

Principal Investigator

Hillary Mellinger

PI Email

hillary.mellinger@wsu.edu

PI Position Title

Assistant Professor

PI Department

Criminal Justice and Criminology

PI College

College of Arts & Sciences

PI Campus

Pullman

Co-PI 1

N/A

Co-PI 1 Email

N/A

Co-PI 1 Department

N/A

Co-PI 2

N/A

Co-PI 2 Email

N/A

Co-PI 2 Department

N/A

Co-PI 3

N/A

Co-PI 3 Email

N/A

Co-PI 3 Department

N/A

Additional Co-PIs

N/A

Proposal Title

Resiliency, Resourcefulness, and Responsibility: How Spanish-Speaking Communities Navigate Language Barriers with Police

Proposal Description

Police encounters are at best tenuous situations in which any miscommunication can have unintended consequences for any of the involved parties. Cultural differences exacerbate the potential for a situation to go awry, especially when different spoken languages are involved. Surprisingly, WA does not collect state-wide data on interpretation provided by law enforcement agencies. Even if data were available, however, qualitative research best supplements quantitative findings to contextualize them. I am conducting an in-depth study of police and community members' experiences in Pasco, WA, as a first step toward understanding how to address police encounters caused or complicated by language and cultural differences.

I am requesting funding to travel to Pasco to enhance my current connections to community organizations and to expand my ongoing research on how Spanish-speaking community members and police navigate language and cultural barriers. In summer 2023, I conducted two focus groups with Spanish-speaking community members, 22 interviews with officers, and 60 hours of police ride-alongs. As part of this research, I established initial relationships with local organizations, including the Boys and Girls Club of Franklin and Benton Counties, the Tri-Cities Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Jubilee Foundation.

Sustaining and growing these connections is critical to advancing my research. Many Spanish-speaking residents are understandably reticent to share their experiences with someone outside of their community. This award would facilitate additional time in Pasco to conduct focus groups while building and expanding on community relationships. The award would also be used to provide meals and child care during focus groups as well as gift card incentives for participants. Community organizations are crucial for my research. They assist with logistics and provide important assurances to focus group participants of my credentials and the legitimacy of the research. Indeed, this research would not be possible without the support of community organizations.

As a land grant institution, WSU's mission statement upholds "scholarly inquiry that benefits society, and the sharing of expertise to positively impact the state and communities." Key findings from my research will be shared with the community and police department with the goal of mitigating language barriers and improving police / community relationships. Ultimately, my long-term research goals are to identify scalable solutions and policy recommendations to reduce language barriers and their associated problems in law enforcement, using Pasco's linguistic and cultural diversity as a key starting point.

I am well qualified to conduct this project. I speak proficient Spanish, and my research focuses on the intersections of the criminal justice and immigration systems. Before pursuing my doctorate, I worked at a national nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to immigrant survivors of violence. Among their challenges, these survivors often endured language barriers as they navigated both criminal justice and immigration issues.

One of WSU's core beliefs is to "improve the human condition" by researching "the vast and complex problems [that] confront the world". Language barriers are one such problem, and they will continue to pose challenges given the growing linguistic diversity within Washington state. Consequently, it is incumbent upon researchers to spend more time addressing the difficulties around interpretation and language access.

Budget

Lodging – \$1,050, based on GSA rate for Pasco of \$105 night * 10 days

Incentive – \$900, based on a \$30 Walmart gift card * 30 people across 3 focus groups

Childcare – \$660, based on the Boys & Girls Club Rate of \$220 per group * 3 focus groups

Food – \$375, based on providing Little Caesar pizzas, soda, and water (\$125 * 3 focus groups)

Total: \$2,985

Certified Budget Administrator
Amanda Wagar

Certified Budget Administrator Email
awagar@wsu.edu