



**The author(s) shown below used Federal funding provided by the U.S. Department of Justice to prepare the following resource:**

**Document Title:** School Tip Line Toolkit: A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability

**Author(s):** Michael Planty, Duren Banks, Stacey Cutbush, Jodi Sherwood

**Document Number:** 252537

**Date Received:** January 2019

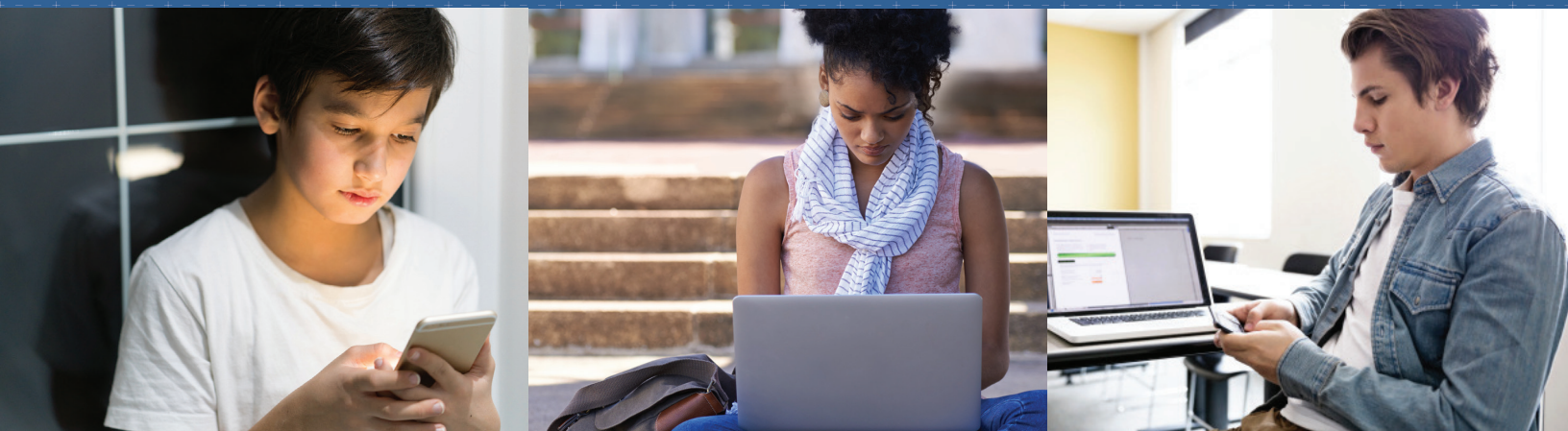
**Award Number:** 2017-CK-BX-0004

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# SCHOOL TIP LINE TOOLKIT

A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability



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**Acknowledgements**

This project was supported in part by Award No. 2017-CK-BX-0004 from the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. The authors thank participants at the National Summit on School Safety Tip Lines, hosted by the Oregon State Police in June 2018, for their review and input, including Safe2Tell Colorado, Kentucky's S.T.O.P. Tipline, Michigan's OK2SAY, Nevada's SafeVoice, Safe Oregon, SafeUT, and Safe2Tell Wyoming.

**Recommended Citation:**

Planty, M., Banks, D., Cutbush, S., & Sherwood, J. (2018). *School Tip Line Toolkit: A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.



# INTRODUCTION

**Tip lines represent one approach that schools and communities may use to promote school and student safety and well-being. Tip lines are designed to provide students or other members of the public with a safe and confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety.**

This Blueprint provides information for educators, law enforcement professionals, community leaders, and school safety experts who are exploring various approaches to promote school safety and student well-being. One such approach to prevent instances of violence, self-harm, and other disorders in the school system is an anonymous or confidential school safety tip line. A school safety tip line is a comprehensive communication system designed to provide students, school personnel, or other members of the public with a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety, thereby equipping authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.

Tip line technology has been used effectively outside of schools to address safety concerns in other contexts (e.g., law enforcement investigations, domestic violence, suicide).

Tip lines offer relatively low-cost solutions that collect information from students as the most knowledgeable source of potential threats to school safety. They leverage existing technology to capture multiple forms of media and can serve as a one-stop shop to report a range of problems that can affect individual student safety, well-being, and school disorder (e.g., self-harm and bullying) in addition to broader school safety threats.

This guide is designed to help stakeholders navigate key decisions and consider the factors necessary to support successful and efficient tip line implementation as part of an overall school safety strategy. Tip lines are promising, but much is still unknown about their effectiveness. Research is under way to determine what impact tip lines have on overall school safety and how to customize this strategy to varied school settings and circumstances. Tip lines can take many forms; this research will help to determine which elements most successfully gather reliable and actionable information from the school community to promote school safety and well-being. The information provided below describes the factors that decision-makers should consider when determining whether and how to implement a tip line as part of a comprehensive, proactive school violence prevention and response plan.

# THE VALUE OF A TIP LINE



## **In 2015, 1,700 public schools reported taking serious disciplinary action in response to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device at school.**

The problems of school crime and safety are widespread and diverse. In 2015, students ages 12–18 experienced 850,000 victimizations at school, including almost 500,000 violent victimizations and 70,000 serious violent victimizations, such as sexual assaults, robberies, and aggravated assaults with a weapon or involving serious injury. Approximately 21% of students were bullied at school in 2015, often through texting, e-mails, and social media. In 2013–14, 1,501 firearm possession incidents were reported at schools across the United States.

