

NEWS

from the Vera Institute of Justice



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New report offers solutions for police facing language barriers

Police agencies serving new immigrant populations can choose from a range of policy options to overcome language barriers, according to a new report just released by the Vera Institute of Justice.

Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement, from Vera's Center on Immigration and Justice, provides practical tips and advice for law enforcement personnel who interact with communities that don't speak or understand English well. The report draws upon the Center's experience developing language access strategies with law enforcement agencies in California, Nevada, and Ohio.

"More and more police departments across America – not just in major cities – are serving people with limited English proficiency," explains Anita Khashu, director of the Center on Immigration and Justice. "Having worked with different size agencies that serve different immigrant populations, we know what steps police can take to be more effective, safer, and fairer, even when resources are limited."

Substantial recent immigration has contributed to a population of over 21 million U.S. residents who do not speak English well. Many of these people live in small towns, suburbs, and rural areas, creating serious challenges for police who have not traditionally interacted with people with low English proficiency. For example, immigrants who do not speak English well may not be able to report crimes or describe a perpetrator to a police officer.

Overcoming Language Barriers comes from the Center's Translating Justice project, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Translating Justice provides technical assistance and training to help criminal justice practitioners serve and respond to diverse, multilingual populations. It is a project of Vera's Center on Immigration and Justice, which engages in program oversight, program development and implementation, technical assistance, and empirical research focusing on the increasing convergence of criminal justice and immigration.

Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement can be downloaded from www.vera.org/overcomelangbarriers.

The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit organization based in New York City that works with leaders of government and civil society to improve the systems people rely upon for safety, security, and justice.

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