

Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement



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Vera Institute of Justice

- > Founded in 1961 as an independent center for policy and practice, making justice systems fairer and more effective through research and innovation.
- > Work on policing, juvenile justice, sentencing and corrections, and the immigration topics.
- > Seventeen Vera projects have been “spun-off” as independent nonprofit organizations.

Translating Justice

- > Provide consulting, training, and research to improve criminal justice services and their accessibility to immigrants.
 - Research on police-immigrant relations
 - Police-community dialogue
 - Language access planning and sharing of best practices

Translating Justice & Policing

>Funding from US DOJ COPS Office in 2005

- Selected 3 law enforcement agencies
- Conducted demographic research
- Interviewed key stakeholders
- Police-community strategic planning
- Recommendations to Chief/Sheriff

>*Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement*

Language Access & Law Enforcement

“Language discordance is our biggest challenge when serving the Chinese community. The language barrier makes it very, very frustrating to get our work done.”

– Police Officer, LVMPD

Language Access & Law Enforcement

“At the core of community policing are partnerships and problem solving, but those essential elements can be hindered if law enforcement is not able to communicate with the growing diverse population in this country.”

– Carl R. Peed, Director, U.S. DOJ
COPS Office

Federal Language Access Enforcement

- > Under Title VI, police departments must provide services accessible to all, regardless of race, color, or national origin.
- > Failing to provide appropriate language services to an LEP individual = national origin discrimination.
- > DOJ Office of Justice Programs Compliance Reviews
 - Since 2004, 50 agencies have been audited
 - Compliance review follows DOJ's four factors

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

Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers in Policing

How to Ensure Language Access in Law Enforcement

- >No one size fits all!
- >Police agencies need to prioritize their language needs
- >**The Goal:** uniform response, accurate service, fair and equitable access

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Determine the languages spoken in the jurisdiction.
- > Conduct an agency-wide audit of internal language capacity.
- > Develop a language access policy and protocol guidance.

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Educate all agency personnel about language access and how to utilize agency language assistance services.
- > Train staff on how to effectively work with “ad hoc,” volunteer, and professional interpreters during an interaction with an LEP individual.

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Recruit bilingual personnel and offer a base pay increase for staff who pass a proficiency exam.
- > Support second language continuing education or refresher courses.
- > Deploy bilingual personnel to areas with high numbers of LEP residents.

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Translate signage and documents that communicate vital information to the public into the most prevalent languages spoken by LEP residents.
 - Search Warrants
 - Miranda Warnings
 - Booking Procedures
 - Summonses
 - Notices of Rights
 - Consent and Waiver Forms
 - Call for Police Assistance/9-1-1
 - Citizen complaint/IA forms

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Provide bilingual personnel with police interpreter training.
- > Use bilingual civilian staff to conduct community outreach and build relationships with LEP residents.
- > Use language assistance technology.

Strategies to Ensure Language Access

- > Notify the public about agency's language access policy and language assistance resources.
- > Form partnerships with community-based organizations and consulates to access their language resources.
- > Pool resources and leverage assets with other agencies and services in the city or county.

**Best Practices
Coming soon...**

Translating Justice National Best Practices Project

- >Funded by COPS in 2007
- >Best Practices Indicators
- >National Assessment
- >Interviews, Site Visits, Focus Groups
- >National Publication and Webcast

TJNBP: Best 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

TJNBP: National Assessment

- > More than 200 agencies (state law enforcement, municipal police department, sheriff's office)
- > 40 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.

TJNBP: National Assessment

> 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%)

TJNBP: National Assessment

> 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%)

For Further Information:

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