

Training Advisory Council Official Recommendation

WELLNESS CULTURE ENCOURAGES
LONG-TERM EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND
SATISFACTION

July 13, 2022

DRAFT

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WELLNESS CULTURE ENCOURAGES LONG-TERM EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND SATISFACTION

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Acronyms used in this recommendation

- **EAP:** Employee Assistance Program
- **OHSU:** Oregon Health & Science University
- **PPB:** Portland Police Bureau
- **TAC:** Training Advisory Council

Executive summary of recommendations

Officer wellness is extremely important, not only for the officers themselves, their families and colleagues, but also the communities they serve. We reviewed materials and conducted interviews with police leaders regarding the current PPB Wellness and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). The Wellness and EAP services are immensely helpful, but we believe the PPB can implement beneficial enhancements and additions.

The Training Division has a significant opportunity to promote a culture and environment that is more inviting to new officers and that encourages long-term employee retention and satisfaction. While various police forces have experimented with numerous programs and ideas, sufficient data is not yet available to evaluate their effectiveness. Nonetheless, the time to act is now, provided that we continue to monitor and update the Wellness Program as additional data and research outcomes become available.

Our recommendation has three components:

1. Integrate officer wellness into all trainings to build self-care habits
2. Provide adequate on-going funding for expanded wellness training and health opportunities
3. Expand training to build a bridge between officers and the community to promote wellness for all

Recommendations in detail

The Training Division has a significant opportunity to promote a culture and environment that is more inviting to new officers and encourages long-term employee retention and satisfaction.

Recommendation 1: Integrate officer wellness into all trainings to build self-care habits

Wellness is about treating the whole person before, during, and after work. PPB has several programs designed to improve officer wellness, but participation is inconsistent. We recommend promoting these programs and wellness practices during regular non-wellness training. Further, where appropriate, we recommend integrating wellness practices and self-care into all trainings and activities. In addition to building the standalone knowledge, this integration can help to develop self-care habits that are cued by events that take place in day-to-day operations.

Background

PPB supports employee wellness through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which began over 20 years ago, and the Wellness Program, which began a little over three years ago. Wellness trainings are part of the Advanced Academy and In-Service sessions. Together, these programs combine reactive support with proactive training and tools that support officer wellness.

Outside of trainings, all officers have the opportunity to engage in the Wellness Hour¹. Unfortunately, current participation is voluntary and thus inconsistent across all units. Additionally, during day-to-day operations, officers can volunteer for the Peer Support Program to receive supplemental training to provide personal assistance to other officers after they experience traumatic incidents, general stress, require family support, and for a variety of other reasons. Over 90 trained

¹ The Wellness Hour is one hour per day (4 per week) that officers can use to attend to their physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial health.

sworn and non-sworn bureau employees volunteer in this program. The conversations are confidential and not tracked, unless there is a mandatory report situation. There is a new app where topics can be logged or requested, which informs future training.

We recommend efforts to increase participation in these programs including by promoting these programs specifically in and generally integrating wellness practices and self-care into non-wellness specific trainings and activities. In addition to building the standalone knowledge, this integration into other trainings can help to develop self-care habits that are cued by events that take place in day-to-day operations. As described by James Clear in *Atomic Habits*, these cues then create cravings that lead to the action of the response and then a reward. An example would be a challenging scenario (or actual incident) that creates the craving for talking to someone about it, driving the response of debriefing the call with a partner or using an EAP service, and leading to the reward of emotional peace.

Additional examples of useful wellness practices include: breathing exercises in scenario based trainings, discussing topical national incidents from the media during trainings and then training to discuss them during roll call (using a facilitator when appropriate), training to take a 15 minute break after calls to utilize some of the EAP and wellness services or apps or even an informal debrief between partners, journaling, meditation, discussing the wellness benefits of call resolution for all parties, and participating in the wellness hour.

We also suggest the trainings themselves consider the wellness of officers during their learning process. For example, considerations around how to engage officers fully without fear of questions or actions being taken out of context. This would include things like prohibiting photos and videos during actual trainings. If absolutely necessary, photos and videos could be taken during practice runs when there is less pressure and concern. This was a comment made during the Community Academy and we wanted to highlight the importance of it as well as other potential wellness aspects that could be applied to all trainings.

A great opportunity for integrating wellness is when the new Dean of Training is reviewing existing trainings. The TAC could also use officer wellness as a lens to provide feedback during training reviews.

Challenges

The most significant challenge is that of the status quo. These changes will require significant buy-in in order to make them a true success. This includes individuals valuing self-care over putting others first; if they help themselves now, they'll be better equipped to help others later.

Time is another challenge. It takes time to integrate wellness into the training, it could also take time away from other topics. It also includes a shift from just looking at the statistics of number of calls to highlighting the importance of positive interactions with the community.

Recommendation 2: Provide adequate on-going funding for expanded wellness training and health opportunities

Officer wellness is included in the proposed City of Portland budget for Fiscal Year 2022-2023, but this includes some items designated as one-time funding. We recommend budgeting for annual allowance for wellness initiatives and dividing wellness dollars equally among precincts and employees to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to use them. The PPB should promote these officer wellness programs and services during trainings. Below are the items in the proposed budget:

- A. **\$15,000 Wellness Library** - The wellness program as a whole is a little over two years old and involves ongoing training which equates to time. We support adding the app to the library that members can access at any time with services that are broader than what is currently being offered including

but not limited to: fitness, mental health, financial advice, etc. This resource would “be more proactive in connection [with] wellness.”

