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## Police Training

Gary Corder, Jack McDevitt and Dennis Rosenbaum

### Purpose

This report from the National Police Research Platform summarizes responses from the first round of organizational surveys<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2010 and early 2011, focusing on police training. Specifically, respondents were asked to rate the in-service/post-academy training<sup>2</sup> they had received during their careers in regard to how well that training had prepared them to do their jobs as police officers.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, supervisors were asked to rate the formal supervisory training they had received.

### Methods

The Training Survey was administered in seven participating agencies located in seven different states – two small agencies (S1 and S2), one medium-size agency (M1), two large agencies (L1 and L2), and two very large agencies (VL1 and VL2). The survey was offered on-line to all sworn members of the agencies, except in the very large agencies, where it was offered to a random sample of sworn members. In total, 1,056 responses were received from sworn personnel. Of the respondents, 18% were women, 20% represented African American, Latino, or other minority groups, and 30% held the rank of sergeant or higher.

The survey items reported here focus on respondents' assessments of the quality of the post-academy training that they have received. The survey did not attempt to measure the amount of in-service training received. States vary in how much annual training is required, and individual law enforcement agencies vary in how much in-service training they provide (or send officers through) over-and-above state requirements.

<sup>1</sup> These surveys preceded the so-called "omnibus" surveys that the Platform administered in Spring 2011.

<sup>2</sup> We use the two terms in-service training and post-academy training in slightly different ways. The latter term more clearly incorporates field training (the training that new officers receive immediately after completing the police academy), whereas in-service training refers to periodic and annual training received throughout one's police career.

<sup>3</sup> The survey emphasized that the focus was not on recruit training. Respondents were asked to focus on "substantial in-service training sessions, those that take at least 2 hours of time. It could include roll call videos or online materials as well as lecture and discussion, but it must add up to at least 2 hours," and then separately were asked about field training.

# The National Police Research Platform

The National Police Research Platform was developed as a vehicle to continuously advance our knowledge of police organizations and their employees and to provide regular and timely feedback to police agencies and policy makers nationwide. In doing so, the Platform is expected to advance both the science of policing and evidence-based learning organizations. This project was supported by Award No. 2008-DN-BX-0005 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

## Key Findings

**Sources of Training.** Sworn personnel in the seven agencies differed in their ratings of in-service training obtained from various providers (their own department, state/regional boards, state police, federal agencies, and private entities). On the rating scale of 4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, and 1=poor, most of the mean ratings were in the average to good range. The sharpest differences between the seven departments pertained to in-house training – officers in four of the agencies rated in-service training provided by their own department highest, but in two other two agencies, in-house training was rated lowest (Table 1). Interestingly, these judgments did not seem to coincide directly with agency size, as officers from both a small agency and a very large agency gave lowest ratings to in-service training provided by their own department. Another pattern in Table 1 is that officers in five of the seven agencies gave the lowest ratings to in-service training delivered by state/regional boards.

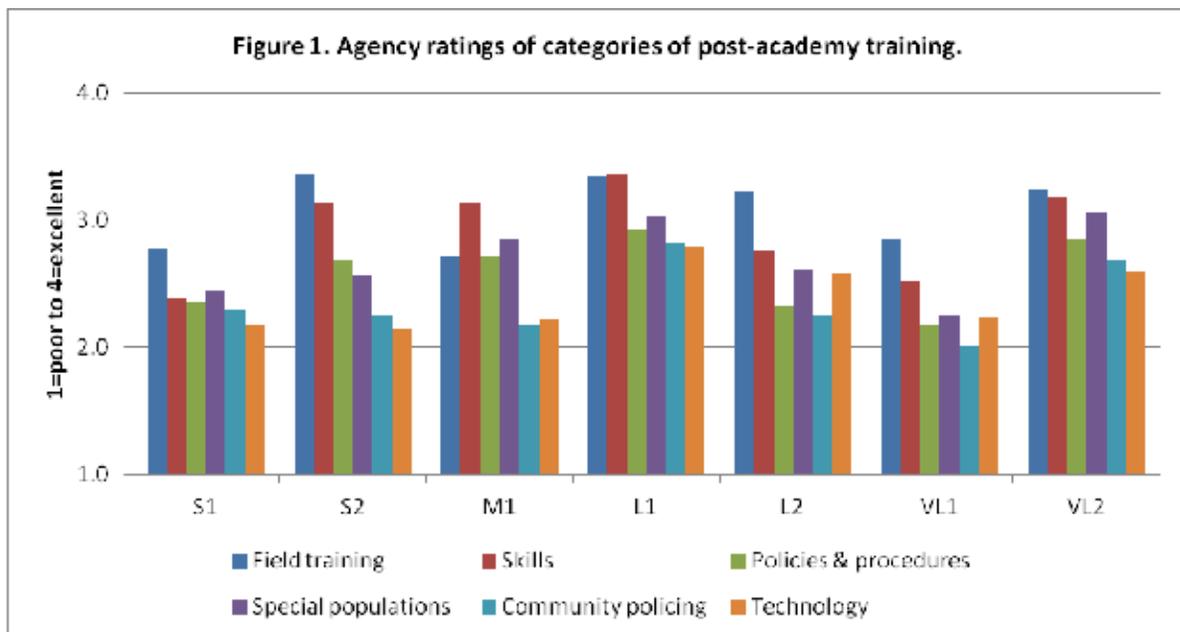
**Table 1. Ratings of sources of in-service training.**

Agency	Highest rating	Lowest rating
S1	Private entities	Own department
S2	Own department	State/regional boards
M1	Own department	State/regional boards
L1	Own department	State/regional boards
L2	Federal agencies	State/regional boards
VL1	Federal agencies	Own department
VL2	Own department	State/regional boards

**Types of Training.** Survey respondents were asked to rate the in-service/post-academy training they had received in 25 topical areas within the general categories of field training, skills, policies and procedures, dealing with special populations, community policing, and technology. Overall ratings were in the average to good range. For

the entire sample of respondents, the single highest-rated training topic was firearms training while the lowest was “how to use in-car cameras.” These combined results should be viewed with caution, however, because the greater number of respondents from the larger agencies tends to dominate the responses.

