

# Operationalizing & Measuring Relational Policing

A proposal for identifying key components, creating a community of practice, and producing measures of success

*Seattle Police Department*

## **Abstract**

This program, which is being developed under the guidance of a long-time Seattle educator and leverages an expanding network of new and existing relationships within Seattle's many and diverse communities, is centered around three primary tenets: relational policing, officer wellness, and growth mindset.

## **Keywords**

*Community, Engagement, Relational, Policing, Trust, Social-Emotional, Trauma-Informed, Actionable*

## **Introduction**

In Washington State, all police and corrections officers are provided their basic law enforcement training through the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC), which runs a 720-hour Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) that ensures that all law enforcement officers statewide receive common, uniform training consistent with the standards set by the Commission and the Washington State legislature.

While there are clear advantages to a centralized training model, one disadvantage is that recruits enter the BLEA with limited meaningful exposure to the unique communities they will be serving and the organizational culture of their employing agency. Instead, it is typically only post-BLEA, during a newly-commissioned officer's probationary period in field training, where the challenge to apply learning in practice is already high, that new officers gain such understanding. From an experiential learning theory perspective, this sequential "hand-off" from academy to agency allows for little opportunity for students to contextualize their learning in the histories, perspectives, and expectations of the diverse and often divergent communities of their home jurisdictions.

The civil rights reckoning across the nation following the murder of George Floyd, the simmering polarization within law enforcement that erupted into the public consciousness following the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and the challenges for agencies nationwide to meet public safety demands in the midst of often significant reductions to both staffing and budget driven by the "defund" movement have made dire and immediate the need to rethink how officers are trained and supported throughout their career. This is long overdue. In this regard, capacity challenges at the WSCJTC academy create new and unique opportunity to front-load officers' training with agency-specific and community-immersive training that so often is short-changed in lieu of on-the-job demands.

Because the WSCJTC requires that students be first hired by their agency before they may enroll in the academy, limited seats and backlogs and delays resulting from restrictions on in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic mean – especially for large agencies like the Seattle Police Department (SPD) – that students may sit on the department payroll for months before they begin their formal training. While department has historically sponsored limited training just prior to students' academy entrance relating to academic matters of law and tactical skills to give students a "jump start" to their academy learning, the model now proposed by SPD will establish a 45-day, pre-BLEA, training experience based in relational policing, trauma-informed practice, and that truly leverages the partnership of the community to drive organizational transformation.

## **Main Components**

Grounded in the foremost of Sir Robert Peel's principles of modern policing that "police are the community, and the community are the police", SPD's pre-BLEA program will be a 45-day initiative that pulls recruits out of traditional classroom training and immerses them in community-based, peer-based, and introspective experiences that will provide them both a lens through which

to receive their BLEA training and, reinforced through post-BLEA field training, a foundation upon which to build their careers as Seattle Police Officers. Structured to allow for a one-week particularized focus on each of Seattle's geographic precincts, programming will fall into three general "buckets" of learning:

- ***Community Centered Dialogue and Learning***

This module is built on the central tenets of relational policing: transparency; honesty; acknowledging mistakes and challenges; and collaboratively identifying areas for improvement and opportunities for growth. Recruits will learn that every encounter is an opportunity to build trust and develop skills to engage respectfully in difficult conversations. In addition to set topics relating to the history of policing in America and Seattle, officers will engage hear and learn directly from communities most impacted by policing, including currently and formerly incarcerated persons, persons who have experienced violence, immigrant and refugee communities, local business communities, and students. Paired with Community Service Officers or members of the Collaborative Policing Bureau, recruits will walk beats in each of the precincts, meet with demographic and precinct advisory councils, participate in volunteer opportunities, and learn about expectations, priorities, and challenges that may be unique to each precinct. This module will also include learning in brain development and the impact of childhood trauma, poverty, addiction, and other societal stressors on many with whom officers will come into contact.

- ***Wellness and Professional Development***

An overwhelming body of research shows the psychological damage caused, acutely and cumulatively, by the vicarious trauma to which officers are routinely exposed, the undeniable interplay between mental health and physical well-being, and the impact of both on officer performance. This module will include training on the neurophysiology of stress, identifying early warning signs, and tools to build resilience. Using tools such as the enneagram, recruits will learn about their own personality types and gain an understanding as to how their own experiences may shape how they perceive and react to others. Recruits will be introduced to existing trainings around wellness and peer intervention, including Active Bystander for Law Enforcement training, to give them the skills to intervene with themselves and others before their behavior may take them down a negative path. Recruits will also be paired with volunteer "mentor" officers to help ease their transition into the department and the law enforcement profession.

- ***Public Safety "360"***

In this module, recruits will provided an introduction to the administration and structure of the SPD and others in the public safety system. Recruits will meet members of both sworn and civilian command, will learn about different units within the department, and have opportunities for ride-alongs in each of the precincts. Recruits will hear from public safety partners, including prosecutors, public defenders, social services, and outreach programs. Particularly as public safety is re-examined, the goal of this module is to provide a welcome to the department and a baseline understanding of their roles in a more holistic model of public safety in Seattle.

***Timeline***

45 work-days

***Potential Budget Needs***

Budget estimates include:

- A minimum of two employees to assist the recruits through the 45 days of pre-BLEA, scheduling events, timekeeping, setting up community meetings, gathering feedback and surveys, and assisting in mentorship development. ~\$400,000
- Outside trainers and curriculum developers. ~\$100,000
- Transportation for field visitations (prisons, courts, precincts). ~\$75,000
- Classroom space. ~\$200,000
- Implementation/Process/Output evaluations - ~\$750,000