

The Importance of Event Stakeholders: A case study of the Route 91 Harvest Festival Shooting

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Introduction

The Route 91 Harvest Festival is a three-day country music festival hosted in an outdoor venue on the Las Vegas Strip in Las Vegas, Nevada. Run by Live Nation event promoters, the festival was a success from 2014 to 2016, but in 2017, the third and final night of the festival ended in tragedy. On October 1, 2017, Stephen Paddock opened fire from his Mandalay Bay hotel room into the outdoor music festival audience below. As a result of the shooting, 58 people, including two law enforcement officers, were dead, and over 850 people had been injured (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2018). The sheer violence of the incident (hereafter called “the shooting”) made it the deadliest mass shooting by an individual in United States history. The Las Vegas Review Journal has announced, however, that the festival will resume in 2019 at a new venue in Las Vegas (Katsilometes, 2018).

Background of the Shooting

The Route 91 Harvest Festival was not a specific target for the shooter. Stephen Paddock (hereafter called “the shooter”) carefully considered several potential events and sites before choosing the Route 91 Harvest Festival (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2018) concluded the Route 91 Harvest Festival and the Mandalay Bay Hotel gave the shooter the privacy and dense crowds he sought to carry out his act of violence. The shooter was known to visit the Mandalay Bay casino twice a month (FEMA, 2018). He checked into two rooms on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay six days before the shooting. During those six days, he moved a cache of weapons into his rooms. The weapons had been acquired through legal means for a year before the shooting, and officers found 23 different firearms in the hotel rooms after the shooting (FEMA, 2018).

The shooter began firing into the crowd of more than 22,000 attendees at 10:05 p.m., 25 minutes after Jason Aldean took the stage at the outdoor music festival. The shooter fired rounds at the music festival, hitting equipment and attendees until 10:15. Law enforcement officers found Paddock dead by self-termination in his barricaded hotel room at 11:20 p.m. (FEMA, 2018).

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department’s (LVMPD) preliminary investigation of the incident by was unable to discover a motive

for the shooting, and found Paddock acted alone, had no known ties to extremist groups, and did not leave a suicide note or manifesto before taking his own life after the shooting (Lombardo, 2018).

Case Dilemma: How do you plan for violence at the event?

Thankfully, the reality is that incidents of an active shooting at events are rare; still, event planners must always consider how to protect the attendees, staff, and assets at their events from violence and harm. The shooting and its after-effects highlight the almost overwhelming aspects to consider when planning an event. A three-day music festival that attracts crowds of over 20,000 guests each day can challenge even the most experienced planners. While it is impossible to plan for every scenario at every event, planners must use the resources they have available to assist them.

A critical component to consider and one of the most important to involve in the event planning process is the event’s stakeholders. Stakeholders of events can provide invaluable resources during the planning process. Stakeholders are those individuals and organizations involved in or affected by an event who can provide expertise, advice, and crucial input in the planning process. Event planners might not have the knowledge necessary to know how to prepare for a major act of violence, but the people who do know how to plan for these situations are available, and their expertise should be utilized to improve the event’s safety and success.

The purpose of this case study is to discuss the importance of involving stakeholders during the event planning process, specifically local community stakeholders who may often be overlooked. Students will be tasked with identifying primary and secondary stakeholders. They will also discuss potential improvements to the event planning process by involving identified stakeholders in its early stages. The student learning outcomes of this study include:

- Improved understanding of the importance of identifying event stakeholders,
- Recommending improvements to the event planning process by involving stakeholders, and
- Investigating and identifying community resources for emergency planning.

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Emergency Response in the United States

There is a national standard for response in U.S. communities when it comes to an emergency (also known as an incident) involving the possibility of significant human injuries. This standard is called the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS was developed in 2004 by the Department of Homeland Security to “enable responders at all jurisdictional levels and across all disciplines to work together more effectively and efficiently” (FEMA, 2004). The development of NIMS was in direct response to the tragedy of September 11, 2001 to drive more efficient responses to emergencies. Communities throughout the United States are trained by FEMA in emergency management and the use of NIMS when an incident overwhelms local emergency personnel. The officials within NIMS are designated within a community by FEMA and include government, law enforcement, and medical services experts who have been trained to respond to local and regional emergencies when NIMS is activated. Because these experts are members of the local community, they can provide event planners with expertise and advice with best practices and ways to avoid potential issues when planning their event in that community.

