COMMUNITY-LED POLICE TRAINING

LOCAL PROGRESS

Policy Background

Police training can be an important tool when developed with and delivered by groups rooted directly in impacted communities. Too often, however, a strong training curricula or mandate does not manifest in reformed departmental practices, primarily due to a lack of oversight over whether officers are learning and adopting the content. Police training is typically attendance-based, with no testing or evaluation required. Local elected officials can and should develop new and creative ways to influence departmental culture—including pressing for hiring practices that ensure a commitment to the well-being of communities as a non-negotiable requirement for new hires. Further, police training should not be considered an end-all, be-all solution; only when developed as part of a systems approach—that is, in concert with strong oversight mechanisms and adequate funding for resources such as public health and social service programs—can training be an effective tool for reform.

While there are many components and considerations in police training, this section focuses specifically on direct engagement with communities, as police academy training commonly emphasizes the tactical components of an officer's job and offers insufficient opportunities to learn authentically from communities. For training programs to be meaningful, funding for training must be independent from the police department, and training should be led by community-based partners that center the needs of their diverse populations. There must also be robust evaluation mechanisms to ensure that officers are learning the training content.

Assessing the Landscape

The following questions can help to provide additional local context:

- What does the state law mandate in terms of police training programs?
- Is the police department training program more robust than what is required under state law?
- Are there community groups that have done work to influence the content of police training practices and/or deliver training?
- Is external input around the content of police training possible? Do any collective bargaining agreements present obstacles or opportunities to negotiating external input?

Best Practices

Local elected officials often cannot legislate around the content of police training programs, particularly because requirements are commonly established at the state level. However, elected officials could consider issuing a local ordinance or guidance that sets standards for new departmental recruits. This could include, for example, directing the department to only hire recruits who demonstrate care for the communities in which they work. In some jurisdictions, through their selection of police commission members, local elected officials can ensure a chief prioritizes training reforms. They can also advocate to ensure that trainings are developed and led by community leaders. Finally, local elected officials can play an important oversight role when it comes to advocating for the transparency and evaluation of training programs.

The following criteria are derived from the Center for Popular Democracy's Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing,[1] Campaign Zero's best practices,[2] principles from the 21st Century Policing Task Force Recommendations,[3] and conversations with policy experts, including the National Police Accountability Project.

COMMUNITY-LED POLICE TRAINING

Criteria	Questions to Evaluate Your Jurisdiction	Meets Criteria? Y/N/Other:	Where to Look
• Police departments should not be directly funded for training. Instead, funding should be earmarked for community-based trainers who are selected through an application process that involves public input.	• Is funding earmarked for community-based trainers (external to the police department)? • Are trainers selected through a process that includes community input?	[Y] [N] _____ [Y] [N] _____	• Police training curriculum: Evaluators will likely need to submit a Freedom of Information Act request to obtain the policy, but can also check the Bureau of Justice Statistics Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies: https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=280

• Police training should center and address the diverse needs of communities.	• Does the training address:
	  • culture and race?
	  • homelessness?
	  • mental health?
	  • youth development/needs?
	  • gender identity and sexual orientation?
	  • interactions with people who are differently abled?
		[Y] [N] _____
		[Y] [N] _____
		[Y] [N] _____
		[Y] [N] _____
		[Y] [N] _____
		[Y] [N] _____
			• Police training curriculum

• Police training should be explicitly anti-racist.	• Does training address implicit bias? • Does the program include anti-racism training/address the history of structural racism?	[Y] [N] _____ [Y] [N] _____	• Police training curriculum

