

# Bridging the Cultural and Language Divide



Presented by:  
Susan Shah, JD, MPH  
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# Presentation Overview

- About the Vera Institute
- Why Focus on this Topic?
- Cultural and Linguistic Barriers to Policing
- Consequences for Law Enforcement
- National Practices to Bridge the Divide

# 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
  - Offices in New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, and New Orleans
- Work on policing, juvenile justice, sentencing and corrections, victim assistance, and immigration topics
- Create nonprofit organizations that provide needed direct services to adults and youth involved in the justice system

# Police-Immigrant Relations Work

- Translating Justice and Engaging Police in Immigrant Communities (EPIC) Projects
  - Working on these topics since 2005; funded by the United States Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
  - Conduct national research on language access and police-immigrant relations
  - Identify promising practices for overcoming language barriers and engaging immigrants in community policing efforts
  - Develop tools and templates for law enforcement

# Why Focus on This Topic?

## ➤ Demographics

- 13% of U.S. residents are foreign born
- 20% speak a language other than English at home
- 9% qualify as limited English proficient (LEP)

- Increasing number of immigrants are settling outside of traditional gateway cities into suburbs, small towns, and rural areas



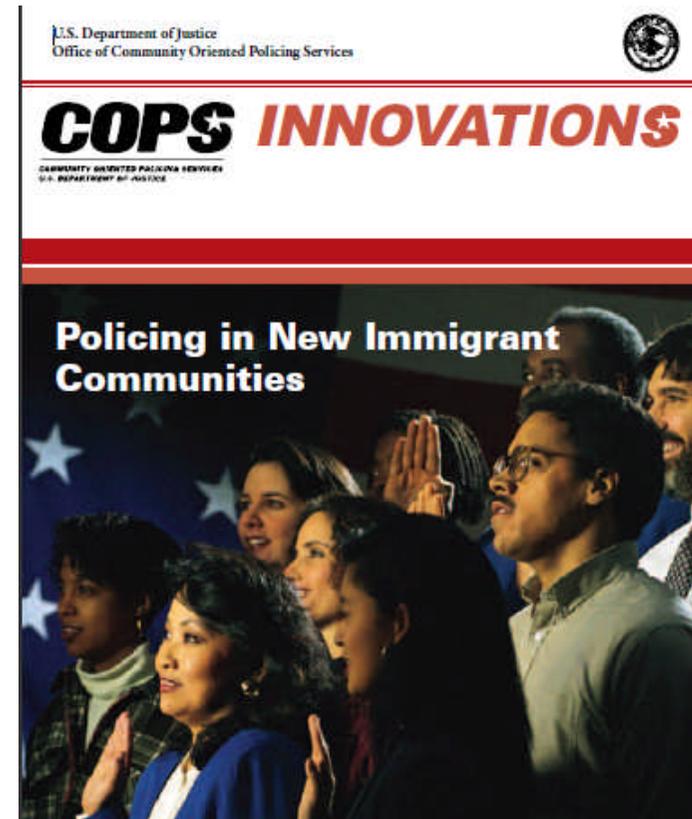
# Why Focus on This Topic?

- As **first responders**, police must interact with all communities and communicate with suspects, victims, and witnesses effectively and without delay.
- Ensuring **public safety** for all means that police have to deal effectively with unfamiliar cultures and languages.
- **Community policing** partnerships and problem solving are impaired when law enforcement cannot communicate with and relate to immigrant communities.

# Barriers to Police-Community Relations

## *2009 Focus Groups Convened by the COPS Office:*

- Language barriers
- Reluctance to report crime
- Fear of police
- Negative impact of immigration enforcement on local community policing efforts
- Lack of awareness of cultural differences



# Consequences

- Crimes do not get reported; witnesses do not come forward
- Officers dealing with the same problem over and over again (FRUSTRATION!)
- Incomplete investigations
- Officers may be put in dangerous situations
- Suspects' rights may not be protected
- Police cannot ensure process of court documents
- Prosecutions may fail

# National Practices to Bridge the Divide

- Two national assessments (2008 & 2011)
  - 200 agencies (state, municipal police department, and sheriff's office) participated in each assessment
  - 47 states/41 states
  - Range of sizes: from 3 to 49,000 sworn and civilian personnel
  - Immigrant populations primarily served included Latino, Hmong, Somali, Haitian, and many others
  - Most common language encountered: Spanish (92%); other commonly spoken languages included Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Somali

# Findings: Encounters

- 80% of law enforcement agencies reported daily encounters with immigrant individuals
- Most common immigrant populations encountered: Latino and East Asian
- Other commonly encountered populations: European/Eastern European and Middle Eastern



# Findings: Oral Communication

- How are agencies communicating with limited English proficient (LEP) individuals?
  - Bilingual officers
  - Language lines/telephonic interpreters
  - Civilian bilingual police staff
  - Volunteers
  - Handheld devices



# Findings: Oral Communication

- In what capacity are bilingual officers using their language skills?
  - Interpreter for other officers
  - Victim assistance
  - Community outreach
  - Translator of documents



# Findings: Written Communication

- Documents being translated:
  - Miranda warnings
  - Consent and waiver forms
  - Notices of rights
  - How to request police assistance (911)
  - Internal affairs complaint forms

# Findings: Quality Communication

- How are bilingual officers tested for fluency?
  - In-house testing
  - Local school or language center
  - Online service
- Does your agency provide or pay for language instruction?
  - Yes: 43%



