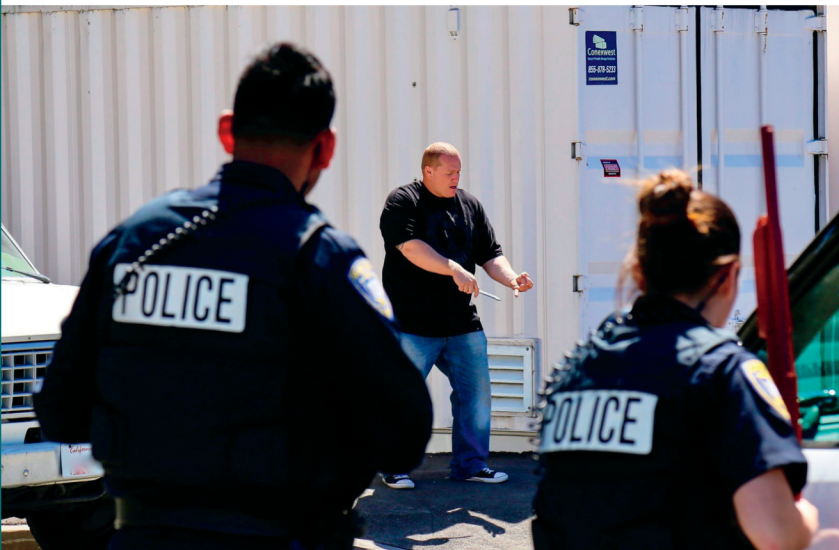
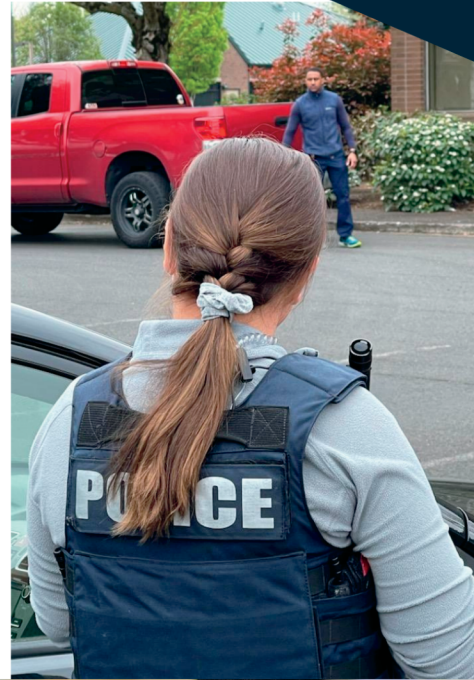




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# Implementing the ICAT Training Program at Your Agency



## Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics

May 2023



POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM

# Implementing the ICAT Training Program at Your Agency

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POLICE EXECUTIVE  
RESEARCH FORUM

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# Contents

<b>From PERF’s Executive Director: ICAT Is Making Communities and Officers Safer .....</b>	<b>1</b>
--	----------

<b>How ICAT Was Developed: By Officers, For Officers .....</b>	<b>4</b>
--	----------

*Sidebar:* ICAT Mission Statement ..... 5

*Sidebar:* A Brief History of ICAT: Key Milestones..... 6

<b>The ICAT Curriculum .....</b>	<b>9</b>
----------------------------------	----------

Three Training Elements..... 9

Seven Modules ..... 10

*Sidebar:* The Critical Decision-Making Model  
Explained ..... 12

*Sidebar:* Oxnard, CA: Suicide by Cop  
from the Perspective of the Person in Crisis ..... 15

*Sidebar:* How to Preview the ICAT Curriculum ..... 16

<b>Who Is Using ICAT? .....</b>	<b>17</b>
---------------------------------	-----------

*Sidebar:* New Jersey Adopts ICAT Statewide..... 18

<b>What the Research Says about ICAT.....</b>	<b>20</b>
---	-----------

<b>Making ICAT Work: Key Implementation Issues, Challenges, and Innovations .....</b>	<b>23</b>
---	-----------

Align Agency Culture, Policy,  
and Operations with ICAT ..... 24

Select the Right Instructors ..... 25

Rolling Out the Training: Who Goes First?..... 27

ICAT in the Academy ..... 28

*Sidebar:* What about Lateral Hires? ..... 28

*Sidebar:* Integrating ICAT with Field Training..... 29

Conducting Effective Scenarios..... 29

*Sidebar:* Stop-and-Discuss or Let-it-Go?  
2 Approaches to Debriefing Scenarios ..... 31

*Sidebar:* Evaluating Scenarios:  
Four Key Questions to Ask ..... 32

*Sidebar:* What Happens to Students  
Not Going through Scenarios?..... 33

Implementation Fidelity:  
Remaining True to the ICAT Curriculum..... 33

The Role of First-Line Supervisors..... 34

*Sidebar:* Leadership Snapshots:  
A New ICAT Feature ..... 35

ICAT “Booster Shots”:  
Providing Ongoing Training..... 35

*Sidebar:* Agencies Need to Stay Up to Date  
with ICAT ..... 36

*Sidebar:* Reinforcing ICAT through  
Monday-Morning Quarterbacking..... 37

**ICAT in Action: Four Implementation Case Studies .....38**

Alliance, NE Police Department..... 38

Volusia County, FL Sheriff’s Office ..... 40

*Sidebar:* How ICAT Principles Are Helping to Improve Investigations in Volusia County ..... 41

Monterey, CA Police Department ..... 42

*Sidebar:* “Left of Bang”: Using ICAT to Limit Disruptions When Responding to Any Incident ..... 43

Harris County, TX Sheriff’s Office..... 44

**What’s Next for ICAT? .....46**

PERF National ICAT Training Center..... 46

ICAT in Jails..... 47

*Sidebar:* PERF Is Looking for Videos to Use in ICAT ..... 48

Curriculum Enhancements ..... 48

**Other Information and Resources .....49**

**About the Police Executive Research Forum ..... 51**

## FROM PERF'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# ICAT Is Making Communities and Officers Safer

**They are the type of encounters that have** challenged police officers for years. A person is unarmed or armed with a knife or other weapon besides a firearm. The individual is agitated and acting erratically, maybe because they are in a mental health crisis. The person may be acting in a manner that may provoke the officer to use deadly force in a “suicide-by-cop” situation.

Traditionally in these types of situations, officers have been trained to confront the subject, bark commands like “drop the knife,” and rely on an escalating continuum of force options, up to and including deadly force, if the subject did not comply. And the results were often tragic – for the subject, for the officers involved, and for the police department and its relationship with the community.

In 2015, the *Washington Post* began assembling detailed information on fatal officer-involved shootings in the United States. The *Post*'s database found that each year, police officers shoot and kill approximately 1,000 individuals.<sup>1</sup> Of these, 400 or so were unarmed or armed with a weapon other than a firearm. And at least 1 in 4 of these individuals had mental health issues at the time of the shooting.

Increasingly, these encounters are being captured on video – either the officers'



Vancouver, Washington Police Department.

body-worn cameras or on bystanders' cell phones – and the footage is often shared widely through social and traditional news media. When the officers' actions appear questionable, public trust in the police can be undermined and the involved officers can face months, even years, of intense scrutiny and

1. “Fatal Force.” The Washington Post. [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/).



the potential loss of their livelihoods and even their freedom.

In 2015, during a period of considerable focus on police use of force in the U.S., the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) began examining what could be done to significantly impact when and how police use force. PERF studied how and why force was used, how police officers were trained, and what we could learn from the practices of other countries. PERF was convinced there had to be a better and safer way to resolve these types of incidents – so that both police officers and everyone else could “go home safely” at the end of the day.

The result of this intensive effort was **ICAT: Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics**. ICAT is an innovative training curriculum that combines classroom instruction with scenario-based exercises to help officers successfully – and safely – resolve the types of challenging incidents described above. (For a look at key milestones in the development of ICAT, see page 6.)

What makes ICAT unique is that it *integrates* the critical skills that officers need in these situations:

- **Communications** – with the subject, fellow officers, dispatchers, and others. ICAT teaches officers how to ask questions (not just bark commands), actively listen to what a subject is telling them, and then try to make a connection and build rapport.
- **Assessment** – of the situation, the threat, the mental state of the subject, and the range of options for addressing the incident.
- **Tactics** – including the use of time, distance and cover, tactical repositioning when necessary, and bringing in specialized resources.

Other training programs focus on one or maybe two of these skill sets. ICAT emphasizes all three, and presents them in a comprehensive, integrated manner.

Over the years, my PERF colleagues and I have heard two common reactions to ICAT:

- First, some people insist that “we’re already doing that.” While it may be true that agencies have trained their personnel in some type of de-escalation, few departments teach all three critical skill sets contained in ICAT – communications, assessment, and tactics – and do so in an integrated curriculum that includes scenario-based exercises.
- Second, people often ask, “How is ICAT different from CIT?” There are certainly common elements to both curricula, including identifying persons in crisis and effectively communicating with them. But there are significant differences as well. Crisis Intervention Team training focuses heavily on the specific types of mental illness and developmental disabilities among individuals that officers may encounter. ICAT dedicates a module to recognizing someone in crisis, but it also focuses on *effective tactics* for safely resolving encounters with these individuals. ICAT starts with teaching officers the Critical Decision-Making Model and teaches them to think through challenging situations using this decision-making approach. This is a critical component to ICAT that is not necessarily taught in other curricula. ICAT and CIT do not represent an either-or proposition. Rather, many agencies have found it useful to train their personnel in both programs.

ICAT was rolled out in 2016, and today it has been adopted by hundreds of police agencies – large, mid-sized, and small – across the country. The entire state of New Jersey has adopted ICAT and mandated the training for every police agency in the state (see page 18).

ICAT is also the only de-escalation training program that has been rigorously studied and shown to be effective through a randomized control trial – the gold standard of research. A 2020 study of ICAT in the Louisville (KY) Metro Police Department found that the



LEFT: The first National ICAT Conference was held in San Diego in January 2023. RIGHT: PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler and Howard Buffett tour the site of the PERF National ICAT Training Center while it was under construction in Decatur, IL.

training was associated with reductions in officers' use of force as well as substantial declines in injuries to both citizens and officers. (See page 20 for more details about this ground-breaking study.)

This ICAT implementation guide provides information about what ICAT is and how it is being used in agencies across the country. The guide includes:

- A summary of the seven ICAT training modules, including the recently added modules on suicide by cop and duty to intervene (what we call "Step Up and Step In").
- Key implementation issues agencies have faced as they rolled out the training and how some departments are addressing those challenges.
- Case studies of how agencies of different sizes, in different parts of the country, have implemented ICAT.
- Recent enhancements to ICAT, including the opening of a state-of-the-art PERF National ICAT Training Center in Decatur, IL (see page 46).

Much of the information in this guide was discussed at the first ICAT National Conference that PERF held in January 2023. That event brought together close to 200 people – police chiefs and command personnel, first-line supervisors, officers, trainers, researchers,

and others – to share their experiences with ICAT over the past several years. I thank all of them – especially PERF's ICAT team and our dedicated cadre of ICAT trainers – for their contributions to this report.

I want to especially thank my friend Howard G. Buffett, the philanthropist and former Sheriff of Macon County, IL. Howard has been with PERF from the very beginning of ICAT. He traveled with us to Scotland to study how police there train to handle persons with knives, and he has supported our efforts all along the way. His invaluable support has enabled PERF to continually upgrade and improve the curriculum and to train hundreds of police agencies in ICAT over the past several years. And his latest contribution – the creation of the PERF National ICAT Training Center – will allow for the training of many more agencies in the years ahead.

Whether your agency has been using ICAT for years or is just now considering the training, I think you will find this guide to be informative and helpful. And if you have any questions or want to talk through implementation, please contact PERF.

Chuck Wexler  
Executive Director



# How ICAT Was Developed: By Officers, For Officers

**ICAT is revolutionizing how police agencies train their officers in use of force.** It replaces outdated concepts such as the traditional (staircase model) use-of-force continuum, the “21-foot rule,” and drawing a line in the sand with approaches that are more versatile and effective. These include critical thinking and decision-making, using time, distance, and cover to an officer’s advantage, active listening and communications, and involving specialized personnel and resources, among other strategies. In ICAT, these concepts and skills are presented through a combination of classroom instruction, video case studies, and scenario-based training.

ICAT is designed primarily for those situations in which someone is acting erratically or aggressively, but is unarmed or armed with a weapon other than a firearm (knife,

baseball bat, etc.). Nothing in ICAT says that officers cannot use force, including deadly force, if the circumstances warrant. However, the goal of ICAT is to give officers the options and tools they need to safely resolve these situations without having to resort to deadly force whenever possible.

ICAT is not the brainchild of a single individual or entity. The training was developed and tested in the field through a collaborative process involving hundreds of police professionals at all ranks and from a variety of agencies in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. And now that the curriculum has been in the field for several years, PERF continues to learn from the experiences of ICAT agencies.

ICAT is also a dynamic curriculum. As new topics and challenges emerge, the core ICAT training is updated with new



“For the longest time, we allowed our tactics to drive our psychology. With ICAT, you have to reverse that, letting the psychology drive our tactics. You have to use your brain and think, “How do I want to respond to this?” Then, “What are the best tactics in this situation?” And it may not be how you were trained years ago.”

— **Officer Cam Deane**  
**Cambridge, MA Police Department**  
**ICAT Trainer**



information, video case studies, and scenarios. Recent additions have included a module on suicide-by-cop encounters and another one on effective intervention strategies, called "Step Up and Step In."

There is no charge to agencies to adopt the ICAT curriculum. However, to help ensure successful implementation, agencies are expected to send personnel to a PERF train-the-trainer session where they can learn about the curriculum in detail and receive guidance on how to effectively present the material.

In addition, ICAT is trademarked, and only PERF is authorized to control or represent the training content. Agencies should be wary of other entities claiming to offer "ICAT training."