These problems are not clustered in just a few places. Almost 69% of public schools reported that one or more violent incidents had taken place on school grounds during the 2015–16 school year (figure 1). Additionally, about 1,700 public schools reported taking serious disciplinary action during the 2015–16 school year in response to the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device at school, including out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 days or more, removals with no services for the remainder of the school year, and transfers to specialized school.

Instances of violence, bullying, fights, weapons, and drug/alcohol use create harmful conditions, fear, and disorder that affect students, staff, and the community. These acts carry enormous costs (direct and indirect) and disrupt the educational process. Solutions based on deterrence and prevention are the most beneficial to reducing these harms to your school community.

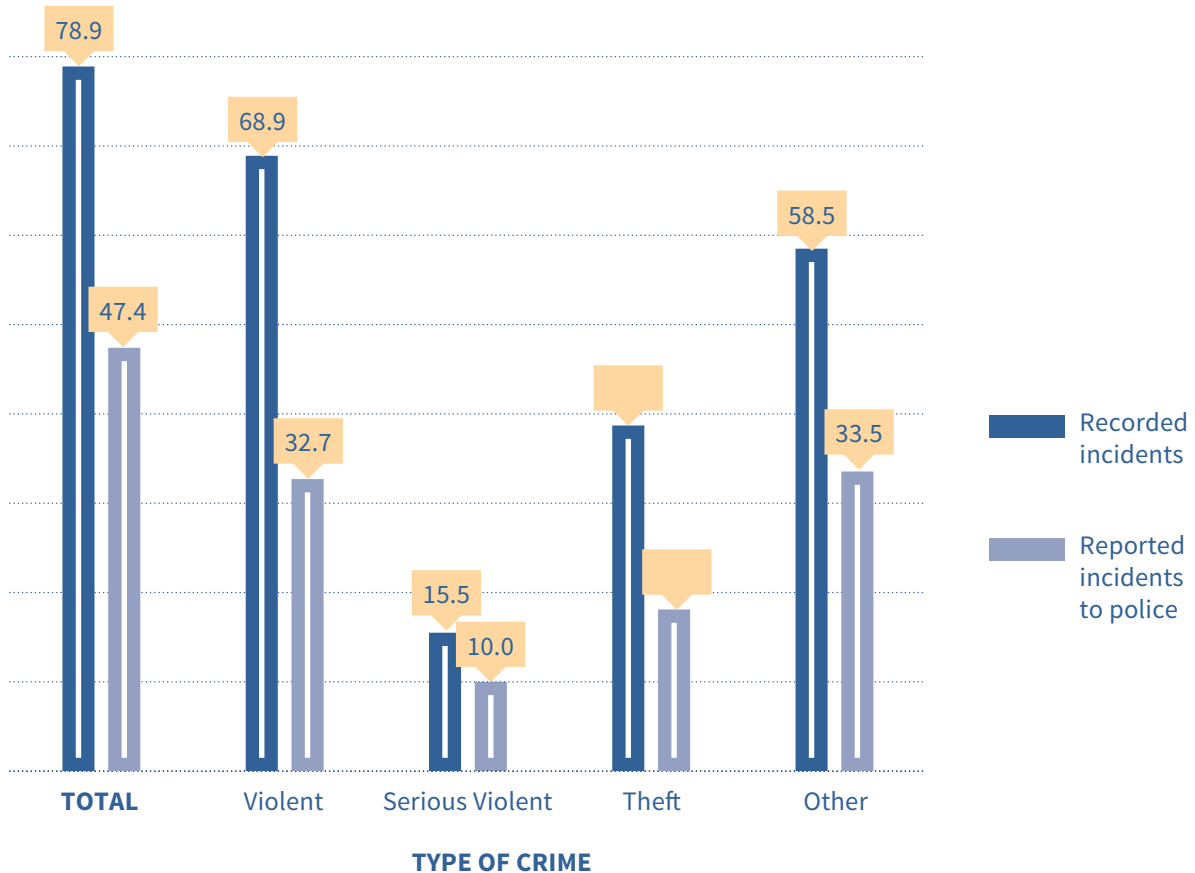
Importantly, tip lines leverage students' direct knowledge of potential threats or adverse events, which is critical because students are often the best source

of such information. For example, a review of school attacks occurring from 1974 through 2000 concluded that in 81% of these incidents, at least one person had information that the attacker was thinking about or planning the school attack; in 93% of those cases, that person was a peer—a friend, schoolmate, or sibling.

Furthermore, victimizations, bullying, and other disorders such as drug and alcohol use are often not reported directly to school authorities. Students don't want to be identified, don't want to get a friend or classmate in trouble, or simply don't know how or where to report these threats. The large amount of unreported victimization and disorder is well known, but the problem is also solvable.

