

# Leveraging Emergency Management to Prepare and Plan for a Mass Violence Incident

**Nazmia Comrie**

00:00:02

Thank you for joining us today. This is the fifth webinar in the COPS Office Critical Incident Review Implementation Strategies webinar series. My name is Nazmia Comrie. I'm a sociologist at the COPS Office, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services at the U.S. Department of Justice. When a mass violence incident occurs, it is never the response of one agency, but rather multidisciplinary stakeholders including law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, hospitals, victim service providers, prosecutors, emergency management, government and civic leaders, media, businesses, and the community as a whole. Through the planning process, coordinating routinely among all relevant stakeholders, developing agreements and conducting multidisciplinary training, exercises and drills are foundational to the process as well as relationship and trust-building. The presenters today are going to explore promising practices and lessons learned from an emergency management perspective, as well as provide available resources to help communities. Before we get started, just want to provide a little bit of background on the COPS Office and our critical incident review.

The COPS Office provides a range of resources to support state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies as they support their communities. We do this through funding, training, technical assistance, and resources. Through our technical assistance, we can provide no-cost training, policy assistance, consultation, assessments, and more to assist your agency and implementation of the strategies shared throughout this webinar, the Critical Incident Review report, and in more than 60 other topics. As part of the assistance to the field, the COPS Office led and managed the critical incident review, active shooter at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. We conducted an in-depth analysis of the tragic shooting where the lives of 19 children and two teachers were lost.

We had three goals as part of our work: To provide the families in the Uvalde community an authoritative review of the mass shooting response. Second, to identify lessons learned for the fields to improve future preparation for and responses to mass shootings. That's really why we're committed to sharing the lessons learned with the field through methods such as this webinar. And finally, importantly, to help honor the victims and survivors of the Robb Elementary School tragedy. I encourage you to visit their remembrance profiles in the COPS Office website and learn more about the lives of those that we lost and how their families want us to remember them.

As a result of the Critical Incident review work earlier this year, the Attorney General lists a nearly 600-page comprehensive report detailing our observations and recommendations of cascading failures and leadership, decision-making, tactics, policy, training, and the provision of trauma and support services. This webinar is part of the COPS Office effort to help agencies implement those recommendations. We dedicate our work to all those who lost their lives and were impacted by the tragedy at Robb Elementary School. And really all of your communities, because each of your communities has been impacted by gun violence and mass violence across this country.

So as we get started, this is going to be a conversation, and so I encourage you that if you have questions, please put them in the Q&A function that will be at the bottom of the screen, and we'll be incorporating those into the conversation. But we will also be dedicating the last 15 minutes of this webinar to questions from the audience. So again, I encourage you to use the chat, put those questions in there. And with that before we get started, just a couple of logistical pieces. If you are watching this webinar with a group of people, please just put the number in the chat so we can make sure we have accurate counting and tracking.

We don't have any currently on here, but we'll be providing resources at the end of this webinar, and we'll also be providing a follow-up email after this webinar with some additional resources as well. So with that, I'm going to turn to our fabulous panelists. We're going to go in the order of the PowerPoint we have here. So Greg, I'd like to turn to you. I'd like each of you to just give a little bit of an introduction and introduce yourselves to the group, and then if we could just go in order of what we have on the screen. So Greg, let's start with you.

### **Greg Babst**

*00:04:21*

Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Again, Greg Babst. I'm the emergency management coordinator here at Fort Bend County in Fort Bend County, Texas. It's just, I would say, a larger county within Texas, one of the fastest-growing counties and one of the most diverse counties in Texas. And we're just outside of Houston. I've been the EMC roughly for about two years here in Fort Bend County. And prior to that, I was the deputy for about a year. And then prior to that I was the training and exercise coordinator for this department. So in the short amount of time, I've moved my way up with some retirements and whatnot, but was able to take over with a fabulous team. I have 15 people that run the Homeland Security Emergency Management Office, and we work underneath K.P. George, our county judge.

So other than that, my background isn't just three years' worth of doing this stuff. I do come with a lengthy background of federal law enforcement experience as a federal law enforcement officer, retired United States Coast Guard, 24 years. I was part of Maritime Security Response Team West, which is the anti-terror, anti-cartel teams for the Coast Guard, and spent most of my career overseas or in the South Pacific doing a lot of response measures and operations for anti-terror and anti-cartel where I get my emergency management background. Again, the Coast Guard always in the military gives you about a hundred collateral jobs. And one of those collateral jobs was I was the national strike team for incident management team. So, worked my way up. Katrina was my first incident way back when as a division group supervisor and worked my way up to a type one, type two incident commander. So, that's a little bit about my background. Thank you.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:06:13*

Thank you, Greg. Angie?

## **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:06:15*

Yes. Good morning or afternoon, depending on where you are. My name is Angela Moreland. I'm a clinical psychologist and associate director of the National Mass Violence Center, and I'm also the director of the preparedness division within that center, which I think is probably most relevant for our talk today. So, the National Mass Violence Center provides training and technical assistance, also a lot of information about resources, research, technology, a whole range of services specifically to address preparedness for mass violence incidents that occur across the country, and then also response to those incidents. Although we provide services nationally and we cover the entire United States, we are located in Charleston, South Carolina through the Medical University of South Carolina. We were the direct mental health response for the Mother Emanuel AME Church shooting that occurred here in Charleston in 2015 where we tragically lost the lives of nine of our church members here.

