



COURTROOM SECURITY FOR TRIBAL PERSONNEL


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


■ COURTROOM SECURITY IN TRIBAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS

The tribal courtroom is one of the most unique and challenging security environments in Indian Country. It brings together defendants, victims, witnesses, family members, and legal representatives in close proximity — often in communities where everyone knows everyone. Tribal court personnel — judges, clerks, prosecutors, public defenders, and security officers — each play a role in maintaining a safe, orderly, and dignified court environment. Effective courtroom security protects judicial independence, ensures due process, and safeguards the lives of all who enter.

 The courtroom is the most emotionally charged environment in the tribal justice system. Verdicts, sentencing, and custody decisions can trigger immediate, intense reactions from parties and their families.

 Tribal court security officers are often the only armed or trained security presence in the building. Their preparation, positioning, and awareness directly determine outcomes in critical incidents.

 Every tribal court employee — not just security staff — has a role in courthouse safety. Awareness, communication, and reporting are shared responsibilities.

 Documented security protocols, post orders, and incident reports are the foundation of a defensible, accountable tribal court security program.

■ ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF COURT SECURITY PERSONNEL

Pre-Session Security Functions

- Conduct a security sweep of the courtroom, holding areas, restrooms, and hallways before any session begins. Document the sweep in writing.
- Verify that all access control points are functional: entry screening equipment, locked areas, and restricted access doors.
- Review the day's docket for high-risk cases: domestic violence hearings, gang-affiliated defendants, custody disputes with prior threats, or individuals with active protection orders.
- Brief all court personnel on any known threats, protective orders in effect, or special security considerations for the day's proceedings.

During-Session Positioning & Awareness

- Position yourself with clear sightlines to the defendant, gallery, and all courtroom exits. Never position yourself where your view is obstructed.
- Maintain continuous observation of the gallery throughout proceedings. Identify individuals who appear agitated, are making threatening gestures, or are recording proceedings without authorization.
- Establish and maintain a clear zone between the defendant and the victim, their families, and witnesses whenever parties are in the same space.
- Coordinate with the presiding judge on a clear, pre-established hand signal or verbal protocol for requesting the judge to recess when a security concern arises.

Managing Disruptions

- For verbal disruptions, approach calmly and quietly, position yourself next to the disruptive individual, and in a low voice direct them to stop the behavior or step outside.
- Escort disruptive individuals from the courtroom firmly but without unnecessary force. The goal is removal, not confrontation.
- For any physical altercation or threat involving a weapon, immediately direct the judge to chambers, clear the gallery toward exits, and call for additional law enforcement support.

■ TIPS FOR TRIBAL COURT SECURITY PERSONNEL

- **Know the Docket Before Court Begins** – Review every case on the day's docket and flag high-risk proceedings. Pre-session preparation is the most important security function you perform.
- **Establish Clear Protocols with the Judge** – Every judge and security officer should have pre-established non-verbal and verbal protocols for recessing, clearing the courtroom, and initiating emergency response.
- **Maintain Calm Professionalism at All Times** – Your demeanor sets the tone for the courtroom environment. Calm, professional, respectful presence reduces tension and projects authority without intimidation.
- **Control Access Before the Problem Enters the Room** – Entry screening and docket review are your best tools. Security problems that are prevented at the door never become courtroom crises.
- **Document Every Incident and Unusual Observation** – A security log entry for every incident — however minor — creates a record that protects court personnel, identifies patterns, and supports threat assessment.
- **Pursue Specialized Court Security Training** – Court security is a specialized discipline. Training through NNJI, NCSC, and the U.S. Marshals Service provides skills that general security training does not.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Courtroom 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. bja.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

Technical Assistance

- **National Center for State Courts (NCSC)** – National court security standards, assessment tools, and training resources for tribal and state courts. ncsc.org
- **U.S. Marshals Service – Court Security Training** – Federal court security training resources that can be adapted for tribal court programs. usmarshals.gov
- **Bureau of Justice Assistance – Tribal Courts** – Technical assistance for tribal court operations including security program development. bj.a.ojp.gov

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 Written Court Security Post Orders Every court security post requires written post orders covering pre-session sweep, positioning, disruption response, and emergency protocols. Post orders ensure consistency and defensibility.</p>	<p>Conduct Threat Briefings Before Each Session A five-minute pre-session briefing between security staff and court personnel on the day’s docket, known threats, and special conditions significantly reduces incident response time.</p>
<p>Establish a Court Security Committee A formal court security committee — including the presiding judge, court administrator, and security supervisor — provides ongoing oversight and ensures security resources align with court needs.</p>	<p>Train All Court Staff on Emergency Protocols Every court employee — clerks, attorneys, advocates — should know the emergency evacuation routes, lockdown procedures, and their role in an active threat response.</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
U.S. Marshals – Court Security	usmarshals.gov
FEMA Tribal Grants	fema.gov/tribal
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