

The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Developing and Implementing a  
Field Training Officer Program for Small Agencies

A Policy Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Professional Designation  
Graduate, Management Institute

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Smaller law enforcement agencies have usually been hard pressed to develop and implement valid, structured, field training programs for their agencies due to lack of manpower, time and financial restraint. Police organizations that do not provide this training or have an inadequate program are leaving themselves vulnerable to lawsuits due to civil liabilities.

The purpose of this research project is to stress the importance of a valid and justifiable field training program; a program that has adequately trained officers, standardized training, a sufficient length of time for recruits, and a evaluation of the recruits that is valid and reliable.

By examining progressive agencies field training programs, examining literature pertaining to training and speaking to officials in the field, there are several key points to field training. First, all training officers should be certified and trained before being placed in a position to train and evaluate new recruit officers. Each field training program should have a length of time sufficient for the recruits to be ready to handle calls alone. There is a tremendous need for documentation and evaluation of the recruits and the knowledge, skills and abilities that they demonstrate, to reduce the amount of liability to the department and the recruits as well.

## **Introduction**

Many large law enforcement agencies have structured Field Training Programs. However, smaller law enforcement agencies, those agencies with 35 or less sworn personnel, which is the national norm for the size of most law enforcement agencies (Adams 1996), have usually been hard pressed to develop and implement a valid, structured training program for their agencies due to the lack of manpower, time and financial restraint. Due to civil lawsuits, the courts still require that the department furnish adequately trained and knowledgeable officers, and justifiably so. Police organizations that do not provide this fundamental training or have an inadequate program are leaving themselves vulnerable to lawsuits such as negligent retention, negligent admission, or failure to train. The public also demands and deserves well-trained and professional officers.

The purpose of this research project will be to stress the importance of a valid and justifiably legal field training program. It will also help guide smaller agencies in the areas of what they need to focus on to develop a good field training program.

The problem with most field training programs is that they are developed for the larger agencies; lasting from fourteen weeks up to six months. Many smaller agencies do not have that luxury of time to spend with a recruit officer to cover the vast amount of material that these large agencies cover. These agencies need these officers on the streets as soon as possible to patrol the streets and counties but still need them to be well trained and knowledgeable in all areas of law enforcement. The training officers are not trained in what to instruct or evaluate and most smaller-sized police departments do not employ formalized planning units for obvious reasons of costs and manpower limitations. Therefore, policies are not articulated and frequently are left to chance (More 1987).

The intended audience for this research will generally be the chief administrators, training coordinators and those involved in policy development for field training programs within their agencies; specifically, smaller law enforcement agencies without any FTO program or a program that lacks formal procedures and policies. Other individuals that may take an interest in this research project would be current police trainers and field training officers from any size agency.

This project will first review the past practices of law enforcement, and the reasons and changes that have taken place by examining books and literature. A review of case law and training guidelines is essential to this project. This project will review case law from Federal Court relating to Failure to Train, Negligent Training, and Negligent Admission. Secondly, this project will review current trends and practices that have come about due to these legal and administrative actions; reviewing current training requirements. Finally, this research project will discuss developing a Field Training Program that is valid and justifiable, based on current training guidelines, and by reviewing several agencies FTO Programs.

The intended outcome of this research project will be for small law enforcement agencies to have an insight on how to develop a valid and workable field training program and what it will take to implement that program to fit the needs of the department, the community, as well as the needs of the new recruit officer.

### **Historical, Legal and Theoretical Context**

Field training has been primarily a post World War II development. In 1968 an IACP survey revealed that 58% of all departments in cities over 10,000 population had no formal field training for recruits. (Saunders 1970) The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration (1967) recognized the need for better training of police officers and

recommended that each law enforcement agency should have a supervised field training program to ensure that proper training was received by newly hired officers.

