

# The Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of Police De-escalation Training



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Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

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January 16, 2025

This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-23-GK-05522-JAGP, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

# The Tempe De-Escalation Project



- DESIGN
- DELIVER
- EVALUATE





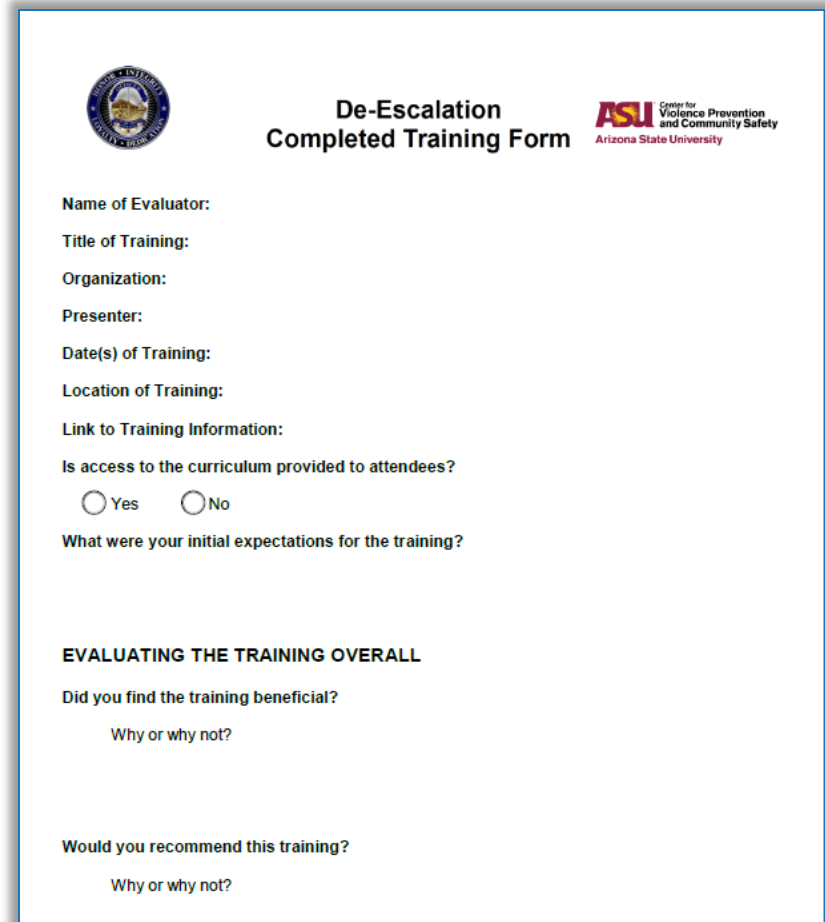


# DESIGN: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT



# Send Officers to De-Escalation Training

- Total number of trainings attended: 22
  - Online: 5
  - Local: 4
  - National: 13
    - Includes visits to other agencies



The image shows a 'De-Escalation Completed Training Form' with the following fields and questions:

- Logos:** Police Department (left), ASU Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety (right).
- Title:** De-Escalation Completed Training Form
- Fields:** Name of Evaluator, Title of Training, Organization, Presenter, Date(s) of Training, Location of Training, Link to Training Information.
- Question:** Is access to the curriculum provided to attendees?  
 Yes  No
- Text:** What were your initial expectations for the training?
- Section:** EVALUATING THE TRAINING OVERALL
- Question:** Did you find the training beneficial?  
Why or why not?
- Question:** Would you recommend this training?  
Why or why not?