So we were very much a part of the initial response and then really for years following, and continue to be a part of the long-term response here in Charleston. And then as part of the National Mass Violence Center, we respond alongside OVC TTAC, we're funded through the Office for Victims of Crime, Department of Justice. So we respond alongside them and alongside many times the FBI Victim Services Team. So we've responded to multiple incidences that have occurred across the country, and one of the main things that come out of those instances is really learning about those lessons learned and really learning what is needed on the preparedness side. So, that's something that's often brought up and we'll talk about today is some of those pieces that fit into preparing for an event. So thank you, Nazmia.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:08:03*

Great. Thank you, Angie. And Danny, I'll turn to you next.

## **Daniel Williams**

*00:08:07*

Well, thank you so much for inviting me to be part of this panel. My name is Danny Williams. I'm the division chief paramedic here with the Allen Fire Department. It's a suburb just about 25 miles north of Dallas. We have about 120 firefighter paramedics and about 150 police officers. So about six years ago, we began implementing the alert process, the alert training for all of our personnel for active attack, integrated response, and on May 6th of 2023, we had a mass shooting at our Allen Premium Outlets. It's an outdoor venue with about 50 acres. Someone opened fire there and I responded to the scene. I've been here for about 24 years, responsible for EMS training, I'm responsible for fire training, and I'm also the emergency management coordinator. So, I appreciate the opportunity to be here. Thank you.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:08:56*

Thank you so much, Danny, and thank you to all of you. I'm really looking forward to this conversation. For those that may have joined a little bit late, please use the Q&A function at the bottom of the screen

to add any questions that you may have. I'd love to be able to incorporate those as we're having our conversation. With that, I'd really like to set the stage for the audience here because we have a multidisciplinary audience. And so, Greg, I'd like to turn to you and to help orient the audience, and maybe at a 20,000-foot view. Can you really describe the role of an emergency manager and what they play when it comes to pre-incident planning and preparation?

## **Greg Babst**

00:09:33

Yes, ma'am. Thank you, again. From the emergency management side of the house, again, this office I would say is the coordination piece. That's what the emergency operation center is able to do. Big picture, situational awareness. We host, at least in this county, are the emergency operation plan for the county. I have 16 jurisdictions, and underneath those 16 jurisdictions, they all write off on our emergency operations plan. So, it is our job within this office to make sure that those plans to include active shooter are all being followed through, they're being trained on, being reviewed every five years in the state requirements here in the state of Texas.

But our team here has looked at things a little different and not just said, "Hey, let's look at these cookie-cutter stamp plans that meet state requirements," but, Do they make sense? And if they don't make sense, how do we write them so that they do make sense? And how do we put something underneath them? Do we have to put some sort of standard operating procedure that goes along the lines with this? And then do we train on that? And we found that that's more beneficial.

So we're in charge of monitoring those plans, updating those plans, and then setting up these tabletop exercises, alert trainings, overseeing them, reviewing them on a constant basis with the team that I have here. And then they give us feedback. So again, those after-action reports are critical, those reviews of those trainings that we host. And then we take those that we hope to then put into a full-scale exercise. And once we run that full-scale exercise, everyone gets, I would say, a little on edge when you say exercise or test them on their capabilities. But here in Fort Bend County, we've restructured that and we're saying, "Hey, it's okay. We'd rather fail here."

So let's go into this exercise, let's be prepared. Let's test our capabilities, and if we fail, hey, rinse, repeat. Let's find out those gaps and let's fix them. And then again, adjust those SOPs as needed, as those standard operating procedures, to meet that criteria. So from emergency management perspective, again, lots of coordination, lots of situational awareness, and then pumping that information out from that higher level to all of these multidisciplines and multi-jurisdictions for them to understand, "Hey, this is where we all are at and we all need to play on this on the same field at times when it comes to active shooter." And then how do we do that? Especially, when it comes to communications.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:12:11*

Great. And as you're even referring to emergency management is, human-made disasters, but it's also those natural disasters. And so you're able to implant or work on all of those promising practices, all of those lessons learned to really help the collective community. And so, I think there's so much value with that. So Angie, I'd like to go to you next and really when we're thinking. I know you have not only the local work that you've been able to do, but then also the national work. And so, I know you teased a little bit about the National Mass Violence Center and being the director of preparedness. I don't know, maybe if you just describe a little bit more about what you all, your role with emergency management in particular. And if you want to throw in some resources, I think that could also be helpful there as well.

## **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:12:54*

Yes, absolutely. I know I couldn't help myself earlier. Sorry, I finally was like, "I have to wait." So the National Mass Violence Center, as I mentioned, one of our main components outside of the response side is the preparedness division. So some people know it as ICP TTA, which is the long version of preparedness. It's Improving Community Preparedness through Training and Technical Assistance. But what we do through that division, it was born out of all of those lessons learned that I just talked about, literally every single community that we go into. On the response side, something is mentioned about how prepared either they were for an incident or how prepared they were not for an incident. So they always say things such as, "If only we had this or that, if only we had in those lessons learned and in those barriers that came up."

But then also on the other side too, a lot of communities will say, "It went really smoothly because we were prepared, because we had already done those joint training exercises together, or we had built those partnerships." So what the preparedness vision really does is go into any level within a city, community, county, state level, and basically provide that training and technical assistance to help communities to be able to be more prepared. So what that looks like in directly with emergency managers, it really depends on where they're already starting. Most I would say, I don't want to say all, but I would say most emergency managers throughout the country have a plan. That's your job. You're going to have a good plan and have a plan, even if it's not directly for mass violence, what to do for mass casualties, for natural disasters, for other major community-wide incidences that could occur.

