

EXERPTED FROM TEXAS CRIME STOPPERS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

When a criminal case is not solved within a reasonable length of time, leads diminish, the trail gets cold, evidence is unobtainable, so the crime is increasingly difficult to solve. For these reasons, most law enforcement agency files contain many unsolved cases. When this occurs, a method is needed that re-awakens public interest in the case and calls on citizens to provide information to help solve the crime. People may witness all or part of a crime without an awareness of what they have seen. Consequently, they may unknowingly possess key information that could aid law enforcement in solving the crime. In some instances, citizens do not contact law enforcement agencies with information out of fear that if they reveal their identity they expose themselves or their families to retaliation. In most instances, these citizens do not come forward with information unless they are assured that they are provided complete anonymity by law enforcement. Finally, citizens may not come forward with needed information because they are uncertain as to whom they should contact in law enforcement and what procedures to follow to supplying information.

The Crime Stoppers program provides a method of overcoming these limitations by involving citizens in solving felony crimes. Through the Crime Stoppers program, citizens who have knowledge of a specific crime are encouraged, either for civic or monetary reasons, to come forward to law enforcement with this information. The program allows any citizen supplying information to remain completely anonymous, if they want. In this way, the citizen is assured that her identity is protected and that any information relayed is utilized. To effectively integrate citizens' knowledge, Crime Stoppers programs must receive law enforcement and media support. Crime Stoppers programs, operating internationally, have an impressive track record. Since the first program's inception in Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 1976, the programs have grown to more than 1,200 in communities around the world. **These programs operating through February 2006 are collectively responsible for clearing more than one million cases and recovering more than 7.8 billion dollars in stolen property and illegal narcotics.** There are three levels of Crime Stoppers programs: local non-profit programs, statewide organizations (as in Texas and New Mexico), and Crime Stoppers International, Incorporated (a non-profit corporation promoting Crime Stoppers programs throughout the world and assisting in coordinating and exchanging information among state and local programs). Crime Stoppers programs are beneficial in combating ever-present crime problems. It is an effective tool in which citizens join with law enforcement to solve crime. These programs serve as a vehicle for citizens to relay criminal information to law enforcement agencies and remain anonymous. However, to remain successful, it takes the dedication of everyone involved. There are over 500 local Crime Stoppers and campus Crime Stoppers programs operating throughout Texas. Many other communities are starting new programs. Countywide and regional Crime Stoppers programs are developing in areas where no single agency has sufficient manpower or finances to support the program.

Local Crime Stoppers programs are designed to achieve citizen interest and involvement in three ways:

1. Anonymity;
2. Establishing reward systems that pay for information leading to the arrest or charges filed on persons involved in felonies, and
3. Selecting an unsolved "Crime of the Week" featured by reenactment in nightly television news broadcasts, radio spots, and newspaper articles.

Local Crime Stoppers programs become non-profit corporations by applying for a charter under Texas law. This enables the program to obtain 501(c)(3) tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service. Thus, allowing tax-deductible contributions to the program. A 15 to 25 member civilian board of directors, broadly representing the community, oversees general program operations and administers funds received through public contributions. The board may perform some or all of the following duties: set policy which creates and controls the program; raise funds to pay rewards and cover administrative costs; determine the amount and method of reward payments, and act as trustee of funds contributed by citizens, businesses, and service groups. Generally the treasurer is designated to make reward payments to informants.

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A law enforcement officer is designated as coordinator by the participating law enforcement agency. The coordinator is responsible for overseeing day-to-day program operations and serves as liaison between the law enforcement agency, the board of directors, and the news media. Other law enforcement officers may be assigned to assist the coordinator with daily program operations.

Since most information received by the program is via telephone, most Crime Stoppers programs obtain a telephone number that is easy to remember, such as a number ending with -TIPS. Each caller is assigned a code number used in all subsequent transactions with the informant. Absolutely no pressure is placed on the informants to reveal their identities, as a key program element is anonymity. This information is then relayed, both by telephone and in writing to the investigating unit handling the case. If the information provided leads to an arrest and/or charges filed against an offender, the informant is then eligible for a reward. The board of directors determines the exact amount of the reward paid based on the law enforcement coordinator's recommendation, the type of case, the value of the information, the amount of property recovered, the number of cases solved as a result of the information, and other relevant criteria.