NIMS incorporates the Incident Command System (ICS), “a standard, on-scene, all-hazards incident management system already in use by firefighters, hazardous materials teams, rescuers and emergency

medical teams” (FEMA, 2004). The ICS is used by emergency responders and establishes a chain of command to provide a controlled and efficient response to an emergency. Within the ICS, multiple stakeholders in the incident response are incorporated into the chain of command; these stakeholders can include law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire departments, community leaders, and more.

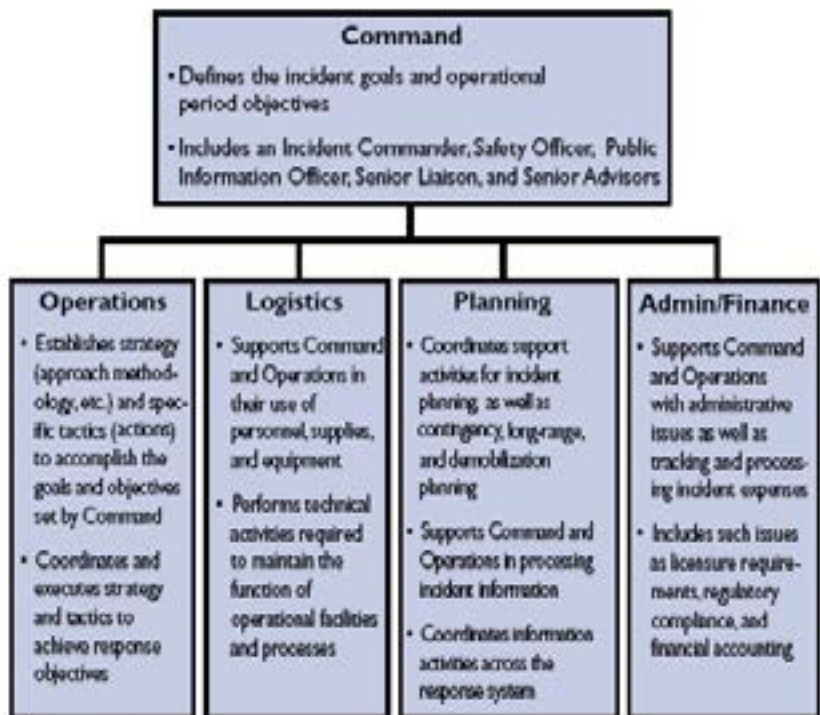
Incident response is managed using a unified chain of command that is led by experts trained in emergency management and utilizing resources already established for emergencies. Implementing ICS results in a collaborative response to incidents within any community. The ICS is only activated in an emergency and when local resources are overwhelmed. The event planner plays an important role in providing critical information about the event to the operations and command function areas within ICS. The planner can provide detailed information on the event layout, where certain event services are, and what resources are available to use in the response. Figure 1 shows the functional areas of ICS and their responsibilities when responding to an emergency.

Emergency Response at the Shooting

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s 1 October After-Action report details the findings involving multiple agencies including the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), the local responding

Figure 1

Incident Command System



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Figure 2

Theoretical Framework for Identification, Differentiation, and Categorizing of Festival Stakeholders



Reprinted from Van Niekerk & Getz, 2016, p. 425

Clark County Fire Department (CCFD), and FEMA. The report includes 72 separate observations of the incident with recommendations for improving preparedness and response in future incidents. While the findings are specific to the Las Vegas metropolitan area, many of the general findings can be applied to other events across the country.

