



SUMMARY REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

Dane County
Supervisor's
Body Worn
Video Camera
Report

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Community Engagement Process and Context

During November of 2024, the nINA Collective facilitated two in-person focus groups at The Grove in Mazomanie. The Grove is a central hub that houses various organizations collaborating to provide various needed services in the Wisconsin Heights area.

The Nov. 19th focus group was facilitated by Jacquelyn Boggess and the Nov. 26th focus group was facilitated by Mathias Lemos Castillo. Mathias is a Spanish speaking facilitator, and was available for both groups if we had Spanish speaking participants. Unfortunately, we did not end up having any Spanish speaking participants, so both groups occurred in English only.

To recruit participants, the nINA Collective worked with the Joining Forces for Families Spanish speaking social worker who serves Mazomanie and Black Earth, as well as The Grove Food Pantry in Mazomanie. Both the Grove and JFF were excellent partners who helped us connect with many residents who are often unheard in rural Dane County.

We also reached out to Wisconsin Heights School, the Mazomanie and Black Earth libraries, and posted notices on community bulletin boards. We had also hoped to work with the Sheriff's Office to invite people who had been pulled over for traffic stops during the pilot period, but due to privacy and legal concerns, we were not able to pursue this route.

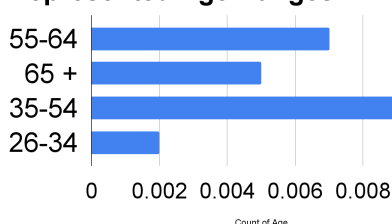


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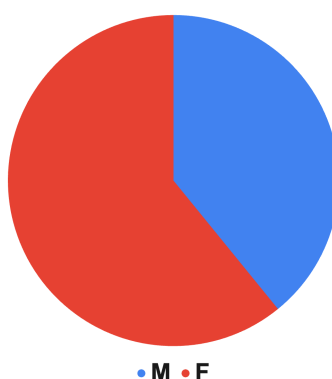
Unfortunately, the geographic constraints of this project did limit our outreach efforts. We had hoped to connect with more immigrants and refugees, but the organizations serving those communities are not located within the West Precinct catchment area for the Dane County Sheriff's Office, so connecting with members of those communities proved unsuccessful.

While we would have preferred more diverse representation, we did have 24 total focus group participants. All participants were from Dane County Supervisor District 28, primarily from Black Earth and Mazomanie. As is consistent with the demographics in that part of the county, there was very little racial diversity among participants. Approximately 60% of participants were women and 40% were men, and we had representation across age ranges.

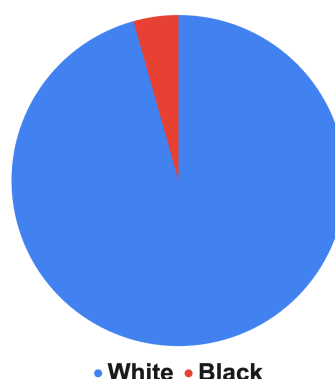
Represented Age Ranges



Gender Representation



Racial Representation



Focus Group Summary

The focus group participants discussed the implementation of body-worn cameras by Dane County sheriff deputies. Participants expressed support for the cameras, citing safety and accountability benefits. Concerns included privacy, officer discretion in turning off cameras, and the potential for misuse. Suggestions included clear communication about camera activation, public access to footage, and using cameras for performance evaluations. The groups emphasized the need for transparency and clear policies on when and how footage is accessed and stored. They also highlighted the importance of community education on their rights regarding body-worn cameras and the potential impact on officer behavior and community trust.

Experiences with Body-Worn Cameras

Of the focus group participants, 3 people shared they have encountered a police officer with a body worn camera during the course of the pilot project. Of those three individuals, all shared that their experience was positive. Some members of the group indicated that they had encountered deputies in recent months, but they were unsure if they were using body worn video cameras. This led to a discussion about the visibility of cameras and the importance of knowing when they are active.



