

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONSHIPS: TRAINING AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE

### OVERVIEW

The research evidence is clear: Any comprehensive strategy to strengthen police-community relations must ensure police consistently treat people with dignity and respect; give them “voice,” a chance to tell their side of the story; make decisions fairly, based on facts, not irrelevant factors such as race; and act in a way that reassures people of their good will.

Researchers have found, repeatedly and across different ethnic groups and communities, that departments that practice these principles see increased public support, cooperation, and compliance with the law. In this way, these principles - cornerstones of procedural justice - are essential to police legitimacy.

These “Notes From the Field” describe how a group of California police leaders, their community partners and the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC) have drawn on this research to develop an innovative training initiative that promises to strengthen police-community relations. It summarizes the initiative’s development and value to departments and communities investing in procedural justice and implicit bias training as a tool for change.



First, the paper describes how the training has constructively engaged officers in difficult police-community trust issues, starting them on the path from being wary skeptics to becoming supportive and knowledgeable practitioners.



Second, it describes how the training’s unconventional design creates opportunities for police leaders to accelerate the pace of change in their departments’ policies and practices.



Third, it describes the city of Oakland’s success in engaging community leaders as training partners, which laid the foundation for a police-community partnership able to build trust and address pressing crime problems.

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## THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT'S PATH-BREAKING TRAINING

Four months after Garry McCarthy was named superintendent of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) in August 2011, he made the issue of distrust between police and communities of color a departmental priority. McCarthy asked the department's training division to work with two experts on procedural justice, Professors Tracey Meares and Tom Tyler at Yale University, to develop an evidence-based training that could serve as the foundation for rebuilding police-community relations in Chicago.

The CPD design team drew heavily on research as they designed the curriculum, but they also aimed for a training that was "by officers and for officers". They put a premium on ensuring that officers understood that applying the principles would contribute to their own well-being and help them reduce crime. The eight-hour training did not shy away from the tough issues associated with police-community relations. It dealt with them in a way that officers would not see as judgmental and that would encourage frank but ultimately constructive discussion that made sense from a real-world perspective.

CPD's training calendar was geared to organizational change. The training division developed a large team - officers hand-selected for their leadership and street credibility rather than their training background - to conduct the all-day course several times a week. They trained the majority of the 10,000-member department in less than a year, a monumental task. This served two important goals: to quickly build department-wide understanding of these principles and to build momentum for complementary changes in department policy and practice, since they knew training alone wasn't enough to improve community-police relations.

## TAILORING THE CURRICULUM TO POLICING IN CALIFORNIA

CPSC was aware of CPD's effort and thought it held promise for police departments in Oakland, Stockton and Salinas to strengthen their relationships with communities, particularly residents disproportionately affected by crime and violence. Each city's situation was unique:



Stockton, a diverse Central Valley community of almost 300,000, was recovering from bankruptcy, and its growing but young police department was making steady progress reducing street violence after a record 71 homicides in 2012. Stockton's police chief, Eric Jones, viewed procedural justice training as an opportunity to shape his department's values and future.



Oakland, a highly diverse Bay Area city of just over 400,000 widely known as one of the most violent cities in the country, was wrestling with an alarming increase in street violence that resulted in 126 homicides in 2012. The police department hoped to reverse that trend by implementing an evidence-based violence-reduction strategy in partnership with community leaders, but longstanding mutual distrust handicapped their efforts to work together.



In Salinas – an agricultural community of 155,000 residents, 75 percent of whom are Latino and many of whom are monolingual Spanish speakers – the department viewed the training as an opportunity to address the challenge of building trust in the face of considerable cultural and language barriers.

CPSC contacted the Yale research team and the Chicago Police Department in early 2013. CPD's training division had developed a tremendous reserve of experience and expertise, and its officers generously mentored CPSC and the California departments. CPSC and CPD cohosted a week-long "train the trainer" workshop that fall, leading to an informal partnership that supported tailoring the curriculum to each city's unique challenges (underscoring the versatility of the curriculum), sharing insights on successes and failures and, importantly, aligning each city's efforts with research on what really worked to strengthen community-police relations.

## THE CALIFORNIA PRINCIPLED POLICING CURRICULUM

**The course outline and its logic:** The Principled Policing curriculum is a day-long course, taught by officers selected for leadership and street credibility. The curriculum is made up of six roughly hour-long modules, blending material from daily police practice, research and anecdotes drawn from instructors' experience. These modules are organized to address officer skepticism and build buy-in early in the training day. The course is evolving, as implicit bias and function-specific material are incorporated into the curriculum.

