



## **Best Practices for Law Enforcement to Preserve Community Trust in the Context of Increased Immigration Enforcement**

### **I. Introduction**

As the incoming Trump administration pledges to [involve](#) local law enforcement in federal immigration enforcement, this memo seeks to assist such agencies in maintaining community trust. While there are [legal limits](#) on compelling local law enforcement to carry out federal enforcement policies, expanding local law enforcement's role in immigration matters could significantly affect community policing initiatives, potentially undermining [trust](#) and cooperation with the communities they serve.

In an environment of heightened tension, fear, and misinformation, fostering strong relationships with immigrant communities is essential. This memo examines challenges faced by law enforcement when engaging with immigrant communities, provides best practices for fostering effective engagement, and highlights successful initiatives implemented by local departments. It aims to equip law enforcement agencies with strategies to navigate these challenges, emphasizing the importance of fostering trust and collaboration with immigrant communities while balancing public safety and federal immigration enforcement responsibilities.

### **II. Challenges in Law Enforcement and Immigrant Community Relations**

The relationship between law enforcement and immigrant communities is fraught with challenges that stem from a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and systemic factors. Immigrant communities often face unique barriers to building trust with police, influenced by past experiences with corrupt authorities in their home countries, cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, and fears of deportation. Addressing these obstacles requires a nuanced understanding of the factors at play and a commitment to fostering mutual trust and communication.

#### *A. Lack of Trust*

Some immigrants lack trust in law enforcement due to [past experiences](#) with [corrupt and abusive](#) police in their home countries. Refugees, asylum seekers, and other protected humanitarian immigrants who have experienced civil war, genocide, and martial law may have difficulty trusting that the police are there to help. These experiences can affect their assumptions about police in the U.S., and such [distrust](#) can

lead to [non-cooperation](#) with law enforcement and underreporting of crimes. Many local police departments lack the [resources](#) to engage with diverse immigrant communities effectively and may not have sufficient bilingual officers or [outreach programs](#) to build relationships with immigrants who are rightly predisposed to distrust them.

Differences in [cultural norms and practices](#) can create [misunderstandings](#) between law enforcement and immigrant communities. Law enforcement agencies lacking resources for cultural awareness [training](#) may struggle to prepare officers to effectively engage with immigrant communities. A joint report of the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Vera Institute of Justice [notes](#) that “[n]o matter what their training and regardless of their department’s policy, if line officers do not treat immigrants fairly and respectfully, the department’s relationship with immigrant communities will suffer...healthy relationships can be badly damaged as word of such incidents spreads.”

Additionally, limited [English proficiency](#) among immigrant populations can hinder effective communication with law enforcement, [making](#) it difficult for some immigrants to seek help or understand their rights. Additionally, language barriers can prevent such immigrants from [reporting](#) crimes or describing incidents, which hinders officers’ ability to provide protection or gather evidence. Effective communication by law enforcement is essential for building trust and ensuring public safety, particularly in high-pressure situations.

#### *B. Fear of Deportation*

In a climate of intense political focus and heightened [rhetoric](#) about immigration and specific calls for [mass deportation](#), many immigrants fear that any interaction with law enforcement could lead to inquiries about their immigration status and potential deportation. Just as distrust undermines law enforcement’s relationship with immigrant communities, this fear can deter entire immigrant communities from [seeking](#) help and [reporting](#) crimes. Many immigrants, especially those without legal status, will [avoid](#) even positive interaction with law enforcement, as they mistakenly believe it could lead to deportation or the deportation of their family members.

#### *C. Misunderstanding and Misinformation*

Immigrants (and many American-born citizens) may not fully understand how the U.S. legal system works, which can create anxiety and reluctance to engage with law enforcement. There can also be [confusion](#) among immigrant communities regarding the role of local police versus federal immigration enforcement agencies such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), contributing to fears about cooperation. [Inconsistent](#) policies across states and municipalities [exacerbate](#) this confusion, making it difficult for immigrants to distinguish between agencies. [Misinformation](#) about ICE operations, such as rumors of impending raids, exacerbates fear within immigrant communities and can discourage engagement with local law enforcement.

### **III. Best Practices for Building Trust with Immigrant Communities**

### *A. Develop Clear Policies on Immigration Enforcement Collaboration*

In the context of increased immigration enforcement actions at the federal level, it is essential that local law enforcement agencies establish guidelines that [balance](#) local public safety priorities with federal immigration laws, ensuring clarity in roles and responsibilities. If local agencies enter into [287\(g\) agreements](#), they should ensure [transparency](#) by publicly sharing the terms, scope, and limitations of these collaborations. Moreover, when practicable, relevant agency agreements and policies should be translated into the appropriate languages for the local immigrant populations and [promulgated](#) as part of a sustained effort to explain the department's procedures, which will promote trust with immigrant communities. In recognition of the fact that federal policy and priorities on immigration are likely to evolve rapidly, it is likely that such guidelines will need to be regularly updated and recirculated.

