



A Guide For City-Led Response

Guide

**Strong Cities
Network**

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Acknowledgements

First published in 2018 as a Toolkit for Responding to a Terror Attack, the revised and expanded City-Led Response Guide addresses city-led responses to a broader range of threats, attacks, incidents and impacts of hate, polarisation and violent extremism. The Guide incorporates good practices, learnings and experiences shared by mayors, local government representatives and practitioners at Strong Cities [Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative](#) activities in [Helsinki](#) (Finland) in 2022, and [Denver](#) (Colorado, United States) and [Oslo](#) (Norway) in 2023; a 2022 workshop in [Malé](#) (Maldives) on response communications and psychosocial support; a 2022 workshop in [Surabaya](#) (Indonesia) on enhancing national-local coordination on prevention, preparedness and response; and desk research and interviews conducted in developing and updating the 2018 Toolkit.

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This includes, *inter alia*: former Mayor Allison Silberberg (Alexandria, Virginia, United States), Mayor Andy Burnham (Greater Manchester, United Kingdom), Mayor Nancy Rotering (Highland Park, Illinois, United States), Mayor Maksim Dimitrievski, Nexhat Aqifi and Shaban Demiri (Kumanovo, North Macedonia), Daniel Lawson and Robin Merrett (London, United Kingdom), former Governing Mayor Raymond Johansen (Oslo, Norway) and former Mayor Bill Peduto (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States), among others.

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Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

[The Institute for Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#) worked with mayors and government partners to launch Strong Cities at a meeting during the opening of the UN General Assembly in 2015. Since then, ISD has expanded and supported Strong Cities membership and has delivered its programming.

ISD continues to host the Management Unit and contributes its research and expertise to meet the policy and practice needs of cities and local governments around the world.



Australian Government



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Acronyms

CAP

County Action Plan

IDP

Internally Displaced People

LAP

Local Action Plan

LGBTQ+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

LPN

Local Prevention Network

MEL

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

MOPAC

Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (London)

NAP

National Action Plan

NLC

National-Local Cooperation

OPHC

Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes
(New York City)

P/CVE

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Glossary

Community: Individuals, social groups and institutions that are based in the same geographic area and/or have shared interests.

Civil society: The arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, that is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.

Do no harm: Through an understanding of the local context, relationships and dynamics more broadly, the principle of Do No Harm involves mitigating or avoiding negative, unintended consequences for the potential beneficiaries of and implementers of prevention and response that may result from such interventions and seeking to influence these dynamics in a positive way.

Mandate: A local official's authority to enact and implement strategies, policies and programs, create and fill positions, and coordinate horizontally and vertically across different offices and sectors.

Mayor: The head of a town, city or municipality, elected or otherwise appointed, who has the mandate to lead local governance. As mentioned in the forward, while there are many forms of local leadership, throughout this Guide, mayor is used as a general term referring to the most senior elected or appointed official in cities, towns, villages, municipalities or other local areas of governance.

Primary prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to build community resilience against hate, polarisation and violent extremism and enhance social cohesion to resist these threats. These programmes target communities regardless of their vulnerabilities and come in a variety of forms.

Secondary prevention: Programmes and other measures that target individuals identified as being vulnerable to recruitment or radicalisation to hate- or violent extremism-motivated violence and seek to steer these individuals down a non-violent path. These interventions might include psychosocial support, mentoring, family counselling, cultural or recreational activities, theological debate, education and vocational training and/or support.

Tertiary prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to support hate- and extremism-motivated violent offenders in their efforts to leave their milieus, disengage from violence, decriminalise and reintegrate into society. This can also include families, as well as those who have not entered the prison system but who may demonstrate some level of support for violence, including those who have returned from territory once held by Islamic State, for example. These programmes, which can take place within or outside of a custodial setting, may offer educational and vocational training, psychosocial or ideological counselling, housing and employment opportunities.

Whole-of-society approach: An approach to prevention and response that envisions a role for multiple sectors at the national and local levels, as well as civil society actors.

About This Guide

The Strong Cities Network City-Led Response Guide offers support for mayors¹, other sub-national officials and the local and state governments they lead, in formulating a sensitive and effective response² in the wake of a hate-or violent extremism-motivated attack, incident or crisis.

In the immediate aftermath of an occurrence or during heightened inter-communal or other tensions, national authorities can often take the lead in emergency responses, reinforcing public safety and launching criminal investigations. However, the impact of the instability that ensues can run deep, causing untold social and other consequences across communities. No matter how resilient they are, communities will require strong local leadership to help them heal and recover.

Sub-national leaders and local officials have critical roles to play in stabilising, reassuring, supporting and tackling social division in the aftermath of an attack and in heightened environments, and there are increasing pressures on local public institutions to establish clear roles and protocols for responding to and mitigating the impacts of such incidents for their constituents.

With the development of this City-Led Response Guide, we offer officials a framework through which to develop and deliver activities in the wake of such an attack, incident or other crisis in a way that complements, rather than duplicates, national government action. The Guide draws on good practices identified during Strong Cities engagement with member and non-member cities, interviews, desk-based research and other research conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue in developing the Guide's first iteration: [Responding to a Terror Attack](#) (2018).

This Guide compiles good practice examples and learnings on key aspects of response, from surveying the issues in a community through to evaluating and sharing learnings from interventions at different levels. Beyond this publication, the content of this Guide will be housed in the Strong Cities [Resource Hub](#) as a 'living' document with examples, practice spotlights and learnings added and updated online.

¹ Strong Cities recognises that there are many forms of local leadership. Throughout this Guide, 'mayor' is used as a general term referring to the most senior elected or appointed official in cities, towns, villages, municipalities or other local areas of governance.

² Preventing and responding to hate, polarisation and violent extremism will be referred to simply as 'prevention' and 'response' throughout this Guide.



Contents

Introduction	11
The Role of Local Authorities	12
Guide Overview	13
Chapter 1: Mayoral Leadership in Response	14
Roles for Mayors	14
National-Local Cooperation in Response	15
Situation Analysis	17
Response	18
Lead from the Ground	18
Coordinate with National Government Responders	18
General Framework	19
Communications	20
Phase 1: Immediate Reaction and Engagement	21
Phase 2: First Official Statement and/or Appearance	21
Phase 3: First Direct Engagements	22
Chapter 2: Community Engagement	28
Situation Analysis	29
Identifying Vulnerable Communities	29
Identifying Entry Points	31
Response: Outreach	33

Chapter 3: Public Communications **38**

Situation Analysis	40
Response	42
Part 1: Messaging	43
Part 2: Dissemination, Working with the Media	49
Part 3: Monitoring	50

Chapter 4: Psychosocial Support **54**

Situation Analysis	55
Establishing a Local Psychosocial Support Working Group	55
Identifying Service Providers and Support Actors	56
Initial Identification of Beneficiaries	57
Response	58
Needs and Risks Assessments	58
Ensuring a Comprehensive Support Package	59
Survey	60
Identify Gaps	60
Long-Term Support	60
Communicating Services & Supporting Vulnerable Groups	60
Lessons for Post-Disaster Psychosocial Care	61
Lessons for Long-Term Psychosocial Care	62
Lessons for Psychosocial Care for Bereaved Families	64
Lessons for Psychosocial Care for Young People	65

Chapter 5: Post-Incident Support	66
Access to Information	66
Access to Justice	66
Memorials	67
Chapter 6: Preparing to Respond	71
Developing Plans	71
Survey Exercises	71
Building Partnerships	72
Learning from Experience	73
Prepared to Respond	74
Conclusion	75
Annex I	76
City Contributions/References	76
Annex II	79
Resources	79

Introduction

The Strong Cities Network City-Led Response Guide is intended to provide support to mayors and other sub-national officials, and the cities they lead, in preparing to respond to threats and acts of hate, polarisation and violent extremism, terrorism, heightened environments and times of crisis. This recognises not only the increasingly complex threat picture facing cities, but also that the principles of effective city-led response are applicable to all those environments.

Whether urban or rural, big or small, cities and other local authorities from Christchurch (New Zealand) to Chattanooga (Tennessee, United States), Greater Manchester (United Kingdom) to Mumbai (India), Oslo (Norway) to Ottawa (Canada), and Paris (France) to Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, United States), cities typically bear the brunt of hate-, violent extremism- and terror-related attacks. They are often the first to respond and, in the long-term, suffer from the fallout of intercommunal tensions, collective trauma of affected communities and economic slowdowns. Such events can generate fear, erode trust in public institutions, and exacerbate historical tensions and injustices. The impact can last for years, with untold impacts on social cohesion and resilience.

Cities often have expanding populations in dense urban centres and are generally the unit of government closest to local populations. They are therefore uniquely positioned to contribute to whole-of-society efforts to identify, understand and facilitate the prevention of hate, polarisation and violent extremism in their communities and to mount an effective and holistic response during times of crisis.

However, they can face challenges. These include a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities both at the local level and in relation to national actors.

Local governments without explicit mandates, and with national governments active in this space, may not see for themselves a role in response to a crisis that is typically viewed through a national security lens. Yet, it is mayors and other city leaders who need to drive this response, supported and encouraged by national government counterparts and security actors (e.g., through appropriate information-sharing and financial support).

Throughout their engagements with Strong Cities, mayors and city officials routinely identify how to respond to crises as a priority issue. The relevance of this issue to sub-national authorities more broadly is heightened given the nature of news reporting and social media, which makes it inevitable that a destabilising force in one city will also have impacts far beyond the city's boundaries, with local events having global impact. As such, enabling cities to respond effectively to such events in a way that builds unity and strengthens resilience has emerged as a Strong Cities priority.

This Guide draws on international and regional good practices, approaches and lessons learned identified in the course of our work with our more than 230 city members and other relevant stakeholders, including representatives from non-member cities, national governments and international and regional organisations. This includes a workshop in [Cape Town](#) (South Africa) on preventing and responding to hate- and extremist-motivated violence, training on communications and psychosocial support in the aftermath of a terror attack or act of violent extremism in [Malé](#) (Maldives), and workshops that address city-led response in [Helsinki](#) (Finland), [Denver](#) (Colorado, United States) and [Oslo](#) (Norway) under the Strong Cities [Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative](#).

The Role of Local Authorities

Mayors, and other sub-national leaders and authorities, are on the frontlines of confronting the most challenging global issues of our time. The threat picture is complex and evolving: from terrorism to rising hate, polarisation and violent extremism – threats that are increasingly fueled or exacerbated by increasing, often unchecked, mis/disinformation and conspiracy narratives – to supporting communities through pandemics and the social impacts of rising migration and internal displacement, cities face a myriad of challenges.

Historically, cities have been outranked and left aside by national authorities in the immediate aftermath of attacks and crises. More recently, however, there is growing recognition of the key role that these local actors must play in prevention and response. Nevertheless, roles and mandates are often unclear. Thus, agreeing on a division of labor between and across the various levels of government in times of peace and calm is critical.

City leaders today must take responsibility for many areas. These include *inter alia* coordinating local actors, liaising with media, addressing the psychosocial needs of survivors and others impacted by the incident, preventing reactionary or escalated violence, and rallying communities to build resilience and strengthen social cohesion against hate and violent extremism. This is particularly relevant in an increasingly polarised climate in which such attacks or crises can be used to influence electoral outcomes and democratic institutions.

Engaging on the ground through local actors that have trusted relationships with impacted communities can help address valid concerns and ensure that individuals do not resort to responses that might be intolerant or undemocratic.



Guide Overview

This Guide seeks to fill a gap in resources for sub-national leaders and local authorities who may find themselves on the frontline following an attack or other incident/crisis. While many manuals and guides exist for post-incident [crisis management](#) and [crisis communications](#), they typically target national actors and focus on strategic communications and coordination, without addressing local responses that both benefit and engage key stakeholders such as local media, survivors and families, social services, community-based organisations, faith leaders and the wider community. As a result, tools and methods to communicate with these stakeholders remain vague. Moreover, crisis management guidance generally draws on Western case studies, which may not be relevant for a global audience. Lastly, numerous resources have been developed over the past years on [soft target](#) or [critical infrastructure](#) protection, leaving a gap in the long-term impact and collective trauma of affected communities.

Strong Cities approaches these issues with a fresh perspective, reflective of its global membership of cities: it offers a blueprint for city leaders and local authorities who look to reassure and support citizens and inspire trust during times of perceived insecurity, instability and trauma.

The Guide is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Mayoral Leadership in Response** provides an overview of key considerations to guide sub-national leaders in the immediate aftermath of an attack or incident.
- **Chapter 2: Community Engagement** sets out how local authorities can leverage existing networks to determine the impact of an attack, identify the most appropriate survivor support mechanisms, and promote social cohesion for the community writ large.
- **Chapter 3: Public Communications** provides guidance on developing outreach plans that can deescalate rising tensions and strengthen a city's sense of identity, morale and cohesion following an attack or incident. Authorities and the media have a duty to inform the public with relevant and useful information and to ensure vulnerable or hard to reach communities are well informed.
- **Chapter 4: Psychosocial Support** guides cities on how to ensure their communities have access to appropriate psychosocial support, both in the immediate and long-term, and includes specific guidance for setting up a local psychosocial support working group, and for supporting children and vulnerable communities.
- **Chapter 5: Post-Incident Support** provides guidance on how to support survivors, families and the impacted communities, including addressing grievances and counter-reactions, access to information and justice, long-term engagement and memorials.
- **Chapter 6: Preparing to Respond** guides cities on what they can do to be prepared should an incident occur, from developing plans, to surveying stakeholders, building partnerships and learning from experience.

The importance of effective city-led response should not be underestimated. The responsibility to engage multiple actors, while also reassuring and supporting communities, and setting an example of strength and unity, may be daunting, but is vital if cities are to remain resilient. Informed by mayors, city representatives, policy-makers and practitioners, this Guide is intended to serve as a roadmap for local authorities in developing their own strategy for effective city-led response.

