

BODY-WORN CAMERA TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VENDOR ACQUISITION GUIDE

Introduction

Congratulations on your Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program (BWCPPI) award. Many BWCPPI agencies within the current funding year have sound body-worn camera (BWC) policies, or are in the process of developing them, as the first step toward BWC implementation or program expansion.

Since the inception of BWCPPI in 2015, the BWC training and technical assistance (TTA) team has worked with hundreds of BWCPPI grantees. It has worked closely with all types of agencies—large and small, urban, suburban, and rural. It has provided TTA to sheriffs' departments, tribal law enforcement, university police, transportation authority police, school police departments, and park police. The BWC TTA team has also assisted agencies in implementing BWC programs in county jails and within state correctional agencies.

BWC equipment, practices, vendor pricing, and marketing strategies have changed dramatically since 2015, and they continue to evolve rapidly. Below we provide some guidance and helpful hints regarding the acquisition of body-worn cameras.

Meeting the complex challenges of acquisition

We understand the importance and challenge of making acquisition decisions. The cameras are just one part of a larger and comprehensive BWC program implementation that your agency committed to when it applied for a BWCPPI grant. Although we help you and your agency regarding acquisition decisions (see below), certain constraints limit the type of assistance we can provide. For example, we cannot recommend, much less dictate, which cameras to buy. We cannot advise you on how to determine the necessary auxiliary services and features, such as digital video storage and redaction, that your agency should procure. We cannot tell you which vendor to select or whether to purchase or lease your BWCs. We cannot dictate whether your agency should buy system components à la carte or select a package of hardware, software, and services offered to your agency by a vendor that may be urging you to act quickly to leverage a "bargain" or "discount" price that will soon expire. Every vendor has a marketing strategy; the concept of "buyer beware" certainly applies here.

This document will help you sort through the complex BWC acquisition process to make an informed decision based on your requirements. Since there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to BWC procurement, your agency must consider the unique needs and local factors that influence your acquisition process. We can provide guidance throughout that process as you work through the relevant issues related to procuring BWCs.

The BWC TTA team has information on common practices used by current and former grantees relating to policy development that drives many considerations for acquiring BWCs (the most recent information on that topic can be found [here](#)). To summarize some key information, just over one-half of all agencies (55 percent) have language on specialty or nonpatrol units wearing BWCs, while less than half (45 percent) mandate BWC use during off-duty assignments—although more recent grantees tend to do so at a higher rate. The BWC TTA team can provide guidance when it comes to BWC procurement, resources, subject matter experts, and peer-to-peer networks to get you all the information you need.

Getting started

BWCs are a long-term investment, and both up-front and long-term costs must be part of the equation. In addition, the sheer number of elements that are part of the BWC procurement process makes the acquisition decision challenging. But you have come this far in the BWC process and are undoubtedly aware that it is not a simple matter of buying “the best” BWCs, turning them on, and recording. Vendors do not always make it easy for agencies to make “apples to apples” comparisons.

Because the acquisition process will require deliberation and thoughtful assessment, it is best to consider products and packages from multiple vendors. Based on the BWC TTA team’s experience in working with hundreds of BWCPIP grantees, we have identified three overarching considerations that should frame your approach before your agency moves to the details of considering the particular features, options, and add-ons that are part of the complex decision and procurement process.