## ICAT Mission Statement

Patrol officers will learn to safely and professionally resolve critical incidents involving subjects who may pose a danger to themselves or others but who are not armed with firearms. Reducing the need to use deadly force, upholding the sanctity of life, building community trust, and protecting officers from physical, emotional, and legal harm are the cornerstones of ICAT.

See the ICAT Training Guide ([www.policeforum.org/assets/icattrainingguide.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/assets/icattrainingguide.pdf), page 13) for the eight training goals that flow from the ICAT Mission Statement.

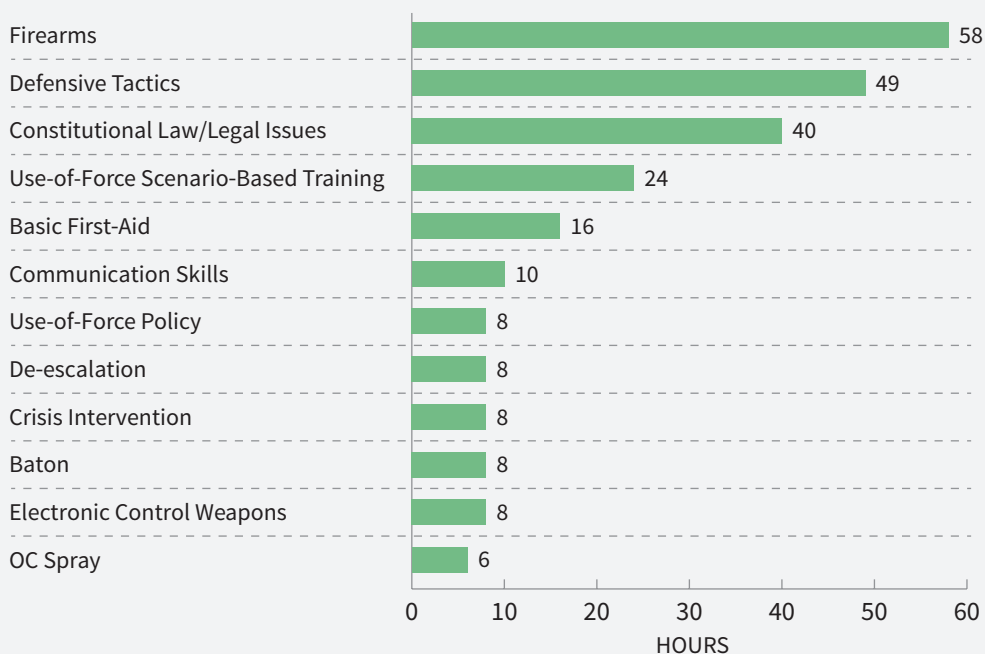


## A Brief History of ICAT: Key Milestones

Here are some of the key milestones in the development of ICAT.

- In 2015, PERF published *Re-Engineering Training on Police Use of Force*, which included a survey of its members on their use-of-force training practices. The research found that both recruits and veteran officers receive substantial training on firearms and defensive tactics, which is appropriate given the firearms threats that officers in the United States face. However, officers receive considerably less training on de-escalation, crisis intervention, tactical communications, and less-lethal options such as electronic control weapons (ECWs).<sup>2</sup>

### Recruit Training: Hours Spent on Use-of-Force Topics (median values)



Source: Police Executive Research Forum

- Later that year, PERF took 25 police chiefs and other agency executives to Scotland to study how police there respond to individuals who are armed with knives or other weapons besides firearms. Because the vast majority of police officers in Scotland do not carry firearms or electronic control weapons (TASERs), they need to rely on their communications skills, tactical positioning, shields and other less-lethal devices, and teamwork to safely resolve these types of challenging encounters. The U.S. delegation sat in on training and heard from both leaders and front-line personnel with Police Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Several Police Scotland officials have continued to advise PERF on the development and rollout of ICAT.

2. *Re-Engineering Training on Police Use of Force*, 2015. <http://www.policeforum.org/assets/reengineeringtraining1.pdf>.

3. PERF's visit to Police Scotland was chronicled by Al Baker, at the time a reporter with the *New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/12/nyregion/us-police-leaders-visiting-scotland-get-lessons-on-avoiding-deadly-force.html>.



TOP ROW AND SECOND ROW, LEFT: Some of the demonstrations and discussions the U.S. police delegation engaged in during the 2016 visit to Police Scotland. SECOND ROW, RIGHT: New York Police Department Emergency Service Unit officers demonstrate a response to a mentally ill man barricaded in a room with a pickaxe.

- After the trip to Scotland, PERF staff spent several days with the New York Police Department's Emergency Service Unit. The ESU has an international reputation for dealing with emotionally disturbed individuals and successfully resolving crises. The purpose of this visit was to see how the specialized skills and approaches used by ESU could be translated to the work of patrol officers.
- In March 2016, PERF published *Guiding Principles on Use of Force*, which included 30 recommendations for improving police policy, training, tactics, and equipment. These recommendations form the basis of the ICAT training program.<sup>4</sup>
- The next month, PERF brought together more than 60 training and tactical experts representing more than 30 police agencies and other organizations from across the country and Police Scotland. The group spent a week at the New York City Police Academy discussing how to put the 30 guiding principles into practice and hashing out details of the ICAT curriculum.

>> continued on page 8



Police professionals from across the U.S. and Scotland spent a week at the NYPD Academy hashing out the ICAT curriculum.

4. *Guiding Principles on Use of Force*, 2016. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/guidingprinciples1.pdf>.

continued from page 7

- Following a peer review of the draft lesson plan, ICAT was pilot tested during the summer of 2016 in seven agencies around the country: the Baltimore Police Department; Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Police Department; Burlington, VT Police Department; Camden County, NJ Police Department; Daytona Beach, FL Police Department; Houston Police Department; and Prince William County, VA Police Department. Based on feedback from students and instructors, the curriculum was updated and finalized.
- The initial version of ICAT was released in December 2016 at a national meeting PERF held in New Orleans. It was attended by 425 police professionals.
- Since then, PERF has held hundreds of ICAT orientation meetings and train-the-trainer sessions throughout the country. Today, many of these agencies are using ICAT to train their personnel (see *Who Is Using ICAT?*, page 17).
- In addition, PERF has held several meetings in Decatur, IL focusing on emerging issues such as suicide-by-cop situations and the necessity of stepping up and stepping in with fellow officers when intervention is warranted. These sessions with nationally recognized experts such as Dr. John Nicoletti, a police psychologist, were instrumental in the development of the most recent ICAT modules (see *The ICAT Curriculum*, page 9).



ABOVE: Attendees at the ICAT rollout meeting in New Orleans in 2016.

RIGHT: PERF brought together a team of experts to discuss new approaches to suicide-by-cop encounters.



BOTTOM, LEFT: An ICAT information session hosted by the Camden County, NJ Police Department.

BOTTOM, RIGHT: Executive Director Chuck Wexler meets with Dr. John Nicoletti, a police psychologist with more than 40 years of experience.



# The ICAT Curriculum

**PERF developed ICAT to be seamlessly** incorporated into an agency’s recruit and in-service training. The ICAT training package includes detailed lesson plans, instructor notes, recommended videos, and sample scenario-based training exercises.

## Three Training Elements

The curriculum has three primary elements:

### **Classroom lectures and discussion.**

ICAT concepts and approaches are presented in seven modules. The curriculum is typically delivered by agency trainers who have gone through a detailed train-the-trainer program run by PERF. As concepts are presented, students are encouraged to participate in classroom debates and discussions.

**Video case studies.** Each ICAT module includes video case studies that illustrate the content covered in that module. Reviewed and selected by PERF’s ICAT training team, these videos typically feature body-worn camera footage from the officers involved in the incidents. And in a unique twist, many of the videos in the ICAT curriculum include interviews conducted by PERF staff with the officers involved in the encounter. (One case study includes

interviews with both the involved officer and subject; see page 15.) These interviews provide first-hand information about what the officers perceived and key insights into their decision making. The “narrated” video case studies are designed to spur classroom discussion about the incidents and what officers can do better in the future. The case studies are not designed to point fingers, but rather to identify more effective approaches.



Jefferson County, Colorado Sheriff’s Office.

**Scenario-based exercises.** An essential component of ICAT is having officers practice the concepts and skills covered in the lectures, video case studies, and classroom discussions. This is done through scenario-based exercises. To provide the most realistic setting, PERF recommends that agencies conduct “live,” in-person scenarios using role players (although some agencies use simulators, often for their refresher training). The ICAT curriculum includes sample scenarios that agencies can use, plus guidance on how to effectively debrief scenarios once they are completed. There are also videos that illustrate recommended practices in scenario-based training.

**Implementation Tip:** While the ICAT curriculum provides sample scenarios that can be used by just about any agency, many departments have found it effective to customize scenarios based on their particular setting (urban, suburban, or rural) or past experiences. For example, university police departments will want to create scenarios that would be likely to occur in a campus setting; transit police agencies might create scenarios occurring on trains or buses. And all agencies can benefit from reviewing previous incidents they had with people in crisis who were not armed with a firearm and looking to customize scenarios based on those encounters.

ICAT is designed to be a 12-hour curriculum.

- One full day is devoted to lectures, video case studies, and discussions.
- PERF has found that most agencies need at least half a day to run students through scenarios. Some agencies, however, spend a full day on scenario-based training, which often allows officers to complete a wider variety of scenarios.



While ICAT allows for some flexibility in how the curriculum is presented, research has found that following the core curriculum and devoting sufficient time to scenario-based exercises are critical to successful implementation. This is known as maintaining *program fidelity* (see page 33).

## Seven Modules

The ICAT curriculum includes seven modules that present the core lessons related to communications, assessment, and tactics. Other modules cover specific topics such as suicide-by-cop and intervention strategies with fellow officers whose actions are not helping the situation.

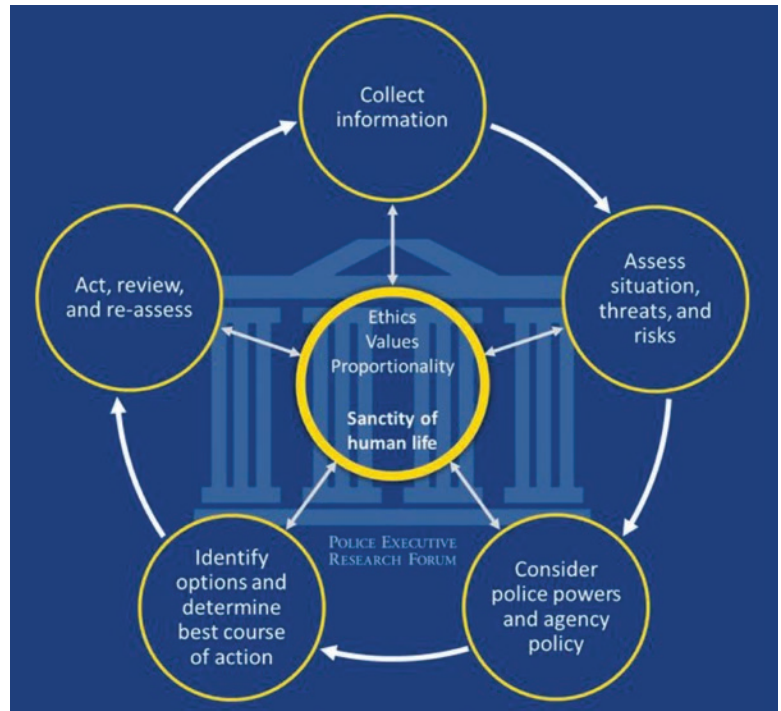
Here is an overview of the seven ICAT modules.

**Module 1: Introduction.** This module provides an overview of ICAT – how it was developed, what the training is (providing officers with more options in use-of-force situations), and what the training is not (telling officers they cannot use force when appropriate). Module 1 also shows how ICAT is challenging conventional wisdom about the response to potential use-of-force encounters. The introductory module is an opportunity for the police chief or sheriff to express their

support for the training, either in person or through a video message, as PERF recommends.

**Module 2: Critical Decision-Making Model.** The CDM is a five-step process that helps officers structure and guide their decision making in responding to any type of incident; it can be especially useful in potential use-of-force encounters. In many agencies, officers also use the CDM as a tool to explain their actions following an incident, and supervisors use it to debrief critical incidents in a structured manner. This module explains the basics of the CDM, describes each of the five steps, and presents examples of how agencies have incorporated the model into their training and operations.

**Module 3: Crisis Recognition.** When they encounter the police, some people may behave irrationally because they are in a mental or behavioral health crisis or because they have an intellectual or developmental disability. For police officers, being able to recognize these conditions is crucial to developing a response that is both effective and safe for everyone involved. Using both research and case studies, this module provides useful information about recognizing people in crisis



The Critical Decision-Making Model (CDM)

and practical tips on how to approach them and defuse potentially volatile situations.

**Module 4: Tactical Communications.** One of the most effective tools police officers have for dealing with someone in crisis is their ability to communicate. This module covers both the theory and practice of effective communications in tense, dynamic

>> continued on page 13



LEFT: Santa Cruz County, California Sheriff's Office.

RIGHT: Conyers, Georgia Police Department.





# The Critical Decision-Making Model Explained



“ The CDM helps you look at the process, not just the outcome. What information did you have? What were the threats and the risks? Was it something you had to respond to right away? If so, what was the plan? The more we can focus on the process, the more likely we are to end up with the outcomes that we want.

— Lt. Dan Warren (ret.)  
**Riverside, CA Police Department**  
**ICAT Instructor**

Decision making is at the core of ICAT, and the CDM is a logical and intuitive tool for structuring and guiding officers’ decision making. The CDM includes five steps that officers should work through when they are responding to any incident, but especially a potential use-of-force encounter. The five steps are:

1. Gather information
2. Assess situation, threats, and risks
3. Consider police powers and agency policy
4. Identify options and determine the best course of action
5. Act, review, and re-assess

The beauty of the CDM is that officers can work through the model as quickly or as deliberately as needed, depending on the circumstances. And if the situation is not resolved the first time through, or if new information enters the picture, then officers go through the steps again – a process known as “spinning the model.”



