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Training Priorities in State and Local Law Enforcement

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The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has long supported the training of State and local law enforcement officers. To determine what types of training would most effectively use available resources, the DOJ recommended in 1981 that a long-term, comprehensive assessment of State and local law enforcement training needs be conducted. In response to the DOJ's request, the Institutional Research and Development Unit (IRDU) of the FBI's Training Division undertook the "Nationwide Law Enforcement Training Needs Assessment." The survey identified the training needs of sworn officers and ranked these needs by priority.

The study was conceived as a longitudinal analysis to allow researchers to identify new needs as they arise and to help them identify any trends that might exist. To date, the IRDU has completed four phases of the study. Articles describing the findings of the first two phases have already been published.[1] This article identifies training needs that

agencies have consistently rated as high priorities over the four phases of the study and summarizes selected phase III and IV findings.

The IRDU gathered information for the study from State and local law enforcement agencies by using a questionnaire containing a list of job activities carried out by sworn officers. Researchers collected five types of information for each of the activities listed in the questionnaire:

1) The gap law enforcement personnel perceived between the level of expertise required to carry out the activity in an optimum manner and the level of expertise currently possessed by law enforcement officers;

2) The harm which would result from inadequate performance of the activity;

3) The time spent performing the activity;

Mr. Phillips

4) The number of officers requiring additional training in the activity; and

5) The degree to which agencies considered the Federal Government a source of training in the activity.

The study used a mathematical model to combine this information to produce a composite training priority score for each activity.[2]

To minimize the time required of respondents, the project staff divided the questionnaire into three separate booklets. No individual law enforcement officer was asked to complete more than one of the three booklets.

Questionnaire Recipients

During phases III and IV, the IRDU distributed survey packets containing the questionnaire, a response booklet, and related materials to a stratified sample of nearly 2,500 State and local law enforcement agencies across the Nation. The project staff drew this sample from the population of all State and local law enforcement agencies in the data base of the Uniform Crime Reporting Section of the FBI, with the exception of college and university police, which were not considered part of the population for this study.[3] The IRDU sent one survey packet each to sample agencies with fewer than 500 sworn officers. It provided agencies with 500 or more sworn personnel with between 3 and 101 survey packets each.

During phases III and IV, the response rate for agencies with 10 or more officers averaged 81 percent. The highest average rate of response (96 percent) came from agencies with 500 or more sworn personnel. When agencies with fewer than 10 sworn officers are included, the rate of response drops to 64 percent. This overall response rate resulted from the very low rate of return of these smaller agencies. An average of 37 percent of the agencies with four or fewer sworn officers responded, while the response rate for agencies with five to nine sworn officers was 54 percent. Figure 1 breaks down the response rate by size of agency.

Police chiefs/assistant chiefs or sheriffs/deputy sheriffs provided 42 percent of all usable responses, sworn officers at the level of sergeant or higher provided 48 percent, and other ranks of officers, such as corporal, patrolman, and trooper, provided the remaining 10 percent.

Training Priorities by Job Activity

The Nationwide Law Enforcement Training Needs Assessment Project seeks, among other things, to provide information that will help guide the development of Federal law enforcement training programs for State and local law enforcement. The nature and extent of Federal involvement in such programs, however, is influenced by the stability of the identified training priorities. Priorities that remain high on the list year after year warrant different curriculum development and delivery strategies than priorities that may appear one year and disappear the next.

During the first 4 years of this study, the agencies consistently ranked

TABLE 1
CONTINUING TRAINING PRIORITIES
Activity Statement

Handle Personal Stress

Maintain Appropriate Level of Physical Fitness

Conduct Interviews/Interrogations

Collect, Maintain, and Preserve Evidence

Drive Vehicle in Emergency/Pursuit Situations

Promote Positive Public Image

Develop Sources of Information

Fire Weapons for Practice/Qualification

Testify in Criminal, Civil, and Administrative Cases

Search Persons, Dwellings, and Transportation Conveyances for Illegal Drugs

Write Crime/Incident Reports

Investigate Conspiracy to Illegally Import, Manufacture, Distribute Controlled Substances

Protect Crime Scene

Detect, Gather, Record, and Maintain Intelligence Information

Investigate Possession with Intent to Distribute and/or Sale of Illegally Imported/Manufactured Controlled Substances

Search and Document (Photographs, Sketches, Evidence Logs, etc.) Crime Scenes

Develop and Maintain Control of Informants in Drug Investigations

Use Effective Supervisory Philosophies and Leadership Styles

Use Undercover Techniques in Drug Investigations

Handle Domestic Disturbances (To Include Awareness of Possible Abuse of Spouses, Children, and the Elderly).