Tapping into students' knowledge is key to response and prevention, and tip lines break the code of silence; they knock down barriers by giving voice to students who might otherwise remain silent out of fear of retaliation or rejection. Tip lines provide an avenue for students to step up and speak out. Students learn the value of civic engagement, skills in bi-directional information sharing, and a proactive approach to concerns they are facing. These skills can be critical not only to their educational development, but also to the safety of their school community. Tip lines provide an opportunity to increase the likelihood that threats to school safety will be reported by providing students a confidential, often anonymous, tool to access support, address violence, and report information about potential attacks and a host of other safety issues actionable by school administrators or law enforcement.

**FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



Source: Musu-Gillette, L., Zhang, A., Wang, K., Zhang, J., Kemp, J., Diliberti, M., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2018). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2017 [NCES 2018-036/NCJ 251413]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.



*In the vast majority of school attacks, someone knew about the plan prior to the incident. Often, it was a schoolmate or friend.*



# COORDINATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS



**Successful tip lines require coordination and buy-in from multiple stakeholders across various disciplines.**

The oversight and operations of tip lines vary, often residing within the attorney general's office or state departments of education, police, or public safety. Regardless, effective planning, adoption, and implementation of tip line technology in schools requires coordination among all relevant stakeholders. Coordination among these key partners can promote widespread buy-in, elicit a comprehensive response to the issues identified, and maximize impact on public safety.

School safety and tip line technology can involve many different relevant stakeholders, including school personnel, parents, students, law enforcement agencies,

and social service providers (e.g., mental health service or substance abuse treatment providers). All of these partners may have varying types and levels of input germane to tip line planning, adoption, and implementation.

Stakeholders may be involved at any point along or throughout the continuum of activities associated with the adoption and implementation of a tip line, including leveraging resources; marketing and outreach strategies; implementation approaches; selection of how information provided will be reviewed, triaged, and forwarded to appropriate responders; and expected costs and outcomes associated with tip line adoption.

## » Relevant stakeholders include...

- School personnel
  - Principal
  - School safety resource officers
  - Teachers
  - Staff
  - Legal counsel
  - Local or district-level education agencies
  - State education agencies
  - Others
- Parent-teacher organizations
- Families
- State attorney general
- State and local law enforcement agencies (e.g., state FBI agents; state and local police departments)
- State and local educational agencies
- State mental health and child welfare agencies
- Community health providers, counselors, crisis intervention services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment providers
- Community leaders/local government officials and staff
- Others involved in larger school safety strategy

Optimal coordination among stakeholders includes clearly defined roles, ongoing communication, and information-sharing. Communication should be bidirectional; that is, information should be both provided to and obtained from key stakeholders.

Convening a School Safety Tip Line task force, commission, or advisory group may help formalize stakeholder roles and increase group commitment and cohesion over time. In some contexts, shared decision-making or even consensus decision-making may be ideal; in other contexts, the role of the task force may be more advisory in nature.



**A tip line Website can be a key information hub for partners, including critical information on how to access the tip line, what to report, and key metrics on tip line usage and outcomes. Examples of state-based tip line Websites include**

- Safe2Tell Colorado:  
<https://safe2tell.org/>
- S.T.O.P. Tipline (Kentucky):  
<https://kycss.org/stop/index.php>
- OK2SAY (Michigan):  
<https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say/>
- SafeVoice (Nevada):  
<http://safevoicenv.org/>
- SafeOregon:  
<https://www.safeoregon.com/>
- Safe UT:  
<https://safeut.med.utah.edu/>
- Safe2Tell Wyoming:  
<http://www.safe2tellwy.org>



## CASE STUDY

### MICHIGAN OK2SAY PARTNERS

#### State Partners

- Office of the Governor
- Department of the Attorney General
- Department of Education
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Technology, Management and Budget
- Michigan State Police

#### Interest Groups

- American Federation of Teachers Michigan
- Michigan Emergency Management Association
- Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police
- Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards
- Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators
- Michigan Association of Non-public Schools
- Michigan Association of Psychologists
- Michigan Association of School Administrators
- Michigan Association of School Boards
- Michigan Association of School Social Workers
- Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals
- Michigan Catholic Conference
- Michigan Education Association
- Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
- Michigan Emergency Management Association
- Michigan High School Athletic Association
- Michigan League of Public Policy
- Michigan Parent Teacher Association
- Michigan Sheriffs' Association
- Michigan State Medical Society
- Middle Cities Risk Management Trust
- Middle Cities Education Association
- Middle Cities Workers Compensation Fund
- Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan
- Special Olympics Michigan

#### As well as private partners

(<https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say/>)



# TIP LINE MECHANICS



**Students are the primary gatekeepers of information. Educating students on how to recognize and report potential threats and risky behaviours will ensure early intervention and prevention.**

## Marketing and outreach

To increase knowledge of and ready access to the tip line, market it to various audiences across multiple platforms. Naturally, reaching the school-based audience with the most direct knowledge of threats to student and school safety should be a primary marketing focus: students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff must know the tip line exists and how it works. They must readily know where and how to access it.

Because students are the primary gatekeepers of information, marketing and outreach efforts directed at students are foundational, and messaging is key. To create a culture of reporting within schools, students must trust that the information they provide will remain confidential, if not anonymous. Students must also trust that some action or change will occur as a result of the tip provided. Marketing and outreach efforts should repeatedly emphasize these messages. Further, students must witness and experience these outcomes to develop and maintain trust that the information they provide to the tip line is taken seriously and acted on accordingly.