# The Tempe Top De-Escalators



## Ride-Along Coding Instrument

### Interaction Questions Questions in Blue – Ask Officer Directly

#### Questions 1-17: Pre-Arrival Stage

1. Interaction Identifier in order observed with each officer
2. Was this a casual (no LE response), brief (minimal LE response), full interaction, or traffic stop? (1=brief, 2=full, 3=traffic stop, 4=accident)  
 1    2    3    4
3. What time was the officer dispatched to the call? (military)  
  
Midnight = 00:00   13:00 = 1 p.m.
4. What time did the officer arrive on scene? (military)  
  
Midnight = 00:00   13:00 = 1 p.m.
5. What time did the officer leave the scene? (military)  
  
Midnight = 00:00   13:00 = 1 p.m.
6. How was this interaction initiated? (1=call for service, 2=citizen flag down, 3=officer-initiated, 4=other)  
 1    2    3    4
7. Did the officer travel with urgency to the scene? (0=no urgency, 1=urgency, increased speed, 2=urgency, lights and/or sirens)  
 0    1    2
8. What type of problem was initially dispatched or observed? (see list of codes)
9. What did the problem turn out to be once the officer arrived and accumulated information? (see list of codes)

## ASU and the 14 Top De-escalators

- 44 ride-alongs
- 166 interactions observed
  - 107 variables recorded per citizen interaction
- One-on-one interviews
- Focus groups

# Officer Survey

- Fall 2018 (n=96)
- Summer 2019 (n=113)
- Patrol Briefings
  - Perceptions of de-escalation training
  - What tactics do you use?
  - How often do you use them?

## Exploring Variation in Police Perceptions of De-Escalation: Do Officer Characteristics Matter?

Michael D. White\*, Victor Mora\*\* and Carlena Orosco\*\*\*

**Abstract** Though de-escalation has become popular in policing, there is very little research on the topic. We know virtually nothing about what it is, whether it works, or even how officers perceive de-escalation. The authors surveyed over 100 officers in the Tempe (AZ) Police Department regarding their perceptions of de-escalation, including tactics used to peacefully resolve potentially violent encounters, the frequency of use, and their perceptions of de-escalation training. We examine perceptions overall, as well as by officer race/ethnicity and sex. Findings suggest that officers view de-escalation through a lens defined by their authority and officer safety. They use certain tactics multiple times each shift. Officers are open to de-escalation training but are skeptical about its impact on citizen encounters. Lastly, minority and female officers use certain tactics more often than white male officers. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications for the larger debate on de-escalation in policing.

### Introduction

Use of force has served as a longstanding source of tension between police and citizens, particularly in minority communities (White and Fradella, 2016). The consequences of a use of force incident can be both tragic and severe, including loss of life, riots, destruction of property, large civil judgements, and erosion of police legitimacy (Fyfe, 1988). Use of force incidents sparked numerous riots during the

1960s, leading the *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968) to conclude that 'deep hostility between police and ghetto communities' was a primary cause of the unrest. Controversial force incidents also led to riots in 1980 (Miami), 1992 (Los Angeles), 1996 (St Petersburg), and 2001 (Cincinnati). The Los Angeles riot following the acquittal of the four officers who beat Rodney King lasted for 6 days, resulting in 63 deaths,

