

Chapter 7: Community Partnerships

"Existing partnerships is what matters on that day."

– Chief of Staff Heather Fagan, Orlando FL

Chapter Summary

Mayors told us existing partnerships in a crisis really matter: you can't call someone in the middle of the night if you don't already have a contact established. This chapter describes some of the partnerships you may want to cultivate.

During the **preparedness** phase, identify partners that may be needed in the response and recovery phases of a mass shooting. Arrange a tabletop exercise with these partners to understand the services they can provide and develop a protocol for a Family Resilience Center. Identify gaps in relationships, such as mental health providers, and cultivate relationships with them. You can discuss the security needs of religious or minority groups that may be targeted by an active shooter. Establish a relationship with school officials. Consider establishing a Community Crisis Response Team of concerned community members.

During the **response**, call on your partners to provide support and services to affected communities. Consult with partners that provide mental health services to shape your messaging. Ask for help arranging vigils. Seek partners needed for long-term recovery.

During the **recovery**, work with partners to ensure the long-term needs of families and the affected community are met, and for help securing funding.



Preparedness

Identify Community Partners Needed to Respond to a Shooting

Mayors told us relationships with community leaders mattered in significant, and sometimes unexpected, ways when a mass shooting happened in their communities. Cultivate these relationships and consider who else you may need to meet. Engage with key community leaders from time to time to discuss their security needs and understand the services they could provide in the event of an emergency. As discussed in Appendix A on Training, you may want to include some of them in a tabletop exercise to explore the role they could play after a shooting.

Examples of partnerships that may be important during the response include:

- Police chief
- American Red Cross
- FBI Victim Services Division
- The National Compassion Fund
- United Way
- School District officials
- Mental health professionals
- Victims' advocacy groups
- Religious communities and faith leaders
- Minority and underserved populations
- Hospitals and blood banks
- Business community organizations
- Grassroots and community organizations representing groups at risk for gun violence, such as organizations that employ street outreach workers
- Local bar association

Key Resource: OVC Checklist for Partnership Planning



The Office for Victims of Crimes provides a “Partnerships and Planning” checklist in its Mass Violence Toolkit. The checklist can help you develop a victim assistance plan using the local resources in your community. Free training and technical assistance related to the Mass Violence Toolkit are available through the OVC Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC). Contact TTAC@ovcttac.org or 1-866-682-8822. <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/mvt-toolkit/PartnershipsPlanningChecklist.pdf>



Local Mental and Behavioral Health Experts

Several mayors told us they lacked existing relationships with mental health providers. Take the time to cultivate relationships with the county public health department, mental health and behavioral health services experts, and victims' advocates working in the district attorney's office. Your staff should have regular contact with the state agency providing VOCA support for victim service agencies and advocacy for victims in your state. In the aftermath of a shooting, these organizations can advise on effective messaging to reduce trauma and provide services (or timely referrals to services) to the families of the victims.

However, be aware that not all mental health service providers are qualified to counsel a victim or witness to a public mass shooting. In the immediate aftermath of a shooting, psychological first aid (PFA) is needed to stabilize emotions and prevent later post-traumatic stress is needed. See the Chapter 10 on Mental Health for more information and resources.

Local Faith-Based Organizations

Religious groups and faith-based organizations are key partners, not only because they may provide services to victims and families in the aftermath of a mass shooting, but also because they are potential targets for hate crimes. Your engagement with them should include:

- Safety and security: arrange for law enforcement officials to help these organizations with threat assessment, building security, alert systems, and partnerships with law enforcement.
- Response and recovery: discuss the services and community response that faith-based organizations can provide after instances of violence, such as vigils, funerals, and spiritual guidance.
- Cultural understanding: seek information about their cultural norms, death and burial practices, and language needs.

Importantly, remind faith-based organizations that provide services in the aftermath of a public mass shooting that they must offer their services to all victims and families, regardless of religious affiliation.

Mayors in Action: Faith-Based Partnerships in Pittsburgh

Before the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting, the Pittsburgh police department had performed threat assessments with the Jewish community and knew the phone numbers and locations of every synagogue in the city. Because the shooting took place on the Sabbath, other synagogues could not be reached by phone. Because of the preexisting relationship with the Jewish community, police were able to go to every synagogue and warn them of the threat as the law enforcement response was ongoing.