20 individual job activities among the top 25 percent in importance, regardless of agency type or size. These continuing training priorities, shown in table 1, should be considered particularly stable because they have maintained their high ranking for at least the 3 most recent years of this study. (The agencies have ranked 14 of the activities among the top 25 percent in importance for all 4 years of the study.) The project staff expects most of the activities shown in table 1 to continue to rank high in the future. Due to the consistency with which agencies have rated activities during phases I through IV, the IRDU will initiate future phases of this study once every 2 or more years, depending on the information needs of the Federal, State, and local law enforcement communities.

Training Priorities by Job Category

To facilitate the development of training programs that address identified training needs, the researchers grouped job activities listed in the questionnaire into five major job categories—drugs, detective/juvenile/vice/intelligence, common, patrol/traffic, and supervisory/management.

When job category training priorities are differentiated by agency type and size, training priority differences become evident. Figure 2 graphically illustrates, for municipal and county police and sheriff's agencies employing 500 or more sworn personnel, the number of top 25-percent activities occurring in each job category as a percent of all activities in the category. Figures 3, 4, and 5 show job category priorities for three additional agency type/size groupings.

Figure 1
Response Rate by Size of Agency

Response Rate in Percent

94.9 (500+)
61.1 (400-499)
81.0 (300-399)
77.8 (200-299)
92.8 (100-199)
80.5 (50-99)
62.6 (40-49)
83.9 (30-39)
78.3 (20-29)
76.1 (10-19)
48.4 (5-9)
39.1 (0-4)

Agency Size
(Full-time Sworn Officers)
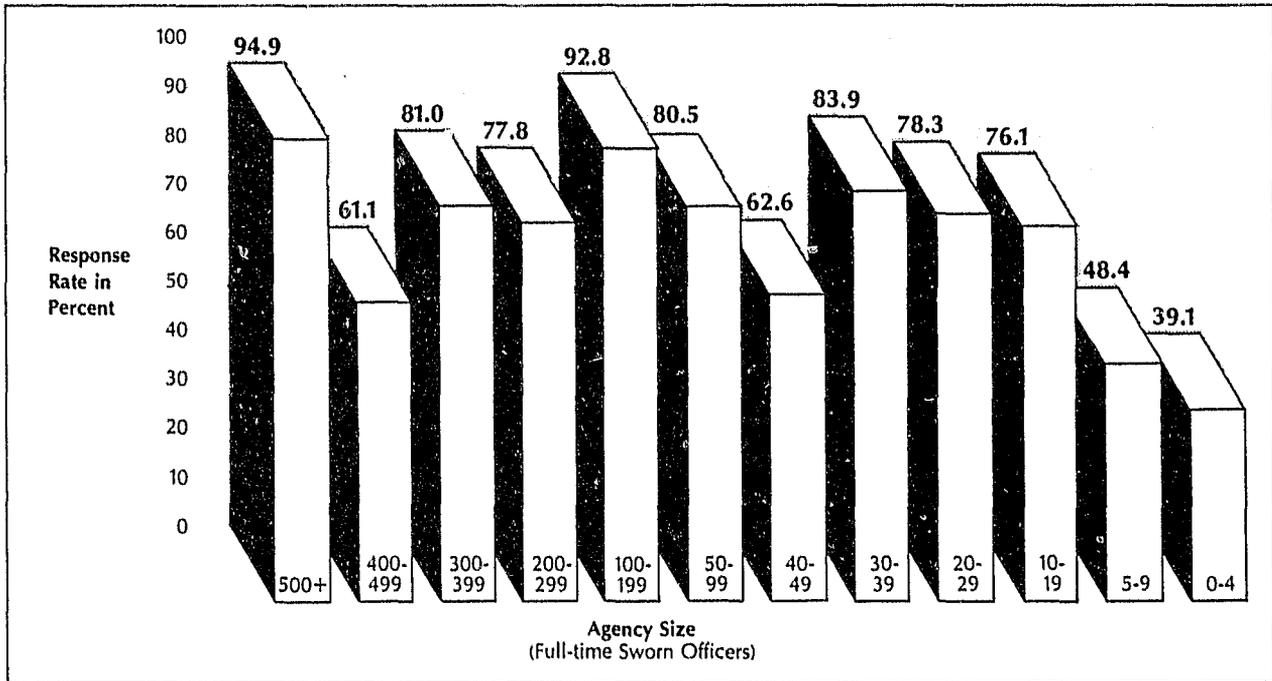
As figures 2 through 5 illustrate, the "drug" category received the highest priority rating across all types and sizes of agencies, except for police and sheriff's agencies with 500 or more sworn personnel. In fact, drug-related activities have sustained a high level of training priority during phases II through IV. These findings support continued Federal involvement in drug training.

