



An Examination of the Type, Scope, and Duration of Body-Worn Camera Training

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Executive Summary

Though the research on BWCs has grown at an exponential rate over the past five years, there has been virtually no discussion about the training used by departments. This is a crucial oversight, given that any program or policy cannot succeed without effective training. We conducted an online survey of agencies receiving federal funds for BWCs to understand the type of training offered to officers, what this training entails, and how frequently training is provided. Responses from nearly 100 agencies indicate several key trends:

- Most agencies use multiple forms of training, rather than just one (66%).
- The majority of responding agencies take advantage of vendor training (71%), but they never rely solely on it.
- Reliance on vendor training did not vary by agency size. Large agencies are just as likely to use vendor training as small agencies.
- The vast majority of agencies provide officers with their own department-specific BWC initial training (84%).
- Only about one-third (34%) of agencies provide any sort of refresher training on BWCs. This is surprising given that both BWC policies and state law frequently change.

The second set of findings involves the content of the specific forms of training.

- Vendor training focuses primarily on operational issues with BWCs, such as the mechanics of activation, deactivation, and video download.
- Vendor training less commonly covers policy issues, though many respondents expressed concerns about this. They felt the department-specific nuances of a policy are not appropriate for vendor training.
- Initial training offered by departments themselves usually cover a wide range of both operational and policy issues. Departments generally do not rely solely on vendor training to cover operational issues.
- The length of vendor and initial training varies substantially, from two hours to more than four hours. Refresher training is usually an hour or less.
- Refresher training tends to focus primarily on a handful of selected policy issues. Respondents highlighted the importance of refresher training for addressing emerging problems (e.g., low activation rates) and changes in policy or law.

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Introduction

In the past five years, the adoption of body-worn cameras (BWCs) has spread rapidly across the United States. Law enforcement agencies have adopted BWCs to achieve a wide range of benefits, from reductions in use of force and citizen complaints to evidentiary value and improved citizen satisfaction (Lum, Stoltz, Koper, & Scherer, 2019; White, 2014; White & Malm, 2020). The federal government has strongly supported the technology's adoption, as evidenced by the development of the [National Body-Worn Camera Toolkit](#), a U.S. Department of Justice [BWC funding program](#), and an accompanying [training and technical assistance mechanism](#). This funding stream – the Bureau of Justice Assistance *Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program* (PIP) – has awarded nearly \$80 million to more than 400 agencies across the country for the purchase of nearly 70,000 BWCs (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2019).

The rapid diffusion of BWCs occurred without a substantial body of research for guidance. Agencies adopting BWCs prior to 2016, for example, could make use of only five published studies or agency reports (White, 2014). Now, more than 120 studies have examined a wide range of questions related to BWCs (Gaub & White, in press; Lum et al., 2019), including stakeholders' perceptions of the technology (Braga, Sousa, Coldren, & Rodriguez, 2018; Crow, Snyder, Crichlow, & Smykla, 2017; Gaub, Choate, Todak, Katz, & White, 2016; Jennings, Fridell, & Lynch, 2014; Smykla, Crow, Crichlow, & Snyder, 2016; Todak, Gaub, & White, 2018) their impact on officer and citizen behavior (e.g., Ariel, Farrar, & Sutherland, 2015; Braga et al., 2018; Headley, Guerette, & Shariati, 2017; White, Gaub, & Todak, 2018), and the effect on court outcomes (e.g., Morrow, Katz, & Choate, 2016; Owens, Mann, & Mckenna, 2014; White, Gaub, Malm, & Padilla, in press). And while some research has discussed the implications of this research for department training, there is virtually no research characterizing the nature, scope, and content of BWC training itself. This omission has significant consequences, as training has a direct influence on an agency's ability to develop and implement a successful BWC program (White et al., 2018).

Methodology

To better inform our understanding of BWC training, the authors used the online platform *Qualtrics* to administer a survey to agencies that have received federal funding for the purchase of BWCs as part of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Policy and Implementation Program (PIP). The survey link was sent to all grantees from fiscal years 2015-2018. The survey (see Appendix 1) captures information related to three types of BWC training: BWC vendor training (i.e., the company who manufactured and sold the BWCs to the agency), department-specific initial training upon receipt of the cameras, and department-specific follow-up or refresher training.

The authors coordinated with CNA, the BJA BWC PIP Training and Technical Assistance provider, to distribute the survey to all PIP grantee sites (N=316).¹ The survey was sent to the point of contact on record for the grantees; in some cases, multiple points of contact were recorded, in which case the survey was sent to all points of contact. After the initial survey invitation was sent, two follow-up/reminder emails were subsequently sent. We received 96 completed surveys (30.3% response rate) from 33 states (see Figure 1). California is over-represented with 10 respondents.