Overarching considerations

- 1. Does your state have legislation that either requires local law enforcement agencies to acquire BWCs or sets specific mandates on how a BWC program is implemented and managed?** You should thoroughly understand the BWC legislation in your state and think about how it will affect your implementation and costs. In addition, there may be local ordinances that address BWC deployment, such as privacy considerations or restriction in use of facial recognition technology (which is a generally controversial feature of BWCs). You will also want to be mindful of pending legislation, as it may affect your choices. For instance, some states have recently passed laws that require investigators or special operations and/or every officer to wear BWCs, at which point you must consider mounting options for a variety of uniforms and plain clothes contingencies. CNA has developed a [resource](#) on BWC mount locations that may prove useful for your agency.
- 2. How prepared is your agency technologically to implement a BWC program, and how much modification will be necessary to get your agency ready for deployment?** Some agencies will have technology infrastructure, processing, and support personnel already in place. For instance, if your agency has in-car cameras, uses pole-cameras, or routinely accesses video from municipal, commercial, or home security systems, you likely have a technological head start. These digital-savvy agencies may be directed toward certain decisions. For instance, if an agency already has an in-car video, it may consider options for bundling its in-car system with a new BWC system. (This by no means is a prescriptive suggestion, and we encourage agencies to consider all feasible approaches for BWC implementation.) Other agencies may be starting from scratch and must investigate issues surrounding bandwidth, infrastructure to support docking stations, and data storage, for example.
- 3. Agencies should recognize that the up-front costs of a BWC program are only part of the equation.** There are many downstream costs and resources that will need to be considered. What we have learned over 6 years of providing TTA for BWCPIP is that downstream costs are often unanticipated, and even some of the more technology-savvy grantee agencies have been caught by surprise. Be aware that there are costs for BWC video redaction, storage, sharing, and retrieval. In addition, BWC units may require permanent personnel, and the software and hardware require upgrades and replacement. All of these processes have associated costs that are generally higher than the up-front costs.

The BWC market and ecosystem are constantly evolving. Increasingly, vendors are bundling packages and taking advantage of advances in technology (e.g., audio-to-text technology purportedly makes report writing easier). These advanced features are sometimes bundled as standard or are sold as add-ons. Vendors are increasingly shifting from à la carte purchase offerings to bundled packages, and packages through which your agency would buy or lease BWCs and related services on a monthly basis (e.g., fee per month, per camera) that often feature automatic equipment upgrades at regular intervals (e.g., every 18 or 24 months). Thus, it is important that your agency determine its current needs, but it should also anticipate how those needs may change in the future.

Sorting it all out: A flexible three-phased approach

Moving forward with your BWC acquisition is not a simple linear process. To make the process more manageable, an agency can organize its broader acquisition process into smaller components. Based on our experience with hundreds of agencies, three phases—planning, testing, and procurement—cover the basics. But keep in mind that your agency may have to revisit and revise its approach as it addresses these phases. You may learn something in the testing phase that leads your agency to reconsider something it thought it had established in the planning phase (e.g., a feature that did not perform as you had anticipated or a feature that you had not anticipated buying is now needed). For example, one BWCPIP grantee purchased BWCs with automatic activation triggers, but then noticed that their magnetic mounts interfered with the automatic activation function on the cameras. The site contacted its vendor and switched out the magnetic mounts, which solved the issue.

Planning

The goals of planning your BWC acquisition should be to gather as much information as possible, use that information to decide on a vendor or BWC model, and establish a timeline for implementation. Below are some steps to help guide you throughout the planning process:

Talk to other agencies. Reach out to surrounding or similar departments to ask about their vendor, functionality, officer feedback, camera deployment, and storage. The BWC TTA team can also assist with finding agencies similar to yours. Consider visiting or speaking with a nearby agency to talk about its BWC system. Also discuss with your prosecutor's office whether other agencies they work with have BWCs and, if so, what products and features they prefer and whom you can reach out to for more information.

Establish an advisory committee. Form a working group to guide your agency through the planning, testing, and procurement process, and make sure to include representatives from all of the relevant agency units. Include information technology (IT) personnel to help keep storage and technical considerations in mind. Consult prosecutors to provide input on evidence-sharing needs and methods. A wide range of internal stakeholders should be involved—such as BWC users, BWC administrators, internal affairs, specialty units, records department, and supervisors—as well as external stakeholders such as police unions, community groups, courts and judges, and prosecutors.

Conduct front-end research. Gather information on vendors and camera models and prioritize the camera capabilities and if/how the BWCs will connect with your current systems (e.g., in-car video, stationary cams, interview room video, and/or closed-circuit TV). Identify what each vendor offers and figure out if/how it meets the needs and priorities of your department. The BWC TTA team has numerous resources that can help with this, such as the [Directories of Outcomes](#), [Annual BWC Policy Analysis](#), and [In Views](#) that feature commentary from BWC experts.

