



Canadian Police Knowledge Network: The power of technology, standards, and collaboration

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ABSTRACT

The Canadian Police Knowledge Network (CPKN) is a not-for-profit organization that delivers high-quality technology-enhanced professional development for Canadian police. Through collaboration, technology, and standards CPKN has established a credible model that offers a reliable, cost-effective solution to meet the increasingly diverse and complex needs of contemporary policing. This article examines CPKN's evolution from an online learning service provider to a nationally recognized leader in police learning and professionalization. It specifically explores the role of ongoing collaboration within the Canadian police community, through CPKN, to develop nationally relevant training and to modernize the competency-based management framework to establish more nationally consistent competency standards.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Police Knowledge Network (CPKN) is a not-for-profit organization that develops and delivers high-quality technology-enhanced learning for Canada's police and public safety community. That's the simple version. In reality, we have evolved far beyond our role as an online learning repository. Today, the network is supporting contemporary policing by advancing learning and professionalization through an elaborate blend of collaboration, technology, and standards.

A Pioneer in Technology-Enhanced Learning for Police

Back in 2004 when a small group of like-minded police training leaders from the National Research Council Canada and Holland College's Justice Knowledge Network came together to form CPKN, it might be said that we were ahead of our time. While there was an identified need for online learning in Canada's policing sector, we quickly learned that achieving a nationally relevant—and accepted—model would be no small feat.

Canada's public safety sector is an exceptionally diverse and layered entity of national, provincial, municipal, and First Nations police services, training institutions, and other public safety organizations. At CPKN we learned early on

that “one size does not fit all”—policing priorities, challenges, and resources vary from province to province and community to community. Easing agencies out of a largely siloed approach to training was a marathon of effort, and we had to find that middle ground to produce learning content and technical infrastructure that was relevant to the greatest number of police and law enforcement agencies. Establishing a credible model that offered a reliable, cost-effective solution came down to a one-at-a-time approach: one conversation, one partnership, one course, one police service, one customer.

The success of CPKN did not come overnight, but over the last 16 years we have established ourselves as an integral piece of Canada's police training model. Far from the meagre catalogue of four courses we started with, CPKN now offers more than 180 courses to more than 100,000 learners across the country. Our in-house design and development team has honed a time- and cost-effective process to produce engaging, high-quality courses. Our custom-built learning management system is a robust and flexible structure that enables more than 350 police and public safety agencies across the country to access and manage their individual online learning curriculums.

Our success has not been an independent effort. We have relied on the time, support, experience, and expertise of

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our Board of Directors, National Advisory Committee, and numerous partners to keep CPKN aligned with the needs and realities of the sector. The commitment of these police leaders and training professionals gave CPKN the clout it needed to establish an extensive network of organizations that are working together to drive excellence in policing professional development.

But a network needs to network. CPKN's annual Stanhope Conference is a national forum for sharing knowledge and best practices for police training. It plays a critical role in keeping the network connected and in reaching consensus on which topics should be the focus of CPKN's energy and resources. The Network Webinar Series is a more recent initiative that provides a platform for policing professionals and visionary thinkers to discuss priority issues—such as systemic racism and transformational leadership—through the lens of professional development. These events not only facilitate open dialogue and idea sharing across the sector but collectively move us towards excellence in professional development for all Canadian police.

Better Together: Collaborative Approaches to Training Development

From the beginning, knowledge-sharing has been a core part of the CPKN model. Through the guidance of our National Advisory Committee, which identifies key topics and emerging issues, CPKN seeks out partners and experts to respond to a constantly expanding range of training requirements. In some cases, an existing course from a police service or training institution may be adapted and shared with the wider police audience. In other cases, courses are developed from scratch, using a collaborative approach that ensures the final product not only has expert content but also aligns with universal learning needs. Moreover, through other projects, such as the *Community Engagement Inventory*, which surveyed the sector on training related to community interactions, police trust, and legitimacy, we work to better understand the scope, niches, and gaps in the training available to the community.

These activities serve the community well. Recent initiatives to produce training on topics such as the cannabis legislation, autism spectrum disorder, methamphetamine and the precursor control regulation, and mental health self-awareness are key examples of how collaboration is producing benefits for police services across the country. It increases access to expertise—regardless of service size or location—on issues of common concern across the sector. It lessens the financial load on individual police services, reducing the number of in-house courses that need to be produced and maintained. (In fact, CPKN courses are developed and maintained at no cost to police services.) When CPKN levels the field on essential learning, individual services are able to invest their efforts in producing supplementary resources to support local operations.

Enhanced Professionalization: Competency-Based Management in Policing

There is also significant collaboration taking place around the issue of competency-based management (CBM) in policing. This has been a topic of discussion among policing leaders for nearly two decades. While there has been incremental progress during that time—particularly in the form of the Police Sector Council's Competency-based Management Framework—CBM is a complex issue, and meaningful progress towards implementation is often beyond the capacity of police services. That said, amid continually evolving demands on police, calls for police reform and de-funding, allegations of systemic racism, and the inevitable economic consequences of COVID-19, there is renewed agreement that CBM is essential to enhancing the productivity, transparency, accountability, and fiscal efficiency of policing in Canada.

At CPKN we are working with key partners—including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Police Governance, and the Canadian Police College—on a national campaign for greater integration of competency-based practice and nationally consistent policing standards. We are working on two fronts: 1) to gain the support we need to fund the work, including modernization of the existing Framework, and 2) to collectively engage the community to identify role-based competencies in key areas such as leadership. It is a massive undertaking but one we feel will form the foundation of sustainable policing well into the future.

CONCLUSION

CPKN is a unique entity. We have evolved from—for all intents and purposes—a common online learning service provider to a nationally recognized leader in police learning and professionalization. But we are still learning, still growing, and still finding new ways to support the Canadian police community.

There are many challenges at hand and ahead for policing in Canada and abroad, but the model that CPKN has created will ensure that Canadian police agencies do not have to go it alone. Through CPKN, the sector has harnessed the power of technology, standards, and collaboration to tremendous effect. And come what may, we can be sure that that will anchor all of us in the years to come.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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