**Maximizing officer participation:** The course is team-taught so that at least one instructor can focus on facilitating group discussion. Officer participation is maximized by limiting class size to 25 and arranging officers at tables in groups of four to six.



The first module begins with "rules of the road" that encourage officers to voice their opinions and concerns and assure them that "what's said in the training room, stays in the training room." The module continues with an overview of the day and provides plain-language definitions of police legitimacy, procedural justice, and implicit bias.



The second module leads officers through a reflective process, examining the causes of the professional and personal stressors associated with policing and how using the principles of procedural justice can reduce them, increase officer safety and help them recover the aspirations and values that led them into the profession.



The third module explores why people obey the law and how that is influenced by their trust in and support for police, not just fear of enforcement or punishment.



The fourth module works through the procedural justice principles as they apply to police interactions with community members, showing that people assess these interactions based on how they're treated, not just on outcomes.



The fifth module reviews the history of policing - in the US and internationally - and how it has shaped people of color's contemporary perspective on police. It uses a bank account analogy to illustrate that the daily interactions police have with the public are opportunities to strengthen (deposits) or weaken (withdrawals) community relations.



The sixth module defines implicit bias and reviews the evidence that it is a universal social condition - not exclusive to police but important for them to understand and address because it can act as a powerful barrier to building trust.

The strong leadership offered by the chiefs in each city, the support provided by the community of practice, and the talented training teams - as in Chicago, each department selected trainers based on their leadership and credibility as officers - enabled the partners to train their entire departments remarkably quickly. Looking back, the experience of the California departments has echoed Chicago's early progress.



**Officers take the training seriously and view it favorably:** The training encouraged meaningful participation and created an environment where officers were candid and introspective. Officers have experienced the training not as corrective, but as a useful framework for engaging with the public and as an opportunity to renew their original inspiration to serve their communities.

**95 PERCENT**

of officers in Oakland, Stockton and Chicago have rated the course as excellent, very good or good.



**Police managers see the training as an effective tool for organizational change:** Managers used its scale and compact timeframe to signal their commitment to procedural justice and to lay a foundation for change in both practice and policy. The training complements accountability measures such as body-worn cameras and citizen review boards and promises to generate tangible improvements in police-community interactions.

Chiefs and command staff at the November 2015 trainings in procedural justice and implicit bias gave their highest rating to the module taught in collaboration with the community.



**The training is readily applied to practice:** In all three cities, course participants frequently volunteered good ideas for changing local police practice and policy to strengthen community-police trust and relations. In Oakland and Stockton, diverse community partners and police quickly applied the principles to their joint efforts to reduce violence.

Oakland reduced injury shootings by 38 percent between 2012 and 2015 using violence-reduction strategies based on procedural justice principles.

- » **The training supports authentic community engagement:** The Oakland Police Department partnered with clergy and community leaders to design and teach the module on the history of policing and race. This collaboration acknowledged the legitimacy of the community's perspective and has increased the department's credibility in the eyes of the community. It produced community leaders who act as critical champions and work closely with the department on matters of mutual importance, even as they continue to press for institutional change. It also has fostered trust-based relationships that have been central to Oakland's successful violence-reduction strategy.

## OAKLAND'S COMMUNITY-POLICE TRUST-BUILDING PARTNERSHIP

Oakland's successful partnership to build trust between communities and police suggests steps other police departments can take to ready themselves for such collaborations.

- » **Begin searching for curriculum "design partners."** The Oakland partners include community organizers, service providers, formerly incarcerated outreach workers, and clergy members. Their backgrounds provide a rich pool of experience and relationships relevant to the course material and valuable to the design process.
- » **Focus on communities disproportionately affected by violence and crime.** Oakland's training partners either live in or have a long history of working with communities deeply affected by crime and violence, giving them a connection with residents who need the police most but trust them the least.
- » **Develop funding to support the community's participation and commitment.** Oakland set aside funding for stipends to support community volunteers (travel, meals, honorariums), payment for community members that committed the time to serve as regular course instructors, and costs involved in training workshops.
- » **Look for leadership.** Oakland's team includes formal and informal leaders connected to significant networks of community residents they have drawn on to champion and sustain change in police policy and practice. These networks are a force for building trust between communities and police.
- » **Consider tapping into emerging resources for supporting and coaching community instructors.** Oakland's lead community instructor, a thoughtful student of community-police relations, took his role seriously and worked intensively with the training team to refine his presentation style and content.