Document desired BWC capabilities. Reference the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) BWC Market Survey (see next page) in conjunction with these questions to identify potential BWC features—although your agency should identify any other features worth considering. Keep in mind that feature sets and technology are ever changing, and the NIJ Market Survey was published in November 2016, 5 years ago. You should also consult vendor websites and the professional literature, and make the prospective value of features part of your discussion with neighboring agencies. Consult with your BWC TTA lead, who can connect you with other agencies that may have tested or deployed BWCs with the particular features you are considering. Those agencies can provide candid feedback about the value of the feature and can confirm that a feature or add-on either has value or performs as well as anticipated or raises unintended problems.

Although “standard” and “add-on” features are ever changing, the list below includes some current features that are commonly offered as options. View NIJ’s [BWC Market Survey](#) for a more complete list of camera features.

- Automatic triggers (for more information, read this [In View](#))
- Low-light recording¹
- Camera resolution options
- Field of vision
- GPS tracking/recording
- Live streaming (if considered, be sure you have the infrastructure and bandwidth to handle it)
- Battery life
- Mounting options
- Data storage options

Testing

Before finalizing your list of requirements for a camera, pilot test multiple vendors’ systems and include the resulting information in a request for proposals (RFPs) or solicitation in accordance with local and federal procurement rules. We understand that some agencies may have little choice in their purchasing decisions because of local or state mandates, pre-existing technology within a department, or other factors.

Connect with vendors. Invite vendors to send your agency BWC systems to evaluate and discuss their plans for developing and deploying future models. For example, is the BWC system they send for evaluation the same one your agency could procure, or do they plan on releasing a new model in the near future? Ask the vendor for a reference list of customers and follow up with them. You can also contact your BWC TTA provider to connect you with agencies that have tested or deployed the particular model(s) your agency is interested in.

Test BWCs in diverse use-case scenarios and involve officers from multiple units. Consider testing by officers in various patrol and specialty units that will use the cameras. Test various camera settings and ask vendors if they can

¹V. Hung, S. Babin, and J. Coberl, *A Market Survey on Body Worn Camera Technologies*, National Institute of Justice, 2016, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdf-files1/nij/grants/250381.pdf>.

pre-set cameras based on your desired settings for testing. When testing multiple BWCs, rotate cameras among officers, if feasible. Assess whether and how well the BWCs perform ancillary or unique functions. For instance, BWCs can serve as makeshift cameras for recording spontaneous field interviews, or they may be used to capture evidence in circumstances where an officer is not able to wait for more advanced support (e.g., capturing footprints in the snow). Agency personnel should steer the discussion and questions during these demos and avoid aggressive sales pitches. Do not hesitate to ask challenging questions and insist that the vendor substantiate its claims, in particular how its products perform in adverse circumstances. For example, do they remain secure in physical altercations or foot pursuits, and how do they perform in extreme cold, heat, and humidity?

Test BWCs in various conditions and use-case settings. It is important to test BWCs under a wide range of conditions that will occur when they are deployed. Again, test to substantiate vendor claims for conditions that are most relevant to your agency. Consider the following elements when testing:

Environmental conditions

- Night shift vs. day shift
- High heat/cold weather
- High humidity/exposure to water
- Exposure to dust
- Durability

Use-case settings

- Patrol operations
- Traffic enforcement
- Community engagement activities
- Field interviews
- Investigations (how well can BWCs pick up evidence on scene?)
- SWAT operations
- Demonstration/First Amendment events
- Detective use

Compatibility

- Test the multiple mounting options from each vendor to identify the best mounting option for your uniform, and test them with all potentially applicable uniforms, including outerwear, where appropriate.
- Test integration with existing equipment (if desired and able).
- Test the accompanying software (e.g., viewing, redacting, auditing).

Vendor testing criteria. It will be helpful to develop a rubric form for evaluating the different vendors that defines the criteria for evaluating the vendors' proposals (e.g., equipment performance, video and sound quality, battery life, mounting options and performance, number of desired features provided) and gives greater weight to the most important evaluation criteria for your agency. The BWC TTA team has also developed a [BWC Field Testing & Evaluation Form](#) that you may find useful.