Most of the current field training programs in use today are based on a model developed by the San Jose, CA police department, which is more commonly referred to as the San Jose model. This program was developed in 1971 and fully implemented in 1972 after they found themselves involved in civil litigation involving inadequate training. Through several years of research and design the San Jose Police Department developed a Field Training program that has stood the test of time with very little revision. This model program is probably the most widely used and copied program in the United States today with over 500 agencies using this model or a variation of it. (Unsinger 1990)

As late as 1989, The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) developed model guidelines for an agency to be nationally accredited. They state that the agency shall have a field training program of at least four weeks. Other criteria required is that the program be based on a job task analysis of the most frequent assignments, use evaluation techniques to measure competency, have a selection process for field training officers, training of the field training officers, supervision of the field training officers, rotation of field assignments, guidelines for the evaluation of the recruits, and reporting responsibilities of the FTO's, among several other areas. (CALEA 1989)

In the past it was not uncommon for an officer just out of the academy to start off with little more than a brief orientation then be placed in a patrol unit with a veteran officer for a few days to observe how the job was done. This is what field training was considered to be. In many field training programs, there were no lesson plans or standardized training modules. A sound performance rating system, anchored in actual job tasks, were absent, and training officers

received little, if any, instruction on evaluation criteria. (Kenney and Cordner 1996) The officer was then placed on their own and received on-the-job-training as he went. When they did not know what to do, they either just “winged it” or called and asked the veteran officer what to do. Surprisingly, it is still that way in many small law enforcement agencies today. These agencies have little to no formal field training program for their recruit officers.

In our litigious society of suing police agencies, police administrators need to be aware of the potential liability they are creating by not having a structured and formalized field training program. Two of the areas of concern are inadequate training and negligent retention. “Generally, poor initial training leads to a lack of confidence, which in turn leads to negligent admission and retention.” (Haider 1990) Under inadequate training, liability can be assessed if agencies do not train their officers in a manner adequate to prepare them for their responsibilities. If, as a result of the lack of training, an officer causes harm to an individual, that agency may be held accountable. Negligent retention could occur when previous actions of an officer should have resulted in the dismissal of an officer, because the administration should not have allowed that officer to continue. Knowledge of the officer’s unfitness may be implied as a result of their improper pattern of performance.

The number of civil suits filed against the police has risen sharply since the 1960’s, from 1,741 in 1967 to nearly 35,000 in 1997. In the wake of the Supreme Court’s landmark decision regarding training standards (*City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378 1989), almost every piece of police litigation filed today asserts inadequate training. (Calibre Press 1999)

There have been a couple of cases from the U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals relating to training programs. In *Davis v. Mason County*, 927 F.2d 1473 (1991) the court stated:

“...the Sheriff’s Department devised a field training program for the officers. While this program may have seemed adequate on paper, in

practice it was never followed.”

One of the plaintiff’s experts testified that as a result of the inadequacy of the field training program, the department, “sent officers out on the street to perform police services without any training whatsoever.” (The deputy received only three or four weeks of field training before being sent out on patrol alone.) The issue was not whether the officers had received any training; rather the issue was the adequacy of that training. Mason County’s failure to train its officers constituted “deliberate indifference”. In a second case *Hirtz v. Gertzen* (1992) the court noted that an employer has an obligation to ensure that personnel are properly trained to perform the functions to which they are assigned.

Training cannot inoculate a department from civil litigation; yet, training programs, which are justified and documented, can help to reduce or eliminate areas where police departments may be the most vulnerable to liabilities. (Buckley 1996) These are just a few of the reasons, therefore, nearly every professional and progressive law enforcement today has developed and implemented formal, structured field training programs to protect their departments and their officers.

### **Review of Literature or Practice**

The State of Texas has set a minimum of 560 hours of basic academy classroom instruction for each person who wishes to be licensed as a peace officer. The person is then required to pass a written examination. Once that person has passed the test and passes the department’s background investigation, the department may hire that person to be a peace officer. However, what happens to that person once they are hired by that agency? How does that new officer apply what they have learned in the classroom to actual street experiences? That is what



field training programs have been designed to do. They bridge the gap between the basic classroom knowledge and the application of that knowledge into actual street experiences by placing the recruit officer with a specially trained and knowledgeable police officer for a specific length of time. This field training officer (F.T.O.) will teach the recruit officer how to apply the knowledge and skills that they learned in the academy. The F.T.O. will then evaluate the recruit officer on his performance until the training phase has been completed. The State of Texas does not currently mandate a minimum, standardized Field Training Program. It is left up to each individual agency to see that every recruit officer hired by that agency receives the knowledge, skills and abilities that that officer needs.

