OPOTA Close to Home Operations Manual

March 2024

DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: PURPOSE

Welcome to the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy's Close to Home program. OPOTA Close to Home was created by the Attorney General to give peace officers throughout the state access to advanced training close to their homes and the communities they serve. To accomplish this, OPOTA has partnered with six regional training providers — all institutions of higher learning.

OPOTA Close to Home strives to become the premier training provider for Ohio peace officers, one that is recognized nationally as a leader in police training. The program's enduring goal is to provide exceptional professional advanced training that is easily accessible to peace officers statewide. Together, regional training providers (RTP) and OPOTA's Advanced Training division develop outstanding courses using the latest research, instructional methods, and technology to meet the needs of law enforcement professionals and their communities.

This manual details expectations for OPOTA Close to Home students and regional providers as well as OPOTA staff members. We welcome comments and constructive criticism aimed at helping instructors and staff to improve services or address concerns that may arise.

Recommended changes to this manual can be made to OPOTAClosetoHome@OhioAGO.gov for consideration by the executive director or his/her designee. (Note: Only the OPOTA executive director or the director's designee can make changes to this publication. A revision date will be added to the document.)

Thank you for your participation in OPOTA training programs.

SECTION TWO: STUDENT INFORMATION AND CONDUCT

While training with an RTP, students should always conduct themselves professionally, as their personal conduct reflects on OPOTA, the regional provider, the law enforcement profession, fellow officers, and their agency. The *OPOTA Rules and Regulations* handout is a helpful resource for instructors and students. All staff, fellow students, visitors, and guest instructors will be treated respectfully.

Emergency Situations

In the case of life-threatening situations, students should call dial 911. If an immediate fire or police response is needed, students should immediately notify the course instructor or a staff member.

Registration

Registration for all OPOTA courses can be completed through the course catalog, which is accessible through the OPOTA Portal. Students wanting to register for classes at an RTP must create an account in the OPOTA Portal. Once a newly created account is approved by OPOTA, registrants will receive a student ID number, found in their profile, which can be used as identification for sign-in sheets or other documents.

Attendance

Unless excused, students are expected to be at their assigned training area on time and prepared, and to adhere to classroom break times. All students should sign in on the morning of the first day of training, then initial the sign-in sheet each subsequent day of the training. The course instructor is responsible for ensuring that the sign-in sheet is properly completed. Failing to show up for a class for which you registered and not providing a substitute from the same agency will result in the agency (or the student, if self-registered) having to pay an established tuition for the empty seat.

In the case of an emergency, permission must be obtained from the instructor for any course absences. Excused absences (e.g., personal or family emergency, illness, mandatory court appearance) cannot exceed 10% of the total course hours. A student whose absences for any reason exceed the 10% limit will be required to make up the missed portions before being awarded a course certificate. Unexcused absences will be reported to the student's agency.

Examination and Assessments

Some training courses and programs include written proficiency tests, skills assessments, and/or other tasks that determine student performance. Instructors will provide specific information, including the scoring process and passing level, at the beginning of each course. Students who do not achieve an acceptable score or level of performance will not receive an OPOTA certificate until all course requirements are met. Students are expected to perform their own coursework and to otherwise conduct themselves honestly and ethically according to established academic standards.

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are a vital part of police training. With most courses, before a course certificate is provided, each student will receive a course evaluation form and an instructor evaluation form. These evaluations, which are completed anonymously, provide pertinent information regarding the quality of the training and facility, as well as insight into the strengths and weaknesses of academy courses. All students are strongly encouraged to complete the forms. (NOTE: With some courses, an OPOTA Close to Home survey designed to gauge real-life application of course material will be sent to attendees and instructors a few weeks after certification is received.)

Ombudsman

OPOTA provides an ombudsman to oversee student welfare during all training conducted during a course. The course instructor will serve as the ombudsman, who is available to assist any student who experiences problems during training and to explain OPOTA's and the regional provider's position on student conduct and responsibilities. Conduct violations should be reported to the ombudsman, who will ensure fair and equitable treatment for all students in his/her charge and report the incident to the provider's point of contact. Instructor misconduct should be reported to the OPOTA Close to Home program manager at OPOTAClosetoHome@OhioAGO.gov.

Professional Conduct

Professional behavior is required and always expected. Disruptive, harassing, abusive, or potentially hazardous conduct is prohibited. No person shall misuse, deface, remove, destroy, or otherwise damage any property or equipment owned by or under the control of the RTP. Such actions may result in dismissal from the training. Students involved in this behavior will be reported to their agency or employer.

