

Making the LAPD a Model for Training Police Officers in the 21st Century

A half a century ago, police departments began to shift from a structure in which officers were assigned to neighborhoods and grew intimately familiar with their “beats” to one that put officers in readily identifiable uniforms and into vehicle patrol, instituted standards for ethical and legal conduct, moved to paramilitary command and control structures, and trained officers to appear as “detached” experts in interactions with citizens. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was a model of this structure for police agencies worldwide.

However, beginning with the civil unrest of the 1960s, shortcomings in the structure became apparent, with police departments being seen as too removed from, and not racially representative of, the communities they served and as being technically proficient but lacking in communications skills.

Training to address these shortcomings has been an ongoing concern for police departments, one that came to a head in Los Angeles when, on June 15, 2001, the city signed a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice, which included a mandate to scrutinize LAPD training in five areas: use of force, search and seizure, arrest procedures, community policing, and diversity.

RAND was asked to address this mandate. Over a nine-month period, researchers relied on a number of data collection methods, including a literature review in the relevant areas; a case study survey of best practices in the policing field; a review of written LAPD course documents, policies, and protocols; observations of training instruction sessions; focus group sessions with police department personnel; and interviews with police managers, elected officials, and community members.

REDEFINING PROFESSIONALISM: A COHERENT APPROACH TO IMPROVING TRAINING

From early on in the effort, it became clear that many of the LAPD’s training problems share a common foundation. Even though the problems encompass many varied topics and training challenges, they are systemic in nature and require a unified approach to change. The researchers recommend that the LAPD clearly and consistently communicate expectations for appropriate LAPD officer behavior.

Specifically, the overarching recommendation is that the LAPD “adopt a concept of police professionalism that incorporates the tenets of corporateness, responsibility, and expertise as the mechanism for guiding the development and execution of its training, including training in the areas of use of force, search and seizure, arrest procedures, community policing, and diversity awareness.”

The three tenets of professionalism are illustrated and explained briefly in Figure 1.

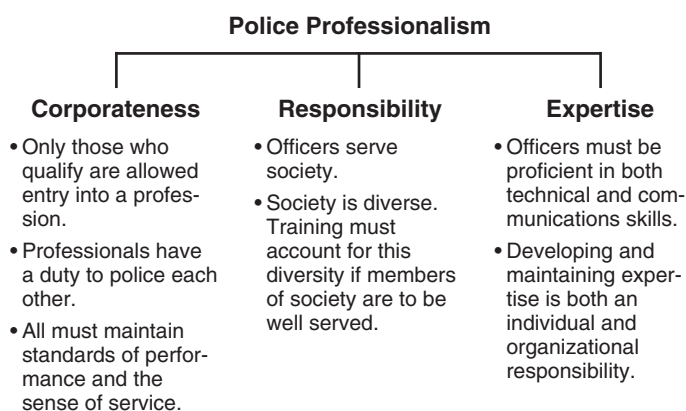


Figure 1. LAPD Training Construct

SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting the overarching recommendation are five recommendations across the three tenets (shown in Figure 2), which are discussed in more detail below.

Corporateness

The recommendation for a **lessons-learned program** derives from heterogeneous sources inside and outside the LAPD. Many businesses today have learned the value of becoming learning organizations and of developing strong knowledge management capabilities. LAPD officials note that structural and cultural divisions among various units sometimes prevent the timely flow of information from the field to the training and the reverse. Furthermore, risk management and liability concerns support the need for a concrete effort to learn from previous actions.