ABOVE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: NYPD CDM; Harris County, Texas Sheriff’s Office CDM; and Indiana University Police Department CDM.

LEFT: Monterey, California Police Department CDM.

Agencies have found the CDM has two key benefits:

- Better decisions up front, often because officers took the time to gather information, assess the situation, and develop options.
- Better explanations of decisions after the fact. The CDM helps officers in writing their reports and testifying in court, and it is used by supervisors to debrief critical incidents in an organized fashion.

The heart of the CDM is the core. It represents the mission, ethics, values, and principles and priorities of the agency. The core guides all five steps in the decision-making process. Agencies that adopt ICAT are encouraged to customize the CDM core to represent their own mission, culture, and values.

**Implementation Tip:** To reinforce the message and importance of the CDM, many ICAT agencies print and display posters of the CDM throughout the agency – for example, in training facilities, and roll call and break rooms. The NYPD places its CDM in the elevators of its Training Academy. Some agencies provide officers with pocket cards containing the CDM or include it as a screen-saver background on agency computers.

continued from page 11

situations. It operationalizes concepts such as active listening (listening to understand and not just respond), “triggers” and “hooks,” and non-verbal communications. It also uses video case studies to illustrate how officers effectively used tactical communications to defuse situations involving people in crisis who were posing a threat to themselves or others.

**Implementation Tip:** Many times, officers who encounter someone with a knife (or other weapon besides a firearm) end up shouting “drop the knife” over and over again. To help get officers out of the loop of just repeating the same command, some agencies give

their officers canned phrases they can use in these situations. For example, “What are you planning to do with that knife?” or “What happened today that caused you to get that knife?” These types of alternatives to “drop the knife” can change the dynamics of the encounter and get the person talking.

**Module 5: Suicide by Cop.** This module was added to the original ICAT curriculum after PERF noted the frequency of those extremely challenging situations in which someone who is suicidal tries to get a police officer to take their life. The module builds on the *Suicide by Cop: Protocol and Training Guide* published by PERF in 2019 with input

Sample scenario filmed in Decatur, Illinois.



from experienced police officers and Dr. John Nicoletti, a psychologist with more than four decades of experience working with law enforcement.<sup>5</sup> Both the publication and the ICAT module define the two types of suicide-by-cop encounters (planned and spontaneous), describe how to recognize suicide-by-cop situations, and provide practical steps that officers can take to try and safely defuse these encounters without having to resort to deadly force.

**Module 6: Operational Tactics.** One thing that differentiates ICAT from other de-escalation training is that it integrates tactics with skills such as crisis recognition and communications. This module focuses on three phases of any police call: pre-response planning, the actual response, and post-response reviews. Using several video case studies, the module focuses on tactics such as taking a “tactical pause” (if safe and appropriate) to develop or refine a response strategy, using time and repositioning to establish and maintain a “reactionary gap,” operating as a team when several officers are on the scene, managing yourself throughout the encounter, and always keeping yourself in a winnable position, including by having a Plan B. The module also includes guidance on how to conduct an effective after-action review to assess performance and learn for the future.

**Module 7: Step Up and Step In.** Another addition to the original ICAT curriculum, this module focuses on how officers can and should intervene in two types of situations: 1) when a colleague is about to engage in misconduct (including the use of excessive force)



Vancouver, Washington Police Department.

or 2) if the officer has a plan that is more likely than the current course of action to successfully resolve a situation. The concept of “stepping up and stepping in” is about preventing problems in potential use-of-force situations before they occur. The module includes several video case studies showing instances where officers successfully intervened and redirected situations that were headed in the wrong direction, as well as cases where “stepping up and stepping in” could have been valuable. Module 7 is designed to give officers the tools they need to exercise leadership when the tactics and communication being used aren’t working.

5. *Suicide by Cop: Protocol and Training Guide*, 2019. [www.policeforum.org/assets/SBCTrainingGuide.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/assets/SBCTrainingGuide.pdf).

## Oxnard, CA: Suicide by Cop from the Perspective of the Person in Crisis

ICAT Module 5 includes a video case study that offers a unique and critically important perspective: that of the suicidal person who is attempting to get an officer to kill them.

In 2019, Oxnard, CA Police Officer Timothy Roberts responded to a call about a young woman, possibly under the influence or mentally ill, who was waving a knife. The woman, who was just 17, said “Kill me” as she advanced on Officer Roberts while displaying the knife. Officer Roberts backed up and repeatedly tried to talk her into dropping the knife. Instead, she charged toward Officer Roberts, and he shot her three times. The young woman, Alejandra, survived the shooting. Less than a year later, she met Officer Roberts and they have stayed in touch ever since.

ICAT Module 5 includes footage of the incident from Officer Roberts’s body-worn camera, interspersed with interviews with both Officer Roberts and Alejandra. It is fascinating – and instructive – to hear what was going through each of their minds as the incident was unfolding. Here is some of what Alejandra has said:

*Before I approached the situation, I was thinking, “How can I present myself as enough of a threat to him to get what I wanted?” When he pointed that gun at me, I kind of finalized my decision to go forth with it... I was trying to provoke him. But when he pointed the gun at me, I thought, “Okay, me provoking him is working, and I’m going to get what I want. I just have to be a little more defiant towards him.”*

Alejandra’s comments demonstrate how suicide-by-cop encounters pose very different challenges from other use-of-force situations, and they reinforce the importance of providing officers with training specifically geared toward handling these incidents. For example, this case study illustrates how tactical decisions, such as pointing a gun at a person with a knife (instead of keeping it in a “low ready” position, for example) can make a person in crisis even more anxious and lead them to run toward the officer in the hope of having their suicide attempt succeed. This insight, which is supported by research by Dr. John Nicolette, an expert on suicide by cop, could help prevent a shooting if an officer is able to identify the subject as suicidal and knows how to adjust their communication and tactics accordingly. Module 5 is designed to provide officers with the tools they need to better deal with these very difficult encounters.



LEFT, ABOVE: Officer Timothy Roberts.

LEFT, BELOW: Alejandra.

ABOVE: Oxnard, CA Police Officer Timothy Roberts and Alejandra with PERF’s ICAT training team at the national conference in San Diego in 2023.

## How to Preview the ICAT Curriculum

The lesson plan and PowerPoint presentation (including embedded videos) for ICAT Module 1 are available on the PERF website at [www.policeforum.org/icat](http://www.policeforum.org/icat). The resources give departments an indication of how ICAT is structured and presented. Agencies interested in reviewing Modules 2-7 should contact PERF Senior Research Associate Jason Cheney at [jcheney@policeforum.org](mailto:jcheney@policeforum.org) or 202-466-7820.

There is no charge for law enforcement agencies to adopt the ICAT curriculum. However, to help ensure a successful implementation, agencies are expected to send personnel to a PERF train-the-trainer session where they can learn about the curriculum in detail and receive guidance on how to effectively present the material.





Athens-Clarke County, Georgia Police Department.

Sheriff's Department is in the process of implementing ICAT.)

- **Campus police departments**, including on the Tennessee, Rutgers, Indiana, Cincinnati, Colorado-Boulder, MIT, and Harvard campuses.
- **Transit police agencies**, including Amtrak, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and Metro Transit in Minnesota.

- **New Jersey State Police.**

- **Delta Police Department** in British Columbia.

Case studies of ICAT implementation in four agencies – Alliance, NE Police Department; Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office; Monterey, CA Police Department; and Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office – can be found on page 38.

## New Jersey Adopts ICAT Statewide

In 2020, then-New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal dramatically overhauled the state's policy and training on use of force, including mandating that all sworn law enforcement officers complete ICAT. As head of the Department of Law and Public Safety, the Attorney General has broad oversight of the state's legal and law enforcement matters. That includes issuing directives to the more than 500 municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies in New Jersey.

The first step was a December 2020 directive revising New Jersey's use-of-force policy and procedures.<sup>7</sup> Developed in conjunction with police executives and union leaders, the policy is based on seven core principles that align closely with PERF's *Guiding Principles on Use of Force* and the model policy of the **Camden County Police Department**.

7. See [www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/agguide/directives/ag-Directive-2020-13\\_Use\\_of\\_Force\\_Procedures.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/agguide/directives/ag-Directive-2020-13_Use_of_Force_Procedures.pdf).



“

We are committed to making New Jersey a national leader in policing reform, and these actions deliver on that promise. We are building on the important work already underway in the state’s best police departments and establishing a new standard of excellence across the Garden State. These changes are about more than just reducing unnecessary use of force by law enforcement. We are also restoring the public’s trust in the work we do—which, in the long run, makes law enforcement more effective and everyone safer.

— **Gurbir Grewal**  
**Former Attorney General**  
**State of New Jersey**

Six months later, in June 2021, the Attorney General issued a second directive updating use-of-force training requirements.<sup>8</sup> This directive required all New Jersey law enforcement officers to complete ICAT training by April 2022. In addition, officers are required to complete eight online training modules and the ABLE (Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement) course.<sup>9</sup>

“One thing we did in New Jersey was ensure our use-of-force policy and training were aligned,” said Chief Kevin Lutz of the **Rutgers University-Camden Police Department**. “By issuing the new policy first, we gave it some time to percolate and become well known among officers. Agencies were then ready to implement ICAT to support the new policy.”

To help ensure consistency and quality in ICAT instruction, the Attorney General’s Office directed each county prosecutor’s office to identify a training coordinator who oversaw delivery of the training in their county. Agency trainers attended ICAT train-the-trainer sessions which were held centrally at the Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick. Chief Lutz, who helped to lead ICAT implementation in the Camden County Police Department and is a longtime ICAT instructor, was chosen to manage the statewide train-the-trainer effort, assisted by other experienced trainers. To demonstrate his office’s commitment to ICAT, Attorney General Grewal personally attended some of the training.

All agency trainers completed a 12-hour course that included classroom instruction, training tips, and participation in scenario-based exercises. There were approximately 40 trainers per class. These trainers were then tasked with bringing the ICAT curriculum – lectures, video case studies, and scenarios – back to their agencies.

Although there has been a change in leadership at the Attorney General’s Office, Chief Lutz said current Attorney General Matthew Platkin strongly supports the reforms put in place by his predecessor. Researchers led by Dr. Gabrielle Isaza of the National Policing Institute are looking to study the impact of ICAT training in New Jersey.

For agencies implementing ICAT, Chief Lutz recommends a top-down approach. Chiefs and other command personnel should get the training first, followed by supervisors and then officers. That way, management and supervisory personnel develop buy-in, and they know first-hand what is expected of their officers and how they are being trained.

8. See [www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/agguide/directives/ag-directive-2021-7\\_Revising-Law-Enforcement-Training-Requirements-for-2021.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/agguide/directives/ag-directive-2021-7_Revising-Law-Enforcement-Training-Requirements-for-2021.pdf).

9. For more information about ABLE, see <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/cics/able/>.



# What the Research Says about ICAT

**While de-escalation training for police officers** has become increasingly popular, until recently there has been a lack of quality research on whether the training works. A 2019 multi-disciplinary review looked at 64 de-escalation training evaluations covering professions such as nursing and psychiatry. However, the researchers were unable to locate any evaluations of de-escalation training in policing or criminal justice.<sup>10</sup>

That lack of research inspired a team led by Dr. Robin Engel of the University of Cincinnati to undertake a rigorous evaluation of ICAT training in the Louisville, KY Metro Police Department (LMPD). Using a randomized controlled trial – the gold standard of evaluation research – the team set out to test whether ICAT training impacted not only officers’ perceptions and attitudes but, importantly, their behaviors as well.

Between February and November 2019, the LMPD trained 1,042 officers in ICAT. Officers were trained together with other members of their patrol divisions, and the nine divisions were divided into three training groups or strata. This allowed researchers to measure

data from the test group (officers who had completed ICAT training) against a control group (officers who had not yet gone through the training). The research design included both pre- and post-training surveys of officers, a separate survey of supervisors, and analysis of use-of-force data.

**In their final report, the researchers concluded that ICAT had a measurable impact on use of force in the LMPD.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, ICAT was associated with:**

- **A 28.1% reduction in use-of-force incidents;**
- **A 26.3% reduction in citizen injuries; and**
- **A 36.0% reduction in officer injuries.**

The reduction in officer injuries is especially noteworthy. A common criticism of de-escalation policies in general, and ICAT training specifically, has been that they will result in more officers getting injured or even killed by suspects wielding knives or other weapons. The research in Louisville found just the opposite; officer injuries dropped sharply after ICAT training.<sup>12</sup>

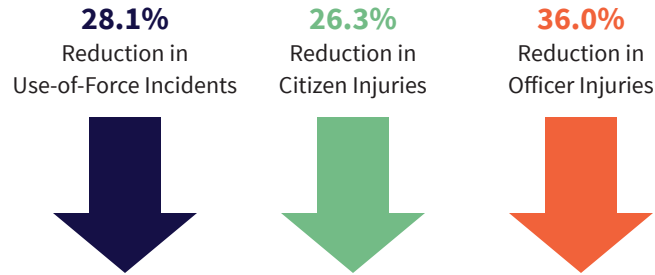
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10. Engel, Robin et al. *Does de-escalation training work?* Criminology & Public Policy, 2019.

11. Engel, Robin et al. *Examining the Impact of Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) De-escalation Training for the Louisville Metro Police Department: Initial Findings*. International Association of Chiefs of Police-University of Cincinnati Center for Police Research and Policy, 2020. [www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Center/LMPD\\_ICAT%20Evaluation%20Initial%20Findings%20Report\\_FINAL%2009212020.pdf](http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Center/LMPD_ICAT%20Evaluation%20Initial%20Findings%20Report_FINAL%2009212020.pdf).

