



PAIRING TRAINERS AND TRAINEES

CNA's [Center for Justice Research and Innovation](#) led an internally funded initiative from October 2020 to September 2021 and conducted case studies of six agencies' field training officer (FTO) programs. During this assessment, CNA examined common practices and policies that law enforcement agencies use within their field training, such as the qualifications an officer must have to become an FTO, and we assessed the quality and effectiveness of communication between trainers and trainees. In this resource, an agency will learn why the pairing process is important and the different range of pairing methods an agency can implement.

Field training is often described as the most important stage in an officer's career¹. The time spent with a field training officer is vital to the trainee's career development and helps shape the culture of an agency. Thus, it is imperative that the trainer-trainee relationship is one which facilitates learning and growth. As stated in the *Field Training Officer Impact Assessment: Field Guide*², trainers are more often paired with a trainee based on their availability, and less often based on a formalized assessment to measure the compatibility of the trainer-trainee. While some agencies noted their pairing practices were based on availability due to a shortage of training officers, most agencies did complete an informal personality assessment conducted by those in the academy who had been working with the new recruits, prior to them being paired with their trainer. However, as one trainer stated, "...Different trainees need different styles. Some need to watch, some need to do things, and some need to hear things." One way law enforcement agencies can enhance the learning process, the experience trainees have in their field training program, and eventually ensure quality officers are ending up on the streets is by formalizing the pairing process between their trainees and trainers.

IMPORTANCE OF PAIRING

The period in which a trainee spends with their FTO is extremely important, because at the end, the trainee will begin operating on their own. During the time spent with the FTO, the trainee needs to learn all the relevant skills necessary to not only be by themselves, but assist their fellow officers in the case of an emergency. For a trainee to have a successful learning experience, pairing them with a trainer they are compatible with, along the lines of personality, learning style, and even culturally, is important. Research has shown that emotions and memory retention, as well as learning, are linked³; thus, considering the monetary value the agency has already invested into the trainee thus far, ensuring the trainer-trainee relationship is harmonious is worthwhile to the agency.

Trainees from the case study agencies without a formalized selection process expressed confusion around how they were paired with their FTO. However, in one of the agencies that did have a formalized process, the trainees interviewed noted they were glad to be matched with trainers where their interests lie, and that the agency was responsive to the feedback placed on the assessment form⁴. By creating a clear selection process and communicating this to the trainees, this is way that, right off the bat, agencies can help to provide structure and a sense of internal procedural justice for the trainees.

Pairing trainees with FTOs of the same race or gender is also something departments should consider to foster an environment conducive to learning, for at least one of their training phases. Interviewees from the agency case studies mentioned numerous ways they felt their gender impacted their roles in law enforcement such as: women being required to take on extra responsibilities (e.g., conducting searches); being treated differently or dismissed by their trainer; and having to do more to prove themselves⁵. When discussing mentoring programs in police departments

and pairing considerations, Valencia (2009)⁶ addresses the importance of BIPOC and gender-specific mentoring relationships, while also clarifying the risk of individuals having to wait for an available match in order to be placed due to a potential lack of diversity in the agency.

DIFFERENT PAIRING METHODS

Public and private sector occupations have adopted a trainer-trainee type of relationship, in which they've utilized a pairing to ensure successful learning and growth.

PAIRING BY AVAILABILITY

All agencies included in the case study examined trainer availability prior to pairing with trainees. Still, some FTOs left during their placement on vacation, military duty, or sick-leave. While some of these cannot be foreseen, agencies ideally will work to ensure the continuity of the assigned FTOs throughout the trainee's phase.

PAIRING BASED ON ADULT LEARNING

After recognizing an alarming trainee failure rate in their agency, the South San Francisco Police Department (SSFPD) implemented a model based on adult learning principles. To achieve this, an administrator individually assessed the FTO and trainee on their learning styles, instructed the trainers to "develop strategies pertaining to how they learn best and what makes them comfortable in a learning environment", proceeded with pairing the FTO and trainee based on their similar learning styles, and has the FTOs and trainees create a plan for the FTO process using their adult learning style⁷.

INFORMAL AGENCY ASSESSMENT

Many agencies in the case study adopted an informal personality assessment, whereby the academy staff or employee development unit worked to assess the trainee's personality throughout their time in the academy, and pair them with an FTO who would be a perceived match, with the intention that they will connect well through shared mentalities and/or traits, or learning styles.

PAIRING BASED ON FORMAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

One agency in the case study recently implemented an optional, confidential questionnaire for trainees to complete, which aids in their pairing with a trainer. This questionnaire asks for information, such as educational background, self-perceived strengths and weaknesses, learning style, and how the trainee is best supported. While the questionnaire has only been in use for one academy class, trainees interviewed expressed satisfaction with having an opportunity to participate in the matching process.

PAIRING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The trainee-trainer relationship is not unique to law enforcement. In other sectors, those going through the training process have selected their "mentor", and one company even used an electronic system to facilitate the review and selection of their "mentor"⁸.

When an FTO and a trainee are compatible, this can lead to a career-long relationship of mentoring and friendship. Officers interviewed mentioned maintaining a continued relationship with their FTO more than 10-15 years into their profession, even as they rose the ranks, calling to ask for help or assistance with various questions or tasks. It's vital that every officer is afforded the opportunity to develop this type of relationship with their FTO.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Warners, R.H., (2010). The Field Training Experience: Perspectives of Field Training Officers and Trainees. November. Police Chief Magazine.
- ² Jenkins, Monique, Jessica Dockstader, Sharon Oster, Thomas Woodmansee, and Mary O'Connor. 2021. Field Training Programs in Law Enforcement. Arlington, VA: CNA. https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/Field-Training-Programs-in-Law-Enforcement.pdf
- ³ Tyng CM, Amin HU, Saad MNM and Malik AS (2017). The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory. Front. Psychol. 8:1454. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01454
- ⁴ To learn more about developing a field training recruit pairing questionnaire and be connected with a peer agency, contact Monique Jenkins at jenkinsm@cna.org
- ⁵ The notion of women having to work harder than men is commonplace in law enforcement. To learn more about the harmful workplace culture, visit the 30X30 Initiative "What Works" here: <https://30x30initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/What-Works-Promotions.pdf>
- ⁶ Valencia, Larry, "A Guide for Mentoring Programs in Police Departments" (2009). All Regis University Theses. 120. <https://epublications.regis.edu/theses/120>
- ⁷ Massoni, M. (2009). Field Training Programs: Understanding Adult Learning Styles. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin Volume: 78 Issue: 2 Dated: February 2009 Pages: 1-5
- ⁸ A Guide for Mentoring Programs in Police Departments.

ABOUT CNA

CNA is a nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. It operates the Institute for Public Research — which serves civilian government agencies — and the Center for Naval Analyses, the Department of the Navy's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC). CNA is dedicated to developing actionable solutions to complex problems of national importance. With nearly 700 scientists, analysts and professional staff, CNA takes a real-world approach to gathering data, working side-by-side with operators and decision-makers around the world. CNA's research portfolio includes global security and great power competition, homeland security, emergency management, criminal justice, public health, data management, systems analysis, naval operations and fleet and operational readiness.

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