

# RILEY COUNTY BWC PILOT REPORT



## DEPARTMENT PROFILE

Riley County Police Department  
(RCPD)

Manhattan, Kansas  
United States

205 Employees  
107 Sworn Police Officers

76,000 Residents

## INTRODUCTION

Public entities, including law enforcement agencies, have a notorious reputation for poorly coordinating change, especially when it comes to introducing new information technology (IT). The results, too often, are projects that fall behind schedule and over budget, which ultimately fail to achieve the intended results. The Riley County (KS) Police Department has experienced its share of these IT implementation failures. In response, its leadership set out to develop a policy to apply the basic concepts of project management to projects involving the integration of new IT software, hardware, and user training. The first project to fall under this new policy was the selection of a body-worn camera platform for field testing. The remainder of this document explains the process undertaken for this project, which we hope will be helpful to any agencies considering a body-worn camera pilot or implementation.

## ABOUT RILEY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Riley County Police Department (RCPD) is a consolidated police agency, and the only one in Kansas. It has been accredited by the Commission on Law Enforcement Accreditation (CALEA) since 1991. The RCPD currently has 205 employees, of which 107 are sworn police officers. The agency serves an area covering 614 square miles with a countywide population of nearly 76,000 residents. The City of Manhattan, with a population of approximately 53,000 residents, receives most of the police services in Riley County. Manhattan is also the home of Kansas State University, a Division I school with an enrollment of 24,000 students. Recent U.S. census data shows that the Manhattan metropolitan area was the 10th fastest growing in the country from 2010 to 2012.

# THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

*The RCPD's budget is roughly \$19 million, of which three to five percent is generally devoted to IT-related expenses. With the ever-increasing costs of technology, the RCPD felt that the use of project management might provide a more efficient and cost-effective way to implement new technology like body-worn cameras. Its new project management policy divided the process into five phases: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and controlling, and closing.*

## THE INITIATION PHASE: CONFIRMING THE NEED & THINKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

The initiation phase generally determines whether or not a project is worth an investment in resources, with the goal of achieving a returned benefit. A critical part of making this determination is the identification of the problem and the requirements for its solution. For this project, the initiation phase began with a question: **Does the RCPD need body-worn cameras?** In other words, what current problem would body-worn cameras solve? *(It is worth noting this question was first asked in December of 2013, long before any incidents that have currently pushed body-worn cameras into the national spotlight.)*

At that time, the stock answer for many agencies usually involved citing a single study from Rialto PD in California that suggested the use of body-worn cameras resulted in significant reductions in uses of force and in citizen complaints. The RCPD, however, was not experiencing problems with frequent or unnecessary uses of force, or with citizen complaints—at least not to the extent that would seem to justify the significant investment necessary to deploy body-worn cameras. Additionally, there were concerns that the use of body-worn cameras might decrease the number of successful prosecutions in cases where video evidence was not available. The RCPD had previously experienced that the public, and by extension juries, had come to expect in-car video evidence in cases involving impaired driving. In short, there seemed to be no immediate problem for the RCPD requiring the solution of body-worn cameras.



Rather than ending the discussion at that point, RCPD leadership decided to consider the future in an attempt to anticipate problems body-worn cameras might solve. They immersed themselves in coverage of body-worn camera usage and how other agencies were deploying the technology, and took to heart quotes like this from a Chief in Missouri: “Having body cameras record officers’ actions is going to show the public, defense attorneys and potential juries the real story of what law enforcement nationwide deal with on a daily basis.” They recognized that as the jurisdiction’s population increased, the odds of police-involved critical incidents would also increase, including incidents such as deadly force encounters or in-custody deaths. The preference was that the RCPD should have all possible measures in place during these events in order to help assess the facts rather than piece them together as a result afterward.

A second issue that the RCPD anticipated was that body-worn cameras would at some point become a piece of equipment expected by their community or required by a potential external mandate. In the past, when the agency had been thrust into situations requiring the adoption of new technology, it was often forced to quickly acquire hardware or software as a result of not expecting the emerging need. Sometimes the adoption worked and sometimes it did not; however, almost always the process produced problems of one kind or another. With body-worn cameras, the RCPD had an opportunity to take the time to identify the best available technology ahead of an immediate need.

Finally, RCPD leadership had already recognized that its in-car camera system was nearing the end of its service life and would need to be replaced within a year. Until body-worn cameras became a topic for consideration, it had been assumed that the RCPD would retain an in-car camera system. A project involving the evaluation of body-worn cameras might also show whether they could be used as a replacement for an in-car camera system rather than as a complement, which is how most law enforcement agencies seemed to look at body-worn cameras. Ultimately, it was decided that enough justification existed to initiate the project and move on to Phase II.

