



HIGH THREAT TRIAL PREPARATIONS FOR TRIBAL COURTS


A Tribal Court Security Planning Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | www.nativejustice.us


■ HIGH THREAT TRIALS IN TRIBAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS

High threat trials are proceedings where the nature of the case, the identity of the parties, known threats, or community tensions create elevated security risk for court personnel, witnesses, victims, and the public. In tribal communities, high threat trials may involve gang-affiliated defendants, domestic violence cases with prior threats against the victim or court staff, high-profile political or governance disputes, or cases involving organized drug trafficking networks. Thorough preparation before the trial begins is the most effective security strategy.

 High threat trial preparation must begin days or weeks before the first hearing — not on the morning of trial. Last-minute security adjustments are inadequate and dangerous.

 Effective high threat trial security requires coordination among the court security officer, tribal police, the presiding judge, prosecution, and victim services before proceedings begin.

 A formal Threat Assessment for each high-risk case — documented and shared with all relevant security and court personnel — is the foundation of high threat trial preparation.

 Establish communication protocols with tribal police and, where applicable, BIA and FBI before the trial begins. Do not assume external agencies know about your proceedings.

■ THREAT ASSESSMENT FOR HIGH-RISK PROCEEDINGS

Identifying High Threat Trials

- Gang affiliation or co-defendant disputes that may bring competing factions into the courthouse.
- Domestic violence cases where the defendant has made prior threats against the victim, witnesses, or court staff.
- Drug trafficking cases involving organized networks with known retaliation histories.
- High-profile governance or election cases where community tension is elevated and large public attendance is expected.
- Cases where the victim or defendant has a history of courtroom disruptions, contempt, or escape attempts.

The Threat Assessment Process

- Identify all known parties: defendant(s), co-defendants with related cases, victim(s), key witnesses, attorneys, and any individuals with active protective orders.
- Review criminal history, prior court incidents, gang intelligence, and any threat intelligence from tribal police or federal partners for all key parties.
- Document the threat level (high/medium/low), specific threat indicators, and recommended security measures in a written Threat Assessment report.
- Share the Threat Assessment with the presiding judge, court administrator, tribal police liaison, and victim advocate before the first hearing date.

■ HIGH THREAT TRIAL SECURITY MEASURES

Physical Security Enhancements

- Increase security staffing: minimum two officers for high threat proceedings, positioned to cover the defendant, gallery, and all exits simultaneously.
- Implement enhanced entry screening: hand wand every person, require all bags to be screened, and consider wandling all attorneys and court staff.
- Establish a controlled entry protocol: designated entry time for parties, separation of defendant's supporters and victim's supporters in the gallery.
- Clear the building of non-essential personnel before bringing an in-custody defendant into the facility. Minimize hallway exposure.

Witness & Victim Protection

- Establish a separate, secured entrance and waiting area for victims and witnesses to prevent courthouse confrontations with defendants or their associates.
- Coordinate with the victim advocate on the victim's arrival and departure plan. Do not allow the victim to leave the building without a confirmed safe exit.
- Brief all witnesses on courthouse protocols, their designated waiting area, and the security officer who will escort them to and from the courtroom.

Courtroom Configuration

- Reconfigure gallery seating if necessary to maintain separation between the defendant's and victim's family and associates.
- Consider requesting that the judge issue a standing order prohibiting electronic devices, requiring identification for gallery admission, or limiting gallery capacity.
- Position the security officer closest to the defendant — not at the door — during high threat proceedings.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal High Threat Trial Security Programs | www.nativejustice.us

■ FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

Court Security Funding

- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Funds tribal public safety including court security staffing, training, and equipment. cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources
- **CTAS – Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation** – DOJ consolidated tribal funding for courts, law enforcement, and security programs. justice.gov/tribal
- **BJA Tribal Justice Programs** – Supports tribal court operations and court security capacity. bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice
- **FEMA Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program (THSGP)** – Annual DHS funding for tribal security infrastructure and emergency preparedness. fema.gov/tribal

Threat Assessment & Witness Protection

- **DOJ Office for Victims of Crime – Witness Protection** – Resources for protecting witnesses and victims in high-threat proceedings. ovc.ojp.gov
- **FBI Indian Country Division** – Federal threat intelligence and coordination for high-threat cases involving organized crime or gang activity. fbi.gov
- **National Center for State Courts – Court Security** – High threat trial security standards and planning resources for tribal and state courts. ncsc.org

■ STATE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **State Court Security Standards** – Most state court administrative offices publish court security standards applicable to tribal courts under intergovernmental agreements. Contact your State Court Administrator.
- **State Homeland Security Grants (SHSGP)** – Tribal court security programs may be eligible for state-administered FEMA homeland security funding. Contact your State Administrative Agency (SAA).
- **Tribal Law & Order Act (TLOA) Resources** – TLOA expanded tribal justice authority and DOJ technical assistance for tribal courts and security programs.
- **Grants.gov Tribal Search Tool** – Search all federal grants available to tribal entities. grants.gov (filter: Tribal Government eligibility)

■ HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRIBAL PROGRAMS & LEADERS

<p>Develop a Formal High Threat Trial Protocol</p> <p>A written protocol defining what triggers a high threat designation, who is notified, what security enhancements are implemented, and how victim/witness protection is coordinated is essential for consistent, effective response.</p>	<p>Conduct Pre-Trial Threat Assessment Briefings</p> <p>A formal pre-trial briefing between security, tribal police, the judge, prosecution, and victim advocate — at least one week before trial — ensures coordinated, fully informed security planning.</p>
<p>Establish a Victim/Witness Safe Passage Protocol</p> <p>Every high threat trial requires a written victim/witness arrival and departure plan. Courthouse confrontations are preventable with proper planning.</p>	<p>Maintain a High Threat Trial Registry</p> <p>A secure registry of all high threat trial designations — documenting the threat assessment, security measures taken, and post-trial evaluation — enables institutional learning and grant documentation.</p>

■ KEY WEBLINKS

National Native Justice Institute	www.nativejustice.us
National Center for State Courts	ncsc.org
COPS Tribal Resources Grant	cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources
BJA Tribal Justice Programs	bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice
DOJ Office for Victims of Crime	ovc.ojp.gov
FBI Indian Country	fbi.gov
CTAS – DOJ Tribal Assistance	justice.gov/tribal
Grants.gov (Tribal Search)	grants.gov

■ PARTNER WITH NNJI — WE ARE READY TO SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

TAKE ACTION TODAY — Contact NNJI at www.nativejustice.us to schedule training, consultation, or access resources.
Strengthening Tribal Justice — One Community at a Time