While the "supervisory/management" job category ranked low among the categories, its importance in law enforcement training should not be underestimated. Since one of the factors used to determine training priority is the number of officers requiring additional training, and only a small portion of all sworn officers occupy supervisory or managerial positions, priority ratings for supervisory and managerial job activities tend to be lower than those for many other activities. However, it is important that managers and supervisors exercise their job responsibilities with great skill, because their performance directly influences the quality of service provided to the public by their subordinates. Thus, supervisory and managerial training will contribute to improved job performance not only by the individuals trained but also by the much larger group of officers they supervise.

Agency Training Expenditures

During phase III, the project staff gathered data regarding the amount of money State and local agencies budget for training their officers. In general, annual agency training budgets for the sample agencies ranged from a low of zero to a high of $7 million, with an overall median expenditure of $2,500. In terms of agency type, the researchers found sheriff's agencies to have the

". . . drug-related activities have sustained a high level of training priority. . . ."

Figure 2
Priority Training Needs For
Municipal and County Police Agencies and Sheriff's Departments
**With 500 or More Sworn Personnel   (n = 846)**

Number of Top
Quartile Activities
Occurring In Each Job
Category as a % of All
Activities In the
Category

13%   25%   34%   11%   19%

Drug | Detective Juvenile Vice Intelligence | Common | Patrol Traffic | Supervisory Management

Job Categories
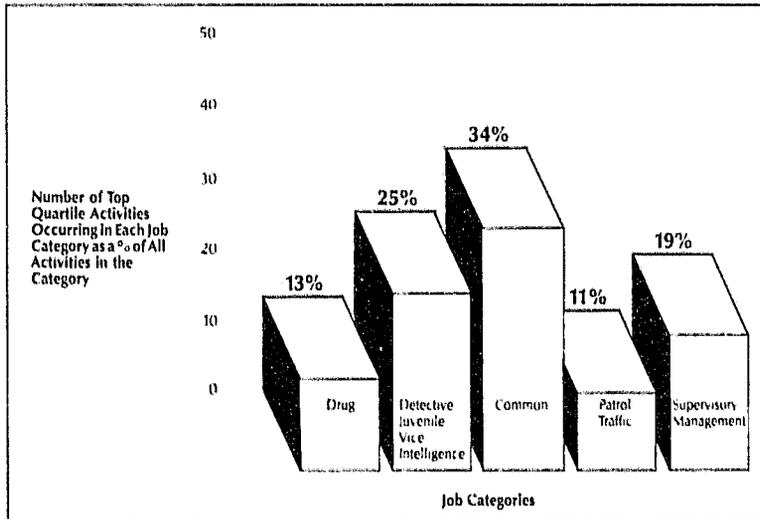
Figure 3
Priority Training Needs For
Municipal and County Police Agencies
With Fewer Than 500 Sworn Personnel   (n = 830)

Number of Top
Quartile Activities
Occurring in Each Job
Category as a % of All
Activities in the
Category

40%   30%   28%   33%   0%

Drug | Detective Juvenile Vice Intelligence | Common | Patrol Traffic | Supervisory Management

Job Categories
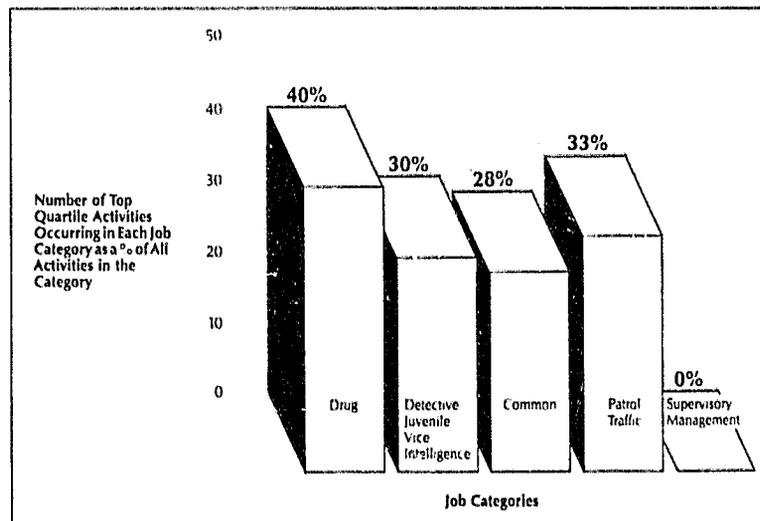
Figure 4
Priority Training Needs For
Sheriff's Departments
With Fewer Than 500 Sworn Personnel   (n = 638)
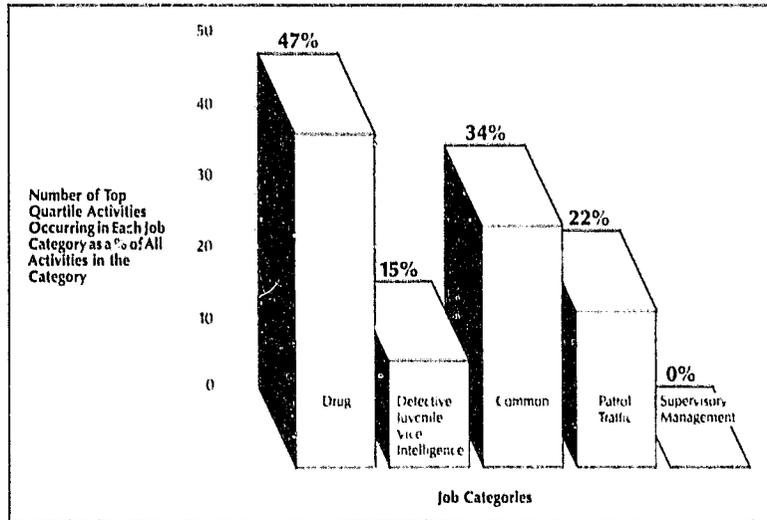
Figure 5
Priority Training Needs For
State Police/Highway Patrol Agencies   (n = 368)

