

A Proposal to Transform Santa Clara County Training Department for Today, Tomorrow, & Beyond

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Social Services Agency (SSA) plays a critical role in improving the lives of Santa Clara County residents. However, while meeting community needs, the agency staff often lack the time and support needed for professional growth and development. This proposal advocates for transforming the Staff Development and Training department into a Learning Center that prioritizes personalized professional development for employees and crafts a myriad of learning modalities that can mold to the busy work lives of staff. By investing in coaching, skill development, and innovative learning opportunities, SSA can enhance employee engagement, retention, and service quality.

The Problem: Training Solutions Needed for the Workforce of Today

Staff Development & Training at Santa Clara County Social Services (SSA) provides training and development opportunities for roughly 3,000 SSA employees. The departments under the SSA umbrella are the Department of Aging & Adult Services, the Department of Employment and Benefits Services, the Department of Family & Children Services, and the Office of Veterans Services. In addition to the departments that serve the community, SSA's Agency Office is comprised of 12 additional departments that are responsible for supporting the agency and employees from Central Services to Technology Services & Support. Under the Office of Program Support, Research, and Evaluation (PSRE) is the Staff Development & Training Department (SD&T). The training department is comprised of 43 staff who all have various roles such as: Trainers, Instructional Designers, Management Analysts, Management Aide, Clerical Support, Office Manager, and 4 Senior Training Specialists who serve as training managers.

According to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the overarching objective of the county training department is to “assist in the achievement of organizational goals and development” (CDSS, 2008, p. 4). CDSS has provided flexibility in the way in which each County Welfare Department sets up its training department, but requires counties to have a department that is responsible for ensuring training regulations and employee training needs are delivered. Over the years, Santa Clara County's Staff Development & Training has had several iterations of training models and the types of training and development offerings that are provided to staff. Some of the development programs and types of trainings that were offered over 30 years ago are being offered today, such as the Mentoring & Leadership Development Programs. These programs have been redeveloped to meet the needs of the workforce today.

To ensure the training and development needs of our workforce are met, SD&T must create learning opportunities that extend beyond mandated training and training that can only be accessed by in-person learning. Over several years, SD&T internally developed a myriad of web-based training (WBT) that staff can access independently. In addition to an increase of WBT, the department has developed a simulation lab to provide a controlled and supportive environment in which staff can practice applying critical skills and theory learned in training. The department also partners with Fresno State University to bring virtual reality learning experiences. Although SD&T has expanded its types of learning offerings that staff can access, there are gaps in the training services as the needs of the departmental agencies shift.

The CDSS Staff Development & Training Manual details the responsibilities of the county to ensure that staff are adequately trained upon hire, continually, and once promoted. Employee recruitment and retention continue to be challenges for many agencies. Counties are responsible for ensuring that the community receives services irrespective of any staffing challenges they may be facing. Since services must continue to be provided to the community, it becomes challenging for employees and departments to prioritize the learning and development needs of the staff. In addition to the staffing challenges, the training needs of the departments and

workforce have increased and shifted to address the changing needs of the community. SD&T is faced with the challenge of offering more support utilizing existing resources. This is an exciting opportunity for the department to re-imagine the way in which training services are delivered and find an innovative solution to meet the needs of the agency.

This is not a proposal to ask for more employees, although that would be helpful; it is also not a proposal for increased funding. Rather, this is a proposal for SSA to embark upon a transformation of the training department. This will require a shift in agency culture as well as time to restructure the way in which training services are delivered to the agency. Inspired by the vision of the agency to “serve, empower, & transform,” Staff Development and Training has forged a new mission to “Develop Staff for Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond.” This mission guides our efforts to reimagine training delivery and create learning experiences for staff that become the future of SSA.

The Vision: Transforming Training into a Dynamic Employee-Centered Experience

Serve Today

- **Innovative Learning Models:** Redesign all training courses using the 70-20-10 model: 70% of learning occurs through on-the-job experience, 20% through coaching and collaboration, and 10% through formal training. The training environment becomes a place where learning can occur while immediately applying it to corresponding job tasks. This learning model will ensure that employees’ development is both balanced and impactful. This will also lead to decreased time employees spend in the classroom and away from job-related tasks.
- **Coaching:** The agency has seen an increased benefit in employees having access to coaching and how it has equipped them to be more confident in their role. To meet this need, we have contracted external coaches to support our staff. While formal coaching has been used in the Department of Family and Children Services and for Executive Leadership, it is not something that staff in different departments and levels have had an opportunity to use. This proposal would transition SSA training personnel into certified coaches who will help support the agency in centering coaching as a solution and help to sustain this practice in lieu of any future fiscal cuts to external contracts. While there are initial costs to having staff certified as coaches, the overall cost savings to the agency is vast.

