

SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: Police Accountability Review Panel DATE: November 1, 2007
FROM: Kathryn Olson
Director, Office of Professional Accountability
SUBJECT: OPA Outreach and Training within the Seattle Police Department

During the October 22, 2007 meeting of the Police Accountability Review Board, a question was asked about efforts made by the Office of Professional Accountability (OPA) to reach out to and train the internal Seattle Police Department (SPD) employee audience.¹ The following information is provided in response.

A fundamental responsibility of OPA is to actively communicate both externally and internally about issues related to police accountability. Open and transparent communication is vital to maintaining public trust and building credibility within the organization. The success of civilian oversight in general, and the work of OPA in particular, relies not only on the public's confidence, but also the organizational confidence that each and every police officer named in a complaint will receive a fair investigation. OPA believes enhanced internal communication improves understanding about reasons for civilian oversight, assists in professionalizing police work, reduces citizen complaints, helps identify and reduce systemic problems, and fosters a better relationship between OPA and the men and women of the Seattle Police Department.

Consistent with this effort, the actions taken below are examples of internal outreach efforts:

1. OPA has a one-hour block of instruction in the training provided to new employees undergoing the Post Basic Law Enforcement Academy, SPD's internal training program that follows completion of the Washington State Police Academy (Post-BLEA). This allows OPA to address all academy graduates prior to their assuming patrol duties. These new employees gain knowledge about the civilian oversight scheme in Seattle, get an historical perspective on police misconduct issues, gain insight about OPA complaint processing and ways to avoid generating citizen complaints, and learn about their responsibility to report misconduct and cooperate with OPA in investigations.
2. Periodic subject specific roll call training is provided. For example, most recently, roll call training on the OPA mediation program was provided to all sworn patrol and parking enforcement personnel. Non-patrol personnel were provided the opportunity to also attend the training.
3. A two-hour block of training on issues related to OPA, including the types of complaints received, investigation processing, and complaint avoidance was presented to all Sergeants during late 2006 and early 2007.
4. OPA provides an annual update to selected Lieutenants and all Captains and above on trends and issues observed in complaints filed with OPA.
5. OPA has input into the development of the Annual Street Skills training program provided to all SPD sworn personnel. Specific training such as that on "de-escalation" techniques has been included as recommended.

¹ Information concerning OPA-IS staff training was provided previously in a memorandum to the Panel dated October 17, 2007. OPA also has made efforts to reach out externally to the Seattle community, holding a variety of public forums throughout the City, enhancing OPA's Web-based communications, and developing multi-lingual brochures to assist our diverse population in understanding the OPA complaint process. More detailed information about such community outreach efforts made will be provided separately.

6. OPA provides subject specific incident review and analysis and complaint avoidance training at quarterly Command Staff meetings that are attended by all SPD managers, including the rank of lieutenant and above.

In the past five months, since becoming OPA Director, I have made a variety of efforts to reach out to SPD personnel. For example, I attended a Police Academy graduation where I had the opportunity to meet and speak with new graduates about OPA, participated in Post-BLEA trainings with new Police Academy graduates, presented at multiple roll call sessions at three of the five precincts, attended Captains and full Command Staff meetings during which OPA issues were reviewed, and have undergone sessions of Street Skills training myself, affording me the opportunity to meet and interact with sworn employees.

In his book *The New World of Police Accountability* (Sage Publications, 2005), Dr. Samuel Walker comments on the important strides made by OPA to communicate with internal SPD staff:

“The significance of the [Seattle] OPA ‘internal outreach’ program is that it represents a serious effort to overcome the traditional conflict between internal affairs and the rank and file. One of the obstacles to police accountability, and part of the basis for the ‘code of silence,’ is that officers do not see themselves as part of an overall accountability effort. Their relations with internal affairs are as much an attitude of ‘us versus them’ as is their relations with the community. The OPA program – a report of which is available on the department’s Web site along with the other reports - represented a genuine dialog and give and take over matters of concern.

In the end, the many reports by the Seattle Police Department present a picture of a department that is actively responding to issues of great controversy in the community, reexamining its policies and procedures, seeking input from community leaders, searching for and adopting nationally recognized policies and programs, and assessing its progress in implementing its own recommendations. All of this process, moreover, is available on the Web for anyone and everyone to read” (p. 191).

Please let me know if the Panel has any questions concerning these “internal outreach” efforts, or if there is other information OPA can provide on point.