

US announces \$19M in grants to expand use of body cameras

September 22 2015, by Ryan J. Foley

The Department of Justice awarded \$19.3 million in grants Monday to dozens of police departments seeking to start using body cameras but turned down a greater number of applicants hoping for federal aid to deploy the technology.

The Justice Department said the grants will go to 73 police agencies in 42 states, helping purchase 21,000 cameras that officers wear on their uniforms to record interactions with citizens. More than 200 other police agencies that applied were passed over for funding for cameras, which are touted as a way to reduce the use of force and clear up questions about disputed encounters.

Interest in the technology soared after a series of fatal encounters between police officers and unarmed civilians, beginning last year with the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown by a white [police officer](#) in Ferguson, Missouri.

In all, 285 departments sought \$56 million under the program, announced by the Obama administration in May. The department said that the 73 awards exceeded the 50 originally envisioned and that it added \$2.5 million to enhance the grant funding available.

"This vital pilot program is designed to assist local jurisdictions that are interested in exploring and expanding the use of body-worn cameras in order to enhance transparency, accountability and credibility," Attorney General Loretta Lynch said in a statement. "The impact of body-worn

cameras touches on a range of outcomes that build upon efforts to mend the fabric of trust, respect and common purpose that all communities need to thrive."

She said an additional \$2 million would go to CNA, a nonprofit research organization, to provide training and technical assistance to departments and \$1.9 million would be used to support research in Miami, Milwaukee and Phoenix on the impact on cameras, including community relations.

Those receiving the largest awards of \$1 million include Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Florida's Miami-Dade County, Chicago, Detroit and San Antonio. Other winners include the two largest cities in Minnesota, Minneapolis and St. Paul, which each received the \$600,000 they were seeking. Among the cities passed over were Des Moines, Iowa; Tallahassee, Florida; and Indianapolis.

In addition to helping pay for the cameras, the initiative, known as the Body-Worn Camera Pilot Partnership Program, aims to help departments develop best practices to address the thorny issues that come along with them. Grant recipients must develop policies addressing when the cameras are turned on, how videos are stored and what can be done to balance privacy considerations with public access to mountains of footage they collect. They will also be expected to keep statistics to assess the effectiveness of cameras during the two-year grant.

It could still be several months before more beat officers in the winning cities have cameras. Local departments will be required to make a 50-percent match and may have to solicit competitive bids before buying them.

Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges thanked the Obama administration for her city's award, saying it would help transform its approach to policing.

Departments passed over for funding say they may have to wait or scrape together local, state or other sources to start or expand programs.

"It's certainly disappointing," said Sgt. Paul Parizek, spokesman for the Des Moines Police Department, which had asked for \$252,000 to help outfit over 200 officers. "Now we're just going to have to look at our options. Do we roll it out in phases? Can we cut somewhere else to supplement this? We definitely don't want to burden the taxpayers anymore, so we're going to have to get creative."

President Barack Obama has proposed additional funding in the next two years to buy a total of 50,000 cameras. The Justice Department said other money would be available through its Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant.

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