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# DELIVER: THE TRAINING



# The Tempe Definition of De-Escalation



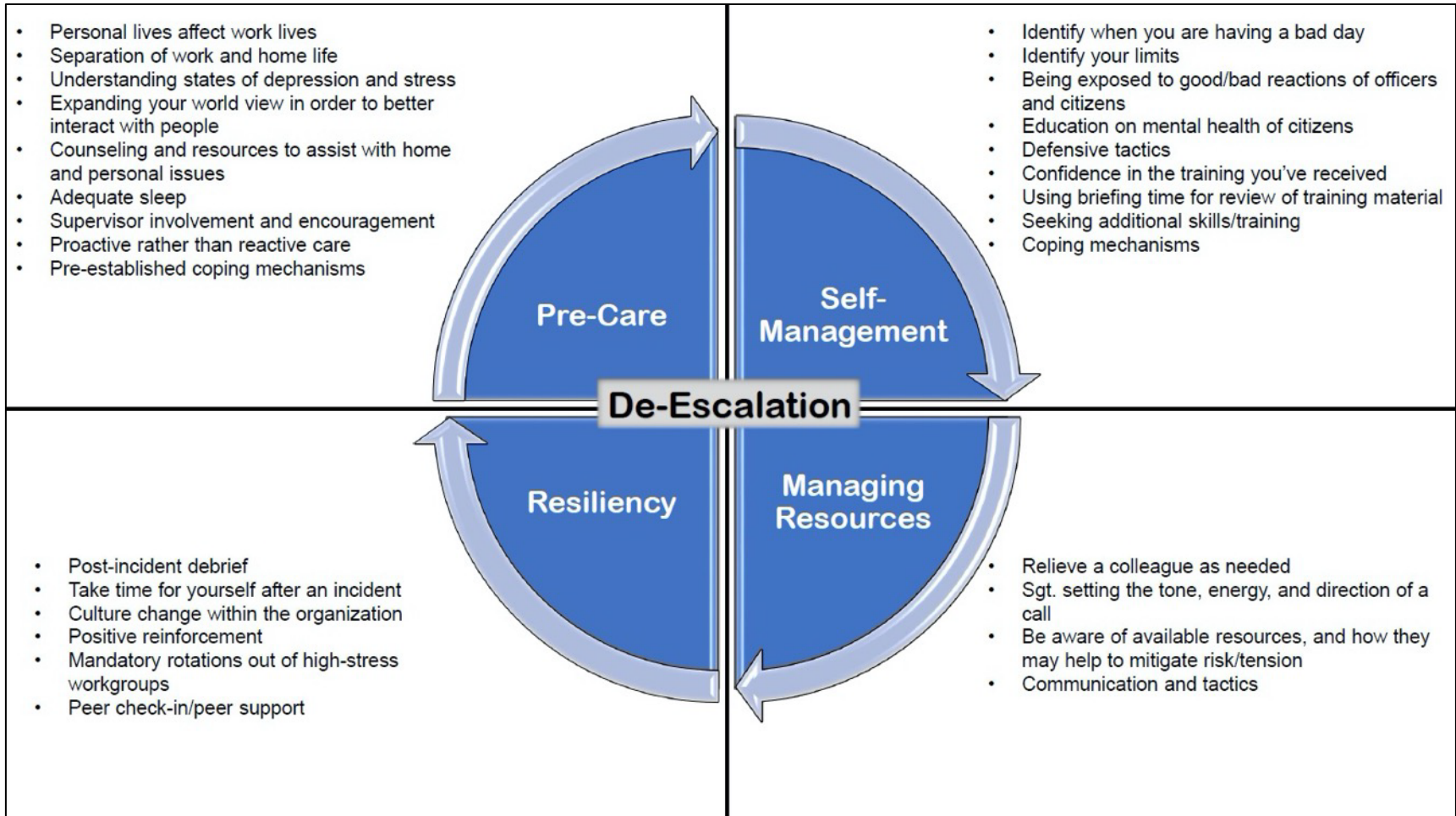
## Officer Safety as a Centerpiece

De-escalation: Techniques used to gain compliance with the goal of reducing violence or aggression. This can be accomplished through application of the PATROL model, communication, the use of appropriate force, and/or other reasonable techniques.

*Note:* **Officers should not compromise their safety or increase the risk of physical harm to the public when applying de-escalation techniques.**



