

**City of Whitewater, Wisconsin
Whitewater Police Department**

Proposal Narrative

FY 2025 Rural Law Enforcement Violent Crime Reduction Program

Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice

Funding Opportunity No. O-BJA-2025-172495

Project Title: Whitewater Digital Evidence & Violent Crime Response Initiative

Applicant / Implementing Agency: Whitewater Police Department (ORI WI0650500)

Service Area: City of Whitewater, Walworth County, Wisconsin

Federal Funds Requested: \$161,260.56 (ceiling \$400,000) • Project Period: 36 months • Match: None
Required

Point of Contact: Daniel Meyer, Whitewater Police Department

Project Abstract

The City of Whitewater, through the Whitewater Police Department (WPD), requests \$161,260.56 in FY 2025 Rural Law Enforcement Violent Crime Reduction Program funding (36 months) to reduce violent crime in a rural, economically distressed community by closing critical gaps in its digital-evidence capacity. Whitewater (pop. 16,038) is a rural university community in Walworth County with a 26.8% poverty rate. Mobile and digital evidence is now central to nearly every violent-crime, sexual-assault, and child-exploitation investigation WPD conducts. The Department examines roughly 100 devices per year, about a quarter of which are locked or encrypted, and currently must outsource locked devices and large media cases to a shared regional laboratory, with turnaround times of three to nine months. Using the SARA problem-solving model, this project will (1) restore and expand in-house mobile-device acquisition and large-scale media analysis; (2) eliminate the device backlog and end routine outsourcing; (3) train and certify a third forensic examiner; (4) add a dedicated server for long-term storage of police department digital evidence; and (5) implement validated Lethality Assessment screening for domestic-violence cases. Expected outcomes include faster case turnaround, no device unprocessed beyond 90 days, increased successful prosecutions, and improved victim safety.

1. Description of the Need (Problem Statement)

Community and Jurisdictional Context

The City of Whitewater is a rural community of 16,038 residents (2025 estimate) located in Walworth County, Wisconsin, and home to the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. WPD qualifies as a rural area under 34 U.S.C. § 12291(a)(32) as it is outside any MSA. The community is economically distressed: the U.S. Census Bureau reports a poverty rate of 26.8%, a median household income of \$54,969, and a per-capita income of \$25,863 — each well below state and national figures. The presence of a large university population gives Whitewater a very young median age of 22.1 years and a substantial transient student population, which shapes the volume and nature of the violent and sexual offenses the Department investigates.

The Whitewater Police Department (ORI WI0650500) provides full law-enforcement services to this jurisdiction. Like most rural agencies, WPD must meet escalating digital evidence demands with limited staff, limited budget, and limited access to regional forensic resources.

Violent Crime and Digital-Evidence Burden

Federal NIBRS data reported by WPD (ORI WI0650500) document a persistent violent-crime and sexual-offense burden across 2019–2024, including the agency’s first reported homicide of the period in 2024:

Year	Pop.	Agg. Aslt	Simp. Aslt	Murder	Robbery	Rape	Sodomy	Child Mol.	Weapon
2019	14,997	20	31	0	0	6	5	14	9
2020	14,952	26	28	0	1	3	2	8	14
2021	15,057	19	44	0	2	11	3	6	10
2022	14,327	20	32	0	2	10	1	7	13
2023	15,415	16	44	0	4	7	0	13	5
2024	15,473	19	40	1	2	5	2	5	16

These offense categories — aggravated and simple assault, robbery, rape, sodomy, and child molestation — overwhelmingly generate mobile-device, social-media, and cloud-based evidence.

Internal WPD case records reinforce the trend: since January 1, 2023, the Department has handled 267 domestic-violence cases, 123 sexual-assault cases, and 4 stalking cases. Dating-violence offenses are not separately tracked; the period also included a domestic-violence-related homicide of a university student-athlete in 2024.

Digital Evidence Across Violent-Crime Investigations

Across these offenses, mobile devices, social-media accounts, and cloud-stored data are now the primary source of evidence. This evidence is crucial for establishing communications between suspects and victims, documenting threats and stalking, placing suspects at scenes through location history, and capturing images and video of criminal acts. Outcomes of assault, robbery, weapons, and domestic-violence cases increasingly depend on whether WPD can rapidly extract and analyze this evidence while leads are fresh and suspects are in custody. Child exploitation cases form one demanding component of this caseload: WPD receives three to four reports per month of hands-on child sexual abuse and is currently working a large, active CSAM investigation. Such cases routinely involve thousands of images and hours of video per device, requiring automated media analysis tools the Department does not currently operate in-house.

