

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES & INDIVIDUALS: Engagement Procedures and Strategies

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SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES & INDIVIDUALS: Engagement Procedures and Strategies

Departmental Policy

It is the policy of the Community Safety Department to use objective criteria, to the maximum extent possible, in determining whether or not to engage situations or individuals that appear suspicious, and to carry out such engagements in a manner that maximizes Community Safety Officer (CSO) safety* and efficiency, while minimizing problematic interactions.

***Disclaimer**

This directive is NOT intended to provide guidelines for ensuring officer safety during engagement of suspicious circumstances and/or individuals. Officer safety is paramount and CSOs should use appropriate officer safety practices when engaging suspicious circumstances and/or individuals.

Overview & Purpose

CSOs are expected to both independently detect, and to respond to reports of, circumstances that are suspicious. Additionally, when CSOs engage individuals whose presence and/or behaviors are suspicious, individuals may perceive CSO contact as inappropriate for a variety of reasons, including the individual perceiving that the contact was due to perceived race, ethnicity, or other similar criteria.

This directive is intended to accomplish the following:

- Provide objective guidelines for responding to calls about reports of suspicious activity
- Provide objective guidelines for responding to observed suspicious activity
- Ensure consistency of CSO response to suspicious activity.
- Minimize the potential for engaging individuals for inappropriate reasons
- Minimize the risk of problematic interactions

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

Definitions

- **Follow up:** Follow up with the reporting person(s) as part of investigation and response to suspicious activity reported to Community Safety.
- **Officer discretion:** A CSO's ability to determine how reported or observed suspicious circumstances are investigated, including deciding whether or not to engage an individual reported to be suspicious
- **Reporting person:** Any person who contacts Reed College Community Safety by any means, via dispatch or by contact with a CSO in the field, who is reporting suspicious activity that they either observed or that was reported to them by a witness who asked them to contact Community Safety to report the suspicious activity.
- **Suspicious activity:** Behavior of an individual, known or unknown to the observer, that a reasonable person could conclude might be unsafe, a violation of Reed College policies, illegal and/or related to criminal activity. This may include individuals on campus who have been, or who are believed to have been, excluded from campus.
- **Suspicious person:** Any individual that is observed and/or reported as currently involved, or having been involved, in suspicious activity on, or in the vicinity of, Reed College property. This may include individuals believed to have been previously excluded from campus, or believed to have been associated with disruptive events and/or criminal activity
- **Suspicious circumstances:** Any combination of factors that would lead a reasonable CSO to believe that a situation is unsafe, represents a violation of policy, and/or is illegal and/or related to criminal activity. Factors include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:
 - Observable or reported behavior of one or more individuals
 - Observed or reported physical circumstances (e.g., broken window, normally secure door propped open, etc.)
 - Statements made by an individual that are overtly evasive or untrue
 - The CSO's knowledge of prior events
 - The CSO's training and experience
- **Witness:** A person that may or may not be a reporting person who observed suspicious activity.

Suspicious Behavior

The following examples are not all-inclusive, nor are they necessarily indicative of an individual engaged in problematic behavior. Moreover, observation of one or more of the following behaviors may not necessarily require CSO action.

Examples of some suspicious behaviors by individuals include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Being present in areas that have been secured and intended to be unoccupied (e.g., Library, Commons, Cafes, labs, private offices, etc.)

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

- Gaining access to secured areas by unusual means (e.g., through windows, through propped doors, requesting to be let in, etc.)
- Being present in areas with limited access and without an obvious legitimate purpose (e.g., roofs, labs, secured areas of the ETC, Reactor, etc.)
- Loitering , especially near high-risk/high-theft areas. Note: loitering, by definition, implies being in an area without any apparent purpose. Examples include loitering in the area of a bike rack, near a loading dock door, when partially concealed by vegetation, in or near a closed facility, in parking areas, etc.
- Refusing to identify themselves and/or state a purpose for being in an area when asked to do so
- Giving deceptive, misleading, or clearly false information about their reason for being in an area
- Making obvious attempts to conceal their actions when observed (e.g., quickly changing direction or stopping an action, attempting to hide an object from view, attempting to conceal themselves, etc.)
- Fleeing the area when observed or engaged
- Repeatedly accessing an area without any apparent legitimate purpose

