

TRIBAL IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

Building an Accountable MMIP Case System

Five actions for tribal governments and law enforcement — drawn from September 15, 2026 testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance

WHY THIS TOOLKIT, WHY NOW

On September 15, former Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer testified before Congress that decades of federal task forces and appropriations have produced “many programs, perhaps too many, but not yet one continuously accountable system.” A case can pass through tribal law enforcement, the FBI, a U.S. Attorney’s Office, tribal prosecutors, victim advocates, and multiple separate databases — with every handoff a place evidence, time, or accountability can be lost. Trent Shores called the crisis “a test of whether our institutions can fulfill one of government’s most fundamental responsibilities.” Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen told the subcommittee his own office has no jurisdiction on tribal land at all.

Lizer grounded the testimony in the case of Ella Mae Begay, a 62-year-old Navajo grandmother who disappeared near Sweetwater in June 2021 and has never been found; the only person charged pleaded guilty this year to robbing her, not to her disappearance. “Families should not have to understand federal Indian law before they can understand what happened to their loved one’s case,” Lizer told the committee. “Government should know.” This toolkit turns his five recommendations into steps a tribal government or department can start now — without waiting on Congress to act first.

Source: Doreen Holtje, “Former Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer testifies before Congress on missing and murdered Indigenous people crisis,” Navajo-Hopi Observer, Sept. 22, 2026.

FIVE ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT NOW

- 1 Formalize the federal-declination handoff.**
Adopt a tribal ordinance or negotiate an MOU with your U.S. Attorney’s Office requiring written notice and full evidence transfer to tribal prosecutors within a set number of days whenever the federal government declines a case — while tribal jurisdiction still applies.
- 2 Set measurable case-tracking standards.**
Put a written SOP in place for evidence transfer, NCIC/NamUs database entry, and interagency communication — including cases that cross reservation boundaries — so a case’s status doesn’t depend on institutional memory.
- 3 Invest directly in tribal capacity.**
Prioritize funding for tribal investigators, prosecutors, victim advocates, forensics, and case-management technology, reducing reliance on FBI resources to move a case forward.
- 4 Pursue STCJ and SLEC expansion.**
Apply for expanded Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction and pursue additional BIA Special Law Enforcement Commissions for tribal officers — the same federal-commissioning framework that gave California tribal officers standing in *Cabazon Band of Mission Indians v. Smith*.
- 5 Build in accountability review.**
Periodically audit whether funded public-safety positions and programs — tribal and federal — are actually being carried out, not just funded on paper.

NNJI SUPPORT FOR EACH ACTION

- **Handoff & jurisdiction** — NNJI trains Criminal Jurisdiction in Indian Country and can help draft or review a federal-declination MOU with your U.S. Attorney's Office.
- **Case-tracking SOPs** — NNJI's free Missing Persons toolkit (nativejustice.us/toolkit-library) provides a starting framework; our SME cadre can adapt it to your department's systems.
- **Capacity building** — NNJI trains Community Policing, Collaborative Response Protocols, and Executive-Law Enforcement Relations — built for the staffing case chiefs and councils have to make.
- **STCJ / SLEC expansion** — NNJI's leadership issued the first deputation agreement and SLECs to a California PL 280 tribe and can walk your department through the application pathway.
- **Accountability review** — The Weekly Intelligence Brief includes a departmental readiness check tribes use to track exactly this kind of follow-through.

TAKE ACTION

Three ways to put this toolkit to work in your community:

- **EDUCATE** — Bring NNJI's Criminal Jurisdiction and MMIP case-coordination training to your department, court, or council.
- **PREVENT** — Adopt the case-tracking and declination-handoff framework above before the next case falls through a gap.
- **CONSULT** — Schedule a working session with NNJI's SME cadre to assess your department's MMIP readiness against these five actions.

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