Chapter 1

Mayoral Leadership in Response

When a crisis unfolds, citizens look to their elected leaders and government institutions for guidance. Mayors and other sub-national leaders and officials are in a unique position to guide and shape the local response. In the case of a hate- or violent extremism-motivated attack, mayors will be expected or called upon to lead their city's response to manage the immediate fallout, while also planning for intermediate- and long-term responses to secure their city, support their residents and ensure it builds back stronger and more resilient. Mayors, typically in consultation with senior local government officials, must take quick decisions under a high amount of pressure and uncertainty. Any major missteps can erode multi-agency or citizen trust, or derail future recovery efforts.

This chapter focuses on key points for local leaders to consider as they chart a sensitive and proportional response in those early days and weeks. Above all, they should aim to enhance trust and build unity between the communities and their residents and local authorities. This will lay the groundwork for subsequent efforts.

Roles for Mayors

Mayors play a vital role in both immediate and long-term responses to crises, particularly around communications, coordination and support for survivors, families and frontline workers. Mayors must play a role regardless of whether they have an explicit mandate for post-attack response and should seek out this role proactively. Too often national

governments dictate post-crisis response, even though it is mayors and local leaders that an impacted city's residents will look to for information. The need for strong and visible mayoral leadership in a post-attack environment is critical as its absence can reduce trust in the mayor's ability to lead the city more broadly, and the local government's ability to handle future crises. As a local official in Oslo told Strong Cities, "mayoral leadership [in the aftermath of the 2011 attacks] inspired trust that the system was working".

Among the roles a mayor can play is coordinating different actors to ensure local needs are being met and that national and local response efforts complement rather than duplicate each other. For example:

- **Mayors should be at the forefront of public communications** following an incident. Leadership communications set the tone for response and can mitigate polarisation and other impacts of the crisis.
- Once an incident has been neutralised, mayors should be **on the ground** consulting with survivors, bereaved families, first responders and community leaders to identify gaps in response, psychosocial and other needs, and **leading a multi-agency effort to allocate local resources and/or seeking national government support**.
- Mayors can play a **key role in coordinating with national government stakeholders** and ensuring that the national response is informed by and aligns with the tone and focus of local efforts.

- Mayors should also ensure that **outsized, loud voices** do not drown out local voices, perspectives and needs, and they should advocate at the national level for their constituents and serve as a buffer between national and local actors on the ground.
- Mayors must be **embedded in command centres** responsible for crisis management. For example, following the [2013 Boston Marathon bombing](#), then Mayor Thomas Menino formed part of the “unified command centre” that oversaw the city’s response. Utilising this multi-agency structure, he was able to assign roles and responsibilities for different aspects of the response, and craft clear, concise and unified messages to be delivered by the mayor and other city leaders. This helped ensure consistent messaging shaped by multiple local government agencies and emergency responders, and reflective of the mayor’s outreach. Similarly, in Oslo (Norway), following the [2022 attack on the LGBTQ+ community](#), then Governing Mayor Raymond Johansen immediately mobilised and led the crisis response team.

National-Local Cooperation in Response

A hate- or violent extremism-motivated incident typically triggers a wide range of responses and responders, both from the local and national levels. Each will have an important role to play, but they can only work effectively if their efforts are coordinated so they complement each other without contradiction or duplication. As the most senior local leader, a mayor is often best placed to coordinate a multi-agency effort to provide support locally and liaise with national agencies to lead a single cohesive response.

Too often, national governments dictate post- crisis responses to the exclusion of local governments, even though it is the mayor and local leaders who the city’s residents will look to for information and support. Mayors and other sub-national leaders often cite the lack of explicit mandates for response as limiting the potential of city-led action in this space. Yet, it is mayors and other city leaders who need to drive this response, supported and encouraged to do so by national government counterparts and security actors (e.g., through appropriate information-sharing and financial support). Crucial to addressing such challenges is to [strengthen national-local cooperation](#) (NLC), enabling actors at both levels to work collaboratively and maximise their respective comparative advantages.

In Norway, for example, the [Commission on Extremism](#) is working to identify lessons learned to help cities respond to local threats and improve national-local coordination, and to support local implementation of the national CVE strategy. The Commission has consulted with municipalities across the country to understand their needs and determine how best to leverage the multi-stakeholder structures in place at both the local and national levels that can be leveraged in a post-attack environment.

As a practice, NLC encompasses the structures, resources and approaches that support both national strategies and security-based responses, with localised needs. Strong Cities has developed multiple NLC resources, including a [NLC Toolkit](#) for the Global Counterterrorism Forum, supported by the [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#). For more information on Strong Cities work on NLC, visit our [website](#).



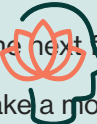
A United “Families First” Response

Following the [2017 Manchester Arena bombing](#), Mayor Andy Burnham commissioned a review of the city’s response. The review found that [personal visits by Mayor Burnham to survivors and bereaved families, and the mayor’s overall strong civic leadership, enhanced community resilience and confidence, and further highlighted the city’s commitment to the united “families first” response. Importantly, the review also found that support should extend to survivors of the attack who were not among the bereaved, who still experienced the trauma, and that such efforts should continue.](#)

Situation Analysis

In the first moments after an attack

Take a moment.

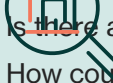
 The next few hours will be difficult.

Take a moment to prepare yourself mentally and physically. While it may seem trivial, it is essential to find the right mindset to make rational decisions under pressure



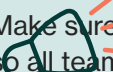
Analyse the situation.

Get a complete picture as possible of the attack:

-  • Is there an ongoing security risk?
- How could the situation potentially escalate?
- Which emergency actors are on the ground?
- Do certain communities or institutions need immediate protection?




Check the chain of command.

 Make sure you know and have communicated the chain of command, so all teams are aware of and respect each other's roles.

Identify clear hierarchies for decision-making, timeframes for updates and a spokesperson to streamline public messaging.



Identify priorities.

 Clear priorities will guide and justify your next steps.

Make sure you communicate these priorities internally and to the public.

Ensure future decision-making is consistent with these principles.

Response

Lead from the Ground

Once an incident has been neutralised, mayors should be on the ground wherever possible to consult with survivors, bereaved families, first responders and community leaders to identify gaps in response, psychosocial and other needs.

“The most notable actions we have undertaken, which had a direct impact on countering terrorist operations and positively influencing the people, is that we made sure to be an integral part of the community. This meant being present now at the event with our community to provide support and strengthen their resilience, as well as directing everyone towards finding real solutions to the problem.”

Mayor Ibrahim Khalil Awsaj, City of Ramadi (Iraq)

Coordinate with National Government Responders

In most cases, a hate- or violent extremism-motivated attack will trigger a response from the national government, as well as state, provincial or regional-level agencies where relevant. Having this support is critical for response, but it can create coordination challenges, especially where the national response does not immediately align with local needs.

Part of a mayor’s role will include coordinating with these different agencies and advocating for the needs of their constituents, serving as a buffer where necessary between national and local actors on the ground.

In doing so, a mayor should be mindful that voices at other levels do not drown out local voices and overshadow their perspectives, concerns and needs.

A mayor should help ensure that everyone knows their role and have what is needed to perform it. When assigning roles and responsibilities, consider if there are individuals who will be better placed to liaise with certain communities.

General framework

Leadership

To ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response from the local authority, and with national government, other local leaders (e.g., religious, cultural, activist) and communities, it is pivotal that the mayor and senior city officials have assigned responsibilities. For example, specific individuals might be better placed to liaise with certain communities than others (e.g., the official in charge of the Department for Education will liaise with schools). While tasks would ideally be established formally in advance, the mayor and their advisers should assign responsibilities quickly if they have not already done so.

Support

Residents will find comfort in their leaders' messages. Showing empathy, in particular towards survivors and their families, is a natural and crucial reaction to an atrocity. However, city spokespeople also need to remain open-minded regarding the indirect impact of their words on the wider population (e.g., communities of a similar ethnicity or religion to the perpetrators may become targets of backlash). It is important to acknowledge that trauma can have unexpected ramifications.

Information & Guidance

Those with information should share as much as possible to avoid the spread of rumours and disinformation and misinformation, within the bounds of the relevant security or information-sharing protocol. Even if there are no immediate updates, it is crucial to outline the steps being taken and any barriers to actions or causes for delay. Being transparent is the cornerstone for trust.

Communications

Communicating is one of the main and most urgent tasks in the aftermath of an attack (see Chapter 3: Public Communications). While the mayor and local authority might have a general strategy, the chaos and emotional environment surrounding an emergency can easily lead to mistakes being made and gaps in messaging.

Following a violent extremism or hate-motivated attack, mayors should be at the forefront of public communications. These initial messages set the tone for response and can help mitigate additional fallout from misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives. Fear and uncertainty create fertile breeding grounds for misinformation as well as disinformation from malicious actors who wish to take advantage of the situation to spread hate. This can undermine the response effort by spreading panic or fuel polarisation that can critically damage social cohesion and lead to further violence in the future. It is crucial, therefore, that a mayor help the city stay ahead of such threats by communicating clearly, frequently and early to set the official narrative for the event and calm uncertainties insofar as possible.

Even if there are no immediate updates, it is important to outline the steps being taken and any barriers to actions or causes for delay.

A mayor should bear in mind four key principles for post-incident communications:

- **Accessibility.** Communication should be plain and straightforward as much as possible. Avoid jargon, keep messaging succinct and provide translation – including sign language interpretation – wherever needed, depending on the community's composition.

- **Balance.** Messaging should balance the need to inform – and reduce space for conspiracy narratives – with the need to minimise fear and post-crisis intercommunal tensions. Focus on the city and its communities rather than on the suspected perpetrator(s) and avoid militaristic and other loaded rhetoric in favour of language that emphasises unity and resilience as a means of recovery.
- **Transparency.** Leaders should be transparent about the city's response. This is crucial for maintaining credibility with and the trust of affected communities. As the city identifies lessons learned from its response, these should be shared with the public.
- **Protect communities from potential backlash.** Specific communities will be more vulnerable to backlash than others following an attack. For example, it has been documented that anti-Muslim [hate crimes often increase dramatically](#) following Islamist terror attacks. Mayors should work with law enforcement to understand and prepare for these risks against potential target communities by including [emergency plans](#) in their response priorities. These plans should account for how to best ensure the physical safety of vulnerable groups and prevent sentiments of retaliation among citizens. One way a mayor can support this is by clearly stating that they stand behind all communities in the city and that the perpetrator does not represent anyone who lives peacefully in the city.

It is also imperative to tailor communications to evolving needs as the city moves from the immediate aftermath to response and then on to recovery.

In the immediate aftermath of an incident, there are three phases to bear in mind and guide decision-making and communications:

- **Immediate reaction and engagement**
- **First official statement and/or appearance**
- **First direct engagements**

Effective communications during these three phases (elaborated below) are crucial for reestablishing safety and security in the immediate aftermath, as well as the transparency and trust needed to support longer-term rebuilding and resiliency.

“By taking a proactive role in communicating with the public, the mayor can shape the narrative to promote unity, resilience and community support. Effective management of disinformation ensures that reliable information reaches the public, mitigating panic and facilitating a coordinated response.”

Representative, City of Sarajevo
(Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Phases of post-incident communication

There are three primary phases of post-incident communication. Communications should align with the priorities set following the attack and be consistent across the phases to provide messaging that informs, reassures and builds trust.

Phase 1: Immediate reaction and engagement

Whether in person or through their team, the mayor will need to ensure that the city’s residents are informed about the situation and the city’s response, managing insecurity and expectations. In the immediate aftermath of an attack or during a crisis, it is important to focus on providing safety guidance, as well as official updates on the event and the local authority’s response. This could be done in cooperation with local media, via the mayor’s official social media channels and/or through any other available rapid communication channels.

To help the population regain a sense of control, the information shared should be timely, clear, concise, relevant, non-contradictory, accessible to all those impacted and generated from credible sources. In the immediate aftermath, providing safety guidance, updates on those in danger and how to get practical help are essential.

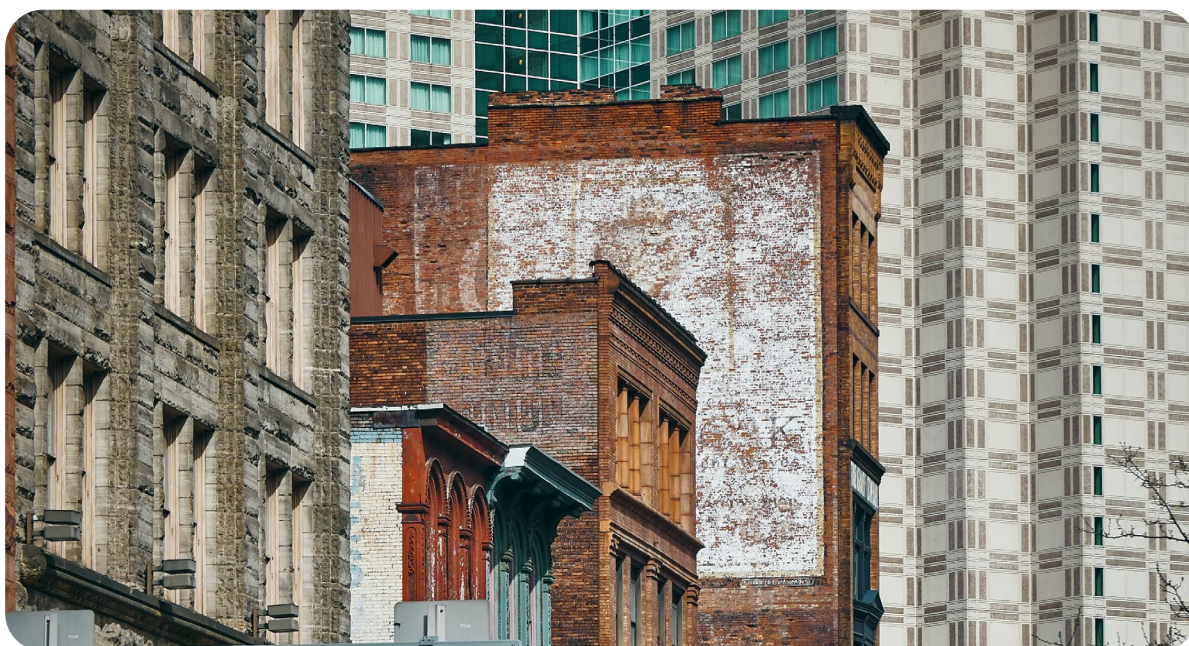
Phase 2: First official statement and/or appearance

It is essential for the mayor to get their first official public statement and/or appearance right, as people will hold them accountable for their words and reactions. While the immediate situation will feel all-encompassing, it is important to plan strategically for the medium- and long-term to ensure early communications can support future rebuilding efforts. A mayor should aim to communicate strength while promoting a unified response. Mayors have shared some tips for how to approach a post-incident statement.

