



The Science of Training

with [David Blake](#)

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Training Day: Setting up use of force training for community education

How to educate your local media and community members about police use of force before a controversial incident occurs

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After a controversial incident involving [police use of force](#), both your local media and community members are questioning how you train your officers.

To address their concerns, you want to set up an outreach event where you run civilians through some use of force scenarios. What type of scenarios work for this situation? How do you prevent injuries from occurring? What learning objectives do you set? How should you debrief those civilians after the scenario?

This training day article outlines the key steps required to host a successful educational event.



You should not only freely provide, but also want to share, every aspect of UOF law, policy, procedure and training with the public. (Photo/PoliceOne)

FORCE OPTIONS SIMULATOR (FOS)

A force options simulator (FOS) is an immersive, realistic and stress-inducing use of force training tool. The FOS generally consists of a high-definition projector that is linked to a desktop computer. The computer presents scripted, life-size video scenarios involving many realistic law enforcement response situations. Scenarios include traffic stops, mental health contacts, domestic violence response and active shooter incidents, plus everything in between.

The setup for most FOS systems ranges from a single large screen to a fully immersive 300-degree environment and may include various interactive capabilities including feedback mechanisms and multiple weapons systems.

The trainee officer interacts with the simulation while a well-trained instructor manipulates the scenario by branching the simulation in new directions based on the trainee officer's actions.

The interaction of use of force equipment such as firearms, pepper spray and TASERs is based upon a laser feedback system that accurately tracks the trainee's behavior. For instance, a FOS can provide valuable debrief information to include the number of rounds fired, location of hits, timing of hits and even the reaction time from the presentation of a threat.

A COMMUNITY RELATIONS TOOL

Force options simulators have been the subject of a significant amount of research. The devices have been shown to be associated with an increased stress response, perceptual distortions (tunnel vision and auditory occlusion), and memory failures/distortions. In fact, there are over 60 studies examining police behavior and decision-making using a type of FOS. Two of these studies explored the FOS effects on citizen attitudes.

The [first study](#) found that after training in the simulator, civilians had more positive opinions of law enforcement. Participating in the training gave the civilians a better understanding about police work and its inherent dangers and reduced beliefs that officers use excessive force. The [second study](#)

found that deadly force training combined with the use of a FOS enhanced college students' opinions of police.

These studies aren't the only evidence of the effectiveness of force options simulators as a community relations tool. Some departments have invited the press, legislators and community activists to participate in FOS training with positive outcomes.

I've had my own experiences providing FOS training to civilians. For most, it's an eye-opening experience to find out just how fast an incident can deteriorate. Some of the most impactful moments come during debriefs scenarios. I often ask civilians how many rounds they fired or to describe the item pointed at them or what was in the background. I also show them where their rounds struck the "suspect" as they fell through the line of fire. In most cases, civilians are truly awestruck at how much they learn when personally experiencing issues associated with some of the most socially controversial issues in OIS.

HOW TO SET UP CIVILIAN FOS TRAINING

Here are some of the key steps involved in setting up civilian FOS training:

1. Select a qualified instructor(s)

Randomly selecting someone in your DT or firearms cadre might not be the best choice. Select someone who has a demonstrated understanding of the academic (legal) aspects of police use of force, as well as an understanding of human factors science and [de-escalation methods](#). The instructor should also be articulate and personable.

2. Promote transparency

There is nothing secret about police use of force and probably 99% of training and tactics. You should not only freely provide, but also want to share, every aspect of UOF law, policy, procedure and training with the public. In general, I believe in providing the same FOS training to your community and the media as what you provide to officers.

3. Select the right scenarios

Pick your scenarios carefully. Think about the big issues that are commonly misunderstood or negatively framed in the media (shots to the back, mistake-of-fact shootings, or "there was no reason to stop him" issues). Most FOS have hundreds of scenarios to choose from.

Each evolution of training should have specific objective(s) you want to demonstrate and explain. For instance, many civilians don't understand reasonable suspicion or their responsibilities to comply with a lawful detention. A scenario can be selected and paused to present each aspect of reasonable suspicion or probable cause that an officer might recognize and have a lawful reason to detain or arrest. There are also opportunities to discuss an objectively reasonable mistake-of-fact which is an often-misunderstood component even for those in the profession (see [Graham v. Connor](#), 490 U.S. 386 [1989]).

4. Send out invitations

Who gets invited to this type of training? It is best to take a triage approach based on your situation.

Invite influential politicians and community members first. Try to provide FOS training to them BEFORE a controversial event happens. Local politicians, religious leaders and business owners are influential members of your community who can direct “the narrative” when a controversial event occurs.

Second, invite the media. All agencies should have a public information officer (PIO) who has developed relationships with journalists. A PIO can assist in planning and coordinating press-related needs for the training. This is also an opportunity to show transparency by supplying the press with handouts on UOF policy, case law and even human factors science applications.

It's can be hard to get politicians, religious leaders and local businesspeople in for a single event. Although time-consuming, you may need to run multiple smaller sessions. Citizen attendance might be a little easier as you can always pull from citizens academies or other special programs. Advertising your civilian FOS program through social media may also allow your community to sign up for the training.

CONDUCTING THE TRAINING

Don't rush your civilian students through the simulator. Realize their worldview might be different than yours. Teach them what a reasonable officer perspective is and how it is created from training and experience.

Use selected FOS scenarios as a walkthrough of the application of law while fostering discussions on police perception of citizen behaviors. Pause at specific points in the video to foster an open discussion and never be adversarial. Be aware that some will not see the world through your eyes under any circumstances. Accept this fact and move on with the training.

Prior to allowing civilians to go “hands on,” provide a weapons safety brief as well as pointing out any potential hazards. It shouldn't even have to be said, but: (a) NO LIVE WEAPONS IN OR NEAR THE TRAINING AREA, (b) ALL PARTIES SHOULD BE CHECKED FOR WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION, (c) IF ONE LEAVES THE TRAINING AREA, THEY MUST BE RECHECKED PRIOR TO REENTRY.

Run each civilian through the scenario while attempting to modulate their level of immersion and stress. Those who are just nervous holding the weapon won't need any further stress, but adding radio communications, audible and visual sirens, and some instructor input can help get students engaged.

Debrief each citizen student on their experience and prepare questions that may demonstrate their perceptual or memory failures. Your experience running scenarios should alert you to which scenarios are most suited for this.

Make it fun. This is not meant to be an intense, fearful, or traumatic experience. There may be times when it gets intense, especially for the student. You must recognize this and bring back some levity when appropriate. You want the overall experience to be positive.

Lastly, consider using your own survey gathering pre- and post-training opinions. It is nice to see what works, what doesn't and whether your method is beneficial. This also allows you to adapt your training for the best outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The force option simulator is one of the most unappreciated and underutilized tools in law enforcement. These simulators can provide realistic stress-based training in just about every aspect of the officer-citizen encounter. The training allows citizens to walk in a patrol officer's shoes. This journey may cause them to understand how a tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving situation impacts police decision-making, perceptual distortions and failures of memory. The right tool with the right instructor can dramatically improve police-community relationships.

About the author

David Blake is a retired California peace officer and certified Ca-POST instructor in DT, firearms, force options simulator and reality-based training. His experience includes SWAT, force option unit, field training, gangs/narcotics and patrol. He is a certified Force Science Analyst and teaches the Ca-POST certified courses entitled Force Encounters Analysis and Human Factors: Threat & Error Management for the California Training Institute. He also facilitates the Ca-POST Force Options Simulator training to tenured officers from multiple jurisdictions. Dave is an expert witness/consultant in human performance and use of force.

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