Examples of some suspicious circumstances include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Broken windows, doors, or other signs of actual or attempted forced entry
- Sounds that may indicate attempted or actual forced entry
- Shouts, screams, or other vocalizations that could reasonably indicate that someone is at risk
- Activation of alarms (e.g., intrusion alarm, smoke alarm, fire alarm, panic alarm, security system fault or trouble, etc.)
- Hang-up calls from emergency phones or to Dispatch
- Lights and/or noises originating from secured areas or at unusual times
- Other fresh evidence of safety or security risk and/or fresh evidence of a crime (e.g., freshly painted graffiti, broken vehicle glass in a parking lot, etc.)

Potentially Problematic Reasons for Engaging an Individual

The presence of any of the following does not preclude a CSO from investigating the circumstances and/or making contact with an individual. However, the following are examples of observations and/or circumstances that, on their own, should not be used to initiate contact:

- An individual's perceived race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or similar characteristics
- An individual's style of dress
- An individual's perceived or stated identification with a specific religion, club, group, or other community

Dispatch Procedure

Information Collection

Whenever dispatch receives a call from, or is contacted in person, by a reporting person about suspicious activity the dispatcher shall attempt to gather the following information:

- The first and last name of the reporting person
- A phone number to be able to contact the reporting person for follow up
- Details about the observed suspicious activity
- The location of the observed suspicious activity
- A description of the individuals involved in the suspicious activity
- The approximate time since they last saw the person(s) involved in the suspicious activity
- Any other information relevant to the report

Dispatch a CSO

After gathering this information the dispatcher will dispatch a single officer to respond to the area to investigate the suspicious activity reported and start a CAD entry. The dispatcher will provide over the radio to the responding CSO the following information:

- Details about the reported suspicious activity
- The location of the observed suspicious activity
- A description of any individual(s) involved in the suspicious activity
- The approximate time since the reporting person said they last saw the individual (s) involved in the suspicious activity
- The first and last name of the reporting person
- Inform the CSO they have contact information at dispatch to follow up with the reporting person

Master Name Check

Dispatch shall check the name of the reporting party, and the name(s) of anyone who is the subject of the report, in the ARMS Master Names database to determine if there is relevant information available that could inform the response to the report.

Assist CSO response and investigation

Dispatch should assist the CSO's response and investigation by providing information available to dispatch that the CSO may request, by relaying any relevant information from the Master Name search, and by contacting Portland Police emergency or non-emergency to assist the CSO(s), as requested by the primary CSO assigned.

Complete the CAD entry

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

When the CSO clears from the call the dispatcher should enter narrative information into the CAD entry to include:

- If the CSO made contact with a person or people or not.
- If contact was made, what the findings or conclusion was reported by the CSO
- That the reporting party was contacted and advised of the outcome of the call, as appropriate. If the reporting party did not provide contact information or could not be contacted, that information should be included
- Other information reported by the CSO

CSO Procedure

Initial Response and Investigation

When a CSO is dispatched to a report of suspicious activity s/he shall respond and investigate the report as soon as possible, secondary to higher priority emergency calls for service. The following are guidelines when responding:

- Based on the information dispatch provided, determine if a cover officer is immediately needed or desired and, if so, let dispatch know to send another CSO. If the information received from a reporting person is lacking in details it may be best to check out the area before requesting additional CSO(s). This decision will be based on officer discretion.
- Respond to the approximate area of the reported suspicious activity.
- Visually scan and/or observe the area to try to locate suspicious activity related to the person/people described by the reporting person.
- If a person/people, are observed that match the description provided by the reporting person, observe from a safe distance, if possible, to see if their current activity appears suspicious and/or if there are other objective factors that would lead a reasonable CSO to find the circumstances suspicious.

Officer Discretion

The responding CSO may, based on all known information, including the CSO's observations and other circumstances, determine the best course of action that results in the overall safety and security of the campus.

If the responding CSO determines, based on the totality of the circumstances, that the reported activity is NOT suspicious (as defined in this directive), then the responding CSO may decide whether or not to make contact with the reported individual(s), or to continue to observe the situation before acting. As part of this decision the CSO should consider the benefits of making contact vs. any potential negative outcome or perception that may occur as a result of the contact.

