BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance
Chief William Johnson

Chip Coldren: Hello, I'm Chip Coldren, I service the managing director for justice programs at the CNA Institute for public research. I am also the project director for BJA's (body worn camera) technical assistance program. Today I'm speaking with Police Chief Will Johnson of Arlington Texas, we will discuss vendor and cost considerations when it comes to body worn cameras. Chief Johnson has 22 years of law enforcement experience and was promoted to Chief in March 2013, he is a police executive research form (fellow) and the recipient of the 2013 (Gary PA's pays) leadership award from (Perth).

Will holds a master's degree from Texas Christian University and a bachelor's degree from Texas Tech University. He's a graduate of the FBI National Academy's 245th session where he was honored as class president. A graduate of the 35th session of the senior manager institute for police, the FBI's command institute for law enforcement executives, the Texas law enforcement management institute's 45th leadership command college and the Anti Defamation League's 2014 National Counter-Terrorism Seminar. Chief Johnson currently chairs the 2016 International Association of Chiefs of Police Civil Rights Committee and is a subject matter expert for the department of justice office of community oriented police and services collaborative reform process. Chief Johnson, thank you for speaking with me today. I know that your department has been involved in a pilot program regarding the implementation of body worn cameras, and we thought it would be a good idea to hear about some of your thoughts and experiences regarding the project. So let me start out with this question Chief, what are the biggest challenges to implementing a body worn camera program within your agency?

Will Johnson: Will first Chip, thank you so much for the invitation to participate in this podcast. This is a topic that's relevant to law enforcement, certainly to Chiefs that are considering the technology and it's a process that we're trying to understand and learn from ourselves as we go through this pilot project. And to answer your question, I think the biggest challenge that we had as we implemented our body worn camera pilot project was understanding what we don't know. You enter into the project with a certain expectation about what

the technology requirements might be, the policy requirements, maybe the operational impacts from the officer's perspective.

But there's such complexity when evaluating to deploy body cameras. External stakeholders like vendor support, selecting a vendor, internal stakeholders, does it integrate into the IT environment of your agency and your government policy for technology standards? Never can lose sight of the fact that cops have to wear this technology and so their input is particularly important to us in terms of functionality where ability, ease of use. And then finally, probably the biggest challenge of all of these is the retention and accessibility of the data that is collected.
Being able to process open records request, effectively manage and maintain custody and chain of command for these evidentiary items that will be used in subsequent prosecutions, and each one of those topics has their own group of sub stakeholders and needs that have to be addressed and evaluated by management.

Chip Coldren:	Thanks, could you just tell us a little bit about the size of this pilot project? How many cameras were involved and how many officers were involved?
Will Johnson:	Well certainly, so Arlington has approximately 650 sworn officers, the pilot project has deployed between 85 and 100 cameras. Not only is it a pilot project to evaluate the usefulness of the technologies (when) we've also entered into a relationship with a leading researcher in the field that's evaluating the public's perception and the legitimacy around the body worn camera project. And so our deployment strategy was randomized to meet both scientific research requirements in tandem with our evaluation, just the technology and do we want to move the organization into deployment of this in a full and ongoing basis?
Chip Coldren:	OK thanks, so can you tell us, have you encountered any obstacles or challenges when meeting with suitable vendors.
Will Johnson:	Well absolutely, I don't that it's an overstatement to state that anytime that you deal with a technology project within policing, the end result is going to be a capability that exceeds where you presently are as an organization but less than the vendor promised they could deliver. And so understanding where

that sweet spot is in terms of what exactly is going to be the usefulness of the product, how the product support is managed, how the hardware and the software support aligns with organizational expectations and then the bottom line that the cops want to know is does it work?

Can I use it with gloves on? Can I use it in harsh weather and cold weather? Does it stay on my uniform? And just the simple things from their perspective that can mean the world of difference in terms of functionality and ease of use.

Chip Coldren: Thank you, at your department, who has a role in deciding which vendor is right for the agency?

