

Family Assistance Center Annex

ESF Coordinator

Director of Social Services

Primary Agencies

Department of Social Services
American Red Cross
Emergency Management

Secondary/Support Agencies

Department of Criminal Justice Services
Red Cross
Law enforcement (security for shelter or evacuation)
Salvation Army
Public Health
Private Sector

Introduction

Purpose:

In wake of an incident that has resulted in mass casualties, it is important to have a plan in place to assist individuals seeking information, manage the expected surge of donations /volunteers, and media inquiries. It is critical that the community be prepared to handle this type of sensitive situation with caution and care. The plan should support the transition to a state managed Family Assistance Center (FAC), if necessary, and be seamless and efficient. Providing assistance to victims and family members that are dealing with reunification or loss of a loved one can be challenging. In order to provide the best assistance, partnership and collaboration from a variety of government and non-government organizations will occur. VDEM recommends incorporating the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) in the FAC plan in order to facilitate the expected communication with various levels of government.

Situation:

The Family Assistance Center (FAC) provides a centralized location where a seamless service delivery system built on multi-agency coordination will result in the effective dissemination of information and assistance to all impacted families. A FAC is the management and organizational framework to handle the victims dealing with an incident of mass casualties. The FAC offers counseling and information on the current situation in a safe and secure location.

Scope:

This plan pertains to an incident that results in mass casualties and/or missing individuals within a locality. It will be activated in the event of multiple actual or perceived deaths. The plan will be used in conjunction with the Commonwealth of Virginia Family Assistance Center plan to develop procedures to establish and manage a FAC and to transition to a state managed FAC, if one is authorized.

Activation of FAC:

A FAC will be established under a variety of mass-casualty situations. FAC operations should be activated as early into the event as possible. Preliminary services can be offered that include providing accurate information, meeting basic health and spiritual needs, and ensuring a safe place to gather. Once the incident commander or the operations section chief has determined the need for a FAC, consultation with other local support agencies will occur to determine:

- Severity of the incident
- Capabilities of the locality to include outside agreements and private business support
- Mobilization of resources
- Number of casualties

In addition to the event necessitating FAC services, normal day-to-day public resources may be affected by the incident, thus limiting local authorities' ability to adequately support the response without outside support. When the incident grows outside of the locality's capabilities/resources it is important to request outside assistance via mutual aid agreement or memorandums of understanding. Additional resources may be requested via the VEOC and Statewide Mutual Aid.

When a mass casualty incident occurs on property owned or operated by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the state will establish and operate the FAC. Local resources may be incorporated into the state FAC under procedures established in the Commonwealth of Virginia Family Assistance Center Plan.

Assumptions:

- The ratio of family members seeking assistance from the FAC to victims is estimated to be 10 to 1. Based on this ratio, if five casualties occur due to a human caused or natural disaster, an estimated 50 family members and victims could seek FAC services or information.
- The locality will notify the VEOC of the establishment of a FAC.
- The command structure for the FAC will follow the NIMS/ICS structure.
- FAC operations will require outside assistance and it is essential that all volunteers be credentialed to work the FAC.

- FAC service requirements may differ depending on type of incident.
- Family members who reside outside of the impacted area might travel to the incident site and may require accommodation; family members who choose to not travel to the site might need some of the same services offered to the family members at the scene.
- The locality will immediately contact Virginia Criminal Incident Compensation Fund and Department Criminal Justice Services to deploy when there are victims as required 44-146.19E Code of Virginia and as noted in the local EOP.
- In the event of a commercial aviation accident in your area, the National Transportation Safety Board will deploy to support on-scene coordination efforts, but will require local capabilities such as law enforcement for security and local medical examiner for victim identification to support their effort.
- If the incident occurs in a small jurisdiction, the individuals identified to provide services may themselves become victims and may not adequately be able to provide the level of care required.

Concept of Operations:

General:

Over the duration of the incident, the FAC will be modified both operationally and structurally/physically. The demands on the FAC will change as the response effort moves through its different stages. At the beginning of the response, there will be a surge of requests, calls, and clients to the FAC. The ability to accommodate this surge will require an analysis of the incident and the anticipated needs of the affected public. Once these needs have been identified, the appropriate FAC organizational structure can be determined and adequate staffing, facilities, and other resources can be acquired and operations implemented.

The FAC should be established to provide families with accurate and timely information, and the best way to do so is in the form of Family Briefings. These briefings can occur on a scheduled basis determined by the locality. Ensure that the families are receiving information periodically to prevent anger and frustration towards the response and recovery efforts.

Functions of the FAC:

- Collection of missing person reports and subsequent collection of ante mortem data, if necessary.
- Coordination with hospitals, shelters, and incident operations to identify missing persons
- Ensure availability of appropriate crisis counseling and spiritual support. Determine the needs of the families and victims and modify FAC operations to provide necessary services
- Maintain security from media and other individuals not requiring the services of the FAC

- Provide assistance to individuals dealing with the loss of life and subsequent destruction to the community
- Manage requests for sensitive information in such a way that does not hinder the purpose of having a FAC
- Ensure accurate information is being received in a timely and consistent manner and is only provided by qualified individuals who will control the information flow outside of the FAC
- Assist in meeting the mental, emotional, and physical needs of those individuals that have been affected by the incident.
- Facilitate information sharing between hospitals to expedite reunification of loved ones

Site Selection:

A FAC will function at its best when the chosen facility or site can be secured from the media and the general public. It is important to provide a safe and secure environment for the victims' families, where they are provided accurate information while being offered services to cope with the incident.