# The Training Framework

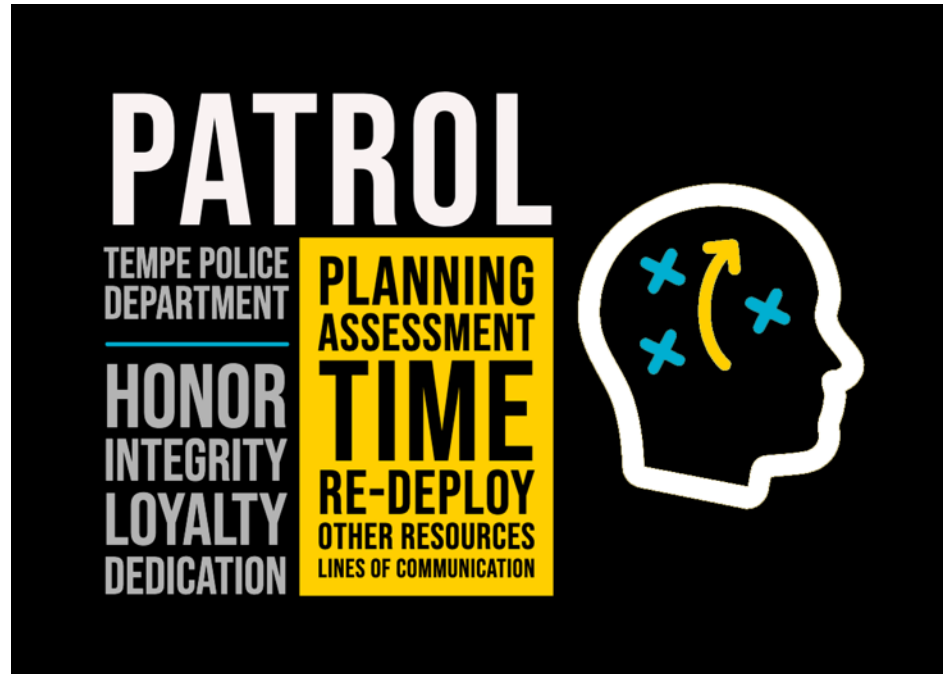




# Final Training Framework



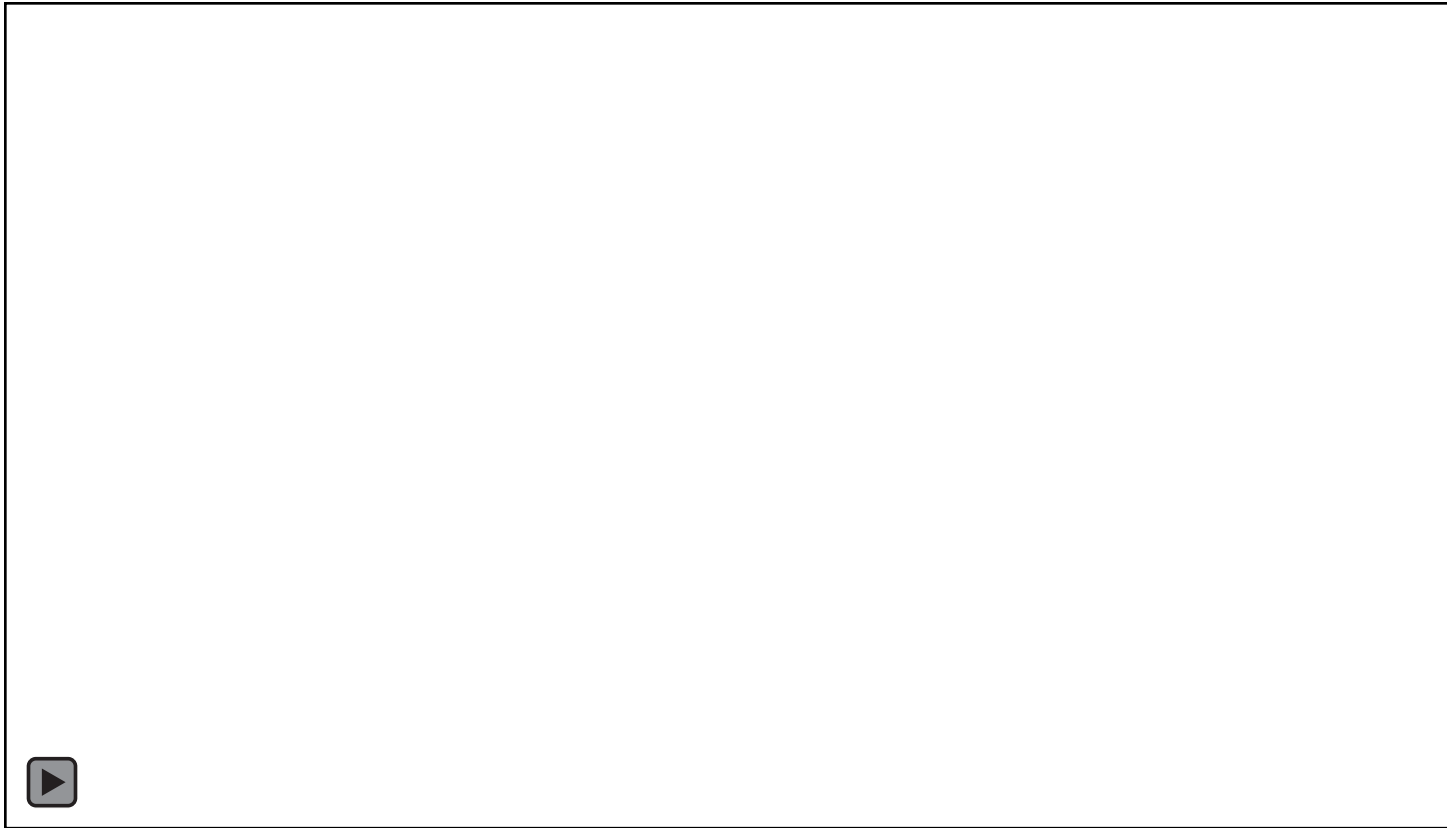
- Defining de-escalation
- Pre-care and self-management
- Sources of stress and trauma
- Effective coping mechanisms and critical incident stress management
- Active listening
- Emotional intelligence
- Planning (including pre-planning), creativity, improvisation, and adaptability affect police work
- The PATROL model – application to scenarios
- PATROL debriefing