Of the 96 responding agencies, 26 (27%) had fewer than 100 full-time sworn officers, 29 (30%) had between 100 and 499 sworn officers, and 19 (20%) had more than 500 sworn officers.² Additionally, 40 agencies (42%) served jurisdictions with at least 100,000 people. All responding agencies deployed BWCs to officers assigned to patrol. Agencies were asked if they equip specialty units with BWCs, and if so, which units. Just over 70% of agencies deploy BWCs to at least one specialty unit. The most commonly identified specialty units were K9 (57%), traffic (56%), community policing (47%), bicycle (40%), detectives (40%), and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT; 34%).

Agencies were asked to describe the format and content of each type of training they employ (vendor, department-specific initial, department-specific refresher). For each type of training, respondents were asked how long the training lasted, its format, and the topics covered related to the operation of the camera itself and the policy used by the department. Operational issues are related to the actual functioning of the camera and accompanying systems, such as *how*

¹ The authors are also part of the BJA PIP Training and Technical Assistance Team.

² 22 respondents did not provide agency demographics.

(i.e., “train the trainer”) or directly to officers—varied in length. The most frequent duration of vendor training is four hours (25%), though two hours (20%) and longer than four hours (19%) were also common. In terms of format, the training tended to be in-person and/or lecture-based (74% and 35%, respectively). Only 10% of agencies reported receiving scenario-based vendor training, and no agencies received vendor training virtually.

The first column of Tables 1 and 2 describe responses from agencies that received vendor training; the entries show the percentage that identified each operational or policy issue covered in the vendor training.³ Operational issues were frequently covered in vendor training, including activation (84%), video download (83%), deactivation (82%), tagging videos (77%), and camera placement (75%). Policy issues were much less likely to be covered in vendor training. In fact, less than half of responding agencies reported covering specific policy issues in vendor training. For example, only 42% of departments reported vendor training that covered circumstances for mandatory activation. Only 30% reported vendor training that covered citizen notification. Timelines for data download (57%) and tagging videos (51%) were the most common policy issues covered in vendor training.

In open-ended responses, many agencies indicated that the most useful aspect of vendor training is the technical knowledge related to the function of the camera: How to physically activate and deactivate the camera; how to dock the camera and ensure video is being uploaded and the camera is charging; the process for tagging and labeling videos; and any automatic activation triggers. Several respondents noted that officers liked having a vendor representative available to answer these types of questions.

Conversely, respondents found policy-related discussions least useful in the vendor training, as some of these issues will vary by department. For example, they felt it was useful and appropriate for vendors to describe *how* to activate or deactivate a camera, but not *when* or *under what circumstances* this should be done. Additionally, some agencies mentioned that vendors would describe features that were not yet available (still under development) or were not being used by that agency, which caused confusion among officers as to the true capabilities of the cameras they were using.

³ Recall that most agencies provide more than one-type of training.

Table 1: Operational Issues Covered in BWC Training (%)

	<i>Vendor Training (n=69)</i>	<i>Initial Training (n=81)</i>	<i>Refresher Training (n=33)</i>
<i>Camera Placement</i>	75	83	57
<i>Activation</i>	84	86	75
<i>Deactivation</i>	82	86	70
<i>Buffer</i>	62	60	30
<i>Battery Issues</i>	66	72	36
<i>Muting Audio</i>	58	56	30
<i>Tagging Videos</i>	77	74	60
<i>Video Download</i>	83	81	60
<i>Charging</i>	0	0	0
<i>Other</i>	18	26	30

Table 2: Policy Issues Covered in BWC Training (%)

	<i>Vendor Training (n=69)</i>	<i>Initial Training (n=81)</i>	<i>Refresher Training (n=33)</i>
<i>Mandatory Activation</i>	42	94	88
<i>Discretionary Activation</i>	36	79	61
<i>Prohibited Activation</i>	37	85	67
<i>Discretionary Deactivation</i>	34	73	42
<i>Off-Duty Use</i>	31	63	52
<i>Personal Camera Use</i>	28	69	36
<i>Citizen Notification of BWC Encounters with Victims and Other Sensitive Populations</i>	30	73	39
<i>Tagging Videos</i>	37	79	48
<i>Data Download</i>	51	77	67
<i>Data Retention Periods</i>	57	84	48
<i>Officer Authority to Review</i>	46	74	48
<i>Supervisor Authority to Review</i>	49	86	67
<i>Officer Access After Critical Incident</i>	48	88	67
<i>Coordination with Prosecutors</i>	34	79	48
<i>Public Records Requests</i>	36	59	42
<i>Redaction of Videos</i>	30	53	39
<i>Other</i>	42	47	24
	25	7	15

Department-Specific Initial Training

Eighty-four percent of agencies provide their officers with initial department-specific training on BWC operation and policy (n=81). Most of these agencies developed their own internal training curriculum (70%), though just over one-quarter borrowed training material from another agency. The most common training duration is two hours (35%), followed by four hours (20%) and one hour (16%).

