

Interest in body-worn cameras (BWCs) has grown rapidly among law enforcement agencies nationwide ever since controversial police use-of-force incidents have transpired in communities across the United States. Diverse groups that include law enforcement, civil rights leaders, politicians, and even the public support the use of this technology due to its potential to enhance transparency and public trust, promote accountability, and improve officer safety.

Over the past year, police departments have deployed cameras on their officers, improved their current body-camera policies and programs, or begun exploring their possible use. When this was written, at least 35 states are working on BWC legislation regarding funding for the technology, video storage and retention, and policies or regulations regarding camera and video use.

The federal government also supports this movement toward BWCs. At the close of 2014, President Obama proposed investing \$263 million in body-worn cameras to strengthen community policing.

As part of this initiative, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced on May 1, 2015, a \$20 million BWC Partnership Program to aid agencies in purchasing cameras, to support the evaluation of BWC practices, and to provide training and technical assistance for local and tribal law enforcement organizations.

Later that month, DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) launched a BWC implementation toolkit to serve as a comprehensive clearinghouse for criminal justice practitioners interested in planning and implementing camera usage.

The police department isn't the only institution that has a stake and interest

in law enforcement's use of cameras. Local government agencies also have a role in the use of the technology in these areas:

- A financial management role in camera procurement.
- An IT role in data and technology infrastructure.
- Local leaders' role in policy development to address camera use and privacy concerns.
- A prosecutor's office role in processing and using video files in court.

Moving beyond the technology as a tool for police, communities also have recently explored the use of cameras by other public employees, in such departments as parking, code enforcement, facilities, animal control, and fire inspection.

With police and nonpolice organizations moving toward adopting body-worn cameras, it is important for local government managers to understand research and best practices from their peers who have already adopted and evaluated BWCs in their organizations.

The remainder of this article describes findings and lessons learned from the Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department's recent deployment of BWCs.

Phoenix Finds Investigative Value

In 2013, the Phoenix Police Department (PPD) deployed the cameras and evaluated their impacts as part of a BJA-funded grant through the Smart Policing Initiative. From this study, PPD found that cameras have tremendous value from an investigative standpoint.

The cameras capture spontaneous utterances, evidence, and situations that could not otherwise be recreated in a courtroom. This also enhances community relations because cameras' documentation increases transparency, builds trust, and encourages more civilized behaviors from individuals who realize they are being captured on film.

The project evaluation also showed that police perceptions of the technology changed notably over time, as officers reported improved comfort and ease and increased recognition of the benefits of the technology.

BWCs also appear to have produced greater arrest activity, as well as significant reductions in complaints against officers (23 percent drop) when compared to officers in a comparison squad area that did not have cameras (10 percent increase).

Finally, BWCs improved the processing of domestic violence incidents, as cases with video were more likely to be

charged and successfully prosecuted, though BWCs did result in longer case-processing times.

Lessons Learned

Include all appropriate city and county stakeholders. The deployment and management of body cameras should be a collaborative effort so that all public safety stakeholders understand how the technology will impact them.

Suggested local stakeholders include the manager's office, police department, city and county attorneys, information technology, finance, public information, courts, mental health, fire, and others as deemed appropriate.

In Phoenix, the IT department staffs of both the city and the police department were involved due to their overlapping and connected roles related to data and information sharing between police, prosecutors, and courts. This was key to moving beyond the archaic systems of burning video files on discs, to creating a portal for PPD to virtually transfer videos in a timely manner, and to support the use of videos in prosecutions.

Public information officers from the police department, city, and county were also important stakeholders. The officers participated in group meetings, and whenever a formal report was developed, it was done collaboratively to ensure community messaging was consistent with the police goals and objectives, which are to promote transparency and to improve the way justice stakeholders do their jobs.

Phoenix's fire department also was included to address concerns regarding HIPAA and information redaction; for example, making sure responders understand how protected information from an officer's camera is used in prosecution.

Develop a communitywide strategic plan. The deployment of BWC is a complicated, costly, and administratively complex process that requires a communitywide strategic plan. The plan should include at a minimum: an operational camera deployment plan (i.e., scope,

nature, and timeline); IT and data infrastructure management; training and policy needs; auditing procedures; and estimated budgets.

Though BWCs have tremendous value, public safety partners should also be cautious in how quickly they deploy the technology. Even if there is political or community pressure or mandates, partners should make sure to set up the back-end solutions for managing the data, to budget costs for storage and infrastructure, and to establish policies for video processing and use—in court or for Freedom of Information Act requests. These are all critical components of a strategic plan that must be in place before the deployment of cameras.

When establishing its BWC program, Phoenix established a citywide task force of the key stakeholders noted above. This taskforce and the strategic plan are dynamic in that the city realizes its policies, procedures, and protocols need to be continually evaluated and updated.

Moving beyond the technology as a tool for police, communities also have recently begun exploring the use of cameras by other public employees, in such departments as parking, code enforcement, facilities, animal control, and fire inspection.

