

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT
MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

Assessing the Need to Change the Pflugerville
Police Department's Field Training Officer Program

A Proposed Policy Research Project
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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to examine the need for a field training program and to assess a need for change in the Pflugerville Police Department field training officer program. Also examined was the amount of time spent on training, type of training, and forms of documentation used by different departments. This research also looks at the cost effectiveness of the field training program.

Research shows that there is a large need for field training officer programs, even though they are relatively new to law enforcement. By looking at numerous departments programs, it is easy to see through comparison and contrast that the majority of the departments that have emulated these programs have a proven record of success. The conclusion found through this research is that Pflugerville Police Department needs to select officers to be field training officers and provide them with the proper training to fulfill these duties. The training for recruits and documentation of all training also need to be improved. Proper documentation will assist in identifying the well trained recruits and will assist in terminating the undesirable recruits who can't perform to the departments minimum qualifications. Research shows that evaluators of the new recruits should be independent from the trainer to eliminate undue pressure being placed on the field training officer.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine and assess the need for change in the current field officer training program of the Pflugerville Police Department. If a need for change is demonstrated, this research will assist in modifying the current training program. This research evaluates the training programs of other police departments which are of similar size to compare with Pflugerville's program. Case law, journals, magazines, and books dealing with these issues will also be used to aid in this research. The goal of this research is to present it to the chief of police and convince him that certain aspects of the field training program need to be changed.

This research is important in the development and presentation of a modified curriculum to the chief of police and will document the results of other departments using a similar field officer training program. This modification to Pflugerville's program will be beneficial to the trainer and the trainee as well.

The Pflugerville Police Department has grown in the past eight years from five officers to a twenty-three officer department. In order to maintain a quality department, it is important to develop officers through effective training, with consistency and documentation of that training to minimize litigation. Though the research will be conducted for the primary use of the Pflugerville Police Department, the applicability of the results will be useful to other departments of similar size and configuration. Initially, the results will

be presented to the command staff of the Pflugerville Police Department.

The intended outcome of this research is implementation of a quality field training program. Such a program would serve to produce quality officers and reduce litigation.

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

Modern field officer training has come a long way since the early 1900s when a young police officer recruit might have been told by his training officer that when you hit a suspect, hit him hard, or when you tell someone something, tell him only once because once is enough. In the earlier days of law enforcement, the new recruits would be issued a badge, revolver, blackjack, and a Sam Brown belt; sent out on patrol for a week of training, and then turned out on his own to handle any type of situation that might arise (Thibault, 1990).

In the early 1900s, August Volmer, City Marshall of Berkeley, CA realized that officers would never be of high quality without special training. As a result, he developed the first formal training program in 1908. In 1916, the University of California at Berkeley began to offer police related courses (Thibault, 1990). In 1934, J. Edgar Hoover established the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) within the Department of Justice. The FBI is considered by many to be one of the leading law enforcement training and educational agencies today (Thibault, 1990). San Jose College (San Jose, CA) implemented a two year associates degree in law enforcement in 1930. However,

as late as 1952, Charles Reith, a well known writer of police history, commented that for American police "ignorance of police duties is no handicap to a successful career as a policeman." He also stated that "ignorance and lack of training and understanding were causes of the frequency of police discomfiture" (Thibault, 1990).

The modernized formal field training program appears to have been established in the San Jose Police Department in 1972. This program was started as a result of a 1970 traffic accident involving an on duty San Jose police recruit who was operating a police vehicle negligently. The death of a passenger in the other vehicle prompted a review of the inadequacies in the department's training.

Although field training programs are relatively new to American police departments, it has long been recognized that the need for such programs existed. As early as 1965, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration made numerous recommendations that agencies implement supervised field training programs (Thibault, 1990).

In 1973, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals made recommendations that agencies should have a minimum of four months of coached field training and that coaches receive 40 hours of specialized training. By 1996, field officer training programs had come a long way, but there was no state or federal mandate requiring field officer training.

The only state training requirement for Texas is that a recruit must receive 560 hours of basic training and pass a written exam with 70 percent of the answers correct before he or she receives his/her state certification. Criminal justice scholars suggest that field training programs are an important tool in developing quality police officers. The most important process of ensuring organizational effectiveness is through training, yet most law enforcement agencies spend less than one percent of their budget to training programs (Thibault, 1990).

One cannot expect adequate performance from untrained officers. There is an old saying that practice doesn't make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect. This writer found this saying to be true in the sense that if recruits are being trained by officers that never received proper training, therefore the police department never decreases its liability or provides a better service to the community.

The large increase in civil suits aimed at police has caused a large demand for well-trained officers. Officers are not only required to know how to perform their duties, but they must always bear in mind the possible cost of their improper performance. Failure to properly train officers has caused administrators to also be held accountable and subject to civil liability.

In *Harris v City of Canton*, Harris was arrested and taken to the police station where she became incoherent and fell twice. Harris received no medical attention while in custody. Approximately one hour later Harris was released and taken to the

hospital by a family member. Harris spent a week in the hospital and then filed a \$ 3 million dollar law suit against the City of Canton. One of her claims was that she failed to receive medical attention while in police custody.

The court made it clear that municipalities can be held liable when officers are inadequately trained and violate peoples constitutional rights. There is no shortage of case law relating to municipalities being sued for inadequate training by law enforcement agencies.