## CREATING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN CALIFORNIA

Over the course of 2015, California Attorney General Kamala Harris brought together the Oakland and Stockton police departments, Professors Jennifer Eberhardt and Hazel Markus from Stanford, and CPSC to tailor a version of the course to police leaders while integrating implicit bias into the curriculum. This was a crucial step because, as the evidence shows, implicit bias can be a powerful barrier to police working to put procedural justice into practice. As their work progressed, the partners also reached out to Oakland's Empower Initiative, which played a central role in Oakland's community partnership, to work with them on continuing the development of the community module, linking it to the new content on implicit bias and tuning it to the challenge of police leadership.

Late in 2015, the Department of Justice hosted two trainings - now POST certified - attended by more than 50 police chiefs and sheriffs from throughout the state. The Stanford research team developed a pre- and post-training participant evaluation survey that showed the course was very well-received. **Participant responses - summarized in a forthcoming white paper - also suggest that engaging in this course material increased the police leaders' confidence in change and, specifically, in their commitment to change in partnership with the community.**

These partners are now developing a menu of options for California police departments and their community partners interested in pursuing such training. One option, led by CPSC, will be a multisite initiative that includes police departments that wish to combine the development of comprehensive training strategies with complementary changes in police policy and practice. Working in close partnership with community leaders, these efforts will be guided by a set of performance indicators focused on building trust. Further information about this initiative can be found at CPSC's website (<http://theCAPartnership.org>). Primary goals of the initiative are to:

- 1 Develop a comprehensive training strategy (including academy, ongoing refreshers and in-depth function-specific trainings) and make complementary changes in departmental practice and policy to support procedural justice and address implicit bias. This builds on research findings that indicate the effects of training fade (especially when they are not supported by organizational policy and practice) and leverages the momentum for organizational change the course creates.
- 2 Invest in the continued development of community-police training partnerships. The positive reception of officers and command staff to a community role in the training - backed up by the early evidence that Oakland's community-police partnership increased the quality of its training - suggests that the potential and importance of community-police training partnerships have probably been underestimated. It makes sense that training cannot be fully responsive to community concerns without the community's ongoing and direct input.

3

Develop performance indicators that police managers and their community partners can use to reliably (and transparently) assess and manage their joint efforts. A truly meaningful commitment to stronger police-community relations requires being able to measure our progress toward this goal. (We note that on a policy level, significant investments are warranted in evaluating whether and how training and complementary changes in police practice produce concrete changes in police behavior and increase community trust.)

## PLANNING CHECKLIST: GETTING THE MOST FROM THE TRAINING



**Select officers recognized for their credibility and leadership to join your training team.** They lend credibility to the training, bring their expertise and experience to bear on course design and during tough classroom discussions, and act as internal champions for these ideas.



**Include community leaders as partners in training design and delivery.** In Oakland, initial wariness between officers and community leaders evolved into a well-received training partnership, adding to the credibility of the department's efforts and helping with pressing crime problems.



**Join a community of practice.** This connects your training team regularly with departments that have launched successful training initiatives, with national best practices, and with research on what's really working and why.



**Provide high-profile leadership support for the training to communicate that strengthening police-community relations is a departmental priority.** Stockton's chief, for example, opened training sessions with a clear statement about the department's commitment to procedural justice.



**Recognize that training is a first step.** Research shows the training generates significant changes in officer attitudes, but these changes fade over time. It's essential to translate the training into everyday departmental policy and practice.



**Develop an ambitious training calendar.** Take your time tailoring the course to your community. But move quickly once you've started your training to build momentum for overall organizational change. Consider instituting a few key changes in department-wide policy and practice soon after the training is completed to maintain momentum and support change.



**Invest in understanding whether training is effective.** "You can't manage what you can't measure." Performance indicators tailored to procedural justice are essential tools for assessing day-to-day progress toward increased trust. In addition, employing curricula developed by police-research partnerships will significantly increase the probability that your investment in trustbuilding will be successful.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Professors Jennifer Eberhardt and Hazel Markus of Stanford University direct the Center for Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions (SPARQ), a "do tank" in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University (<https://sparq.stanford.edu>) that has authored the module on implicit bias and is serving as a learning partner to the efforts in California.

Reverend Ben McBride directs the Empower Initiative (<http://theempowerinitiative.org>), which provides coaching for clergy and community leaders and law enforcement agencies on building trust with disaffected communities.

CPSC facilitated the replication of the procedural justice training curricula in California. CPSC works with civic and community stakeholders to achieve sustainable community-wide reductions in violence, to reduce the reliance of cities and counties on enforcement practices that contribute to over-incarceration, and to strengthen trust between criminal justice agencies and the communities they serve (<http://theCAPartnership.org>).