SERVICES

# COVID conditions trigger renewed engagement on the future of technology-enhanced learning (TEL)

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For many Canadians, the global COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in ways we had not previously experienced. The shuttering of businesses, closure of schools, reduction in public services, public health measures, and states of emergency across the country have changed everything about the way we live and work. This includes sweeping changes to how education, training, and skills development are implemented in the public safety community across the country. Since COVID-19, there has been a diverse response to how organizations are addressing training, ranging from cancelling all training in the short-term to quickly pivoting to modified delivery modes, such as online learning and virtual classrooms.

The Canadian Police Knowledge Network (CPKN) was founded in 2004 by a group of thought-leaders from police, government, and academia. The purpose was to advance and evolve training and education through technology-enhanced learning. What began with four online courses and a handful of partners has now grown to a network of over 450 agencies and multiple types of technology-enhanced learning solutions. Those original visionaries allowed us to be perfectly poised to help police and public safety respond to COVID-19 and our new virtual reality.

Over the past three months, CPKN has been engaging police and public safety agencies from across the country in a series of discussions about the pandemic and its current and future impacts on the world of training. Some common themes have emerged from these discussions.

1. **Changes to training delivery are not a short-term solution.** Many services have had to delay certain classroom-based learning, meaning when physical distancing restrictions are lifted, there will continue to be an excess demand for available classroom space and trainer resources. Changes to more technology-enhanced learning are longer-term solutions.

2. **Training standards are important.** Provinces set policing standards that include expectations for training and its delivery and assessment. When considering alternate modes of training delivery, two sets of standards should be considered: provincial police training standards and instructional design standards. Solid instructional design standards can ensure police services are continuing to train to meet necessary service requirements.

3. **Budget constraints will likely be part of a new training reality.** There is still a lot of unknown around budgetary impacts, but governments at all levels will be looking for efficiencies where possible as the economy re-opens. Training units should plan for and consider cost efficiencies where possible.

4. **Mental health training will continue to be a priority.** Mental health is a priority topic during the pandemic. Canadians are facing challenges that have impacts on mental health. Police officers will be required to respond to an increasing number of calls for service related to mental health crises while also navigating new strains and stresses on their own mental health, particularly as physical distancing requirements, changes to patrol operations, and concerns about contracting COVID-19 impact their daily work. Training and support for personal mental health as well as responding to mental health calls is a priority.

5. **The time is right to explore new modes of technology-enhanced learning (TEL).** There are pockets of organizations across the country using emerging modes of TEL including micro-learning, virtual reality, and virtual classrooms. Understanding the successes and failures of these implementations and best practices can help Canadian public safety organizations develop and successfully implement newer modes of training delivery.

6. **Evaluation needs to be at the heart of all training** Research (Thalheimer, 2017) has long shown that technology-enhanced learning is just as effective as, or more effective than, classroom learning because of the techniques and standards used in training and course development. Evaluating training for its effectiveness will be an important

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piece of ensuring effective learning. For many organizations, there is an added challenge presented by COVID-19 restrictions. How can competencies be adequately evaluated for skills that require physical or human interaction? There is interesting research on the effectiveness of virtual and simulated assessments that can be explored as well as finding other technologies that allow for in-person skill evaluation.

Though the pandemic has presented many challenges, there are opportunities in exploring solutions to these challenges. As an organization, CPKN's primary focus is to deliver high-quality technology-enhanced professional development that meets the evolving needs of Canadian policing. With such a mission, CPKN is well placed to support public safety organizations and play a role in this transformation. Founded on the principle of being "for police by police," CPKN is a network that consists of our Board of Directors, National Advisory Committee, police community, and public safety partners. We have spent the past year engaging in the process of developing a strategic plan which remains highly relevant in the "new normal" of COVID-19.

Carving a successful road forward will include adhering to our core principles, which include leading and inspiring professional development by providing access to TEL that adheres to sound instructional standards, using appropriate technologies and delivery methods, and above all else, collaboration. By harnessing the knowledge, experience, and best practices of the CPKN Network, the public safety community can embrace technology to deliver effective, timely, and relevant training that meets the emerging needs of all Canadian policing professionals.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES
The author has no conflicts of interest to declare

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