Properly establishing your Crime Stoppers program is essential to success. If not, the program may receive negative publicity that jeopardizes not only its credibility but also other Crime Stoppers programs' credibility. The key to a successful Crime Stoppers program is good planning. As in any problem-solving situation, program planning includes all operational phases beginning with generalized planning and continuing through program implementation. A successful program must have the interest and cooperation of the community, media, and law enforcement agencies. Explaining how Crime Stoppers works increases interest and understanding. Explain its history, successes, philosophies, and benefits to all partners. Understanding this manual, attending training events and talking directly to people from different Crime Stoppers organizations is the best way to develop the knowledge to get necessary support. The following are important points to remember.

- Law enforcement agencies' successes (reported in the media), due to Crime Stoppers, increase community and media respect for law enforcement.
- By drawing out tipsters, the program helps solve cases that might otherwise go unsolved.
- Crime Stoppers saves law enforcement agencies time and money by enabling them to compile information on criminal activity. This helps foster cooperation between various law enforcement agencies, resulting in more efficiency, as well as saving investigation and overtime costs.
- Many cases are often cleared by one tip.
- Crime Stoppers assists the community and law enforcement with crime prevention.
- There is a large financial recovery (stolen property and drugs) for every dollar contributed to Crime Stoppers.
- Crime Stoppers is successful with worldwide support.

Initially, establish an interim board of directors to oversee program startup. The interim body consists of four to six people. This board creates operating procedures, determine permanent board size, and fills board positions.

Board of Directors

The interim board, after finding support for the program, creates a permanent board of directors to run it. This board then becomes the legal entity representing Crime Stoppers. Fifteen to 25 civilian volunteers representing a broad community cross-section make up the board. Law enforcement officers may take an advisory role, as a non-voting board member, in order to maintain Crime Stoppers' integrity as a community program. Board members are important. Members are privy to confidential and sensitive information on crime and have access to funds. Since board members are directly responsible for program success, select each member carefully and conduct a background check. A corporate lawyer's services, an accountant, and an advertising or marketing professional are valuable assets. **Do not include elected officials and political candidates as board members.**

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The board is responsible for a variety of tasks. These include:

- Setting policy within the framework of the legal documents which create and control the program including the day to day operations and the coordinator's office;
- Raising funds through community and corporate donations for paying rewards, administrative costs, promotion, marketing, and training;
- Determining the amount and method of reward payments and ensuring that these rewards are paid;
- Overseeing the administrative coordinator;
- Acting as trustee of funds which must be administered in a prudent and legal manner and are donated by citizens, businesses, and service groups;
- Developing new initiatives for curbing crime;
- Maintaining liaisons with the media, the coordinator, and law enforcement agencies, and
- Providing insurance and legal protection for the program against criminal and/or civil liability.

The board of directors shall register its program as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization within the United States. This is beneficial because:

- Liability of the board of directors is limited;
- Tax-exempt status from federal and local governments can be obtained;
- Donations made to Crime Stoppers are tax-deductible;
- Corporate books and records are free from open records laws that apply to government agencies, and it creates organizational continuity.

Structuring the Board

The board establishes committees. Each committee handles separate tasks to facilitate program operation. Most programs have the following committees.