One-quarter of agencies provide BWC training to recruits at the academy. Just over 20% of agencies deploy BWCs to new officers during the academy, about half of agencies (51%) wait until field training (e.g., after the academy), 4% deploy after field training, and the remaining deploy at some other time. The most common formats for the department-specific initial training were in-person and lecture-based training (86% and 42%, respectively). Department-specific initial training was common among agencies of all sizes: fewer than 100 sworn officers (88%), 100-499 sworn officers (100%), and 500 or more sworn officers (95%).

Column 2 in Tables 1 and 2 shows the responses from all agencies who indicated they use department-specific initial training. The most common operational issues included in initial training were: video download (81%), camera placement (83%), and activation and deactivation of the camera (86% for both). The most common policy issues covered in initial training were mandatory camera activation (94%), prohibited camera activation (85%), data download (84%), and officer and supervisor authority to review (86% and 88%, respectively). Coordination with prosecutors (59%), public records requests (53%), and issues surrounding video redaction (47%) were less commonly covered.

In open-ended comments, respondents said operational issues should be covered in the initial department training if the agency does not receive training from the vendor. If the department receives vendor training, the operational or technical issues should be covered there. Coverage of operational issues in both vendor and department-specific initial training is redundant. Respondents again highlighted that policy issues should be a central feature of the department-specific initial training. Also, some respondents indicated that coverage of issues outside of line officers' purview (e.g., retention, redaction, or public records policies) were unnecessary in the department initial training.

Department-Specific Refresher Training

About one-third of respondents (34%) said they conduct follow-up or refresher training (see Column 3 of Tables 1 and 2). The refresher training is most commonly delivered annually (33%) or on an “as needed” basis (33%). Refresher training tends to be shorter than initial training, usually an hour (51%) or less (e.g., half-hour; 24%). Operational issues are often not covered in refresher training. Activation and deactivation (75% and 70%, respectively) were the most common operational issues discussed during refresher training. Video tagging and downloading were covered in 60% of refresher training.

A handful of policy issues are more prominently featured in refresher training. The most common policy issues include: mandatory activation (88%), prohibited activation (67%), tagging videos (67%), officer and supervisor authority to review (67% for each). Policy issues that are less common include: discretionary deactivation (42%), personal camera use (36%), citizen notification (39%), coordination with prosecutors (42%), public records, (39%) and redaction (24%).

In open-ended comments, respondents noted that refresher training is most useful for covering BWC policy changes or software updates. Responding agencies also noted refresher trainings can serve as a useful feedback loop; for example, after several months of use, the department could provide additional guidance on specific operational or policy issues that may need clarification. Or it may be necessary to disseminate changes to local or state law related to recording, retention, or public records. Agencies also noted that BWCs were often incorporated in other types of training, such as use of force, tactics, pursuit, CED/Taser, and other camera systems (e.g., in-car cameras) training.

Conclusion

While the research surrounding BWCs has grown exponentially in the past five years, there has been virtually no emphasis on training. This is a notable oversight given that effective training is imperative for a successful BWC program. This survey is the first attempt to understand how agencies implement BWC training to their officers, both initially at program deployment and with refresher training over time.

Several key findings emerged from the survey responses of nearly 100 agencies receiving federal funding for BWCs. The first set of findings involve the different forms of BWC training.

- Most agencies use multiple forms of training, rather than just one (66%).
- The majority of responding agencies take advantage of vendor training (71%), but they never rely solely on it.
- Reliance on vendor training did not vary by agency size. Large agencies are just as likely to use vendor training as small agencies.
- The vast majority of agencies provide officers with their own department-specific BWC initial training (84%).
- Only about one-third (34%) of agencies provide any sort of refresher training on BWCs. This is surprising given that both BWC policies and state law frequently change.

The second set of findings involves the content of the specific forms of training.

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- Initial training offered by departments themselves usually cover a wide range of both operational and policy issues. Departments generally do not rely solely on vendor training to cover operational issues.
- The length of vendor and initial training varies substantially, from two hours to more than four hours. Refresher training is usually an hour or less.
- Refresher training tends to focus primarily on a handful of selected policy issues. Respondents highlighted the importance of refresher training for addressing emerging problems (e.g., low activation rates) and conveying changes in policy or law.

