



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Understanding the Impact of Statewide Use of Force Training

In December 2020, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (NJOAG) announced the implementation of a reform package to [reduce police use of force](#). This included changes to statewide use of force policy, mandatory use of force training, and the collection and publication of use of force data. Through external funding, the National Policing Institute led an independent multi-year, multi-method evaluation of the implementation and impact of these reforms in collaboration with the University of Cincinnati and the NJOAG.

As part of this evaluation, the researchers examined the impact of the mandated training—including the Police Executive Research Forum's Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) de-escalation training and Georgetown University's Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) peer intervention training—on officers' perceptions, attitudes, and self-reported behaviors. The findings below represent officers' responses to training surveys immediately before, after, and one to two years after their training participation. The high response rates to the surveys—ranging from 12,623 to 17,036 responses at pre- and post-training—offer insights representative of law enforcement officers across New Jersey. No other police training evaluation has presented findings informed by such a high volume of responses. This brief examines the impacts found on officer attitudes. A second report/brief will focus on the impacts on officer behaviors identified from the evaluation.

WHAT WE FOUND

- Officers reported substantial receptivity to the mandated de-escalation and peer intervention training and perceived their leadership to support these training programs.
- De-escalation training enhanced officers' attitudes on topics like the use of force, interactions with community members, and responding to people in crisis, aligning with training goals.
- Peer intervention training enhanced officers' perceptions of police misconduct, attitudes toward peer intervention, and self-reported likelihood of peer intervention, aligning with training goals.
- Long-term assessments found officers continue to feel that de-escalation and peer intervention strategies are useful, though some training decay does occur.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

- Mandated training, whether through state reform or other forms of oversight, can still be positively received by officers and have similar effects as training programs that police departments voluntarily implement.
- De-escalation and peer intervention training can support changes in officers' views to facilitate safe, effective interactions with community members.
- Police agencies should integrate follow-up training opportunities (i.e., booster or refresher training) and organizational methods (e.g., first-line supervision) to keep officers' knowledge current, mitigate training decay, and support skill practice over time.
- Training is often a primary, although under-evaluated, mechanism for change in police departments. Police agencies should continue examining the impact of training on officers' attitudes and behaviors.

For a complete discussion of the research methodology, findings, implications, and limitations of this evaluation, see the full report [Examining Police Reforms in New Jersey: Impacts on Officer Attitudes and Self-Reported Behavior](#).