

NEW ERA OF PUBLIC SAFETY

A GUIDE TO FAIR, SAFE, AND EFFECTIVE
COMMUNITY POLICING

11

ACADEMY AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Training is the foundation by which police departments ensure that officers engage in safe, fair, and effective policing. This point is emphasized in the Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (the President's Task Force Report), which observes: "As our nation becomes more pluralistic and the scope of law enforcement's responsibilities expands, the need for expanded and more effective [police] training has become critical."¹

To serve communities well, officers should stay up to date on best practices and continually develop their skills. Yet no universal standards for police training exist; each state and jurisdiction has different requirements. Departments that want to practice community policing, however, should emphasize the values of fairness, equity, procedural justice, legitimacy, transparency, and accountability in all trainings. These values, as well as training in tactics such as de-escalation and crisis response, will help develop officers with a guardian mindset oriented toward serving communities.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

To ensure officers understand and carry out departmental requirements and are trained to adhere to community-centered values, departments should:

11.1

Ensure that basic recruit and in-service training covers a wide variety of skills, including crisis response, de-escalation, cultural competency, and leadership.

11.2

Prioritize the development and implementation of rigorous in-service training.

11.3

Directly involve community members in the development of training initiatives and curricula.

11.4

Use contemporary adult education techniques in training programs.

11.5

Carefully select field training officers (FTOs) and training staff.

11.6

Develop robust programs to train officers to serve as FTOs.

11.7

Treat service as an FTO as an important career step that factors into decisions about promotion.

11.8

Keep complete, accurate, and up-to-date records of training curricula, materials, and attendance.

11.9

Periodically review, audit, and assess training programs.

STANDARD TRAINING PRACTICES

All police officers are required to successfully complete extensive academy and field training programs. Nationally, more than 600 law enforcement academies train new recruits at more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies.² Nearly half of these academies are housed at educational institutions, such as colleges, universities, and technical and vocational schools.³

Many police departments send recruits to these academies, and some (in larger jurisdictions) operate their own academies. Both types are effective if they meet departmental needs and provide high-quality training. State and regional academies, however, are only able to provide baseline instruction, covering the minimum requirements of departments served. Unlike in-house academies, state and regional academies don't tailor trainings to the departments where recruits will eventually work or to the communities that they will eventually serve.

After graduating, new officers continue training with a higher-ranking officer — often called a field training officer. FTOs provide intensive on-the-job training and daily performance evaluations; the goal is to teach new officers how to navigate the job, including how to interact with community members, adhere to department policies and procedures, and generally carry out the department's mission.



New officers benefit when FTOs are selected based on their performance histories and mentorship abilities. Unfortunately, training doesn't always give new officers the skills they need to succeed. Some must learn department-specific policies on their own, especially when field training focuses on writing reports and other administrative skills (which are important but do not significantly influence community policing).

After completing field training, officers must meet requirements for ongoing, in-service, and continuing professional education. All states have Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) commissions, which set minimum training requirements for officers and certify them as "peace officers."

To maintain certification, most commissions require officers to complete at least some continuing education courses. These requirements vary widely by state and department. Some states, like Illinois, require training in procedural justice and cultural competency every three years, while others leave this type of training to individual departments.⁴ Similarly, some states require officers to regularly certify competency in nonlethal tools, like pepper spray, while others require regular certification only in lethal tools, like firearms.





BEST PRACTICES IN ACADEMY AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Training serves as the foundation by which departments teach members practices and tactics to police in a fair, safe, and effective manner that reflects and affirms a commitment to community values. When focused on best practices to reduce harm, both physical and psychological, and keep community relations intact, training is the most effective and direct means of shaping officers who protect the public and preserve public safety. To ensure officers understand and carry out departmental requirements and are trained to adhere to community-centered values, departments should:

RECOMMENDATION 11.1

ENSURE THAT BASIC RECRUIT AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING COVERS A WIDE VARIETY OF SKILLS, INCLUDING CRISIS RESPONSE, DE-ESCALATION, CULTURAL COMPETENCY, AND LEADERSHIP.

As departments move toward community-centered approaches to policing, all department members should receive training in problem-solving principles, trauma and victim services, analytical research and technology, and linguistic and cultural competency.⁵ Like other professions, policing is affected by external change, whether it be the development of new technologies, changes in law and policy, improved policing tactics and practices, shifting cultural norms, or emerging social problems.