So one of the things that we can do if they don't have one specific to mass violence is provide consultation and trainings to embed mass violence into the plan. But oftentimes, even if there is a mass violence plan, one major lens that we can bring is to help build victim services into that plan. So in talking to emergency managers and law enforcement and other entities across the country, one thing that people often say is, "We're really good at the initial disaster." We're good at stopping the disaster, apprehending the perpetrator, whatever those initial pieces are. But what a lot of communities that haven't been through mass violence don't understand is that's only one tiny piece of the iceberg. So really after that, you have victim services that are built into that initial response from second one that the incident happens, all the way up through weekdays, weeks, months and years later.

So what we can help with is figure out how to build victim services into the incident command post, into the EOC, into how to build up that family assistance center and have that translate into a resiliency center and just provide our lessons that we've learned and expertise around that. And that can look like literally just reading over plans and providing some expertise. We have a whole host of consultants who are emergency managers, law enforcement, different areas of leadership that have been through this before, but then we also can go, "Oh, that's kind of a—" We can just read and do a couple of small things all the way up to literally coming in and sitting down with you and writing the plan alongside you, understanding that you have other jobs and you're very busy and you probably don't have time built into your daily tasks to have a whole another piece added on there, especially in communities that have a lot of other emergency management needs going on there.

And then trainings, we can provide a whole area of pieces. I'll put our website on here that has a lot of those, but really our role is to just meet you where you are as a community. And I said the cities, communities, all of that. We also have worked with school districts, with hospital systems, pretty much with any level that would like assistance. And we can meet you there and provide whatever assistance we can, and it's free because it's through the Office of Victims of Crime. So it's already funded.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:17:11*

And real quick as a follow-up, Angie, does that also include private sector that you can work with? I know you referenced hospitals, but can you also work with businesses and organizations that need assistance on that front?

### **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:17:22*

That is a really great question. We have not had requests very often for private sector, but I don't see why we couldn't. I mean, if it's contributing to the community. What we probably would do in that case is bring in more of the overall community, which I'll talk about a little later. But it's very helpful to have all the entities at the table, and that can sometimes be helpful for us as an outside person to come in and help to compile, bring all the people together. So yeah, I don't see why we couldn't. We probably though would just involve more of the broader community as well.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:17:56*

Great. Thank you. So Danny, before we drill in, I'd like to see is anything else you want to add when we talk about the value of emergency management?

### **Daniel Williams**

*00:18:05*

Yeah. And I'm in the state of Texas as well, like Greg mentioned. So we have a five-year emergency plan, and that provides that really broad overview of what all of those different annexes and what each department is going to do, how it's going to be provided and implemented. But I think it's really

important to understand the freedom that you're going to be able to operate in as emergency management with your local municipality as far as what you're going to be expected to do, not just what's written down in the book, but there's so many different things as Angie was talking about, one of the main ones being victim services. They became my best friends both at the state level and the federal level offering those resources and things that I didn't know that I even needed. And so you have to be able to see. Thankfully in our municipality, our city management elected officials were very, very generous as far as us helping with those months and months and months after the incident.

Our incident was over in an hour, the whole thing. I took care of victims for 10 or 11 months. And so, being able to know what your capabilities like, talking with that city management, your elected officials or your supervisors like, "Hey, what all are we going to be allowed to do? What's going to be our budget? What are we going to be able to expend on this incident?" And so, knowing what your specific roles and responsibilities are and what they will be. And become very good friends with anybody involved in victim services, they will be your best friends.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:19:40*

What's so interesting about what you're referencing, Danny, there is collaboration, right? And also recognizing that from an emergency management, you don't necessarily do everything. And that ties back to what Greg was saying is part of it is pulling everyone together. And so I think that that piece is a really good segue into. . . Literally, the next couple of minutes, I'd really like to focus in on that coordination and all that collaboration. And so I'm going to ask another basic question. And so Greg, I'm going to come to you, who really should be involved when we're talking about pre-incident planning and coordination? Is it just the emergency manager? Are we just having law enforcement? Who should be at the table? And again, I recognize it's basic, but I want to make sure we've got that foundation before we drill in some more.

### **Greg Babst**

*00:20:26*

Again, you can't build this stuff in a box, right? Not even when you're building out training, leading up to a functional exercise or full-scale exercise, or just when it comes to a tabletop. Never build anything in a box. We build on a community approach here within our emergency operation center, and that's the way we push things. So again, it's that coordination piece I would say. And it goes before that, I would even say, and it's getting out and meeting everyone. Hosting those committees, bringing in committees when you're building out this planning workshop to build out to some sort of training or some sort of exercise on a consistent basis so that it's not the first time you're meeting when something goes into action. And like Danny said, the thing happened and it only took an hour for the response, but the coordination piece on the backend of all that takes years.

And just like in anything in emergency management, when it comes to all hazards. The response, we know how to do that, it happens quickly. And if we go into it and the operators operate, and then we do it and we coordinate and we get it done, it's that after effect, that ripple effect, or recovery effect that

takes months, years, long-term recovery to get everything back to a real stable state. And who knows if you can even really get back to a stable state, but what's the new state look like? And it's again, coordinating, communicating all beforehand. And then when you go into this planning concept of if you're going to build into an exercise or to a drill or however you want to explain it, it's bringing everybody. . . I would say, to the stakeholders, to the table first, what's the goal? You set the goal. And then once the goal's there, you set those objectives.

