

Vera Institute of Justice: STOPS (Sensible Traffic Ordinances for Public Safety) Solicitation

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) is launching a project to work with localities across the country on a safer, fairer, and more equitable approach to traffic stops. We invite eligible jurisdictions to join a cohort that will partner with us for a nine-month initiative. Each participant jurisdiction will study, draft, and pass legislation or policy to end or limit the use of law enforcement stops for low-level issues that do not affect traffic safety—such as broken taillights, dangling air fresheners, or expired vehicle registrations. Several cities including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and states from Virginia to Oregon have already taken such action. This project seeks to add many others to their ranks.

Why STOPS? Nationally, police stop [more than 20 million motorists](#) a year for alleged traffic violations. A significant number of these traffic stops are for minor violations that do not affect public safety. For example, Vera's recent [report](#) on Suffolk County, Massachusetts (Boston and environs), found that over the past decade, about a third of traffic stops (out of nearly 500,000 total) were for violations such as driving with a single broken taillight, expired or defective vehicle registrations, a missing inspection sticker, or window tint.

Ending these low-level stops can promote public safety and community trust in the police. While the stated reason for conducting such stops is ostensibly public safety, these stops [very rarely result in the recovery of guns](#) or other contraband. Instead, the frequency of these stops and their disparate impact on communities of color [compound distrust in government institutions such as police](#) departments and prosecutors' offices, which depend on the public's cooperation to solve crimes. In addition, these stops increase the risk of [physical, psychological, and economic harm](#), especially in Black communities. Finally, eliminating stops for equipment violations and other minor issues allows police to [prioritize enforcement of driver behavior that actually threatens public safety](#), such as dangerous driving.

Vera works in more than 20 statehouses and city and county legislatures across the country on campaigns for [community-driven safety](#), [pretrial justice](#), ending [unjust fines and fees](#), advancing the [right to counsel for immigrants](#), and more. By partnering with Vera, jurisdictions will:

- gain the assistance and support of a national organization that harnesses [decades of expertise](#) in criminal legal and immigration reform to bring our combined assets of data, evidence, and solutions to the policy arena;
- participate in nine virtual monthly sessions from April to November 2023 (excluding August) with a cohort of other localities, with a curriculum covering data collection and dissemination, political strategy, community participation, bill or policy drafting, messaging, implementation, and alternative means of enforcing requirements like vehicle registration;
- build a base of support with other localities participating in the cohort;
- learn from jurisdictions that have passed similar policies, including looking at their evidence and results, as well as messaging, materials, and strategy; and
- receive access to public opinion polling previously commissioned by Vera.

How to Partner? Vera will select partners through a short [application](#), followed by a phone interview. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, with the cohort to start in late April 2023. Before deciding to apply, jurisdictions should feel free to reach out to Marta Nelson, mnelson@vera.org, with any questions.

Please consider the following criteria and apply using this [link](#):

- We welcome a team of people to apply from a jurisdiction, for example a group that includes a local legislator, a traffic safety commissioner, and a community leader.
- We are leading this cohort with the expectation that all jurisdictions will introduce legislation or other lasting policy changes within a year from the beginning of our cohort sessions.
- At least one partner from a jurisdiction must have the positional power to introduce this change: for example, a mayor, a city council or state legislature committee chair, a police chief, a traffic enforcement agency, or ideally a combination thereof.
- Data about traffic stops can help a jurisdiction demonstrate why ending or limiting certain low-level stops is important for safety and equity. Preference will be given to jurisdictions that have access to raw traffic stop data including demographic data. We also strongly encourage applications from teams that have the capacity to compile and analyze such data either internally or using a local research partner like a university. If data analysis is a concern, feel free to flag this in the application and Vera can assist with locating partners who can help.
- Partners must have the ability and willingness to share and report data with their government colleagues and the public.
- Partner applications that include community groups or advocacy organizations as co-applicants will be given strongest consideration.