Classroom Attentiveness

OPOTA Close to Home seeks to give students the highest level of training in the classroom and through practical application. Therefore, the use of non-class-related mobile devices (e.g., cellphones, tablets, etc.) is prohibited during class unless used at the instructor's direction. Likewise, the use of non-classroom-related reading material is prohibited. Inattentiveness is unprofessional and disrespectful to other students and the instructor(s).

Personal Appearance

Both classroom and practical-application courses are conducted at facilities that are part of institutions of higher education. During traditional classroom courses with no tactical or physical applications, students — when not in uniform — are expected to wear appropriate business casual clothing, such as slacks or jeans (unbleached and without holes), sport shirts or blouses, sweaters or similar attire as well as appropriate footwear (closed-toe shoes).

Other variations of clothing are acceptable during tactical and physical portions of practical-application courses when approved by the course instructor. When leaving the practical-exercise area, however, students should appropriately clean their shoes and clothing of any debris, dirt, or mud that may have accumulated during the training.

Smoking and Tobacco Use

Smoking and the use of tobacco, including smokeless tobacco and electronic smoking devices, are prohibited in the classroom. Smoking and the use of tobacco, smokeless tobacco, and electronic smoking devices on the grounds or in buildings are regulated by the policy of the individual RTP.

Deadly Weapons and Dangerous Ordnance

Instructors will conduct safety checks before any course involving practical application that could result in the injury of staff members or students.

Unless allowed by the RTP, no firearms, dangerous ordinance, explosives, flash bangs, etc. are to be brought inside any building. When in doubt, seek approval and direction from the RTP course instructor or a staff member.

When authorized firearms are not worn, they must be stored in RTP-provided gun lockers; properly secured in vehicle trunks; or, when no trunk is available, out of plain sight. Students attending training courses involving weapons will be advised when and where to secure their weapons. **Safety priorities will always be followed.**

When weapon clearing is necessary, firearms can be cleared only at an approved clearing barrel. Loading and unloading should be conducted only at the direction of the course instructor.

Food and Drink Consumption

The regional training provider has established a policy regarding the consumption of food or drink in classrooms or building common areas and identified designated vending machines for student use. Students will adhere to the established lunch period as directed by the course instructor.

Medications, Alcohol and Controlled Substances

Students are expected to arrive for training with a clear head — not under the influence of alcohol, prescribed medications that affect their ability to participate in training, or any controlled substance prohibited by law. The RTP can provide additional information regarding its policy.

Fire / Smoke Emergencies or Drills

Students should make themselves aware of exits, fire alarm locations, and emergency devices. They should notify the instructor or a staff member of any observed fire and proceed to exit the building as quickly as possible. They may render aid if able to do so safely. Students will follow the direction of instructors and staff members when participating in any drill.

Tornado / Severe Weather Advisory (or drill)

In the event of a tornado warning, sighting, or other severe weather advisory that indicates a need to move to safe quarters, students should proceed immediately to the designated shelter area.

In the event of a Level II and Level III snow emergency, students will follow the RTP's direction regarding attendance for a course at its facility. (RTP will coordinate with OPOTA about any makeup hours required.)

SECTION THREE: REGIONAL PROVIDER INFORMATION

Course Proposal and Approval

Advanced training courses offered by a regional provider must be submitted to OPOTA for approval using the Close to Home email address (OPOTAclosetohome@OhioAGO.gov). Approved courses will be listed as OPOTA courses in the OPOTA Portal online catalog, with student registration for those courses completed through that portal. To register for training, students must create an OPOTA Portal account.

The RTP must request permission to offer the Traditional OPOTA Course(s) and receive prior written approval from OPOTA before offering any such course(s).

The RTP also must receive prior written approval from OPOTA before offering a new OPOTA Course.

Requirement to Submit Lesson Plans

Regional providers must submit course lesson plans to OPOTA for approval. These will be completed and submitted in accordance with the most recent MOU.

Facility requirements

At a minimum, an RTP facility must:

1. Be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable federal and state laws.
2. Have an HVAC system, running water, and restroom facilities sufficient to accommodate students attending course(s) at the facility.
3. Have sufficient physical space, seating, and desks to allow for the safe and effective instruction of classes of at least 20 students.
4. Have sufficient high-speed internet and online-capable audiovisual technology for use during classroom instruction.

Student-to-Faculty Ratio Standards

An RTP must meet or exceed the following student-to-faculty (students: instructor) ratios detailed in the MOU, unless an exception is requested in writing and granted by the executive director of OPOTA:

1. Maximum ratio of 25:1 for courses or portions of courses without a practical-application component.

2. Maximum ratio of 10:1 for courses or portions of courses involving the discharge of a firearm. For range management and live fire, a maximum ratio of 5:1 is strongly recommended.

