Active shooter incidents are increasing. Many organizations, including schools, businesses and events, have begun including protocols for the possibility of an active shooter situation. The statistics are disturbing. The FBI released a paper “A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013” with the following metrics:

- During the study period, 160 active shooter incidents occurred.
- An annual average of 6.4 incidents occurred in the first 7 years studied, rising to an annual average of 16.4 in the last 7 years; an upward trend.
- 70% of the incidents occurred in either a commerce/business or educational environment.
- 60% of the incidents ended before police arrived.
- All but 2 incidents involved a single shooter.
- Casualties (victims killed and wounded) totaled 1,043. The shooters were not included in this total.
For over 30 years, Black Swan Solutions® has successfully assisted organizations with planning for, managing and recovering from mass casualty events, including active shooter incidents. Based on lessons learned, here are core guidelines to consider as your organization plans for this type of event or any other mass casualty incident, such as a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, or facility fire/explosion.

Lesson 1: Coordinate with local resources
All organizations rely on community responders to assist in a crisis. Yet most never proactively involve these same agencies in plan development and testing. If a crisis occurs, this can result in significant challenges related to cooperation and coordination. Here is a list of recommended resources we suggest contacting for coordination prior to an incident:

- Local American Red Cross
- City, County and State Emergency Management
- Local police, fire and rescue
- Department of State, if applicable

Lesson 2: Test your plan
Have a plan for testing shelter in place and evacuation processes, including a reliable means to account for every employee on premise at the time of the event. This information will also be invaluable for first responders involved in the search and rescue effort.

Don’t forget about accommodating employees with special needs or disabilities, such as those in wheelchairs. Make sure that evacuation plans are actionable for all employees and that there are at least two evacuation routes available. Practice the evacuation plan and the alternative plans, such as shelter in place, if evacuation is not safe. Ensure managers know the plan thoroughly so they can set an example and lead other employees.
Lesson 3: Have a secure, centralized database for up-to-date information

In a crisis, organizational leaders will need to make decisions quickly and will need accurate information to respond appropriately. It is equally important that all parties involved have real-time access to reliable information for coordinating and responding effectively. Many organizations have plans in place to protect information, as well as to backup existing resources. In addition, we recommend organizations also develop or outsource a database committed to storing information about the people impacted by a crisis, with the capability of including:

- Location and status of victims, including those safe, injured or deceased
- Documentation of what has been communicated to families and their specific needs
- Persons responding to the crisis and what roles they are filling

Lesson 4: Contract with a disaster call center in advance

Consider contracting with a specialized crisis call center to ensure you have a plan in place to accommodate mass inquiries while providing a professional and compassionate response. Families will expect your organization to account for their loved ones who may have been affected by the crisis and to provide up-to-date information. The volume of inquiries and requests for information will often overwhelm your internal capabilities. Utilizing a dedicated crisis call center allows your organization to respond rapidly, centralizes the response, and helps your organization dedicate staff to other duties.

Lesson 5: Deliver difficult news personally

Difficult news must be delivered personally. If the news is not good, make the effort to say it either in person or on the telephone – don’t text it or leave a voice mail. It is very tempting for organizations to solely rely upon technology, such as email, text and phone, for communicating efficiently in a crisis with those impacted. However, doing so creates the risk of being perceived as impersonal and cold, possibly contributing to irreversible reputation damage and media scrutiny.
Lesson 6: Train your staff for crisis events

Prior to a crisis, identify and train organizational personnel who will interface with victims and families in a critical event. Understand the importance of self-care for those involved in responding to the incident and debrief them at the end of every shift. Consider contracting with an organization to provide specialized training, as well as to offer guidance and support to those employees during the crisis.

In addition, train staff on what to do during an active shooter incident or other crisis event to protect themselves, including the Run-Hide-Fight process outlined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

There are numerous resources available online through reputable agencies to begin this conversation. In addition, some organizations offer workshops and training specifically for active shooter events and other crises. Here are some resources that might be helpful for expanding and refining your emergency operations plan for active shooter incidents:

- FEMA online course: “Active Shooter – What You Can Do”
- Department of Homeland Security 90-minute Webinar: “Active Shooter Awareness Virtual Roundtable”
- Department of Homeland Security Active Shooter Workshop Series
- Department of Homeland Security Video: “Options for Consideration Active Shooter Preparedness”
- A variety of downloadable resources through the Department of Homeland Security, including pamphlets, booklets, posters, and pocket cards
- The FBI provides several guides for developing emergency operations plans specific to schools, institutions of higher learning, health care facilities and places of worship

Lesson 7: Pre-establish plans for a Family Assistance Center

In advance of a crisis, consider strategies for establishing a Family Assistance Center, typically at a hotel, where victim families can gather to obtain information and receive emotional support and psychological first aid. Families also have an opportunity to obtain information from responding authorities.
We all hope that we never have to face an active shooter situation or crisis. However, with mass casualty events increasing and public places becoming more common targets, it is imperative that organizations prepare for the possibility that this type of event could impact them. Using these lessons as a guide, we encourage you to evaluate your plan and do a gap analysis to determine what areas might benefit from further assessment.

Black Swan Solutions® assists organizations in preparing for, responding to and recovering from the human impact of crises. Our turnkey approach integrates the expertise of experienced, masters-prepared professionals with state of the art technology. We mitigate organizational risk by ensuring that people get timely and accurate information, as well as the human support they need during and after a crisis. In responding to crises ranging from data breaches to mass casualty events, our client organizations, among the most recognized brands in the world, rapidly communicate with stakeholders, demonstrate compassion for victims, and protect their reputation. For more information, call us at 888-723-2466 or visit www.blackswancrisissolutions.com.