

## BWCs in a Small Agency: Accountability and Meaningful Changes



Researchers from the University of Southern Indiana studied body-worn cameras in a small, suburban city to see the impacts on the way police officers were held or felt accountable for their behavior. The study was conducted in the ‘Sunnyvale’ Police Department (pseudonym) that had been using cameras for 2.5 years. The city had a population of roughly 25,000 people with 10% living under the poverty line. The racial composition of the city was about half Black and 20% White, with the remaining population divided equally between Latino and Asian individuals.

Using a survey of officers, interviews, and ride-along observations, the research team wanted to know the impact of BWCs on training, report writing, supervision, and citizen encounters. Thirty-eight out of 45 officers participated in the study, with 23 of 26 patrol officers answering the survey, and 19 of those officers allowing the researchers to do two-hour ride-alongs.

### Key Findings

BWCs offered significant advantages in terms of: time savings, immediate

rewards, and improving overall community relations especially documentation, training, and complaint investigations.

### Training.

Sunnyvale used BWC footage to document officer performance during training exercises. If an officer performed poorly during in-service training or field training they were recommended for remedial training. If they continued to struggle with an issue, then the department could take different approaches with the officer – continue to train or even termination.

### Citizen interactions.

Officers said that BWCs had not changed the way they dealt with people. But 24 out of 38 officers said that BWCs changed the way they made decisions during encounters. Some officers said that they became “more legalistic” when writing citations. Because their decisions could be questioned retrospectively by supervisors some officers felt they could no longer let people off with a warning or ‘pep talk’ and wrote a ticket. BWCs also lessened the questions about treating people differently based on race, sex or social status.

## Grants Administration: Certificates and Monthly Reports

We continue to send out policy completion certificates to those who have successfully completed the policy review process, submitted all of their paperwork, and who have an executed contract.

For those who have not successfully completed the policy review process or have outstanding paperwork, the SRTBWC team will be contacting you. In addition, monthly reporting has also begun and reports were due on August 15th. If you have not done so, please submit your reports online in the grant administration portal.



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*Overall, the research found that BWCs had an uneven impact on internal accountability. While BWCs **did** influence internal accountability, the change was different from the expected outcome. The mere presence of BWCs made it possible to have an officer’s behavior documented and reviewed internally and externally. This caused officers to generally feel more accountable for their behavior, which spread across reporting, training, and police-citizen encounters.*

**The full article can be read [here](#).**