Students can be educated about the tip line reporting process and how to recognize threats and harms before they happen. Classroom-based outreach and school-wide events can be used to convey the value of early identification and prevention.



Importantly, though, tip line visibility should extend beyond schools into the broader community. School safety isn't just a school-level concern. It's a public safety concern. Marketing beyond the school audience to the larger community underscores shared responsibility and accountability; it amplifies collective monitoring and surveillance.

The tip line should be marketed through multiple and repeated forums. Methods for marketing and outreach across audiences may include brochures, posters, billboards, letters to households, presentations, assemblies, staff training sessions, social media, and other community outreach campaigns and events. Information about how to access the tip line may be prominent on materials that students access often, such

as printed on agendas where students keep homework assignments and testing dates and on school Web sites. Messaging may be most effective with few words and a call to action. Involving stakeholders in both generating materials and marketing is likely to extend reach. Repeated and highly visible messages are key so that potential reporters know about the tip line and have ready access to it when they become aware of a threat to student or school safety.

## Information reception

Successful tip line operation requires consideration of how, by whom, and under what circumstances reported information will be received and protected. One key consideration includes determining whether the tip line will function as confidential or anonymous. In the event of confidential reporting, a third party may follow up with the tipster to confirm and collect any remaining necessary information. However, confidential data can still be subpoenaed. Alternatively, anonymous reporting may increase a reporter's confidence that they will not experience any negative repercussions for reporting, thereby increasing trust in the system. However, anonymous tip lines often include two caveats: anonymity will be forfeited, but confidentiality maintained, in the event of (1) an active threat (e.g., acute/active suicide) or (2) a malicious false tip. In both instances, anonymous calls are traced. Carefully disclosing these exclusions at the outset of a tip via any platform may be prudent or legally necessary. Tip line administrators should explore strategies to identify and address tip line misuse and malicious false reporting. Tip lines often enact penalties for malicious false reporting, ranging from school disciplinary action to monetary fines (e.g., \$100) or criminal charges.

Submission of information depends on the mechanics of the system. Students, parents, and other tipsters may be able to submit information through a toll-free telephone number, Web-based/mobile device applications, texts, e-mails, or a combination of these modes. Related, multimodal platforms may accept online chats, phone messages, photos, videos, and images from social media applications. Given the ever-evolving technological landscape, it is essential to involve tip line advisors or stakeholders who have a pulse on students' technology and social media use, ensuring relevant and effective tip line capabilities.

Through any of these means, students or tipsters are asked a series of general questions about the school, nature of the problem, incident information (what happened or could happen?), time, date, persons involved, and other relevant details. If the threat is made by a known person, information should be collected about name, address, age, gender, relationship to the tipster, and other pertinent details. Careful consideration of tip line questions is warranted, as the responses to these questions could enable tip line responders to connect the dots between related tips.

Performance or use issues might arise if the reporting application is not well integrated into other platforms that students regularly use. The reporting platform must be easy to access and use, provide clear instructions, and assure users that their information will remain confidential. Certain platforms might be more likely to elicit tips on specific issues; for example, suicidal threats or self-harm might be more likely communicated through a two-way interaction like texting or voice. Allowing tips to be provided via whatever media the reporter is most comfortable with is essential.

**Trained staff, often volunteers, will collect, verify, and route the tip information to the most appropriate school, mental health, or law enforcement response team.**

## Information access and triage

When developing a plan to implement a tip line, stakeholders should consider how reported information will be accessed and triaged. Once information is received, it should be reviewed and shared as warranted with the appropriate responders, whether school officials, mental health providers, counselors, or law enforcement officers. Ensuring cross-agency buy-in can be a key to effective coordination. Consider establishing a Threat Assessment Team comprising skilled stakeholders, including a digital expert; this team must be capable of making informed decisions regarding the appropriate triage and response to tips. It is critical that the threat assessment team be informed of state laws and regulations germane to their tip line access and triage.

The escalation of information to a more formal response by the criminal justice system will be determined by the nature of the tip and by state, district, and school policies. These policies can be coordinated with formal memorandums of understanding between agencies. Consider written policies that require responders to report outcomes to the tip line database, with regular review of “open” tips or those that result in an ongoing investigation. This follow-up is important to communicate to tipsters as evidence that the information they provide is being taken seriously and acted upon. In addition, tip line funders and school administrators need to know that the tip line is eliciting valuable and credible information and a response that has a demonstrated impact on school safety.

School tip lines will likely elicit a large volume of information that references several different types of threats to school safety. The information will be communicated through a variety of formats, and it will likely need to be validated. The volume and variability as to how the information is received are extremely valuable, however. For example, videos or images can provide more concrete evidence about a potential situation than just a voice message alone. Duplicate reporting from separate tipsters about the same incident can provide verification that a threat is legitimate. The process of verification—collecting as much detail as possible and cross-validating information with other tips and available information from schools or other authorities—is one strategy to address this concern.

## Training

Identifying, recruiting, and training staff to answer and respond to tip line calls has been found to be a critical component of effective tip line implementation in other settings, including crisis response lines and 911. Following this model, the school safety tip line should be staffed 24/7/365 to respond to crisis calls whenever they come in.