- Speak out explicitly against hate, violence and extremism; make it clear that they have no place in the city and will not win.
- Call for unity, reasserting the city's inclusive identity and calling on residents to come together and find strength in one another.
- Focus statements on the city and its communities rather than giving a platform to the perpetrator(s), their motives or manifesto. Avoid saying the perpetrator's name so as not to glorify them with notoriety or martyrdom (something perpetrators often long for), especially if they are operating in radicalised spaces online.
- Avoid militaristic or reactionary language that heightens feelings of fear and antagonism. Recognise the profound sense of violation and anger people experience after an attack but be mindful not to inflame tensions with calls for retaliation.
- Diffuse tensions and the potential for retaliation based on race, ethnicity, religion or tribe. If members of a specific community carried out the attack, be mindful of potential backlash against that community.

Phase 3: First direct engagements

The mayor's initial engagements will be equally important in demonstrating their priorities. For example, whom the mayor visits first (for example, survivors in hospital, other institutions related to the target of the attack, schools), which media outlets they talk to and the potential political allegiances that might demonstrate. The mayor should ensure that their actions are consistent and in line with the priorities they have set from the beginning of their term.





 [Then Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Adern speaking at a press conference, March 2019](#)

Empathise and Unify

Following mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch (New Zealand), which killed more than 50 people, and injured a further 50, then-Prime Minister Jacinda Arden held a press conference, describing the attack as “an extraordinary and unprecedented act of violence” and “one of New Zealand’s darkest days”.

- **Resist war rhetoric.** Prime Minister Arden’s statement focused on those impacted, giving almost no platform to the perpetrator himself, in contrast to other post-attack responses which have been more militaristic or reactionary, which can heighten feelings of fear and antagonism. She recognised the profound sense of violation and anger people experience after an attack but did not inflame tensions (e.g., no calls for retaliation through warfare or crackdowns on civil liberties).
- **Avoid saying the perpetrator’s name.** Prime Minister Arden made a point of referring to the shooter in the abstract to avoid glorifying him. While the primary aim was to avoid rewarding him with notoriety or martyrdom, which attackers often long for (especially if radicalised and operating online), this strategy also avoided creating an “us” versus “them” narrative.
- **Unite people through a call to action.** While noting that white nationalism was a growing issue (even though the perpetrator was Australian), Arden encouraged all nations to respond and create an environment where such ideologies cannot flourish. Through initiatives like the Christchurch Call she “succeeded in ‘othering’ the terrorist, but not by treating him as an emissary from a hostile outside world”.



📌 [South Florida Mayors speaking at a press conference, December 2023](#)

South Florida Mayors Present United Front Against Anti-Semitism

In December 2023, following rising spike in antisemitism, made worse by local impacts of the Israel-Gaza crisis, a group of Miami-Dade County (Florida, United States) mayors joined together to present a united front to the community. Miami Mayor Francis Suarez noted the challenge facing local governments: “All of the elected officials who are here are struggling to figure out, day in and day out, how to make sure that we can project safety, deliver safety and take away that sense of fear that is in the hearts of so many people in our community”. North Miami Mayor Alix Desulme said, “[w]e say unequivocally that North Miami condemns all forms of hate, antisemitism, bigotry and violence”.

- **Clarity of message.** Antisemitism will not be condoned.
- **United front.** Mayors from 15 municipalities came together.
- **Consistency.** Unity was reflected in consistent messaging.



✦ [Mayor of L'Hay-les-Roses, Vincent Jeanbrun, addresses an anti-violence march and rally, July 2023](#)

A Call for Unity and Calm Amid National Riots

In July 2023, the Mayor of L'Hay-les-Roses, Vincent Jeanbrun, led an anti-violence march and rally in his town (south of Paris, France) holding a banner reading “Together for the Republic”, a call for unity and calm following a week of riots across France. The previous evening, rioters had rammed a flaming vehicle into his house, injuring his wife and one of his children. Mayor Jeanbrun was joined by President of the Metropolis of Grand Paris and Mayor of Rueil Malmaison Patrick Ollier (L), President of the French right-wing party Les Republicains and MP Éric Ciotti, French President of the Senate Gerard Larcher and Ile-de-France Region President Valérie Pécresse. The anti-violence rally was one of many demonstrations in front of town halls, part of nationwide local action following the riots.

- **Local visibility.** Rally held in the town’s main market square, the heart/gathering point of the town.
- **United front.** Representatives of all the major political parties united for a clarion call for calm.
- **Deescalate.** Rather than call for retribution, it was a call to action for calm, unity and public order.



Following a 2021 deadly knife attack in **Wuerzburg (Germany)**, Mayor Christian Schuchardt spoke at a [memorial service](#) for the victims. The attack was carried out by a young Somali man at a time when there was widespread tension across Europe regarding refugees. Anticipating potential backlash against the city's Somali community, the mayor urged that “the crimes of individuals should never be ascribed or extended to ethnic groups, religions or nationalities” and asked that Somali refugees not be blamed.

Bavaria Governor Markus Soeder added to this plea, emphasising that “we must never answer such a hate-filled deed with hatred or revenge”. After noting that online conversations had highlighted the perpetrator's immigrant background, the Governor asked the city's residents “but didn't people with an immigrant background also help in exactly the same situation?”



In 2022, the Strong Cities Network and the [Bertlesmann Foundation](#) created a graphic animation, narrated by former Mayor Bill Peduto, on his experience and key decision points during and in the wake of the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue attack.

Advice from Mayor Bill Peduto on communicating following a hate-motivated attack

In October 2018, a man entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, United States), Pennsylvania, and opened fire on congregants during Shabbat celebrations, killing 11 people and wounding six others, including four police officers. It was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in American history. Former Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, now a Senior Adviser to the Strong Cities Network, shared his experience and his response decision points:

1. Have multiple communication devices and mechanisms that work on different sources (i.e., phone signal, ethernet, radio frequency) for both internal and external communications. During the attack, Mayor Peduto wanted to communicate as much as possible with the public, inspired by the response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, but the phone network went down and his public information officer was unable to use his phone.
2. Be transparent and upfront with the public regarding the official response. Even if there's nothing new to say, say there is nothing new to say.
3. Be transparent about your top priorities in the immediate term to manage expectations. Mayor Peduto told the public up front that his first priority would be the victims and the families; second, those who were wounded; third, the Jewish community; fourth, the greater Pittsburgh community.
4. Use your priorities to guide all future actions. Following the attack, there was an idea to close a major road in front of the synagogue. The Public Safety Director did not want to because it was a major route to several hospitals. As families of the victims were his first priority, Mayor Peduto asked them what they wanted. They wanted the road open, so it stayed open.
5. Remember, trauma can have unexpected ramifications. Even if there is somebody who lives 15 miles away from an attack, who is not a member of the targeted group and has no connection to the incident, they can be affected by that trauma.
6. Do not politicise the event. There will always be opportunities to talk about the political ramifications and legislation that could help prevent future attacks. However, immediately following an attack is not the time.

Chapter 2

Community Engagement

Community engagement is key to a participatory approach to local governance, which is increasingly recognised as [good practice](#) at all levels of government. Most local authorities already engage in their communities in a variety of ways and recognise its importance. High levels of trust create a foundation for meaningful response. For example, an [incident review](#) of the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016 (Florida, United States) highlighted how “pre-existing Orlando police-community relationships, fostered and sustained over time, enhanced the resilience of the community in the aftermath of the Pulse terrorist shooting”. Additionally, during a Strong Cities workshop on response in [Helsinki](#) (Finland), law enforcement officials emphasised how prevention-oriented community engagement efforts had helped with post-incident response, as members of the public were already familiar with reporting processes and trusted that their local law enforcement would respond appropriately.

There are numerous city examples of how pre-existing relationships among city leaders, frontline personnel and communities have enabled a city to mobilise swiftly in response to an incident. For example, in Boston (Massachusetts, United States), years of [developing and exercising planning](#) for the annual marathon and other events proved vital in the wake of the 2013 bombing, as it enabled the mayor and city government to swiftly mobilise a command centre through which the response was coordinated. In Helsinki (Finland), the 23 local government and civil society stakeholders that comprise its [Safe](#)

[City Network](#) meet regularly to proactively discuss community tensions, challenges and needs for responding to emerging threats. The network can be mobilised swiftly to respond if and when required.

Mayors and cities also need to be aware of the acutely sensitive and emotionally charged context in which they will be operating during times of crisis, noting that situations can escalate rapidly, particularly where there is perceived injustice or a desire for retaliation.

This chapter provides guidance on how to use long-term community engagement strategies and partnerships following an attack or other crisis. A long-term strategy for building trust, which often is the result of long-term investments in relationships with different communities, is essential to ensure that relationships are in place and can be leveraged effectively in times of crisis. Conversely, engaging communities as a ‘one-off’ following an attack can leave them feeling instrumentalised or stigmatised and/or reinforce negative perceptions.

Through long-term engagement, local authorities will be able to:

- Disseminate information and guidance in a tailored and effective way.
- Identify community needs, existing resources and the support available (e.g., volunteer networks and informal information-sharing mechanisms).
- Identify appropriate survivor support mechanisms.

Situation Analysis

Identifying Vulnerable Communities

The first step after an attack or during a crisis is to determine the needs and priorities of those impacted. As part of this effort, local authorities should identify communities that might be especially vulnerable and therefore need dedicated and tailored support.

Relevant Communities	Examples
<p>Targeted Communities</p>	<p>The 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue attack led to concerns about the general safety of Jewish communities. The city, therefore, engaged with these communities to identify means of support, for example, by providing additional security for places of worship on Jewish holidays.</p>
<p>Communities perceived to be related to the perpetrator(s) or origins of a threat.</p> <p>Being linked to the perpetrator(s) in any way may lead to blame, revenge attacks and self-stigmatisation.</p>	<p>There is increasing evidence that terrorist attacks and periods of heightened tension can cause spikes in hate crimes and lead to ethnic tensions, indicating growing intolerance against individuals or communities perceived to be linked to the events. Aside from the direct harm caused by this reciprocal violence, it can have long-term effects on community cohesion.</p> <p>Since 2015, successive waves of terrorist attacks in France have triggered a surge of Islamophobia across the country and an increase in hate crimes targeting the Muslim community, especially in the direct aftermath of terrorist attacks. Fifty-four anti-Muslim incidents were registered in the week following the Charlie Hebdo attack.</p> <p>A Fondation Jean Jaurès study conducted in 2019 revealed that 42% of French Muslims felt they experienced discrimination based on their faith, with the number rising to 60% for Muslim women wearing a headscarf. Following a spate of attacks in October 2020, concerns emerged relating to the government's proposal for a "bill on Republican principles" (former "bill against separatism"), aimed at cracking down on Islamist extremism. This bill was seen by many as potentially stigmatising for Muslim communities.</p>

	<p>Adopted amendments included introducing restrictions on Muslim religious practice, including banning headscarves for girls under 18 in public spaces, or preventing mothers who wear a headscarf from taking part in school trips, raising concerns about the risk of institutional Islamophobia.</p> <p>Other areas have also reported an increase in attacks. London Mayor Sadiq Khan similarly <u>reported</u> a five-fold increase in Islamophobic incidents reported to the Met Police following the 2019 London attack, with <u>similar spikes</u> following other incidents around the world.</p>
<p>Communities affected collaterally, whether physically and/or psychologically (e.g., their assets were destroyed, a similar event happened before with a different target).</p>	<p>These communities could be individuals whose personal assets or homes are destroyed, and who will need both temporary shelter and post-traumatic care. Attacks and crises may also have indirect victims. For example, social media coverage of such events can be <u>overwhelming</u> for a person’s nervous system and create traumatic stress just as if they had experienced the event first-hand.</p>
<p>Communities that are at risk of (further) radicalisation, either because they follow the ideology of the perpetrator(s), or they stand at the receiving end of the attack. In either case, they might feel that the use of violence becomes legitimised.</p>	<p>A spectrum of extremist and terrorist networks capitalised on the Christchurch attack in 2019. For example, following the attack, ISIS made an official statement calling for revenge by the Muslim community. At the same time, the Facebook livestream recorded by the shooter and his manifesto (and/or excerpts thereof) were circulated via the internet/social media (e.g., 8Chan, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), several British tabloids (e.g., The Sun, The Mirror, MailOnline) and cable news (e.g., Sky Australia, Sky New Zealand), which served to further radicalise individuals in the online space, and <u>inspired further plots/acts of racist violence and terrorism</u>, including <i>inter alia</i> in U.S. cities, such as <u>Buffalo</u> (New York), <u>San Diego</u> (California) and <u>El Paso</u> (Texas), <u>Baerum</u> in Norway, <u>Halle</u> in Germany, <u>Singapore</u>, and <u>Stanwell</u> in the United Kingdom.</p>

Identifying Entry Points

Local authorities should adopt a **mixed approach**, in which they conduct direct community engagement, and work through community-based partners who already have trust and credibility on the ground and can serve as entry points. This can include CSOs, local media outlets, private companies and community leaders.

