

Promising Practices for Overcoming Language Barriers:

Examples from a National Assessment of Law Enforcement



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Agenda

- > Vera Institute of Justice overview
- > Translating Justice's work
- > National promising practices project
 - Promising practice indicators
 - National assessment
 - Findings
 - Selection of model sites
 - Overview of model sites
- > Promising practices
- > Resources in our publication
- > Q & A

Vera Institute of Justice Overview

- > Founded in 1961 as an independent center for policy and practice, making justice systems fairer and more effective through research and innovation
 - Offices in New York, Washington DC, and New Orleans
- > Works on policing, juvenile justice, sentencing and corrections, and immigration topics
- > Creates nonprofit organizations that provide needed direct services to adults and youth involved in the justice system

Translating Justice's Work

- > Provides consulting, training, and research to improve criminal justice services and their accessibility to immigrants
 - Research on police-immigrant relations
 - Promising practices for engaging immigrants in community policing efforts
 - Language access planning and training

Consequences of Language Barriers in Ensuring Public Safety & Fighting Crime

- > Victims cannot report crimes
- > Police cannot communicate with victims and witnesses
- > Police cannot ensure process of court documents
- > Officers may be put in dangerous situations
- > Investigations may be halted
- > Suspects' rights may not be protected
- > Prosecutions may fail

National Promising Practices Project

- > Funded by USDOJ COPS Office
- > Promising practices indicators
- > National assessment of law enforcement agencies
- > Identify promising practices
- > Site selection
- > National publication and webcast

Promising Practices Indicators

- > Leads to improved police-community relations
- > Demonstrated benefit to LEP community
- > Demonstrated benefit to law enforcement community
- > Improves officers and civilian staff skills
- > Leverages existing resources; fosters pooling or sharing
- > Formal partnerships with the community
- > Institutionalized within the agency

National Assessment

- > Almost 200 agencies (state, municipal police department, and sheriff's office) participated
- > 47 states & DC
- > Range of sizes: from 3 staff to 16,000
- > 70% encountered LEP individuals daily
- > Most common language encountered: Spanish (92%)
 - Other commonly spoken languages: Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Somali

Findings

- > How are agencies communicating with LEP individuals?
 - Oral Assistance
 - Bilingual officers (93%)
 - Language lines/telephonic interpreters (68%)
 - Civilian bilingual police staff (60%)
 - Contract interpretation or translation services (35%)
 - Volunteers (25%)

Findings

- > How are agencies communicating with LEP individuals?
 - Written translations (43%)
 - Miranda warnings
 - Consent and waiver forms
 - Notices of rights
 - How to request police assistance (911)
 - Internal affairs complaint forms
 - Pool resources among agencies (60%)

Findings

- > Do agencies have a written policy for serving LEP individuals?
 - Yes (36%)
- > Do agencies track languages encountered?
 - Yes (22%)
- > Are agencies providing formal training for working with interpreters?
 - Yes (17%)

Selection of Model Sites

- > Diversity in language groups among LEP populations being served
- > Diversity in geography
- > Diversity in the size of agency
- > Varied approaches to serving LEP individuals

Overview of Model Sites

- > Boise (Idaho) Police Department (361)*
- > Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (4,929)*
- > Lexington (Kentucky) Division of Police (741)*
- > Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (1,830)*
- > Oklahoma City Police Department (1,269)*
- > Storm Lake (Iowa) Police Department (26)*

*Number of Sworn Officers and Civilian Personnel

Promising Practices

- > Clearly identify a need
- > Build on what exists
- > Maximize resources
- > Leverage partnerships
- > Enlist volunteers
- > Improve personnel skills
- > Make the program permanent

Clearly identify a need

- > Storm Lake Police Department
 - Primary LEP languages: Spanish and Laotian
 - Conducted a multi-agency citywide assessment



Build on What Exists

- >Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department
 - Primary LEP language: Spanish
 - Researched the field to ensure adequate compensation and competitive salaries



Maximize Resources

>Storm Lake Police Department

- Primary LEP languages: Spanish and Laotian
- Uses civilians to fill staffing gaps