12. The ICAT evaluation in Louisville was designed to study the impact of the training on overall use-of-force incidents and injuries to officers and citizens. The researchers did not have data to examine if the uses of force that did take place were “excessive.” They analyzed only reported counts of force by type and found that the number of force incidents declined significantly after officers took the training.

## Impact of ICAT De-escalation Training in Louisville, KY



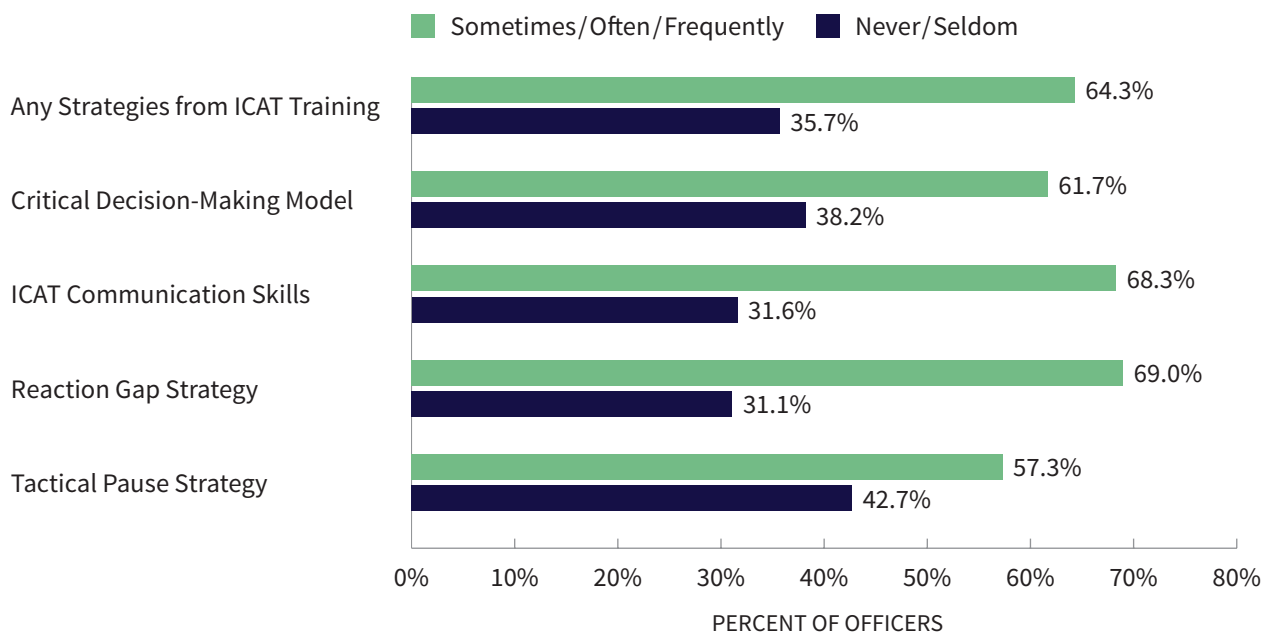
Sergeant Justin Witt was instrumental in rolling out ICAT training in the Louisville Metro Police Department and in facilitating the groundbreaking study of the training.

The study also found generally positive results on officers' perceptions and attitudes:

- 80% reported positive perceptions of and receptivity to the ICAT training.
- The majority (>60-70%) self-reported use of the de-escalation tactics they learned in ICAT.
- There were positive changes in officers' attitudes toward interactions with the public, persons in crisis, and use of force in general.

The researchers did find some areas for improvement. For example, there seemed to be some training decay over time; 40% of officers reported the need for refresher training. In addition, there was low participation in supervisory activities to reinforce training. First-line supervisors play a critical role in the implementation of ICAT, and the research shows that agencies need to ensure that their supervisors receive the training and are supporting their officers in implementing it in the field.

## Follow-Up Survey Found Most LMPD Officers Self-Reported Using ICAT Skills



Based on this finding, PERF adjusted the ICAT curriculum to reinforce the key role that first-line supervisors play in helping officers improve their decision making and better manage critical incidents. Each ICAT module now includes a set of “Leadership Snapshots” – tips and techniques for sergeants and other supervisors to use in the field and during discussions with their officers. (For more information about the role of first-line supervisors in ICAT, see page 34)

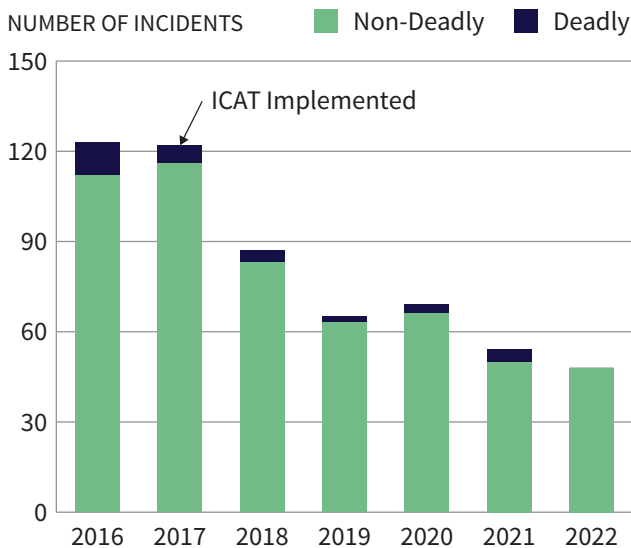
In addition to this formal research, several agencies that implemented ICAT have reported positive results in their communities:

- In the **Volusia County, FL Sheriff’s Office**, the number of use-of-force incidents has declined over the past several years, as the agency implemented ICAT in 2017 and then stood up its own training academy four years later. Between 2016 and 2022, total use-of-force incidents involving VCSO deputies dropped by nearly two-thirds, even as the number of calls for service remained fairly steady. Deadly force incidents declined to 0 in 2022.

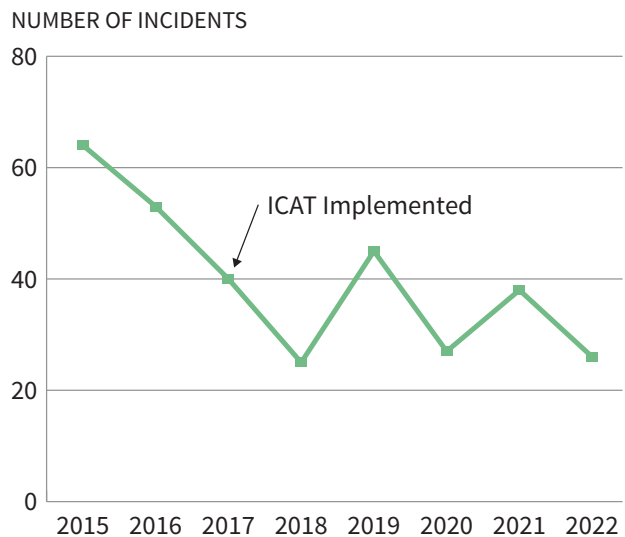
- In the **Baltimore Police Department**, an early adopter of ICAT, total use-of-force incidents declined nearly 55% between 2018 and 2021, according to the Baltimore Consent Decree Monitoring Team.<sup>13</sup> While the number of Level 3 (most serious) use-of-force incidents remained fairly constant, the less serious Level 1 and Level 2 incidents have fallen sharply. For example, there were 77 electronic control weapon (ECW) deployments in 2018, but only 17 in 2021. Instances where officers pointed a firearm (down 55%) or pointed or “arced” an ECW (down 62%) also fell dramatically.

- In the **Burlington, NC Police Department**, use-of-force incidents declined in recent years, from 64 in 2015 to 26 in 2022. The department first implemented ICAT in early 2017. When it experienced a jump in use-of-force incidents in 2019, it put the entire department through ICAT retraining, and incidents decreased again.

### Use-of-Force Incidents Volusia County, FL Sheriff’s Office



### Use-of-Force Incidents Burlington, NC Police Department



13. *Compliance Review and Outcome Assessment Regarding Use of Force*. Baltimore Consent Decree Monitoring Team, 2022. [static1.squarespace.com/static/59db8644e45a7c08738ca2f1/t/63a32a64ca07762bafec2a18/1671637605442/](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59db8644e45a7c08738ca2f1/t/63a32a64ca07762bafec2a18/1671637605442/).

# Making ICAT Work: Key Implementation Issues, Challenges, and Innovations

**Now that ICAT has been in the field for** several years and been implemented by so many agencies, there is a healthy – and growing – body of knowledge and experience on how to get the most out of the training. A key purpose of the January 2023 ICAT National Conference in San Diego was to bring together a variety of agencies from across the United States to share their experiences and insights.

**One critical lesson ICAT agencies have learned is the importance of up-front planning and careful, thorough execution. Implementing ICAT requires a considerable investment of time and resources. Experience shows that to get the training right, agencies cannot approach implementation in a piecemeal fashion. Some agencies have attempted to present ICAT one module at a time, spread out over several weeks. Others have tried delivering the training online. Neither of these approaches proved successful. To be effective, ICAT needs to be presented as an in-person class lasting a minimum of 12 continuous hours.**

The conference in San Diego revealed two other critical issues that agencies face when adopting ICAT:

**1. How to roll out the training.** How do agencies prioritize who gets the training first? Whom do they select as trainers? How do agencies set up scenario-based

exercises, and how do they know if the exercises are effective? How does ICAT fit into the academy curriculum for new recruits? And how do agencies remain true to the overall structure and goals of ICAT?

**2. How to sustain ICAT after initial adoption.** Do officers need a training “booster?” And if so, what does that training look like? How do agencies incorporate ICAT principles and concepts into other ongoing training? For example, how can decision making and other ICAT principles be included in the regular firearms qualification that officers must complete?

This section examines a range of key implementation issues and offers the experiences and insights of agencies that have already addressed them. For many of the issues, there may not be a single “right” answer or definitive way to do things. That is the beauty of the growing ICAT community: agencies can learn from one another and make implementation decisions that are right for them, while maintaining fidelity to the ICAT curriculum.

## Align Agency Culture, Policy, and Operations with ICAT

ICAT cannot be implemented in a vacuum. It operates within the culture of an agency. To be successful, ICAT must be in alignment with an agency's culture, policies, and operations, including existing training.

**Culture.** The overall culture of the agency must reinforce a sincere commitment to the underlying principles of ICAT – the sanctity of life, de-escalation, patience, and critical decision making, to name a few. If an agency's culture is solely rooted in a “warrior-like” approach to policing or one that emphasizes speed in resolving every matter, then ICAT is unlikely to take hold and succeed.

**Implementation Tip:** One concrete way agencies can demonstrate the alignment of agency culture and ICAT is through their awards programs. Many ICAT agencies have created awards to recognize successful de-escalation efforts and put them on par with more traditional awards for heroism and bravery. For example, the **Burlington, NC Police Department** presents its lifesaving awards in a public celebration, in front of the recipients' peers. This helps to send the message that the department is committed to the principles of ICAT and supports those who follow the training.

**Policies.** An agency's use-of-force policy may follow a traditional (staircase model) use-of-force continuum that automatically escalates the response when a subject's behavior escalates. But ICAT trains on a different approach – using the Critical Decision-Making Model (CDM) to step back, buy time, and develop a Plan B. In this situation, officers will be confused about what is expected of them, and the training may be counterproductive. Agencies need to ensure they are not sending mixed messages with their use-of-force policy and training.



ICAT training in the Harris County, Texas Sheriff's Office kicks off with a video message from Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, emphasizing how ICAT fits in with the agency's culture and operations.

When New Jersey began to implement ICAT statewide, the first step was to update the state's use-of-force policy based on seven core principles that align with ICAT. Only after the policy had been in place for several months did the state begin its ICAT training. This helped to ensure that officers knew what the policy was (and, therefore, knew what was expected of them), and it helped them understand how ICAT fit with the new policy. (See page 18 for more details on New Jersey's state-wide implementation.)

Aligning agency policy with ICAT does not necessarily mean having to rewrite entire policies. The **Monterey, CA Police Department** took its existing use-of-force policy, which was developed by Lexipol, and updated it to reflect the key elements of ICAT, including by adding a graphic of Monterey's version of the Critical Decision-Making Model.

**Operations.** Finally, ICAT should align with other parts of the agency's operations, especially training. ICAT must complement, not contradict, other training courses an agency offers. Ideally, ICAT principles and strategies – especially the CDM – will be incorporated into other training classes, in areas such as fire-arms, pursuits, domestic violence and others.

In addition, agencies need to ensure their use-of-force investigators and internal affairs personnel are intimately familiar with how officers are being trained in ICAT. This information will help them make informed decisions when use-of-force encounters occur.

**Implementation Tip:** When it was rolling out ICAT, the **Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office** included personnel from Internal Affairs and other specialized units in the original train-the-trainer sessions. It was unlikely that the IAD members would serve as ICAT instructors, but the agency thought they should thoroughly understand the curriculum and see how deputies were being trained in use of force moving forward.



PERF's lead ICAT instructor Dan Alioto (RIGHT), a retired captain from Maryland, along with Bill Murray, a retired lieutenant from New Jersey.

## Select the Right Instructors

One of the most consequential decisions agencies make when implementing ICAT is identifying the right instructors. Experience shows that quality and consistency among the instructors result in quality and consistency in the delivery of the training. This is especially important with ICAT, which involves the presentation of new concepts and approaches.

Experienced ICAT agencies have identified several characteristics that are essential in their ICAT trainers:

- **“Credible messengers.”** ICAT trainers should be highly respected by their peers and have the credibility to deliver the training, which will be new and different to many officers. Being viewed as having recent and relevant experience on the street is

often essential. In the **Riverside, CA Police Department**, the selected ICAT trainers included two members of the SWAT team and the president of the Police Officers Association.