They can help ensure messages are conveyed appropriately through relevant channels to key groups, provide a ‘temperature check’ on how certain communities are responding to an attack, and serve as critical service providers in the short- and long-term. Local authorities should assess the **advantages, opportunities, risks and challenges** of direct versus indirect engagement, which may vary depending on the target audience, to decide where to place emphasis.



Responding to Anti-Asian Hate in New York City during COVID-19

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, reported crimes targeting Asian people rose by nearly 150% in major US cities. New York responded to this surge with targeted public awareness campaigns, such as [“I Still Believe in Our City”](#), by artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, developed with the NYC Commission on Human Rights and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. Others included a [Stop Anti-Asian Hate Education Resource Guide](#), a joint effort of the NYC Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes and the Department of Education, with comics, podcasts, spoken word poems and videos content.

	Who	What
Direct Engagement	Assign an internal case manager who is perceived as a trusted point of contact within the relevant community. This could be a community engagement officer, a social worker, a local or community police officer.	In addition to the usual qualities required to engage with communities (being empathetic, practical, trustworthy, non-judgmental), the individual should have a thorough understanding of the community dynamics and structures and be as open-minded as possible. Providing resources and training on unconscious bias, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and conflict resolution can be important to address this in a structured manner.
Indirect Engagement	Community actors can have various backgrounds, for example, community organisers, local council members and other government leaders, non-profit or business leaders, volunteer or faith leaders, and long-term residents. Some of these actors can engage with and influence multiple spaces, including domestic, professional, social and cultural.	These actors can provide an informed frontline understanding of their communities and help identify existing structures and relationships, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities in which the community is already interested and involved and where community engagement might be integrated. • Social, economic and political structures that can be used for community engagement. • Changing needs and concerns.

Response

Post-incident outreach requires careful planning to ensure that the purpose and goals of the outreach are clear, that methods employed are tailored to both the community and context, and that the engagement does not add to the trauma experienced. Messaging must be widely accessible, including for traditionally hard to reach communities and those for whom the recent events may have undermined trust and/or heightened fear.

Engagement should thus be planned carefully, and in consultation with trusted community leaders, to ensure that the structure of the engagement and the messaging is thoughtful and constructive and that methods employed build trust and promote dialogue. Establishing a working group with community leaders can help mitigate any unintended consequences and guide the city on tailoring messaging, methods and channels.

Outreach

<p>Key Principles</p>	<p>Building trust and dialogue through transparent communications and detailed planning</p>
<p>Communicating Objectives</p>	<p>Explain the purpose of your engagement</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gauging the impact of this incident on different sub-communities. • Identifying short-, medium- and long-term community needs. • Assessing community skills and expertise, and people’s appetite to support wider post-incident response. • Developing a recovery plan based on community needs and priorities. • Disseminating information and soliciting ongoing feedback on the response. <p>Outline a clear plan</p> <p>How do you intend to sustain engagement and how contributions of community members will be used? This should include addressing potential data privacy issues and anonymity guarantees if community members speak to you in confidence about their concerns, things they have seen online and/or worrying trends.</p>

Methods

Go to the Communities

Knock on residents' doors and/or identify where people congregate. The case manager should be accompanied by a trusted and credible community interlocutor.

Organise Public Meetings and Open Houses

- **Enable the public to lead** in identifying priorities, organising support, implementing programmes and evaluating outcomes. Empower them to draw on their full potential in developing collective actions and solutions. The local authority should act as a coordinator, rather than issuing instructions.
- **Provide a space** for people to meet and connect, but also to raise legitimate concerns so that any challenges and disagreements can be addressed. This builds a culture of shared responsibility and openness, rather than shaming people for being afraid, angry, etc. It is vital that such sessions are facilitated by someone with a background in mediation or high-stakes situations, as emotions may run high and require a confident, calm 'referee'.
- **Establish a working group** representative of different community actors who can convene as needed to share updates, troubleshoot issues and adjust the strategy or next steps accordingly. Ensure this group represents the diversity of your local population, across various common divides (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation).
- **Media.** Online channels can remove barriers for outreach (e.g., travel costs, audience size) and allow for a continuous flow of information, networking and consultation (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp). That said, many segments of the population may not be active or comfortable with social media (e.g., older residents), or have limited access to the internet and therefore prefer more traditional media like radio, local news or print. For the latter, the city may be able to negotiate in-kind support through regular segments, column inches, etc. It is best to use a variety of channels to reach the widest possible audience – do not assume a Facebook post will have universal reach.

- **Multilingual and Accessible.** All outreach efforts should be multilingual and accessible, reflective of all languages and guided by the city's communities. If language support is required, cities could consider partnering with local universities/colleges or CSOs with language capabilities to provide continual/rapid response translation and interpretation. For example, a 2010 – 2021 project led by the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) brought together undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and high-impact research with public engagement and outreach, focused on support for [Multilingual Manchester](#).
- **Surveys.** A quick and easy way to gather information, especially when conducted online. However, be sure to consider relevant privacy legislation and regulations, and 'clean' the data and check for anything that looks suspicious or anomalous.

Engaging Norway's Interfaith Communities in Response

Norway's [National Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities](#) (or Samarbeidsrådet for tros-og livssynssamfunn, STL) brings together more than 40 religious communities to foster interfaith dialogue, understanding and trust. Following the 2022 LGBTQ+-targeted shooting in Oslo, the Council mobilised religious leaders of all faiths to support Oslo's LGBTQ+ community and to show solidarity against the attack. The interfaith community also played a role in addressing conspiracies and bigotry that followed the attack, hosting seminars that emphasised the city's principles of openness and inclusion.

The importance of collaboration between interfaith communities – particularly religious minorities – and law enforcement should not be underestimated. Oslo's [Sondre Norstrand Muslim Center](#) has a designated contact person at the police department and meets regularly to discuss concerns, whether that be emerging tensions that need to be addressed or ways to make Oslo's Muslim community feel safe and protected against bigotry; building relationships and trust that are also pivotal in a post-attack environment.



Language Access Plan

Aurora (Colorado) is one of the most diverse cities in the United States. One in every five residents was born outside of the country, hailing from 140 different nations. Children in the community speak more than 150 different languages in public schools. Providing meaningful access to services for residents with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is a strategic goal for Aurora, as articulated in the City's 2020 - 2030 Immigrant Integration Plan: "Ensure city services are accessible to speakers of other languages: The city will continue to develop and implement its Language Access Plan, so that city staff can interact with and deliver city services to all residents of Aurora, no matter what language they speak."

Aurora's Language Access Plan offers specific language services (such as document translation and interpretation during city government meetings) in the city's top 10 designated languages and the Voiance International Line offers interpretation in 150 languages to support one-on-one interactions.



Muslim Youth Protect Churches in Jordan

In April 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility for Palm Sunday attacks on two Coptic Christian churches in the Egyptian cities of Tanta and Alexandria, which killed 44 and injured more than 100 worshippers, including children. With the group making repeated threats to Jordanian security, young Muslims in Jordan took the initiative to guard churches across the country, including in Aljoun, Madaba and Zarqa during Easter celebrations "to ensure the safety of Christians inside".

Empowering Community-Based Organisations in Response

The New York City Mayor's [Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes](#) (OPHC) has underscored the importance of addressing, preventing and responding to hate violence. OPHC organises and participates in town hall meetings, sponsors programs for youth, and provides educational resources. Among OPHC's key initiatives is a [Community Advisory and Services Team](#) (CAST), a partnership with New York City community-based organisations that supports and elevates their important grassroots work to serve the communities that are the most vulnerable to bias-motivated incidents and hate crimes so that the city is better positioned to improve services to respond to the needs of the diverse communities and ensure a safer, welcoming New York City for all.

OPHC also runs a number of community-based grant programmes, including Community Project Grants, a joint initiative of OPHC and the NYC Commission on Human Rights (CCHR). [Community Project Grants](#) to encourages individuals, groups, non-profit organisations, academic institutions, and other entities located in New York City to implement creative projects that promote community respect, prevent hate violence, and seek to address hate crimes, bias-motivated incidents, and discrimination through pathways outside of law enforcement and the criminal legal system. Applicants can propose projects including, but not limited to, community workshops, educational videos, events, conferences and social media campaigns.



Preventing Retaliation

Following the [2019 Easter bombings](#) in Sri Lanka, several attacks were targeted at Muslim-owned businesses and houses, and there were calls to boycott Muslim-owned shops. This example shows how quickly communities perceived to be associated with the perpetrator(s) can become demonised, and the need for local authorities to engage actively with all communities to avoid further escalation and damage to a city's social fabric.

Chapter 3

Public Communications

A confluence of events and trends in recent decades has made the social fabric of cities more fragile, leaving core democratic institutions undermined, and communities increasingly brittle, fractured and highly reactive. Combined with a 24 hour/7 days per week global media cycle, and social media channels that promote outrage and serve as conduits for misinformation and disinformation, the need for sub-national leaders and governments to have in place strong communications plans and protocols, particularly in times of crisis or heightened tensions, has never been more acute.

While national agencies will likely take responsibility for security responses, local authorities have unique access to their constituents and should therefore play a central role in de-escalating rising tensions and maintaining unity across their city. Local government workers will need guidance and information on how to adapt their services in any circumstances, remaining calm and united in their public engagements despite the surrounding chaos.

Getting this approach right can be a source of anxiety for local authorities as they will likely contend with increased community – not to mention national and international – scrutiny. It is important to note that while people tend to be “fairly resilient, calm and rationale” in the immediate aftermath, in “the days and weeks following the attacks, the targeted populace tends to change their behaviours and attitudes in accordance with their perceived risk perceptions”. To ensure that local authorities shape these reactions and retain the trust

and legitimacy of their residents and national authorities, they should develop and follow a comprehensive communications framework.

Although no two attacks/incidents are identical, cities can face a myriad of similar communications-related challenges in their response. These include acting under enormous time pressure, having to make do with imperfect resources, having to take decisions in the face of incomplete information, the need to communicate with vulnerable communities or residents that are ‘hard to reach’ or ‘hardly reached’, and the potential for misinformation and disinformation distributed by the news media or social media to further complicate communications.

To help navigate these and other challenges, this chapter outlines considerations for local authorities in their communications effort, both in the days following an incident and beyond:

- **What are specific needs at this time?**
- **How should messaging be constructed?**
- **What and who are the best channels for dissemination?**

The objective is to integrate crisis communications into an existing communications strategy.



Effective & Inclusive Communications

Below is a list of groups that should be considered explicitly in city-led crisis communications and engagement:

- Communities that might be linked by some with a perpetrator, cause or event
- Children (aged 0 – 18 years old)
- Young adults (aged 18 – 30 years old)
- Older adults (70+ years old)
- Indigenous people
- Gender-diverse/LGBTQ+ communities
- Rural communities
- People who are not active on social media or the internet
- Those who may have previously experienced trauma or who are vulnerable
- Communities who are hard of hearing and have low vision
- Those who do not speak or who are not sufficiently fluent to understand crisis communications in local language(s)

Are there other groups or communities in your city that you need to actively engage during times of crisis?

What resources, channels, support does the city need to marshal to reach them?

Situation Analysis

Public Communications

The situation analysis will inform the content, format and dissemination of a city’s communications as it:

- Builds a more complete picture of the attack/incident or crisis, and the required response.
- Listens to the general narratives circulating and the key actors involved.
- Identifies the various segments of its audience and how to communicate with them.

<p>Step 1: Context Analysis</p>	<p>Gain a comprehensive understanding of the event and the crisis response and be prepared to address misinformation, disinformation and hate narratives. This will help the city gather the content for its communications, as well as pre-empt questions and concerns on which it will be asked for comment.</p>
<p>Step 2: Internal Capabilities Survey</p>	<p>Staff and responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public spokespeople • Senior communications official (ideally someone proximate to the mayor or an elected leader) • Communications staff responsible for different channels • Community engagement staff • Frontline services (e.g., education, health, etc.) • Stakeholder manager or focal point to work between agencies, nationally and locally <p>Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official website • Public social media accounts • Public hotline • Citizen contact database (for outreach via post or email) • Local media (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers) • Interfaith community, CSOs, public institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.) • Internal channels and with other agencies, (e.g., police, education sector, health institutions)

Step 3: Stakeholder Survey

Gain a comprehensive understanding of reactions to an attack or other incident or crisis. This should begin as quickly as possible (e.g., immediately following an attack or incident, or as tensions rise).

A stakeholder survey will help the local government assess who else is occupying the information landscape, officially or informally, the audiences they are reaching and what content to address. For example:

- Are there mis/disinformation or conspiracy narratives circulating about the attack? If there are, who is most vulnerable or susceptible to them and who is best placed to influence them?
- Are there accusations directed at the local authorities or crisis response teams more generally? Are they justified or should you provide additional facts?
- What can you do to stem leaks that may inflame tensions?
- Which communities could be targets of hate crimes following an attack/incident or during tensions?

Supporting an Internally Displaced Community

For 20 days in September 2013, an armed conflict between the government forces of the Philippines and rebels from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) held the [city of Zamboanga under siege](#). The conflict began when MNLF rebels attempted to occupy several coastal communities in Zamboanga City in protest of the Philippine government's failure to implement a 1996 final peace agreement with the MNLF. The conflict resulted in the displacement of more than 120,000 civilians and the destruction of 10,000 homes. More than 200 people were killed, mostly MNLF rebels. Following the siege, religious leaders served as vital advisers and intermediaries for the internally displaced community. Moreover, as there were at least three local languages and many dialects spoken within that community, the city government partnered with a consultant on Muslim affairs, who provided guidance and translation support.

