



Chapter 3:

Public Safety

This chapter addresses a critical “front line” issue in every community: public safety. Officials in this realm are often the first to interact with immigrants in a municipality. In some cases, they may be the people who inform immigrants of their rights and responsibilities and services available to them. It is also impossible to discuss public safety without recognizing the challenges of illegal immigration and federal law enforcement. However, this toolkit is focused on what municipalities can do to support local immigrants; therefore, while we will touch on these issues, please refer to your municipal attorney, local police, or fire chief for guidance on local issues and concerns regarding undocumented immigrants.

Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities to providing public safety services to immigrants will help municipalities better serve their entire population. In doing so, they can create virtuous cycles of inclusion and better outcomes.

Common Challenges

When it comes to public safety, services and protections must apply to all community members regardless of documentation status, English fluency, housing, or employment situation. Municipalities need to be able to communicate with and respond to emergencies involving everyone in the community. Immigrants may be particularly cautious to contact local police, however minor or meritorious the situation may be. A 2012 survey of Cook County Latinos found that local involvement in immigration enforcement has significantly heightened fears, mistrust, and isolation.¹⁷ Regardless of an individual community's policies, nationwide immigration enforcement practices have diminished the willingness of ethnic communities to interact with police, extending even to children of immigrants who are citizens of the U.S. These federal immigration sanctions, combined with lack of cultural competency and language barriers create bigger challenges for municipalities and immigrant communities. Challenges that municipalities face related to public safety include:

Communication and trust. Misunderstandings and distrust can arise out of differing expectations and experiences with public safety officials among different cultures. Fear of deportation for an undocumented individual, family member, or friend can further preclude legal immigrants from contacting or cooperating with local authorities. This can hinder community-wide public safety enforcement and criminal investigations. Under-reporting of domestic violence is another prevalent issue among foreign-born residents due to wariness of law enforcement officers, cultural differences, or economic insecurity. While police departments increasingly include Spanish-speaking officers and other personnel, accommodating other languages can be more difficult.

Unfamiliarity of driver's licenses, identification, and insurance. Illinois drivers must have vehicle liability insurance and carry the card in their vehicle at all times. Immigrants have lower auto insurance coverage rates than native citizens; perhaps because many people new to the U.S. have little understanding of what insurance is, how it can help, and that it is required by law. Driving without proper identification, licensure, or insurance poses risks to the entire traveling public and can lead to higher accident costs and law enforcement challenges.

Municipal participation in Secure Communities and 287(g).

Under Secure Communities, fingerprints taken by local police upon arrest and submitted to the FBI get checked against immigration databases.¹⁸ Federal enforcement is then triggered against those found to be unlawfully residing in the country or removable due to a criminal action. Similarly, under Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, local law enforcement agencies can enter agreements with the federal government designating local officers with the ability to perform immigration enforcement functions.¹⁹ Increased focus on such enforcement has caused some immigrants and native-born residents to feel less safe, believing police attention is diverted from other criminal activity.

Even if a community does not participate in 287(g), there may be a fear that local law enforcement officials will act as immigration agents—hindering community policing and relationships with foreign-born residents.²⁰ A frequent perception with both programs is that they lead to racial profiling and the prosecution and deportation of non-violent criminals, individuals arrested but not convicted of a crime, or even those with legal residency.²¹ In 2011, the State of Illinois moved to withdraw from the Secure Communities program, but was overridden by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As a response, Cook County passed an ordinance to end the practice of complying with ICE requests to hold immigrants at the County's expense beyond when those individuals could be released. Other states and municipalities have enacted ordinances to curb the influence of Secure Communities by barring local police from detaining immigrants under many circumstances.²²

Immigration services fraud.

As immigrants seek to become American citizens, they often become the targets of scams involving unauthorized practice of immigration law. Individuals pretending to serve as attorneys or on behalf of the government take advantage of immigrants by offering to provide legal advice and often charge overpriced fees for basic services or misrepresent procedures.

17 Theodore, Nik, University of Illinois at Chicago, "Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement," 2013. http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/qci/documents/1213/Insecure_Communities_Report_FINAL.pdf.

18 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, "Secure Communities," Last modified September 5, 2013. <http://www.ice.gov/securecommunities/>.

19 Ibid., "Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act," Last modified September 5, 2013. <http://www.ice.gov/287g/>.

20 Immigration Policy Center, "Secure Communities: A Fact Sheet," Last modified November 29, 2012. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/secure-communities-fact-sheet>.