And so then once you set those objectives, you set committees up with all these players that would be involved in that committee. And then get them to come up with those objectives, write those objectives, and then write up your exercise plan. And then everybody has stake in the game. And it's amazing, even in emergency management, you think you know it all, because you see it all, and you coordinate it all. But man, when you start putting these committees together and all these highly intelligent people in their field start bringing up things and you're like, "I would've never thought about that. I didn't think about that." And so again, it gets you involved and gets you to understand that the complexity in all of this, especially when it comes to active shooter as it can be quick at times when the response is, but the after effect or the ripple effect, you take time.

So again, coordination, whole community effect and then bringing those committees together and communicating well. And then, I would say, the hardest thing in this is keeping it, if you're going to build into an exercise, is getting people to understand is not to release this information when you're going to do the exercise. Because if you leak it and what you're going to do and people get these objectives out, then it just destroys things and it's almost like cheating. So you really want to test those capabilities, be able to hold that information. Once those committees get that stuff in and set those objectives, but building into committees.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:23:44*

Thank you. And you're talking a lot about bringing all of the stakeholders together, all of those relevant parties, but sometimes some people just don't want to come to the table. And so, Angie, I want to turn to you. How could an emergency manager or a team bring it, make sure that they have the relevant people there, and how do you deal with maybe a little bit of a reluctant stakeholder? So maybe the local municipality doesn't want to come to the table, maybe it's the local rescue. How do you work through that process to get them to the table?

## **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:24:19*

That's a really great question, and I will say, Nazmia, you say sometimes that happens, it often happens. At least with one, and there's multiple different reasons for that. I'll say, the first reason that often can happen, and I'll get into what you do about it. But one of the reasons is no one wants to think that this is going to happen in their community, right? I feel like in the past, I would say decade, but even more in the past few years, we have come a long way in that realm. I would say, when our center started in 2017, there was a lot more of just that general sense of, "But that won't happen here. I know that

happens, but our community is safe and our community is okay.” I mean, that’s a healthy coping mechanism, right? We don’t want to think that that’s going to happen, if something like that will happen in our community.

I think we have come a long way now where people are starting to understand that it could. I mean, we often say when it happens and not if it happens. And then if it never does, that’s great, then I’m wrong and that your community’s better off for that. So, people have gotten better. However, even then oftentimes people either feel like they have it like, “I don’t need help because we already have the resources,” and people don’t always know what they don’t know. So like a community we just recently worked with, they said, “Every year.” And a lot of people say this, “We do an update on our emergency management plan every single year,” or law enforcement will say, “We do these exercises and we are a part of it.” And that’s phenomenal, and that means they’re already starting way ahead of some other communities. The problem is if they don’t know what victim services need to be included or they don’t know some of those unique things that happen with mass violence, it’s very different than natural disaster.

Well, I don’t want to say very different. There are some unique aspects beyond natural disaster, beyond mass casualties because it does impact the whole community. So you’ve got that whole-community piece and you oftentimes, if the perpetrator is living, you now have a court system and you have a federal trial and all other things that are just very different than some other disasters. So if you can get past those pieces, and I think a couple ways to get past that, and it really doesn’t matter who it is that isn’t coming to the table, you would take these same approaches. I think one is getting that buy-in, and a lot of times that buy-in can happen by, like, people. So, law enforcement really likes hearing from other law enforcement officers, emergency managers like hearing from emergency managers. I’m a clinical psychologist, I’m sure I’m guilty of it. That if a clinical psychologist is telling me the needs of victims after, I probably will, my ears will get a little bigger and I’ll listen because they understand where I’m coming from. And then also people who have been through it. So.

I think a couple of the really big pieces are that’s where sometimes bringing us in or anyone outside of the community in to have a buy-in meeting, bringing everyone together and talk about, this is what happened in our community, from a like person. An emergency manager saying, “In our community, we thought we had it. We thought we were set, and then here’s what we found out.” Or law enforcement, Chief Mullen was our chief during our incident in Charleston. And he talks all the time about lessons learned. We were really good at what we were really good at, but here’s what we didn’t know.

So I think calling on those other resources and calling on other communities who have been through it and maybe are similar in either the background of the professionals or the setting, another large city that’s been through it, another small town, somewhere similar, you need to get that buy in. And that buy-in is really, really important. And like Greg was saying, that buy-in from all the entities. So, you can have one group coming forward and screaming from the rooftop saying, “We need this,” but unless you have the other key leadership components in your community there, it’s not going to go very far. You’ve got to have everyone bought in together and build up that momentum and then the work really gets done.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

00:28:40

Great. Thank you. Actually, all three of you have talked about at various points, it's also not just bringing the law enforcement to the table, but it's thinking about who you have from the agency, right? And so you were talking Angie, victim advocates, right? But do you have your PIO, your public information officer at the table, and are you considering dispatch and call takers? So I really like this whole-of-community approach. And before we get out of this area, move into training, Danny, I'd like to really just turn to you to talk a little bit about some of the agreements that you should have in place as part of agreements, MOUs, MOAs, what should you have in place as part of your pre-incident planning?