"I thought that the body cameras are already in use."

"if this became more of a standard of practice throughout the state, maybe they can come up with the legislation stating that, oh, this could be protocol for this."

"they're gonna have to have certain rules, like, Okay, if you accidentally turned it off, we needed this critical three minutes of, you know...and if they did it over and over, like, obviously that's something we'd want to know about."

Benefits and Impact of Body Cameras

Overall people felt a sense of security, accountability and comfort as a result of deputies wearing body cameras. Participants stated that they think body cameras foster safety and accountability for both deputies and the public. Some participants discussed the potential for officers to feel more confident in their interactions with the public, as well as the support that cameras may lend to report writing. Along these lines, participants also discussed the importance of body cameras in providing factual information and reducing misunderstandings.



"Yes, [I feel] safer...for many reasons, I mean, for accountability on them, and for, you know, just another, another eye that that one little thing couldn't, you know, may not have been recognized and right there, and they can't go back and say, no, that didn't happen. That whether it's on whoever got stopped, or whoever's involved, or whether it's the police, just more accountability"

"For the officers, if somebody is accusing them of something, then they have proof."

[body cameras can] "show that they didn't do anything wrong, that they handled everything right. And that's how it goes on both ends. Maintains professionalism."

"[when] tensions are high, [you can] forget exactly what was said..."

"when they're trying to figure it out later, it should make reports a lot easier."

"maybe some day, it could be more streamlined to where some of the officers don't have to take off their duty shifts to appear in court, to stand up in front because you have a video, because you have video there, and you don't need officers to go and do that. And that might save community expenses as well."

Concerns and Opinions on Body Cameras

In regard to concerns, participants expressed some discomfort around not knowing how private the videos would (or would not) be, and if witnesses could be exposed. Participants discussed the importance of privacy and the potential for misuse if cameras can be turned on and off by the deputies. The majority of participants felt that the benefits outweighed the risks; however some individuals shared that they were unsure of the benefits of body worn cameras and whether the project should continue in their community. No participant actively opposed body worn video cameras.



"if it's a sensitive situation, or a delicate situation with a family, or you come across an accident, you want that recorded? I mean, you probably do, but it doesn't need to be seen, you know, there's because that's going to come up, you know. I mean, and that footage, could help a lot of people in ways, you know, yeah, something you want to see, but, I mean, it has to be very delicate and sensitive of who sees."

"people in the community that doesn't need to be recorded if they request to be not recorded. If there's going to be an option to actually turn it off at that point in time."

"I'm sure there's options right now, but I almost think that almost everything should be recorded now. How, how that recording is stored afterwards, is another story. So I don't know who goes through those videos, how they decide for what videos stay, which videos go, how long they stay, for where they go to after that?"

Impact on Officer Behavior

Participants discussed the likelihood of officers maintaining professional behavior if they know they are being recorded. They discussed the potential for body cameras to reduce harassment and improve accountability. Some participants mentioned the importance of self-awareness for deputies, and the potential for supervisors to utilize body camera footage to offer supervision and guidance to deputies with a focus on continuous learning and improvement. The majority of individuals shared that they feel body worn video cameras keep them safe and accountable for their own behavior when encountering law enforcement. Overall, individuals shared that the cameras support feelings of protection and accountability for both parties.



"..it might make the officer feel more confident that they wouldn't have their actions or their words judged, because they would be proved right then easily, they would be in a situation where they're more confident to rectify the situation and deal with people."

"I would like to see those [videos] used for performance evaluations - good and bad, because they're not with their manager or their own supervisor all the time, and they may not say all the good things they're doing, but if they can actually watch those and how they treat people....It's not like you're in an office and your manager is going to look over your shoulder and see the work you're doing"

"and if they didn't [handle everything correctly], and their superior listens to it, you know, then they can work with them or whatever needs to be done."