3. Maximum ratio of 10:1 for courses or portions of courses with a substantial practical-application component and/or in which students are expected to participate in/demonstrate competence in subject control and physical skills. (The OPOTA executive director has approved a 14:1 ratio for Instructor Skills teach-backs. Other course scenarios may require further assessment regarding instructor ratios to ensure the safety of students and role players.)

Student Attendance Verification

An RTP must have all students sign in on an OPOTA-prescribed sheet for each day of instruction and submit copies of the daily sign-in sheets to OPOTA immediately upon completion of the course, along with a Course Completion Record.

Severe Weather

Severe weather can affect attendance and the overall safety of OPOTA students and regional staff, making it vital to monitor such weather prior to the actual event. Regional providers need to plan ahead in case of facility closure or travel restrictions. There are options available for an RTP to ensure compliance with OPOTA attendance guidelines:

1. Hold classes for regional students when facilities, travel and parking are available.

2. When an RTP cannot open its facilities, instructors can use electronic platforms (Teams, Zoom, etc.) to instruct students on parts of the curriculum that do not involve a practical exercise.

3. When appropriate for the course, create lab times for students to conduct independent study or to research references related to the coursework or lesson plan.

4. Schedule a makeup session so students can reach the minimum number of established hours.

Before a severe weather event, or as soon as practical, the RTP should notify the Close to Home regional manager by email of the plan or steps being initiated. The regional manager can provide guidance and make recommendations to the RTP to alleviate administrative concerns and document those via email. Staff and student safety will always be paramount in instances of severe weather.

Instructor Requirements

Only OPOTA-certified instructors are permitted to teach OPOTA topics during OPOTA-approved training programs. All instructors used by an RTP must meet or exceed the instructor requirements in the Ohio Administrative Code, Rule 109:2-1-06, Approval of Instructors.

The RTP must document that all instructor requirements are met and maintain a copy of the current OPOTC instructor certificate for each of its instructors. These records must be available for inspection upon request. Further, the RTP has an ongoing duty to promptly report to OPOTA any instructor who fails to meet the requirements.

The RTP will ensure that instructors teach for the full time scheduled for each topic. Each hour of class time includes 50 minutes of instruction and a 10-minute break. Breaks may not be combined (e.g., to shorten the class day, extend lunches, delay starting time).

Instructors permitted to teach OPOTA courses are expected to:

- Respect the legal, ethical, and professional ethos of commission-approved program instruction.

- Adhere to student-to-instructor and student-to-equipment ratios.

- Use all instructional opportunities to stress the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities officers bear to their employers and communities when serving in an official capacity.

- Understand that the information provided reflects the minimum standard for instruction. Instructors are expected to draw on their expertise to exceed minimal instructional standards.

- Instruct using as many principles of adult learning as possible. Examples include:
  - Problem-based learning
  - Student-centered learning
  - Active group discussions
  - Scenario-based activities

- Emphasize continuously the benefits and consequences of ethical and unethical behavior, respectively.

- Reiterate that all scenarios in a lesson plan are either fictional and/or adapted from publicly available sources.

The Attorney General's Office reserves the right to remove any instructor from any OPOTA course at any time.

Objective Achievement Assessment Methodology

Course lesson plans will be delivered to ensure compliance with the [International Association of Chiefs of Police Law Enforcement Code of Ethics](). Assessment of learning will be continually monitored by instructor evaluation(s) of practical exercises (where applicable); debriefing of practical exercises (where applicable); reflective exercises (where applicable), and appropriate formative and summative assessments (where applicable), among other possible means.

Course Books

The course book is the historical record of the training provided by OPOTA. It includes documents pertaining to the class, instructors, students and any other pertinent information. OPOTA uses an application called POLARIS (Peace Officer Listing Academy Registration and Information System) to create and archive course books. The course book is initiated when an RTP submits a proposal to offer an advanced-training course.

For tracking purposes, when sending the initial course proposal, an RTP should use the following format to name the file: {Training Group}-{Course #}-{YR}-{Sequence} Provider Name - Course Name - Month Year. For example, 56-999-24-00 Clark State - First Line Supervision - July 2024. The RTP will use 00 for the initial sequence number because the submitter will not know this information until it is assigned by the OPOTA Close to Home administrative assistant.

The regional provider is responsible for completing all the subsequent course paperwork and sending it by email to OPOTA Close to Home at OPOTAClosetoHome@OhioAGO.gov. Subsequent course paperwork will include the sequence number (last two digits above) assigned by the Close to Home administrative assistant and the date of the email as the file name and in the subject line. For example, 56-999-24-24 Clark State First Line Supervision – July 2024 – 2-01-24. The Close to Home administrative assistant ensures that the submitted paperwork is processed, approved, and uploaded to POLARIS.

