

Lessons from the Gerrish Township Police: Community-Based Policing and BWC Footage



The Gerrish Township Police Department (MI) is a small municipal agency that received a micro-grant for body-worn cameras in 2021. Over the last two years, Chief Brian Hill has combined the use of BWCs with his philosophy of community-based policing.

Chief Hill shared his perspectives on building public trust through technology and person-to-person interactions. Importantly, the chief sees trust as a two-way street. “We need to listen, but also need to educate citizens on what we are doing and why. We can’t allow ourselves to get stuck in a traditional role of not being engaged in the community.”

He wants his officers and township residents to “move past the badge number.” Officers need to be in the community and making contact. “Each of our officers has to complete a community project—that’s part of their evaluation process. You need to know citizens on a first name basis. Law enforcement people are busy, but you

always have a minute to roll down the window and talk to that guy working on his lawn and see how he’s doing.”

Several years ago, Chief Hill created the not-for-profit organization ACT-NOW, which stands for Advisory Community Team—Neighbors On Watch. The organization hosts several community engagement activities throughout the year, but its main focus is its monthly community dialogues. In preparation for the meetings, Chief Hill reviews what is happening in social media to get a feel for the concerns. He then reviews policing issues for the last month,



Chief Brian Hill, Gerrish Township (MI)

prepares a presentation—often with body-worn camera footage, and then facilitates discussion. “It is important for the citizens to see incidents from our perspective and the body worn camera footage validates what actually has occurred.”

Chief Hill gave an example of how BWCs have made a difference in the community and with his officers. “The other day a father came in quite angry about the way his son was treated.” Chief Hill offered to watch the footage with the parent and said, “If we see something amiss, I will acknowledge our responsibility and take action to correct it. I’m not afraid to deal with the video footage cold because I know our culture and I know my officers.” In watching the video together, the officer did not act poorly, so when the father walked out, “he was no longer mad at us.”

ICYMI

New Grantees – Recording of the Welcome Webinar can be found [HERE](#)

Do you have a substantive question about using BWCs? [ASK BOB](#)

Prosecutor Guidelines – JSS released a new publication to assist prosecutors and police in developing policies. Read it [HERE](#)

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