The content of the local authority’s messaging, as well as the regularity and mode of communication, will differ depending on the target audience. For example, there is value in having a dedicated case manager for survivors who can be on call as needed, while media receive information via official statements or briefings from delegated spokespeople. Decisions on how to communicate with various audiences should be based on a full stakeholder analysis.

Local authorities should leverage pre-existing relationships with community-based partners to convey their messages in an appropriate format and through relevant channels. Posting on official channels is rarely sufficient as it requires residents to have existing knowledge of those channels and visit them regularly.

This is true for social media, for example, where a mayor’s Twitter account or the municipal police Facebook page posts useful information. While it is worth generating as many followers of such accounts as possible during times of calm, the accounts are unlikely to have the necessary reach in the aftermath of an attack.

Instead, the mayor or other relevant local leader should strive to communicate directly with community members wherever possible, while still promoting or directing them towards verified sources for additional information. Ideally, community-based partners would be part of two-way (bi-directional) communications with the local authority, helping not only to disseminate key messages and updates, but also to provide insight on how specific groups receive the attack and any emerging harmful trends (e.g., misinformation/disinformation). **Monitoring** conversations around the attack, incident or amid rising tensions on **social media** can inform the analysis of the situation and provide further information on:

- Questions and concerns raised by the relevant communities that can be addressed by the local authority, e.g., related to protection and other security measures.

- Misinformation and disinformation that needs to be addressed, e.g., related to background of the perpetrator, motives and targets.
- Communities that may become targets of hate crimes post an attack/incident, including revenge/reprisal attacks. For example, following the Manchester Arena attack, Manchester and London reported a [five-fold increase in hate crimes](#) with a specifically anti-Muslim rhetoric.
- Ad hoc community initiatives that would be worth promoting.



Response

Having established a more complete understanding of post-incident narratives, the city’s communications plan should then focus on:

- Developing messaging to provide information needed to provide clarity and to address mis/disinformation and hateful narratives that can follow such incidents, with a view to inform, unite and react.
- How and through which channels (e.g., community channels, social media, traditional media, etc.) this messaging is best disseminated.
- Monitoring the response and reactions to this messaging (including through continuous community engagement and social media monitoring) so that adjustments can be made (to both content and channels) where necessary to meet the evolving context.

Part 1: Messaging

Communications following an attack or incident should aim to:

- **Ensure there is a continuous flow of information between local authorities and the public.**
- **Establish trust and transparency in the post-incident response.**
- **Foster solidarity and social cohesion within the affected communities and between them and local authorities.**

Informing	
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide objective facts, not speculation. • Provide clear guidance for the safety of residents and affected communities. • Establish a schedule and a lead person and/or entity for the response.
Cross-Cutting Principles	Transparency, Integrity, Honesty, Empathy
Tips	<p>Maintain trust and credibility among residents by demonstrating empathy, competence, expertise, honesty, openness and commitment. Continue your work on the ground, engaging face-to-face with affected communities. <u>During these ongoing engagements</u>, remember to promise only what you can deliver, highlight efforts and results, refute allegations succinctly and manage public anger and hostility by acknowledging it and providing answers thoughtfully, confidently and in line with established key positive messages.</p> <p>Provide regular updates. If there is nothing new to say, explain the situation and provide an update on what you the city is doing. Silence risks breeding confusion and fueling misinformation and disinformation. Only share facts from trusted sources and address any misinformation or disinformation directly. It is better to tackle rumours head-on, exposing them as false or misguided, than allow conspiracies to spread unchecked.</p> <p>That said, local authorities should not draw attention to stories which would have limited visibility otherwise. This is sometimes known as the “trumpet of amplification”, a <u>key tactic</u> for those wishing to channel falsehoods into the mainstream.</p>

It is therefore vital to have **accurate monitoring of social media and trusted intermediaries** who can feed back on the substance of discussions in the community (e.g., local employers; health, youth and social workers; faith leaders; sports coaches). This will help you determine when harmful information has crossed a ‘critical mass’ of exposure (and needs to be addressed), or whether it remains in the fringe but should be monitored for future spread.

Provide guidance on what sources to trust and existing support mechanisms. If misinformation and disinformation are a major risk, consider launching an ‘amnesty line’ for people to report (anonymously) any harmful content they have seen and its source. This can help to overcome the limitations of content monitoring, since viral content may spread on encrypted platforms (e.g., WhatsApp) or those difficult to track with standard ‘social listening’ tools (e.g., TikTok, YouTube).

Uniting

Principles

- Keep messaging apolitical.
- Beware of unintended glorification.
- Use language that promotes unity and tolerance.

Cross-Cutting Principles

Transparency, Integrity, Honesty, Empathy

Tips

Build solidarity and acknowledgment, particularly in the days following the attack when relief support is being mobilised and survivors and their loved ones need reassurance that they will be cared for, listened to and supported. Express concern, ask questions, be responsive to survivors’ ideas, and remind them that help is available, and problems can be solved. It helps to be aware of the stages of grief and trauma they may be going through during this time. Language and terminology used to describe an attack or incident, perpetrators, motives and targets should be selected carefully.

For example, local authorities should be conscious that labelling something a ‘terrorist attack’ will have associations and consequences. Terrorism is a specific tactic with particular motives and objectives, and the term should not be used to demonstrate how seriously the local authority is taking a situation.

According to [Tarik Kafala](#), Head of BBC Arabic at the time of the [2015 Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris](#), “the value judgements frequently implicit in the use of the words ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorist group’ can create inconsistency in their use or, to audiences, raise doubts about ... impartiality. It may be better to talk about an apparent act of terror or terrorism than label individuals or a group”.

It is equally important to be very cautious about amplifying a terrorist message or creating a ‘cult of personality’ or martyrdom around the perpetrator(s) and mitigate against [one attack inspiring others](#).

What public figures say can bring people together or divide them. The words used by local leaders in the aftermath of an attack impacts how community members respond, both emotionally and behaviourally.

Local leaders and the governments they lead need to show a united front and adopt a common, ideologically and politically neutral message. This will mitigate the risk of ripple effects from the attack, including attempts to avenge victims through violence or to harass or commit hate crimes against individuals who may share the perpetrator’s background (e.g., ethnic, faith and migrant status) or are perceived to support their cause.

For example, following the [2015 Kumanovo clashes](#), council members gathered to agree to a common message, which focused on:

- Unanimously condemning the event.
- Asking the population to follow government advice.
- Promoting solidarity across all ethnic and religious backgrounds



A Choice to Unite or Divide

In [July 2011](#), a far-right Norwegian extremist killed 77 people, many of them teenagers, in a bomb attack in Oslo and a gun rampage at a Labour Party youth camp on Utøya Island. The attacks left the country stunned. The perpetrator's 1500-page manifesto would go on to be [cited](#) as a source of inspiration for future attacks, including the Christchurch Mosque attack.

Much has since been written about the attacks, from the perspectives of survivors, the families of the teenage victims, and on the politics surrounding the attack on the Labour Party camp. But, in the wake of the attack, the Norwegian Labour party faced a choice: whether to frame the attacks and the response in inclusive political rhetoric (i.e. an attack on all Norwegians) or emphasising the political motivations of the perpetrator and that the Labour Party had been targeted. Then-Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg (who has served as Secretary General of NATO since 2014), chose not to politicise the attacks. That decision helped frame the wider discourse about the attack, shifting the focus from an act of terrorism to a national tragedy, and a country united in grief, rather than divided by politics.



📌 [Then Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley leads joint press conference, August 2019](#)

Mayor, Senators, Members of Congress Unite

In August 2019, a 24-year-old male shot and killed nine people and wounded 17 others near the entrance of a bar in Dayton, Ohio, in the [deadliest mass shooting](#) to occur in Ohio since 1975. Key features of Dayton (Ohio, United States), response in the immediate aftermath included:

- Solidarity and support from dozens of US mayors who have also faced attacks in their cities.
- Acknowledged bravery of first responders and the community response.
- Representatives of both major political parties showed a united front.
- Clarity of messaging around when the next round of information would be released and what the community could do.
- Called for unity: Dayton has “grit” – resilient during tough times.

Reacting	
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform instead of denying, justifying or shifting blame. • Beware of timing.
Cross-Cutting Principles	Transparency, Integrity, Honesty, Empathy
Tips	<p>Be candid about any mistakes and explain how the local authority is rectifying them, without engaging in unnecessary debates or becoming defensive. The public tends to have strong negative reactions to blame-shifting and it will do little to help establish trust.</p> <p>For example, former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was heavily criticised following the November 2019 London Bridge knife attack for blaming the opposition party instead of admitting shortcomings from his government and outlining clear next steps to address the situation. Despite negative comments on his initial reaction, the Prime Minister maintained his stance, which led to accusations of furthering a hate agenda and a wider loss of public support.</p> <p>Communications in the immediate aftermath of an attack should focus on essential updates, expressions of empathy or solidarity and security protocols. It is equally important for discussions on drivers of violence, consequences, liability, public inquiries, restorative justice and long-term response to wait for the mourning phase to pass. This is also true for reactions to specific attacks or attribution. While targeted communications can be used to deescalate a situation and provide facts, the audience needs to first have processed events in order to absorb communications positively.</p>

Part 2: Dissemination

High-profile incidents or heightened tensions will inevitably raise questions and concerns among children and young people more broadly. As such, it is important to ensure that teachers are equipped to facilitate an informed and productive discussion in the classroom.

Consider using social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to reach younger audiences (or partnering with young activists and influencers to disseminate your messaging), as well as promoting a unique hashtag to direct people to relevant information.

Considerations

- **Language:** Do you need to translate materials or use an interpreter for live events?
- **Culture:** Is it more appropriate to communicate in person or to use less direct channels or social media?
- **Literacy:** Is it more appropriate to record messages or use visuals rather than provide written statements?

Resources

- **Financial:** Available budget
- **Human:** Staff and partners
- **In kind:** Venue to host press conference, website to host information, public figures and credible messengers to convey key messages to the public.



Working with the Media

Cities should hold roundtable talks with journalists to raise awareness in a collaborative setting (rather than or in addition to a press conference). This can serve as an opportunity to outline what the local authority is doing, what messaging is helpful, what misinformation and disinformation they should be aware of, and to promote a 'do no harm' approach when liaising with survivors, such as protecting names.

Following the [Manchester Arena Bombing](#) (United Kingdom), there was a [500% surge in Islamophobic attacks](#). A study conducted at the [University of Cambridge](#), found that the "reporting by the mainstream media about Muslim communities is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain". These trends exist across all forms of media not just newspapers.

Media coverage of collective traumas may also trigger psychological distress in individuals outside the directly affected community. For example, a [study](#) of media coverage of the Boston Marathon Bombings (Massachusetts, United States) compared the impact of direct exposure (i.e. being at/near the bombings) to media exposure (i.e. bombing-related television, radio, print, online and social media coverage) on acute stress. The study found that **repeated media exposure was associated with higher acute stress than direct exposure**.

Local governments should work with media outlets to explain that repeatedly showing gruesome, distressing images is not in the public interest, and that the repeated display of such imagery serves to keep the potentially traumatic experience alive and exacerbate event-related distress. Media coverage following collective traumas can also diffuse acute stress widely. To limit the potential for harm, media coverage should include warnings before such images are shown. City officials should also be mindful of these considerations when designing public service announcements and other crisis communications.

Part 3: Monitoring

Monitoring the response and reactions to mayoral and local government communications and the narratives around the incident is crucial and should inform subsequent communications. This should be done through continuous community engagement and social media monitoring.



#PorteOuvrte

In March 2015, [six attacks](#) that included explosions and shootings at a rock concert, cafes and a soccer match sent the city of Paris (France) into chaos. Residents used the hashtag #PorteOuvrte – French for “open door” – on Twitter to offer safe haven to strangers seeking to escape the attacks.



#IllRideWithYou

In December 2014, a lone gunman held hostage ten customers and eight employees of the [Lindt Chocolate Café](#) in Martin Place in Sydney (Australia) during a 15-hour standoff. Two hostages and the perpetrator were killed during the siege; three other hostages and a police officer were injured. Twelve hours into the siege, Australians began flooding social media with sentiments of solidarity and support for Muslims in the community. Using #IllRideWithYou, Australians offered to sit next to members of the Islamic faith on transport if they were frightened of being targeted for reprisal.



#ikwilhelpen

In March 2016, [two coordinated bomb attacks](#) at Brussels Airport and on a train leaving Maalbeek metro station in central Brussels shook the Belgium capital. Thirty-two people were killed and more than 300 were injured. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks, with the perpetrators linked to a terrorist cell involved in the 2015 Paris attacks. Brussels residents took to social media to show solidarity and offer support – from transport to places to stay – using the hashtag #ikwilhelpen, which means I will help.

Lessons Learned from Communications During COVID-19

In 2021, the [US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) convened public health and communications practitioners to examine challenges, opportunities and lessons learned while communicating with communities during the pandemic. Recommendations applicable to broader crisis communications include *inter alia*:

- Ground communications **in reliable data and inclusive of impacted communities**.
- Tailor messaging **to meet unique needs** of communities and population groups, consistent, culturally congruent, delivered by trusted community messengers.
- **Spokespeople** need to be credible, speak plain language, and be trained in how to effectively deliver messages in a way that audiences can digest.
- **Misinformation** and **disinformation** must be countered quickly. It is too large a task for any one source and requires a confluence of voices from a group of organisations and media sources working in a coordinated manner.
- Community-based organisations provide a trusted voice during crises, but during the pandemic, few had sufficient access to materials, funding or resources needed to spread their messages within communities. It is crucial to engage community organisations that work directly with those at risk and **provide necessary funding**.
- **Bidirectional** (top-down, bottom-up) communications recognise the value of high-level communications coming from credible sources that can be translated for use in and by specific communities, while also integrating the expertise of community-based organisations. During COVID-19, much of the messaging was top-down, with insufficient engagement with community-based organisations in shaping the messaging drawing on their unique insights about what communities needed to hear.
- **Consider convening a coordinating body** as part of the local authority's communications infrastructure. A centralised body can coordinate, build relationships, share lessons, facilitate bidirectional coordination and compile materials on, messaging and good practices.
- Some inconsistent messaging will be unavoidable due to the rapidly changing nature of a crisis. Aim for **consistent messages and terminology** (e.g., between national and local/subnational governments, across channels, within local government).