The United States is experiencing a health crisis, and the rates of deaths by suicide and drug overdose continue to climb. For these reasons, all officers need crisis response training. Approximately 25 percent of people with mental health disabilities have a history of police arrest.⁶ And people with untreated mental health disabilities are 16 times more likely than those in the general population to be killed during an encounter with the police.⁷ (For more detail, see Chapter 5.)

The President's Task Force Report recommends that POST commissions include crisis intervention techniques in basic recruit and in-service officer training.⁸ It also recommends including de-escalation training, which teaches officers how to defuse crises, in the basic curriculum of all academy training.⁹

To interact effectively with all community members, officers must also demonstrate cultural competency — the ability to engage with all people, regardless of background, in a way that respects and responds to their beliefs, practices, and cultural and linguistic needs. All people have unique backgrounds and experiences that shape who they are and how they relate to the world around them. Officers should therefore be trained to understand community members' social customs and modes of communication. Community members should work with their departments to develop and deliver cultural competency training that represents all community groups, as discussed in greater depth below.

Leadership training is also essential. Ongoing leadership training for all personnel throughout their careers will nurture leadership skills, teach positive behaviors, and increase commitment to community standards.¹⁰ Promoting a culture of community and public service depends on department leaders' commitment to these values. For this reason, departments should provide executive-level leadership training for all supervisors, from sergeants to chiefs. (For more detail, see Chapter 9.)

RECOMMENDATION 11.2 PRIORITIZE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RIGOROUS IN-SERVICE TRAINING.

Skills are perishable. And many officers lack opportunities to revisit subjects they studied as cadets and new recruits. With this in mind, community-centered departments prioritize the development and implementation of high-quality in-service training to ensure that officers are serving communities according to current best practices. Just as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals must engage in continuing education, police officers need and deserve opportunities to refresh old skills, build new ones, and acquire instruction on emerging topics.

Accordingly, savvy department leaders identify specific training goals and objectives and develop them with input from inside and outside the department. This allows officers at all levels — from patrol to detective to supervisor — to share challenges they face and community members to explain what they need and expect from the police.

The critical self-analysis that departments engage in when reviewing uses of force, searches and seizures, crisis response encounters, misconduct investigations, complaints from community members, and other significant incidents should also inform the development of training priorities and goals. If a department has recently

experienced officer injuries or higher rates of use-of-force incidents associated with foot pursuits, then training may seek to emphasize sound decision-making, safe pursuit tactics, and de-escalation.

RECOMMENDATION 11.3 DIRECTLY INVOLVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING INITIATIVES AND CURRICULA.

The President's Task Force Report calls on departments to work directly with communities to ensure that training programs are effective and align with community values, and many departments have acted accordingly.¹¹ In 2014, the Seattle Police Department developed a training on bias-free policing in collaboration with the city's Community Police Commission, an organization representing diverse communities that works toward just and equitable policing. During the training, a commission representative explained what bias-free policing looks like to the community and how perceptions of biased policing affected relationships in the community in the past.¹²

Departments in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York, meanwhile, have established working groups with community representatives to ensure that policies, training, and practices meet community needs and align with community values.¹³

TRAINING PROGRAMS SHOULD ALSO DRAW ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY AND INCORPORATE LOCAL GUEST SPEAKERS, SUCH AS VICTIMS OF CRIMES, MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS, ADVOCATES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, AND OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS.



Training programs should also draw on the wider community and incorporate local guest speakers, such as victims of crimes, mental health service providers, advocates for social change, and other community members. Other educational institutions, like law and medical schools, are also well equipped to help develop and deliver training on specific topics.

RECOMMENDATION 11.4 USE CONTEMPORARY ADULT EDUCATION TECHNIQUES IN TRAINING PROGRAMS.

Education experts have shown that adults learn more from engaging in real-world experiences than from passively consuming information.¹⁴ Appropriately, a consensus is emerging on behalf of law enforcement training that (1) is geared toward experiential training, reflection, and discussion; (2) prepares officers for the application of skills in the real world (*i.e.*, when interacting with members of communities); and (3) accounts for different learning styles.¹⁵

The field of law enforcement is uniquely suited to provide realistic, scenario-based training. Instructors can teach officers how to respond to real-life encounters through role-play or body camera or other video footage. They can also ask officers to analyze realistic scenarios and determine whether an officer's performance aligned with department policies and applicable law. Experts

recommend that training in the use of force include discrete scenarios woven throughout the training period so that officers can apply the skills they learn to real-world problems.¹⁶

RECOMMENDATION 11.5 CAREFULLY SELECT FTOs AND TRAINING STAFF.