- **Executive** – The executive committee is comprised of the chair/president, vice-chair/president, secretary, treasurer, past chair/president, and at least one at-large member. The executive committee reviews the on-going board activities and sets the agenda for upcoming board meetings. It is not a decision-making committee, as this is the entire board's function.
- **Nominating** – This committee actively recruits potential board members on a regular basis. It should assess the organizational needs and aggressively seek out suitable candidates to meet these needs.
- **Fundraising** – All board members are expected to raise funds. This committee develops the financial plan and then provides the logistical support to ensure execution. The committee needs the entire board's support to succeed.
- **Publicity** – This committee is responsible for preparing displays, slide shows, flip charts, computer PowerPoint presentations, videos, bumper stickers, window placards, billboard signs, bill mailing enclosures, printed messages on grocery bags, and other advertising. The committee is also responsible for arranging feature news stories and public service announcements about the program. Publicize something new about the program every month, whether it involves solving a major case, an upcoming event, or a statistical milestone, like the program's 100th solved case. This is an important committee, responsible for creating program awareness.
- **Special Events** – This committee is responsible for awards and recognition banquets, special briefings, golf tournaments, fun runs, and other fundraising and awareness activities.
- **Other Committees** – The board may consider implementing other committees as needed such as bylaws and standing rules committees, a history and records committee, a scholastic Crime Stoppers committee, and others that are created as needs arise.

Board members usually serve three-year terms and are replaced by new members. Initially, members serve one-year, two-year, and three-year terms creating staggered terms, where one-third of the members are replaced each year. Most programs have a minimum attendance requirement for meetings, and members who fail this requirement may be removed according to the bylaws.

Monthly Meetings

It is important for the board of directors to have regularly scheduled meetings, at least once monthly (more initially). All board members, and the coordinator, who present reports and keep the board up to date on issues of interest, are expected to attend all meetings.

Use the most current edition of “Robert’s Rules of Order” as your guide for all meetings; however, a general schedule may go as follows:

- Call to order
- Roll call
- Introduce guests
- Approve minutes
- Treasurer’s report
- Coordinator’s report, statistical update, reward recommendations, other activities
- Committee reports-fundraising, publicity, nominating, special events, rewards
- Old business
- New business
- Announcements
- Adjourn

Coordinator

Once you find support for your program and select a board of directors, designate a coordinator. A law enforcement officer should fill this position, but some programs use a civilian. The coordinator is responsible for overseeing day-to-day program operations and serves as liaison between the board of directors, news media, and law enforcement.

This person is responsible for taking telephone tips and analyzing the information. The coordinator must have an outgoing personality, impeccable reputation, excellent communication skills, and much self-motivation.

Responsibilities include but are not limited to, the following:

- Answering the Crime Stoppers telephone lines and taking tips;
- Screening calls, verifying the information, and forwarding the information to the appropriate agency to investigate;
- Following up with investigators to determine an investigation’s status and determining if additional information is needed from the tipster;
- Maintaining tip files by keeping them updated, accurate, and secure;
- Maintaining statistics for the program, including the number of calls, number of cases solved, amount of stolen property recovered, and narcotics seized resulting from successful tips;
- Working with the local media to produce re-enactments, ensuring that the “Crime of the Week” and other projects are accurately publicized;
- Appearing with members of the Crime Stoppers board of directors at public speaking functions;
- Promoting the Crime Stoppers program with all law enforcement agencies with whom the board has dealings;
- Meeting monthly with the Crime Stoppers board;
- Presenting a comprehensive coordinator’s report to the board on unusual activities, cases of interest, and solved cases to assist board members in determining reward amounts, and
- Explaining the pay out process to tipsters.

Note: The coordinator must NEVER meet with a tipster directly or pay a reward.

The coordinator also makes public presentations to small and large groups, explaining the program and its successes. This activity increases interest and program awareness and helps raise funds. This person also has lots of contact with the media, narrating re-enactments, and doing interviews for radio, television, and print. He should be familiar with all areas of his law enforcement agency, so he can explain the program and gain interest from officers, as well as follow up with any department to which a tip is passed.

A coordinator's position is a demanding one. It often requires working overtime, as well as being on call. The position is diverse and challenging due to ever-changing information from tipsters and the varied cases involving Crime Stoppers.

Executive Director/Administrative Staff

Some programs opt to hire an executive director or administrative staff to assist the coordinator and assume administrative duties, raise funds, make media contact, recruit board members, and network with business communities.