- **Interest.** Instructors have to want the assignment. Agencies should avoid anyone who is “voluntold” to be an ICAT instructor. Some agencies use an interview process that includes a test classroom assignment.
- **Buy-in.** Trainers have to believe in the ICAT curriculum and its underlying principles.
- **Effective presenters.** Like all trainers, ICAT instructors need to be comfortable in front of the classroom and effective in presenting the curriculum, spurring discussion, and deflecting any negative comments.

“What I’m looking for more than anything are believers. People who are enthusiastic, forward-thinking, progressive ... people who are willing to think about different ways to do things and really want to do them. Having people who are credible messengers is very valuable.”

— **Chief John Mueller**  
**Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NY)**





Other experienced ICAT trainers include Raphael Thornton (LEFT), a retired sergeant from the Camden County, New Jersey Police Department, and Lt. Shelly Katkowski, of the Burlington, North Carolina Police Department. They now help PERF with train-the-trainer sessions across the country.

Some agencies have found they need to go outside their existing training staff to find the right instructors to present ICAT. Here is how some agencies have gone about selecting their ICAT trainers:

- The **Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office** started by using its academy training staff to serve as ICAT instructors, but soon learned that several did not buy into the program. So the VCSO pivoted and identified five "natural leaders" in the agency and sent them to an ICAT train-the-trainer session. Even before formal training started, these five leaders went out into the field to "do ICAT" and demonstrate that the concepts and strategies work. "Training didn't start in the classroom; it started on the street," explained Captain Brian Bosco, who serves as Training Commander for the VCSO.
- The **Minneapolis Police Department** started with a pool of 22 potential trainers who had been involved with another training project. For ICAT, the agency selected five instructors deemed to be the "best of the best." The group brought a range of experiences and perspectives, including a SWAT officer and a union representative. The police department assigned the trainers to deliver the parts of the ICAT curriculum they had the most experience with. For example, the modules on Crisis Recognition and Tactical Communications were presented by a trained hostage negotiator.
- As it was about to roll out ICAT, leaders of the **Cambridge, MA Police Department** reached out to street officers and asked them, "Who are the officers you turn to when a first-line supervisor is not available?" Based on those responses, the agency selected its ICAT trainers, all of whom had recent field experience.
- In the **Riverside, CA Police Department**, ICAT trainers start out as role players in scenario-based exercises. Once they have demonstrated proficiency with ICAT concepts in that role, they can move into the classroom, teaching one module at a time at first.

## Rolling Out the Training: Who Goes First?

When ICAT was first released, most of the early adopters focused initially on training their patrol officers. This approach seemed to make sense: ICAT is geared toward front-line personnel, so why not immerse them in the training first?

Over time, however, many agencies have come to recognize the benefit of a more top-down approach to rolling out ICAT. The idea is that for patrol officers to be successful in using ICAT on the street, they need understanding and support from their first-line supervisors, field training officers, mid-level managers, and especially the agency's Command staff. Therefore, it is essential that these supervisory and management officials know how officers are being trained and what, precisely, is expected of them.

Here are a few examples of how agencies have rolled out ICAT to their current personnel:

- **Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office.** The HCSO delivered a four-hour ICAT overview to all Command staff; they sat through classroom lectures and observed (but did not directly participate in) the scenario-based exercises. Next, the agency put all lieutenants and sergeants through the training, followed by the Field Training Deputies. Only then did the HCSO train their patrol deputies. It took the agency approximately 18 months to train all these groups.
- **Louisville, KY Metro Police Department.** Similarly, the LMPD sent its upper Command through ICAT first. The message to commanders was, "You need to understand what our patrol officers are being trained in." At the same time, putting Command staff through the training first sent a powerful message to front-line officers that the LMPD was serious about ICAT.

- The **Monterey, CA Police Department** hoped to train its sergeants and Field Training Officers first, but in an agency of its size (53 sworn personnel), scheduling proved challenging. Instead, the department decided to train officers and sergeants together as teams, which provided valuable lessons in how officers and supervisors need to work together.

Regardless of whether an agency chooses to train from the top down or the bottom up, it is critical that the agency's chief executive – chief, sheriff, director, etc. – clearly and publicly expresses their support for ICAT and lays out their expectations of agency members up front. **Module 1 of the ICAT curriculum recommends that the chief or sheriff personally stop by the training to deliver this message or, in the case of larger agencies, film a video that can be shown at the beginning of the training.** PERF has many examples of effective video messages from chiefs or sheriffs that can be shared with other agencies.

**Implementation Tip:** The **Yonkers, NY Police Department** believes strongly in training as teams. So when it implemented ICAT, the agency opted to train supervisors, patrol officers, and even dispatchers who normally worked together in the same precinct and on the same shift. The department secured a state grant to cover the costs of providing ICAT training as an overtime assignment.



## ICAT in the Academy

Another challenge agencies face is how best to deliver ICAT training to their new recruits. Agencies that operate their own training academies have the luxury of deciding how – and when – to introduce ICAT in their academy curriculum. Agencies that use regional or statewide academies to train their recruits generally have to rely on their post-academy training to introduce ICAT.

Among agencies with their own academies, there are different approaches to presenting ICAT to new recruits:

- The **Louisville, KY Metro Police Department** presents ICAT principles early in its academy and weaves them throughout the recruit curriculum. However, students don't participate in ICAT scenario-based exercises until after they've completed training on less-lethal devices and other de-escalation concepts.
- The **Baltimore Police Department** teaches the Critical Decision-Making Model at the beginning of its academy and reinforces decision making throughout the curriculum.
- In the **Cambridge, MA Police Department**, recruits must complete a number of courses on fundamentals – the law, defensive tactics, etc. – before going through the full day-and-a-half ICAT curriculum. The theory

is that early in their academy experience, recruits may not know enough about the fundamentals of police work to appreciate and absorb ICAT.

- In the **Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office**, ICAT is taught during the first week of the academy, including putting recruits through scenario-based exercises. Then, ICAT principles, especially the Critical Decision-Making Model, are reinforced throughout the recruit curriculum.

Agencies that rely on outside academies for recruit training generally have to present ICAT during their post-academy training. The **Burlington, NC Police Department** runs a six-week post-academy training during which ICAT is presented as both a tactical course and



Louisville Metro Police Department recruits.

## What about Lateral Hires?

Lateral hires bring a level of training and experience to an agency, but their backgrounds – and the cultures in which they previously operated – are likely different from the experiences in your agency. That is why most ICAT agencies choose to put their lateral hires through the full ICAT curriculum. This is especially important if officers are moving from smaller, less urban agencies to big-city departments that have different challenges and different tools to address them. Some agencies make a point of trying to take advantage of the lateral hires' knowledge and experience during classroom discussions of ICAT video case studies and in scenario-based training.

## Integrating ICAT with Field Training

For new officers coming out of academy training, it is important for agencies to consider how to integrate ICAT with their field training experience. Some agencies are getting an early start on this challenge.

- The **Cambridge, MA Police Department** brings its Field Training Officers into the academy for the last two weeks of instruction. The FTOs are immersed in the recruits' scenario-based training, including ICAT. This gives the FTOs a chance to experience what the recruits are learning and to assess their strengths and weaknesses.
- Similarly, the **Burlington, NC Police Department** brings its FTOs into the post-academy training that recruits go through once they complete their initial instruction at the regional training center. FTOs are teamed up with the recruits they will be mentoring, and the pair go through ICAT scenarios together. This allows the FTOs to see what the recruits are learning, and it gives them the opportunity to work together before they hit the streets.
- In the **Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office**, many Deputy Training Officers (DTOs) saw themselves only as evaluators, not coaches. As the VCSO embraced ICAT, it wanted DTOs to take ownership of the training and adopt a new philosophy. Instead of thinking "How many recruits can I fail?," they are now focused on "I'm here to teach my backup." The agency put the DTOs through a role player class and made them part-time ICAT instructors, role players, and evaluators. Now, a DTO might spend a full day teaching ICAT; on other days, the DTO might come in off the street, take part in a few scenarios, and go back to the road. This approach not only generated buy-in among the DTOs; it also helped to change their mindsets to emphasize instruction, coaching, and working toward the success of their recruits.

as a reflection of the agency's culture. Other agencies work to inject ICAT into their outside academies. For example, the **Burlington, VT Police Department** (one of the initial pilot sites for ICAT) sends agency trainers to the state training academy to teach ICAT not only to their own recruits but also recruits from other departments.

### Conducting Effective Scenarios

Scenario-based training exercises are at the heart of the ICAT curriculum. Scenarios are where officers put into action the concepts and principles they learned in the classroom. It is essential that agencies implementing ICAT devote the time and resources needed to effectively carry out this part of the training.

Experienced ICAT agencies have identified several issues that departments need to consider in conducting effective scenarios:

- **Provide enough time.** The basic ICAT curriculum sets aside a minimum of four hours for conducting scenarios. Depending on how many students are in a class and how many scenarios each student will go through, agencies may need to devote additional time to scenarios. The key point is not to rush officers through the scenarios. ICAT is built on the principles of slowing situations down and giving officers time to resolve them without having to use force, if possible. It is important to model that behavior in the ICAT scenarios and give officers time to try out and apply their skills and not feel compelled to bring the situation to a rapid conclusion. Agencies will undermine the value of the scenario-based



Broomfield, Colorado Police Department.

training if they put artificial time constraints on how long scenarios can last.

- **Use appropriate settings.** If possible, agencies should try to conduct scenarios in settings that officers are likely to encounter in the field, providing them with plenty of room for the situations to play out. Agencies that have tactical villages in their training academies are at an advantage, but other agencies can get creative with where they conduct their scenarios by using community resources that may be available. Specialized police departments such as campus or transit agencies should set up their scenarios in settings unique to their environs. The new PERF National ICAT Training Center in Decatur, IL provides more than a dozen scenario-based training venues for both police and corrections (see page 46).
- **Present realistic and winnable situations.** While the ICAT curriculum has a number of model scenarios for agencies to use, departments can also customize the scenarios to more closely match the conditions and challenges in their communities. Some agencies model their scenarios on actual incidents their officers encountered in the past. Regardless of the particulars of the scenarios, it is essential that they provide

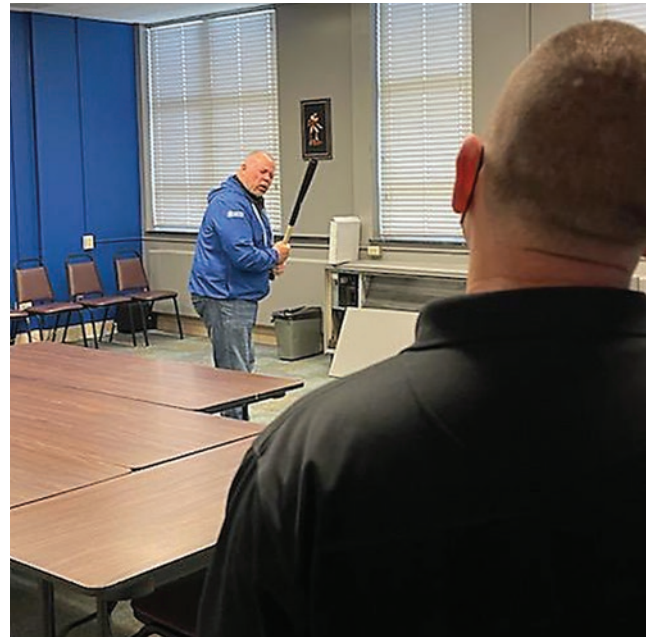
opportunities for officers to practice their skills, learn, and ultimately succeed. It is not helpful for scenarios to have unreasonable surprises or “gotcha” moments.

- **Mix things up.** Although it’s important for officers to be put in winnable situations, ICAT scenarios should not become too predictable. Officers should not think that “ICAT scenarios” are always low-stress encounters where the subject eventually surrenders (just as they shouldn’t think that “firearms scenarios” are always situations where officers fire their weapons). Agencies should mix up their scenarios, injecting appropriate levels of stress into their scenarios and helping officers use the Critical Decision-Making Model to work through situations.
- **Select the right role players.** In addition to picking the right classroom instructors, agencies need to pay close attention to whom they select as role players for their scenario-based training exercises. It is critical that role players understand the goals and cadence of the scenarios, be able to pay close attention to the actions of the officers, respond appropriately to what the officers say and do, and challenge the officers to achieve a successful outcome (without engaging in “gotcha” moments). Role players must also be able to get into and remain in their roles.

Given these requirements, most agencies opt to use sworn police officers as their role players. They have the knowledge and experience to know how a subject on the street is likely to respond to an officer’s actions or words, escalating or de-escalating their actions based on what the student does. Officers who serve as role players can also provide important insights when debriefing the scenarios. Oftentimes, agencies discover they have officers who are “naturals” at the role, including some who may have formal training or experience in acting.

Other agencies, such as the **Aurora, CO Police Department**, hire trained actors (or even theatre students from local colleges or universities) to serve as role players. While these people may not have policing experience, they can bring more robust and realistic acting skills, and may be able to challenge students in the way fellow officers cannot.

**Implementation Tip:** In small or mid-sized agencies, it is likely that any officers selected to be role players already know and are friendly with the officers going through the scenarios. These close relationships can make it difficult for the role players to stay in their roles and for the students to get the most out of the scenarios. To overcome this challenge, agencies in a region can share their personnel, sending officers to serve as role players in neighboring departments where the officers may not personally know the role players.



Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

## Stop-and-Discuss or Let-it-Go? 2 Approaches to Debriefing Scenarios

There are two basic ways to conduct debriefs and promote learning during scenario-based training:

1. **Stop-and-Discuss.** In this approach, facilitators stop the action at critical junctures of the scenario and discuss the situation with the student. This can occur when the student makes a questionable decision or takes a debatable (or even counterproductive) action. Or the scenario can be stopped when the student does something outstanding or highly productive. In either case, stopping the action provides an opportunity to probe the student's thought process and decision making in the moment, while it is still fresh in their minds.
2. **Let-It-Go.** This approach allows the entire scenario to play out before the facilitators conduct the debrief. The benefit of this method is that it more closely resembles the situations that officers will face on the street and gives the students an opportunity to "think on their feet" as they try to work through the scenario.

ICAT agencies report using both approaches; there does not appear to be a clear preference for one method over the other. Agencies might want to test both approaches and see which one works best for them.

**Implementation Tip:** The **Camden County, NJ Police Department** has used both approaches based on the students participating in ICAT scenarios. The department tends to use *Stop-and-Discuss* for its recruit officers. This helps to prevent "learning scars" if a recruit gets too far off track and may not be able to easily recover. CCPD trainers keep the stops short – usually around 30 seconds – and facilitators don't provide students with the "answers." Rather, it's more of a quick coaching session. For experienced officers, the department generally lets students complete the entire scenario before debriefing. Experienced officers may be less prone to the types of mistakes that need immediate intervention, and this approach allows them to practice the cadence of a more realistic encounter.

- **Thoroughly and honestly debrief.** After a scenario has concluded, it is important for instructors to conduct an honest, thorough, and helpful debrief with the student. Role players can also provide valuable insights during the debrief. Many agencies use the Critical Decision-Making Model (see page 12) to structure their debriefs. The CDM helps officers explain their actions and decisions at various points in the scenario, and using the CDM in scenarios gets officers accustomed to using the tool in the field. If multiple officers are involved in a scenario, let each officer take one CDM step and explain their actions. Regardless of how debriefs are structured, instructors should provide honest and constructive feedback; this should never be a punitive process.



Santa Cruz County, California Sheriff's Office.

## Evaluating Scenarios: Four Key Questions to Ask

Scenario-based exercises are an essential element of ICAT. But in conducting their debriefs, how can training facilitators evaluate just how well the student did?

In assessing student performance during scenario-based training, agencies should consider asking four key questions:

1. **Did the officers keep themselves in a winnable tactical position throughout the scenario?** Facilitators look at issues such as clearly establishing roles and responsibilities among responding officers, maintaining a reactionary gap, and keeping options open as the incident progresses.
2. **Did the officers use effective communications?** Here, facilitators look for effective introductions, active listening, providing options, and using empathy as a tactic.
3. **Were the officers able to influence behavior? And if so, how?** Was behavior change influenced by factors such as communications, providing options, threatening force, etc.?
4. **Was there a successful outcome? Why, or why not?** Were the classroom training benchmarks met? Were there missed opportunities? How did the officer view the outcome?

Although achieving a successful outcome is always the goal, officers can learn a lot from answering all four of these questions following a scenario-based exercise.

## What Happens to Students Not Going through Scenarios?

ICAT agencies can expect to spend a minimum of four hours – and up to eight hours, in some cases – on scenario-based training. Assuming each scenario includes one to three students at a time, the question arises: “What do you do with the other officers who aren’t engaged in a scenario at the moment?”

It is recommended that agencies **not permit** officers to watch fellow students go through the scenarios, especially if they haven’t had their turn yet. (Some agencies allow officers who have already completed a scenario to watch their colleagues complete the scenario; they can learn from how their peers handled the encounter.)

To make the time productive for non-participating officers, some agencies, such as the **Monterey, CA Police Department**, put officers into discussion groups with instructors serving as moderators. They can further analyze the scenario they’ve just been through or review additional video case studies. If the agency has the resources, it can also set up multiple scenarios that officers go through, thus minimizing the time they are not actively engaged in this part of the ICAT training.

### Implementation Fidelity: Remaining True to the ICAT Curriculum

Both experience and research show that it is critically important for agencies implementing ICAT to follow the curriculum as developed. This is known as “implementation fidelity.”

In a recent white paper she prepared for PERF, Dr. Gabrielle Isaza of the National Policing Institute concluded that following the ICAT training model as designed increases the likelihood of program success. “When implemented as intended, ICAT is more likely to result in improvements in your agency, such as increasing officer skills to safely resolve critical incidents, reducing the need for deadly force, and promoting the sanctity of all human life,” she concluded.

Here are some of the essential ICAT training elements that need to be followed:

- **Length of training.** Agencies should devote a minimum of 12 hours to ICAT training over consecutive days: 8 hours in the classroom and at least 4 hours for scenario-based

exercises. Some agencies, such as the **Harris County, TX Sheriff’s Office**, have found they need more time for scenarios, so they extended ICAT to a 16-hour course.

- **Class size.** In her research, Dr. Isaza noted that 45 students seems to be the maximum class size to be effective. Most agencies, especially small and mid-sized departments, will have smaller classes. Ideally, classes should have up to three ICAT instructors and up to three experienced role players for scenarios. “These metrics allow for valuable classroom discussion and skill practice while maintaining the cadence of the course,” Dr. Isaza concluded.
- **Training elements.** ICAT is presented in seven modules (see page 10) and includes a combination of classroom lectures, video case studies and discussions, and scenario-based exercises. It is important that agencies present all three training elements in the order outlined in the training curriculum, and that instructors not skip or ignore material or videos that they don’t like or agree with (as happened in one large police department).

- **Customization ... within reason.** Because local context and conditions are important, the implementation of ICAT may need some level of customization in certain agencies. For example, agencies may want to customize scenarios to match their operating environment (urban/suburban/rural, university campus, transit system, etc.) and the tools available to officers (not all agencies equip personnel with electronic control weapons, shields, or other less-lethal tools). However, it is important that the essential elements of the training remain.

**Implementation Tip:** Some agencies have made minor adjustments to their presentation of Module 3: Crisis Recognition. For example, the **Riverside, CA Police Department** brought in county mental health practitioners to add more depth and local context to the discussion of persons in crisis.

## The Role of First-Line Supervisors

As more agencies implement ICAT, they have come to recognize the critical role that sergeants and other first-line supervisors play in the successful response to critical incidents. To help sergeants manage these types of incidents, PERF developed

a *Critical Response Toolkit for First-Line Supervisors*.<sup>14</sup> The toolkit provides guidance and resources to help first-line supervisors prepare for a critical incident, manage the situation, and then effectively debrief and learn from the encounter.

To ensure first-line supervisors are up to speed on how their officers are being trained in ICAT, many agencies either carve out ICAT training time for sergeants or have sergeants go through the training with their officers. For example, the **Burlington, NC Police Department** includes a four-hour ICAT block in its training for new sergeants. The class focuses on how to manage critical incidents by securing the people and other resources that are needed, putting officers in winnable situations, and coaching them to success.

The **Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office** follows a similar approach. Its ICAT training for patrol supervisors doesn't focus on directly handling the person in crisis. Rather, it emphasizes making sure deputies get the resources they need and enabling them to do their jobs. The training encourages supervisors to intervene only if deputies are doing something counterproductive or dangerous.



Fargo, North Dakota Police Department.

14. See [www.policeforum.org/critical-response-toolkit-for-first-line-supervisors](http://www.policeforum.org/critical-response-toolkit-for-first-line-supervisors).

## Leadership Snapshots: A New ICAT Feature

To reinforce the key role that first-line supervisors play in successfully managing critical incidents, PERF has added a series of “Leadership Snapshots” to the ICAT curriculum. Each ICAT module includes tips and techniques for sergeants and other supervisors to practice in the field when their officers or deputies are responding to critical incidents.

For example, in Module 4: Tactical Communications, the Leadership Snapshot reminds supervisors to carefully monitor and, if necessary, manage the emotions of their officers, to provide officers with specific advice or directions (not “bumper sticker” slogans), to check in with officers after a stressful incident, and to celebrate successful outcomes.

### Leadership Snapshot

- Use the CDM as much as possible
  - After-action, debrief, report-writing, remedial, etc.
- Through assessing and reassessing must be ready and willing to Step Up and Step In; in-person or on the radio
- Let your trained officers work these calls for service and do not rush them
- Guard against contempt-of-cop

## ICAT “Booster Shots”: Providing Ongoing Training

Over the years, agencies that implemented ICAT have learned that officers need a refresher course at some point. This finding is backed up by research. The University of Cincinnati study of ICAT implementation in Louisville found that 40% of officers said they could benefit from follow-up instruction 4-6 months after their initial training (see page 21).

The key concepts and skills covered in ICAT are perishable if officers don’t get the opportunity to apply (or at least practice) them on a regular basis. Just as agencies require officers to regularly requalify with their service weapons, they should mandate that officers demonstrate proficiency with the skills learned during ICAT training at least once a year.

Agencies are taking various approaches to providing follow-up ICAT training. Some agencies are sending officers back into the classroom for more ICAT instruction.

- The **Louisville, KY Metro Police Department** created a four-hour block of ICAT follow-up training. This training does not repeat all of the ICAT modules, but rather focuses on particular issues or concepts that officers in Louisville could benefit from. Scenario-based exercises remain a key element of the follow-up training.
- When the **Burlington, NC Police Department** noticed an uptick in its use-of-force incidents in 2019, the agency decided to put all its officers back through the full ICAT course. The department also found that capturing, analyzing, and publishing use-of-force data helped to reveal training successes, shortcomings, and needs. Uses of force in Burlington declined in the years after the refresher course.
- The **Monterey, CA Police Department** cycles officers who have completed ICAT back through the training. Officers who are farthest out from their original instruction are put in classes with new officers. This approach not only provides veteran officers



with an ICAT refresher, but also allows new officers to learn from their more experienced colleagues.

Agencies are also working to integrate ICAT principles and tactics into their in-service training:

- The **Minneapolis Police Department** uses body-worn camera video from its own incidents to include in its in-service training. Recently, for example, officers responded to a woman high on drugs who suddenly picked up a kitchen knife and began slashing at another person. While use of lethal force likely would have been justified, officers assessed the situation and successfully deployed their electronic control weapons. This example is used to show the benefit of quickly “spinning” the Critical Decision-Making Model and developing a plan of action.
- Once a year, the **Burlington, NC Police Department** produces a video of an incident in which officers used ICAT to successfully defuse a critical incident and distributes the video to the entire agency. The videos use body-worn camera footage of the incident and are narrated by the officers involved,



Long Beach, California Police Department.

who talk about what they did well and what they might have done differently. In addition to reinforcing ICAT concepts and implementation, the videos are a way for the department to publicly celebrate successful outcomes.

- The **Volusia County, FL Sheriff’s Office** incorporates ICAT principles into the fire-arms training it conducts three times a year. In addition to measuring marksmanship, the VCSO tests officers on their tactical, communications, and de-escalation skills.

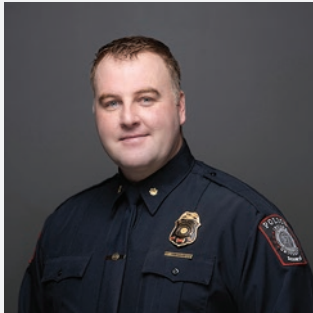
## Agencies Need to Stay Up to Date with ICAT

Many departments were early adopters of ICAT, meaning that it’s been several years since their officers completed the training. Since then, PERF has made significant upgrades to the curriculum, including the addition of new modules on suicide by cop and “stepping up and stepping in,” which covers officer intervention strategies. There are also several new video case studies, some of which are narrated by the officers who were involved.

Because many of their officers were taught ICAT from earlier versions of the curriculum, these agencies should retrain their experienced personnel using the newest version of the curriculum. Not only will this ensure that officers are being trained in the latest ICAT concepts and principles; it will also help standardize ICAT training across the agency. New recruits or recently trained officers will be on the same page as veteran officers who were trained in ICAT years before.

In addition, to keep officers’ ICAT skills fresh, PERF recommends that agencies conduct annual ICAT training using the latest curriculum.

## Reinforcing ICAT through Monday-Morning Quarterbacking



“ I reflect on when I played football in college. I couldn’t come in on Sunday and tell the coach, ‘I’m not watching the film from yesterday’s game.’ You’ve got to watch the film to get better. Policing is no different, so our department has the Monday-morning quarterbacking discussions that we have to have in order to improve. For us, it’s not an option. ”

— **Major Stephen Luce**  
**Director for Professional Standards and Education**  
**Indiana University Police Department**

The idea of “Monday-morning quarterbacking”—watching film from the last game to identify strengths and areas for improvement—has been a central element of professional and collegiate sports for years. In policing, however, officials have traditionally shied away from the practice, often because they didn’t want to be seen as second guessing the actions of other officers.

But as videos of police encounters with the public have become almost ubiquitous, some agencies are incorporating Monday-morning quarterbacking into their culture and training. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler has written extensively about the importance of police leaders watching and learning from videos from their own agencies and from others.<sup>15</sup> In early 2023, Wexler facilitated a series of Monday-morning quarterbacking sessions with departments across the country.<sup>16</sup>

The **Indiana University Police Department (IUPD)** in Bloomington, IN has developed a novel way to use Monday-morning quarterbacking to reinforce ICAT with its officers, first, through a custom app that supports the collection and analysis of use-of-force incident information and, second, the production of monthly videos to share the teachable moments with department members.

Most of the force-related incidents that IUPD officers are involved in are with persons not affiliated with the university and a large majority of these incidents occur on the fringe of the IUPD’s patrol jurisdiction. Through mutual aid with several other law enforcement agencies in the area, IUPD is often called to respond to incidents involving individuals experiencing a mental crisis not only on the campus environment but in the local community.

The IUPD first implemented ICAT in 2018. The department partnered with a faculty member in the Department of Criminal Justice at IU Bloomington to create its “CDM app.” Each use-of-force incident is captured by officers in the app and, using the Critical Decision-Making Model as a guide, the incident passes through a thorough review process. This process is independent of the involved officers’ supervisors. Next, the incident is brought before a monthly review panel that views the body-worn camera footage and dissects the incident for policy, operational, standards and training implications.