In a recent survey of law enforcement agencies around and in Bexar County, Texas, 71 percent of the surveyed agencies reported using field training programs. Of those programs surveyed, the length of those programs ranged from one week to 28 weeks. Many of those agencies were the smaller agencies (25 or less sworn personnel) of Bexar County. 85 percent had programs that lasted at least four weeks. (Four weeks is the minimum recommended length according to CALEA.) Therefore, the length of time recruit officers will spend in a field training program will vary widely from small agencies to larger agencies. In 83 percent of the agencies, the field training officers received training prior to their assignment. (Adams 1996)

Without well trained, training officers, how can a training program succeed? Training of the personnel that will be teaching the recruit officers is therefore, essential in any field training program. The field training officer is the key to any program. (Leichliter 1999) Placing the recruit officer with an officer who has been at that agency awhile to show him how things are done there creates one of the most common occurrences; placing the officer with a veteran police officer who is not necessarily qualified to be a trainer or an evaluator. He has probably been a

“good” officer for the department and therefore, believed that he would be a good training officer also. Even though, the field training officer should maintain high efficiency ratings, he should also be a model officer as far as character and integrity. The officer should have a great deal of patience, excellent communication skills and possess the ability to work well with recruit officers. Above all he must want to be a Field Training Officer. If field training is imposed as an assignment, the program may be doomed to mediocrity from the onset (MacKenna 1985).

In medium to larger sized departments selection of field training officers is best accomplished by having a selection process. In small agencies it may be possible to make that selection based on the officers desire to be a training officer and their supervisor’s personal recommendations. Officers in smaller agencies are better known by the administrators and their supervisors for their quality of work, their knowledge of the laws and policies, and their character traits. However the selection of the training officer is made, no officer should be permitted to function as a training officer without adequate training and certification.

Just as there is no one set way to do every task in law enforcement, there is also not a set way to develop a field training program. Frequently, smaller departments simply copy another larger departments field training program. The result is a program that fails to address the needs of that particular agency. Each agency needs to develop a training program that will benefit their agency taking into account their particular community’s needs and tasks. What works for the Dallas Police Department may not work in a smaller agency. Each agency has its own special characteristics and those characteristics need to be taken into consideration. What is needed is a thorough job task analysis. This is a detailed list of tasks that are related to what all a police officer does; from the major tasks like arrest to the very minor like barking dog and delivering messages. Agencies that do not conduct a job task analysis, or rely on those done by other

departments may prove problematic in the future in the event of litigation where the analysis is at issue in the trial. (Adams 1996)

Once those tasks have been determined, those tasks are then listed in what has been labeled as some as a training guide, a lesson plan of what that officer should be taught. The training guide is a catalog of all skills, knowledge and abilities considered essential to be mastered prior to solo patrol duty. (Molden 1986) These tasks are then rated daily to evaluate how well the officer is performing. If the evaluation is not based on validated, job related criteria, the agency could become vulnerable to lawsuits.

The length of time a recruit should be in training is a main issue of debate. What the program will present is usually related to how long the program will be. Generally, the more time available for field training, the more effective and thorough the program will be. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals submitted in 1973 a recommendation that field training programs should be a minimum of four months. Smaller agencies, having less administrative issues, usually less geographic area and fewer serious offenses could reasonably get by with a shorter training period. However, the program should not be less than four weeks in length as recommended by CALEA. Because most of the training programs used today last an average of 12 to 17 weeks for most agencies, the problem with a shorter training period is how will a jury perceive the adequacy of the training if it is brought up as an issue in civil litigation.

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

There are key elements that are present in every successful field training program. They are a set length of time of training, selection of the field training officers, training of the field training officers, evaluations of the recruit officers (preferably on a daily basis), and guidelines

for the evaluation of the recruits. Properly conducted programs can reach beyond training and positively impact the officer retention problem, which is of such concern to many law enforcement agencies today. (MacKenna 1985)

Field training programs in smaller departments usually have no structure. There is no set time on how long the recruit will be in the program. Police work is complex and can become very frustrating if you do not have the knowledge or skills to handle situations as they arise. "New officers need the time to apply the knowledge acquired in the academy to role situations under the direct guidance of a supervising officer." (MacKenna 1985) If you do not give the recruit officer enough time to experience a variety of calls under the supervision of a training officer, you are denying that officer and the community of a great amount of knowledge and performance. Putting partially or poorly trained officers on the street without an adequate amount of time for training could constitute "deliberate indifference" in regards to training in the eyes of a jury. That is what the U.S. Supreme Court cited as the standard in the landmark decision of *City of Canton v. Harris*. (Molden 1995)