# The Training



- A test run, January 2020
- Series of one-day sessions, February-March 2020
- Instructors – TPD training unit, Top Ds, outside experts (ASU)
- Refresher (virtual) roll call trainings





# EVALUATE: THE RESEARCH



# The Evaluation - RCT



- Squad-based randomization (100+ per group)
- Comparing outcomes
  - Self-reported attitudes/behavior (survey)
  - Administrative data (use of force, complaints, injuries)
  - Citizen surveys
  - Body-worn camera footage
    - Random review
    - All use of force



# Officer Perception Survey



- 6 months before and after training (June/July 2019, 2020)
- Rate importance and use of 18 different de-escalation tactics.
- Post-training Differences for Trained Group

Importance - **compromise**

↑ Use – **compromise, maintaining officer safety, knowing when to walk away**

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at:  
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/1363-951X.htm>

## Moving the needle: can training alter officer perceptions and use of de-escalation?

Officer perceptions and use of de-escalation

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Received 8 August 2020  
Revised 23 November 2020  
Accepted 20 January 2021

### Abstract

**Purpose** – De-escalation training for police has received widespread attention as a method for reducing unnecessary and excessive use of force. There is virtually no research on de-escalation, and as a result, there is little understanding about what it is, what it includes and whether it is effective. The current study compares attitudes about the importance and use of de-escalation among officers who were randomly assigned to participate (or not) in de-escalation training.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The current study draws from a larger randomized controlled trial of de-escalation training in the Tempe, Arizona Police Department (TPD). Approximately 100 officers complete a survey in June–July 2019 and again in June–July 2020. TPD delivered the de-escalation training to half the patrol force in February–March 2020. The authors compare treatment and control officers' attitudes about the importance of specific de-escalation tactics, how often they use those tactics and their sentiments about de-escalation training. The authors employ an econometric random-effects model to examine between-group differences post-training while controlling for relevant officer attributes including age, race, sex, prior training and squad-level pretraining at attitudes about de-escalation.

**Findings** – Treatment and control officers reported positive perceptions of de-escalation tactics, frequent use of those tactics and favorable attitudes toward de-escalation before and after the training. After receiving the training, treatment officers placed greater importance on compromise, and reported more frequent use of several important tactics including compromise, knowing when to walk away and maintaining officer safety.

**Originality/value** – Only a few prior studies have examined whether de-escalation training changes officer attitudes. The results from the current study represent an initial piece of evidence suggesting de-escalation training may lead to greater use of those tactics by officers during encounters with citizens.