The standard folders in the OPOTA electronic course book include:

- Administration
  - Course approval application
  - Instructor form(s)
  - Course planning form
  - Course roster
  - Attendance record
  - Waivers
  - Course standards and expectations form
  - Course cost summary report
  - Invoices
  - Injury reports
  - Any other administrative paperwork pertaining to the course.
- Class Materials
  - Lesson plans
  - PowerPoint presentations(s)
  - Handouts
  - Schedules
  - Equipment
  - Photos
  - Any other class-related material.
- Correspondence
  - Any correspondence not sent electronically between the student and the RTP, the RTP and OPOTA, or the RTP and any other entity.
  - Pre-course written assignments, which should follow the current APA format for student papers.
- Emails
  - Historical record of emails associated with the course.
- Evaluations
  - Course evaluation(s)
  - Instructor evaluation(s)

- o Surveys
- Exams
  - o Pre-test
  - o Post-test
  - o Quizzes
  - o Pass/Fail practical-application sheets.
- Completed Registrations
  - o Course registrations are received by the Close to Home administrative assistant when students register for class via the OPOTA Portal or the OPOTA course catalog.
  - o Prior to a course start date, the RTP will receive the class roster, name tents, and sign-in sheets.

Regional providers should adopt the same folder format for their course book record before sending it to the Close to Home administrative assistant, helping to speed uploading into POLARIS. This format will also facilitate OPOTA's response to public-records requests.

SECTION FOUR: OPOTA

Close to Home Liaison

The OPOTA Close to Home program manager will act as the liaison between the regional providers and OPOTA's Advanced Training, Professional Standards, and Curriculum sections.

Webpage and Email

To provide information and maintain communications with regional providers, peace officers and law enforcement agencies, a webpage has been created and will be maintained. The OPOTA Close to Home webpage can be assessed through the OPOTA website. The email address for the program is OPOTAclosetohome@OhioAGO.gov. Regional providers will submit course proposals and other course documents to this address.

Course Curriculum

OPOTA will provide the regional training providers with the most up to-date copy of the course curriculum, outline, and/or list of course content requirements.

Student Course Registration and Student Payment

The Advanced Training section oversees course registration through the OPOTA Portal, an online system that enables potential students to view and register for courses. After a course registration is submitted, section staff process the request, including acceptance; receipt; and, if necessary, refunding of course payments. The staff will submit course enrollment counts to the regional providers not less than 72 hours before an RTP's scheduled course.

Course Completion Record

The course completion record is the official, complete record for courses and will include:

- The course name, date(s), time(s), and location.
- The name(s) of the instructor(s).
- Copies of the daily student sign-in sheets.
- A notation of whether each student passed or failed the course (if applicable).
- If applicable, the CPT Verification Information and Skills Assessment Course information, and a roster notation for reduced CPT hours for any student (if applicable).
- Attestation signed by the RTP and the instructor that:
  - Each student was present for at least 50 minutes of each 60 minutes of course instruction.
  - The course was completed in conformity with the MOU, the OAC, and the ORC.

Quality Assurance Procedure

The OPOTA Close to Home program manager will conduct announced or unannounced inspections – in person or virtually — of an RTP's facility, instruction, and/or equipment during the facility's normal hours of operation. The manager also might enroll an independent auditor to attend as a student and observe the RTP-provided course. The auditor will complete an internal document that is more detailed than any of the course-related surveys and return that document to the manager. The RTP will not be reimbursed for the approved auditor's attendance, and the auditor will be counted as part of the maximum enrollment number for the course. Only one auditor seat will be permitted — assigned at the discretion of the RTP manager.

Surveys

The Close to Home manager will conduct course surveys of the students. OPOTA will develop and conduct random surveys of students to solicit feedback on course experience, the RTP, and the facility, and/or other course-related questions. Surveys will become part of the appropriate course book.

Invoicing

After receiving the course closure paperwork from the RTP, the OPOTA Close to Home administrative assistant will submit for approval an invoice to the Close to Home manager and the assistant executive director for operations and training. Upon receiving that approval, the administrative assistant will submit the invoice to the AGO Finance Section for payment to the regional provider.

Course Enrollment Notification

The Close to Home administrative assistant will send a course enrollment count to the RTP no less than 72 hours before the RTP's scheduled course. The notification will inform the regional provider of the total number of students who are registered for the course. Because students will have the ability to register up to the day of the course, however, the RTP must have the ability to scale up to the maximum number of students who can register for that course. The RTP has the discretion to allow walk-in students to sign up for the course (through the OPOTA Portal) on the day the course begins.