## THE PLANNING PHASE: DEFINING OBJECTIVES, REQUIREMENTS, & STAKEHOLDERS

*The planning phase began with the identification of a project manager and the selection of a project team.*

The project manager would be tasked with the overall responsibility for managing all aspects of the project. It was not deemed necessary that the project manager be any type of subject matter expert in body-worn cameras or related issues. Instead, the project manager needed to be someone with successful experience in leading collaborative efforts—a person to manage the people and the process. In the RCPD's case, a Division Commander was identified as the project manager.

*The next step of the planning phase involved the selection of the project team.*

Ideally, the team needed to be comprised of stakeholders, which the RCPD's policy defined as any person or work unit actively involved in the project, and anyone who could be positively or negatively impacted by the project. In short, the project team should consist of those people who would use body-worn cameras and those who would be directly impacted by them. The RCPD's project team consisted of personnel from the uniformed patrol division, the training section, the evidence section, the information technology section, and prosecutors from the local District Attorney's Office.

*The first order of business for the project team was to develop the project's objective.*

The more clearly defined the objective, the greater the likelihood that it would be achieved. For the RCPD's project team, the initiation phase clearly established that its objective was not to select a body-worn camera platform for full deployment, as the definitive need for body-worn cameras had yet to be established. Rather, the project team determined its objective would be to identify the best available body-worn camera platform for the RCPD, should the agency decide it needed one.

*The second order of business for the project team was to determine the necessary requirements of any body-worn camera platform from the perspective of each stakeholder.*

This was, in hindsight, the team's most important task, as these requirements would be the yardstick by which to measure any body-worn camera platform, enabling the team to make more informed decisions.



### AFTER DELIBERATION, THE PROJECT TEAM ARRIVED AT THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:

#### OFFICER PERSPECTIVE

- Durable
- Easy to Operate
- Multiple places to wear battery pack
- Quick battery recharge/replace
- Auto-notification of camera in use
- Simple transfer process to storage
- Easy to link to specific cases/incidents

#### TRAINING PERSPECTIVE

- Video no better than human eye

#### IT PERSPECTIVE

- Reasonable bandwidth and storage expenses
- Minimal impact on network infrastructure

#### EVIDENCE PERSPECTIVE

- Easy to search for specific videos
- Long-term storage without DVDs
- Ability to link multiple videos
- Paperless chain of custody
- Ability to completely delete

#### PROSECUTOR PERSPECTIVE

- Capability to easily redact

The remainder of the planning phase involved mapping out the project's activities, the responsible party for each activity, and realistic completion dates for each activity. The selection of completion dates resulted in a project nearly 10 months in length from start to finish. This seemed like an unusually long time for a project of its size, and it was certainly a longer planned process than most past IT-related projects had been. On the other hand, because past projects had not been process-based, they usually surpassed their expected completion dates. The body-worn camera field test project was completed as projected, largely because the planning phase required the production of specific documents that would serve as a guide for the project team throughout the process.



## THE EXECUTION PHASE: SELECTING A PLATFORM & BEGINNING THE TRIAL

The next phase in the project (the execution phase) involved two parts. First, the project team needed to select body-worn camera vendors for consideration. After reviewing materials from a number of vendors, the project team selected two body-worn camera platforms to investigate further. One was chosen because its digital media storage system was compatible with the RCPD's existing in-car camera video system, potentially reducing implementation and maintenance costs. The other vendor was chosen based on an existing relationship with the RCPD and their positive customer service record.

Team members then visited two nearby agencies to see the different body-worn camera platforms in action. With their list of requirements, team members were able to evaluate each platform against the RCPD's own needs. The project team concluded that both platforms met most of the requirements, but one appeared to do so more consistently; namely, it allowed for cloud storage of video files, which would eliminate the overcrowding of physical video evidence storage. Finally, it was the only body-worn camera with a head-mount option, and the team saw this as a critical advantage. With that said, the project team unanimously selected the TASER AXON flex for field trials.

Through coordination with TASER sales representatives, the project team was able to secure four AXON flex cameras for a two-month field test. The team solicited field test volunteers from each of the agency's three patrol shifts and one from the central bar district's walking patrol. The field test officers received training from TASER personnel and the AXON flex cameras went operational that same day, marking the beginning of the monitoring and controlling phase of the project.

## THE MONITORING & CONTROLLING PHASE: TESTING THE PRODUCT IN CONTEXT

The field test officers were asked to evaluate the AXON flex on a weekly basis using an evaluation form with the following categories: ease of use, durability/reliability, comfort, mounting options, video quality, and data management. General guidelines regarding what to record were issued at the beginning of the field trial, as well as categories to serve as identifiers for individual video files. Evidence protocols were discussed throughout the trial, but the opportunities for testing them were limited, as only one discovery order was issued for a body-camera-related case during the field trial. Sharing videos through internet links rather than hard storage devices was tested in coordination with the County Attorney's office, and that process proved successful. The field trial concluded as scheduled, and the closing phase of the project began.