Key Resources: Faith-Based Organizations and Preventing Hate Crimes

Department of Justice, Preventing Hate Crimes in Your Community:
<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/preventing-hate-crimes-your-community>

Department of Justice, Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) Program Fact Sheet: <https://www.justice.gov/file/1059716/download>



Overview of the FBI's Victim Assistance Resources:
<https://www.fbi.gov/resources/victim-services>

Department of Justice, Protecting Places of Worship:
<https://www.justice.gov/file/1058496/download>

Department of Justice COPS Office, Stop Hate: Action Steps for Local Communities:
https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/05-2016/action_steps_for_local_communities.asp

Department of Justice, Understanding Trends in Hate Crimes Against Immigrants and Hispanic-Americans: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/244755.pdf>

Minority and Underserved Communities

Within U.S. cities, Black and Hispanic neighborhoods often experience high levels of gun violence, yet these crimes rarely receive the level of attention or resource allocation that public mass shootings do. Partnering with community leaders from these neighborhoods can help you develop effective violence interrupter and other evidence-based programs to reduce “everyday community gun violence.” For more information, see the Afterword: A Note About Urban Community Gun Violence.

Understand the security concerns of these communities and arrange for law enforcement agencies to meet with them. Identify language translation services where needed. Understand the cultural norms of these communities. Document the locations of their schools, community centers, and places of worship.

It's important to note that a pre-existing relationship with community leaders based on trust is vital in the aftermath of a racially motivated hate crime or officer-involved shooting. These leaders can play an important advisory role and serve as credible messengers to their communities to help prevent social unrest.

Mayors in Action: Community Partnerships in Orlando



In the case of the Pulse shooting, the Mayor's office had longstanding relationships with organizations serving the LGBTQ+ and Hispanic communities. The ability to work with these groups to host vigils and provide services to the affected communities would not have been possible without these relationships built on trust and respect.



School Communities and Districts

As described in Chapter 6 on school shootings, develop relationships with the broader school community: the school board, parent groups, and leaders of the schools and universities in your city. Schedule meetings with your school superintendent to discuss the school district's violence prevention plan and security needs.

Local Business Community

The local business community should also be included in preparedness planning. As the EL Paso shooting illustrates, businesses and workplaces can be targeted. Urge businesses to develop their own security protocols informed by local law enforcement guidance. Additionally, the business community may play a vital role in a recovery by providing resources, raising money for victims and families, and planning events.

Community Crisis Response Team

In the preparation phase, consider establishing a Community Crisis Response Team. The CCRT model involves inviting a variety of community partners to form a crisis response team that can be mobilized after a mass shooting. For more information, see Chapter 10 on Mental Health.

Engage National Partners

While this chapter is focused on community partners, you should also engage national partners directly, through state agencies or through their local chapters. Obtain the name and contact information for the local representative of each organization should you need to reach them during a crisis.

The FBI, especially the Victim Services Division and Critical Incident Response Group, can provide significant law enforcement and victims assistance resources. You should take the time to meet your regional Special Agent in Charge (SAC). Beyond its tactical and law enforcement capabilities, the FBI may also be able to leverage other partnerships that you don't have the ability to activate. For instance, FBI agents with victim services expertise are likely already connected to community-based victim service providers in your community and can activate them if you don't already have your own relationships in place. Additional information about FBI resources is provided in Chapter 3 on Victims and Families and Chapter 4 on Law Enforcement.

The American Red Cross can provide significant resources for the victims and families. However, the ARC can only respond to incidents if they are invited, so, when needed, you will need to make a call to activate its resources. The ARC has psychological first aid expertise. It can provide "just in time" training to other victim service providers and mental health service providers on psychological first aid and related topics such as stabilizing victims and witnesses. The ARC may be able to mobilize volunteers from other networks such as the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), a network of over 5 million volunteers.ⁱ Additional information about the ARC is provided in Chapter 3 on Victims and Families.

ⁱ For more information, please see <https://www.nvoad.org/>.



The National Compassion Fund, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and the United Way also bring significant resources to the response and recovery. Initiate contact with each of these national organizations to discuss the services and funding they can provide, and to learn how to contact them when you need them. Additional information about The National Compassion Fund is provided in Chapter 5 on Donations and Volunteer Management.

Response & Recovery

Direct Partners Where They Are Needed Most

The first 24 hours after a shooting can be quite chaotic. Take the time to activate your partners and direct them to where they can be most helpful. For example, partners can be directed to provide services at the Family Reunification Center in accordance with any protocols you may have. Others may be directed to help plan a vigil. Still others might help out at the scene of the shooting to manage the items left to honor the victims or deliver food to first responders. Decide whether to invite the FBI, the ARC, or other national partners to join in the response.

