

SETTING A CAMPUS CRIME STOPPERS REWARD SCHEDULE

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An anonymous Crime Stoppers tip leads to the first time arrest of a student in possession of marijuana at an inner-city middle school of a large urban school district. The student Board of Directors of the school's campus Crime Stoppers program operating within the previously provided reward schedule awards the maximum allowable reward of \$100 to the anonymous tipster. The reward is distributed the next day. Within the following three days two more Crime Stoppers tips lead to the arrest of students on campus with illegal narcotics. Under the guidance of the program's law enforcement coordinator and its faculty advisor, the student Board of Directors again decides to award \$100 rewards to the respective tipsters given the apparent success of the first such reward a few days earlier.

The next day the supervising law enforcement coordinator of all of the school district's campus Crime Stoppers programs converses with the faculty advisor of the campus Crime Stoppers program of this inner-city school and refuses to pay out these last two \$100 rewards as too excessive given that it represented the maximum reward amount allowed. He elaborates that he has veto powers and that it does not make sense to allow student boards in different schools to award different amounts for similar tips. After a lengthy discussion about the district's provided reward schedule, the purpose of the programs, the advertised autonomy of the student Board of Directors, and the reward budget available from sponsors, the district's law enforcement coordinator relents and pays out these two \$100 rewards. But he remarks that the school district is considering

abolishing all of the student Board of Directors of the various campus programs for the next school year.

The issue of appropriate reward schedules raised in this actual experience is not an isolated incidence across the country. Indeed, it is one of the most contentious and toughest tasks for law enforcement, campus administration, and school district alike to set an appropriate reward schedule based on which student board members determine reward amounts for tipsters. Given the nature of the issue, the coordinating agency and its Crime Stoppers coordinators and program supervisors must take the lead.

Setting the reward schedule

Ideally, a program's supervising law enforcement coordinator sets the initial reward schedule in consultation with the individual law enforcement coordinators, the school district, and potential sponsors providing financial support.

The common goal is to formally structure reward payment amounts in order to provide an easy to comprehend rationale by which awards are made. A clearly defined reward schedule leaves no room for second-guessing and confusion by student board members. It provides them with a clear guideline under which to operate and prevents any potential pattern of abuse.

Care needs to be taken to check with applicable state and local laws to see whether they provide any guidelines for reward amounts awarded by Crime Stoppers programs, and in specific by campus Crime Stoppers programs. It is advisable to take adult programs' reward schedule structure as a guide on how to constitute campus programs reward schedules by type of crime, by severity of crime, by number of arrested subjects, by the dollar value of recovered property or confiscated contraband, etc. However, this does not

mean that campus reward schedules need to be identical to adult programs schedules. The higher level of life responsibilities of adults and the usually more severe nature of adult victimization may necessitate higher payment amounts for adults than for students on campus. This is an issue that each individual Crime Stoppers program has to decide for itself given its program's individual circumstances and operating environment. Emulating state and local laws by incorporating the different classifications of misdemeanor and felony offenses into one's reward schedule goes a long way in teaching student board members the logic behind payout structures. It is also highly advisable to cement the reward schedule in a program's bylaws.

Finally, it may be prudent to differentiate between reward schedules suitable for a high school Crime Stoppers program and a middle school program depending again on the program's individual circumstances and operating environment. Age differences of offenders and tipsters, the frequency of, and the types of crimes committed tend to differ between these schools to justify such a distinction. Reward schedules for middle schools may reflect the younger age of the student body by lowering the dollar amount range for reward payouts. The vast majority of crimes at middle schools tend to be misdemeanors such as alcohol and cigarette consumption, vandalism, as well as marijuana and prescription drug offenses. Crime on high school campuses tends to add more offenses to the mix such as thefts, burglary of motor vehicles, assaults, weapons offenses, terroristic threats, and hard drugs such as cocaine, LSD, etc.

Administering the reward schedule

In managing the reward schedule, officers should take the community setting as well as the history of the program, previous programs, or similar programs in the same region

into account. Cost of living expenses, living standards, the setting in an urban, suburban, or rural environment, the prevalence and frequency of certain types of crimes and victimizations both in the community and on campus are all important factors to take into account. This is because the goal of paying out crime tip rewards is to set incentives: monetary incentives to entice previous and future tipsters to come forth with more information leading to the prevention of crime and the clearing of past and current offenses.

For example, in many inner-city schools situated in low-income neighborhoods the prospect of acquiring a monetary reward for turning in a crime tip leading to the prevention or clearance of an offense represents a powerful motivator for underprivileged students. It is oftentimes the student board members themselves, beside the coordinating officer and the faculty advisor, who advertise awarded reward amounts further motivating other students. By administering reward payouts consistently and fairly, officers and faculty advisors can reap huge benefits for the program, the campus, and their agency.

Given the campus framework and the young age of students, officers should guide student board members to award payouts at the higher end of the range of applicable rewards for weapons offenses, terroristic threats, and illicit narcotics possession and distribution because of their potential dire consequences for the campus community and on the learning environment at school.