Will Johnson: Well, there's multiple people that will have input on that process. So certainly the cops have input in terms of ease of use of the device itself, our internal police IT department evaluate the environment which the software is going to have to be able to function from a command and control perspective, a policy compliance perspective, a data retention perspective and then the last stakeholder group within the city is going to be the city IT department and how does this program match other programs that they may be utilizing?

Well we found in our pilot project there's an additional group that is very important in the process and that is the other elements within the criminal justice system, particularly the district attorney's office. Ultimately, a percentage of the files that are collected will have evidentiary value and be submitted as part of a case processing packet for a trial, and the manner in which that has accessed, downloaded or shared with the district attorney's office and what file format it shared in is of particular importance to the DA's office. So their voice is important in the selection process as well.

Chip Coldren: So you have these different groups and stakeholder groups, how will each of those groups help you in making the decision about the vendor?

Will Johnson: Each one of those groups is going to have their own set of requirements and topics of importance, at least based on our experience. And they'll share that back with the project coordinator in the pilot project, I think the real root of the question that you're asking is, when there are differences of opinion of

what is most important, how do we reconcile those conflicts to make sure that we are satisfying the majority of the system requirements that each of the stakeholders had.

And that's been more of a challenge for us, the different groups have selected different functionalities as being the most important aspect for their perspective, and very few of the vendors that we have piloted, and we have three different vendors in our pilot project, all had the same technical capabilities. So short answer is you have different stakeholders picking different vendors for different reasons and there's not a lot of synergy between those different stakeholders or consensus amongst those stakeholders as which the best solution is.

Chip Coldren: Very interesting, so in the end you're not going to make everybody happy correct?

Will Johnson: That's a very true statement, in the end, if we ultimately decide to deploy a full deployment of body cameras not everybody is going to be happy. So the question is, do we satisfy most of the requirements that each stakeholder has and then did we prioritize those different needs in a logical sense where they understand how the decision was made in a procedurally fair sort of environment so that even in their not completely satisfied, they believe that the process was fair and that their voice was heard in the selection process.

Chip Coldren: I appreciate that perspective, and I imagine that you would, even with the challenges this process presents with involving these different groups, that you'd rather have these challenges than not have them involved at all?

Will Johnson: Absolutely, because there is no program that, from my perspective, that could be implemented that is going to be free of any risk of not having buy in from key stakeholders. And so if you know that there's going to be challenges where groups don't get everything that they want, the process in which the selection was made and the transparency of what you're trying to accomplish becomes of critical importance so that as different segments of the organization are working through the implementation process and dealing with challenges, that it doesn't derail the entire program but rather staff is

motivated to overcome the challenges that are presented to achieve the ultimate goal of a sustainable program.

Chip Coldren: OK, and that's a very, very, very good perspective Chief. Can you tell us, what have you learned about the cost of cameras as you've gone through this process?

Will Johnson: What we've learned is that the cost of cameras isn't what you should be focusing on at all, it's the human capitol cost to be able effectively manage the volume of data, in other words, full time equivalent positions that are dedicated to the program to make sure that it is sustainable, that the data is retrievable, that retention schedules are followed, that evidence is secured and equally important that files of non-evidentiary value are purged in an appropriate and lawful manner and that we're responsive to open record requests as it relates to files that we have on our possession.

But those open records request that we don't erroneously release files that are protected by law and protecting the privacy of people in the community by law because of an insufficient staffing level to be able to manage the request. So the cameras do have a cost, the storage certainly has a cost that is incrementally larger than the cameras, but the real cost driver for any program at least from our experience has been determining the right number of people to be able to staff the program and effectively manage it.

Chip Coldren: So are those costs now looking to be greater to you than you initially thought they would be at start of this process?

Will Johnson: We knew that the human capitol cost was going to be the most expensive and ongoing cost, what we're having difficulty doing right now is just making sure that we don't overstaff the program which would represent an unnecessary cost to the community in terms of funding (of) position. But equally important that we don't under staff the project and have a deficiency where we can't manage the volume within the defined time parameters as established by law.