Departments that provide in-house training should establish specific, performance-based criteria for selecting instructors. FTOs should be veteran officers who are up to date with in-service training (*e.g.*, impartial policing and de-escalation) and have shown a commitment to community policing in their performance. Such FTOs are best suited to provide new officers guidance on best practices and insights into the communities they work with.

Departments should select trainers based on similar criteria, with an eye toward who may be the best conduits for specific subjects. As discussed in Chapter 2, departments should carefully select trainers who develop and deliver material in especially sensitive subjects, such as implicit bias and cultural competency, and who will work with members from marginalized or diverse communities to develop and deliver training.

Officers with histories of misconduct, who have received multiple complaints from community members, or who have been the subject of misconduct lawsuits are not suitable instructors or FTOs.

RECOMMENDATION 11.6 DEVELOP ROBUST PROGRAMS TO TRAIN OFFICERS TO SERVE AS FTOs.

Experienced officers who have demonstrated success in the field may not know how to be effective FTOs or mentors. Effective FTO programs include rigorous, detailed instruction on how to conduct FTO training so that it aligns with department and community needs and values. For example, the San Jose Police Department in California, a pioneer of effective field training, requires FTO candidates to undergo 40 hours of training prior to deployment in a teaching role.¹⁷ This instruction covers 30 different areas of proficiency, including communication, mentoring, and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION 11.7 TREAT SERVICE AS AN FTO AS AN IMPORTANT CAREER STEP THAT FACTORS INTO DECISIONS ABOUT PROMOTION.

In some departments, the only benefits of serving as an FTO are modest pay raises and access to overtime work and pay — benefits that may not attract candidates who reflect the values of the department. Consequently, experienced officers may view an FTO assignment as a “road to nowhere,” which may result in a low-quality FTO applicant pool.¹⁸ Because FTO programs are department leaders’ first opportunity to inculcate core values in new officers — and to weed out those who are unsuited for employment — FTOs should be of the highest quality and deeply committed to community values. Opportunities for career advancement are reliable ways to attract a competitive candidate pool.



RECOMMENDATION 11.8

KEEP COMPLETE, ACCURATE, AND UP-TO-DATE RECORDS OF TRAINING CURRICULA, MATERIALS, AND ATTENDANCE.

Many police departments don't keep accurate or complete records of training curricula, courses, or attendance.¹⁹ To ensure that all department members have received required training, departments should keep and maintain attendance records.

Failure to do so increases the likelihood that officers or their partners will lack needed skills and knowledge; that supervisors will make ill-informed staffing choices; and that departments won't be able to hold accountable officers who fail to meet performance standards or follow department policies. Moreover, complete, current, and accurate records enable communities to hold departments accountable for insufficient or outdated training.



RECOMMENDATION 11.9

PERIODICALLY REVIEW, AUDIT, AND ASSESS TRAINING PROGRAMS.

Training ensures that officers have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to police fairly and safely, but it can be expensive — and should be carried out in a cost-effective manner. Department leaders should establish detailed training schedules and logistical plans to maximize cost-effectiveness. In-person training can be expensive because departments need officers to serve as instructors as well as substitutes to temporarily fill officers' shifts in the field.

Because policing best practices are always advancing and evolving, departments should periodically review training curricula to ensure they teach new developments in the profession and account for shifting community needs — and to ensure they don't teach outmoded practices or reflect outdated community needs.

TRAINING ENSURES THAT OFFICERS HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES THEY NEED TO POLICE FAIRLY AND SAFELY, BUT IT CAN BE EXPENSIVE – AND SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT IN A COST-EFFECTIVE MANNER.

Yet relatively few departments formally evaluate their training programs. All training initiatives should be assessed via written evaluations from participants; scores of tests given during training; post-training officer performance (and whether it reflects the target skills and principles); and aggregate departmentwide performance trends across time. Furthermore, department leaders should consider community feedback about policing services.

Training does not need to be held exclusively at training centers or firing ranges; instructors can train officers at patrol stations, too. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD), for example, designed a mobile program that provides officers with refresher tactical training at their local stations.²⁰ The LASD's then-serving monitor praised the program's debut, noting:

On each [training] occasion, large numbers of deputies participated. During a several day [training team] visit to Century [Station], for example, 86 deputies received training, and none were away from their patrol duties for more than an hour. Because the officers come directly to the training from patrol duty, the station environment is particularly conducive to serious training.²¹

Lessons learned at the stations were carried back to the training center. The program also revealed gaps in training in areas ranging from implicit gender bias to safety during encounters with active shooters. These observations helped LASD evaluate — and improve — its training procedures and practices.

CITY HALL
POLICE HEADQUARTERS

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