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

The responding CSO shall advise dispatch of whether or not contact will be made. Additionally, the responding CSO has officer discretion to have dispatch request assistance from Portland Police Bureau, emergency or non-emergency, if the CSO determines that all the circumstances render it unsafe for the CSOs on duty to contact the individual(s) involved, or if the activity has moved off of college property.

Observed Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) Violations

CSOs shall take reasonable action to engage all reported or observed AOD violations on campus. Refer to the Community Safety directives related to AOD violations for drugs and alcohol.

Intercultural Considerations

All individuals have had past experiences with uniformed officers and “authority figures.” Regardless of the CSO’s approach and demeanor, an individual’s past experiences will inform his/her perceptions of the encounter to some extent. In particular, an individual’s race, national origin, ethnicity, disability, gender identification, etc. may influence that individual’s perception of an encounter—and the individual’s history will typically be unknown to the CSO at the time of the encounter.

Moreover, some ethnicities/races are underrepresented among the Reed College community of students, staff, and faculty. Specifically, the percentage of community members from underrepresented ethnicities / races, including Asian, Latino/a, African American, and Native American, is well below national and local levels. This fact may lead individuals from underrepresented ethnicities / races to feel singled out, and it may lead community members who report suspicious activity—and CSOs—susceptible to disproportionately identifying individuals from under represented groups as suspicious or proximate to suspicious circumstances.

CSOs are expected to be alert for the possibility that an individual has been identified as suspicious or proximate to suspicious circumstances because of the individual’s perceived ethnicity / race, and to take care to ensure that objective criteria are used to evaluate reports and observations.

CSOs as “Filters”

CSOs who respond to a report of a suspicious individual or suspicious circumstances are expected to evaluate the report based on as many objective criteria as possible, and to filter out reports that do not appear to be based on substantially objective information. Such filtering is essential to minimizing the risk of problematic interactions and ensuring fair and equitable treatment of all community members. However, CSOs should not devalue reports of suspicious circumstances or fail to act in the community’s best interest solely out of concern

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

for intercultural considerations. Whether or not an individual may feel singled out is an important consideration, but only one of many that CSOs should evaluate.

Communication strategies

When CSOs initiate an engagement with individuals because of suspicious circumstances/behavior, they are expected to be aware of the intercultural considerations discussed in this directive. CSOs should always be alert to the possibility that an individual of any description may feel singled out by the contact, and CSOs should be thoughtful with their choice of words and mindful of the potential impact. CSOs should consider whether or not explaining the reason for the engagement would be more or less likely to deescalate the encounter. In many circumstances it may be appropriate to "apologize" for inconveniencing people or potentially causing them some embarrassment--and, this is not to say that CSOs need to be apologetic for doing their work.

Attempting to treat everyone the same will likely result in treating many or most people inappropriately. Since all individuals are unique and bring their own perspective to interacting with a CSO, the CSO should strive to evaluate each interaction individually and treat each situation and individual according to the circumstances.

Follow up with reporting person(s)

CSOs that are dispatched in response to reported suspicious circumstances should routinely include follow up with the reporting person as part of the response and investigation. Follow up contact should be completed as soon as possible after the initial response and investigation is completed in the field or sooner if additional information is needed to fully investigate the suspicious activity.

The preferred method of contact with the reporting person is in person or by phone the same day. However, follow up contact the following day either in person, by phone, or, if necessary, by email will also be acceptable if contact cannot be done the same day because the reporting person cannot be reached.

The follow up contact should typically include the following:

- Sharing basic information with the reporting person about how the CSO responded to the reported suspicious activity as well as their findings, if any.
- Asking the reporting person if there is any additional information related to the suspicious activity reported that they have become aware of since they originally reported it.
- Thanking the reporting person for reporting their concern to Community Safety.
- Asking the reporting person if there is anything else that the CSO or Community Safety can do to be of further help.

**Reed College
Department of Community Safety
Departmental Directive**

Additionally, if the CSO or Dispatcher believe that any of the “Potentially Problematic Reasons for Engaging an Individual” criteria (above) may have come into play, follow up could include a discussion of the reasons for the call and reinforcement of appropriate and effective ways to identify potential problems.