## **Daniel Williams**

00:29:23

Sure. And I never want to ever present this as, "Look at what we did or that you need to do it this way," or that we had everything figured out. We did a lot of training. The incident itself, it went as well as could be expected. We had officers that responded very quickly, everyone was transported in less than an hour. That's due to a lot of the training that we had. But the after effect, the ripple effect like they were talking about, you got to understand that there's no amount of paperwork or agreement that is going to make this work. Just the paperwork, just the agreements. I think more important than that is the relationships prior to both with internal city departments between FD, PD, emergency management, elected officials, our parks department, they're the ones who set up the family assistance center. We have talked through how they were going to be the group that did reunification and housing shelters and victims and all of those kinds of things.

And so we had worked with them for months and months and years and years to develop those relationships, both internal and external. So the city in which we work, the teams work together really well. One of the things that we have consistently preached, that we've consistently talked about, is not so much what group is going to be in charge of this, more so what group is going to be responsible for what things. We've all been on local state, federal scenes where egos can get in the way about who's in charge. And if you have all of that worked out beforehand where your local-level people, they're not in it to be in charge of anything. They know what they're responsible for, they know what we're taking care of. In hearing from FBI and hearing from DPS, they said that the incident, the after effect was so much smoother than a lot of the incidents that they've been involved in.

And they could tell that we've worked, together the relationships, that it wasn't one of these contests about who was in charge. So it's very important to have agreements about internally who's going to be responsible for A, B, and C. Now, of course, we have mutual aid agreements with our neighboring cities. Those relationships go a long way on how people are going to respond when there's an incident in your city. How you've gotten along in the past, how you've treated each other, how you've worked with each other, how you've trained with each other. So the understandings between departments and local cities, I mean, it is so important. It is so imperative to develop positive working relationships before the day of

the incident. If you expect to show up the day of the incident and everybody's just going to listen to you, man, that's not going to work. That's poor planning. So develop those relationships beforehand, and it's just the benefits from that are just so much more than just showing up and hoping for the best.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:32:32*

And really thinking about those relationships, you're right, there was an emergency manager from the Pacific Northwest that I was talking with, and he was like, "You should not only know the responders and the stakeholders, but you should also know how they like their coffee," right? So it's really getting to know each other so that you're not on the scene, whether it's a human-made disaster, whether we're talking a natural, and you're trying to figure out who each other are, right, especially at that local level. So I think, I'd like to now switch a little bit and talk a little bit about training and exercises. And so, maybe I'd like each of you, if you could just say a little bit about what strategies should agencies communities be considering from a training perspective? I'll go with Angie and then Greg and then Danny, how about that?

### **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:33:22*

Yes, and I'm going to steal that, Nazmia, about how they like their coffee because that's so true from the previous thing, you don't want to be the night of an incident saying that. So for the training, I'm sure this is probably what Daniel and Greg might've said too, so sorry I had to go first. But that really doing a key piece is doing those trainings together. So all organizations are pretty good at their trainings, are very good at their trainings. You're good at your job, you're good at what you do. I think cross-training and learning what other people do and training, doing those joint training exercises together. And I think that's extremely, extremely important. Not only to know how you're collaborating together, so doing a joint training and so that emergency management, law enforcement, Fire, EMS, the school system, everyone can see what would happen together, but also having even the people there doing tabletops and doing practice exercises that might not be super active at every stage, but so they can see how it would play out among other people as well.

So really having those training sessions together. And if you make mistakes or if you're learning that there's gaps or you don't know certain things, that's even better because then you learn those things and you know what to improve upon in those trainings. So those like together but then also knowing what each other does. I think we're very good at knowing. . . We're not very good, but we're often good at knowing what people do on a normal day-to-day basis. We're not necessarily good at knowing what we would do in this crisis situation and how everyone would respond and what their roles would be because different roles come into play. What you'll be doing, and I tend to say the night, but that's just because they often occur at night. But what you're doing the night of an incident might not be your normal role of what you would be doing, but when a mass violence incident is not occurring.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

00:35:18

Thank you. Greg?

## **Greg Babst**

00:35:20

Yeah. Again, just to lead on that, first thing I'd like to say, to get buy-in, especially when you go into a training or an exercise of something like this, at least from the emergency operation center or emergency management planner, you've got a lot of leverage when it comes to grants. So, we use a lot of grant money to bring in resources, and then we have those resources that we offer up for these agencies to use during training. And then again, they get to use these resources and they don't have to maintain these resources, but then they're capable and then they know what we have in our bank. And so if something like this happens, I know that they can request it and we can go out. So again, I leverage the grant system from FEMA bringing in those or other agencies, bringing in those federal dollars to be able to buy this equipment, to be able to host it out to these jurisdictions.

And then they don't have to do the legwork or anything like that for that grant funding because it does take a lot of work to get that stuff, to roll it into a jurisdiction too. So, we use a lot of grant funds and we leverage that, of having a mass amount of resources for them to be able to leverage that. Second thing, feed people. If you want them to come, right? What we do is when we're going to hold a big exercise or something like that, again, we build our partnerships again with our stakeholders or that are on the outside that would be bringing stuff into an incident to help support that as donations or anything like that. So that helps with donation management, what would be needed provided. But the cool thing is they get to play a part in this. So again, they bring in barbecue trucks and hamburger trucks and food trucks and all this wonderful stuff that you're going to host for this training, for this large-scale exercise.