So we're really working hard to understand workload, volume and input into the program from a data collection perspective so that we can manage the output and the flow of the files as we process and manage them.

Chip Coldren: Good, thank you. So now that you've been through this pilot process for a while, what do you think your top considerations are going to be when it comes to selecting a vendor?

Will Johnson: Well certainly, I think that just this conversation and these questions have oriented our audience that selecting the cameras is really the quickest and simplest part of the process. The ongoing support and dedication required to sustain a program is really one of the top considerations in vendor selection. So who as a vendor is in the best position to sustain long term, the organizational needs that each individual agency might be faced with, do they bring sufficient product support, product staffing and technical support to be able to manage the volume of data being collected by the police agency because that's going to be of paramount importance.

The other thing… I'm sorry, one last thing on vendor selection is, we've really focused on trying to answer this question before we selected a vendor and that is, if we ever want to change vendors in the future, what does that process look like? How do we get our data files whenever the data is taken, if it's in a cloud storage do we get to maintain the metadata that is inputted with each data file in the file management process, is that (exportable) as well as the file itself so that you don't end up with three years worth of data but yet all of your metadata that you used to sort and file the files is lost in the transition.

So that's of particular importance in selecting a vendor as well.

Chip Coldren: I can see that, it's not the raw technology that's a difficult decision, it's what else do the vendors provide in terms of support for all the human capitol that you're putting into this project in the first place right?

Will Johnson: That is absolutely correct.

Chip Coldren: Good, thank you. One last question, and this is just what you would recommend to other agencies who are going to get into pilots like this, to have a successful process?

Will Johnson: I would really stress three things, number one I would have a slow, methodical and inclusive environment to evaluate the products and evaluate the deployment strategy. That inclusive environment should include not only

technical stakeholders that would be needed to deploy the technology, but really community stakeholders too in terms of what is the value proposition for the introduction of these cameras within your agency and within your community. Without a doubt, these programs cost money, the true question is that money the most appropriate way to spend it to meet the community's needs?

(And many communities, that question) has largely been answered yes, it has been, communities have wanted it. But there still needs to be the exercise for the questions asked. Number two is that you develop a defined body worn camera policy prior to deployment of the cameras in the field even if you're only piloting the cameras. So before we begin our pilot project, we had a departmental policy on body worn cameras that was approved and disseminated even before we started the pilot because the minute that you pilot even one camera, you are collecting organizational records, you are collecting potential evidence items for court.

You're collecting potential video files subject to open records request and you have to have the ability to have expectations with the work force in terms of how they should use the camera and defined expectations of how the department will manage and process the request that come in for the file footage afterwards. So that's of equal importance also. And then the final thing is really understanding what you're getting into, it is – as we did our due diligence in asking agencies that presently have cameras deployed, many of the agencies that we spoke with – really we're trying after the fact to address some of the topics that we've talked about today in a reactionary mode because they took cameras from a vendor and deployed them to test them out with thinking about some of these administrative requirements that everyone agency is faced with.

And so just stressing the importance of prior to any pilot project, really understanding what the potential ramifications might be and anticipating those needs before deployment.

Chip Coldren: Excellent, thank you Chief Johnson for those very thoughtful responses to our questions. We're grateful that you could speak with us today to share your knowledge on this important topic. We encourage law enforcement, justice

and public safety leaders who's agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body worn camera programs to visit the body worn camera tool kit at www.bja.gov/bwc, this tool kit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with adoption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes.

We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of theses resources and especially the body worn camera tool kit have been designed as a national resource, as your resource. Please submit your ideas for new content through the bwc support link at the bottom of the home page. This is Chip Coldren of (CNA's) body worn camera team signing off, thank you to our listeners for joining us today and thank you again Chief Johnson.

Will Johnson: Thank you for having me.

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