There were over 50 LVMPD overtime officers on site for the Route 91 Harvest Festival when the shooting started. Among the observations in the FEMA after-action report section, "Pre-Incident Special Events Planning," were notes about precautions taken by the event managers and the local authorities to prepare and respond for emergencies. These include communication between the event organizers and the LVMPD Special Events and LVMPD Communications departments, hiring LVMPD overtime officers, hiring an on-site Community Ambulance during the event, and setting up a medical tent on site to respond to medical emergencies. FEMA also mentions deficiencies in preparing for the event, detailing the weak points in the report.

Perhaps most notable was the fact that the LVMPD Special Events section determined there was no need to dedicate a dispatcher for the event since the expected attendance was under 25,000 participants (FEMA, 2018, p. 11), as per standard policy. This resulted in the emergency dispatch system becoming quickly overwhelmed as dispatchers were unaware of the event and had trouble responding to the sheer number of calls; nor had dispatchers been trained about where to correctly direct emergency responders to the event.

Additionally, event organizers had not included local fire department (CCFD) personnel in their planning and staffing for the event, and the CCFD had not been notified of the event. FEMA noted that this decision hindered emergency response as teams were not able to instantaneously develop a response plan for the mass casualty incident (MCI) that occurred at the event. This lack of preparation resulted in an un-coordinated, improvised effort to react to the incident. The FEMA report noted that event organizers must reach out to local emergency response agen-

cies (police, fire, medical) to incorporate their expertise into pre-event planning and allow these agencies to develop incident action plans for specific events in their community even if they are not contacted by event organizers at the time an incident occurs (FEMA, 2018, p. 11–13).

Event Stakeholders

Stakeholder theory states that an organization's success is dependent upon more than profits (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder theory suggests that it is important to develop and maintain relationships with those the organization affects or could potentially affect (Reid, 2011). The central idea in stakeholder theory is that an organization's success relies on its ability to meet the needs of key groups and individuals who may be affected (Gargalianos, Toohey, & Stotlar, 2015). Applying stakeholder theory to events, organizers should include their current and potential stakeholders in the event planning process to ensure its success. Using the stakeholder theory approach can help event organizers identify existing and potential event stakeholders, better understand their relationships, and respond to the expectations of the identified stakeholders (Reid, 2011). Reid stated in 2011, "Engaging stakeholders throughout the event planning process provides a stronger likelihood that the community is satisfied with and will support the event, providing competitive advantage to event organizers" (p. 22).

There are many groups and individuals to consider and involve when planning an event, especially one the size of the 2017 Route 91 Harvest Festival. Stakeholders of an event can include any group or individual that is directly affected by or may be affected by an event. Event stakeholders are typically divided into primary and secondary groups. Primary stakeholders include those directly involved in the production and management of an event such as event organizers, employees, volunteers, suppliers, sponsors, and attendees. Secondary stakeholders exist on the periphery of the event but are affected by the event and include local government, the host community, and emergency services (Reid, 2007).

A festival's stakeholders include an almost overwhelming list of groups and individuals. A recent article on festival stakeholders noted the need for a "wider and consultative perspective where the sustainability of the festival is ensured as it complements the interest and contribution of the wider and often marginalized stakeholder groups" (Van Niekerk & Getz, 2016, p. 419). The authors also provided a list of possible stakeholders to consider when planning, as seen in Figure 2.

While most event organizers involve and consider primary stakeholders, secondary stakeholders can be overlooked during the event planning process, as evidenced by the incident at the Route 91 Harvest Festival in 2017 (emergency dispatchers and the local fire department were unaware that an event with over 22,000 attendees was taking place in their jurisdiction).

Recommendations for Improvement

The After-Action Report from FEMA (2018) was a report that compiled investigative information from the shooting and summarized 72 separate observations and respective recommendations for improvements in emergency response and communication within the Las Vegas metropolitan area's related law enforcement, government, and medical services. While the recommendations were specific to Las Vegas, FEMA noted that many of these recommendations might be utilized for improving both communication efforts and emergency response for events in other communities in America.