## THE CLOSING PHASE: DEBRIEFING ON WHAT WORKED, WHAT TO IMPROVE

To conclude the project, the project team and several TASER representatives met with the field test officers to hear their evaluation of the AXON flex and discuss recommendations for future actions. All the officers were impressed with the AXON flex's video quality, durability, and ease of use. They also appreciated the multiple mounting options. Officers agreed, though, that each mounting option had comfort issues; however, each found an option that was acceptable. In addition, sound quality on several units as well as image stability were the more common complaints concerning the actual operation of the cameras. It was recognized, however, that increased video motion was inherent with the head mount, and the sound issues were largely a product of ambient noise. Finally, officers acknowledged that in the early part of the field trial, they often forgot to turn on the AXON flex (though this problem had improved markedly by the end of the field test). The project team recognized that this would need to be a major focus of training in future deployments of body-worn cameras.

As noted before, evidence protocols were not put to the test; however, it was clear that consistency in categorizing and labeling video files with specific identifiers would be another significant training issue. Evidence personnel on the project team also stressed that further planning was necessary for the evidence workflow, as they simply had not interacted enough with the AXON flex's digital storage platform (EVIDENCE.com) in order to resolve all their unanswered questions.

The IT team members also noted the AXON flex's impact on the agency's technology infrastructure; they reported that uploading videos from the cameras accounted for an inordinate amount of the agency's upload bandwidth during the field trial. This caused some concern with the project team because at most, only two cameras were uploading video files at any given time. The TASER representative appeared surprised by this, as some agencies were uploading hundreds of cameras at a single time. He felt that this was a technical issue that could be resolved, and he offered to coordinate contact between the RCPD's IT personnel and a lead TASER technician. *(Note that this was successfully addressed in Phase II of the project by re-balancing the amount of upload bandwidth dedicated to the body cameras.)*

When the field officers were finally asked to give their recommendations, they were unanimous on two points.

**First, head-mounted cameras were the only platforms to consider, and since TASER's AXON flex was the only body-worn camera with that option, they felt that no other platform needed to be tested. Second, they recommended that the AXON flex cameras be purchased for all walking patrol and bike unit officers, as they had no means of recording incidents.** This small group (eight

in total) could then work with the project team to address the issues and questions raised during the field trial. Afterward, the agency would be in a much better position to determine if body-worn cameras were right for its officers. The project team added an additional recommendation to purchase one camera for each of the agency's three patrol shifts for the purpose of evaluating the AXON flex's potential for replacing its in-car camera system.

The final activity of the closing phase involved the project manager's after action report on the process used during the project. Only two of the project team's activities were completed outside of the projected dates, one by six days and the other by twelve days. This represented a significant strength of the process: a clearly defined listing of actions, responsibilities, and due dates.

Project team members were interviewed individually as part of this after action, and they identified a number of additional strengths:

- Logical framework for the process from start to finish
- Clear, specific goals and objectives from the outset
- Requirements for platforms to be tested that were developed from the perspective of all the stakeholders: patrol, evidence, IT, training, and prosecutor
- Involvement of key stakeholders across Divisions, which allowed information about the project to naturally diffuse throughout the department
- On-site visits to jurisdictions employing the technology under consideration
- Well-planned test phase using front-line officers
- Formalized feedback process from test participants to the project team and vendor

The only weakness of the process noted among project team members was that not everyone was able to attend each meeting, so a slightly larger team might offset the inevitable scheduling issues.

The project manager noted three additional weaknesses of the process. First, more actions could have been delegated to team members instead of the project manager, which was an issue with the manager rather than the process. Second, the project manager felt that there should have been regular progress reports to the functional manager. The functional manager usually supervises the project manager and is responsible for providing the project manager/team with the resources needed to complete the project. The project manager believed that this would provide another layer of accountability to ensure that the project remained on schedule. Finally, the project manager believed that more time should have been spent in developing temporary policy and procedures to guide field test officers in their use of the Axon flex. While this concern did not result in major problems during the field trial, it certainly could have.

# CONCLUSION



Despite the relatively small scale of the project, it was considered to be one of the most successful implementations of new technology in the agency's history. Those who would be most impacted by the use of body-worn cameras had the responsibility for all phases of the project. Through the use of basic project management, team members were able to hand a piece of technology to front-end users and not only have it work as intended, but they also took those users' recommendations to make the technology work better for them. **Within a month of the project's close, RCPD leadership approved the project team's recommendations and initiated the purchase of 11 TASER AXON flex body-worn cameras for full-time use.** Not surprisingly, it was also determined that the purchase and deployment of these 11 cameras should be treated as a project, and the same project management process was approved for use.

## MORE INFORMATION

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