

MISSING PERSONS INVESTIGATIONS PROTOCOL

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

■ MISSING PERSONS & MMIW/MMIP IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People (MMIW/MMIP) represents one of the most urgent public safety crises in Indian Country. Native women are murdered at rates up to ten times the national average in some areas, and thousands of Native people go missing each year — many cases lost between federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions.

- ⚠️ Native women are murdered at rates up to 10x the national average in some tribal areas.
- 📌 An estimated 5,712+ AI/AN missing persons cases were reported to NCIC in 2021 alone — thousands more go unreported.
- ⚖️ Jurisdictional complexity involving tribal, federal, state, and local agencies frequently delays investigations.
- 🗣️ Community members are often the first to know someone is missing — informed reporting saves critical time.

■ REQUIREMENTS FOR PROPER MISSING PERSONS PROTOCOL

Immediate Response Requirements — First 24 Hours

- **No Waiting Period:** Immediately begin investigation upon report — never impose a waiting period regardless of age or circumstances.
- **NCIC Entry:** Enter the missing person into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database within 2 hours of report receipt.
- **Notify Next of Kin & Tribal Leadership:** Contact immediate family, establish a family liaison, and notify tribal council as appropriate.
- **Jurisdictional Notification:** Immediately notify FBI, BIA, and relevant state law enforcement to ensure coordinated response.
- **Evidence Preservation:** Secure the last known location, preserve digital evidence, and document the preliminary scene within 24 hours.

Investigative Standards

- Classify each case by risk level (high/medium/low) based on age, vulnerability, circumstances, and known threats.
- Activate AMBER Alert for missing children. Coordinate with state Indigenous alert systems where available.
- Establish formal MOUs with FBI, BIA OJS, state police, and county sheriff for joint investigation and shared jurisdiction roles.
- Submit all cases to NamUs (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System) within 30 days of report.
- Maintain comprehensive documented case files including photos, known associates, medical records, and all investigative actions.

Cultural & Trauma-Informed Protocol

- Engage family members as partners — provide regular updates, respect cultural practices, and assign a dedicated family advocate.
- Allow and support traditional healing, ceremonial practices, or community search protocols led by tribal members and elders.
- Provide language assistance for community members whose primary language is not English.

■ TIPS TO INFORM TRIBAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- **Report Immediately — No Waiting** — Call tribal police, BIA, or 911 the moment you believe someone is missing. Every hour matters.
- **Document What You Know** — Record last known location, time last seen, clothing, vehicle, and companion names. Recent photos are critical.
- **Preserve Digital Evidence** — Do not delete texts, social media messages, or location data. Share all digital information with investigators immediately.
- **Contact Multiple Agencies** — Report to tribal police AND FBI AND BIA Law Enforcement. Do not assume one agency has notified the others.
- **Use NamUs — It's Free** — Anyone can submit a missing persons case to NamUs.gov — it connects cases to DNA databases nationwide.
- **Notify the Tribe & Community** — Alert tribal leadership and community networks quickly. Community eyes extend the reach of any investigation.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Missing Persons Programs | www.nativejustice.us

■ FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

Law Enforcement & Investigation

- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Funds hiring, training, and equipment for tribal law enforcement including missing persons units. cops.usdoj.gov
- **BJA Tribal Justice Programs** – Supports tribal courts, corrections, law enforcement, and MMIW investigations. bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice
- **CTAS – Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation** – Consolidated DOJ funding including MMIW/MMIP response. justice.gov/tribal

MMIW/MMIP & Victim Services

- **OVW VAWA MMIW Task Force Grants** – Dedicated federal funding for tribal governments addressing Missing and Murdered Indigenous People. justice.gov/ovw
- **Savanna's Act Implementation Funding** – Supports tribal protocol development, data collection, and interagency coordination. justice.gov/tribal

Data & Technology

- **NamUs – Free Case Entry & DNA Matching** – Free case entry, DNA cross-referencing, and forensic support. namus.nij.ojp.gov
- **Tribal Access Program (TAP) – FBI CJIS** – Tribal law enforcement access to national crime databases including NCIC. fbi.gov/services/cjis
- **AMBER Alert in Indian Country – OJJDP** – Training, technical assistance, and alert system integration. amberalert.ojp.gov/indian-country

■ 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 Written Missing Persons Protocol Develop and formally adopt a protocol compliant with Savanna's Act, Hanna's Act, and DOJ guidelines. Review annually.	Train All Officers on MMIW/MMIP Protocol Every officer should be trained on missing persons intake, NCIC entry, family communication, and jurisdictional notification.
Document Community Need for Grants Track all cases, response times, outcomes, and gaps. This data drives successful grant applications and policy advocacy.	Establish Interagency Agreements Formalize MOUs with FBI, BIA, state police, and county sheriff before a case arises. Pre-established agreements mean faster response.

■ 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