And you get to test that phase of, what's that supply chain look like, but also you're going to feed everybody that's there. And fed people are happy people, and they're going to come to training, especially if they got a free meal there. So, we leverage that quite a bit here to get people to be involved in that training. And then, I would say, that the big piece in this, when you go into training. A commander or somebody in charge, is obviously going to be probably one of the not first on scene when it comes to an active shooter or something like that. So, it's good for those commanders and those chiefs to understand, "All right, what's our low-level people, when they're first on scene, what are they going to do? Do they have the right training? Can they set up commands so that when I come in, it's a good changeover?"

They've got stuff under control and it's not just mass chaos walking into that. So one thing that we leveraged in one of our trainings that we did here, a full-scale exercise into an active shooter, is beforehand, you want to set people up for success. So, we held a tabletop that was like what we were going to do for the exercise, but we did it in two phases. We held the tabletop for all the chiefs and all the commanders, and they came in, gave them the scenario, how you going to run that? Gave them modules and they explained stuff out, and obviously, they do very well. Now we have them sit in the

back and we have the newbies come in. And we give them the same scenario, and we listen to their response and how they're going to react. And it's interesting to see without that level of wisdom and experience of how they're going to react and what they're going to do and what their priorities are.

And so now their commanders and their chiefs can say, "Okay, now I know what to expect. And maybe I need to do some lower-level training to get them to know what command looks like and what I expect from them if they have to set up a scene, especially as quick as an active shooter can be and the mass amount of resources they're going to pile into that situation." So another good training topic that we've done here and using to help leverage that stuff. And then when you're building an exercise, I mentioned it right now, you don't want to build up to see people fail. So, it's get that education out there, get them to understand what those SOPs are that they need to study, get that alert training, schedule some stuff up, throw a tabletop, throw a symposium, maybe do a quick functional, and now give a full-scale exercise.

And so, now they're a little bit more comfortable going into this. And then you've built up. . . It's not cheating, you've built them up, you've got them ready for that exercise. And so now, you go into that exercise. Now realistically you can say, all right, these are some gaps because we trained on this before we got here, and they knew what they were supposed to do. So now, how do we fix that? And then, again, like the circle of the wheel, we just rinse and repeat and we keep evaluating. So that's some of the stuff we're doing here in Fort Bend County.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:40:02*

That is great. And there were so many good pieces in terms that are tied in also with the recommendations from the Critical Incident Review report about providing awareness to your entire agency on incident command, which you're doing, talking about the various tabletops and talking about how you built it up. One really exciting project that the COPS Office is working on, we're partnering with the National Tactical Officers Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police to develop training on exactly what you're talking about, is managing that incident command management of an active threat situation. So, more to come about that in 2025, but that's great. Danny? Okay, so I'm going to ask you to talk a little bit about the training and then I've got a follow-up question for you, so I'm giving you a heads-up now.

## **Daniel Williams**

*00:40:48*

Sure, absolutely. So, one of the things that we wanted to do after we've done all of our alert air classes is we wanted to set up realistic training. And what I mean by realistic—I've been in the fire service quite a while where we've done the large-scale scenarios, where when we say realistic, that focuses in on moulage and it focuses in on so many of those things that we think are important. When in reality we need to focus in on the team-based, micro-based training. We've seen in military applications, we just came back from a large military model and simulation conference, and that's some of the things that the

military focuses in on is team-based, group-based training to be put into place in a larger-scale environment. And so, when we did our larger-scale exercises, we didn't just do one exercise because that's what I've been accustomed to my entire career.

We have one big day, most of the people end up in staging, never get utilized, and everybody forgets that they're even there and they sit there for a few hours and don't really get a chance to participate. So we did three days, two sessions per day where every single one of our firefighters and every single one of our police officers went through an active attack scenario with actors, with victims. That way every single person was there. After our incident that was what all of our personnel said they reverted back to, is what we covered on those simulation days where all of them got to train. Instead of it just being the single checkbox event where we say, "Yeah, we trained everybody." When most of the time that misses most of your organization.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:42:28*

Thank you for that. And before I say my follow-up question, we are going to be transitioning shortly to our live Q&A with the audience. So please start to put your questions in the Q&A function so we can get those prepped. But Danny, I know this webinar really focused on the pre-incident planning and preparation, but I'd like to give you just a little bit of time based on your experience as the incident commander during the mass violence incident at Allen, Texas. What considerations would you like to share with those that are listening to this that you think that are really helpful, a strategy that they should take back?

### **Daniel Williams**

*00:43:05*

Yeah, so a lot, Greg, talked about the incident is quick and we handle that. That's the part that we're typically really good at. The things that I didn't know, the things that I never had any idea that I didn't know. First off, don't be afraid to admit that you don't know what you don't know, right? Whenever I finally was able to link up with victim services with FBI, DPS, IDPS, I told them, I said, "Look, this is my first mass shooting. I know that you all have been on a plethora of these, so please help me." So, be humble enough to ask for help. That's the first thing. I know we go into a lot of these situations with our guards up and we want to be the person in charge. Look, don't let pride be your downfall on this. Be humble enough to ask for help.

Get connected quickly with your victim services, both at the state and federal level. Second, get connected with the volunteer groups who are already going to be there. Initially, in our instance, we had 5,000 people there on site the day of the incident. So, how does the fire department take care of 5,000 people? You can't. How does the police department or emergency management, like you just can't. We had people whose vehicles were locked up, they couldn't get home. You have Red Cross there, you have the Salvation Army there. You have all of these people with very quick access to vetting processes and

procedures and very quick access to cash. So they gave them debit cards so these individuals could get home. So that they could find their way home, so that they could get an Uber, so that they could go eat because their cars are locked up for two days as part of the evidence.