### *B. Expand Language Access Programs*

In communities with large immigrant populations, the U.S. Department of Justice [recommends](#) hiring bilingual officers and using translation services to improve communication, thus facilitating better interactions with non-English speaking populations. Law enforcement agencies should prioritize language access at all levels, for example, by providing translation services during meetings and training sessions and ensuring that all written materials are available in multiple languages. Correctly-translated materials [ensure](#) comprehension and help earn the confidence and trust of community members.

### *C. Conduct Cultural Competency Training*

Law enforcement officers should be trained in the complexities of working with immigrant populations, educated on cultural norms and customs to prevent misunderstandings, and provided with tools for effective interactions through [cultural competency training](#). According to Police Chief Magazine, courses [designed](#) to equip police with cultural competencies, which are unrelated to political activism, can help officers “observe how conflict management is differentiated across cultures, especially in four overarching patterns of culture: justice, honor, harmony, and reciprocity.”

### *D. Engage Immigrant Community Leaders*

Law enforcement agencies should actively collaborate with cultural organizations and immigrant community leaders to build trust, improve communication, and enhance public safety. Partnering with established community networks allows police to better understand cultural nuances and address the specific concerns of diverse immigrant groups. According to the [Police Executive Research Forum \(PERF\)](#), engaging religious groups, advocacy organizations, and immigrant-owned businesses can create vital connections that facilitate information-sharing and mutual understanding. Additionally, the sustained [involvement of community leaders](#) ensures continuity and trust during times of heightened tension, as leaders can vouch for law enforcement's good faith and serve as bridges between police and the broader community.

### *E. Build and Sustain Community Engagement*

Hosting regular events, such as forums or community meetings, provides opportunities for law enforcement to interact positively with immigrant communities outside of enforcement contexts could help dispel fears, reduce misunderstandings, and encourage crime reporting. Immigrant communities are diverse, encompassing various legal statuses, ethnicities, languages, and socio-political backgrounds. By engaging a [broad](#) range of representatives from different groups, police can ensure that their outreach is equitable and fosters unity rather than division.

Visible commitment from law enforcement leadership is essential to demonstrate sincerity and avoid perceptions of superficial public relations efforts. High-ranking officials' active participation in community initiatives signals the importance placed on these relationships by the department. For example, community programming [emphasizes](#) the involvement of police chiefs and sheriffs in outreach activities to build credibility and trust with immigrant populations.

### *F. Advocate for Appropriate Funding*

To effectively balance local law enforcement's involvement in federal immigration enforcement with their core public safety responsibilities, agencies must advocate for adequate federal funding and strategic resource allocation. Federal programs such as the [Office of Justice Programs](#) (OJP) and the [Community Oriented Policing Services](#) (COPS) provide critical financial support for initiatives that enhance community trust, improve public safety, and address violence prevention. Local agencies and officers should advocate to ensure that essential resources are not diverted from community policing or other vital services for federal immigration enforcement actions. By securing adequate funding, local agencies can ensure that the demands of federal immigration enforcement do not [undermine](#) critical community policing efforts.

## **IV. Positive Examples of Effective Programs**

Building trust between law enforcement agencies and immigrant communities is essential for fostering public safety, encouraging crime reporting, and ensuring equitable access to justice. Across the U.S., many law enforcement agencies and collaborative initiatives have implemented innovative programs to develop and strengthen these relationships. The following examples highlight successful strategies employed by law enforcement agencies to build bridges with immigrant communities, demonstrating how proactive outreach, inclusive policies, and partnerships with community leaders can create safer and more cohesive neighborhoods.

### *A. The Eagle County Law Enforcement Immigrant Alliance*

The Eagle County Law Enforcement Immigrant Alliance (LEIA) is a collaborative initiative established to enhance trust and collaboration between law enforcement and immigrant communities in Eagle County, Colorado, where a [significant](#) Hispanic immigrant population resides. The LEIA convenes law enforcement officials and immigrant community leaders to promote civil rights, increase the reporting of crimes

by Hispanic/Latino residents, and reduce victimization within the immigrant community.