The recommendation to **improve training quality** is supported by classroom observation, document review,

Police Professionalism

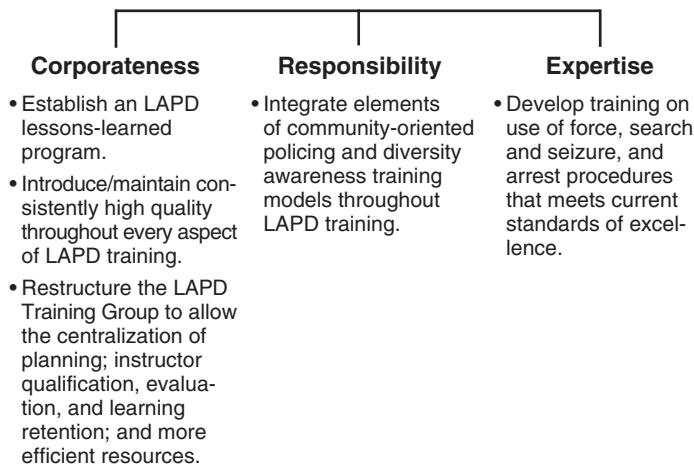


Figure 2. Recommendations by Tenet

interviews, and focus group responses, all of which note that while there are individual examples of excellence, inconsistencies exist across recruit, in-service, and management training, as well as across subject areas, indicating a need for improved overall quality control.

The recommendation to **restructure the LAPD Training Group** was supported by the identification of the issue by mid- and senior-level LAPD leadership and bolstered by the results from the focus groups and from field observations about the nature and structure of the various training functions. Specifically, the division between recruit and in-service training functions, the unclear role and chain of command of training coordinators, and the way in which roll-call curricula were developed and delivered were all noted.

Responsibility

The recommendation to **integrate community policing and diversity awareness models throughout LAPD training** derived from a view expressed by many inside and outside the LAPD that community policing training was inadequate and isolated from other training courses with which it belonged. Elected officials and community members expressed the desire to see more meaningful community engagement and partnership. Meanwhile, many LAPD personnel struggled to define what community policing is and to identify examples of how it might be implemented.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. This research brief describes work prepared for the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department by RAND Public Safety and Justice. It is documented in Training the 21st Century Police Officer: Redefining Police Professionalism for the Los Angeles Police Department, by Russell W. Glenn, Barbara R. Panitch, Dionne Barnes-Proby, Elizabeth Williams, John Christian, Matthew W. Lewis, Scott Gerwehr, and David W. Brannan, MR-1745-LAPD, © Copyright 2003 City of Los Angeles, 278 pp., a public document pursuant to the California Public Records Act that is available via the Internet at www.lapdonline.org. RAND documents are available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: 310-451-7002; toll free 877-584-8642; FAX: 310-451-6915; or email: order@rand.org). Abstracts of RAND documents may be viewed at www.rand.org. Publications are distributed to the trade by NBN. RAND® is a registered trademark. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis; its publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

Case studies and literature reviews underlined that community policing is a departmental endeavor, not a discrete task during the activity of policing; thus, it cannot be handled as a discrete part of training.

Expertise

The recommendation to **develop training on use of force, search and seizure, and arrest procedures that meets current standards of excellence** was heavily informed by curriculum review, classroom observation, and focus group responses. Some courses in these areas follow best practices in learning principles and some do not. Current training ranges from being of high quality to needing substantial improvement, as understood by training experts, students of courses, and community members and elected officials who see the translation to behavior in the field. While the research did not measure student outcomes (how much officers learned and how they applied that learning in the field), classroom observations and focus group/interview responses indicated difficulty in communicating the underlying principles of use of force, search and seizure, and arrest procedures. Further, how these topics were interrelated and that community policing and diversity awareness were inseparable were inconsistently communicated.

These key recommendations were supported, in turn, by more than 35 other recommendations, which are fully documented in the final report.

IMPLICATIONS

The LAPD's training problems are not entirely unique. National case studies indicate that other law enforcement agencies regularly wrestle with the same or similar issues. However, because of Los Angeles's heterogeneous and dynamic character, the LAPD faces many issues previously seen only internationally, and it experiences many law enforcement challenges before the rest of the country does. In this sense, the LAPD may be a bellwether that offers it the opportunity, and responsibility, to be a leader in policing and to develop ethical, legal, and innovative responses to meet more globally emerging needs. As the LAPD moves forward to reestablish a new professionalism based on the three tenets of corporateness, responsibility, and expertise, it can serve as a model for other major domestic and international departments.

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