

GANGS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

A Law Enforcement Resource Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | www.nativejustice.us

■ GANG ACTIVITY IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Gang activity is a growing public safety challenge in many tribal communities, particularly those near urban corridors, on reservations with significant youth populations, and in areas impacted by drug trafficking networks. Tribal gangs often differ in structure and motivation from urban gangs, requiring culturally informed identification, prevention, and intervention strategies.

🔴 The FBI and BIA have identified gang activity in more than 75% of tribal communities surveyed, with membership tied to drug distribution networks.

😞 Gang recruitment increasingly targets tribal youth ages 12–16, particularly those with ACE histories, housing instability, and school disengagement.

🚫 Drug trafficking organizations use gang networks to distribute methamphetamine, fentanyl, and heroin through Indian Country.

⚠️ Gang-related violence and retaliation cycles create ongoing community trauma and overwhelm tribal justice resources.

■ IDENTIFYING GANG ACTIVITY IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Common Gang Indicators

- Graffiti with gang symbols, names, or territorial markings on tribal infrastructure, housing, or public spaces.
- Individuals displaying gang colors, clothing, hand signs, or tattoos consistent with known gang affiliation.
- Unexplained influx of money, vehicles, or goods among youth or young adults with no apparent income source.
- Clustering of individuals with shared identifiers in specific locations, particularly during evening and overnight hours.
- Pattern of violent incidents, assaults, or shootings with apparent retaliatory motivation.

Risk Factors for Gang Involvement

- History of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) including abuse, neglect, household substance use, and incarcerated parents.
- School disengagement, chronic absenteeism, or dropout status combined with lack of employment opportunity.
- Housing instability, poverty, and exposure to community violence as a normalized experience.
- Absence of positive male role models, cultural connection, and community belonging.

■ PREVENTION, INTERVENTION & SUPPRESSION STRATEGIES

Prevention (Before Involvement)

- Support youth cultural programming, mentorship, sports, and traditional practices as protective factors against gang recruitment.
- Partner with schools to identify at-risk youth and connect them with services before recruitment occurs.
- Engage families and community members as early prevention partners.

Intervention (During Involvement)

- **Gang Intervention Workers** – Employ credible messengers — individuals with lived experience — to conduct outreach and offer alternatives to gang life.
- **Restorative Justice Programs** – Connect gang-involved youth with accountability processes rooted in tribal values rather than defaulting to incarceration.
- **Cross-Agency Case Management** – Coordinate law enforcement, social services, education, and behavioral health around specific high-risk individuals.

Suppression (Enforcement)

- **Document Gang Membership Properly** – Maintain gang intelligence files consistent with civil rights protections. Consult with legal counsel on documentation standards.
- **Coordinate with FBI Safe Streets Task Forces** – FBI maintains gang-focused task forces that can be accessed by tribal law enforcement for intelligence and joint operations.
- **Pursue RICO & Drug Trafficking Charges** – Major trafficking operations require federal prosecution. Build relationships with U.S. Attorneys for proactive gang case referral.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Gang Prevention & Intervention Programs | www.nativejustice.us

FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

Gang Prevention & Intervention

- **OJJDP Tribal Youth Programs** – Funds juvenile justice and gang prevention in tribal communities. ojjdp.gov
- **BJA Gang Reduction Programs** – Supports comprehensive gang reduction strategies including tribal programs. bja.ojp.gov
- **CTAS – Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation** – DOJ consolidated funding for tribal public safety including gang response. justice.gov/tribal

Law Enforcement & Intelligence

- **FBI Safe Streets Task Forces** – Provides tribal law enforcement access to gang intelligence and joint operations. fbi.gov
- **DEA Tribal Drug Enforcement Programs** – Supports tribal drug enforcement including trafficking network disruption. dea.gov
- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Funds tribal law enforcement capacity for gang investigation. cops.usdoj.gov

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 (filter: Tribal Government eligibility)

HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRIBAL PROGRAMS & LEADERS

Adopt a Balanced Gang Strategy Effective gang programs require all three elements: prevention (youth investment), intervention (outreach), and suppression (enforcement). None works alone.	Engage Former Gang Members as Partners Credible messengers with lived experience are often the most effective intervention tool. Consider hiring or formally partnering with community intervention workers.
Document Intelligence Carefully & Legally Gang intelligence files must comply with 28 CFR Part 23 standards. Ensure your documentation practices are legally defensible.	Invest in Youth as a Public Safety Strategy Every dollar invested in youth programming, mentorship, and cultural connection reduces future gang recruitment and law enforcement costs.

KEY WEBLINKS

National Native Justice Institute	www.nativejustice.us
BJA Tribal Justice Programs	bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice
COPS Tribal Resources	cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources
BIA Law Enforcement Services	bia.gov/bia/ojs
OJJDP Tribal Youth Programs	ojjdp.gov
FBI Safe Streets Task Forces	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