Media

The media's role in Crime Stoppers is to provide public awareness and education about the Crime Stoppers program. The media also publicizes the Crime Stoppers telephone numbers, its program objectives, methods of operation, and successes. It is also responsible for broadcasting law enforcement agency reports, re-enactments, crimes of the week, and other programs. It is the coordinator's responsibility to stay in contact with the media to see that these responsibilities are met. The media should schedule a regular time slot for Crime Stoppers features, so that people receive this information on a regular basis.

Offer the program to all media representatives to reach a broader audience and avoid complaints of favoritism. However, exclusivity contracts with specific media outlets dealing with specific program formats are considered when the program benefits from this arrangement.

This allows the media the opportunity to decide its own involvement in the program. Since Crime Stoppers is a community-based program, the media is seen as promoting community involvement and safety, rather than promoting a law enforcement program. The media is asked to report on an unresolved crime, in an attempt to generate more information about the case and enhance public support for the program.

The advantages of media involvement with Crime Stoppers are:

- The public is interested in crime;
- A crime of the week helps build the audience or increases circulation;
- Helping projects a strong image of community involvement by the station in fighting crime;
- It provides increased involvement and improved relations with law enforcement agencies and officers;
- It provides an opportunity to follow up on unresolved offenses;
- It allows an opportunity to promote crime prevention and involve the public in battling crime and protecting themselves against crime;
- It helps maintain or improve ratings;
- The "Crime of the Week" replaces an item in the news and is produced at about the same cost;
- It provides media with positive community service material during license renewal hearings;
- Not only is the media playing an important role in reporting crime through Crime Stoppers features, but also when these offenses are solved, as a direct result of the media's commitment, it can take credit for solving crimes, and
- It helps promote fund raising events.

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The media's role in the Crime Stoppers partnership can include the following:

- Running the crime of the week on the same day each week, at the same time, and in the same location;
- Once a successful format, location, time or logo is established, it should not be changed without Crime Stoppers board consent;
- The media can run stories of how Crime Stoppers works and its successes in other locations;
- The media is expected to promote crime of the week segments;
- Public service announcements are run to promote Crime Stoppers and explain how to get involved;
- Television stations are asked to commit to providing a producer, equipment, and necessary personnel for producing crime re-enactment's each week, and
- Maintaining Crime Stoppers integrity by not divulging confidential information or jeopardizing Crime Stoppers through early release of details shown in weekly re-enactments.

Law Enforcement

The primary role of law enforcement within Crime Stoppers is to quickly and efficiently investigate tips, provide feedback to the coordinator on case status, and request more information when necessary. A program may determine that there is a need for a law enforcement agency to create a memorandum of understanding or a letter of agreement between the agency and the Crime Stoppers program outlining the respective organizations responsibilities to each other. This allows for individual organizations to have a policy in place regarding the agreed upon expectations. This agreement is reviewed annually and appropriate changes made as required. The law enforcement agency has an obligation to promote the program both internally and externally. This creates greater program awareness within agencies and encourages investigators to utilize the program. Crime Stoppers provides the public with an alternative method to pass on crime solving information to law enforcement agencies, especially when people are reluctant to become involved in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement agencies' support for Crime Stoppers provides the public the opportunity to do the right thing anonymously, if they want. Senior law enforcement managers also have an obligation to attend Crime Stoppers functions such as receptions, media events, annual board meetings, and conferences.

This show of support and commitment adds prestige to Crime Stoppers and shows appreciation for the citizen volunteers managing this program.

Legal And Operational Documentation For Local Programs

Basic Documentation

These are the three basic instruments that create a Crime Stoppers organization and make it a legal entity:

- **Articles of Incorporation**
- **State of Texas Charter**

These two basic documents create a non-profit organization. Only after the articles of incorporation are filed with the Texas Secretary of State and a state charter is issued does a Crime Stoppers program receive the recognition and protection of Texas law. A filing fee is required.

- **Bylaws**

The legal document by which all operations are governed must be completed before your operations begin, because it defines the total operation of your Crime Stoppers program.