So get together with your NGOs, get together with those volunteer agencies who literally just show up there to hand out money and take some of that off of your plate, get linked in, like I said, with your victim services very quickly. And it was pretty overwhelming a couple of days in not having realized the assistance that those other entities could provide me. Once I was connected with those groups and said, "Look, what are some pitfalls? What are some things that you've seen in other cities?" What are some things that I need to watch out for? What are some things that I need to have done on Monday by this date, by this time, by Tuesday? And so, we start setting out a timeline. And so getting together with those individuals, asking for help, asking for assistance, it's invaluable. So do not be afraid to humble yourself and ask for help and realize that there's a lot of things you don't know that these other people do.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:45:39*

Thank you so much for sharing that. And I have so many more questions for all of you, but I want to get to some of the questions from the group. And so I'm going to go through them. If we have some time, I'll add some more. But Greg, the first one is actually for you: Do you currently utilize the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation program method when you're beginning to set up a reoccurring preparedness exercise with multiple agencies?

### **Greg Babst**

*00:46:04*

Yes. We use that as a model, right? And I will say that very broadly, it's a good model, but there's a lot of stuff that's missing in that just on the finite stuff because you never. . . It's a good model depending on the hazard building out, there's a lot of intricacies that go in there, but we do use the HSEEP model. We follow it, but we finite it in that whole community approach, especially when it comes to the evaluations and building out those objectives. We do stuff a little bit different, but yes, as a model. Yes.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:46:43*

Great. Thank you. Angie, I'm going to combine two questions and I'm going to come to you from a funding and a resource perspective. So when starting this, what avenues of funding for the reoccurring exercises is there available out there? And at the same time for training broadly. So I'll look to you first, Angie, and then Greg or Danny, if you have other thoughts on this, feel free to add.

## **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:47:08*

Yeah, that's a great question. So on the preparedness side, so before an incident has happened, there is our funding. So through the National Mass Violence Center, we're able to provide funding for training or provide, not funding to you for training, but able to provide trainings. We have a host of different consultants, like said, and consultant groups. And we also have 19 partner organizations including IAEM for emergency managers, IACP, National Fallen Firefighter Foundation, a lot of different agencies that we contract with and can come in and provide trainings on the preparedness side. And then also, I would say, look towards other local and national projects within that on the response side. So once an incident has occurred, there's funding called the AEAP funding, and that is directly through the Office of Victims of Crime and it flows down through the state victim assistance. So you're already receiving state compensation and victim assistance for victimization, but this is an additional amount of funds that come to your community in order to help.

It's really to directly help victims, but there are ways to build in trainings for that, especially trainings as they will continue to help victims and the community and first responders heal following an incident. Obviously, once you've received a training, hopefully you're not just forgetting it so that it also is helping you to prepare for potential future instances that occur. And that's where a lot of our requests are coming at this point. I think almost every community that we have responded to and are working with, they're now really building up trainings and really starting to build up preparedness for if it were to happen again, and maybe not even in their very close community, but in their extended community or a state if it were to occur again. Because often with those trainings, you are not going to be able to handle it within your own. Even a big city can't always handle it within their own jurisdiction. You have to call on those outside resources and statewide resources.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:49:20*

Thank you. Greg, do you have any additional resources you want to flag in either of those spaces?

## **Greg Babst**

*00:49:27*

Again, FEMA's got the prep tool kit, it's a good thing to jump onto and use. It's a free tool. It does take a little bit of learning that system and getting access into that system, but once you're in it, it's a great tool. And then, FEMA's got its national exercise program, and usually it hosts every year a plethora of exercises. They can come out and help support and give contract support during those exercises too, free of charge. So, all you got to do is put in an application. We did that. We did that for a communications drill here in the EOC two years ago, and very successful and free of charge.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:50:05*

Thank you. Danny, anything else to add on this topic on funding and resources?

## **Daniel Williams**

*00:50:10*

Nothing to add. They've covered it.

## **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:50:11*

Okay. Okay. The only other thing I'll add, I will talk a little bit more at the very end, but the COPS Office also provides no-cost training and technical assistance. So you could also reach out to us, and if it's something that's outside of our scope, we can always connect you with these other resources as well. So the next question is, and I'm just going to throw it out and see who would like to take this, is what resources are available to help get buy-in from a smaller community such as a university? How do I market prevention and training to such an organization? So, anyone want to take that question?

## **Angela Moreland-Johnson**

*00:50:47*

Absolutely. So we actually, out of one of the major things that we're working through right now within the Mass Violence Center is we have an annex that we've put together, which is, it's like a 150-page document that literally can help emergency managers and help communities as a whole to be able to literally walk through the 16 best practices that we outline as needed or as recommended to be a part of an emergency management plan to incorporate those victim services pieces. So the annex really just walks you through all of those. We are in the process of building out annexes for. . . We're calling them special considerations. So basically, for subsets, and the university piece is one that has been developed through the university caucus of IAEM, Vanessa Flores, and many other. I'm just closest with her. That doesn't mean that she's the only one doing this; there's a lot of people, she's our liaison, but who have been working on that caucus. They have really built out, already completed a couple of modules that universities can take that basically take those questions and recommendations for what to build into the plan. And it has specifics for universities. So, that is not on our website yet. We actually just had a meeting with them this week and they requested we put it up there. So it will be up there, but you can. . . I will figure out, I can get to, Nazmia, and get you that if you're interested.