Examples of the varied roles community-based partners can play include:

- Mental health services: Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) of Montgomery County, Ohio provided coordination of service delivery and helped shape Dayton's messaging.
- Family and victim assistance: In El Paso and Orlando, the Family Assistance Centers had over 40 community-based organizations present to serve the needs of victims, their families, and first responders.
- Unity and healing via spiritual leaders: A local Imam amplified Orlando's message of unity and healing. Faith leaders united in San Bernardino to host vigils and services in the immediate aftermath of the attack.
- Organizing events and donations management: The business community helped fund victims' assistance funds and permanent memorials in many cities. For example, in Orlando, Disney and other local business partners donated millions to the OneOrlando Fund. In Dayton, the Downtown Dayton business community organized a vigil and contributed to managing the fund for victims.
- Victims' fund management: Community foundations have also played a role in donations fund management and oversight.
- Legal services: in Orlando, the local bar association provided a range of pro bono legal services for victims and their families.
- Memorials: In El Paso, Walmart partnered with the city to establish a "Grand Candela" memorial, a 30-foot-tall obelisk honoring the victims with a "beacon of light." The city conducted focus groups with the families to understand how they wanted to memorialize the shooting.





Image 9: Grand Candela memorial at the Ciela Vista Walmart in El Paso (TomStar81).



Mayors in Action: Community Partnerships

After the mass shooting in El Paso, local, state, and federal agencies collaborated to establish the El Paso United Family Resiliency Center (FRC) to help victims and families recover from the trauma they experienced. Opened three months after the shooting, the FRC is run by county and city governments, with funding from the Office of the Governor and United Way El Paso.

The FRC disseminates information and connects victims and families to services provided by nearly 40 community-based organizations. These services include individualized case management, referrals for counseling, financial planning, legal guidance, spiritual care, and more, based on an individual's specific needs. Without the engagement of so many community-based partners, the center would not have been able to meet the changing needs of the community, facilitate programs tailored for specific populations, and reduce stigma around receiving mental health care through outreach and education.



One Fund El Paso also involved collaboration with multiple community-based partners. While the fund was administered by the National Compassion Fund, it was established in collaboration with the City of El Paso and local foundations (the Paso del Norte Community Foundation and the El Paso Community Foundation). Importantly, the fund partnered with at least seven community organizations to help victims and family members apply for compensation. Communications about the fund were made in both English and Spanish. Community partners were also instrumental in providing representatives to oversee the donations. They developed the final distribution protocol that disbursed \$11.8 million to 355 victims and family members.

Endnotes

¹ EL PASO UNITED FAMILY RESILIENCY CENTER, "What We Do," *available at* <https://www.elpasounitedfrc.org/what-we-do> (last visited Apr 15, 2021).

² EL PASO UNITED FAMILY RESILIENCY CENTER, "About," *available at* <https://www.elpasounitedfrc.org/about> (last visited Apr 15, 2021).

³ EL PASO UNITED FAMILY RESILIENCY CENTER, "What We Do," *available at* <https://www.elpasounitedfrc.org/what-we-do> (last visited Apr 15, 2021).

⁴ EL PASO UNITED FAMILY RESILIENCY CENTER, "About," *available at* <https://www.elpasounitedfrc.org/about> (last visited Apr 15, 2021).

⁵ NATIONAL COMPASSION FUND, *One Fund El Paso*, *available at* <https://nationalcompassionfund.org/fund/one-fund-el-paso/> (last visited April 14, 2021).

⁶ NATIONAL COMPASSION FUND, *Local Agencies Assisting With One Fund Applications*, *available at* <https://nationalcompassionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Local-Agencies-Assisting-with-One-Fund-Applications.pdf> (last visited April 14, 2020).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Vic Kolenc, *\$11.8M El Paso Mass Shooting Fund Makes Last 2 Payouts, Audit Still To Be Done* (July, 2020), *available at* <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2020/07/21/el-paso-mass-shooting-fund-makes-last-two-payouts-audit-next/5453190002/>.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS CHECKLIST

Preparedness

- Identify community partners that may be needed in the response and recovery phases of a shooting. Identify and fill gaps.
- Initiate contact with national partners, such as FBI, American Red Cross, and the National Compassion Fund.
- Using a tabletop exercise or other form of planning, engage with partners to discuss their role in responding to a mass shooting or similar crisis. Include partners that can provide mental health services for the recovery phase.
- Consider establishing a Community Crisis Response Team (CCRT).

Response

- Contact partners to request help filling the unmet needs of families and victims.
- Consult with partners that provide mental health services to shape messaging.
- Cultivate partnerships that are lacking as you move to the recovery phase.

Recovery

- Work with partners to ensure that the long-term needs of families and the community are met, and for help securing funding.

