

BODY-WORN CAMERAS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) launched the Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program (BWC PIP) in 2015 to assist law enforcement agencies with the enhancement or implementation of body-worn camera (BWC) initiatives. In addition, BJA funded a new training and technical assistance program to help police agencies implement their BWC programs. Informed by the experiences of cities and counties as well as additional research, this fact sheet highlights best practices for implementing BWCs and will support communities considering BWC programs.

As police departments progress in the 21st century, they recognize the need to provide officers with additional tools to collect and document evidence. Many police departments have deployed body-worn cameras to meet these needs with the support of DOJ, OJP, and BJA. The use of these cameras has overarching implications for local governments and law enforcement, so the decision to implement a BWC program should be carefully considered.

ASK QUESTIONS, HOLD MEETINGS

Successful implementation of a body-worn camera program requires all stakeholders in a jurisdiction, including local government officials, officers, prosecutors, defense counsel, and community members, to be aware and informed of the program. Therefore, it is important to include multiple stakeholders in the implementation plan. Here are some key steps to take as you plan.



■ **Research.**

Deciding to implement a BWC program cannot be taken lightly. Before deciding, it is imperative to research all aspects of the cameras, from cost to training to technology features to privacy. Reach out to other jurisdictions to learn from their experiences and review the toolkit and Implementation Guide created by the [BJA](#).

■ **Elected Officials.**

The role of elected officials is critical. They must understand the capabilities and limitations of the cameras and provide their support to the program. If you have the support of civic leaders who understand the benefits of a BWC program, it will help legitimize the program and garner support from the rest of the community.

■ **Public Outreach.**

Obtaining community members' input and providing information about the functions of BWCs will help gain support for the program and increase its legitimacy. Also, setting realistic expectations regarding the utility of BWCs from the beginning can potentially mitigate challenging issues further down the line.



■ Police Department.

When considering BWCs, be sure to sit down with everyone in the department, explain the purpose of the program, and address any concerns members may have. Include officers in beta testing cameras so that they can get used to the technology; ask for their feedback and input. The officers need to see and understand the benefits of using the cameras.

■ Prosecutors.

Though research on the impacts of BWCs on criminal prosecutions is limited, the research that exists suggests that domestic violence cases are more likely to be prosecuted if the cases involve an officer wearing a camera. BWCs can provide reliable evidence for courts, especially for cases in which the victims are hesitant to press charges, or when other evidence is not reliable. Consult with prosecutors when writing policies on data storage, sharing, and access. Once a BWC program is implemented, make it a practice to notify prosecutors about video footage if the involved officer has a recording.



KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK



What goals do we want to achieve?

One of the most important first steps is to figure out why you want to start a BWC program. Is it for the evidentiary value? Officer safety? Transparency with the community? Or perhaps you have multiple goals. Identifying the goals will facilitate planning, policy development, and implementation and will allow you to clearly explain to officers, community members, and other stakeholders what you hope to accomplish.



Are we prepared for freedom of information requests?

This can be a burden for the police department, especially in the absence of a policy or a clear understanding of the State guidelines concerning requests to view or obtain the videos. Also, redaction can be time-consuming and expensive. Be sure you have a plan in place before implementation.



How can we fund a BWC program?

Departments have funded BWC programs in many ways, but one that many U.S. jurisdictions have benefitted from is the Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program (BWC PIP), funded by the DOJ, OJP and BJA. Other funding resources include local police foundations, asset forfeiture funds, special local taxes, and county or municipal funds.



Can our current technology infrastructure handle the addition of BWCs?

One of the biggest challenges a police department may face is ensuring that it has sufficient storage capacity for all videos collected from the cameras, sufficient bandwidth to efficiently transfer video files from cameras to storage locations, and training of officers to implement and maintain the program. Be sure to consider the cost of purchasing new equipment, storing and managing data, transferring data, purchasing servers, and training officers.

Note that some studies have indicated that the long-term benefits of BWCs (including reduction in citizen complaints and litigation costs) may outweigh initial start-up and maintenance costs.



Do we understand the legislation concerning BWCs?

Consult with prosecutors and legal advisors to understand current laws relating to the use of BWCs and be sure they review and provide input on your policies before implementation. Several organizations (e.g., the Urban Institute and the National Conference of State Legislatures) track developments in BWC legislation.

Most studies of body-worn cameras have found them to be a useful tool for law enforcement. BWCs have the potential to reduce complaints against police (and introduce cost savings based on the reduction in complaints) and quickly resolve officer-involved incidents, as now you have visual documentation to reference. The videos can be a great tool to teach officers the right way and the wrong way to react in situations and the potential outcomes. They can help improve officers' performance and officer safety by highlighting areas of improvement or suggesting where internal policies need to be adjusted. The cameras benefit not only officers but the community as a whole.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Bureau of Justice Assistance, Funding

Bureau of Justice Assistance, "Body-Worn Camera Toolkit."

BWC PIP, Body-Worn Cameras: Training and Technical Assistance

Urban Institute, "Features: Police Body-Worn Cameras: Where Your State Stands."

Bureau of Justice Assistance, Body-Worn Camera Implementation Checklist

Dominique Burton, James R. Coldren, Jr., Denise Rodriguez, "Executive Session: The Future of Police Reform Efforts in the U.S." The CNA Corporation, August 2016.

Michael D. White, "Police Officer Body-Worn Cameras: Assessing the Evidence." Washington, DC: Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services, 2014.

National Conference of State Legislatures, "Body-Worn Camera Laws Database."

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