21 TRAC Immigration, "Sharp Decline in ICE Deportation Filings," Last modified February 21, 2012. <http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/274/>.

22 Selway, William, Bloomberg Politics, "States Limit Help to U.S. Agency on Immigrant Detentions," December 19, 2013. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-12-19/states-limit-help-to-u-s-agency-on-immigrant-detentions.html>.

Strategies to Improve Public Safety

Law enforcement and safety personnel can set a community-wide tone for immigrant outreach and integration. Fostering inclusion and cross-cultural awareness can lead to better public safety outcomes.

Increase communication with the immigrant community.

Frequent, two-way communication between the police and fire departments and the immigrant community is essential. Immigrants should feel assured they will be contacted when necessary and that they may contact local authorities with safety concerns. The Village of Hoffman Estates offers its residents a hotline that does not require callers leave contact information to promote crime reporting. Possible strategies to increase communication with the local immigrant community include:

- Partner with neighboring community public safety agencies as appropriate to leverage limited resources and avoid coverage gaps.
- Connect with local community-based organizations. Many immigrants are likely to turn to spiritual or community leaders if they are a witness or victim of a crime.²³ Authorities should therefore make inroads with key civilians who might serve as a conduit of valuable public safety information. Conduct outreach to church communities and temporary employment agencies, leaving behind business cards and pamphlets
- Increase media relations or public service announcements. Regularly reach out to ethnic radio and television stations, blogs, and print media to make them aware of local initiatives.

Meet immigrants where they feel most comfortable.

Places of worship are a good starting point. Bensenville's Crime Prevention Coordinator visits churches every few months, gives out business cards, and makes himself available for help (see Appendix B: Additional Resources to learn more). Keep visits consistent and let the community know you are there and available to assist. Face-to-face meetings and calling people, as opposed to sending impersonal correspondence, helps build relationships and trust with newcomers. Personal visits serve as an opportunity to inquire about other issues such as transportation, education, housing, health, or childcare needs. Ask whether the immigrant community uses social networks to disseminate information through Twitter or Facebook. Some municipalities may find that their immigrant community, especially if youthful, is tech-savvy.

SPOTLIGHT

Community Bus Tour

The Community Bus Tour is available to new residents interested in learning more about the Village of Skokie. Parents from the Niles Township ELL Parent Center travel to Skokie Village Hall for a guided tour of the building including where to pay water bills, purchase vehicle stickers and pet licenses, receive flu shots, etc. The tour of Village Hall concludes in Council Chambers with a presentation and Q&A with the Mayor. Upon leaving Village Hall, the group walks to the Skokie Public Library for a tour of that facility. The locations of the Skokie Park District facilities are also included in the tour.



Community Response Unit.

Source: Addison Police Department.

23 Theodore, "Insecure Communities."

Cultivate transparency and openness.

Police departments and municipalities can hold informational sessions on local law enforcement and legal processes. Offer tours of municipal facilities or “open house” days. This can help all newcomers to the community appreciate their rights and responsibilities while promoting confidence in local authorities.²⁴

Provide information in the languages your community needs.

Emergency communications systems and dial-a-ride services can include a Spanish option or other widely used language. Additionally, communities should ensure that key safety signs, brochures, and informational materials are translated into the language appropriate for the local immigrant community.

Some cities have passed ordinances prohibiting police from enforcing immigration laws outside the context of a criminal investigation. As mentioned earlier, if immigrants are fearful that a call to the police might mean that the officers will look into family immigration status, chances are the crime will go unreported. The Village of Carpentersville reassures residents the police department will not contact federal immigration authorities if the person is victim of a crime.

Make immigrants aware that they may be eligible for a state issued temporary visitor’s driver’s license. The state is currently extending Illinois Temporary Visitor Driver’s Licenses to up to 500,000 immigrants who undergo driver’s testing and submit proof of insurance.²⁵ Applicants must prove Illinois residency for at least one year and show they are ineligible for a Social Security card. To save local resources and establish a predictable, transparent process, the Villages of Wheaton and Carol Stream have already implemented a policy of flat fines for drivers pulled over who are unable to produce a valid license.

Publicize alternate forms of identification. The Matrícula Consular de Alta Seguridad Consular Identification Card, issued by the Mexican government, must be accepted by all local governments as valid identification under state law.²⁶ Evanston officials found people who feel they have “proper identification” are more likely to report crimes or otherwise interface with officials.

