

Problem Statement

Since 2022, Whitewater has experienced significant demographic changes with a substantial increase in the immigrant population, primarily from Nicaragua and Venezuela. Approximately 800-1,000 immigrants have arrived, adding to the city's 15,000 residents. These individuals come for various reasons and have different legal statuses. This influx has introduced several challenges, particularly for law enforcement. The key issues include communication barriers, non-familial living situations, fake identifications, and limited public transportation for unlicensed drivers.

One of the most significant challenges is the palpable trust barrier between immigrants and law enforcement. Many immigrants arrive with negative perceptions of law enforcement from their home countries, which complicates efforts to build trust and cooperation. Additionally, many immigrants come from agrarian cultures where formal schooling is less prioritized, further complicating communication. The specific Central American Spanish dialects they speak often differ significantly from those familiar to local Spanish speakers, adding another layer of difficulty.

The impact of these changes is reflected in law enforcement statistics. For instance, there has been a nearly three-fold increase in citations for operating a motor vehicle without a license. Wisconsin does not allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, leading many to drive without a license out of necessity. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of public transportation options in Whitewater, making the streets less safe and increasing the workload for officers.

Law enforcement has also encountered extreme cases highlighting the dire circumstances some immigrants face. In the winter of 2022, officers responded to a call and found a family with a toddler living in a small shed in freezing temperatures. In 2023, a deceased infant was found in a cardboard box in a field, leading to the discovery of multiple cases of juvenile immigrants being impregnated by adult males, exacerbated by non-familial living arrangements.

Approach: To address these complex issues, Whitewater's law enforcement agency aims to reorient its mission towards community-oriented policing. This approach requires additional staffing and resources to implement effective strategies. The proposed plan involves three primary initiatives:

1. **Educational Partnerships**: The first initiative focuses on creating educational partnerships with local organizations. Education is highly valued in Whitewater, providing a solid foundation for this approach. The goal is to enhance immigrants' understanding of local laws and resources while educating officers about immigrant cultures. Partnerships will be established with organizations such as the Whitewater Unified School District and The Community Space, which already offer English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Law enforcement officers will participate in these courses, providing a platform to engage with the immigrant community and understand their needs better.

The initiative also aims to offer independent courses covering various topics pertinent to the immigrant population, such as traffic laws, immigration law, mental health resources, and civic participation. These courses will utilize existing resources like the "Helpful Information" document and a bilingual Immigration Law guide commissioned by the City of Whitewater. Importantly, the curriculum will be developed in consultation with the immigrant community to address their specific needs and concerns.

2. **Trust-Building Initiatives**: Building trust within the immigrant community is crucial for effective law enforcement. This initiative involves meeting immigrants in non-threatening environments, such as

places of worship and community centers. Officers will regularly visit St. Patrick's Catholic Church and other locations where immigrants gather, offering a presence that is supportive rather than enforcement-focused.

Collaboration with local organizations such as Whitewater Unites Lives and The Community Space will also be key. Officers will participate in meetings and activities organized by these groups, providing a law enforcement perspective and building relationships over time. The goal is to establish a "Community Watch" group, empowering immigrants to report crimes and suspicious activities, thereby fostering a sense of safety and cooperation.

3. Technological Enhancements: Improving communication technology is essential to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the immigrant population. This initiative involves testing various language interpretation services, such as Propio, Language Line, Google Translate, and Worldwide Tech Connections, to find the most effective solutions for both officers and immigrants.

Beyond direct communication, the initiative aims to make public information more accessible. This includes providing materials in multiple formats, such as written documents and recorded videos, and ensuring non-native English speakers can participate in local government. This will be achieved by utilizing technology that facilitates involvement in public meetings, including Police and Fire Commission meetings.

Long-Term Strategy: The long-term strategy involves continuous engagement with community groups and relevant agencies to adapt and refine our approach based on evolving needs. Annual reviews of crime statistics and community feedback will help assess the effectiveness of our initiatives and guide future adjustments.

To ensure sustained impact, the City of Whitewater has several ongoing efforts. Senator Tammy Baldwin's office is working on an appropriation request for an Immigration Liaison position for 2025. Additionally, Fitch and Associates have been commissioned to complete an organizational workload study for the police department. This study will provide recommendations on long-term staffing needs and best practices, informing community stakeholders and preparing for a potential public safety referendum.

Expected Outcomes: These initiatives aim to build legitimacy and trust in our department, making Whitewater safer for all residents. By fostering positive relationships and improving communication, we expect to see several benefits:

- **Enhanced Trust and Cooperation**: Building trust through consistent, positive interactions will encourage immigrants to cooperate with law enforcement, leading to more effective policing and community safety.
- **Improved Communication**: Enhanced technological capabilities and educational initiatives will bridge communication gaps, making it easier for immigrants to understand local laws and for officers to understand immigrants' cultural contexts.
- **Reduced Crime and Disorder**: With better communication and trust, we expect a decrease in unlicensed driving and other issues, improving overall public safety.
- **Stronger Community Engagement**: Educational and trust-building initiatives will empower immigrants to participate more actively in the community, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

- **Sustained Impact:** The long-term strategy ensures that these efforts are not just temporary fixes but are integrated into the fabric of Whitewater’s community policing approach, with continuous evaluation and adaptation.

Implementation Plan

1. Initial Setup and Staffing

- **Hiring Additional Staff:** Secure funding to hire three additional sworn officers dedicated to community policing.
- **Training:** Provide cultural competency training for all officers, focusing on understanding the immigrant community’s unique needs and challenges.

2. Educational Partnerships

- **Collaborate with Educational Institutions:** Partner with local schools and organizations to develop and deliver educational programs for immigrants and officers.
- **Develop Curriculum:** Work with community leaders to create relevant courses covering local laws, resources, and cultural awareness.

3. Trust-Building Initiatives

- **Engage with Community Groups:** Regularly visit places of worship and community centers to build relationships with the immigrant community.
- **Participate in Community Activities:** Involve officers in events and meetings organized by local organizations to foster trust and cooperation.

4. Technological Enhancements

- **Test Communication Tools:** Evaluate various language interpretation services to find the best fit for the community and law enforcement.
- **Disseminate Information:** Ensure public information is accessible in multiple languages and formats, and enhance capabilities for non-native English speakers to participate in local government.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Annual Reviews:** Conduct annual reviews of crime statistics and gather community feedback to assess the effectiveness of initiatives.
- **Adjust Strategies:** Based on the reviews, make necessary adjustments to strategies and initiatives to ensure continuous improvement.

Collaboration and Consultation: Throughout the implementation process, we will maintain close consultation with community groups, private and public agencies, and other stakeholders. Regular meetings and feedback sessions will ensure that our approach remains responsive to the community’s needs.

Conclusion: The City of Whitewater’s plan to reorient its law enforcement mission towards community-oriented policing through educational partnerships, trust-building initiatives, and technological enhancements aims to address the unique challenges posed by the recent demographic changes. These strategies will build trust and legitimacy in our department, making Whitewater safer for all residents. With a long-term commitment to these initiatives and continuous engagement with the community, we

believe this approach will have lasting positive impacts, fostering a more inclusive and cooperative environment for years to come.