All tip line staff should pass a background check and fully understand the scope of their work, including training requirements and content; expectations for the information that will be shared by tip line reporters; state laws and regulations, including FERPA and HIPAA compliance; and any expectations about minimum



- Tip line staff should be trained to have a full understanding of
- The types of issues that are likely to be reported.
  - The tip line system operations and reporting policies and procedures.
  - The range of resources available in the community to respond to caller information: mental health crisis, substance use issues, feeling unsafe, or imminent harm

and maximum levels of effort to staff the tip line. For example, tip line administrators may want staffers to commit to a minimum number of hours per week to maintain their skills to engage with reporters and respond to tips; however, a maximum level of hours may also be important to minimize burnout. Tip line administrators may set specific screening and personnel requirements, such as being a U.S. citizen who is at least 18 years old.

Staff should be experienced working with your stakeholders. They should be trained in and have a full understanding of the types of issues that are likely to be reported, including self-harm, suicide, depression, bullying, specific threats to school safety, harassment, and other concerns. Training should also focus on skills that are needed during the call, including reflective listening, collaborative problem solving, and crisis management. Training should provide staff with the skills to develop trust and positive rapport, while also eliciting the information that is needed to understand the nature of the concern and forward it to community partners to effectively respond. For these reasons, tip lines often enlist highly qualified, licensed professionals as tip line technicians. Regardless of who is staffed as tip line operators, tip line administrators should conduct frequent assessments for vicarious trauma among staff and provide support as necessary. Refresher trainings at regular intervals are also advised.

Staff should also be trained on all tip line policies and standard operating procedures, including salient state laws, confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements

(i.e., maintaining the confidentiality of the information that they receive from tips), protocols for protecting personally identifying information involving students (e.g., indecent photos), and use of tip information involved in criminal investigations. For example, it may be a crime for staff to communicate, save, or make copies of certain types of material they are exposed to in their role on the tip line. Staff should have a full understanding of the operations of the tip line system to answer questions that reporters may have, including how the system protects reporter anonymity or confidentiality, what happens to a tip after it is reported, and how a reporter can follow up to provide more information about an event or to check on the status of school, law enforcement, or other response to the tip. An operations manual that includes tip line policies and standard operating procedures can be a helpful reference for tip line technicians; consider also including relevant state laws and frequently asked questions. Make the operations manual a living document; update it regularly.

Training should further include information on the varied resources available in the community to respond to youth who are in mental health crisis, experiencing substance use issues, or feel unsafe, as well as contact information to access those services. Staff should have access to a current database of school and emergency contacts to route the tip message to and be trained to recognize red flags that indicate the situation should be forwarded to law enforcement officers, school administrators, child protective services, other first responders, or community services.



*Training should focus on skills that are needed during the call, including reflective listening, collaborative problem solving, and crisis management.*

# RECORDING INFORMATION



**Tip line programs that link initial tip information with final dispositions can provide critical information about best practices related to information assessment and incident response.**

Reporters should be notified what information is being recorded and how it will be used. Information from the initial call or tip should capture all the information provided about the event, including the type of event and specific details to determine whom the information should be forwarded to and how urgent a response is needed. In addition, information on the people involved, the suspects, and the location or other context surrounding the event is important to inform the response and to link multiple tips that may refer to the same event or the same individuals. Finally, the initial call may also indicate whether the reporter can be contacted (by providing a name or saying that he or she can be contacted anonymously through the app), which should elicit an immediate response by tip line staff to engage the reporter and collect more information as needed.

Records of individual tips ideally will include not only information provided by the reporter in that initial call or during follow-up exchanges, but also the routing of and response to the tip. The record should indicate whom the tip was routed to and on what date, along with a confirmation that the responder was notified of or received the tip information. The responder (e.g., a law enforcement officer) should also provide information to the tip record, including the date of receipt, follow-up actions taken, and status of the issue identified in the tip (whether it has been resolved or is ongoing). Understanding how many tips are responded to and what actions are taken is important information to communicate to students and to the broad community

to promote buy-in for the tip line. Communicating that tips are taken seriously and are responded to promptly, in a manner that preserves confidentiality and promotes student safety, will promote trust by reporters and encourage more participation.

Finally, consider how the tip record can include any information that can link the tip to already-identified events or individuals. Tip lines may receive multiple reports referring to the same incident and may also receive multiple reports of the same individuals involved in a series of incidents, such as repeated bullying. Analysis of the number of tips that come in can suggest how well you are reaching your intended audience of student, teacher, parent, and other reporters. However, linking tips to unique events and individuals will further help you and your partners to understand the scope and nature of school safety issues in your community and to develop effective responses to those issues.

Consider creating a case management system for recording tips and threats. Maintaining the information in a central database enables access to appropriate parties and facilitates linkages across incoming tips. Provide a user-friendly dashboard to facilitate navigating tips and data.



# ARCHIVING AND MAINTENANCE



## Tip line programs must comply with federal and state privacy laws.

At a minimum, all information should be retained in a database that allows tip line administrators and their partners to track trends in tip volume and types of tips received, identify unique incidents and individuals involved in those incidents, and track responses to the tips received. The information should be retained in a format that allows for linking and analysis and that is also compatible with other school or emergency response systems, as needed, such as calls for service received by law enforcement (911), school administrative systems that track information on safety events and discipline responses, or other systems maintained by your community partners.