SPOTLIGHT

Oswego Citizens Police Academy

The Village of Oswego offers a free 12-week program for anyone over 18 years of age who is interested in keeping the community safe. It is intended to promote cooperation and communication between residents and the Oswego Police Department. Participants learn about patrol tactics, traffic enforcement, gangs, crime scene processing, and more.



Community volunteers.

Source: Addison Police Department.

²⁴ Cities of Migration: Brooklyn Center for Community Safety, “Taking Time for Community Safety,” http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/taking-time-for-community-safety/.

²⁵ Garcia, Monique, Chicago Tribune, “Illinois to Begin Issuing Driver’s Licenses in December to People in the County Illegally,” October 29, 2013. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-10-29/news/chi-illinois-illegal-immigrants-can-apply-for-drivers-licenses-in-december-20131029_1_temporary-visitor-driver-standard-licenses-issuing-driver.

²⁶ Illinois General Assembly, “Public Act 094-0389,” Last modified January 1, 2006. <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=094-0389>.

Consider establishing an Immigrant Affairs Office or dedicated community liaison. It is important that the immigrant community knows who to go to when they have questions. Municipalities should appoint an immigrant affairs liaison for police, fire, and emergency management departments. Some communities have a designated community liaison position within their police or fire departments to assist with outreach to local immigrant groups. If limited funding is available, the liaison positions could be filled by part-time employees or volunteers from local community-based organizations.²⁷ Such positions also serve as a tool for recruitment to bolster diversity within local government.

Create an immigrant advisory council. Localities have found success with advisory committees comprised of immigrant members of the community.²⁸ Such entities can broaden the perspective, enhancing municipal leaders' ability to focus on the right challenges. The key is not being overly prescriptive so that the committee can develop its own ideas and identify possible solutions. Advisory groups can be guided by a charter and mission statement, calling for improved communication, identifying gaps in access to services, developing trust between local government and the immigrant community, or other identified priorities.

SPOTLIGHT

Bilingual community alerts

The Village of Bensenville has a Code Red Emergency Notification System, through which all residents and businesses receive reverse 9-1-1 phone calls regarding emergencies or disaster situations. The Village records voice messages in English and Spanish and listeners have the option to dial 9 to hear the Spanish language version.

Increase diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

Communities should try to provide settings for positive interactions between police and immigrants, both structured and informal. Organize community meetings in coordination with local immigrant organizations or churches and hold them at a location and time convenient for the target audience. Police athletic leagues, summer youth employment programs, and the like can help form bonds with immigrant youth. Departmental soccer teams can challenge local teams to tournaments or exhibition matches.

Some key considerations when developing a strategy to increase diversity and understanding:

- Proactively engage immigrant groups. This can be done before festival days, parades, and other holidays to understand what's coming and plan for a safe, enjoyable experience for the entire community.
- Choose neutral event locations. The location of public meetings is often a secondary, though important consideration. Foreign-born residents may be less inclined to attend a meeting or event that is held in a building where law enforcement or other government work occurs. Extra consideration should be given to locating meetings at more neutral territory like schools, churches, or community centers.²⁹
- Consider accessibility when selecting a public meeting venue. In scheduling meetings and events, organizers should be mindful of time and resource constraints of immigrants in their community: is the location accessible on foot or by transit? Is the timing unlikely to conflict with residents' most common work schedules?

Collaborate with local service providers. Social service agencies and schools are great resources and can be invaluable partners in increasing public safety in a community. Safety and law enforcement agencies should seek input from social service providers on their outreach strategy and methods. Police departments can also work with schools and community colleges to make safety and gang awareness presentations. Safety providers should also consider giving safety presentations to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes or partner with schools to make Spanish-language presentations catering to parents. Schools are particularly important for informing immigrant families of children's rights.

27 Gambetta, Ricardo and Burgess, Michelle, The National League of Cities Center for Research and Innovation, "Public Safety Programs for the Immigrant Community: 17 Good Practices in U.S. Cities." <http://www.nlc.org/Documents/Find%20City%20Solutions/Research%20Innovation/Immigrant%20Integration/public-safety-programs-in-the-immigrant-community-qid-jun11.pdf>.

28 Cities of Migration: Newport News Police Department, "Police Take Community Outreach to City Hall." http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/police-take-community-outreach-to-city-hall/.

