=1&course=G0402%20-%20ics-402%20-%20incident%20command%20system%20\(ICS\)%20overview%20for%20executives%20and%20senior%20officials](https://training.fema.gov/gstate/downloadmats.aspx?rd=1&course=G0402%20-%20ics-402%20-%20incident%20command%20system%20(ICS)%20overview%20for%20executives%20and%20senior%20officials)

G-191 Incident Command System/Emergency Operations Center Interface: According to FEMA, this course reviews Incident Command System and Emergency Operation Center responsibilities and functions and provides an opportunity for participants to begin developing an interface between an Incident Management Team and EOC personnel. FEMA recommends this course for elected officials. The course is not available online as of this writing, but more information is available here: <https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/trainingmaterials/>

Active Shooter Trainings

Observe an Active Shooter Training for Law Enforcement

Some mayors have observed or participated in active shooter trainings arranged for law enforcement agencies. They report this observation helped them understand the law enforcement tactics used during active shooter containment. One mayor recommended doing this as a best practice, noting he wished he had seen an active shooter training before the shooting that took place in his city.

Arrange Active Shooter Trainings to Defend Municipal Buildings and Staff

The 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol and mass shootings at governments buildings in San Bernardino, Virginia Beach, and the Washington Navy Yard highlight the need for preparedness and security for government buildings. Consult with your chief of police about arranging appropriate training for security staff that work for the city, including contracted security and/or local police that protect municipal buildings.

Municipalities such as Jersey City, NJ have also contracted active shooter drill training to prepare city staff for a potential attack on a municipal target.² Consider whether to arrange active shooter training for your staff to prepare them for a potential attack in their offices, in consultation with law enforcement.

Key Resource: FBI Training Materials

***The Coming Storm*, an FBI-produced film to help prepare officials to respond to an active shooter event:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jgS7jBXZU4>



Other FBI resources: FBI, “Run. Hide. Fight.” video:
<https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>

Active Shooter Drills for Schools

Realistic active shooter training for law enforcement personnel is necessary and appropriate. Note, however, that the Public Health Advocacy Institute, teachers unions³, and mental health experts recommend against unannounced or realistic active shooter drills for children (such as the type offered by ALICE (which stands for “Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate”). These drills can be traumatizing for children and may do more harm than good; better approaches are available.⁴ See Chapter 6 on School Shootings for more information about the mental health needs of students.

Learn from Other Mayors

Look for opportunities to benefit from the experience of other mayors. For example, the U.S. Conference of Mayors hosted an excellent panel discussion that featured the insights of mayors who responded to a mass shooting (see link below). Other mayors have written books, such as Mayor Steve Scaffidi, who shared his experience responding to the Sikh Temple shooting in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012. Trainings that were helpful to other mayors are mentioned below.

If a public mass shooting takes place in your community, you can count on other mayors to immediately contact you to share their advice and condolences. While their advice will be invaluable, in the immediate aftermath of a shooting your focus will necessarily be on the investigation, the press, and the victims and families. Therefore, feel free to contact experienced mayors or their staff before a crisis to solicit their advice on planning a tabletop exercise and developing the recommended protocols.

Finally, we hope you will find this Playbook—which highlights the advice of experienced mayors, staff, first responders, health care professionals, and other experts—a useful tool for planning your response to a mass shooting.

Key Resources—Mayors Share Their Experience

U.S. Conference of Mayors, 88th Winter Meeting: Lesson Learned - Preventing, Preparing for, and Responding to Mass Shootings, 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hijqn9q1rQg>



Six Minutes in August: A Story of Tragedy, Healing and Community, Steve Scaffidi. The book tells the story of the murder of six members of a Sikh Temple, and the aftermath of that day’s events on the community of Oak Creek, its newly-elected mayor, and the families of the Sikh Temple: <https://www.amazon.com/Six-Minutes-August-Tragedy-Community/dp/057816714X>

Endnotes

¹ U.S CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, 88th Winter Meeting: Lesson Learned - Preventing, Preparing for, and Responding to Mass Shootings, 2020, 21:40 *available at* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hijqn9q1rQg> (last visited Apr 8, 2021).

² Leah Asmelash, *Nation's largest teachers unions call to end active shooter drills over fears they're traumatizing students*, CNN (2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/12/us/active-shooter-drills-teacher-union-trnd/index.html> (last visited May 6, 2021).

³ Sarah C. Peck, *Halt active shooter drills in schools*, SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL (2019), <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/opinion/commentary/fl-op-com-peck-halt-active-shooter-drills-schools-20191120-fbtyyjfutvf4zlyue5ghebi7gm-story.html> (last visited May 6, 2021).