Empower Tomorrow

- **Personalized Employee Learning Journeys:** Tailor training paths to individual learning styles, departments, and career aspirations to help foster a deeper sense of belonging, purpose, and value among our staff. Employees will naturally take on more of a role in their learning when they feel that it is meeting their own goals for growth.

- **Essential Skills Development:** “Emotional Intelligence”, “De-Escalation”, “How to Have Difficult Conversations”, and “Harmonious Work Environment” are all examples of essential skills training. They aren’t directly related to an employee’s job duties, however, they are important to their growth as an employee. Providing increased training offerings that focus on essential skill development can help employees improve their interactions with their coworkers, managers, and clients. These offerings can range from essential skills needed to interact with co-workers and clients to computer or task- related skill development. When employees feel confident and proficient in their ability to carry out a task, it can empower them in their role. Partner with local universities to connect opportunities for our staff to continue their learning.
- **Transform Beyond:** Staff Development & Training Department transforms into a Learning Center where staff can be supported in their professional development goals as well as have a safe, controlled environment to develop and strengthen the essential skills needed to provide excellent services to the community by evolving our simulated learning experiences.
- **Experiential Learning:** Increase and improve our immersive learning opportunities such as simulations and virtual reality. Santa Clara County currently offers simulation labs to new social workers and participants of the Leadership Development Program. While this is a great resource, it is also underutilized. SD&T can develop increased learning opportunities for staff throughout the agency to benefit from immersive learning experiences. We can continue to seek out opportunities to increase our virtual reality offerings beyond our Aging and Adult staff. Santa Clara Social Services can become an emerging leader in immersive and simulation-based learning. Employees will have a safe, controlled environment where they can practice and apply critical and essential skills needed for the job.

Getting Started

By embracing a model where training is individualized, experiential, and continuously adaptive, we can transform our agency from a traditional service provider into a vibrant Learning Center that both nurtures our employees and elevates our care for vulnerable populations. To move forward, it will require a commitment to the following:

- Agency Executives will explore with the training manager to create, adopt, and implement an agency-wide policy on employee learning and development priority.
- Role Redefinition for SD&T staff: Transition training personnel into certified coaches and learning consultants who are equipped with analytical tools to assess employees’ learning needs and developmental progress. Create internal growth and expansion opportunities related to primary roles and job functions.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Explore our current training infrastructure and repurpose existing meeting spaces into learning and development spaces.
- **Explore Learning Management Systems (LMS)** that will support the learner by providing a comprehensive resource that will monitor their learning journey as well as automate manual processes.
- **Create tech-enabled training environments** that can support simulation labs, VR setups and experiential learning. Establish a central hub for all training, as well as designate and retrofit training space in our North and South County locations.

Expected Outcomes and Return on Investment (ROI) from Transforming Training

- **Engagement and Job Satisfaction:** A learner-driven approach increases engagement and job satisfaction, recruitment, and retention.
- **Enhanced Service Quality:** Personalized learning improves service delivery, leading to better client outcomes.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** Safe learning environments foster innovation and adaptability, essential for social services challenges.
- **Long-Term Cost Savings:** Preventive professional development reduces turnover, burnout, and service delivery errors, ensuring sustainability.

Benefits For All Stakeholders

- **For Employees:** Increased achievement, job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and career advancement opportunities.
- **For the Agency:** A skilled, engaged workforce, improved service delivery, and a reputation as an innovative leader.
- **For the Community:** Responsive, knowledgeable staff meeting critical needs with empathy. This shift from mandated training to employee development rejuvenates the workforce and improves service quality for vulnerable populations.

The opportunity for innovation is upon us. Let us innovate boldly, recognize the profound impact of investing in our people, and reimagine a future where professional growth is a core pillar of our agency's mission. Aligning our training approach with bold new strategies will not only boost employee engagement and satisfaction but will also lead to improved service outcomes that resonate throughout our community. Let's champion the culture shift to empower our employees, enhance our services, and secure a brighter future.

References

California Department of Social Services. (2008). *Staff Development and Training Manual*. Staff Development and Training.

<https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/staff-development-and-training>