Community Perception and Feedback

With the exception of one person, participants were unaware that there was a pilot project occurring; however, most participants had also assumed body cameras were already in use. In general, participants were surprised to learn this was a new strategy for the Dane County Sheriff's Office. Participants saw the potential for body cameras to reduce harassment and improve community trust. However, they also noted the importance of clear policies and public awareness about body camera use. Overall, participants responded that they do make them feel safer and that they positively impact personal safety and accountability.



"I would think when they stop somebody, if they have it on, tell them right away...yeah, you're being recorded, or we are being recorded. So people know."

"So there's a call, boom, [the body camera should be] activated, no matter what the circumstances..."

"I have an officer that comes over to talk to me about school for my son, and so, you know, there's nothing to do criminally. So I don't know if he's got a body cam either, but I don't know if that's something that needs to be recorded, or if it's just the criminal acts that may be recorded. I'm not sure how that how they draw the line."

Recommendations

Recommendations from focus group participants

- Participants supported making body cameras a standard practice.
- Participants generally felt that it was important to ensure clear policies, highlighting the importance of transparency around who can access body camera footage and what citizens' rights are when approached by a deputy with a body worn video camera.
- Participants recommended the need for clear communication about when body cameras are active in order to foster public trust.



"I almost think that it would be better off criminal or civilian to be recorded if this, if the officer is outside of their vehicle, that their camera just automatically turns on. They enter their vehicle again, it automatically turns off."

"Is there anything set in place for moving forward, for when the pilot is over, of identifying that these cameras are on these officers. Is there, you know, this big white tag with red writing saying, smile you're on camera?"

Recommendations from nINA Collective

1. Develop a communication plan to share the results of this process and to inform the public about the implementation of body worn video cameras.
2. Create a "know your rights" card that deputies can share when interacting with the public when body worn video cameras are in use. This card should be available in multiple languages and include a link to the Body Worn Camera Policies and Procedures that is available on the Sheriff Office website.
3. As you expand the use of body worn cameras throughout the county, we recommend partnering with existing organizations or groups in the county that work with Black, Indigenous, Latine and Asian American Communities to inform policy and roll out, since that perspective was limited in the Dane County Sheriff's Office West Precinct catchment area.

Appendix: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction and Overview:

The 2024 Dane County budget included funds for the Dane County Board of Supervisors to conduct a Strategic Community Engagement process. The process included focus groups to get community input regarding the body worn video camera pilot being conducted by the Dane County Sheriff's Office.

Everything you tell us today will be kept confidential. nINA Collective, as an external consultant, will hold all of the assessment data and will report on overall themes and insights that emerged from these conversations. Nothing you say here today will be attributed to you personally. In our report from the focus groups, some quotes may be used, but we will never link those quotes or any identifying information to individuals.

Ground Rules:

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Please speak one at a time. This will help us capture everyone's thoughts and opinions. Also please be aware of how much or how little you are talking. As facilitators, we may cut in or redirect the conversation onto the next topic or to allow another person the chance to speak. Comment sheets will be provided if you have additional thoughts that were not incorporated into the conversation.

Are there any questions before we begin?

1. To start, we would like to ask each person to share your:
 - a. Name
 - b. Where you live
 - c. What interested you in joining us tonight
2. Did you know that Dane County Sheriff deputies in your community are piloting the use of body worn cameras?
3. What are your opinions or concerns about body cameras?
4. Have you or anyone you know encountered an officer with a body worn video camera in the last couple of months?
 - a. If so, how was that experience?
5. What possible benefits can you see from the use of body worn cameras?
6. Do you feel body cameras make you and/or your community feel safer?
7. How do you think the body cameras might impact the behavior of the deputies who wear them?
8. What do you think your options are if you encounter a deputy with a body worn camera?
9. Do you have any advice or feedback you would like the Sheriff's Office to consider as they conclude this pilot project?



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