Highlights from FEMA's report recommendations that should be considered by event planners include:

Observation 2: The Route 91 Harvest Festival did not integrate Clark County Fire Department services for the special event, as there is no requirement to include fire personnel in event plans or operations.

Recommendations: Encourage partnerships with special event promoters to better coordinate pre-event planning. Encourage venue promoters and operators to hire not only law enforcement, but fire departments to be on site for the event (FEMA, 2018, p. 11–12).

Observation 3: The Fire Alarm Office and fire department line personnel were not aware that the festival was occurring.

Recommendation: Continue to circulate a monthly special events calendar across all local emergency response agencies for events occurring within each jurisdiction (FEMA, 2018, p. 12).

Observation 4: The tent size and pre-staged medical supplies for the festival's medical tent were insufficient for a mass casualty incident of this scale.

Recommendation: Continue to provide special events law enforcement, fire, and medical services staff with robust mass casualty incident (MCI)/medical kits. Require special events promoters to provide a pre-determined amount of MCI equipment for all future special events (FEMA, 2018, p. 12–13).

Observation 12: Security in the medical tent became an issue due to crowd panic, exacerbated by intoxicated festival attendees wanting to assist. This led to multiple altercations inside the medical tent that hampered patient care and treatment.

Recommendation: Incorporate medical tent security protocols in special event incident action plans (IAPs) (FEMA, 2018, p. 17).

Observation 22: Operational readiness was an issue for the on-site law enforcement officers assigned to the interior of the event, as their equipment was in vehicles parked approximately 250–350 yards away.

Recommendation: Ensure that, when possible, overtime (OT)

officers' vehicles are near their locations during special events. Consider allowing officers to carry rifles and other needed gear depending on the event, as well as wear tactical vests, to ensure equipment and situational readiness (FEMA, 2018, p. 23–24).

Observation 23: Law enforcement officers at the scene did not have access to or authorization to use equipment that could have been helpful in the response, including tactical vehicles and shields. Tactical vehicles were unavailable on 1 October and thus were not deployed at the scene. Officers also did not have access to shields, as they were located inside of the tactical vehicles.

Recommendation: Provide for the full capability to use tactical vehicles on a day-to-day basis (FEMA, 2018, p. 24).

Observation 25: Several active duty military and other off-duty public safety personnel assisted with response. However, there were also some cases in which off-duty public safety personnel complicated the response by attempting to assist when they were unable to do so.

Recommendation: Consider offering training on crowd mitigation for all public safety officials, as well as private security officers, to provide additional capacity in the event of an MCI (FEMA, 2018, p. 24).

Observation 32: There were communication and coordination shortfalls among officers related to clearing the venue. Civilians continued to emerge from hiding places as late as four hours into the response, even as the Homicide Crimes Bureau was conducting their investigation on the scene. Given the size and layout of the venue and the large number of attendees, clearing the venue proved to be challenging for officers.

Recommendation: Use a bullhorn or other sound amplification device to make announcements that it is safe for civilians to come out of hiding and approach law enforcement officers. Ensure that officers are clearly identifiable to civilians during the venue clearing process (FEMA, 2018, p. 28)

In summary, if event planners had involved the local fire, medical, and other first responders in the planning process from the start, many of these challenges could have been mitigated, resulting in a more efficient and effective response to the mass casualty incident. The observations and recommendations from FEMA highlight the need for planners to involve more stakeholders in the early stages of the planning process.

Discussion Questions

- How do you identify the stakeholders in an event?
- Why is it important to work with the local community when planning an event?
- What efforts can event organizers make to help emergency responders at their event?
- Using Figure 2 as a guideline, who were the primary stakehold-

ers in the Route 91 Harvest Festival in 2017?

- Using Figure 2 as a guideline, who were the secondary stakeholders in the event?
- Why should event organizers include both primary and secondary stakeholders in the event planning process?
- What resources are available in your community for developing an emergency response plan?

Recommended Reading

- Freeman, R. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. (Pitman series in business and public policy). Boston: Pitman.
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