Following the review, the IUPD’s training staff create a video that recaps specific incidents and what can be learned from them. The involved officers are given the opportunity to provide narration and their perspective for the final video, which is presented in a podcast-like format and distributed throughout the department.

15. See, for example, the following editions of *PERF Trending*: [www.policeforum.org/trendingaugust29](http://www.policeforum.org/trendingaugust29) and [www.policeforum.org/trending4Feb23](http://www.policeforum.org/trending4Feb23).

16. See [www.policeforum.org/trending25mar23](http://www.policeforum.org/trending25mar23).

# ICAT in Action: Four Implementation Case Studies

**Since 2016, ICAT has been implemented** by law enforcement agencies across the country. ICAT users are a diverse group of police departments and sheriffs' offices of varying sizes with different implementation experiences.

Here are short case studies of four ICAT users.

## **Alliance, NE Police Department:**

*A Small Agency Makes Dramatic Changes, and Gives Officers a Chance to “Fail Forward”*

Alliance is a city of approximately 8,000 people located in the Great Plains region of western Nebraska. The city is the county seat of Box Butte County. The Alliance Police Department (APD) is authorized for 22 sworn officers, plus 12 telecommunications professionals in the Emergency Communications Center, which provides dispatch services for all police departments in the county and fire departments in four counties.

Philip Lukens became chief of the APD in December 2020 and immediately recognized the department had issues with use of force, particularly with TASER deployments. Although they weren't being tracked at the

time, the chief estimated his officers were averaging 40-50 TASER deployments a year.

## **First Step: Revamp Use-of-Force Policy**

His first step was to totally revamp the APD's use-of-force policy to emphasize de-escalation and minimize force whenever possible – in the words of the chief, “to do everything in our power to use our words before we deploy a tool.” For the first time, the policy prohibited officers from deploying a TASER for verbal non-compliance; it can be used only in response to active aggression.<sup>17</sup>

Police personnel were given the opportunity to comment on the draft policy before it was implemented, and six months later it was officially adopted. Chief Lukens said he wanted his officers to have time to get comfortable with the new policy and the opportunity to “fail forward” – that is, get experience trying to follow the policy even if there were missteps along the way.

## **Assigning “Skeptics” to Be ICAT Trainers**

Next, the APD sent two people – a sergeant and an officer – to an ICAT train-the-trainer session that PERF held in Colorado. In selecting the two trainers, the chief deliberately looked

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17. This policy is in line with the *Electronic Control Weapons Guidelines* that PERF published in 2011: [https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free\\_Online\\_Documents/Use\\_of\\_Force/electronic%20control%20weapon%20guidelines%202011.pdf](https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Use_of_Force/electronic%20control%20weapon%20guidelines%202011.pdf).

for skeptics within the agency – people who were inclined to say, “this isn’t new – we’re already doing this.” He said these two skeptics came back from the training session as believers, and they proceeded to train the rest of the department.

For the scenarios, the department relied on its VirTra simulator. Chief Lukens said that conducting scenarios with live actors would be preferable, but in a small agency like the APD, it is impractical to use existing personnel or try to hire actors. He said the simulator has more than 1,000 scenarios, so it is unlikely officers can memorize them or get the same scenario twice.

In addition to ICAT, the APD has implemented Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and ABLE (Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement). Chief Lukens feels that this combination of training is helping officers more effectively deal with verbal non-compliance through communication, as opposed to deploying a TASER or other tool as they often did in the past.

For new personnel, the APD puts recruits through a six-week “mini-skills” pre-academy before they enter the statewide law enforcement academy. In addition to covering APD policy and administrative matters, the pre-academy introduces recruits to the mission, vision, and values of the department, presents the basics of ICAT, and gives recruits a test on APD policy, including the new use-of-force policy.

### **Results: Fewer TASER Deployments, Reduced Officer Injuries**

The results of ICAT training in Alliance have been dramatic. After averaging 40-50 TASER deployments a year, the APD had two in all of 2022.



In addition, officer injuries are down because personnel are using their communications skills more and not getting into as many physical altercations. And the chief is recognizing effective de-escalation through departmental awards and other forms of recognition.

### **Advice for Smaller Departments**

For other small departments looking to implement ICAT, Chief Lukens has three pieces of advice:

1. Be dramatic in making changes. Officers should “feel the shock” of the changes in policies and training, and not get the impression that ICAT is simply the “latest fad” that the officers can wait out.
2. Get your policy in place and make sure it has been socialized before you start training. Give officers the opportunity to “fail forward” and learn from mistakes.
3. **Confront skeptics head on. Chief Lukens took a chance in identifying two initial skeptics to be the APD’s lead ICAT trainers, and it paid off. The department did lose a couple of officers who were not on board with the changes. And while that can hurt a small agency like the APD, Chief Lukens said that losing those officers was better in the long run.**

## **Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office:**

### *Embedding ICAT in Academy and In-Service Training*

Located on the Atlantic coast of Florida, Volusia County covers more than 1,400 square miles and is home to more than half a million people. Each year, the county welcomes millions of tourists to its beaches, state parks, and the Daytona International Speedway. With 450 sworn deputies, the Volusia County Sheriff's Office (VCSO) is the largest law enforcement agency in the county, which includes a dozen municipal police departments.

### **Identifying Informal Leaders to Head Up ICAT Training**

The VCSO was an early adopter of ICAT, beginning shortly after Mike Chitwood was elected sheriff in 2016. The agency started by getting its Command staff and middle managers on board through a customized ICAT class. Next, the VCSO focused on identifying informal leaders in the agency and making them the lead ICAT trainers. In general, these were hard-working, highly respected street personnel who presented ICAT not only in the classroom but also in the field, by modeling ICAT principles and approaches in real-world situations.

Initially, the VCSO tried to present the ICAT curriculum in just four hours, but soon realized that it required a full eight-hour presentation, plus scenarios. Where possible, the VCSO used video case studies from its own agency – good and bad – to support the

classroom lectures. And while the agency experimented with using its VirTra simulator for the scenario-based exercises, it found that officers could not effectively practice their positioning – getting distance and cover – with the simulator. So the agency shifted to using live role players for its scenarios.

### **Establishing an In-House Academy to Train Recruits**

The bigger challenge the VCSO faced was in training its new recruits – not just in the mechanics of ICAT but also in the philosophy and culture that Sheriff Chitwood was seeking to instill in the agency. At the time, VCSO recruits were being trained at an academy at a local college using a curriculum created by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for recruit officers throughout the state. As Sheriff Chitwood has said, "You have one chance to train somebody correctly – one chance. You have one chance to build the culture of your organization."

So the Sheriff asked the state if the VCSO could set up its own training academy, where recruits could be trained in the culture of the agency and the principles of ICAT from day one. The Volusia County Sheriff's Training Academy opened in June 2021, and its first class of 20 graduated in late November of that year.

ICAT is taught during the first week of the Academy, including putting recruits through scenario-based exercises. Then, ICAT principles, including the Critical Decision-Making Model, are reinforced throughout the recruit



“ For us, ICAT is not a class – eight hours and you're done. We insert ICAT throughout our training, and we mix things up. During firearms training, we have scenarios where you don't shoot. And there are some ICAT scenarios where students have to use force. ”

— **Captain Brian Bosco**  
**Training Commander**  
**Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office**

curriculum. The VCSO makes extensive use of scenario-based exercises for all its training topics; recruits are likely to complete a scenario just about every day of the academy.

### Recognizing Successful De-escalation and Decision Making

To reinforce ICAT, the VCSO created an ICAT refresher course, and it continues to emphasize ICAT in all its annual in-service training.

In addition, the agency expanded its awards program to recognize outstanding de-escalation and decision making in critical incidents, through its Lifesaving Award and Sheriffs Award. Looking to the future, the VCSO is working on a dedicated ICAT training program for supervisors and another one for dispatchers.

### Advice for Other Agencies

Captain Brian Bosco, VCSO's Training Commander, offers the following advice for agencies looking to implement ICAT:

1. Bring the Command staff and supervisors on board right away.



Volusia County, Florida Sheriff's Office.

2. Identify informal leaders and get these key people in place to help with implementation. These include highly respected street personnel, SWAT and other specialized units, training staff, and others. Use your top performers to help influence and guide the rest of the department, most of whom will be open to change.
3. ICAT is not a 12-hour class. It has to be a philosophy that is embedded in everything you do, in training and field operations.

## How ICAT Principles Are Helping to Improve Investigations in Volusia County

Captain Brian Bosco says there has been one unexpected byproduct of the adoption of ICAT in the Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office: improved investigations. The agency is currently clearing about 55% of its serious crimes, a rate that Captain Bosco credits to a variety of factors, including Compstat, a Real Time Crime Center, and ICAT. He explains the ICAT connection this way:

*Part of de-escalation and ICAT is slowing things down and bringing in more resources that may be needed. We drill that into our supervisors. We've also taken the emphasis off quantity – "How many arrests have you made?," most of which were for less serious crimes. We've moved the emphasis to quality – "How many crimes are you solving?"*

*Slowing down on crisis calls has led us to slow down on all types of calls. We're getting our deputies to spend the time canvassing the neighborhood, getting fingerprints, developing leads, and the like. We want them to focus on helping to solve the crimes that have the greatest impact – the serious crimes. And when we do solve those cases, their efforts are celebrated through awards or other recognition.*

## Monterey, CA Police Department:

### *Driving Home the Critical Decision-Making Model*

The Monterey, CA Police Department has 53 sworn personnel serving a resident population of about 30,000 people, which balloons to 100,000 on many days with tourists and other visitors.

In 2016, the department's leadership committed to revamping how it trained officers on use of force. When PERF announced an ICAT information session in Los Angeles, Chief Dave Hober, Assistant Chief Bill Clark, and Lieutenant Jake Pinkas attended. They came back to Monterey and immediately implemented the training.

### Training as Teams

The department wanted to start by training its sergeants and Field Training Officers, but in an agency of its size, scheduling proved challenging. Instead, the department decided to train officers and sergeants together as teams. Lt. Pinkas said this approach worked out well. During scenarios, if an officer needed to call a supervisor, it was their actual supervisor who showed up. It took the department three classes to train its officers.

Monterey Police devote 16 hours to each ICAT class: one day in the classroom and a full day of scenarios. The agency used four of the recommended scenarios included in the PERF curriculum and adjusted them to better match their community. The department has worked to mix up its scenarios. Lt. Pinkas said they didn't want the ICAT scenarios to always involve officers being able to talk the knife out of someone's hand. In some instances, officers may need to use some force to achieve a successful outcome.

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Monterey, California Police Department.

## Getting the Right Instructors and Role Players

For instructors, Monterey Police started with Assistant Chief Clark and Lt. Pinkas (both had attended the initial orientation session). However, the department soon discovered that having the Assistant Chief in the room was stifling open discussions among the officers. So the agency pivoted. It had Assistant Chief Clark (or Chief Hober) speak to the class at the beginning, to show their support and set expectations, and then leave the classroom. The department also brought in a lieutenant from the tactical team and a union leader to round out the training team.

For role players, the department started by using its unarmed community service officers. ICAT trainers met with them ahead of time, went through scripts, and coached the CSOs on how to act. They also set up a system using text messages to guide the role players through the scenarios in real time. To supplement the CSOs, the department identified officers who performed well in the field and during scenarios and recruited them to be role players. The officers sat in on a class as a refresher, then jumped into their role playing.

The department also used one ICAT instructor to play the role of a dispatcher during scenarios. If officers go on the radio to ask for additional information or resources, the "dispatcher" facilitates the request. This helps to get officers into the habit of making requests during critical incidents.



## “Left of Bang”: Using ICAT to Limit Disruptions When Responding to Any Incident

The Monterey Police Department has incorporated the book *Left of Bang*, written by two Marine Corps veterans, into their presentation of ICAT. The premise of the book is that, regardless of the incident (in this case, a call for police service) or how simple or complex it may be, there is usually going to be some type of impact or explosion – a “bang.” Up-front preparation is critical to minimizing the magnitude and impact of the bang that will inevitably occur.

Monterey Police present this concept during ICAT Module 1: Introduction. They show how just about any type of call for service – from a traffic stop to an arrest for domestic violence – can produce some level of “bang.” They emphasize how the ICAT principles of slowing down, collecting information, and using the Critical Decision-Making Model can help officers better manage calls and minimize the bang that will likely occur.

### Reinforcing the CDM

**To reinforce the training, Monterey Police plaster the Critical Decision-Making Model all over the department. Every department member is issued a 3x5 card that contains the CDM, and the image is included in its use-of-force policy.**

In addition, Lt. Pinkas said the department emphasizes slowing things down and making good decisions in all responses, so rookie officers are introduced to ICAT concepts from the start.

### Advice for Mid-Sized Agencies

Lt. Pinkas offers the following advice to other mid-sized agencies implementing ICAT:

1. Buy-in and support from the top are critical. Leaders need to send the message that it’s okay for officers to take their time on calls. Agency leaders should also provide personnel with the tools they need to succeed. As part of ICAT implementation, the Monterey Police Department acquired 40 mm. less-lethal launchers, shields, rope-ties, and other tools.

2. Identify and empower informal leaders who can help “sell” ICAT to the rest of the agency. Find those members who are respected by their peers and know how to teach to serve as instructors in the classroom and champions in the field.
3. Get comfortable with the idea of reviewing and discussing videos of other officers. Explain to your personnel that the purpose of the video case studies is not to criticize or second-guess other cops, but to learn from their experiences and figure out how our agency can do better.



## Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office:

### *An Agency-Wide Commitment to ICAT*

Serving the Houston metropolitan area, the Harris County, TX Sheriff's Office (HCSO) is one of the largest full-service sheriff's offices in the nation, with patrol, detention, and dispatch responsibilities. The agency has approximately 5,000 employees, including about 2,300 sworn deputies and 1,000 detention staff who work in the Harris County Jail. The HCSO has made an agency-wide commitment to training its personnel in ICAT.