Federal Tax Exempt Documentation (IRS Non-profit Section, Toll free (877)(829-5500)

Apply for recognition as a 501(c)(3) organization by completing IRS package #1023 (Application for Recognition of Exemption) and IRS Publication #557 (Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization). Both are available on the Internal Revenue Website at www.irs.gov.

Texas Tax Exempt Documentation

After federal tax exempt status is established, a program must make a written request to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts to receive state exempt status. Such status exempts the program from franchise tax, and state, and local sales tax for items and services purchased for program operation.

Operational Documents

Bylaws – This is the basic document by which all your Crime Stoppers operations are managed. Include the following sections.

- Organization’s purpose
- Directors
- Meetings
- Officers
- Committees
- Nominations and elections
- Contributions and depositories
- Fiscal year
- Parliamentary authority
- Amendments

Budget – You must establish a budget to give board members a way to evaluate and control income and expenditures. Without a budget there is no way to know where you are (i.e.: your Crime Stoppers program is “out of financial control”). Budgets take many forms but usually contain at least two sections: rewards and other operational expenses. If you need help, ask any certified public accountant to help you develop a format to best suit your program.

Minutes – One signed copy of the minutes for each official board meeting are kept in a permanent book (loose-leaf notebook) as the official record of your Crime Stoppers program. Usually the board secretary or other officer as designated by the board keeps this book. (Suggestion: maintain a photocopy or electronic copy of this book and keep it in a separate, safe place.)

Standing Rules and Operational Procedures – These are the rules and procedures that cover areas not addressed in your bylaws, such as:

- Reward assessment and payment procedures;
- Personnel policies – As the program develops and employees are hired, consider job descriptions, duties, responsibilities, holidays, etc. A certified public accountant or attorney can assist writing these policies, and
- Accounting and cash management – The board treasurer and/or certified public accountant can assist in writing these policies.

Cooperative Agreements With Law Enforcement Agencies – If your program is working with more than one law enforcement agency, you may have written agreements with some of these agencies.

Cooperative Agreements With Media – Your program may or may not have such agreements; but if it does, they are mutually accepted and approved by your board.

Operational Plan – This should be written and regularly updated. Any organization must know its goals and objectives and how it plans to reach them. This is the purpose of an operational plan. It should include:

- Short-term and long-term goals that set the general direction for the organization. These goals are realistic and ambitious;
- Specific objectives – These are stated in such a way that when reviewed in six months to a year, it is easily seen what has or has not been accomplished. (Example: We will raise \$5,000.), and
- Strategies – These are the specific activities by which the board will accomplish broad goals and specific objectives. (Example: We will raise \$5,000 by having a “Bail Out” in October.)

Inventory of Fixed Assets – It is very important that the board monitor closely the accumulated physical assets. This inventory should include: description; date acquired; donated or purchased, and value.

Schedule of Insurance Coverage (If applicable)

State Certification By The Texas Crime Stoppers Council

When Senate Bill 85 and Senate Bill 149, 71st Legislature Regular Session, were signed into law in 1989, the Texas Crime Stoppers Council was charged with certifying all local Texas Crime Stoppers programs that plan to receive and expend court generated fees.

A local Crime Stoppers program **must not accept** any court-generated fees, under the provisions of Article 42.12, Sec. 11. subsec. (h), Code of Criminal Procedure and Article 37.072, Code of Criminal Procedure, until such local program becomes certified.

The Texas Crime Stoppers Council certifies a program, if it meets all the requirements as listed in the application for certification. Programs that receive court-generated funds should sign cooperative working agreements for equitable fee sharing, where there is more than one certified program in a county. A suggested method is fee distribution based upon percentage of felony arrests. Sample documents are provided in Section 4 of this manual.

Other Documentation

- Appropriate city, county, or state permits/licenses
- Better Business Bureau (BBB) registration and/or approval
- Copyright or trademark registration of logo, if applicable
- Audit – an independent accounting firm may conduct the audit. This important document is needed for basic information to complete IRS Form 990. The audit is also vital for fundraising, maintaining the program's credibility, and is a sound business practice.