Current Capability Gaps

WPD examines approximately 100 devices per year in-house, but roughly 25% are locked or encrypted and cannot be acquired with current tools. This produces three compounding problems:

- **Outsourcing and delay.** Locked devices and large media cases are sent to partner law enforcement agencies for processing. Turnaround runs three to nine months, and each transfer requires a round trip of more than one hour for drop-off and again for pickup, consuming investigator time and complicating chain of custody.

- **Backlog.** WPD carries a standing backlog of roughly 10 devices awaiting examination, delaying active violent crime and exploitation investigations.
- **Storage exhaustion.** The Department's entire forensic storage capacity is a single 14-terabyte hard drive, which is full. Without additional capacity, WPD cannot retain or process the large media volumes that modern violent-crime, sexual-assault, and exploitation cases generate. Additionally, WPD currently shares network storage for general digital storage with the rest of the City of Whitewater municipal departments, which is problematic for both capacity and security. This makes the Department reliant on costly cloud-based options for body camera evidence storage with a current utilization of over 18 terabytes of storage.

Left unaddressed, these gaps mean violent offenders remain active while evidence sits unexamined, assault and domestic-violence victims wait for cases to move, exploited children remain unidentified, and prosecutions are jeopardized by delay and chain-of-custody complexity.

2. Project Goals and Objectives

This project applies the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) to a clearly defined problem: rural violent crime that cannot be effectively investigated or prosecuted because digital evidence is delayed, outsourced, or inaccessible. The *Scanning* and *Analysis* phases are documented in Section 1 (NIBRS trends, internal case counts, device volumes, and rising digital-evidence demands across the violent-crime caseload). This section describes the project goals and objectives. Sections 3 and 4 set out the *Response* — the project design and implementation plan as well as the capabilities and competencies. Section 5 describes the *Assessment* through performance-measure data collection.

Goal 1 — Reduce digital-evidence turnaround time.

- Objective 1.1: Restore in-house acquisition of locked/encrypted mobile devices, reducing turnaround for priority cases from the current 3–9 months to 24–72 hours.
- Objective 1.2: Eliminate the standing device backlog so that no device remains unprocessed longer than 90 days.

Goal 2 — Reduce or eliminate reliance on outside laboratories and cloud-based storage.

- Objective 2.1: Acquire and analyze the great majority of locked devices in-house, ending routine outsourcing of mobile and media evidence.
- Objective 2.2: Expand forensic storage capacity beyond the current single 14TB drive to support large video and media caseloads across violent-crime investigations.
- Objective 2.3: Acquire digital evidence storage equipment to ensure our digital evidence is secure while managing future costs for the Department in future years by reducing reliance on cloud-based storage options.

Goal 3 — Strengthen examiner capacity and investigative quality.

- Objective 3.1: Train and certify a third forensic examiner under the Magnet Training Annual Pass.

Goal 4 — Improve victim safety in domestic-violence cases.

- Objective 4.1: Implement validated Lethality Assessment screening on every applicable domestic-violence case.

3. Project Design and Implementation

Phase 1 — Planning (Project Months 1–3)

The project will open with a structured planning phase. During this period WPD will: finalize procurement of forensic licenses, hardware, and storage; finalize implementation of the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) Lethality Assessment screening and identify the investigator(s) to be trained on it; designate the new examiner and schedule their Training Annual Pass coursework; and establish baseline metrics and the data-collection workflow described in Section 4. Planning ensures that tools, training, and personnel are aligned before operational deployment.

Phase 2 — Acquisition and Deployment (Months 2–6)

WPD will deploy Magnet Graykey Essentials for forensically sound acquisition of locked and encrypted iOS and Android devices, including communications, location history, images, video, and deleted artifacts, with Preserve functionality to capture data subject to reboot and expiration timers. Graykey integrates directly with the Magnet Axiom analysis platform, enabling a unified acquire-to-analysis workflow. To support this workflow, the Department will deploy a dedicated forensic processing computer and a 56-terabyte network-attached storage (NAS) array, replacing the exhausted single-14TB-drive configuration and providing the capacity needed to retain and process large video and media volumes. The Department will also deploy a dedicated server with

capacity to store general digital evidence and data as well as body camera recordings to ensure the data is secure and reduce reliance on expensive cloud-based options.