lowest median training budget—$1,800. They determined median training budgets to be $2,300 for municipal police, $27,000 for county police, and $543,523 for State police/highway patrol agencies. Note that the large differences in training budgets by type of agency result primarily from differences in agency size and not from inherent differences by agency type in the level of support for training. State and county police agencies are much larger on the average than typical municipal police or sheriff's departments, and therefore, they tend to have higher training budgets.

Perhaps the most striking figure resulting from the economic analysis was the $725 median annual training budget for that half of the agencies having budgets less than the $2,500 median of all agencies in the sample. This means that one-fourth of the agencies surveyed budgeted $725 or less annually for training, while another fourth budgeted between $725 and $2,500. Most (93.4 percent) of the agencies in this group were relatively small, employing fewer than 30 sworn officers.

Agency training budgets, which may cover the costs of any course materials, tuition, travel, and per diem associated with the training, represent one major component of the total cost of training sworn officers. A second important component is the cost of an officer's salary while in training. The project staff estimates the cost of officers' salaries while they train to exceed $70 million annually. These figures are based on findings of a study conducted by the International City Management Association,[4] combined with findings of phase III of the Nationwide Law Enforcement Training Needs Assessment. These constitute conservative estimates of the magnitude of salary costs borne by agencies in providing training to their sworn officers in those agencies that provided the necessary data. More than 9,000 agencies serving populations of under 10,000, which were not included in the International City Management Association study sample, annually consume substantial additional resources.

Officers' salaries during training, together with the resources budgeted for training, account for the bulk of agency resources supporting training of sworn officers. However, additional agency training costs (such as those associated with developing, producing, and delivering in-house training and the cost of agency facilities used for training activities, etc.) represent other agency resources consumed in the process of training sworn officers. Estimates of the total annual amount State and local agencies spend to train their sworn officers will vary considerably, depending on how the very limited available data are interpreted. A conservative figure, based on data available during phase III of the study, would be at least $200 million or an average of over $400 for every full-time officer in the Nation.

Conclusion

Phases I through IV of the Nationwide Law Enforcement Training Needs Assessment study have provided the U.S. Department of Justice specific information about the training priorities of State and local agencies. Further, the study has given information to Justice Department agencies to use in budgeting and program planning. Finally, the study has pointed out the need to explore alternative training technologies (such as video taping and satellite broadcasting) that have the potential to augment conventional classroom training and reach the large, widely dispersed population of law enforcement officers. Future phases of the study will continue to update current and past findings. At the same time, future phases will seek to identify emerging training priorities so law enforcement trainers can continue to help provide high-quality law enforcement services to citizens across the Nation.

Footnotes

[1]Robert G. Phillips, Jr., "State and Local Law Enforcement Training Needs," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 53, No. 8, August 1984, pp. 6-15; "FBI Surveys State and Local Law Enforcement Training Needs," *The Police Chief*, vol. 53, No. 7, July 1986, pp. 18-23.

[2]U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *State and Local Law Enforcement Training Needs in the United States, 1985, Volume II: Technical Report* (Quantico, VA: Institutional Research and Development Unit, 1986), pp. 31-32. This report describes the model and its application, as well as other methodological aspects of the study. Note: The analytic model used to identify and prioritize training needs was designed to operate from a national perspective. Since training priorities may vary greatly from one agency to another, the results of the Nationwide Law Enforcement Training Needs Assessment will not necessarily reflect training priorities within a specific agency. Therefore, individual agencies wishing to use the results discussed in this article for training management purposes should also take into account any factors (environmental, political, etc.) that could cause training priorities within the specific agency to differ from the priorities of law enforcement agencies in general.

[3]U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 1984* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985).

[4]G. J. Hoetmer, *Police, Fire and Refuse Collection* (Baseline Data Report, vol. 16, No. 7) (Washington, DC: International City Management Association, 1984).