Also, through the IAEM website, I think you can get to that university caucus as well. So that's specific to universities right now. So I'm glad you asked about that one because that one's more on its way. A couple of areas that we're working on the conference that I'm actually at right now, which is why I'm sitting outside, is the OVC Indian Nations Conference and we're trying to build out special considerations for Indian country right now.

And then there are several other types of special considerations for K through 12 schools, for state levels. So forthcoming in the next couple of years, our plan is to have some very specific resources for those universities. And then the second part of your question about how to get that buy-in, I think it's the same as what we are talking about but just on the university level. The bad news is that mass violence incidents have happened at a lot of universities. I don't want to say good news, because there's no good news with mass violence, but the one piece that we can bring to this is that because there are

many universities who have experience with this, there is a lot of expertise and people who have been through it, whether it's strengths or weaknesses of what happened in the response. So, I would really recommend reaching out to some of those universities because that can be helpful for the buy-in, or we can help you to connect you with those.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:53:37*

Great, thank you. Yes, please.

### **Greg Babst**

*00:53:42*

Just a little add in on that, there's a lot of these universities too that have internships. And when they have those internships, we bring those interns into here and bring them in for a couple of months, get them to work through emergency management, especially when it comes to those exercises. So, they're students and then helping the university that they're at. And usually, they're on a bunch of those committees too. And so, it's a really good leveraging gap to bring in those interns, and then those interns put you into all these different types of committees and whatnot and pull that university in to help support that.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:54:15*

That's great. That's great. Thank you both so much. So we've got just about two to three minutes left and I've got two questions. So I'm going to ask for condensed or abbreviated responses. First one actually, I think is a really clear one. I'm going to go to you, Greg, and it's really about the military. And so the question is, what experience and/or openness exists to train alongside military assets to refine enhanced response techniques? How are you addressing the perishable aspects of training? So, I'm going to quickly go to you to that one, and then I will open up the other one.

### **Greg Babst**

*00:54:49*

All right. From a military standpoint, I would say, it's a hard question. I brought my military experience into emergency management here, and a lot of the way the military trains. Again, finding all levels of types of training and education to me so that everybody can understand either if it's touch, see, feel, what's that look like? Do you need to do a sandbox? Do people need to walk through it? Are people able to listen or you hand them something? So again, the military gives all those different types of education purposes, and we've implemented a lot of those. And I've put those into play here as we've built out training and exercise.

But I would say to coordinate, especially when it comes to active shooter, that's hard I would say. Because if you're calling in a DOD element for that, that's a scary situation and almost pretty robust. Actually, here at the Emergency Operations Center, the Texas State Guard and the National Guard train

in our Emergency Operations Center, and they drill here. I get to know that leadership, I get to know their processes, and then we work through those communications as stuff is needed. So, I bring in those drills and we watch them work, and then they, again, building that community relationship.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:56:21*

Perfect. Thank you so much. And as we're wrapping up, I think two things I would say is, the perishable skills. It's that constant training. It's keeping that in mind. It's not saying that you've given the training 10 years ago, and that should be good. As an example, in our report, we reference that law enforcement and community should be going through active shooter training at least on an annual basis. So eight hours of training broken out as needed, but that is one of the things that we recommend. So I think that does get to the perishable skills piece.

Quickly, I'll come to you, Danny. I just want to add one thing. We did have a question around school resource officers working beneficial to emergency management and deterring mass violence. And I would just say as a broad scope around law enforcement, whether you have SRO or excuse me, school resource officers, or you have a school-based law enforcement. The most important thing in terms is making sure that they're trained, that you're taking into account this pre-incident planning, and that is really what it's going to come down to when it comes to the preparation.

It's not just putting an officer in, whether they're a school resource officer, school-based law enforcement, without having the training, and all the necessary pieces that we just discussed. So, I would add that piece there. Danny, did you want to add something in quickly before we wrap up?

### **Daniel Williams**

*00:57:43*

Yes. I was going to say, for your personnel, the most important thing that you can do prior to, during, and after is providing for their mental health, creating an environment where that is the norm. I had some of our personnel asking before I had even arrived here at Central Fire Station for the emergency management elected officials component saying, "When is our debrief going to occur?" Because we've had that atmosphere, that environment where that's the norm, and so we've paid for that. We received blanket, generic billings, and we've just paid for those individuals, their families, neighboring departments that were responding to the incident. So you cannot invest too much money in the mental health of your personnel. I mean, when you try to put a price tag on it, it's invaluable. Thankfully, we haven't lost a single firefighter, police officer, dispatcher, city employee to any causes, and so I'm just thankful that they were willing to reach out for that mental health.

### **Nazmia Comrie**

*00:58:46*

Thank you so much, Danny, for sharing that. Our hearts are with your community and all the communities impacted by mass violence, and really thank you to all of our panelists for sharing. I know there was so much information to condense in this one hour time period. I also want to thank all the

audience that are here that have been active. What I just quickly want to say before we wrap up is these are some resources. There's some resources in the chat. Please feel free to reach out if you have questions, if you want to connect. As the panelists were saying, you don't have to do this alone within your community, and you don't have to do this alone without this assistance. So, feel free to reach out. Thank you for everything you are doing to keep our community safe, and we look forward to you joining our next webinar in February. More details to come on that. Thank you and have a great day.