Texas law requires that all law enforcement agencies in the state conduct a minimum of eight hours of "de-escalation" training, but it doesn't specify the exact content of the training. The HCSO decided to go beyond the minimum training requirements and adopt the full ICAT curriculum, including classroom instruction and scenario-based exercises.

As with all ICAT agencies, among the early decisions the HCSO had to make were, Who would be the ICAT instructors?, and Which personnel would be trained first?

### **A Diverse Group of ICAT Instructors**

The agency sought a diverse mix of personnel to serve as ICAT trainers, based on their education, experience, and assignment. The HCSO selected 11 members to go through an ICAT train-the-trainer session taught by PERF. The group included both tactical personnel and members from specialized units such as Internal Affairs. The latter were included in the train-the-trainer session not because they would likely end up being ICAT instructors, but because the agency thought it was important for them to learn what deputies were being taught on use of force, according to Sergeant Jose "Rico" Gomez, the HCSO's ICAT Coordinator.

The agency ended up with a core of 4-5 dedicated ICAT trainers, who had experience in both patrol and detention. This range



Harris County, Texas Sheriff's Office

of experience came in handy as the HCSO was developing its scenarios for ICAT. The trainers were asked to think about the most challenging de-escalation situations they had experienced and to write down what happened and how the deputies and subjects responded. These real-world encounters become the basis for the ICAT scenarios.

### **A Top-Down Approach to Training**

The HCSO adopted a top-down approach to rolling out ICAT:

- HCSO Command staff were given a four-hour block of instruction on ICAT to familiarize them with the training and to reinforce the underlying principles of ICAT. From the beginning, Sheriff Ed Gonzalez set the tone by expressing his full support for ICAT; he recorded a video that is played at the start of each ICAT class.
- The department decided to train its first-line supervisors first – both sergeants and lieutenants. The supervisors went through the full ICAT course, including scenarios. The curriculum was customized to focus on the supervisors' role in managing critical incidents and supporting their officers. It took the HCSO approximately three months to train all first-line supervisors.

- Next, the agency began training its Field Training Deputies (FTDs). This curriculum focused on their roles in mentoring and coaching their deputies during field training. The training stressed how backup officers (who are frequently FTDs in the field) have certain key responsibilities, such as assessing the situation, marshalling resources, and the like.
- After all these groups were trained, the HCSO began training its field deputies, a process that took approximately one year. Sgt. Gomez said some veteran officers complained at the start of the training that they had already been through de-escalation training during their careers. “The scenario-based training in ICAT was a real wake-up call for some officers – and a welcome one at that,” Sgt. Gomez said. “The scenarios were key to showing that ICAT was different.”
- More recently, the HCSO has begun developing a customized ICAT curriculum for its detention officers.

New patrol deputy hires go through the full ICAT curriculum in the HCSO Academy. This includes deputies laterally hired from other agencies, even if they have already gone through the state-mandated de-escalation training. The agency feels it is important for them to see how the HCSO looks at use of force and for all personnel to be on the same page. New cadets get ICAT about 4-5 months into their 6-month academy training, with the training reinforced during their 3-month field training period.

### **Reinforcing ICAT through Ongoing Training**

The HCSO emphasizes the Critical Decision-Making Model not just in ICAT training but in broader agency operations. Posters with the CDM are hung throughout agency facilities, including district stations and detention centers. In addition, the HCSO has incorporated the CDM into other training courses, including its Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training.

To further reinforce ICAT, the HCSO has included ICAT in its rotation of in-service training courses. The ICAT training team works closely with personnel involved in behavioral health training. When there are critical incidents that have a nexus of mental health and de-escalation, the agency will draft and distribute a training bulletin that debriefs the incident, often using the CDM.

### **Advice for Large Agencies**

For large agencies implementing ICAT, Sgt. Gomez offers the following advice:

1. Make sure the agency leadership, including the CEO, is on board. In the HCSO, Sheriff Gonzalez and Chief Deputy Mike Lee set the tone – early and very publicly – which then trickles down through the ranks. The Sheriff’s video message at the beginning of the training made a big difference in helping to overcome any initial resistance to ICAT.
2. Focus on first-line supervisors and field training personnel first. For street deputies or officers to effectively implement ICAT in the field, they need the support of these two groups. So it is critical that supervisors and FTOs fully understand and embrace ICAT.
3. For agencies that are training their correctional personnel, make sure the curriculum is customized to fit their needs and challenges and that the trainers themselves have some experience in a correctional setting. (PERF is developing an ICAT in Jails curriculum – see page 47.)

# What's Next for ICAT?

**ICAT has always been a dynamic training** program. Since it was first introduced in 2016, ICAT has undergone several upgrades that have drawn on the experiences of ICAT agencies and addressed emerging use-of-force topics and challenges. Among other enhancements, PERF has added new modules on suicide by cop and “stepping up and stepping in” (intervention strategies), expanded the library of video case studies, and in several videos had officers provide first-hand narration of the incidents and their decision making.

The future development of ICAT will be guided by this same spirit of evolution and innovation. Here are some examples.

## PERF National ICAT Training Center

While some larger police agencies have modern training facilities that feature state-of-the-art classrooms, technology, and tactical villages for scenario-based training, the vast majority of departments lack such amenities. A new PERF National ICAT Training Center is helping to close that gap by making contemporary training facilities geared toward the delivery of ICAT available to more agencies.

Funded by a generous donation from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the PERF National ICAT Training Center will allow PERF to conduct both train-the-trainer sessions and ICAT instruction for interested agencies



Scenario-based training venues at the PERF National ICAT Training Center.



The auditorium (LEFT) and classroom at the PERF National ICAT Training Center.

from across the country. It will also serve as an innovation hub for developing and testing new features of ICAT, such as a customized course for jail personnel.

Located on 52 acres in Decatur, IL, the Training Facility includes 50,000 square feet of classroom space, scenario-based training venues, and administrative offices. Features include:

- An auditorium with stadium-style seating for 144 students. The auditorium has industry-leading technology, including live streaming over 16 screens.
- A 108-seat classroom also equipped with industry-leading technology, including three 98-inch flat screens and the ability to live-stream from the auditorium and other locations.
- Eleven different scenario-based training venues spread over 22,500 square feet. These include a convenience store, fast food restaurant, hardware store, hospital emergency room, mobile home, place of worship, residential apartment, retail store, school classroom, tavern, and warehouse. Each scenario-based venue is uniquely constructed and includes catwalks that allow instructors to monitor the scenarios from above.
- A mock railroad station with an Amtrak train car.

- A separate venue that mirrors a correctional facility, including prisoner intake, day room and recreation area, and eight prisoner cells. This venue will be used to support the ICAT in Jails curriculum.
- On-site virtual training capabilities, including VirTra simulators.
- Administrative offices, including a boardroom with state-of-the-art technology for meetings.

The PERF National ICAT Training Center will be operated by the Public Safety Training Foundation, in partnership with PERF. Retired Macon County, IL Sheriff Tom Schneider will oversee the Facility's operations.

## ICAT in Jails

The original ICAT curriculum was designed to help patrol officers who are the first to arrive at the scene of a critical incident. As sheriffs' offices began implementing ICAT for their patrol deputies, many recognized that the personnel in their jails could benefit from this type of training as well.

Corrections officers often face the same types of challenges as officers on the street: individuals who are in a behavioral or mental health crisis, who are unarmed or armed with an edged weapon or other dangerous device, and who are acting erratically or even

## PERF Is Looking for Videos to Use in ICAT

PERF continuously updates the ICAT curriculum to keep it fresh and relevant to the challenges officers face today. That includes finding new videos that illustrate the key elements of ICAT and can be used in the classroom as case studies.

If your agency has videos that you would like PERF to consider for the ICAT curriculum, please contact PERF Senior Research Associate Jason Cheney at [jcheney@policeforum.org](mailto:jcheney@policeforum.org) or 202-466-7820. Prior to using any video, PERF will get appropriate permissions from the agency and its leadership.

violently. But jail personnel generally do not have the full range of lethal and less-lethal tools that officers on the street do. They have to rely heavily on their communications skills, tactical positioning, teamwork, and decision making to defuse tense encounters.

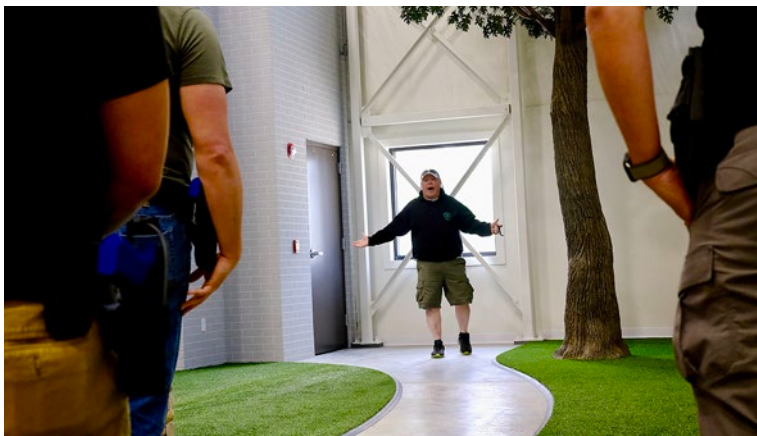
PERF is creating an ICAT in Jails guide that will help correctional officers hone these skills in dynamic situations. Like the original ICAT training, this course will use the Critical Decision-Making Model to help jail personnel work through challenging incidents, and it will focus on both officer safety and the safety of others.

The scenario-based training facility for corrections at the new PERF National ICAT Training Center will serve as a laboratory for designing and testing the training as well as a centralized location where sheriffs' offices and other correctional agencies can come to take part in the training.

## More Curriculum Enhancements

PERF continuously monitors national trends in use of force in general, as well as the ICAT curriculum specifically. Staff regularly gather and analyze feedback from instructors and students. This information is crucial to the development of new modules, the refinement of existing material, and the identification of new training tools such as video case studies.

In addition, based on feedback from existing ICAT users, PERF will be researching and developing a model follow-up (or booster) training for officers who have completed the full curriculum. PERF also recommends that, to keep their officers' de-escalation skills fresh, agencies should conduct annual ICAT training using the latest curriculum.



ICAT instructors conduct scenario-based training in the new PERF National ICAT Training Center.

# Other Information and Resources

**Agencies looking for more information** about ICAT, including options for training, should contact:

Jason Cheney  
PERF Senior Research Associate  
[jcheney@policeforum.org](mailto:jcheney@policeforum.org)  
202-466-7820

In addition, agencies can refer to the following resources:

## **ICAT Website**

[www.policeforum.org/icat](http://www.policeforum.org/icat)

The website provides a variety of information, including a sample lesson plan and PowerPoint deck for Module 1. Agencies interested in previewing the entire curriculum should contact PERF directly.

## **ICAT Training Guide Report**

[www.policeforum.org/assets/icattrainingguide.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/assets/icattrainingguide.pdf)

This 2016 publication details how ICAT was developed, the underlying philosophy and principles of the training, and the original curriculum.

## **Guiding Principles on Use of Force**

[www.policeforum.org/assets/guidingprinciples1.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/assets/guidingprinciples1.pdf)

This 2016 report lays out PERF's 30 guiding principles for reforming use-of-force policies and practices. It is the policy foundation of ICAT.

## **Re-Engineering Training on Police Use of Force**

<https://www.policeforum.org/assets/reengineeringtraining1.pdf>

This 2015 report details PERF's research on how police agencies have traditionally trained their officers on use of force and presents a blueprint for enhancing that training.

## **Examining the Impact of Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) De-escalation Training for the Louisville Metro Police Department**

[www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Center/LMPD\\_ICAT%20Evaluation%20Initial%20Findings%20Report\\_FINAL%2009212020.pdf](http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Research%20Center/LMPD_ICAT%20Evaluation%20Initial%20Findings%20Report_FINAL%2009212020.pdf)

This 2020 publication presents the findings of the independent study of ICAT's impact in the Louisville, KY Metro Police Department. Completed by a team of researchers at the University of Cincinnati, the study found ICAT was associated with substantial reductions in uses of force and officer and citizen injuries.

## **Suicide by Cop: Protocol and Training Guide**

<https://www.policeforum.org/assets/SBCTrainingGuide.pdf>

This 2019 report presents practical guidance on how to recognize and respond to potential suicide-by-cop encounters. It forms the basis for ICAT Module 5: Suicide by Cop.

### **Critical Response Toolkit for First-Line Supervisors**

[https://www.policeforum.org/  
critical-response-toolkit-for-first-line-supervisors](https://www.policeforum.org/critical-response-toolkit-for-first-line-supervisors)

This online toolkit provides sergeants and other supervisors with guidance and resources to help them manage critical incidents. Given the important role that sergeants play in implementing ICAT, the toolkit reinforces many of the steps that supervisors should take to help their officers successfully defuse these incidents.

### **Transforming Police Recruit Training: 40 Guiding Principles**

[https://www.policeforum.org/assets/  
TransformingRecruitTraining.pdf](https://www.policeforum.org/assets/TransformingRecruitTraining.pdf)

This 2022 report presents guiding principles for re-engineering recruit training in five key areas: 1) academy organization, operation, and philosophy; 2) curriculum; 3) academy leadership and instructors; 4) technology and physical facilities; and 5) continuity between academy and field training.

# About the Police Executive Research Forum

To learn more about PERF, visit [www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org).

**The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)** is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual

law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected President and Board of Directors and a Board-appointed Executive Director.





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**For more information (or if your agency is interested in a customized,  
on-site training for all agency personnel): Contact Jason Cheney at  
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[www.policeforum.org/ICAT](http://www.policeforum.org/ICAT)**

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