Average ratings given to the in-service/post-academy training categories differed among the seven participating agencies, as presented in Figure 1. Field training was rated highest by officers in five of the agencies and was effectively tied with skills training in a sixth. Only in the medium-sized agency was the pattern different, with skills training and training on how to deal with special populations both rated higher than field training. Average ratings of field training and skills training exceeded the 3=good threshold in four agencies. In one of the very large agencies (VL1) and one of the small agencies (S1), though, only field training approached the 3=good level, with most of the rest rated much closer to 2=average.



**Supervisory Training.** Sworn respondents in the seven agencies that participated in the Training Survey were asked if they had official responsibility as the primary supervisor of one or more full-time employees. Those answering “yes” (362 respondents) were asked to evaluate the formal supervisory training they had received on 10 specific topics. Combined ratings on the 10 topics in two of the agencies (one large and one very large) were above 2.9, nearly reaching the 3.0 “good” threshold. The average ratings in the other five agencies varied between 2.2 and 2.6, in the middle range between “average” and “good.”

Comparing the seven agencies’ ratings on the 10 topics shows some apparent differences in the strengths and weaknesses of their supervisory training (see Table 2). None of the seven agencies had exactly the same highest and lowest rated topics. In general, the highest rated topics seem to correspond to the managing aspect of supervision, whereas the lowest rated topics tend to correspond more to leadership functions. Personnel in four of the seven agencies identified “getting subordinates committed to department goals and missions” as the lowest rated aspect of the supervisory training they had received.

**Table 2. Ratings of supervisory training topics.**

Agency	Highest ratings	Lowest ratings
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizing and managing work</li> <li>Applying discipline policies</li> <li>Responding to personal problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>none (multiple ties)</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining high integrity among subordinates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting subordinates committed to department goals and missions</li> </ul>
M1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining records and reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivating subordinates to do their best</li> </ul>
L1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining high integrity among subordinates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handling citizen complaints</li> </ul>
L2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining records and reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting subordinates committed to department goals and missions</li> </ul>
VL1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring and evaluating employee performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting subordinates committed to department goals and missions</li> </ul>
VL2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying discipline policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting subordinates committed to department goals and missions</li> </ul>

**Individual Differences.** Relationships between individual respondents’ personal characteristics and their ratings of the in-service and supervisory training they had received were also explored. None of the simple bivariate relationships were strong – none of the coefficients were as large as .20. Officer rank, race/ethnicity, gender, prior military service, level of formal education, and whether they were currently enrolled in college all had relatively weak relationships with respondents’ ratings of any of the topical or categorical areas of training, including field training and supervisory training.

The relationship between individual characteristics and respondents’ ratings of the various categories of in-service training was also explored using multivariate analysis. This method makes it possible to consider the simultaneous impact of various personal characteristics as well as the

agencies that respondents work for. Among personal characteristics, there was some tendency for women respondents and older respondents to give higher ratings to the training they had received. Mainly, though, this analysis revealed that agency-level effects are much stronger than individual-level characteristics for explaining differential ratings of in-service training. That is, the ratings given by officers within a department seem to have more in common than, say, the ratings given by all female officers, all minority officers, all younger officers, or all college-educated officers across the seven-agency sample. This was confirmed by a separate analysis of variance components, which indicated that 16.6% of the variance in ratings of in-service/post-academy training and 9.1% of the variance in ratings of supervisory training were accounted for by agency effects. Personal characteristics of the respondents accounted for much less of the variance in ratings (2% and 6%, respectively).

### **Implications**

Findings from the Training Survey in seven initial sites indicate that respondents' ratings of in-service/post-academy training were affected more by the nature of the training received and the dynamics of the seven participating police agencies than by respondents' personal characteristics. Major differences in evaluations of in-service training were not found between lower-ranking and higher-ranking officers, white and nonwhite officers, or according to other personal characteristics.

The findings demonstrate a degree of unevenness in police in-service and supervisory training and the capacity of the Platform surveys to detect these differences. Officers differ among the seven departments in their ratings of the post-academy training they have had and the ratings they give to different training providers. Also, the supervisory training topics rated highest in each of the seven agencies differed rather dramatically. This unevenness no doubt reflects the fragmented and non-standardized systems of policing and police training found in the U.S.

Skills training and field training got the highest marks from respondents in these seven agencies. Ratings of supervisory training and in-service training on policies and procedures and how to respond to special populations were in the middle range between average and good. Technology training and community policing training received mean ratings closer to "just average." Going forward, the Platform will continue to refine questions about training. When applied to a larger sample of agencies and officers, the Training Survey should provide insights about both trends and norms for agencies of different sizes and regions of the country.