COMMUNITY-LED POLICE TRAINING

Criteria	Questions to Evaluate Your Jurisdiction	Meets Criteria? Y/N/Other:		Where to Look
• Police training should prioritize problem-solving skills.	• Does training equip officers with de-escalation skills?	Y	N	_____	• Police training curriculum
	• Does the training equip officers with mediation skills?	Y	N	_____	
	• Does the program include crisis intervention training?	Y	N	_____	
	• Does the program incorporate problem oriented policing (POP) concepts?	Y	N	_____	
	• Does training equip officers with communications skills?	Y	N	_____	
	• Does the program include training on use of force?	Y	N	_____	
• Police training should include language training to help officers communicate with non-English speakers?	• Does the training include language training (for example, a Spanish-language component in communities with large populations of Spanish speakers)?	Y	N	_____	• Police training curriculum
• Training should be scenario-based.	• Does the training include role-play components that simulate actual scenarios that officers will encounter?	Y	N	_____	• Police training curriculum

COMMUNITY-LED POLICE TRAINING

Criteria	Questions to Evaluate Your Jurisdiction	Meets Criteria? Y/N/Other:		Where to Look
• Training should be consistent and continuous.	• Does training include a field component to ensure that officers have the opportunity to apply skills?	Y	N _____	• Police training curriculum
	• Are officers required to complete additional field training on an ongoing basis (e.g. after the completion of the formal academy)?	Y	N _____	
• Trainings should be developed with community input.	• Is training developed in partnership with community-based organizations that work with individuals directly impacted by policing practices?	Y	N _____	• Police training curriculum
• There should be robust oversight mechanisms to ensure that officers are learning the training content.	• Is there an evaluation or test that officers must pass before completing the program?	Y	N _____	• Police training curriculum
	• Are officers evaluated through scenario-based training?	Y	N _____	
• The department should keep records on the training received by officers.	• Is the department required to keep records that document the type of training received (including length, frequency, content, and who develops it)?	Y	N _____	• Police training curriculum
• Evaluations should test for attitudes as well as technical knowledge.	• Are officers tested on their understanding of implicit bias and structural racism as a requirement for completing the training?	Y	N _____	• Police training curriculum

Additional Considerations

- Police departments should adopt hiring guidelines to screen out candidates whose motivation for or approach to a law enforcement career is inconsistent with community service. A commitment to serve communities above all else should be one of the non-negotiable characteristics of a new recruit.

Lessons from the Field

In Albany, NY, the Center for Law and Justice (CFLJ) has played a major role in helping to reform police training policy. As a result, the Albany Police Department set up its own academy for training that goes beyond state mandates, and has worked closely with community groups, including CFLJ, to determine the philosophy and content of the training. The growing mutual trust and respect between the department and CFLJ was built over the course of many years of deliberate relationship-building and changes in police department culture.

Today, due in part to CFLJ's influence and advocacy, all officers are trained in LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion), a pre-arrest diversion program that focuses on harm reduction and case management rather than arresting people for low level offenses related to drug abuse, poverty, and mental health issues. Officers also receive training on procedural justice and implicit bias. The CFLJ is now attempting to interest the department in including systemic implicit bias, which looks at the history of structural racism and its impact on institutions and communities. The program would also include a lesson in American civil rights history.

Officers also participate in a legal-rights education program along with community volunteer lawyers, to assist in the teaching of young people about how to make decisions that could keep them safe during a police encounter and what their legal rights are during such contacts. The CFLJ has found that police officers benefit from these sessions as well. They learn more about the community's perception of police and the needs of young people.

Resources

- See the Bureau of Justice Statistics' Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies: https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=280

- See APM Report's analysis of states that require de-escalation training: https://www.apmreports.org/story/2017/05/05/police-de-escalation-training

- See the 21st Century Policing guidance on Training and Education: http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/documents/pdfs/708-21stCenturyPolicingPillars5and6.pdf

- See New Orleans's community-police mediation program: http://communitypolicemediation.org/.

NOTES

1. "Building Momentum from the Ground Up: A Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing," The Center for Popular Democracy, http://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/JusticeInPolicing-webfinal.pdf, 44.

2. "Training," Campaign Zero, Accessed June, 2018, https://www.joincampaignzero.org/train/.

3. "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing," President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing," May 2015, http://elearning-courses.net/iacp/html/webinarResources/170926/FinalReport21stCenturyPolicing.pdf, 51-60.