- **Credibility** is essential to effective, persuasive communication. Strategies for achieving maximum credibility during a crisis include **leveraging trusted, authoritative intermediaries** to communicate key messages.
- Listen to community needs and concerns and **express genuine empathy**.
- Communicate **respect and trust in the public** and publicly praise those on the front lines or community-led efforts to support the response.
- Communicate with **openness, frankness and honesty**. Communities are more likely to follow guidance if they understand the rationale. Access to accurate information (positive and negative) helps people build appropriate expectations.
- **Communicate change early** as a perception of obfuscation will diminish trust and can motivate people to look for information elsewhere, fostering a belief in rumours, misinformation, and conspiracy theories.
- **Help people prepare for the immediate and longer-term future** both pragmatically and mentally and reduce the anxiety resulting from uncertainty. It is equally important not to foster illusions of certainty, which could lead to the erosion of trust.
- **Message framing** is vital to fostering empowerment. Communications strategies that suggest people should 'calm down' imply that some people are in a panic, potentially creating further anxiety. "We are getting on top of the crisis" is a positive message but reinforces a crisis. Instead, to instil calmness and optimism, try "**we are on the road to recovery**". **Appeal to public solidarity and resilience**; facing a common threat can elicit a shared sense of togetherness, encouraging people to look beyond their differences and respond with a heightened sense of collective responsibility.



Chapter 4

Psychosocial Support

While the experiences of those who have survived acts of terror, hate or violent extremism are deeply personal and context-specific, research has uncovered common layers of trauma and stages of grief among survivors and witnesses. These span from physical and medical effects to intrusive, long-term psychological trauma.

In the aftermath of an attack, fear has long-lasting implications on public health, safety and the economy. It is therefore crucial that all individuals impacted can access psychosocial support.

Local authorities should not necessarily develop or oversee such mechanisms themselves. However, they often have the necessary reach, resources and credibility to co-ordinate the diversity of relevant actors, one of the most important (and challenging) tasks in emergency situations. This chapter outlines the various steps local authorities should undertake to build a co-ordination mechanism to provide tailored and comprehensive psychosocial support to the local population following an attack or other crisis situation.

Trauma is Not Dependent on Proximity

A study of survivors of terrorism in Israel found that 77% displayed symptoms of traumatic stress, while 59% showed signs of depression. The study also found that proximity to an attack was not always a key factor to determine the psychological impact on an individual, with witnesses just as likely to experience trauma as those who were directly targeted by attackers or experienced physical injuries.

Collective Trauma

Five years after the 1995 Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo (Japan), survivors continued to present "unexplained physical symptoms" likely resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition to individual impact, affected societies often suffer from "collective trauma", manifesting as a shared feeling of "imminent pervasive threat, fear, terror and inhibition ... a state of generalised insecurity, terror, lack of confidence and rupture of the social fabric". These feelings of anxiety are especially acute in cases where a particular ethnic or religious community is targeted by attackers, ostensibly separating them from the rest of the population.

Situation Analysis

Local authorities usually have a good understanding of the various actors operating on the ground (e.g., social services, counsellors, mentoring initiatives, extra-curricular clubs, non-formal education). Nonetheless, there may be resources and providers that are particularly grassroots, less well known to officials, or likely to be overlooked when there is an emergency. Local authorities may therefore find it helpful to establish a **local psychosocial support working group**, open to all service providers and supporting actors. Ideally, the local authority would assemble this group as a prevention effort and mobilise it in an emergency such as a terrorist attack, a natural disaster or a health crisis.

Establishing a Local Psychosocial Support Working Group

1. Assign an employee (or more, depending on needs) from the local authority as focal point(s) for partners and to administer the working group (e.g., maintaining related documents and databases, organising and leading meetings, liaising with partners).
2. Secure a space for the working group's meetings and determine their recurrence.
3. Start collating the necessary documents, including:
 - **Terms of reference** that set out 'membership' criteria, principles to abide by (e.g., 'do no harm'), roles and responsibilities (including actors outside the working group such as national agencies and the police), meeting guidelines, ways of working, etc.

- **A database of service providers and supporting actors** including their main target audience or beneficiaries, the areas of support, their geographic reach, their method and the languages spoken (e.g., hotline, in-person counselling, social activities, group support circles).
- **A database of beneficiaries** not necessarily including names and contact details, but rather various groups that might need psychosocial support (e.g., parents of victims in neighbourhood X); this will feed into a matrix that cross-checks that all groups needing support are covered by a service provider or support actor.
- **An evaluation log** to continuously review the support available and challenges experienced by service users to improve provision. This review should take place at the regular meeting, where you can gather feedback from the various members of the working groups on demand for services, capacity and resource issues, equal access and so on. For example:
 - » Is suitable support available across the city?
 - » Are there any individuals who need support but are not currently receiving it?
 - » Are services adapting to the cycle of trauma?

Identifying Service Providers and Support Actors

1. Organise **an open meeting for all stakeholders** who can provide a frontline service or support people in need of psychosocial support in other ways (e.g., providing meals, keeping them company, contacting relatives, running errands). In larger cities, various meetings should be organised in different neighbourhoods to ensure the local authorities are aware of all potential partners.

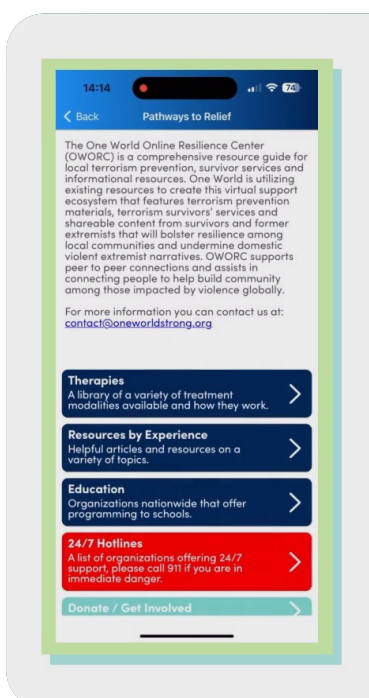
2. **Reach out directly to partners** the local authorities are already aware of.

3. Use community engagement activities to **identify other potential partners**.

4. Set up **a regular town hall for official partners and anyone willing to volunteer** their time or expertise.

While **volunteering** can be an essential resource in times of crisis, it is vital to maintain standards in line with duty of care. For example, someone with no formal training should never be responsible for trauma counselling; equally, someone lacking the necessary background checks (e.g., a [Disclosure and Barring Certificate](#) in the United Kingdom) cannot be assigned to work with minors or vulnerable adults. It may seem excessive, but do not skip these steps even if you are desperate for added capacity or people seem well-meaning. If anything goes wrong, it will be much harder to justify why a volunteer was given access to victims or placed in roles beyond their knowledge if you have not followed basic procedures.

Service providers and support actors can include families, community leaders, religious or traditional leaders/healers, community health and social workers, educators (formal/informal), women’s groups, youth clubs, community planning groups, volunteer networks, local charities and businesses, etc., as long as they receive proper training.



ResilienceNet – OneWorldStrong.org

A mobile application that connects individuals, survivors, first responders and refugees to relevant practitioners, services and resources, regardless of geographic location. ResilienceNet offers a range of services, including educational, peer support, violence prevention and secure chat services. The platform is dedicated to providing survivors, first responders and refugees with the help and support they require to move forward with strength and resilience.

Learn more: [ResilienceNet Mobile App | OneWorldStrong](#)



Unbroken Cities

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotherham (United Kingdom) launched a network of cities and charities to support the recovery of Ukraine after the war. It came as a response to a request for support from Lviv (Ukraine) Mayor Andriy Sadovyi to support his vision for a national rehabilitation programme, [Unbroken](#), to help his country recover from the trauma of war. The two UK mayors have offered to convene mayors from some 20 cities across the UK and US to provide Lviv and Ukrainian organisations with strategic and technical support from cities that have experienced terror attacks and extremist violence, as well as opening up their medical and charitable networks in support of Lviv.

Learn more: [Unbroken Cities Network | OneWorldStrong](#)

Initial Identification of Beneficiaries

Identifying beneficiaries should start as soon as possible, and the list of names should be reviewed regularly at the working group meetings. The following groups can serve as a starting point to identify potential beneficiaries:

- **Direct victims and survivors.** Those physically injured and other individuals present at the scene; [a report on victim support](#) following terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom argues that those “who are ordinarily classified as ‘witnesses’ who were in close proximity to the incident or at the scene shortly after should be considered and treated as survivors by all of the agencies involved in assisting victims, and be able to access adequate support services”.
- **Next of kin.** Families and other individuals close to the direct victims or survivors.
- **Emergency services.** Law enforcement officers, fire department and ambulance personnel and other first-line responders, who need to be educated about the potential long-term effects they might experience from such events.
- **Secondary victims and survivors.** Individuals and members of communities who relate to the victims (e.g., the Jewish community following the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue attack).
- **Government employees.** Staff within the local authority who may be in any of the categories above, especially those most closely involved [in crisis management and response](#).

- **Other considerations:**

- » **Cross-border survivors.** For example, individuals who were visiting your city at the time of the attack. The [International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence](#) provides comprehensive guidelines to address their specific needs.
- » **Diasporas.** Nationals living abroad or individuals living in your city whose hometown has been hit by a terrorist attack. These people will require information and potentially psychosocial support and will have specific needs such as translation.
- » **Multilingual.** The working group should ensure it has professionals speaking different languages, to translate or interpret information and provide remote support.

Support service providers should not be restrictive in who can have access, as attacks or crises can have a mental health impact on individuals not directly affected by the violence. Following the 9/11 attacks (United States), people as far as [Denmark](#) reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder related to the terrorist attack in New York, with similar findings following the 2011 attacks in [Norway](#).

In the early stages local authorities may need to prioritise, so those in greatest need can access immediate care. However, in the longer-term, cities should aim to serve a wider constituency, emphasising community outreach and engagement in order to identify additional people in need of psychosocial support.

Response

Needs and Risks Assessments

Psychosocial support should be tailored to the needs and risks of each individual as much as possible. The Local Working Group should collaborate to identify needs and conduct risk assessments, determining which care pathway is most appropriate in each case and who will take ‘ownership’ for that individual. The local authority can provide a joint framework to conduct and compile these assessments, as well as ensure regular updates from providers (in line with privacy restrictions and doctor–patient confidentiality).

There are at least five dimensions related to well-being that should be included:

- **Psychological or social.** Such needs can range from those requiring medical follow-up for syndromes such as post-traumatic stress disorder or depression to less severe issues linked to emotional well-being, where beneficiaries might need an external actor (e.g., a community support group) to help them cope.
- **Information and advice.** The aftermath of an attack or incident may be very disorienting and overwhelming. Individuals might simply need advice on legal issues, how to deal with their employer or professional commitments, or how best to manage attention from media and journalists, and public visibility.
- **Physical health.** While this category could encompass mental health, we refer in particular to visible injuries, especially long-term ones, and the associated effect on self-perception or identity. Such injuries can be a persistent reminder of trauma, require significant changes to a person’s lifestyle and capabilities, or make them identifiable in public.

- **Practical and safety.** Practical problems, ranging from damage to property to difficulty in accessing a phone or accommodation, “often act as reminders of what people have been through and make it harder to get their life back together”. It is crucial to consider the digital aspects of addressing practical and safety concerns, and the potential for victims to become targets of hateful abuse, accusations, and misinformation and disinformation online (as, for example, took place for parents of children killed in the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown (Connecticut, United States). Basic e-safety measures, such as limiting public access to social media accounts, should be introduced, and broad privacy guidance and advice given on reporting harmful content.
- **Financial.** There are various potential financial dimensions related to wellbeing after an attack, for example, direct victims and next of kin may suffer from financial difficulties due to funeral costs and lost wages, as well as damage to personal property.

It has become common practice for crowdfunding to take place for victims of terror attacks (e.g., London Bridge or Christchurch attacks). While such practices can be pivotal in ensuring that survivors receive the appropriate level of support they need, decentralised crowdfunding efforts can equally be harmful, with a psychological impact on survivors and fuelling further polarisation. For example, following the August 2020 Kenosha shooting (Wisconsin, United States) in which two people were killed, a crowdfunding site raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay for the legal defence of the perpetrator accused of intentional homicide.

Ensuring a Comprehensive Support Package

The OCHA Inter-Agency Standing Community’s intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies illustrates that a “key to organising mental health and psychosocial support is to develop a layered system of complementary supports that meets the needs of different groups”. Through continuous collaboration and regular meetings, the Local Working Group can identify what aspects of support are being addressed and by whom, and what gaps remain.

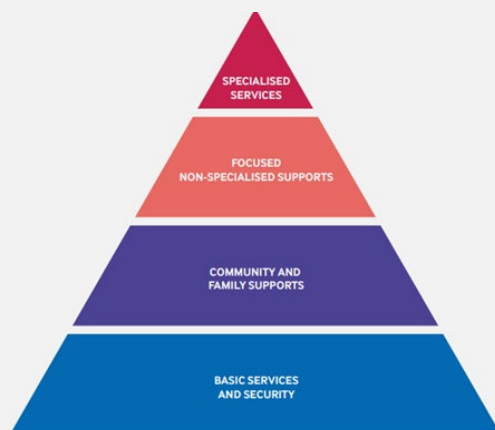


Figure 1: Intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies.⁵³

Survey

- Identify which working group actors are covering which needs, as per the risk assessment. This should be added to the database.
- Determine what other support mechanisms exist and which needs they are covering (e.g., national level compensation schemes).

