



COURTHOUSE PHYSICAL SECURITY FOR TRIBAL COURTS


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


■ PHYSICAL SECURITY OF TRIBAL COURTHOUSE FACILITIES

The physical security of a tribal courthouse — its layout, access control, lighting, signage, and structural design — is the foundational layer upon which all personnel-based security rests. A well-designed and properly maintained courthouse physical security environment enables security officers to do their jobs more effectively, reduces the likelihood of unauthorized access, and communicates to all who enter that this is a professional, secure, and dignified judicial setting. Physical security assessment should be conducted annually and used to guide facility improvement investment decisions.

 Physical security design that separates public and restricted spaces, controls entry and exit points, and provides clear sightlines for security officers is the most cost-effective security investment a tribal court can make.

 Inadequate lighting is one of the most common and most correctable physical security vulnerabilities in tribal courthouses. Parking lots, entry areas, and hallways must be well-lit at all times.

 Camera coverage gaps — blind spots in parking lots, hallways, holding areas, and courtroom exits — are exploited in the majority of courthouse security incidents that are successfully reviewed on video.

 Every door that provides unauthorized access to a restricted area is a physical security failure. Access control for all restricted doors must be verified during every pre-session security sweep.

■ PHYSICAL SECURITY ZONES

Zone 1: Public Access Areas

- Parking lots, exterior approaches, landscaping, and public exterior spaces. These areas should be well-lit, clearly marked, and free of concealment areas near the building entrance.
- CCTV coverage of all parking areas and exterior approaches is essential. Camera placement should capture vehicle plate numbers and facial images at the building entry.
- Signage should clearly direct all visitors to the designated public entry screening point. No ambiguity about where to enter.

Zone 2: Entry Screening Point

- The entry screening point is the most critical physical control layer. It must be physically designed to ensure that all persons pass through screening — with no bypass routes.
- The entry point should be staffed during all operating hours, equipped with a WTM and hand wand, and have clear visual control of the entry area.
- Provide a secure area immediately adjacent to the entry point for secondary screening and for holding prohibited items awaiting disposition.

Zone 3: Public Corridor & Waiting Areas

- Public corridors and waiting areas must be monitored by CCTV and within sightline of security posts. Furniture should be arranged to maximize officer visibility and minimize concealment opportunities.
- All public restrooms should be checked at the start and end of each day and during pre-session sweeps. Restrooms are frequently used for concealing weapons and contraband.

Zone 4: Restricted Judicial & Administrative Areas

- Judge's chambers, clerk's offices, jury rooms, and administrative areas must be secured with controlled access — key card, cipher lock, or secure key — accessible only to authorized personnel.
- The judge must have a direct, private route from chambers to the bench and a direct exit from chambers to a secure exit. This route must be unobstructed and known to all security staff.

Zone 5: Holding Areas & Restricted Prisoner Access

- Prisoner holding areas must be completely separate from all public areas. All prisoner movement within the building must use designated secured corridors not accessible to the public.
- Holding area doors must be secured at all times except during active prisoner movement. Verify all holding area door locks during every pre-session sweep.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Courthouse Physical 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

Facility Security Resources

- **DHS CISA – Physical Security Assessments** – Free physical security vulnerability assessments for tribal facilities. cisa.gov
- **FEMA – Tribal Homeland Security Grants** – Annual DHS funding for tribal security infrastructure including physical security upgrades. fema.gov/tribal
- **National Center for State Courts – Facility Security** – Courthouse physical security standards and assessment resources. ncsc.org

■ 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>Conduct an Annual Physical Security Walk-Through</p> <p>A documented annual walk-through of all five physical security zones — using a written checklist — identifies vulnerabilities, prioritizes improvements, and creates the documentation needed for grant applications.</p>	<p>Request a DHS CISA Security Assessment</p> <p>CISA provides free, voluntary physical security assessments for tribal facilities. These assessments are conducted by federal security professionals and provide actionable, prioritized recommendations.</p>
<p>Address Camera Blind Spots as a Priority</p> <p>Camera blind spots in parking lots, hallways, and holding areas represent known security gaps. Identify and eliminate them through a combination of camera repositioning and new camera installation.</p>	<p>Include Physical Security in Court Facility Capital Planning</p> <p>Physical security improvements — secure entries, access control, camera coverage, and lighting — must be integrated into every facility renovation, new construction, or major capital improvement project.</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	bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice
DHS CISA Security Assessments	cisa.gov
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National Center for State Courts	ncsc.org

■ 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