# Findings: Policies

- What policies/protocols do law enforcement agencies have?
  - Deployment of language access resources
  - Info sharing with the federal government
  - Serving LEP individuals
  - Serving immigrant victims of crime/certifying U-visas
  - Assisting trafficking victims/certifying T-visas

# Programs & Practices

- Become a familiar face in the community
  - Ongoing community forums
  - Special liaisons; victim advocates
  - “Store front” substations
  - Columns in ethnic media; radio programs



# Programs & Practices

- Involve community leaders in decision-making
  - Advisory councils
  - Recruitment councils
- Teach the community about policing
  - “Talking with Police” lessons in ESL classes
  - “New American” police academy



# Findings: Training

- Does your agency provide training for personnel on topics related to immigrant communities?
  - Yes:78%
- Does your agency invite immigrant community leaders to train officers?
  - Yes: 43%



## Findings: Planning

- Was this program developed with direct input from representatives of the immigrant population?
  - Yes (66%)
- Did your agency conduct a needs assessment before initiating your programs to serve immigrant communities?
  - Yes (48%)



# Findings: Planning

- Core components of a planning process:
  - Know who you are serving
    - Community demographics
  - Know how often the community is coming into contact with your agency
    - Voluntary contacts
    - Involuntary contacts
  - Identify all resources available
    - Other government agencies
    - Community-based resources
    - Neighboring police agencies

## Findings: Evaluation

- Has your agency involved the community in evaluating the success of your efforts to serve immigrant communities?
  - Yes (39%)

## Next Steps

- Through our assessment we will identify law enforcement agencies with promising practices
  - Diversity in immigrant populations being served
  - Diversity in geography
  - Diversity in the size of agency
  - Varied approaches to serving immigrant individuals
- Plan to profile these law enforcement agencies in a national report and podcasts ([www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov) & [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org))

## Contact Information

Susan Shah, JD, MPH

[sshah@vera.org](mailto:sshah@vera.org)

(212) 376-4026

[www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)



# Statistics

- According to the 2009 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census, the Latino population in Nashville (Davidson County) was 55,622
- Metropolitan Area:
  - In 1980: 5,973
  - In 1990: 7,665
  - In 2000: 40,139

Source: [www.diversitydata.org](http://www.diversitydata.org)

# Various Policing Strategies

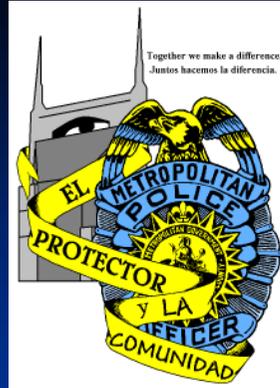
- No one solution
- Use various community-informed programs
  - El Protector
  - Cricket Interpreters
  - Bilingual Chaplains
  - Additional Community Outreach

# Purpose

The “El Protector” program has been designed to fully integrate the MNPD Community Oriented Policing services philosophy to engage the Hispanic community in Nashville in reducing DUI’s, traffic fatalities, domestic violence incidents, and in crime prevention.

# Mission Statement

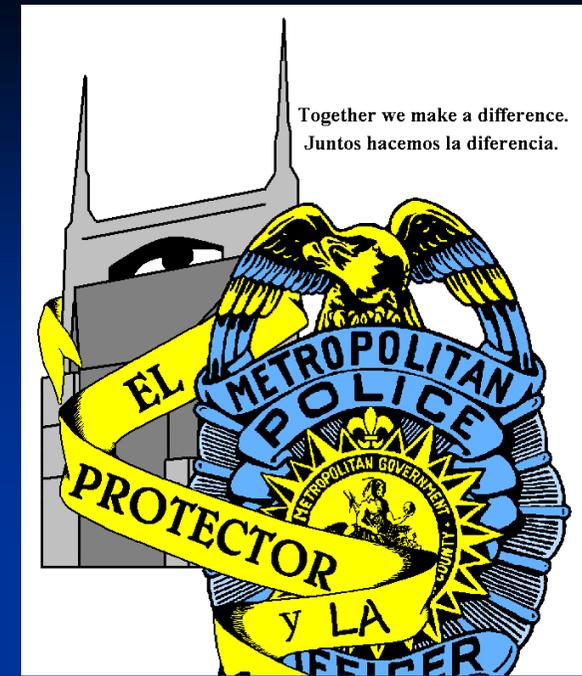
To create an outreach program that strengthens the relationship between the Hispanic community and the MNPD.



- Adopted successful state model to city needs
- Developed to educate Latino population
  - Including driving issues and domestic violence
- Logistics
  - Bilingual officers, precinct based, agency wide commitment

Through:

- Community meetings
- Community center functions/activities
- Partnerships with businesses
- Media (including radio shows and Spanish-language media)



# Advisory Board

- Board of Directors composed of 15 community members
  - Knowledge of Hispanic culture
  - Develop goals and objectives
  - Develop mission statement
  - Develop action plan
- Provide guidance to the program
- Ensure that our educational message is sent out consistently through out all outlets
- Re-branding

# cricket® Interpreters Program

- Partnership with the business community
- Volunteer interpreters
  - 24-hour period
  - Primary and Backup
- May receive calls from Metro Police Officers who need interpreting assistance. The volunteer will speak with the individual on the phone and then accurately interpret to the officer what is being said.