Phase 3 — Training and Certification (Months 2–12)

A third examiner will be trained and certified through the Magnet Training Annual Pass (TAP), taking approximately one course per quarter during the calendar year the TAP is active. Coursework will include, at minimum, Graykey Examinations (GK200) and Axiom Examinations (AX200), progressing toward Magnet Certified Graykey Examiner (MCGE) and Magnet Certified Forensic Examiner (MCFE) credentials. The designated new examiner will be drawn from existing sworn or civilian personnel and identified during the planning phase. Concurrently, designated investigators will complete Lethality Assessment training so that screening can begin in Phase 4.

Phase 4 — Full Operation and Backlog Elimination (Months 6–36)

With tools, storage, and a third certified examiner in place, WPD will bring all routine mobile and media examinations in-house, systematically clear the existing backlog, and maintain a standard under which no device remains unprocessed beyond 90 days. Trained investigators will apply the selected Lethality Assessment instrument to each applicable domestic-violence case to guide safety planning and case prioritization.

4. Capabilities and Competencies

Organizational Experience

The Whitewater Police Department already operates a functioning digital-forensics program with two trained forensic examiners but lacks the specialized and costly software tools required for in-house forensic extractions. WPD examines roughly 100 devices per year in-house and has sustained this workload while managing a rising volume of violent-crime, sexual-assault, and child-exploitation investigations. This established foundation means the project restores and expands a proven capability rather than building one from nothing, substantially reducing implementation risk.

Personnel and Staffing

Two examiners currently perform all in-house forensic work. This project adds a third examiner, trained and certified under the Magnet Training Annual Pass, increasing throughput and providing redundancy so that examinations continue during leave, court, or major-incident surges. Resumes and job descriptions for the two current examiners and the designated new examiner are attached and are excluded from the page limit. The Department's point of contact for this initiative is Daniel Meyer.

Tools, Integration, and Validation

WPD's selection of Magnet Graykey and Axiom reflects deliberate workflow integration: Graykey performs acquisition, Axiom performs analysis, and the two share a unified case format. Because examiners are already proficient in Axiom, adding Graykey minimizes the learning curve and accelerates operational readiness. Maintaining familiar vendor tools also supports tool validation, which is essential to evidence admissibility.

Partnerships and Regional Role

WPD presently depends on cooperating law enforcement agencies' labs for locked-device and large-media examinations. Restoring in-house capability not only ends this dependency but positions WPD to reduce demand on overburdened regional partners and, where appropriate, assist neighboring rural agencies, the vast majority of which do not have such capabilities.

5. Plan for Collecting the Data Required for Performance Measures

WPD will collect and report performance data through BJA's Performance Measurement Tool (PMT) on the required semiannual schedule, with the Project Director responsible for timely, accurate submission. The data-collection plan establishes baselines during the planning phase and tracks the following measures, each tied to a project goal:

- Median and maximum device-examination turnaround time (Goal 1).
- Number and age of devices in backlog; count of devices exceeding 90 days unprocessed (Goal 1).
- Number of devices examined in-house versus outsourced (Goal 2).
- Forensic storage capacity deployed and utilization (Goal 2).
- Number of examiners certified and certifications earned (Goal 3).
- Number of domestic-violence cases screened with the Lethality Assessment instrument and resulting safety actions (Goal 4).
- Investigative outcomes: examinations completed, cases cleared, and prosecutions supported.

Source data will be drawn from WPD's records management and forensic case-tracking systems and from examiner logs.

6. Sustainment Plan

The capabilities funded by this project are designed to be sustainable beyond the federal period of performance. Training and certification produce durable, transferable expertise that remains with the Department. In-house acquisition reduces the recurring cost of outsourcing and the investigator hours lost to transport. The digital evidence storage capabilities will also reduce the long-term recurring costs associated with cloud-based storage options currently utilized. WPD intends to sustain recurring license and training costs through a combination of municipal budget, asset-forfeiture proceeds, and future grant cycles.