Review of Literature or Practice

In 1986, Michael S. McCampbell surveyed 588 police departments throughout the United States concerning their use of field training. He determined that some major advantages of training were: 1) the decrease in the number of civil liability complaints, 2) better consistency in training, and 3) better documentation (McCampbell, 1986).

McCampbell found that 183 of the 288 departments responding to the survey had some type of field training, while 36 percent had no field training program. His study also showed that 67 percent of the field training officer programs were less than 10 years old and 95 percent of the programs were initiated because of personnel problems and complaints (McCampbell, 1986).

All training programs should occur in a planned, organized sequence, and should be clearly stated in written policies. Field training programs are often divided into three or more phases and vary in length. An introductory, or orientation

phase, is followed by the training phase, and lastly, the evaluation phase. This is especially common in smaller departments. Agencies should use standardized evaluations and trainees should be given written evaluations daily. It is recommended that all field training officers receive at least 40 hours of specialized training. An annual evaluation of the program itself is advised (McC Campbell, 1986).

Discussion of Relevant Issues

San Jose's program, which is 14 weeks long with standardized lesson plans, training guides, and departmental policies is described in McC Campbell's study. The recruit spends four weeks with three different field training officers and is given daily feedback. During the last two weeks, the field training officer wears plain clothes, and rides with and evaluates the performance of the recruit. A recruit either passes on to solo patrol, is given remedial training, or is terminated.

The Newport News Police Department has a 12 week program similar to the San Jose program in which the recruit spends four weeks with three different instructors and receives evaluations every two weeks. The 12 week program in Flagstaff, AZ has the recruit evaluated daily by the field training officer, weekly by the sergeants, and at the ninth week, the corporal begins giving evaluations for two weeks. The recruit then spends one week working with criminal investigations.

In Largo, FL, the training program is directed mostly toward patrol. Prior to this training, the recruit spends time

observing the investigative and administrative aspects of the department. Departmental policies, report writing, communications, and other internal department procedures are taught in this phase. The recruit receives weekly written evaluations and for the next six weeks is assigned to patrol. During the last week, the recruit is "shadowed" by the field training officer who monitors the proficiency of the recruit (Dunham, 1989).

The Pflugerville Police Department currently assigns a new recruit to a patrol officer during which time he or she is taught how to do a report, learns locations in the city, and all other facets of patrol. The recruit is given daily performance reports. At the conclusion of the 2-4 week period, depending on the recruit's prior training, he or she will be evaluated by a patrol sergeant who makes recommendations to the chief of police as to whether the recruit is ready for patrol, needs remedial training, or should be terminated.

The field training program at the Round Rock (TX) Police Department consists of four phases and has a well defined policy directive towards field training. During the first three phases, the recruit is assigned to work with a field training officer and gains more responsibility and authority to handle calls in each phase. The last phase allows the recruit to handle all calls, using his or her own discretion in each situation. The trainer then makes his recommendations to the chief of police.

This examination of different police departments has shown that, overall, there are more similarities than differences in

field officer training programs. These programs are also in great demand in order to reduce civil liability and complaints, and to produce more confident officers by preparing them with the proper tools for their job.

One of the key issues that this research looks at is "Do law enforcement agencies need to have field training programs in place?" and identifies why it is important to have them. Statistics show that a lack of training causes a low morale in officers, and causes unnecessary grievances. Negative relations between the police department and the community also arise. The officers are also under public pressure (via media coverage) for the ignorance of poorly trained officers.

Other problems may also plague inadequately prepared officers. There is a high probability that a citizen's rights will be violated. Recruits have plenty of training in writing tickets, but special cases such as hostage or potentially violent situations are not as readily available for training purposes, thus leaving room for mistakes. Proper simulations could very well effect the outcome of these highly critical situations.

Some of the constraints on these real issues is budgeting for such programs. The Pflugerville community, like many others, is not easily persuaded to spend money on programs it does not deem necessary. Because the Pflugerville Police Department to this date, has never been sued internally or externally, the citizens assume that the officers are completely qualified to handle any predicament that arises.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research assessed the need for changes in the Pflugerville Police Department field training program. Further, the research assessed and reviewed beneficial ideas from other departments. The historical background and legal issues of field officer training programs have given the researcher insight into this demanding training. A greater need, than originally thought by the researcher, for a successful field training program was found. Financially, the cost of litigation far exceeds field training costs and, emotionally, the field training benefits of high morale, confidence, and fewer negative complaints are invaluable.

A clear recommendation would be to designate certain officers who are the most qualified to be field training officers and require them to obtain 40 hours of specialized instructor training. It is also this researcher's opinion that the maximum cost of sending two officers through field officer training would be their combined salaries of twelve hundred dollars, and the cost of training with accommodations to be another thousand dollars. The total cost to train two officers would run no more than twenty-two hundred dollars. This training could be done at the Department of Public Safety located in Austin, TX, which is only 10 miles from the Pflugerville area.

A more defined written field training program requiring more written documentation should also be implemented. The written program and documentation would be implemented at no extra cost to the Pflugerville Police Department.

After examining the research and comparing the Pflugerville Police Department program, it has proven itself to have done a good job of training its officers. The Pflugerville Police Department prides itself on being one of the best police departments of its size and it is the researcher's goal, through the research and recommendations obtained, to continue to be the best.

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