In response to widespread immigration enforcement actions by then-president Trump in March 2018, members of LEIA signed a [letter](#) stating: “Know that we are sworn to serve all residents and guests regardless of immigration status. Victims or witnesses of crime should never be afraid to come forward to report crimes or ask for help. This policy is in the best interest of the safety of our community as a whole.” LEIA’s success underscores the importance of building relationships with community leaders to foster trust, conducting regular outreach initiatives to engage immigrant populations, and ensuring distinct national and local law enforcement policies are communicated and disseminated

### *B. Pittsburgh Bureau of Police’s Multicultural Liaison Unit*

The Pittsburgh Bureau of Police (PBP) has [prioritized](#) improving service to its diverse immigrant and refugee communities, which have [grown](#) significantly in recent years. To foster trust and effective communication, PBP has implemented a range of strategies, including incorporating immigrant-specific information in procedural justice and implicit bias training for officers. Their “[Unbiased Policing Policy](#)” explicitly prohibits using race, ethnicity, or language ability as criteria for enforcement actions, and officers are instructed to encourage all victims and witnesses to report crimes, regardless of their immigration status. Moreover, the department has issued specific [guidance](#) regarding its immigration status non-inquiry policy.

To [bridge](#) the gap between law enforcement and immigrant communities, the Pittsburgh Mayor’s office worked with PBP to establish a Multicultural Liaison Unit that provides multicultural training to police personnel and a 24/7 interpreter line for first responders. Liaisons seek to ensure that police officers are seen as “protectors” rather than “enforcers” and help educate immigrant communities on their legal rights, personal safety, and effective interactions with law enforcement. The department recognizes that many immigrants come from backgrounds where police interactions may have been negative, and it seeks to change these perceptions by educating both the police and community members about U.S. laws and PBP policies.

### *C. Seattle Police Department’s Immigrant Liaison Program*

The Seattle Police Department (SPD), as part of Seattle’s “Welcoming City” policies, is [tasked with](#) prioritizing and considering “policies, actions, and practices that help immigrant and refugee communities succeed.” One successful immigrant-relations initiative implemented by the SPD is the use of [Community Liaison Officers](#) (CLOs) to [build trust](#) with various communities by “walk[ing] the streets and immers[ing] themselves in the culture of these neighborhoods, talking to business owners and residents and hearing their concerns.” CLOs, who can be members of immigrant communities themselves, are [contracted](#) to “act as a neutral bridge” between communities and local government, “ensuring underrepresented groups have access to City information, resources, and decision-making power.”

#### *D. Alexandria's Community Police Academy*

The City of Alexandria, Virginia [operates](#) a 9-week Community Police Academy program that helps residents learn more about the Alexandria Police Department and its day-to-day operations.

A “community” or “citizens” police academy is a program [designed](#) to educate community members about the operations and philosophy of their local police department. These academies typically include lectures, interactive activities, and discussions about various aspects of policing, such as patrol operations, crime prevention, and community policing practices. In Alexandria, the Community Police Academy’s goals are to simultaneously help residents “make more informed judgments” about the Alexandria Police Department and help the Department gain a “greater understanding of the views and concerns of the community” through enhancing the relationship between police and the city’s residents.

By engaging with diverse community members, police officers can learn about the specific concerns, cultural backgrounds, and needs of immigrant populations, enabling them to serve these communities more effectively. Participation in such academies allows community members, including immigrants, to interact directly with police officers in a non-enforcement context, fostering trust and cooperation.

#### *E. Salt Lake City Police Department's Youth Explorers*

The Salt Lake City Police Department’s [Explorers Program](#) is an innovative initiative aimed at individuals aged 14 to 20 interested in pursuing law enforcement careers. “Explorers” take part in several department and community service programs and must attend activities on a monthly basis to remain active. Notably, the program does [not](#) have a citizenship requirement, allowing lawful permanent residents (LPRs) to participate.

The Explorers Program [provides](#) opportunities for young people, particularly from diverse backgrounds, to engage with law enforcement in a positive setting and has been successful in expanding the pool of future police recruits, particularly among Hispanic and female participants. By involving youth from immigrant backgrounds, the program not only prepares them for potential careers in law enforcement but also strengthens community ties and enhances mutual understanding between law enforcement and diverse populations.

#### *F. Collaboration between the Somali American Police Association and the City of Minneapolis Police Department*

An ongoing collaboration between the [Somali American Police Association](#) (SAPA) and the City of Minneapolis Police Department focuses on recruiting individuals from the East African immigrant communities to strengthen ties with these communities and enhance public safety. This partnership has [yielded](#) positive results, as officers also reported a decrease in crime and an improvement in the overall relationships between the police and the East African population following initial outreach activities. There has

also been an increase in the number of officers from the Somali community joining the Minneapolis police force, which helps improve trust and communication between law enforcement and the immigrant community.

## **V. Conclusion**

In light of increased federal immigration enforcement efforts, it is crucial for local law enforcement agencies to prioritize strategies that preserve trust within immigrant communities. Building this trust enhances public safety by encouraging crime reporting while maintaining the integrity of community policing initiatives. Law enforcement can balance their responsibilities by implementing clear policies, expanding language access programs, conducting cultural competency training, engaging community leaders, sustaining outreach efforts, and advocating for adequate funding, while fostering safer communities for all residents.