How Joliet PD Modernized Training with Axon VR

Improving Decision-Making, TASER 10 Proficiency, and Community Engagement

The Challenge

The Joliet Police Department, serving a diverse community of over 150,000 residents as Illinois' third-largest city, faced significant training constraints. With almost 300 officers, the department struggled to conduct frequent, hands-on training due to logistical challenges, overtime costs, and resource limitations.

"One of the biggest challenges we faced at Joliet PD was scheduling in-person training for a department of our size, especially given the manpower shortage it created. Backfilling the streets required additional officers, leading to significant overtime costs." explains Deputy Chief Christopher Botzum.

Another challenge emerged during the department's transition from TASER 7 to TASER 10: the shift in deployment mechanics required officers to adjust to firing each probe independently, a change that demanded time, repetition, and muscle memory to fully internalize. With traditional training typically offering only one live-fire opportunity per year, officers had limited chances to build the reflexes needed to perform effectively under pressure.

At the same time, Joliet PD recognized a need to enhance officers' communication and de-escalation skills to improve interactions with the community—particularly for new recruits. Traditional training offered limited opportunities to practice complex, community-based encounters or build strong documentation habits, especially with hands-on training occurring so infrequently. The department wanted a way to reinforce decision-making, communication, and reporting skills more consistently without adding strain to staffing or resources.

"VR allows us to conduct training with just one trainer, anywhere in the station."

Deputy Chief Christopher Botzum

The Solution

Joliet PD turned to Axon VR Training, integrating Community Engagement Training (CET) and Simulator Training—Range Skills and Virtual Reality-Based Training (vRBT)—into its monthly schedule. This allowed officers to develop critical decision-making, TASER 10 proficiency, and communication skills in immersive, high-stress scenarios.

"We were among the first agencies to receive the VR headset. Recognizing its potential, we incorporated VR into our training to ensure officers had frequent, realistic exposure to high-stress situations," says Botzum.

Dedicated VR trainers were assigned to every patrol shift and specialized unit, making training more accessible across the department. Officers trained in roll-call rooms or other available spaces—no need for a dedicated facility or multiple instructors. "VR allows us to conduct training with just one trainer, anywhere in the station," Botzum emphasizes.

Officers used VR controllers that replicated the TASER 10 and their duty handgun—reinforcing proper technique and mitigating training scars by providing a realistic training experience with controllers that match the weight, balance, and feel of real-world equipment. Simulator Training: Range Skills allowed officers to practice dynamic, repeatable drills that are typically difficult to replicate in traditional training. These drills focused on fundamental skills, providing valuable muscle memory for various situations, including adapting to different clothing, body types, positions, and movements—elements often challenging to train for in live-fire environments.

Simulator Training: vRBT provided officers with immersive, unpredictable scenarios where trainers could customize environments, character behaviors, and outcomes to meet specific training objectives. These dynamic scenarios helped officers practice critical decision-making, de-escalation, and force application in situations that were fast-paced and reflective of real-world encounters.

Training in these immersive virtual environments helped officers refine their responses to complex, real-world situations, building confidence and improving their ability to act decisively under pressure.

The structured progression—from CET to vRBT—allowed officers to build on their skills over time, from communication and empathy to precise force application.

Joliet PD integrated Axon VR across multiple areas of training, using realistic, scenario-based modules to support tactical, communication, and community engagement skills:

- **TASER 10 Training:** Officers repeatedly practiced TASER 10 deployments, weapons transitions, and verbal commands, building muscle memory and improving decision-making under stress.

"We've had multiple instances where officers successfully used the TASER 10 for the first time in real-world situations without any issues. The transition was seamless because they had already experienced it in VR."

Lieutenant Julie Larson, TASER Administrator

- **Community Engagement Training:** Officers experienced complex civilian interactions—including scenarios involving mental health crises—building empathy, learning de-escalation tactics, and gaining perspective on how their actions impact the public.
- **Recruit Training:** New recruits are introduced to Axon VR after returning from the academy, allowing them to develop early familiarity with real-world policing scenarios.
- **Report Writing:** Officers will be using Axon VR scenarios as a basis for writing reports, reinforcing their ability to document incidents clearly and accurately.
- **Public Outreach & Recruitment:** Beyond training, Joliet PD found success using Axon VR at community and recruitment events. By allowing civilians to step into officers' shoes, the department helped the public better understand the challenges law enforcement faces.

The Results

Joliet PD's adoption of Axon VR led to measurable improvements in officer readiness, TASER 10 proficiency, decision-making under pressure, and communication with the community.

Real-World Training in Action

Officers who trained with Axon VR demonstrated increased accuracy and faster decision-making in real-world TASER 10 deployments—particularly during their first field uses of the device.

"We've had multiple instances where officers successfully used the TASER 10 for the first time in real-world situations without any issues," Taser Administrator Lieutenant Julie Larson confirms. "The transition was seamless because they had already experienced it in VR." That prior exposure helped officers respond more decisively, maintain control, and apply the right techniques under stress in dynamic, real-world situations.

One incident involved multiple officers responding to a chaotic scene with a large crowd. The officers needed to deploy the TASER 10 but faced the challenge of ensuring accurate probe placement under stress. Because they had practiced similar high-stress scenarios in VR, the officers executed the deployment effectively—maintaining control and avoiding escalation.

Some veteran officers were initially skeptical of Community Engagement Training, but after experiencing scenarios from the perspectives of civilians in crisis—such as domestic violence victims or individuals with mental health needs—they reported greater empathy and stronger de-escalation skills during field interactions.

"When citizens experience these scenarios firsthand, they walk away with a new level of appreciation for the challenges officers face daily."

Lieutenant Moises Avila, VR Administrator

The Value of Report Writing Training

Joliet PD discovered an additional benefit of Axon VR Training—using scenarios to enhance report writing. After completing training scenarios, officers wrote reports as if responding to real calls. This practice sharpened officers' ability to clearly explain decisions and reflect critically on their responses. Many agencies aren't aware of this use case, but Joliet PD sees it as an essential part of developing well-rounded officers.

Recruitment & Community Engagement

Beyond officer training, Joliet PD has leveraged Axon VR as a powerful tool for recruitment and public education. At recruitment events, prospective officers and community members can engage in immersive policing scenarios, helping them understand the complexities of law enforcement decision-making.

"When citizens experience these scenarios firsthand, they walk away with a new level of appreciation for the challenges officers face daily," says VR Administrator Lieutenant Moises Avila. "It's been an eye-opening experience for many members of our community."

Key Outcomes: A Transformational Shift in Police Training

Joliet PD's adoption of Axon VR represents more than just an upgrade to training—it's a shift toward a more modern, scalable, and outcomes-driven approach. By replacing infrequent, resource-heavy in-person training with immersive, high-frequency VR training sessions, the department has improved officer preparedness, tactical confidence, and the quality of community interactions.

These improvements in tactical readiness, confidence, and communication underscore how immersive training directly supports safer, more capable officers in the field.

- **Training Frequency & Proficiency:** Officers now train monthly instead of yearly—significantly increasing their muscle memory, decision-making speed, and confidence with TASER 10 use.
- **Better Decision-Making Under Pressure:** Officers demonstrate faster response times and greater accuracy in high-stakes situations, reinforcing their ability to act decisively.
- **A New Approach to Communication & De-escalation:** VR scenarios have provided a deeper understanding of civilian perspectives, improving officer interactions and reducing escalation risks.
- **Public Trust & Community Engagement:** Joliet PD's use of Axon VR at community events has helped bridge understanding between officers and civilians, reinforcing transparency and trust.

“Axon VR has modernized our training program and given officers the tools they need to succeed.”

Deputy Chief Christopher Botzum

- **Cost-Effective Training at Scale:** Since implementing VR, Joliet PD officers have fired over 16,000 virtual probes—training that would have cost $384,000 with live cartridges. This level of repetition would have been cost-prohibitive and extremely difficult to achieve through traditional methods due to time, staffing, and live-fire limitations.

With the adoption of immersive VR training, Joliet PD has redefined how officers build real-world readiness.

16,000
Virtual probes fired

Training that would have cost
$384,000
now delivered through VR

Officers now train
Monthly
instead of yearly

Training frequency increased
12x

Future Vision

Joliet PD continues to expand its VR training program, reinforcing its commitment to more effective TASER training, enhanced de-escalation techniques, and deeper community engagement. By incorporating ongoing VR training into its standard curriculum, the department ensures that officers continue to build preparedness for both tactical and interpersonal challenges. “Axon VR has modernized our training program and given officers the tools they need to succeed. We’re excited to see how this technology continues to evolve,” says Botzum.

Joliet PD’s experience demonstrates how frequent, immersive training with Axon VR enhances decision-making, reduces costs, and equips officers to respond more effectively when it matters most.

To learn more about how Axon VR can support your agency’s training goals, contact us for a demo.