The results presented here are informative but the sample of responding agencies may not reflect the larger universe of BWC-adopting agencies. All respondents have applied for and received federal funding for BWCs. Nevertheless, this study represents an initial effort at understanding the type, scope, and duration of BWC training.

About the Authors

Janne E. Gaub is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She also serves as a Subject-Matter Expert for the Bureau of Justice Assistance BWC Policy and Implementation Program Training and Technical Assistance mechanism, providing guidance and support to law enforcement agencies adopting BWCs. She received her Ph.D. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Arizona State University in 2015. Dr. Gaub's primary research interests are police BWCs, specialty units, misconduct, and gender and policing. Her work has been published in *Criminology*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Police Quarterly*, *Policing: An International Journal*, and *Women & Criminal Justice*.

Michael D. White is a Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University, and is Associate Director of ASU's Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety. He is also the Co-Director of Training and Technical Assistance for the US Department of Justice Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program. He received his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Temple University in 1999. Prior to entering academia, Dr. White worked as a deputy sheriff in Pennsylvania. Dr. White's primary research interests involve the police, including use of force, technology, and misconduct. His recent work has been published in *Justice Quarterly*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, and *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Aili Malm is a Professor in the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Emergency Management at California State University, Long Beach. She is also a Subject Matter Expert for BJA's Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program. Dr. Malm is interested in the assessment and evaluation of policing strategies and intelligence. In this capacity, her research requires an ability to blend theory with advanced methodologies, including social network analysis (SNA). She was one of the pioneers in applying SNA to help understand illicit networks and has used social network analysis to examine several different types of markets, including arms, drugs, art, and human trafficking. She routinely trains law enforcement in the use of SNA for intelligence analysis. She has worked as a PI or Co-PI for over \$5 million in grants. Currently, along with Dina Perrone, she is the external evaluator for the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) pilot in Los Angeles County and San Francisco. She has also led grants researching drugs on the darknet and human trafficking networks.

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Appendix A: Survey

Vendor Training

1. Did officers in your agency receive training from your BWC vendor?
 - a. No (skip to question 8)
 - b. Yes
 - c. I don't know

2. How long was the vendor training provided to officers? (Round up to the nearest half-hour)
[Dropdown menu]

3. Was the vendor training customized by your agency?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes (please explain) _____

4. Please select the content included in the *vendor-provided* training. (Select all that apply)
 - a. Operational issues
 - i. Camera placement
 - ii. Activation
 - iii. Deactivation
 - iv. Buffer
 - v. Battery issues
 - vi. Muting audio
 - vii. Tagging videos
 - viii. Video download
 - ix. Charging
 - x. Other: _____

 - b. Policy issues
 - i. When activation is **mandatory**
 - ii. When activation is **discretionary**
 - iii. When activation is **prohibited**
 - iv. Discretionary deactivation (e.g., citizen request)
 - v. Off-duty use
 - vi. Personal cameras (prohibited or permitted)
 - vii. Citizen notification of BWC
 - viii. Encounters with crime victims and other sensitive populations
 - ix. Tagging videos
 - x. Data download (how, when, how often, etc.)
 - xi. Data retention periods
 - xii. Officer authority to review
 - xiii. Supervisor authority to review
 - xiv. Officer access after a critical incident
 - xv. Coordination with prosecutors

- xvi. Public records requests
- xvii. Redaction of videos
- xviii. Other: _____

5. Describe the format of the vendor training. (Select all that apply)
- a. In-person
 - b. Virtual, video, or other form not in-person
 - c. Lecture
 - d. Scenario-based exercises
 - e. Other: _____
6. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the vendor training were **most** useful/beneficial for officers?
7. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the vendor training were **least** useful/beneficial for officers?

Department BWC Training

8. Does your agency provide BWC training to officers apart from or in addition to vendor training?
- a. No (skip to question 16)
 - b. Yes
 - c. I don't know
9. Did your agency staff develop your BWC training?
- a. No (e.g., borrowed or adopted from elsewhere)
 - b. Yes
 - c. I don't know
10. Would you be willing to share your department training materials with other departments?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. How long was the department training provided to officers? (Round up to the nearest half-hour)
[Dropdown menu]
12. Please select the content included in the *initial department* training. (Select all that apply)
- a. Operational issues
 - i. Camera placement
 - ii. Activation
 - iii. Deactivation
 - iv. Buffer
 - v. Battery issues