Identify Gaps

- Using the survey, determine whether all needs from the assessments are being addressed through current service providers and support actors. If you identify specific gaps, explore whether you can organise training for community providers or grassroots groups to fill them.
- Revise your assessment continuously, using the regular meetings to evaluate the response and identify new trends or challenges.



Long-Term Support

The Local Working Group should consider ways to commemorate or remember the events as a community. Public outreach is central here, as memorial mechanisms should be guided by the victims and wider community:

1. At the individual level, “crisis counselling related to birthdays of victims, holidays, important family anniversaries, and [at least] the first anniversary of the event” will be important.
2. At a collective level, symbols “have the ability to strengthen identity and generate solidarity to encourage proper conduct, order and confidence. Symbols may be cultural emblems such as flags, logos, places or buildings, or events and performances such as rituals of mourning, candlelit demonstrations, wreath-laying ceremonies, memorial processions, etc.”.

Communicating Services & Supporting Vulnerable Groups

The Local Working Group should take a proactive approach to ensure the whole population is aware of available support, including more hard-to-reach communities. While each service provider will publicise their specific offer, the local authority can ensure it has a centralised platform to facilitate coordination among service providers. Communications should be clear and disseminated widely, to “help address any confusion over where people should go to if they need assistance” and there should be common information across all partners’ platforms including websites, social media and direct engagement.

Content	Dissemination Tools	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current situation? • Where can I get information? • Where can I go for care? Does the care vary if I am a direct or indirect victim? • How can I deal with practical issues surrounding work, finances, etc.? • What are my rights re compensation/redress? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Flyers, brochures, billboards • Media (e.g., print, radio, TV) • Social media • Helplines • Direct messaging (e.g., text campaigns and alerts) • Partnership with tech platforms and search engines to have location-based alerts (e.g., used during COVID-19 or elections) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy rates: consider visual content or recording messages • Language needs: consider translation and interpretation services • Culture: communicate in person or through less direct channels or social media

Lessons for Post-Disaster Psychosocial Care

A [2022 report](#) on psychosocial care responses to attacks in Belgium, France and Norway found that despite the existence of international guidelines on post-disaster psychosocial care, there were important differences between the three studied countries in the psychosocial care responses to large-scale terrorist attacks. The report found that to build better practices, **a survey of the content and organisation of post-disaster psychosocial care in different countries should be established as well as a cross-country framework for monitoring and evaluation research.** It is essential to gain knowledge across national borders on the quality and efficiency of different psychosocial care responses to strengthen our preparedness for terrorist attacks and similar mass casualty incidents internationally.

Lessons for Long-Term Psychosocial Care

The After Action Report (AAR) for the Response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings (Massachusetts, United States) identified a number of best practices and areas of improvement in this area. The AAR identified as a **best practice the continued provision of mental health services by state and local mental health services for several weeks following the bombings**. The report found that “emotional support and healing for the community remained a high priority” and that “resources continued to be made available to the public and were well advertised through various media outlets”.

Strong Cities heard the same from survivors of the bombings, but an area that has been raised as **a significant lesson learned is that over the long-term, as more people recognise the need for and seek out support, mental health services and associated processes need to be available**.

The AAR identified as an area for improvement, **mental health services for non-public safety personnel, healthcare and human services providers**. The review found that “the mental health needs of some healthcare and human services providers who supported individuals impacted by the bombings were not adequately addressed”. It further stated that the “City of Boston personnel who were part of the Boylston Street recovery effort and felt the stress of physically working in the impacted area did not have their mental health needs adequately addressed”. The AAR recommended to provide psychological first aid training for healthcare employers and human services employers to provide them with skills to identify signs of psychological trauma in their employees. Ensuring long-term access to mental health support for first responders and all personnel and providers involved in response efforts is crucial.





Triggers for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

In Kumanovo (North Macedonia), community police officers have warned against the use of fireworks before the New Year holiday and at weddings, as the noise might trigger trauma following [clashes in 2015](#) (also known as Operation “Divo naselje”). The clashes were a series of shootouts which erupted during a raid between Macedonian police and an armed group called the National Liberation Army, which saw eight Macedonian policemen and 10 militants killed, and a further 37 officers injured.

For survivors of two mass school shootings in [Parkland](#) (Florida) and [Santa Fe](#) (Texas) (United States) in 2018, fireworks are a challenge and can trigger symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Some young survivors asked their communities to show sensitivity during Fourth of July (Independence Day) celebrations and be aware of the impact fireworks might have on the students and faculty facing the short and long-term effects of the school shootings.

The U.S. [National Center for PTSD](#) recommends that citizens who want to be sensitive about their fireworks should have a conversation with their neighbours about how the sounds might affect them, or at least alert them as to what time they plan to set off fireworks.

Lessons for Psychosocial Care for Bereaved Families

Following the 2011 mass shootings in Oslo and Utøya, the Norwegian government launched a proactive outreach programme to prevent unmet help needs (in line with the country's health care model). The majority of survivors received one or more types of primary health services both directly after the attack and the following year. Most survivors used specialised mental health services.

A [study](#) published in 2015 (updated in 2019) included recommendations from those who took part in the proactive outreach programme that may offer guidance to cities when considering the provision of care for bereaved families. More than 80 bereaved parents and siblings gave the following advice about what is important in the delivery of support following a traumatic loss:

- Reach out and offer help.
- Repeat the offer if it is at first refused.
- Assign a contact person to ensure continuity in the delivery of support services.
- Include the bereaved, both those with psychological and biological closeness to the deceased, in support programmes.
- Base support on competence and communicate it with empathy.
- Be flexible, listen to what they need, but take charge when required.
- Provide clear information at an early stage about how the death happened, normal grief and crisis reactions, what will happen next, where and from whom they may receive help. Repeat the information.
- Connect them with a psychologist and other professionals as required.
- Help them get in contact with others who shared the experience.
- Offer adaptations at school and work without them having to ask for it.

Another study published in [Scandinavian Psychologist](#) reviewed a programme, organised by the Norwegian Directorate of Health, which brought together bereaved families over four weekends to process and learn about grief. This proactive follow-up included group sessions, plenary lectures, workshops and social activities, with themes changing over time and reflecting important post-attack milestones, such as the trial, verdict, commission report and the grief process.

Lessons for Psychosocial Care for Young People

A qualitative study of psychosocial care for hospitalised young survivors of the 2011 Utøya attack in Norway highlighted key considerations for health-care workers in providing care for young people.

Three overarching categories emerged related to:

- Remembering the past
- Dealing with the present
- Preparing for the future

The study found that “[f]or the youths in the study, talking with hospital staff about their traumatic experiences was mostly perceived as positive and linked to various helpful outcomes. In addition to engaging in the trauma narrative, staff needed to comprehend and address how the traumatic experiences and the hospitalisation resulted in the survivors’ extended fear and changed appraisals about the world and themselves. Having the time to stay physically and mentally close to the youths and engage in everyday interaction was crucial in rebuilding their sense of safety and bringing back normalcy. The hospital staff played a significant role in strengthening the survivors’ confidence in own capabilities and trust in others. The different professionals in the hospital contributed to various aspects of psychosocial care, and both trauma-focused interventions and commonplace conversations and actions were emphasised as important and meaningful approaches.”



Chapter 5

Post-Incident Support

Use the momentum of social solidarity in the initial days to lay the foundations for professional support that survivors may need in the future. Survivors' needs will change over time and should be monitored and acknowledged constantly through mechanisms such as annual public meetings and open houses chaired by the mayor, professional support groups and working groups. This provides ongoing opportunities for direct mayoral leadership and allows for a sense of shared responsibility, the development of community-led solutions, an opportunity to troubleshoot issues and re-introduce existing resources, and strategies for how to best fill gaps.

Access to Information

Ensuring ongoing post-incident support and consistent, accessible information for all affected is crucial. A good practice for local governments is to establish a single, central office (some term this a 'one-stop-shop' or a centralised information or assistance centre) to make accessing information and support as straightforward as possible for survivors, communities and front-line workers (for example, law enforcement, healthcare, educational, security and relief professionals). Where possible, local governments should then also leverage the support of civil society organisations operating in the city/region to augment available support on a needs-basis and in the longer-term. This can include *inter alia* referrals to support services such as bereavement counselling and mental health support, such as confidential support lines, live chat services, and local therapy clinics.

Ensuring that all communities are aware of available support is crucial. Awareness and coordination should also be conducted around charitable funds, government welfare and social support services for carers, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups, including children, youth, minorities, refugees, asylum seekers and foreign nationals.

To this end, an online/digital resource (multilingual and accessible) that is widely promoted and publicised to all communities (including remote or otherwise hard to reach) is also advised. This platform can also be leveraged to maintain an on-going dialogue between relevant city offices, law enforcement and those affected, including *inter alia* regular updates about investigations, details of compensation schemes, links to local/state/national resources and support, noting that long-term, regular communication with survivors can support them in their recovery.

Access to Justice

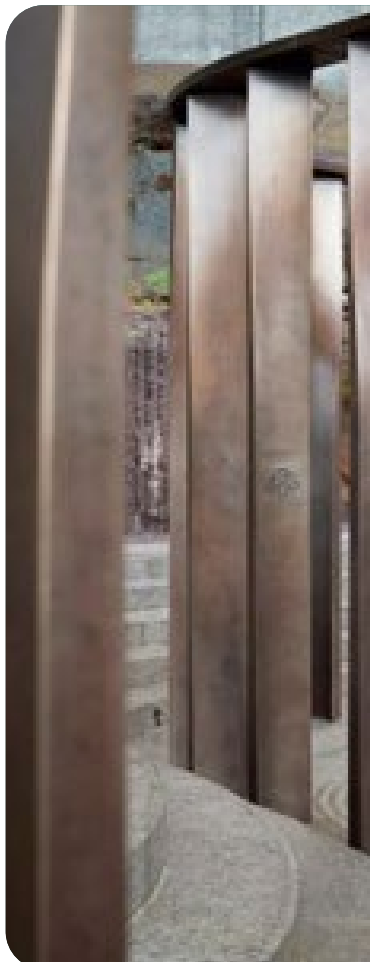
Seeing justice served is important for those impacted in coming to terms with what has happened. Although an investigation, prosecution and sentencing of the perpetrator(s) does not compensate for the harm done, it can offer survivors a degree of recognition. A trial can also bring to light information and context needed for a full understanding of the events leading up to, during and following the attack, which can facilitate closure for some survivors and their families.

Access to justice is a fundamental human right and a principle of the rule of law. This includes *inter alia* the right to a fair trial and the right to an effective remedy. While providing adequate avenues for people to exercise these rights through the judicial system is often within the jurisdiction of state and national governments (i.e., not within the mandate of a mayor or local government), local officials can provide support for residents by advocating at the state and national levels where needed.

Memorials

Following an attack or incident where there are victims and survivors, it is common for spontaneous memorials to appear and become a gathering point for those wishing to grieve and memorialise those lost. Over time, local governments may consider erecting a permanent memorial, although decisions to do so will appropriately be shaped and guided by cultural norms.

Where a local government has decided to construct a permanent memorial, it is good practice to engage the survivors, families and communities in the creative process, to ensure that decisions surrounding memorialisation and commemoration are inclusive and respectful of all affected communities, rather than something that can divide communities. Memorials can also advertently or inadvertently shape the narrative of the attack, the response and how the city recovered and rebuilt. They can also serve a prevention function, a reminder to future generations of the impact of violence, with many cities engaging schools in commemorative activities to ensure future learning.



Utøya Memorial Site at Utøyakaia

The [Utøya Memorial Site at Utøyakaia](#) was opened in June 2022 by Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre. Designed to remember each of the 77 victims of the July 2011 terrorist attack, the memorial features 77 large bronze pillars that form a curved question mark, one pillar for each victim. At the base of the steps are 77 narrow bronze columns, with the first curved arc aimed at the sun as it stood in the sky when the bomb exploded in Oslo. The second arc is aimed at the sun as it stood in the sky during the attack on Utøya.

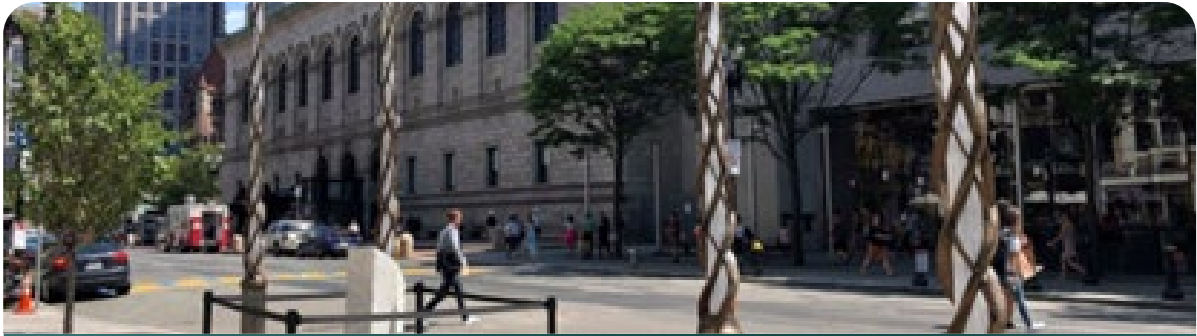
The process to design and build the memorial was long and complex, with the first site proposed abandoned after fierce local opposition. The second site selected was also the subject of legal challenge from locals concerned that tourists would overwhelm what is a quiet, rural setting, and from others (including some who had taken part in rescue efforts following the attack) concerned that the memorial would prolong their trauma. In February 2021, a Norwegian court ruled in favour of building the memorial.



Transforming Utøya Island

The island of Utøya, the site where so many, mostly young people, lost their lives in the same 2011 attack, has been transformed into a space that tells the story of that day, commemorates those who were lost, and – crucially – serves as a centre for learning, where youth can engage on topics of democracy, social cohesion and community resilience. The architects and the island’s custodians undertook extensive consultations with survivors, families and communities, as well as assembling [a panel of advisers](#) from New York’s [September 11 Memorial Museum](#) and the [Pentagon Memorial](#) to advise based on their respective processes.

While many survivors wanted the island’s café, where so many young people had been murdered, to be torn down, grieving parents wanted it to remain. The architects reflected those different needs through the concept of Hegnhuset (meaning “safeguarded house”, protecting both the building and the democratic ideals it embodies). A pavilion shields views of the café from those who don’t want to be reminded; inside the café, for those who want to learn more, the story unfolds via a visual timeline. There is also a memorial on the island: a large steel ring, suspended from trees in a clearing overlooking the water that laps on the island’s shores. The ring is inscribed with the names of the victims.



Reclaiming the Finish Line

The [memorial](#) to the Boston Marathon Bombing was built at two distinct locations near the Marathon's finish line, separated by a city block, marking the locations where two pressure cooker bombs were detonated in 2013. Each feature granite pillars ringed by bronze and glass spires meant to bathe the sites in warm white light. Cherry trees bloom each April during the anniversary, and two modest bronze bricks have been set in the sidewalk to honour the police officers killed in the bombing's aftermath. Around the base of the two pillars is an inscription etched in bronze: "Let us climb, now, the road to hope."



Reclaiming the Day

The [Highland Park City Council](#) (Illinois, United States) honoured the first anniversary of the attack on an Independence Day Parade in 2022 with a day of healing. The service started with a memorial ceremony, followed by a walk down the parade route, ending with a drone show instead of fireworks (the latter which may trigger trauma). Mayor Nancy Rotering said "[i]t was important for us to say that evil doesn't win, and this is our parade route, and this is our community that we are taking back". Mayor Rotering led a consultative, multilingual process with bereaved families and survivors before finalising plans for a permanent memorial. A rose garden is serving as a temporary memorial for the community.



From Spontaneous Memorials to the Forêt de Soignes

Following the 2016 Brussels (Belgium) attacks, the community established many spontaneous memorials. Permanent memorials were then built, including the Flame of Hope, a sculpture in [Molenbeek's Municipal Square](#), a memorial plaque in the departure hall of Brussels Airport, and a Memorial Garden, with a plaque listing the names of victims who died at the airport. [Thirty-two birch trees](#), one for each victim, were planted in a forest outside of Brussels, the trees representing people standing in a circle holding hands, surrounding a stone circle, encircled by water.



A Glade of Light

The [Glade of Light](#) monument honours those who died in the Manchester Arena bombing (United Kingdom). A white marble 'halo' bears the names of those who died and, in 2022, relatives of the victims made memory capsules holding mementos which were then embedded in the memorial. The monument includes native plants that will provide year-round colour, and a tree in the centre of the monument selected to bloom around the May anniversary of the attack.

Chapter 6

Preparing to Respond

When an incident such as a terror attack occurs, panic will spread and individuals will respond in unforeseen ways. While preparation will have its own limitations due to the unpredictability of human behaviour, it is important for local authorities to establish basic processes and systems for each aspect of the response. This will help minimise the potential for mismanagement and ensure that the city and its communities recover in a unified and effective way. This conclusion outlines the steps local authorities should take to prepare the post-incident response.

Developing Plans

This Guide provides a foundation for mayors and senior officials to develop their own tailored response plans.

Response Plans should be developed in collaboration with relevant actors and in consultation with beneficiaries where appropriate. They should be reviewed and practiced frequently to ensure all relevant stakeholders are well prepared. Annual table-top exercises and simulations can be useful to embed knowledge and expose flaws in the system, for example a one-day exercise to practice the response to a specific and evolving scenario, with all relevant staff involved. This should include national actors and local partners and include the pre-identification of roles and responsibilities should a crisis occur. Preparing and testing crisis response systems and approaches regularly will help cities identify where such strategies can be improved and ensure the different stakeholders involved are aware of changes and their responsibilities.

This can, in turn, facilitate a swift, appropriate and effective multi-stakeholder response in the event of violence.

In general, Response Plans should include:

- **Roles and responsibilities:** ensure you have staff in charge of all tasks and steps described in the chapters.
- **Available resources and channels:** for example, a communications plan should include a spreadsheet of local social media groups and channels with a large following, most popular radio stations, key community leaders, citizens' associations, etc.
- **Prepared packages of measures:** such as frequently asked questions, draft statements (or useful templates), dormant websites ready to be activated, hotlines and social media protocols.

Survey Exercises

A survey of local stakeholders is useful for many areas of work, but particularly important for rapid response in times of crisis. Consider points of entry across the community, so that messages can reach the widest possible audience at speed. For communications, this includes more marginalised groups and individuals, who may otherwise be vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation or feel excluded from the recovery effort. Consider which methods of communication would resonate best for each group and establish ongoing contact with key figures where possible.

For example:

- Media outlets (according to their respective affiliations or readership)
- Community leaders
- Faith leaders
- Sports teams
- Family physicians and hospitals
- Major employers
- Social workers
- Institutions (courts, universities, schools, trade union heads)
- Large cultural centres (music venues, museums, theatres, stadiums)

Building Partnerships

Having multi-actor and national-local structures, relationships, partnerships and protocols in place prior to an attack helps facilitate an effective and timely response should there be an incident. Mayors and other local officials who have had to respond to incidents in their cities frequently underscore how important it is for cities to prepare and practice with all partners to face worst-case scenarios and not to underestimate how quickly incidents can escalate. In such cases, established and trusted partnerships become crucial for an effective response.

Ideally, building partnerships will form part of the crisis response plans. The importance of these links is fourfold:

- Partners can help you **understand your audience**, informing the content and format of your response.
- Partners can support in **disseminating your response** to key groups and the general public.

- Partners may be willing to **amend their own response**, for example by promoting information solely to the police.
- Partners can provide a **'temperature check'** on how certain pockets of the community are responding to an attack.

Partners may include:

- **Community liaison officers.** Political officials, community leaders or members of civil society groups who have trust and credibility with residents.
- **Local media.** Influence could relate to content, for example providing photographs and recordings to outlets as appropriate, or broader agreement on how to frame an evolving situation. It is important to consider 'geo-ethnic' media, which targets specific geographies or communities. In countries where media outlets are owned in part by political parties or ethnic groups, be prepared for messaging from them that may disrupt your communications strategies and prepare a response.

“All too often the media are perceived as “opponents”. But the institutions and the media need each other, and provide mutual feedback. To ensure the government has a favourable reception in terms of communication in a crisis situation, the media must be involved on a mutual basis. If not, the media will increasingly use informal sources. In small communities, these informal sources and rumours could become critically important.”

SAFE-COMMS, *The Terrorism Crisis Communication Manual for Public Authorities*, March 2011, p. 13.

- **Private sector.** Businesses can help amplify your response. Employers have unique and immediate access to their workforce and are sometimes more trusted than political institutions. They can therefore play a role in influencing reactions to such events.
- **Other cities.** Cities that host important diasporas can help you access people who may be affected by events. This can be done through networks such as the Strong Cities Network and through community engagement (see Chapter 2).

“Again, we are reminded that public–private interactions are crucial and must be developed before an incident occurs. Developing those relations before an incident helps facilitate the flow of information during crises and may help ensure that the data conveyed to first responders is accurate, such as changes in floor plans and access routes.”

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,
Lessons from the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks – Parts I and II,
U.S. Government Publishing Office, 8 and 28 January 2009

Learning From Experience

Following a crisis, a structured debriefing process called an After Action Review (AAR) can be useful to help prepare for future crises. The process, developed by the U.S. Army, calls for leaders to assess the incident and response, and draw out lessons learned. An AAR should be dual-focused: it should both identify opportunities to prevent a future crisis and improve on the plans in place for response. In 2020, the US Department of Justice and National Police Foundation published a guide to conducting AARs, which may be useful for city administrations looking for information: [How to Conduct an After Action Review](#).

Examples of AARs include:

- [An After-Action Review of Minneapolis City Agencies’ Responses to Activities Directly Following George Floyd’s Death on 25 May 2020](#)
- [2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report](#)
- [FEMA After-Action Report on the Las Vegas Shooting, 2017](#)
- [After Action Report for the Response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings](#)

Local and national governments may also appoint independent evaluators or commissions to review a significant event.

Examples include:

- [The Independent Commission to Investigate the Facts of the Tragedy in Lewiston: Initial Interim Report \(2024\)](#)
- [London now significantly better prepared for a terrorist attack \(2022\)](#)
- [Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019 \(2020\)](#)
- [The Kerslake Report: An independent review into the preparedness for, and emergency response to, the Manchester Arena attack on 22nd May 2017 \(2018\)](#)
- [The 22 of July Commission Releases Final Report on Norwegian Terrorist Attack \(2012\)](#)
- [Pradhan Inquiry Commission into the 2008 Mumbai attacks](#)

Prepared to Respond

While no city is ever fully prepared to respond to an attack such as the one that occurred in Boston in 2013, the city's rapid medical response was in part enabled by more than a decade of efforts by the medical community to build, sustain and exercise its emergency-preparedness programmes.

Every year, the medical community would review relevant literature to learn from others who have faced such events. For example, Boston had previously hosted symposia on planning for and responding to terrorist attacks. Speakers from the cities of Israel, London, Madrid and Mumbai had shared their experiences in responding to a mass casualty event.

This knowledge had been integrated into planning for special events, such as the marathon. The nature of the Boston Marathon meant that medical resources were assembled and staged along the marathon route, and staffed with team of professionals, including first responders, physicians, nurses, etc.

Boston followed carefully crafted and exercised plans, integrating lessons learned from mass casualty events in cities around the world, and training staff repeatedly in implementation.

[Be Prepared – The Boston Marathon and Mass-Casualty Events | NEJM](#)



Conclusion

Mayors, other local officials, and the governments they lead, have key roles to play in mounting an effective and inclusive response following an attack or crisis. It is pivotal that city leaders understand and respond accordingly to the trauma and deep societal cleavages that can divide and polarise communities in the wake of attacks. Communities, no matter how resilient, require strong leadership to help them heal and recover, and local governments are uniquely positioned to lead a response that reestablishes public safety and promotes healing and recovery.

This Guide is intended to identify the key roles and responsibilities that mayors and other sub-national leaders and local officials can and must play in the immediate aftermath and longer-term to stabilise, reassure and support their constituents, and the mechanisms, partnerships, protocols and considerations that can help mitigate the impacts of such attacks or crises, and rebuild the resilience of their communities.

A mayor needs to approach response planning as if an attack is a matter of when rather than if. They need to chart out an effective, sensitive and proportional response following a hate- or violent extremism-motivated attack, including:

- Ensuring local actors are all aware of response plans and understand the chain of command, their role and whom to contact in a range of different scenarios.
- Coordinating between local actors, as well as with national response teams, to meet the varied local needs while minimising duplication.
- Communicating with the public to prevent panic, shape the narrative around the incident and minimise space for misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives.

- Different means of providing support and comfort to residents, giving particular attention to communities directly targeted by the attack.
- Strategies to mitigate psychosocial and economic fallout in the medium- to long-term.

A mayor is uniquely placed to understand the threats facing their city and coordinate a response sensitive to the individual needs of different communities. Every city is different and every mayor will need to take a tailored approach to serve its residents effectively. However, they do not have to stand alone. Mayors worldwide are facing similar challenges and can learn from each other's experiences and draw strength from one another. This Guide is merely a starting point for mayors to learn lessons from fellow local leaders who may have experienced and had to respond to a hate or violent extremist attack in their city: we encourage you to go beyond this resource and connect with them and other local leaders who might have developed contingency plans should their city be the location of the next attack.

This Guide, as with all other Strong Cities tools, will be housed in the Strong Cities [Resource Hub](#). It will be a living document, added to and updated based on the Network's engagement with mayors and cities, and serving as a starting point for mayors and local officials as they develop their response plans. The City-Led Response Guide is central to Strong Cities' ongoing efforts to build a community of practice between local leaders that crosses national and regional boundaries and transcends differences in context and resourcing, with the basic aim of sharing experiences, good practices and key learnings, in order to unlock and catalyse city-led response.

Annex I: City Contributions/ References

Aarhus	Denmark
Alexandria (Virginia)	United States
Ajloun	Jordan
Aurora (Colorado)	United States
Baerum	Norway
Balqa	Jordan
Bavaria	Germany
Boston (Massachusetts)	United States
Brussels	Belgium
Buffalo (New York)	United States
Cape Town	South Africa
Christchurch	New Zealand
Colombo	Sri Lanka
Dayton (Ohio)	United States

Denver (Colorado)	United States
El Paso (Texas)	United States
Greater Manchester	United Kingdom
Halle/Salle	Germany
Helsinki	Finland
Highland Park (Illinois)	United States
Kenosha (Wisconsin)	United States
Kumanovo	North Macedonia
L'Hay-les-Roses	France
Las Vegas (Nevada)	United States
Lewiston (Maine)	United States
London	United Kingdom
Madaba	Jordan
Malé	Maldives
Miami-Dade County (Florida)	United States
Minneapolis (Minnesota)	United States
Mumbai	India
New York City (New York)	United States

Newtown (Connecticut)	United States
Orlando (Florida)	United States
Oslo	Norway
Paris	France
Parkland (Florida)	United States
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	United States
Ramadi	Iraq
San Diego (California)	United States
Santa Fe (Texas)	United States
Sarajevo	Bosnia & Herzegovina
Singapore	Singapore
Stanwell	United Kingdom
Sydney	Australia
Tokyo	Japan
Wuerzburg	Germany
Zamboanga	The Philippines
Zarqa	Jordan

Annex II:

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