To protect privacy and maintain control of the information, you should limit access to the tip line database to the tip line administrators and identified key staff from your partners. In general, federal mandates and other privacy protections will limit access to any identifiable information, so multi-system access to the database is not possible. Reports from the database on trends and responses will likely provide your partners the information needed to plan and leverage resources to respond to the tips received. Database access should therefore be limited to individuals who are responsible for conducting such analyses and have been specifically trained in protecting personally identifiable and sensitive information.

Data should be housed on a secure platform that prevents unauthorized access to or disclosure of the information. You will likely want to retain the information for multiple years to allow analysis of trends over time and to link individuals, events, and event locations that are identified across multiple tips. Tip line database administrators should also consider routine data review to identify common gaps in information reported (e.g., do reporters frequently know the contact information of a suspect?), identify unique events and individuals, and ensure that tips are responded to in a timely and thorough fashion. The tip line data that you retain is useful to your partners for analysis and reporting only if the information is as complete and accurate as possible. Regular checks of the data can not only identify trends in school safety, but also inform training for tip line staff and responders to more effectively respond to tips and engage the community in appropriate use of the tip line.

Technology will fail at times, and a system failure can be catastrophic. It is important to consider the mechanisms for and frequency of (1) testing your tip line functioning and (2) backing up tip line data. IT support should conduct regular testing, possibly even daily, of all tip line communication methods. New technology updates, pushes, or bugs may create glitches in tip line systems. Equally important is considering including as standard operating practice both the mechanism for and the frequency of backing up tip line data systems. Maintaining the functionality of your technology systems is vital.



# DISSEMINATION AND REPORTING



## **Routine and annual summary reports are effective ways to promote the program for wider use and communicate value to key stakeholders.**

One of your most important tools to support ongoing and appropriate use of the tip line can be the dissemination and reporting strategy you choose. Regular, concise reports targeted to schools, potential tip line reporters, likely responders to tips, and your other community partners can provide evidence that the tip line has been implemented in the manner intended and is receiving and responding to information related to school and student safety.

Dissemination and reporting should be informed by (1) identifying key audiences for your reports and (2) defining what type of tip information is most useful to your partners and audiences. Key audiences will include funding resources, likely responders to tips (e.g., law enforcement officers, crisis counselors), schools, and tip reporters (e.g., students, teachers, staff). After you identify these audiences, engage them to determine what information is most useful for their purposes. For example, you may choose to limit the information you report to safety threats, such as a summary of the tips that relate to school safety, bullying or self-harm, or you may also describe tips that relate to student wellness (e.g., substance use) or opportunities for disruptions (e.g., planned parties). You may also include media or other partners that can help reach your key audiences through a variety of platforms, including social media, marketing materials, regular group electronic mailing lists, newsletters, annual reports, meetings, or other communications.

For tip line partners, particularly those that have committed resources to develop and support implementation of the tip line, consider quarterly reporting that focuses on the volume and types of tips received. This audience will benefit from knowing the monthly volume of tips, the sources of tips (e.g., students, teachers, parents), the locations of the events that prompted the tip (e.g., in identified schools, at home, in the community, online), and the responses to the tips. This information will help to inform marketing strategies should tips be more likely to come from students in a specific district, for example, or identify the need for additional partners or resources if a high volume of tips is coming from a certain location or does not have a documented response.

Information about the nature of the tips, the characteristics of the individuals involved, and the response taken is important to communicate to all of your partners, including students and the community, to support the impact of the tool. This information can include aggregate statistics not only on the number of tips, but also information on unique incidents, locations, and individuals. As noted repeatedly throughout this Blueprint, information on responses to tips is critical to communicate to these audiences, to provide evidence that the information is being taken seriously and that the community and your partners are taking action in response to the tips received. It can also be powerful to communicate selected feedback or anonymized examples to relay the impact of the tool on individuals or communities.

A perspective on a crisis averted, an individual who was removed from an unsafe situation, or someone who was linked to counseling or other support services can be a powerful message. Statistics on the volume and type of information received on the top line are important to communicate, but all your partners will likely agree that even averting just one crisis is a compelling reason to continue the work that you do.

Reports and other dissemination materials are most effective when they are targeted, concise, and communicated through a variety of media. Dashboards or fact sheets on your tip line Web site can provide information on overall usage and potentially be customized to examine detailed information on certain types of tips (e.g., bullying), or specified responses to tips (e.g., law enforcement response). Examples of the positive impact the tip line has had can be communicated through presentations to partner organizations and on marketing materials. We recommend that reports be disseminated at least annually to funding sources, and more often to your immediate partners to communicate information about the overall tip line usage, responses to tips received, and impact on school and student safety.



### **CASE STUDY: Planned School Attack**

#### **Tip**

Multiple tips were received from students concerning a planned school attack. The reports gave additional information regarding a high school student who was making statements of his plan to kill others.

#### **Response**

The school resource officer, school counselor, and dean of students met with the student. The student's parents were contacted and advised of the situation. The student saw an outside therapist and was later admitted to a psychiatric hospital.