Evaluations are based arbitrarily unless there are guidelines for the training officer to follow. Without standardized evaluation guidelines, the evaluation can end up being nothing more than a popularity contest. If the new officer fits the image expected of the senior officer, the probability of success is high. If not, failure is certain. The training is usually inadequate because it is usually left up solely to the training officer on what the recruit officer learns. It is based on the training officer's perception of what training is needed, or what interests them (Keene PD). Most professional and progressive agencies have changed their programs and developed and mandated training requirements for all new recruit officers to relieve their agencies of these problems and protect themselves against litigation.

Field training also has an aspect to it that is rarely thought of when thinking traditionally of a field training program. Field training is actually the last step of the hiring process. It helps document why an officer should be dismissed should that need arise. The goal of any field training program is to produce a competent patrol officer. Unfortunately, some people are not able to reach that competent level required and regardless, by the efforts made of their training officers, must be terminated. (Dallas PD) Administrators may not be willing to admit that an officer who passes his academy, written tests, and background does not measure up. But the choice is one of keeping a poorly trained and ineffective officer on the street or dismissing him early in his career. It is actually a service to the community because that officer will not be able to deliver the service required, and a service to the officer because he will never be satisfied or fulfilled by his career. (Haider 1990)

When developing field training programs there are going to be costs involved. The main cost is going to be obtaining training for the field training officers. Whenever looking at a training program, this is the one cost that can not be overlooked. Training of the FTO's is essential to any training program if you are going to have a reliable and valid program.

The benefit from this however is that those officers you send for training are going to be better officers for the department and themselves. They will have a positive influence for the department in morale, and attitude. That alone can decrease your turn over rate and increase the professionalism of your officers. . There will also be a decrease in potential liability for your agency. These officers are going to be aware of all policies and procedures for your agency, and will have become familiar how to properly evaluate and document the recruit officers progress or non-progress for those few unsatisfactory officers. A study by Michael McCampbell shows that agencies that have an effective field training program reduced civil liability complaints by 29.5

percent and were more successful in EEOC judgements. (McC Campbell 1987) Of course the most obvious advantage is the final product of your officer; a professional and productive police officer. If you have qualified Field Training Officers, you will have better qualified police officers.

### **Conclusion / Recommendations**

It is unfortunate that many medium and small city police departments have not fully recognized the value and importance of formal field training programs. Administrators of these agencies need to realize that in this day and age, law enforcement must have field training programs that are well structured, well documented and handled by officers that are well trained.

Agencies that do not have a structured Field Training Program or feel that their program is lacking need to look at the following areas and make changes as appropriate. The first area is the training of the field training officers. Each F.T.O. should be trained and certified before they are assigned a recruit officer. Secondly, the department needs to be sure that detailed and accurate records are maintained. These records serve two purposes, they standardize the training and they insure that all mandated training is accomplished.

Thirdly, develop a field training guide based on actual job task analysis. This will serve as a check-off for the FTO and the recruit to be certain that all skills, knowledge and abilities considered important have been covered and mastered, prior to the recruit officer being assigned solo duty. Next, be sure that the recruit officers are allowed a sufficient time of field training before being placed on their own. The training should be long enough to complete all the required training modules in the training guide and ensure that the officer is capable of solo duty. Finally, have guidelines for the evaluations of the recruit officers. A good evaluation will identify strengths, weaknesses, and defend against EEOC and liability claims. (Molden 1986)

Developing a Field Training Program is a time consuming activity. But the resulting outcome is far better than being without one. Agencies will reduce their potential exposure to civil liability lawsuits such as negligent training or negligent retention. Agencies can help increase officer morale, and professionalism. Officers who are knowledgeable, well trained, and able to handle the job of a police officer will better serve their communities.



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To: Rita Watkins

From: Sgt. J. P. Bevering  
White Settlement Police Department

Re: Final P.R.P

Date: October 17, 2000

Here is my final copy of my police research project for review. I have made the corrections and included the abstract.

I would like to attend the Module III scheduled in January, 2001. Could you please reserve me a slot if there is a vacancy?

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. P. Bevering".

J. P. Bevering