**Keywords** Training, Police, Use of force, De-escalation

Paper type Research paper

### Introduction

August 9, 2020 marked the six-year anniversary of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri. The police killings of Brown, Freddie Gray and others led to public outrage, riots and demands for police reform. In late 2014, former President Obama created the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing to examine the causes of the crisis, and to identify recommendations for improving community trust and enhancing police accountability. The Task Force final report included nearly 60 recommendations to improve policing, but

The authors would like to thank the leadership and officers of the Tempe (AZ) Police Department for their participation in this study.

**Funding:** This research was supported through grant funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, grant # 2017-WY-BX-0008.



Policing An International Journal  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
1363-951X  
DOI: 10.1108/PJPM-08-2020-140

# Citizen Perceptions



Phone interviews of citizens who had recent encounters with a Tempe officer

- Compared perceptions – Trained v. Not Trained officer

Of 28 variables, 16 are statistically significant favoring positive training impact:

- the officer treated them **fairly** (2.65 vs 2.46);
- the officer was **honest** with them (2.65 vs 2.48);
- the officer **listened** carefully (2.61 vs 2.41);
- they were **satisfied** with how they were treated (2.56 vs 2.33);
- the officer remained **neutral** throughout the encounter (2.61 vs 2.43);
- the officer was **patient** with them (2.63 vs 2.46);
- the officer actively **listened** (2.57 vs 2.40);
- the officer **compromised** with them (2.38 vs 2.14);
- the officer showed **empathy** (2.47 vs 2.23);
- officer did or said things to **calm them** down (2.40 vs 2.10).



# BWC Random Review



Randomly select 10 officers per week

- Pre-training (n=230); Post-training (n=246)

Trained officers were significantly:

- less likely to use a condescending/patronizing tone.
- more likely to attempt to build rapport with the citizen.
- less likely to fail to transfer control to another officer, if necessary.
- less likely to use charged/imposing body language.
- more likely to resolve the encounter informally.





# BWC in Use of Force Incidents



- All- 6 months pre- and post-training (8/1/2019 - 8/30/2020)
  - Pre-training (n=658); Post-training (n=320)
- Trained officers spent significantly **more time on scene**
- **Officer injuries were uncommon**
- Community members were **58 percent less likely to be injured** during use of force encounters with treatment officers

# Lessons Learned



- Define de-escalation
- Teaching the material effectively (and often)
- Many outcomes, not just one
- Should be embedded throughout PD
- Benefits of visiting other agencies
  - What works for them?  
How does it translate?



# De-Escalation Training Checklist (pp. 12-13)



## PLANNING

- Create a committee
- Articulate your goals
- Identify a list of trainings
- Select a training
- Develop a messaging plan

## DELIVERY

- Determine who will be trained
- Finalize training logistics
- Determine who will deliver the training
- Refresher training

## EVALUATION

- Identify key outcomes
- Explore collaboration with external researcher
- If not possible, explore internal evaluation
- Communicate results

# Tempe, AZ Spotlight Report



- Access the report here:  
<https://www.smartpolicing.com/tta/publications>

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## The Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of Police De-escalation Training

emerged as a strategy that many believe can reduce the use of force by police officers. Despite de-escalation's rapid adoption, its use is both limited and mixed. As a result, key questions about its impact remain unanswered. In 2017, the Tempe, Arizona Police Department (TPD) and researchers from Arizona State University (ASU) received funding through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Smart Policing Initiative (SPI) to design, deliver, and evaluate a de-escalation training program. This SPI Spotlight publication highlights the development, implementation, and evaluation of Tempe's efforts and provides a checklist of issues to consider for fellow agencies considering similar programs.

The Tempe SPI team customized its own training. The Tempe team devoted 18 months to curriculum development, centered on three activities:

- Sending officers to attend two dozen different de-escalation trainings to hand-pick what would work for Tempe.
- Identifying and learning from "top de-escalators" in TPD.

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**TEMPE, ARIZONA SMART POLICING INITIATIVE**

## The Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of Police De-escalation Training

SEPTEMBER 2024



# Implications for Other Areas of Criminal Justice



DISPATCH

- Continuity
- Citizens and Officers
- Front End Resolution



DETENTION

- Compliance
- Injury Mitigation
- Lawsuit Liability





**Thank you!**

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