>Oklahoma City Police Department

- Primary LEP language: Spanish
- Uses staff skills efficiently



Leverage Partnerships

> Boise Police Department

- Primary LEP languages: Bosnian and Somali
- Uses community resources to supplement departmental efforts



Enlist Volunteers

- > Metropolitan Nashville Police Department
 - Primary LEP language: Spanish
 - Uses volunteers to assist in outreach and overseeing services



Improve Personnel Skills

>Lexington Division of Police

- Primary LEP language: Spanish
- Language program serves other professional development purposes

>Oklahoma City Police Department

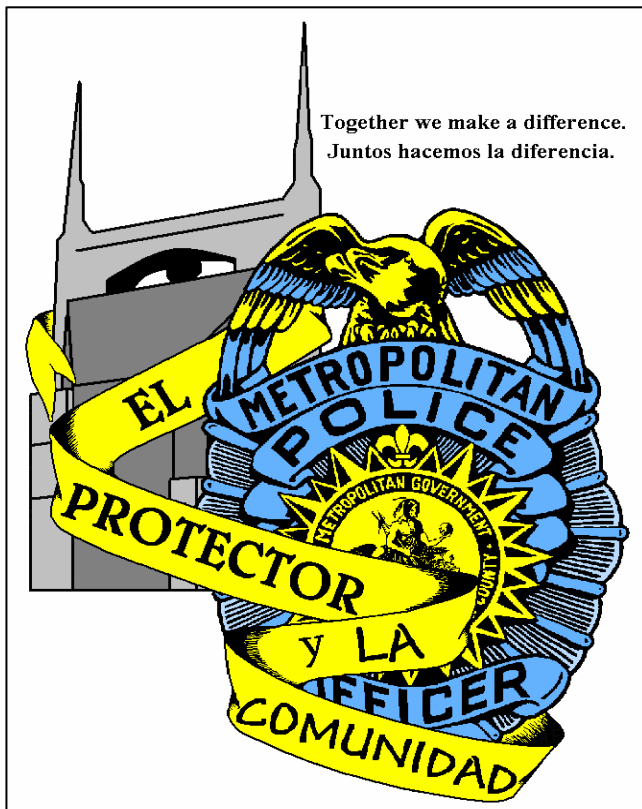
- Primary LEP language: Spanish
- Uses in-house resources to develop personnel skills



Make the Program Permanent

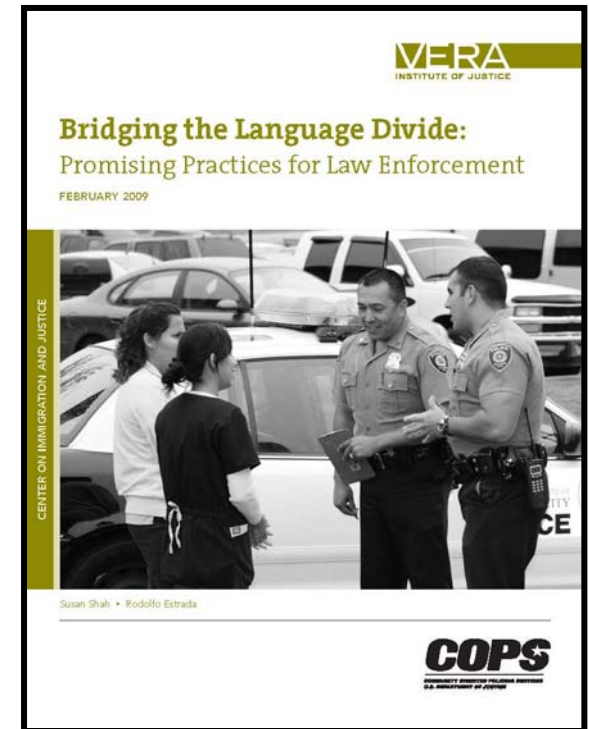
>Metropolitan Nashville Police Department

- Primary LEP language: Spanish
- Expanded the program beyond one officer



Resources in our publication

- > General orders and operating procedures
- > Job classifications
- > Job descriptions
- > Interpreter code of professional responsibility
- > Community advisory board application
- > Contacts from agencies assessed
- > Publications and websites



For Further Information

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You can download our report and view our webcast at
www.vera.org.