

Campus Crime Stoppers

Dramatic increases in crime and violence on our state's university and public school campuses prompted forming campus Crime Stoppers programs in an effort to empower the campus community to provide an alternative means to solve and reduce crime.

In reviewing school policy and speaking with respective administrators, security personnel, and school resource officers, we discovered, in numerous instances, that there was no formal method for students to report a crime to school administrators. Nor was there a certainty that an effort would be made to solve the reported crime, recover stolen property, or to apprehend the person(s) responsible for committing campus offenses.

Many parents, students, and school administrators are frustrated that crime or the threat of violence on campuses is diminishing the learning environment and are asking, "Can anything be done about this?" Often the response from the school is to check in the lost and found or to file a report with a law enforcement agency.

Forming the Board/Committee

Texas law, specifically Chapter 414, Texas Government Code, also known as the "Crime Stoppers Law" defines a local Crime Stoppers program, establishes the Texas Crime Stoppers Advisory Council, and affords certain records protection. A program not setup to operate 100 percent consistent with the legal definition is not a legitimate Crime Stoppers program. Based on this analysis, we have identified only two ways a campus program is established and operated in Texas:

- a. As an umbrella program (with bylaws) of an existing community Crime Stoppers program, preferably one that is certified by the Texas Crime Stoppers Advisory Council, or
- b. As an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation consistent with the above referenced law and certified by the Texas Crime Stoppers Advisory Council.

To establish a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, please consult Section I, *Texas Crime Stoppers Operational Resource Manual* for procedures and required documents.

When establishing an umbrella program, a community Crime Stoppers board should consult its bylaws for any special action or requirements previously adopted for establishing a new committee. Students should comprise and operate the board of the umbrella program. We recommend placing the student chair on the community's Crime Stoppers board as a voting member. The umbrella program operates on a particular campus much like the local Crime Stoppers program but focus on campus-related offenses.

Before establishing a campus program, interested parties should discuss with and involve the established local Crime Stoppers program, school authorities, and law enforcement officials. Thoroughly discuss the two recommended procedures for setup and decide the best method for you.

Give each student a packet explaining the proposed campus Crime Stoppers program and a board of directors member application form. Board members should be trustworthy and credible within the school and with the students, and must comply with the standards and guidelines that apply to extracurricular activities. The board should represent the entire student body.

The sponsor may be an adult school district representative that provides day-to-day direction with the campus board of directors and is responsible for the campus offense reports.

The coordinator may be a representative of law enforcement such as a school resource officer who receives and disseminates tip information. In some instances, the coordinator and sponsor are the same. The sponsor/coordinator is chosen by vote of the student body, appointed by administrators, selected by the campus board, or appointed by a law enforcement agency.

Offense Report and Reward Schedule

One campus component urges all campus crime victims (including students, teachers, administrators, or staff) to report offenses to a school district representative using an offense report. If applicable, the victim is urged to also file an official report (including the incident report form) with a law enforcement agency. Only the designated coordinator maintains these reports. The incident report: (1) describes the offense, the stolen or vandalized property dollar amount; (2) gives the campus board offenses to publicize and solve; and (3) gives the victim of campus-based offenses the sense that something can and is being done to solve offenses occurring on campus.

The person responsible for maintaining cleared offense reports reviews each report, copies the reports excluding the victim's name, and presents the cleared reports to the board. The board then evaluates each cleared offense to determine a reward. The board has the authority, depending upon the circumstances, to raise or lower cash reward amounts.

Publicizing Offenses

After the board has categorized the offenses, they then publicize the offenses utilizing available resources such as school newspapers, flyers, bulletin boards, or any other creative administration-approved manner. Publicizing the crime is key in solving the offense. Generally, the more a crime is publicized the greater the solution chances.

Reporting Tips

The main factor to consider when trying to arrive at a workable solution for a student to relay information about a crime is the student's **complete anonymity/confidentiality**.

There are three recommended ways a student can report his/her knowledge of a particular crime. The student has the option to use any recommended procedure at his/her discretion.

- a. The student may report the information in person to a sponsor/coordinator, school district representative, school resource officer, or other law enforcement officer. The sponsor/coordinator is trustworthy and credible within the school and with the student body and **must keep the student's identity in strict confidence**. The case is handled within the school depending on the information and crime. If the information relates to a community-based crime or is so serious that it cannot be handled within the school, the sponsor/coordinator provides the information to an appropriate agency. **(We strongly discourage this reporting method.)**
- b. The student has the option to call any Crime Stoppers program.
- c. The student may deposit information in a suggestion box.

Once again, protecting the student's anonymity/confidentiality is paramount. It may be that establishing a campus hotline or referring students to the local Crime Stoppers program is the best way to maintain anonymity.

As the sponsor/coordinator receives information, a code number is issued to the student. This number ensures anonymity, helps track information through investigation, and is used collecting rewards. Not all persons utilizing Crime Stoppers want a monetary reward, however in the event that one does, the code number is used for collection.

Investigating Offenses

Every school has a student handbook detailing offenses and consequences for violating these offenses. It is our wish that most cases are handled by the school administration. However, in circumstances where the information is more than the administration should handle, a law enforcement agency is contacted immediately. In all cases, the school administrator or sponsor/coordinator receives all information pertaining to offenses committed on campus. Also, they may be the only offense investigator and will call law enforcement at their discretion and according to state law. As mentioned above, the administrator or sponsor/coordinator may handle the investigation including detecting suspects, recovering stolen property, and assessing disciplinary action for the violations listed in the student handbook. Another option an administrator may consider when disciplining students committing campus-based offenses is referral to an established teen court.

Reward Payments

Rewards are created solely to obtain needed information to solve an offense. The point is that not all persons participating in the program want the reward. Many callers are thankful that they can relay the information and not get involved to the point that they have to reveal their identity.

Many creative options are available to pay rewards. The most important factor to consider is choosing a method that ensures the tipster's anonymity/confidentiality. The sponsor/coordinator chooses the most effective means.

Records

All Crime Stoppers records are maintained separate from school records.

Funding

All fundraising activities shall comply with school standards and guidelines. The community program may subsidize umbrella programs. Each campus program may, if established as an independent non-profit program, maintain control over its own funds. Campus programs may establish a bank account. Restrictions still apply to court and probation fees.

Publicizing Program Successes

Advertise program success to students and parents. Utilize school and community resources to accomplish this, ensuring continued participation and support.

Conclusion

A successful and productive program requires full dedication and support from the community. Making the program a successful and productive role model for other schools takes tremendous work and dedication. It is our hope that the community accepts this program as enthusiastically as we Crime Stoppers have presented it.

Direct questions to:

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