It is very important for officers to keep reward schedules flexible by operating within a range of reward amounts per crime classification or by specifying maximum payout limits per classification where those limits are not set into stone. It is advisable to have an understanding with financial sponsors that payouts may exceed reward schedules'

guidelines in extraordinary cases. It is these extraordinary and often serious cases that showcase the success of the flexibility of a campus Crime Stoppers program.

For example, in one suburban community the high school received a bomb threat at the beginning of the school year. Realizing the grave consequences such a threat carries with it and the potential for copycat offenders, the supervising officer of the campus Crime Stoppers programs in this school district contacted the financial sponsor of the campus programs for approval to advertise a reward amount substantially higher than the maximum allowed under the high school program's reward schedule. The financial sponsor, in this case the county's Crime Stoppers program, gave its quick approval and a reward of \$1,000 was assertively announced and advertised. Within a day, a suspect was identified, confessed to the crime, and gave up an accomplice. Due to the success of this Crime Stoppers tip no other bomb threats were recorded for the remainder of the school year.

In another example from the same suburban school district, a \$1,000 reward was advertised for information leading to the clearance of a burglary at the district's administration building involving the theft of computer hardware and related items valued at over \$32,000. Within an hour of announcing the reward over the schools' intercom systems a student at the alternative school located adjacent to the administration building came forward with a tip leading to the arrest of the perpetrators and the recovery of the stolen items. Lauded by the detective taking the anonymous phone tip for coming forward quickly, the anonymous student explained that he would have come forward even quicker if he could have gotten to a phone faster.

In many inner-city schools, flexibility may be required to break the prevalent “snitch syndrome”. A misguided sense of loyalty to the neighborhood, to a gang, to fellow classmates impedes the willingness of potential tipsters to come forward. Increasing rewards and aggressively advertising actual payout amounts can sometimes overcome such impediments, especially if such advertising is combined with credible announcements that “snitching” is not the same thing as “tipping” and the anonymity of a potential tipster is ensured.

Flexibility also encompasses keeping an open mind about changing a reward schedule when the need arises. Oftentimes, it will be the student board members who will ask for more latitude in setting reward amounts given demographic changes, trends in victimizations, and growth on campus. Officers and faculty advisors should not restrict students too much in their freedom to operate autonomously.

Financial funding is a very important issue in administering reward schedules. Ideally, adequate funding is secured from sponsors before a program’s start or a reward schedule’s revision. If such funding is not secured beforehand or at least ensured through likely successful fundraisers in regular future intervals, then the risk of running out of reward funds jeopardizes the set reward schedule. This opens the door to inconsistencies, lack of fairness, fund rationing, and obsolete schedule criteria. Officers and faculty sponsors need to take great care to manage the program in such a fashion that an adequate program funding leaves the administering of the reward schedule independent from funding issues.

An example of a successful reward schedule is the illustration of the schedule developed by the Rockwall, Texas, Police Department serving all of Rockwall’s campus Crime

Stoppers programs. The schedule was developed based on student board members' feedback as well as in consultation with the financial sponsor of the campus programs, Rockwall County Crime Stoppers, Inc. The maximum amounts displayed in this schedule are not set in stone as to ensure the flexibility of the program for extraordinary incidences. However, they offer strong guidance to the student board members.

An illustration of a successful reward schedule

CRIME CLASSIFICATION	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
<i>MISDEMEANORS</i>	<i>up to \$</i>	<i>up to \$</i>
CLASS C	25	50
CLASS B	50	100
CLASS A	100	150
<i>FELONIES</i>	<i>up to \$</i>	<i>up to \$</i>
STATE JAIL	150	200
THIRD DEGREE	200	300
SECOND DEGREE	300	400
FIRST DEGREE	400	600

Undertaking payments from reward schedules

The final step in handling rewards is the actual payout procedure. Officers must be careful not to endanger the anonymity of tipsters. Some tipster may not wish to remain anonymous. In these cases officers may pay rewards directly to tipsters, if so desired by student tipsters, although it is highly recommended that officers do not involve

themselves in the rewards payout process as to minimize their professional liability and exposure to potentially false claims. Having a process in place to anonymously accomplish the reward payment is a prudent requirement.

Examples are utilizing a vacated locker on campus whose number combination is provided to the tipster or using a never checked out book in an unpopular section of the school's library. The tipster would then be provided with the title and location of the book containing an envelope with the reward inside. Another alternative is to use an off campus location such as a cooperating bank where anonymous tipsters receive their rewards after providing their code number at the drive through teller. Individual officers should strive to use their training, experience, imagination, and common sense in finding ways to deliver reward payments anonymously to tipsters.

Experience shows that in many successful programs some student tipsters outright refuse the reward, because they take pride and responsibility in doing their civic duty to help fight crime on their campus. Campus Crime Stoppers not only promotes this spirit but also provides an effective outlet for achieving it.

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