

ILLINOIS STATE CRIME STOPPERS  
ASSOCIATION

THE WHAT, HOW AND WHO

## **WHAT IS A CRIME STOPPERS PROGRAM?**

All Crime Stoppers programs share a common goal; they exist to help law enforcement agencies solve crimes. In every community there are people who have information that could help police arrest criminals but that information never reaches officials. Most experts agree that two factors impede this flow of information- fear and apathy. Crime Stoppers programs overcome these obstacles and provide a new channel for knowledge to flow from the public to the police. This outline is intended as a guide to help you start a program in your community.

## **HOW DOES CRIME STOPPERS WORK?**

Simply put, Crime Stoppers provides a telephone number that citizens can anonymously report information that may help police solve a crime. Callers are assigned a code number when they give their information and at no time are they required to provide their name, address or telephone number. The ability to remain anonymous is a major factor in overcoming the fear that many people feel. Callers are also eligible for a cash reward of up to \$1,000 if the information they provide results in the arrest and filing of criminal charges against a suspect. The availability of these rewards can be a significant motivator to people who would otherwise remain uninvolved. By its' very design, Crime Stoppers overcomes the two major obstacles that prevent people from contact the police through normal channels.

## **WHO MAKES UP A CRIME STOPPERS PROGRAM?**

Crime Stoppers programs are made up the three components: law enforcement, the public and the media. Each element is equally important to the success of the program.

The police should provide a coordinator who acts as a liaison between law enforcement and the Crime Stoppers board. They are also the recipients of the information generated and need to be committed to the concept and timely use of the information.

The public provides the Board of Directors who is responsible for the guidance and direction of the program. The Board raises money to pay reward (no government funds should be used) and serve as the visible community involvement in the program.

Media organizations publicize the program, keeping it in the public eye with success stories and the "Crime of the Week".

## **WHAT DOES EACH COMPONENT DO?**

### **The Public**

Most obviously, the public provides the impetus, direction and climate within which the program must operate. The public is the source of the Board of Directors which is composed of concerned citizens who guide and direct the program. The Board should be a cross section of the community it serves. Good choices for Board members would be local business owners, bankers educators and civic leaders. Most Board members avoid political office holders or lawyer who may practice criminal law. Generally, the Board should be a reflection of the community and include people from all segments of society. Board members should be workers, not watchers. Avoid people who seek to be named to your Board because of prestige or publicity. Although Crime Stoppers programs do not demand large amounts of time from their boards, they do require a commitment and dedication.

The public also provides the elements necessary for the operation of the program. These are fundraising and information. One of the Board's major functions is to provide money to pay rewards and operate the program. This money should come from public donations, not tax dollars. Keeping the program independent from government money is important to its standing as a community effort. Crime Stoppers programs are uniquely successful at fundraising. One reason for this is that contributors can see their donations at work right there at home. The public also provides callers that supply the information about criminal activity. Getting the information is a job shared by the other two elements of Crime Stoppers.

### **The Law Enforcement**

As the recipients of the information from anonymous callers to Crime Stoppers, the police need to be involved in and committed to the Crime Stoppers program. Their major contribution is the assignment of the Police Coordinator. No other single person has more influence over the public perception or the overall success of Crime Stoppers. The police coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the program and is the most visible member of the team. There is no more critical position and many factors have to be considered in the selection of the person who most frequently represents the program. The coordinator serves as liason between the Board and the police and is the board's "expert" on law enforcement matters. The coordinator prepares and produces the Crime of the Week and is the one person the public comes to recognize as "Crime Stopper". This person also receives the calls, logs them and disseminates the "tips" to the appropriate law enforcement agency. Add to this the fact that the coordinator often serves two masters, the Board and the law police agency, and it's easy to see why the proper choice is critical. Programs can rise or fall on the quality of the coordinator.

## **The Media**

Every successful Crime Stoppers program also has extensive media support. Programs in metropolitan areas often have network television stations airing the "Crime of the Week" featuring high quality reenactments of incidents. Smaller markets may depend on local newspapers, radio and cable television for similar coverage. Whatever the market, media involvement is crucial to the publicity of the program, its' successes and its' existence. The "Crime of the Week" is a specific unsolved crime that the program publicizes. It is usually select and prepared by the coordinator and should be a regular feature in all forms of media. The "Crime of the Week" presents a crime that police wish to get information on but it also serves as a reminder of the program's presence in the community. Media organizations are very important to the continued effectiveness of any program and are noteworthy for their donated time and service to Crime Stoppers programs everywhere.

## **HOW TO START A CRIME STOPPERS PROGRAM**

Deciding to act is the most important step. There is no one formula for the initiation of a good Crime Stoppers program. Many have been started by no more than one or two people committed to the concept. Some programs find a base of support in another organization such as a local Chamber of Commerce. The initial Board of Directors can start small and add members as needed. Other Crime Stoppers programs in your area are an excellent source of information. Relying on their expertise can save you some trouble and give you added impetus to your fledging efforts. The Illinois Crime Stoppers Association has representatives around the state and is ready to assist in your efforts.

## **SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND**

Remember that a Crime Stoppers program is a cooperative effort. You need the combined efforts of the public, law enforcement and the media to create a viable program. Keep in mind that Crime Stoppers owe much of its' success to the fact that it is a simple principle. Don't be afraid to experiment within the suggested guidelines. Each community is different and what works in one may not work in another. Fundraising efforts are an area that programs have tried new and interesting approaches with great success. Lastly, be prepared to become involved in a program that may produce results beyond your expectations. And maybe it wouldn't hurt to see how much it would cost to increase the size of the local jail.