- vi. Muting audio
- vii. Tagging videos
- viii. Video download
- ix. Charging
- x. Other: _____

b. Policy issues

- i. When activation is **mandatory**
- ii. When activation is **discretionary**
- iii. When activation is **prohibited**
- iv. Discretionary deactivation (e.g., citizen request)
- v. Off-duty use
- vi. Personal cameras (prohibited or permitted)
- vii. Citizen notification of BWC
- viii. Encounters with crime victims and other sensitive populations
- ix. Tagging videos
- x. Data download (how, when, how often, etc.)
- xi. Data retention periods
- xii. Officer authority to review
- xiii. Supervisor authority to review
- xiv. Officer access after a critical incident
- xv. Coordination with prosecutors
- xvi. Public records requests
- xvii. Redaction of videos
- xviii. Other: _____

13. Describe the format of the department training. (Select all that apply)

- a. In-person
- b. Virtual, video, or other form not in-person
- c. Lecture
- d. Scenario-based exercises
- e. Other: _____

14. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the department training are **most** useful/beneficial for officers?

15. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the department training are **least** useful/beneficial for officers?

In-Service/Refresher Training Questions

16. Does your department provide regular in-service or refresher training on BWCs for officers?

- a. No (skip to question 24)
- b. Yes

c. I don't know

17. Would you be willing to share your in-service/refresher training materials with other departments?

a. Yes

b. No

18. How often is in-service/refresher BWC training offered?

19. How long is the in-service/refresher training provided to officers? (Round up to the nearest half-hour) [Dropdown menu]

20. Please select the content included in the *in-service/refresher* training. (Select all that apply)

a. Operational issues

i. Camera placement

ii. Activation

iii. Deactivation

iv. Buffer

v. Battery issues

vi. Muting audio

vii. Tagging videos

viii. Video download

ix. Charging

x. Other: _____

b. Policy issues

i. When activation is **mandatory**

ii. When activation is **discretionary**

iii. When activation is **prohibited**

iv. Discretionary deactivation (e.g., citizen request)

v. Off-duty use

vi. Personal cameras (prohibited or permitted)

vii. Citizen notification of BWC

viii. Encounters with crime victims and other sensitive populations

ix. Tagging videos

x. Data download (how, when, how often, etc.)

xi. Data retention periods

xii. Officer authority to review

xiii. Supervisor authority to review

xiv. Officer access after a critical incident

xv. Coordination with prosecutors

xvi. Public records requests

xvii. Redaction of videos

xviii. Other: _____

21. Describe the format of the in-service/refresher training. (Select all that apply)
- In-person
 - Virtual, video, or other form not in-person
 - Lecture
 - Scenario-based exercises
 - Other: _____
22. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the in-service/refresher training are **most** useful/beneficial for officers?
23. Based on feedback from attendees, what portions of the in-service/refresher training are **least** useful/beneficial for officers?

General Training Questions

24. When do new officers/recruits receive BWCs and associated training?
- In the academy
 - After the academy, during field training
 - After field training
 - Other: _____
25. Are BWCs incorporated into other types of department training (for example, use of BWCs during firearms training)?
- Yes
 - No
26. [If “Yes” to #24] Please describe how BWCs are incorporated into other training conducted by the department (be as comprehensive as possible).
27. Do you have any other thoughts or comments about BWC training that you believe would be useful to other agencies just getting started with BWCs?

Agency Demographics

28. State: [Dropdown menu]
29. Type of agency:
- Police department
 - Sheriff’s department
 - State law enforcement agency
 - College/university police department
 - Other: _____

30. Jurisdiction population:

- a. 1 million or more
- b. 500,000 to 999,999
- c. 250,000 to 499,999
- d. 100,000 to 249,999
- e. 50,000 to 99,999
- f. 25,000 to 49,999
- g. 10,000 to 24,999
- h. Less than 10,000

31. Number of full-time sworn personnel: [Dropdown menu]

32. Number of part-time sworn personnel: [Dropdown menu]

33. Number of civilian personnel: [Dropdown menu]

34. From the list below, please indicate the specialty units that your agency operates and if they have/will have BWCs. (Select all that apply)

[two columns of checkboxes – Agency Has Unit, Unit Has/Will Have BWCs]

- a. Canine
- b. SWAT
- c. Gangs
- d. Traffic
- e. Mounted
- f. Bicycle
- g. Boat/marine
- h. Community policing
- i. Detectives/investigations
- j. Jail/corrections
- k. Other: (please indicate all other specialty units you have, and which have/will have BWCs) _____

If yes to #10 and/or #17:

Thank you for offering to share your training materials. Please provide your contact information and we will be in touch.

- Name and rank:
- Email address:
- Phone number: