

Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Metropolitan Police Department

Dominique Burton: Welcome to part three and the conclusion of our podcast with the Metropolitan Police Department with Commander Ralph Ennis of the Technical Services Department, Derek Meeks who is director of the BWC program and technology innovation, and Anita Ravishshankar, PhD research fellow.

Todd Maxwell: So as the some of the other studies -- I recently read a couple of other studies on the use of force actually going up in a couple of places. Do you guys as part of this study since its ongoing ever comparison of those and tie in some of the interesting things to see if that's actually occurring in the district?

Anita Ravishankar: So, in kind of keeping with that pure scientific method approach here, we haven't looked at our data yet. We will obviously what the trial rep says but we don't want to prejudge anything along those lines, but kind it's your point about use of force going up and some jurisdictions. I think this is one of the reasons we decided to work at Use of Force, not just holistically but also in terms of the serious instances and the minor instances because I think one of the phenomena we are seeing in other jurisdictions is that reporting is going up even though maybe actual frequency of use of force has not really changed.

And so because, you know, for most jurisdictions, use of force measures are based on officer self-report. We want to try to account for that and that's why we kind of split up the serious versus the more kind of other uses of force.

Ralph Ennis: And some of these other studies, I understand her aggregates, studies where we're taking information from police departments from various locations and aggregating the information together. You can imagine external factors and then there is department culture can impact that data widely depending on where the information is coming from whereas with our, the way we're doing it its' just off. Everybody is under the exact same invention. So we're excited about the find because it will be more pure so to speak from a layman's term.

We believe are findings of it. It seems to be a really neat opportunity to fold in this approach because we have the opportunity right -- pretty much the onset of the deployment. Speaking as a person responsible for some of the deployment, it was only slightly more of a challenge because we had clarity in exactly what we want to do and how we want to do it. We just had to spread out the overall deployment activities over essentially two different cycles.

One of the beginning where half of the officers got cameras for the treatment group and then the other now at the end of the year for all of the what previously were in the control group.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you for adding some light into that question. Some of the other agencies that have research partners have ended up using some of those researchers areas for help in policy formation and in some other -- if you guys used a lot of your researchers to assisted work with other areas or are they focus directly on this project that's going on right now?

Derek Meeks: So Anita is mainly focused on the body camera program but she does help with some other inquiries as they come up. Nothing too major because at the end of the day, we want to get this right first and her work is monumental sifting through all the data that she have to sift through and cleaning it.

So, she doesn't have a ton of time outside of the process but I will say as far as the policy formation is this -- let me just highlight this one more time, and so I think that you need to have a solid (housing) before you do anything and you need to be sure that you include everyone including your researchers in those discussion when coming up with your policy because that's ultimately going to lead and dictate how your program either succeeds or fails.

It's very important as your program works right out of the hopper and that you have a very few issues as possible and that you thought everything through. It gives credibility to the (AC) to the program and to the entire process. If you do not think this through and you start a program dealing with these different issues as they're coming along, and they end up making the media is going to

derail everything. So, it really is vitally important to make sure that you properly clean up front.

Ralph Ennis: I know Anita is going to want to talk about the lab. Before she does, I just want to give her a note. It was interesting for me sitting around command staff meetings, watching folks listen to her and respond to the information she was bringing to the table. It seemed to provide additional context for decision making and things along those lines. And well as Anita says, she's primarily focused on the hobby camera. Already there's been a number of discussion and a growing amount of interest in having her kind of service in a variety of places.

Anita Ravishankar: Yes. So one of the things I'd find to add is that just being an in-house researcher makes a big difference I think. I know at times research partners from the outside will work with, you know, a lieutenant or someone in the department to kind of help them collect the data and things along those lines. The good news there is that police departments do have a lot of data just that they collect by default of record keeping.

But it's often much harder to figure out where all that data is residing and how it can be used to measure outcomes that we care about for this study as well as kind of more big picture MPD operations, and I think that's kind of one of the ways I see the value add of having actually coming in-house. And one more thing I wanted to add about the study actually that it also, I think, a nice -- a unique thing about MPD's approach to this is that all what we talk about in terms of the study design, the randomization protocol, the outcome if we are going to be measuring and how exactly we're defining them.

All of that is then documented in what we call a pre-analysis plan which lays out kind of all of that information up front and this will be made public. It will be put to the open science framework website very shortly and the goal here is really to promote transparency and the credibility of the study and also to engage our stakeholders again. So, we really take the stakeholder engagement thing very seriously from the post (involvement) day all the way through to how you actually study the effects of body cameras in D.C.

Ralph Ennis: True. Anita, check on this and be -- the lab is intended to kind of provide the service at large, right, where it's providing more scientific and research based information around so it's for the sake of policy formation.

Anita Ravishankar: Absolutely, the goal is really to provide that evidentiary basis for decision makers.

Derek Meeks: So while this is the first instance and certainly a very large significant one, it's kind of the starting point I think for a lot more of this across the City of D.C., which to me that's an incredibly meaningful thing because it means that policymakers are having increasing access to analysis and information to really help ensure that they're going the right direction. I think it's a really neat innovation on D.C.'s behalf.

Todd Maxwell: Well thank you guys for - thank you all for and explaining the process a little bit more and given us some insight in that. We look forward to seeing that report when it comes out and Commander Ennis had talked about basically how important policy was so I think we sort of cover that and even elaborate if you want, but what advice would the three of you give to other agencies that are looking at implementing body-worn cameras.

Ralph Ennis: I'll start and then I'll turn it over. I made advices to know what you're going to use (that) into and you need - you need to follow some common sense measures for deploying a major change in practice and that body cameras are a huge change in practice for most police department and I don't mean know what yourself - know what you're getting yourself into in a manner as deter or say people should not deploy body cameras.

I believe in body cameras. D.C. believes in body cameras. I'm saying that to say before you start the process you need to look at the entire landscape and then make your decisions. You need to take the time to collaborate with other BWC agencies to outline your planning process.

You don't want to do things like project implemented program before working with your stakeholders and developing a good policy. You need to figure out who those stakeholders are and you need to get them involved and every place is a little different, but you need to like whatever your landscape is make sure that everybody who has a state in this process that you include them.

You need to consider things like, you know, are you under a mayor or do you have a city manager, do you have elected council, you know, and you need to make sure that anybody who can put a (roebuck) in your way for the lack of their understanding of what's going on given (form from the) (inaudible) and is involved in the process from the get go so that they're - so that they're still included, they have the information and you're (left up) to get a (roebuck) for that.

It's essential. I cannot say this enough for police department to include their unions if you are a unionized department and to make sure that you listen to what their concerns are and you get their feedback and you know that you include their concern so that they are with you standing from the get go at your meetings and back into your program. If you do - go ahead.

Derek Meeks: And actually to that point, it is because of the support, part of the reason of the success of D.C.'s program of MPD's program here is because of the union support and also in the member support as well. This was very broadly adopted and I think that is a kind of a different experience than what other areas might be - might have so to me that's a - that's a fairly significant item right there.

Ralph Ennis: Yes, you need to make sure you're including your other partners in government, your medical community, your fire department, your civil liberty, your special interest groups, you know, the civil liberty groups, all of those people need to know what's going on and stay engage throughout the entire process and the third thing and I can't state this enough that you need to involve everyone internally to the police department on your program and in your meetings.

At MPD we had from very early on, an internal BWC committee that that committee included decision makers from every major part of our department. It literally touches the BWC program. It literally touches every single aspects of your police department in areas you never would think it touches.