#### **» Key indicators for partners may include the following:**

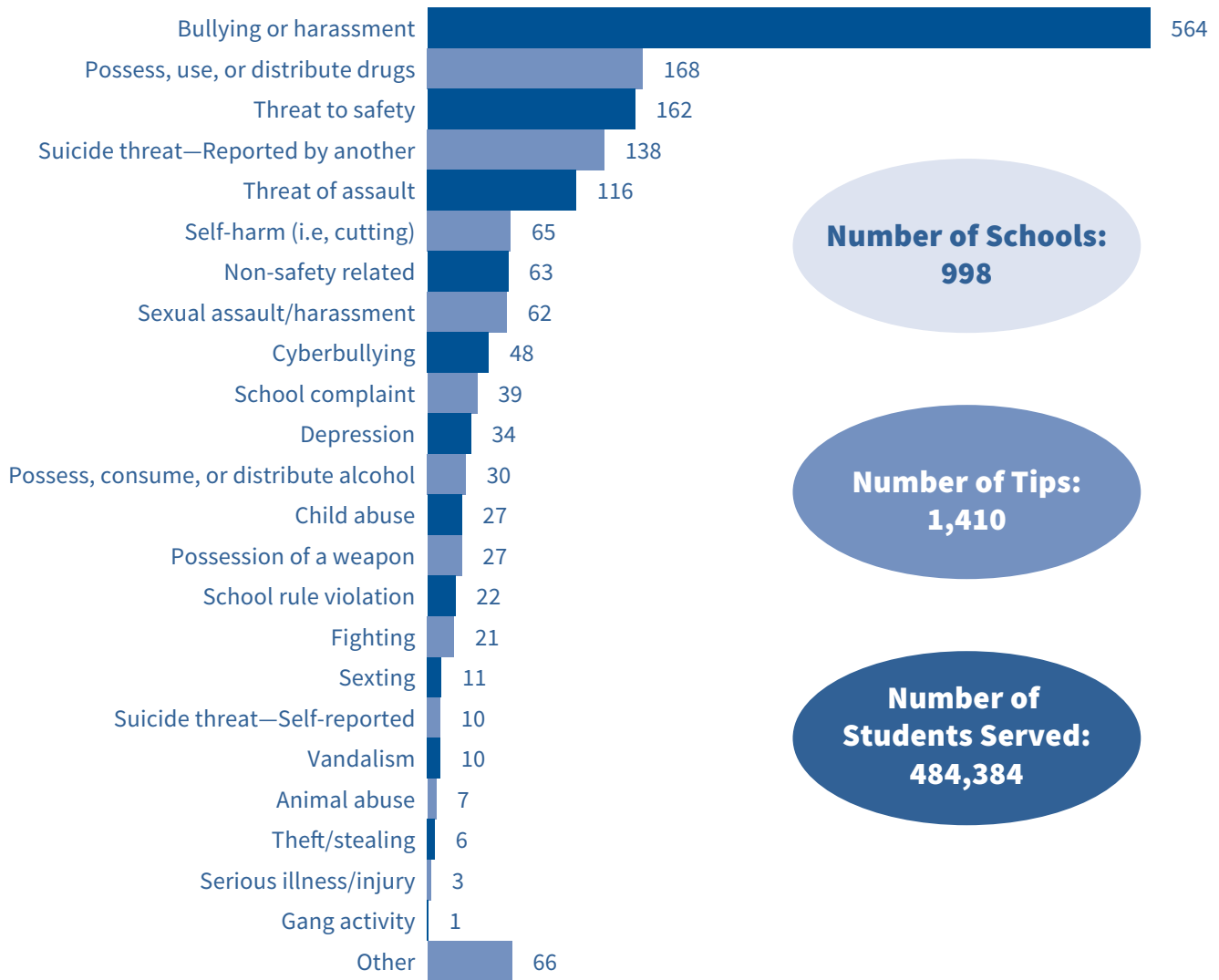
- Number of schools or jurisdictions with at least one tip
- Number of tips received per month
- Number of tips received by type of event (e.g., bullying, harassment, self-harm, credible threat to school safety)
- Source of tips (e.g., students, teachers, community members, anonymous reporters)
- Method of tip reporting (e.g., app, online platform, phone, text, e-mail)
- Number of and type of tip responses (e.g., referred to school officials, linked to counseling services, forwarded to law enforcement)

#### **» Key indicators for communities may include the following:**

- Number of unique events identified
- Characteristics of unique events (e.g., number of threats against teachers)
- Assessment of event (e.g., Was it determined to be credible tip? Did the tip involve a threat to school safety?)
- Number of unique victims or suspects (or both) identified
- Number and type of responses to threats
- Outcomes of events reported (e.g., suspension)
- Individual perspectives or anonymized tip response examples



## CASE STUDY: Incident Types



**Tips may have multiple incident types. All incident types are based on the tipsters' perception of the tip information prior to investigation. These numbers do not reflect the outcome of the incident type after investigation.**

Source: SafeOregon.com. (2018, June 15). 2017–2018 annual data report, June 16, 2017–June 15, 2018 (version 1).