- B. **\$25,000 Wellness Inservice** - The hope of this funding is to provide an annual training day to officers that is outside of traditionally available training options. This could include courses such as: yoga, meditation, budgeting, health, and more. One particularly positive aspect of this program is that the funding goes back into the local economy to support the trainers. It also allows current employees to share their own expertise thereby broadening relationships within the PPB. Providing time for relationship building is always important to wellness.
- C. **\$115,000 Coach Certification** - This ask is directly related to Wellness In-service (B). It will expand the pool of sworn and non-sworn staff, bureau wide, who are able to engage in and earn certifications in their areas of interest. Once certified, these staff members can provide annual or as needed in-service training and consultation to others in the bureau. As mentioned above, these certifications would be varied with the intention of increasing in-house services, developing sustainability and the continued improvement of the wellness program.
- D. **\$100,000 Mental Health** - The PPB currently offers the Canopy program to members for mental health services. Employees can utilize a 1-800 number or go through their Kaiser or MODA health insurance (copay waived) to find their own service provider. When accessed, employees are allotted 10 sessions. The goal is to hire a mental health practitioner whose purpose would be to build relationships, learn about the cultures bureau wide, be available when emotional first aid is needed imminently and create and build up partnerships throughout the bureau and the city thereby continually improving resource access for employees. This increased level of care for PPB staff will help elevate the quality of work life within the PPB and support recruitment and retention.
- E. **\$600,000 Annual Cardiac Screening** - Unlike the other requests above, this request is new to the wellness program as a whole. Data has shown first responders have significantly increased risk of heart attack versus the

general population. PPB's research team proposing this program has suggested all sworn staff receive annual heart health screenings designed specifically for first responders. The research team has identified two alternatives for providing these screenings, the first is Sigma and the second is Doctor Ryan Norton with OHSU. Sigma is a healthcare company that focuses on increasing the health and performance of members of public safety. Doctor Norton is a co-Medical Director, currently providing this service as well as conducting wellness seminars, studying injury rates, and providing additional services for Portland Fire & Rescue.

Challenges

Much of the funding needs to be invested annually. These programs and their associated costs are not one-time expenses. The PPB also needs to ensure that this funding is appropriately tracked to ensure it is expended solely on these programs. Of course the PPB needs to make employees aware of these new services so they can utilize them. One approach is to schedule cardiac screenings automatically for each employee during normal work hours to remove the overhead of finding time outside of work.

Recommendation 3: Expand training to build a bridge between officers and the community to promote wellness for all

While community outreach is frequently considered for benefits to the public, we believe community engagement outside of calls for service is beneficial to officer wellness. We recommend promoting additional positive experiences with the community, small and large, and enabling officers to use their Wellness Hour for such engagements. Further, we recommend building on the goodwill and the relationships created by the Community Academy to develop an alumni group to engage community members who have gone through the training to discuss their

experience, evaluate the material, and support outreach to future community participants.

Background

With a shortage of officers, there is limited time to spend on public outreach. This, coupled with many events and opportunities being closed or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, means that the majority of interactions between the public and officers are incident-specific. This could result in more negative experiences for all parties. Fed by events in the news, this could widen the gap in understanding and empathy between the PPB and the public it serves. Typically reports on “community outreach” focus on the positive benefits to the community, but we believe it benefits the officers as well.

Three of our team members had the opportunity to participate in the Community Academy, and were very impressed by the awareness and understanding that it created. Officers can volunteer to participate, and some are asked to participate. Community members are from advisory councils or are city officials. Due to time and expense, only a limited number of sessions can be conducted each year. Based on our experiences and observations, we believe there is significant value both in the academy itself as well as in the informal conversations it stimulated.

We recommend building on the goodwill and the relationships created by the Community Academy to develop an alumni group to engage community members who have gone through the training to discuss their experience, evaluate the material and support outreach to future community participants. These alumni can also participate with a partner officer to engage and support the new participants. They can also be an excellent source for public input regarding introducing officer and community wellness into new programs. Reviewing and assisting with the creation of the restorative justice program is just one example where this alumni group could contribute. We would also like to see additional officers participate in the Community Academy program, even if they aren’t able to participate for the full day.

This academy could also be made more accessible to the community by creating an online version of the training. Including go-pro-type recordings of the scenarios would add impact and interest to these online sessions. Regardless, participation in the Community Academy should be required for PPB councils and should be extended to other interested community groups. As resources become available, there is also significant benefit to making the Community Academy more broadly available to the general public.

We also recommend promoting additional positive experiences with the community, small and large. An example might be “coffee with a cop.” We believe these positive social interactions are beneficial for all participants’ wellness, but these should be in addition to the Wellness Hour.

Challenges

The most significant challenge for all of these community related projects and programs is time. As an initial step, officers could opt to use some portion of their Wellness Hour time for community outreach. While this could be a viable stop-gap during times of constrained resources, it should not become a requirement. More broadly, scheduling time for community outreach is an investment. Yet, increased positive experiences can lead to significantly improved community relations, improved job satisfaction and an increase in retention. In turn, would reduce resource constraints and add to job and community satisfaction.

References and Sources

PPB Personnel Interviewed

- Ofc. Amy Bruner-Dehnert, Employee Assistance Program
- Ofc. Chase Bryson, Behavioral Health Unit / Crisis Intervention Team
- Capt. Chris Gjovik, Training Division
- Ofc. Leo Harris, Wellness Program
- Sgt. Todd Tackett, Training Division

- Sgt. Steven Wilbon, Canine Unit
- Ofc. Amy Youngboard, Behavioral Health Unit

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