



## HIGHER ED ISSUE BRIEF

### Campus Active Aggressor: Mitigate, Respond to, and Manage the Impacts and Consequences

Daily headlines remind us of the threat and impact of violence on our community. In their most extreme form—active shooter/mass casualty—these events are sudden, unexpected, and high-profile and can have a profound impact on students, parents, faculty, and staff and the trust they have in the safety of their classrooms, residences, and workplaces.

Over the five-year period from 2017 through 2021, firearms deaths rose 33% according to the [Gun Violence Archive](#). While still statistically rare, over the same time mass shootings—defined by the FBI as “one or more individuals who are engaged in killing or attempting to kill in a populated area”—doubled indicating that this is a problem that is not just endemic but increasing. This steady climb in active aggressor incidents is particularly disturbing for school leadership as the [Rockefeller Institute of Government](#) reports that of the mass shooter incidences documented since 1996, almost a quarter occurred in schools.

Understandably, with each new incident in the news, the concern on campuses grows as does the pressure on leaders to take action to prevent violent acts and keep communities safer. Yet few schools have adequately prepared beyond tactical training for police departments and ambiguous statements in their handbooks about workplace violence.

While the duration of an active aggressor event can often be measured in minutes, its impact on an organization can be measured in months or even years. By taking steps now to develop a broad and holistic approach to mitigate, respond to, and manage the impacts and consequences of this most troubling of risks, you can help your community not just be safe but to feel safe.

## 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TEAM

- 1 When was the last time our institution participated in an exercise that tested not only our operational capability but also our ability to anticipate and respond to the longer-term strategic and reputational impacts of this type of event?
- 2 Do we have the proper teams / structure in place to respond both in the short- and longer-term?
- 3 Are our stakeholders aware of what to do during an active aggressor event as well as their role in helping to prevent this type of situation from happening?
- 4 Do we have sufficient mental health and wellness support in place for our community and professionals appropriately trained to escalate potential risks?
- 5 Are we building a campus climate in which community members feel comfortable seeking help for themselves or others?

# STEPS TO TAKE NOW

## ESTABLISH A PREVENTION PROGRAM

A viable violence prevention program reduces the likelihood of warning signs being ignored, provides support to community members who need it, and reduces legal risk. It requires:

- Clear definition, policies, metrics, and accountability
- Clear criteria/processes to support timely reporting, analysis and appropriate escalation of events or threats
- A cross-functional Behavioral Threat Assessment Team to manage program & determine response options
- Ongoing team training and capabilities development
- Community-focused training programs that explain how to support a safe environment and provide guidance beyond the generic “Run, Hide, Fight”

## PLAN & PRACTICE STRATEGIC RESPONSE

As with any crisis, the perceived effectiveness of the response can have more influence on an organization’s reputation and viability than the underlying event or issue. A Crisis Management Team focuses on the strategic and long-term impacts and consequences of a significant and violent event. To be effective, it requires:

- A well practiced team with clearly defines leadership, authority, membership, specific roles/responsibilities
- An efficient process to enable fast, strategic decision-making on reputational, legal and policy implications
- A stakeholder-centric focus to ensure that short, medium and long-term needs are anticipated, and communications are consistent, compassionate, and credible

## PLAN & PRACTICE OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

Strong and well practiced emergency response protocols are vital to ensure an effective response during an active aggressor event. Ensure that your institution has:

- A capable, well-trained, and well practiced Emergency Operations Team that can react in real-time to manage accountability and provide first responders much-needed resources, information, and support
- A NIMS and ICS-compliant structure that reflects a clear understanding of the security protocols and capabilities for your campus as well as law enforcement procedures and expected response
- Regular, ongoing active aggressor training and exercising including tabletop exercises and functional drills, ideally in partnership with local authorities

## PLAN FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

An active aggressor incident puts immense stress and emotional burdens on stakeholders, and institutions need to be prepared to provide aid, and support including:

- Financial assistance for items such transportation, housing, medical, funerals, tuition, and extended leave.
- Psychological support and grief counseling for students, staff, family, and first responders
- Family Assistance Centers
- Guidance and planning for vigils, memorials, & charities

# NEED SOME HELP?

## WE’VE BEEN THERE

Our team has decades of experience helping institutions grapple with the increasing risk of community violence. We’ve partnered with clients across industries from leading hospital networks, manufacturers, and academic institutions to global technology firms to develop comprehensive approaches that mitigate, respond to, and manage the impacts and consequences of this troubling risk.

## WE’LL HELP YOU PREPARE

While statistically rare, active violence situations are on the rise. Our team can support you in the development of robust plans and protocols to help prevent this type of tragedy from occurring in the first place and in responding compassionately and effectively if, in a worst-case scenario, it does.



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