So we would have meetings bi-weekly in the (SEAS) Conference Room with 15, 20 people around the table just talking through issues, making progress every single week towards our goal of deployment and what we did is we took the feedback we receive internally and then we would brief the chief once a week or once every couple of weeks with everything new that came up and propose a solution to some of the problems and things and what that did was that ensures that when we roll the program out nobody was surprised. That no part of the department had additional work that they had considered or there were some roadblock because we hadn't considered the program impacting some other part of the department so that's very, very, very important.

And lastly I want to say you have to look in other department's experiences so you're keenly aware of all the components and the requirements that BWC brings. I'm saying that because there are all kind of things that you wouldn't consider so much more than just putting cameras out.

Once you have cameras out, you know you're responsible for all the footage, you're responsible for making sure that it all reaches where it's supposed to. You're responsible if you have behavior that's being captured on these cameras that if it's bad behavior that you know it's there and that you're addressing it so what you need to do is you need to have people on staff that can audit video, that can make sure that they're being tagged directly and retained for the proper time. You need to make sure that there's people there to review video for investigation.

You don't want to have a take that where you have an investigation or God forbids (inaudible) (the force) where the, you know, the investigation says one thing and the body camera video says another thing. You need to sync all those things together and lastly you need to have - if you are from a place that

has, you know, a significant FOIA burden or an open government burden, you need to make sure that you are properly staffed to handle the request for the footage so it's so much more than just putting body cameras on people and tell them to turn it on.

The back end for maintaining the program is enormous and just as a little reference, in D.C. we're going to have 3,200 cameras when it's all said and done and right now we're in the process of hiring 12 coordinators to help us manage the program. That's an additional 12 surveying employees. We hired five new FOIA specialists to assist with the FOIA burden and that, you know, to help coordinate with actions for the video so there's a - it's a large burden to lift, but if you do so, you do it properly, I think you're going to have a program that's effective for the community and your department and I think you'll be very happy with it. We are extremely happy with our department, you know, our program here in D.C.

Todd Maxwell: Anita, do you have anything?

Anita Ravishankar: I would just say, you know, as an advocate for research here, a lot of police departments don't have a ton of internal research capacity at this time, but a lot of them are also pretty close to universities that do have a lot of research capacity and a lot of folks who are interested so I don't - the police department shouldn't be deterred by not having that in-house capacity.

Certainly, it is not terribly hard to get in contact with that and folks are definitely interested in doing this type of research on the academic side and so one thing I would say is if you are looking to implement a body-worn camera program, integrating the research piece at the outset is certainly a way to keep your cost low and also learn a lot about what the cameras are actually doing in your community, which as we discussed earlier, you know, our communities are all different, we have different support centers and things like that so we're not all kind of the same.

Every study is not going to have the same results everywhere so we kind of strongly encourage other departments to contribute to that knowledge base by doing this type of work if it is feasible for them.

Todd Maxwell: Do you have anything else to add?

Derek Meeks: Thank you. I think everything has been already said and then of course the magnitude is significant. You know setting achievable goals along the way and then kind of keeping focus on keeping the program alive. This is something I think it - I think the thing that we'll find is that body cameras will have a fairly profound impact on (inaudible) and as a consequence, it's probably as much of a journey as it is (it does to the nation).

Todd Maxwell: Well thank you all for participating today and providing us with insight on this important topic and how it affects the large agency like the Metro PD and especially a complicated agency like the Metro PD. Lots of moving parts here so thank you for sharing your insight on this.

Ralph Ennis: You're welcome.

Derek Meeks: My pleasure. Thank you.

Todd Maxwell: We encourage all law enforcement, justice and public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body-worn cameras to visit the body-worn camera tool kit at www.bja.gov/bwc. The tool kit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use with the help with (to adopt) and use for community engagement and policy development, data collection, also training and educational purposes. We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff.

Lastly, all these resources and the tool kit have been ground as your resources so please submit ideas or new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the home page. This is Todd Maxwell of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team signing off. Thank you all for joining us today.

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