

# **BWC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDANCE**

## **Engaging the Community in BWC Policy Development and Reviews of BWC Operations**

*Steve Rickman, Community Policing Subject Expert and BWC TTA Lead &  
Tammy Felix, Research Scientist and CNA BWC TTA Analyst*

### **Purpose**

This document helps law enforcement agencies develop strategies to engage their communities when deploying body-worn cameras (BWCs). This guidance builds on lessons learned from the BWC Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Team's work with hundreds of agencies. These agencies were funded through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program (BWC PIP).

Community engagement is an important element of all police operations, including BWC programs. Informing community members and stakeholders about BWC policy and program implementation builds trust and support for BWC programs. For example, the Virginia Beach Police Department provides extensive information, including video presentations, on its BWC program website (<https://www.VBgov.com/government/departments/police/pages/bwc.aspx>). Police departments have learned that an informed community will help sustain and expand a BWC program.



*Officers at a community parade. Source: istock image*

This document provides guidance on engaging communities in BWC policy development, BWC implementation, and issues and challenges resulting from deployment.

### **Policy Development**

The BJA BWC TTA program recommends that agencies inform their communities of their intent to deploy BWCs and engage community stakeholders as part of the policy development process. To address this recommendation, an agency may consider the following steps:

1. Identify and list community stakeholders who may have an interest in the deployment of BWCs. These

will vary by community. BWC PIP agencies such as Jefferson County, Alabama, Sheriff's Department have reached out to civic organizations, citizen advisory committees, tenant organizations, churches, schools, local hospitals, and other organization that may be affected by BWC use. They also conduct community surveys.

2. Identify methods to communicate with these groups. BWC PIP agencies have developed a variety of communication approaches, including briefings, letters, and social media posts. Any of these approaches can explain the BWC program's goals and proposed policy positions. Policy topics that BWC PIP sites have found particularly relevant include notifying subjects that they are being recorded, privacy concerns, and public release of videos.
3. Capture and document community feedback, including support or concerns. Comments provided at public meetings, through social media, or through other media can be compiled, organized, and shared within the department and with the public through reports and website posts.

### Strategies for Smaller Agencies

Smaller and rural agencies may not have advocacy groups or even active community neighborhood organizations within their policing jurisdictions. Agencies can present at other public events, such as city council meetings, business association meetings, or gatherings at faith-based organizations. Periodic phone calls or emails to community stakeholders, such as town council representatives and clergy, can provide simple information that they can pass on to their constituencies.

Agencies can also post BWC program updates on social media or include them in community newsletters corresponding with the annual review of the policy. Law enforcement agencies also have posted about officers in spontaneous interactions with youth and young adults, assisting people in distress, and special events on social media. These posts help to create a positive perception of officers, especially among young people and marginalized groups (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJNbo9Cgr0g>).



*Officer engaging with a child in the community. Source: istock image*

### Implementation

Agencies should continue to keep the public informed after finalizing the policy and deploying the cameras. After one year of deployment, the agency should update community stakeholders with information that can easily be shared. This may include flyers or newsletters that can be printed or shared as email attachments. This material can be augmented with public service announcements, community meeting presentations, and website posts on implementation progress (<https://Hillsboro-oregon.gov/our-city/departments/police/body-cameras>).



### **Critical Incidents**

A critical incident, such as an officer-involved shooting, will immediately bring community focus to your BWC program and the policies that govern it. It is important for a department to be able to cite policy and specifically address questions about video review while the incident is still under investigation. It is also important to communicate the point at which the public will be able to access the video from the critical incident.

### **Topics of General Interest for Community Stakeholders**

Ideally, departments should consider sharing their BWC policy with the public on their agency website so the public can be fully informed and stay up-to-date as the BWC policy is updated. For example, the Athens-Clarke County Police Department discussed above makes its policy available on its website (<https://www.athensclarkecounty.com/DocumentCenter/View/59193/517---Body-Worn-Cameras>).

In communicating with community stakeholders regarding BWC policy and program implementation, the BWC PIP TTA team has found that the public are often interested in the following:

- Whether or not the agency requires officers to notify subjects that they are being recorded.
- Instances or locations in which recordings are not allowed (e.g., in hospital settings).
- BWC activation and deactivation requirements.
- Compliance performance data and compliance enforcement policy.
- Requirements for review and release of video, including after a critical incidents.

### **Sustaining Community Engagement**

The department should establish an ongoing process to keep community members informed about the BWC program. Some departments have actively sought feedback on BWC policy and program implementation as an ongoing process. After deployment, the department should make officials available to answer questions about BWC practices from the media and the public. We recommend that each department conduct an annual policy review. After each policy review, the department should share information from the review, including any enacted or recommended policy changes and operations data—such as the number of cameras deployed and compliance data—used to investigate complaints and used in judicial proceedings with community members and stakeholders. This information can be in the form of a brief report suitable for social media, departmental websites, or local media, newsletters, or newspapers. Keeping the community informed will help sustain public support for the program and build trust.

**To request training and technical assistance,  
email: [BWCTTA@cna.org](mailto:BWCTTA@cna.org) or visit our website: [www.bwctta.com](http://www.bwctta.com)**

For more information on the BJA Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Initiative, contact:

**John Markovic, BJA**  
[John.Markovic2@usdoj.gov](mailto:John.Markovic2@usdoj.gov)

**James “Chip” Coldren, CNA**  
[Coldrej@cna.org](mailto:Coldrej@cna.org)