Management Structure:

The FAC should be operated under the Incident Command System with the appointment of a FAC Director to serve as primary authority and decision maker to FAC operations. In addition to a FAC director, consider the appointment of Public Information Officer to conduct media briefings and ensure rumor control for the incident. Other important positions to consider when developing a staffing plan are liaison officer and safety officer.

FAC Director

- Oversees and manages of all FAC operations
- Ensures that all needs are being met inside the FAC to include those individuals providing the services
- Serves as the liaison to Emergency Operations Center and the Incident Commander
- Reports any significant issues to operations chief at the EOC

Public Information Officer (PIO)

- Coordinate with the FAC director to ensure that information is suitable to be shared with the media
- Serve as the spokesperson for the FAC and will conduct media briefings away from the site
- Responsible for rumor control and any media inquiries.

Liaison Officer

- Serve as point of contact in the FAC for agencies that are not present but are assisting in FAC operations
- Serves as point of contact for agencies interested in serving in the FAC
- Ensures all staff members have been vetted and credentialed by representing agency

Safety Officer

- Advises FAC director on operational health and safety
- Ensures ongoing assessment of the environment to continue to operate a safe and secure FAC

Services:

Primary Services:

- **FAC Security**
Provide safe secure environment from media and curiosity seekers. The FAC should be separate from the scene but close enough to provide site visits after the recovery effort has ceased. The media briefings should be held at a separate location from the FAC to ensure that families leaving the FAC will not have to share elevators or parking lots with media or the general population. Provide credentialing to all persons entering the FAC.
- **Reception Center**
Welcome and greeting of FAC clients with initial registration of their contact information, other family or next of kin (NOK) information, and preliminary gathering of information of the missing or deceased loved one. During this time, an overview of services to be provided is given and an assessment of current behavioral health or first aid needs is taken. In addition, the reception center will serve as a security checkpoint for those individuals who may be trying to gain access to the FAC with intentions other than reuniting with loves ones.
- **Family Briefings**
Should be conducted on a regular schedule even if no new information needs to be reported. These briefings become essential to developing a relationship with the families at the FAC. Ensure that accurate and timely information is disseminated
- **Crisis Counseling/Spiritual Care**
Assist family members, FAC staff, and volunteers in understanding and managing the full range of grief reactions. Provide interdenominational pastoral counseling and spiritual care for people of all faiths, who request it, and to serve on death notification teams. Ensure that individuals providing counseling services are not part of the affected population, as they may not be able to provide the best quality to care for the families.
- **Victim Advocates**
Provided to families to assist them in understanding the processes and agencies they will likely encounter and receive assistance from, and to address the needs of each specific family. Advocates will help families with their knowledge of the criminal justice system and in the process

of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner to include victim recovery, identification, and return of remains. These advocates will support families who may need to transport the descendant across state lines or to another country.

- **Death Notification**
Is the formal notification that a positive identification has been made on the NOK or loved one to the surviving victims and family members. The process of death notifications is highly sensitive and should be handled by individuals with experience in these areas.
- **Site Visits**
May be requested by the group or individual seeking answers to the incident or closure. It is important to provide visits to those requesting but to do so in a coordinated manner. Ensure the families and victims not view the site during evidence recovery or search and rescue operations. Also, ensure safety from the media and outside sources during the site visit.

Secondary Services:

- Child Care
- Adult Care (to be separate from the child care area)
- Assistance with death related paperwork (Funeral Services, dealing with life insurance, obtaining death certificates)
- Financial assistance (if the deceased was the head of household family may have difficulty paying bills)
- Assistance with basic needs (clothing, food, toiletries)

Roles and Responsibilities:

It is essential that services are provided by subject matter experts that have additional training and/or experience in a mass casualty event. All staff should be vetted and credentialed by the local agency that they are representing. Consider pre-identifying local staff that are trained and knowledgeable to support FAC operations.

Local Social Services

- Appoint a FAC manager
- Support training of FAC manager

Local Law Enforcement

- Provide site security
- Assist with the NOK notification

Safety and Security:

The family members, victims, and worker's safety and security will be a priority at the FAC. Credentialing will be conducted for all persons entering the FAC. The jurisdiction must ensure that those working in the FAC have the proper clearance to be present and working with a sensitive population.

Demobilization:

Planning for demobilization should begin upon activation. Demobilization can be done by scaling back services as they are no longer needed. For example having a staff of ante mortem interviewers can be scaled back and demobilized once all interviews have been conducted and data collected. Consider having one person capable of collecting ante mortem data on staff for the duration of the recovery process; often families will remember information that they may have forgotten during the interview. When considering closing the FAC ensure families are given local resources that can be helpful in their community such as victim advocates and behavioral health professionals.

Factors to consider when determining the closure of the FAC:

- Number of families or loved ones visiting the FAC each day
- Number of victims that remain unidentified
- Need for daily briefings (rapidly changing information)

Before deciding FAC operations will cease, the FAC director will ensure that all needs can and will be met outside of the FAC. Make sure that all persons coming to the FAC have been provided the appropriate resources to continue the process once operations have completed.

Plan Maintenance and Exercising:

This plan should be exercised and updated every four years to be consistent with the adoption and promulgation of the jurisdiction's Emergency Operations Plan. In addition, when the plan is exercised or activated the lessons learned should be incorporated and appropriate changes be made to this plan.

References:

- Code of Virginia, Title 44, Military and Emergency Laws, Chapter 3.2, Emergency Services and Disaster Law
- The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288, as amended
- Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996, Public Law 104-264, as amended
- Foreign Air Carrier Family Support Act of 1997, Public Law 105-148, as amended
- VDEM Family Assistance Center Plan