Retrieved from <https://www.safeoregon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SafeOregon-2017-2018-Annual-Report-061518-1.pdf>

# RESOURCES

## Ongoing attention to securing funding is paramount, as is careful consideration of costs and returns on investment.

Preventing harm and loss of even one life is worth any cost. Still, as with any school security solution, schools must consider costs and returns on investment.

Relative to other school safety technology, tip lines are considered a low-cost solution. The technology is a straightforward acquisition, usually through existing vendors. The most significant cost drivers include hosting a vendor platform (i.e., phone, text, social media, and online systems) and hiring, managing, and training staff.

Best practice and optimal tip line functioning includes staffing the tip line with a 24-7 live operator. This includes 24-hour monitoring of all incoming tips through all reporting mechanisms (e.g., phone, text, online). Of course, a 24-hour monitoring approach can drive up costs.

Alternatively, tip lines may include a tip line operator for only a portion of the day (e.g., 6 a.m.–10 p.m.). During the times when there is no operator (e.g., 10 p.m.–6 a.m.), voice recordings or automated replies to texts and online submissions may direct callers to contact local law enforcement. However, it's possible reporters will fail to take further action; this may be a lost opportunity to receive an important tip. In addition, involving third parties in receiving tips also introduces the likelihood of error, including the failure to systematically document, triage, triangulate, and respond appropriately to all incoming tips, according to established tip line processes and procedures (e.g., reporter confidentiality). This may introduce liability. Should districts or schools pursue this option, the importance of partnership planning and coordination cannot be overstated.

Yet another cost-saving alternative for tip line technologies includes asynchronous tip line monitoring. With this approach, there isn't a tip line operator. Rather, staff review tips (e.g., voicemails, texts, online reports) at regular intervals (e.g., every 4 hours). However, this approach creates a time lag between when the tip was reported vs. when the tip was received. This time lag may introduce failure to avert a critical incident. Subsequently, districts or schools may be held liable for having information and failing to act in a timely or appropriate manner.

In addition to staffing, other direct costs include marketing and promoting awareness (refer to Section 4a), systems, maintenance, and supplies. Marketing and awareness is done at the state, district, and school level. School-based efforts usually involve hanging posters or using school or class time to promote awareness and educate staff, students, and parents.

Funding must be obtained and secured for ongoing tip line operations. Funding streams for school safety technologies may be available at the federal, state, and local levels through grants or legislative allocations. Braided funding streams (e.g., from multiple federal and state agencies) may promote the sustainability of a tip line as funding sources ebb and flow.

Fortunately, increasing school safety is a non-partisan issue. Enlisting bipartisan support and identifying tip line champions within the state legislature can be a productive means of galvanizing support.

In sum, ongoing attention to securing funding is paramount, as is careful consideration of costs and returns on investment.

# POTENTIAL RISKS

**Proactively anticipating and managing potential risks will increase student and school safety and increase the tip line’s credibility and operational integrity.**

During tip line planning, adoption, and implementation, it is necessary to anticipate and mitigate any potential operational risks. Potential risks may include issues involving liability and accountability, among others.

Liability issues in tip line technology range from (1) protecting the confidentiality of the person reporting a tip to (2) treating the tip as sensitive information to (3) being held responsible for prompt review, triage, and appropriate response to tips received. During the tip line planning process, the planning team should establish policies and procedures to secure and safeguard the identity of the reporter. Otherwise, retaliatory acts toward the reporter may ensue. Furthermore, the tip itself should be considered sensitive information. Failure to treat it as such could inadvertently destabilize existing safety and security measures or escalate the risk of harm or loss of life. Failure to comply with federal and state laws and regulations, including FERPA and HIPPA, may also create liability. Further, it’s possible that responsible

parties (e.g., schools, FBI) may be held liable if they receive information about a threat to student or school safety and fail to act on it.

Balancing school safety and individual privacy is important. Maintaining confidentiality around a reporter’s identity and a tip can be particularly challenging when information must be divulged to others for appropriate handling. Persons involved in tip line operations must both protect confidentiality and sensitive data, on the one hand, and investigate tips and avert imminent harm, on the other. Every system must comply with federal and local laws concerning individual privacy.

Another potential risk includes issues involving performance and accountability. Tip line effectiveness is therefore paramount, not only to secure student and school safety, but also to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. Performance and accountability are also necessary to secure ongoing funding for tip line operations. Tip line planning teams should therefore develop and clearly communicate performance standards to responsible parties. Planning teams might also consider conducting tip line process and outcome evaluations; conducting evaluations allows midcourse corrections and improvements in operations and thus demonstrates a commitment to transparency, performance, and accountability.

In sum, proactively anticipating and managing potential risks will increase student and school safety and increase the tip line’s credibility and operational integrity.



# SUMMARY

## **Tip lines equip authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.**

Research is still under way to determine the impact of tip lines and other approaches to support school safety. This Blueprint identifies the important factors that educators, law enforcement professionals, community leaders, and school safety experts should consider when exploring tip lines as a part of their solution. Many factors remain unknown about the effectiveness of tip lines and the optimal design for a particular school setting. What we do know is that tip lines afford students, school personnel, and other members of the public a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety that could otherwise go unreported. Tip lines equip authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy.







This resource was prepared by the author(s) using Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice. Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.