

# REPORT WRITING IN TRIBAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

A Law Enforcement Professional Skills Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us)

## ■ REPORT WRITING IN TRIBAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

The police report is the foundation of every prosecution, every civil proceeding, and every administrative review in law enforcement. In tribal departments where federal prosecution is common, reports are reviewed by FBI agents, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, federal grand juries, and federal judges. A well-written report builds strong cases. A poorly written one destroys them — regardless of how well the officer performed at the scene.

 A well-written police report is the most powerful tool an officer has in court. It establishes what happened, when, where, and how — in the officer's own words, before memory fades.

 Report omissions, inconsistencies, and non-objective language are the most common targets of defense attorneys in both tribal and federal prosecutions.

 Every use-of-force, every search, every arrest, and every significant investigative action must be documented in writing — if it's not in the report, it legally did not happen.

 Federal prosecutors routinely review tribal police reports for completeness and objectivity before accepting cases for prosecution. Quality reports drive prosecution decisions.

## ■ CORE REPORT WRITING STANDARDS

### Timeliness

- Complete all reports as close to the end of shift as possible. Memory degrades rapidly — detail accuracy drops significantly after 24 hours.
- For Major Crimes Act offenses, complete a preliminary report and notify supervisors before end of shift regardless of time.
- Late reports signal to prosecutors and courts that documentation was an afterthought — not a professional priority.

### Accuracy & Objectivity

- Record only what you personally observed, heard, smelled, or collected. Clearly attribute statements to the person who made them.
- Use specific, factual language: "Subject stated: I didn't do it." Not "Subject denied involvement."
- Avoid conclusory language ("subject was intoxicated") without the observed facts that support it ("subject had slurred speech, bloodshot eyes, and odor of alcohol").
- Never speculate, editorialize, or include opinions. Record what you observed, not what you thought about what you observed.

### Completeness

- Every report must include: who (all parties), what (actions taken and observed), when (specific times), where (precise locations), why (stated purposes), and how (methods used).
- Document all attempts to locate witnesses, even unsuccessful ones. Document refusals to cooperate and by whom.
- Include all Miranda warnings given: the exact time, location, and the subject's verbatim response.
- Document every notification made to supervisors, FBI, BIA, medical personnel, or other agencies with the time and recipient name.

## ■ TIPS FOR STRONG POLICE REPORTS

- **Write as Though a Federal Judge Will Read It** — Because they might. Write with precision, professionalism, and clarity at all times.
- **Use Active Voice** — Active voice is clearer and stronger: "I observed the subject conceal a bag" not "A bag was observed being concealed."
- **Organize Chronologically** — Narrative reports should tell the story in chronological order: dispatch time, arrival, observations, actions taken, results.
- **Quote Directly When It Matters** — For admissions, threats, and critical statements, use exact quotation marks with the source identified.
- **Avoid Jargon and Abbreviations** — Write out terms and agency names in full at first use. Federal prosecutors may not know tribal-specific abbreviations.
- **Proofread Every Report Before Submission** — Typos, grammar errors, and inconsistencies undermine credibility. Take five minutes before submission to review every report.

# RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Law Enforcement Report Writing Programs | [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us)

## ■ FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

### Training & Capacity

- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Funds tribal law enforcement training programs including report writing. [cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources](http://cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources)
- **BJA Tribal Justice Programs** – Supports tribal law enforcement capacity building including documentation training. [bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice](http://bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice)
- **CTAS – Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation** – DOJ consolidated tribal funding for law enforcement training and operations. [justice.gov/tribal](http://justice.gov/tribal)
- **BIA Law Enforcement Training Academy** – Federal training resources for tribal law enforcement including report writing curriculum. [bia.gov/bia/ojs](http://bia.gov/bia/ojs)

### Technical Assistance

- **FBI Indian Country Division** – FBI agents can provide guidance on report quality standards for Major Crimes Act cases. [fbi.gov](http://fbi.gov)
- **U.S. Attorney Tribal Liaison Programs** – Can provide feedback on report quality and documentation standards for federal prosecution. [justice.gov/usao](http://justice.gov/usao)

## ■ STATE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **State Homeland Security Grants (SHSGP)** – Tribal law enforcement may be eligible for state-administered FEMA homeland security funding.
- **Tribal Law & Order Act (TLOA) Resources** – Expanded tribal criminal authority and DOJ technical assistance for implementation.
- **Grants.gov Tribal Search Tool** – Search all federal grants available to tribal entities. [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) (filter: Tribal Government eligibility)

## ■ HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRIBAL PROGRAMS & LEADERS

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| <b>Implement a Report Review Process</b><br>Supervisors should review every report before it is filed. Regular feedback on report quality is the fastest way to raise department-wide documentation standards. | <b>Conduct Annual Report Writing Training</b><br>Annual scenario-based report writing training — using real case examples and feedback — maintains and improves officer documentation skills.   |
| <b>Create a Report Writing Standard for Your Department</b><br>A written style guide specific to your department ensures consistent formatting, required elements, and quality standards across all officers.  | <b>Review Reports That Were Challenged in Court</b><br>When defense attorneys or prosecutors raise report quality issues, conduct a debrief. Every challenged report is a training opportunity. |

## ■ KEY WEBLINKS

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| National Native Justice Institute | <a href="http://www.nativejustice.us">www.nativejustice.us</a>                             |
| BJA Tribal Justice Programs       | <a href="http://bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice">bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice</a> |
| COPS Tribal Resources             | <a href="http://cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources">cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources</a>         |
| BIA Law Enforcement Services      | <a href="http://bia.gov/bia/ojs">bia.gov/bia/ojs</a>                                       |
| U.S. Attorney Tribal Liaison      | <a href="http://justice.gov/usao">justice.gov/usao</a>                                     |
| CTAS – DOJ Tribal Assistance      | <a href="http://justice.gov/tribal">justice.gov/tribal</a>                                 |
| Grants.gov (Tribal Search)        | <a href="http://grants.gov">grants.gov</a>                                                 |

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

**TAKE ACTION TODAY** — Contact NNJI at [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us) to schedule training, consultation, or access resources.

*Strengthening Tribal Justice — One Community at a Time*