Procurement

These questions should feed into your RFP. For assistance, please consult the BWC [RFP Guide](#) and reach out to your contacts at our TTA team if you need additional help.

ASK YOUR AGENCY

Budget. What is your agency's budget for your BWC system? Although agencies will often have a fixed budget for BWCs (perhaps the same budget that your agency submitted with its BWCPIP grant application), it is important to remain flexible because the market is dynamic, and technology and services may be bundled in a variety of ways. Have you compared your budget to those from other agencies to make sure it is realistic? Have you put your information into the [Cost and Storage Estimator](#)? Have you checked to see if your state has procurement contracts or if you can work with other agencies nearby to leverage volume discounts? It is possible that something you had not previously considered affects other budget areas. Perhaps the system selected or configuration desired will affect the required IT support. For example, local storage will likely require more local IT support than will a vendor's bundled cloud storage solution. The ability to transmit video to partners via an electronic link may save significant personnel time and media costs over transmitting data via physical media such as DVDs or thumb drives. Have you followed the procurement requirements for your jurisdiction? In addition, if you are using federal funding, you should ensure that you are following federal guidelines—issuing an RFP, getting at least three bids, and/or following sole-source guidelines.

Storage and integration. How will you handle [digital evidence integration](#)? What are the storage and data transmission requirements for your desired system (based on the amount of video you expect to generate)? How will you share information with your partners? Will uploading video be automated, or will workstations be set up for that activity?

Digital evidence management (DEM). How will you manage the BWC footage that you collect and gather? DEM includes how video footage is collected, redacted, stored, retrieved, and shared. The BWC TTA team has published a document that explains the DEM process in seven jurisdictions.² The document can be summarized with three major findings. First, the team found that the use of BWC footage is interconnected within an agency and across the criminal justice system. Second, BWCs and their footage require more resources than criminal justice agencies initially realized. Third, the release of video footage to the public is an important component of transparency and accountability, but many agencies have different rules, policies, and state laws governing that

DEM encompasses a wide variety of devices, technologies, tools, and data, particularly as they relate to the criminal justice system. Digital evidence integration is a process that puts together the electronic data (videos, photos, documents, and other material) into a common repository or system.

² C. D. Uchida, S. E. Solomon, C. Connor, J. McCluskey, J. Markovic, C. M. Katz, M. D. White, and Q. Patterson, *Managing Digital Evidence from Body-Worn Cameras: Case Studies in Seven Sites: Executive Summary*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2021.

release. In addition to these results, there are site-specific findings and 11 recommendations that will assist you in dealing with all of the footage that you will acquire.

After testing. Are you satisfied with what the BWCs captured? After reviewing each vendor's offerings, what did you learn that might help in your vendor selection? What is your agency's plan and capabilities for upgrades, considering both storage and the hardware itself?

ASK THE VENDOR

Training. Does the vendor provide training for its BWC system? What is the training model? Does the vendor train the department or is it a "train the trainer" approach?

Contracts and pricing. How long is the contract or the terms of agreement? What is included in terms of hardware, software, and service? Does the contract include the purchase of the cameras or is it a lease?

Upgrades. What does the vendor offer in terms of upgrades? Consider both storage and hardware updates.

Technical support. What is the quality of the technical support that the vendor provides? Is there a dedicated support line, email, or chat line? This may differ based on the type of contract you would have with the vendor. What does the vendor support specifically include? Revisit discussions with agencies that have implemented BWC programs using that vendor. Inquire whether these agencies had technological or functional issues with the BWCs, supplemental equipment, or services and ask whether the vendor lived up to its promises. Consider negotiating prices with the vendor.

We hope that this document provided you with greater insight into what your acquisition decision process may look like. All parts of BWC implementation are interconnected, and choosing which camera features work best for your agency prompts consideration of how it may affect such factors as storage, staffing, and evidence sharing.

Thorough research and planning are crucial for navigating your BWC procurement and ensuring that your decision provides the best possible value and utility for your agency. The BWC TTA team can help answer most questions you have about BWC acquisition.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2019-BC-BX-K001 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.