Collaborate with unions and community organizations. In Phoenix, officer and supervisor labor unions expressed significant concern in two main areas: language captured by the cameras and possible “fishing expeditions” by management designed to find policy violations that were not the subject of a formal complaint.

PPD included the unions in procurement and policy development processes to ensure unions could provide input on BWCs regularly and so that rules for police officers were not entirely driven by police management. To respond, for example, to union concerns of “fishing expeditions” or the management review of any video that was not associated with a specific resident complaint, PPD created a monthly audit program in which sergeants and lieutenants are encouraged to randomly review and inspect captured video.

Union representatives also participated in interest-based relationship training hosted by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service with the police department. Consequently, the unions were treated as joint stakeholders in BWC processes affecting their members.

A body-worn camera program should also involve open communication with the community. In Phoenix, the police department leveraged its existing community advisory boards, including the Hispanic Advisory Board, African American Advisory Board, LGBTQ Advisory Board, Muslim Advisory Board, and Community Response Squad to provide a place for open communication and for groups to raise any concerns with BWCs.

PPD made presentations to each advisory board to educate and solicit feedback on the technology and related policies. One of the common concerns the department received was regarding officers' control over the activation of cameras, so it spent considerable time educating the community through advisory boards, town hall meetings, and informal conversations on this matter.

Using these settings, they explained that during an officer's 10-hour shift

there are times when it would be inappropriate for their conversations or actions to be caught on video. These could involve going to the restroom, being in the locker room before or after a shift, or having a private conversation with a significant other. If officers are entrusted to carry a firearm and handcuffs, the community should trust protocols or policies that require them to turn cameras on at the appropriate time.

Proactively educate city partners in the technology.

PPD engaged in a number of formal and informal activities to ensure that stakeholders understood the physical technology of BWCs (how they are used, and where officers wear them), and also the institutional aspects of their use (purpose of the cameras and videos and policies and regulations).

The Phoenix police department found interactive learning opportunities the most valuable for educating stakeholders. While piloting potential camera vendors, for example, it had representatives from labor unions wear the cameras and participate in scenario testing developed by its training bureau.

This firsthand testing not only allowed union representatives to be involved in the camera selection process, but also provided them a practical understanding of how the cameras would be used in the field for a variety of police activities. These included foot pursuits, traffic stops, use of a weapon, or in a low-light building search, thus impacting their feedback on body camera policies and protocols.

PPD also encouraged stakeholders whose jobs don't normally put them out on the streets to participate in police ride-alongs. This was particularly useful for city prosecutors because it allowed them to see the processes officers go through, from using cameras in the field to uploading videos after their shifts and completing their departmental reports.

While engaging stakeholders through practice, police officials also found value in educating stakeholders

in formal settings. PPD created and led a citywide working group, conducted stakeholder interviews in small-group settings, developed regular city council reports, and participated in council and town hall meetings.

Increase attention on the needs of the city prosecutor's office. During the implementation of cameras in Phoenix, PPD discovered that evidence flow was a key issue for the use of BWC video. The city prosecutor's office was one of the most impacted due to staff responsibility over misdemeanor cases.

The county prosecutor's office was also important for violent crime charges. County prosecutors, however, often have months to prepare violent crime cases for trial, whereas city prosecutors have only days, thus requiring efficient and timely information flow for videos from the police department.

To overcome this information requirement, the department had dozens of meetings with staff and paralegals from the city and county prosecutors' offices to work through processes, policies, and procedures to ensure that prosecutors got as much lead time as possible to prepare for trials.

Currently, Phoenix allocates specially assigned personnel called court liaison officers who work alongside the prosecutor's office to ensure the proper chain of custody of evidence and to

attend to logistical issues pertaining to the camera data. The police and prosecutors also worked with IT to create the electronic portal to expedite the transfer of video files.

Aside from a communitywide strategic plan, police, prosecutors, and the manager's office should discuss issues related to evidence flow and identify a short-, medium-, and long-term sustainability strategy for addressing logistical issues associated with video files.

The Phoenix Police Department continues to collaborate with local government partners for the ongoing use of officer body-worn cameras and has plans to expand their use in the upcoming year. **PM**

ONLINE RESOURCES

For more information, check these websites:

U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Body Worn Camera Toolkit: <https://www.bja.gov/bwc>.

Smart Policing Initiative (SPI) webinar, Evaluating the Impacts of Officer-Worn Body Cameras in the Phoenix Police Department: <http://www.smartpolicinginitiative.com/tta/body-worn-cameras>.

Arizona State University study: https://publicservice.asu.edu/sites/default/files/ppd_spi_feb_20_2015_final.pdf.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <http://www.landlinemag.com/Story.aspx?StoryID=29522#.Vcos9HFVhBd>.
- 2 <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-20-million-funding-support-body-worn-camera-pilot-program>.
- 3 <https://www.bja.gov/bwc>.
- 4 www.smartpolicinginitiative.com.
- 5 Reference for SPI Phoenix Spotlight at <http://www.smartpolicinginitiative.com/tta/spotlight/phoenix-az-site-spotlight?device=desktop>.



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