29 Keidan, "A Local Official's Guide to Immigrant Civic Engagement."



Glen Ellyn.
Source: Jim Watkins

Work with the private sector on safety initiatives.

It's not just not-for-profit agencies that make good partners on immigrant initiatives. Municipalities may want to consider local banks or other service based businesses as partners. Some cities have worked with banks to expand identification options for opening an account.³⁰ Reducing the number of unbanked residents in a community can improve safety as there is less of a need to carry or store large amounts of cash (see the Workforce and Economic Development chapter for a spotlight on Self-Reliance Credit Union in Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood).

To address the high rates of uninsured immigrant drivers, Chicago's Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE) partnered with GEICO to offer discounted car insurance.³¹ Progressive Insurance also has a Spanish-language web site.³² In Indianapolis, State Farm Insurance partnered with the Hispanic Public Service Campaign on Child Safety to educate residents about child safety restraints in vehicles. State Farm donated car seats, conducted clinics, and helped air radio public service announcements on Spanish-language stations.³³ Locally, Bensenville worked with temporary employment agencies to promote carpooling and reduce driving by unlicensed individuals.

SPOTLIGHT

Immigration Promotores

The Latino Policy Forum offers *Promotores de Inmigración* training aimed to develop community-based trainers who have a strong understanding of immigration policy and its effects on immigrant communities. Specifically, the training has three goals: increase knowledge of immigration policies and impact on the immigrant community, learn skills as they relates to building collective and strategic action, and engage participants in opportunities to address immigration issues locally through trainings and coordinated actions. This training program is intended to assist immigration advocates and community members in building capacity to alleviate challenges associated with immigrant status within Latino and immigrant communities.

30 Gambetta and Burgess, "Public Safety Programs for the Immigrant Community: 17 Good Practices in U.S. Cities."

31 Government Employees Insurance Company (Geico). <http://www.geico.com/landingpage/go51.htm?logo=70461>

32 Progressive Casualty Insurance Company (Progressive). <http://www.progressiveseguros.com/>

33 Ponce Publicidad, "State Farm and Mayor Peterson's Commission on Latino Affairs Launch Hispanic Campaign on Child Safety in Indianapolis." <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/state-farm-and-mayor-petersons-commission-on-latino-affairs-launch-hispanic-campaign-on-child-safety-in-indianapolis-69977292.html>

SPOTLIGHT

Educate staff and elected officials about the U.S. immigration process and issues for undocumented people vis-à-vis public safety. Increasing awareness of programs and policies that are applicable to immigrants can help service providers by giving them knowledge and resources they can offer to immigrants. This can also help local immigrant families become more aware of resources available to them. For instance, assistance and compensation are available to victims of criminal activity regardless of immigration status. U-Visas are temporary visas available to immigrants and family members of immigrants who are victims of a crime.³⁴ Dedicated U-Visa education and training may be appropriate for local public agencies.

Incorporate these strategies into public safety worker recruitment, training, and retention. Cultural sensitivity training and diversity awareness should be included in police and fire academy curricula. Offer language training programs to officers, cadets, and recruits alike. Encourage a pipeline of ESL and multi-lingual personnel by noting such opportunities in marketing and recruiting material.



Coffee with a cop.
Source: Addison Police Department.

U-Visas

In order to qualify for a temporary U-Visa, a victim must be certified as helpful or likely to be helpful in the investigation and prosecution of criminal activity. Chicagoland communities like Bensenville, Carol Stream, and Wheeling have successfully connected residents to U-Visa processing and made legal referrals. Access to this legal remedy for victims is enhanced when local law enforcement agencies understand U-Visas and establish an efficient means for processing the 2-page certification (Form I-918B³⁵). Typically this entails having a designated intake person within a police department. Though not an endorsement for citizenship, U-Visas help protect immigrants who have been victimized while aiding in law enforcement efforts.

Addison's Community Emergency Response Team

The Village of Addison's Police Department offers an eight-week Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training taught in Spanish at the Henry Hyde Resource Center. The two classes each train 30 local Hispanic leaders to supplement the capacity of first responders. This ensures that language access is not an issue should a major disaster or emergency occur. The CERT training is also a resource used by the Police Department during traffic stops and at community events and celebrations.

³⁴ U.S. Immigration Support, "U Visa for Immigrants who are Victims of Crimes," Last modified 2012. <http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/visa-u.html>

³⁵ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status," Last modified April 15, 2013. <http://www.uscis.gov/i-918>

