

TRIBAL RELATION-BASED POLICING

A Community Policing Resource Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | www.nativejustice.us

■ RELATION-BASED POLICING IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Relation-based policing is a community-centered law enforcement philosophy that emphasizes trust, partnership, and genuine relationship between officers and the communities they serve. In tribal communities, where historical trauma has created deep-seated mistrust of law enforcement, relation-based policing is not just a strategy — it is a prerequisite for effective public safety.

💛 Tribal officers who are known and trusted by community members receive more information, generate more tips, and solve more cases.

🏠 Community members who trust law enforcement are more likely to report crimes, cooperate as witnesses, and engage in prevention programs.

🧠 Research consistently shows that departments investing in community relationship-building reduce incidents, use of force, and repeat calls for service.

❤️ Cultural connection and ceremonial participation by tribal officers builds legitimacy that no enforcement strategy can replicate.

■ CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRIBAL RELATION-BASED POLICING

Cultural Engagement & Presence

- Attend tribal cultural events, ceremonies, and community gatherings as a community member, not just as an officer in uniform.
- Learn and respect cultural protocols, including greeting customs, elder deference, and ceremonial practices.
- Support youth cultural programming, traditional language revitalization, and community healing initiatives.
- Engage with traditional leaders, medicine people, and community elders as genuine partners in community safety.

Partnership & Collaborative Problem-Solving

- Establish a community advisory group that meets regularly to identify safety priorities and evaluate department performance.
- Partner with tribal social services, behavioral health, housing, and education departments on shared safety concerns.
- Implement co-responder models for behavioral health calls, pairing officers with mental health or social work professionals.
- Co-develop enforcement priorities with community input rather than imposing external policing agendas.

Youth & Prevention Focus

- Invest officer time in youth programming including mentorship, school presence, and recreation programs.
- Use restorative justice approaches where appropriate, connecting offenders with community accountability rather than defaulting to incarceration.
- Support community-based prevention programs addressing the root causes of crime: poverty, trauma, substance use, and lack of opportunity.

■ TIPS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- **Show Up When Nothing is Wrong** – Regular non-enforcement presence at community events, schools, and gathering places builds familiarity and trust that cannot be manufactured during a crisis.
- **Know the Community Members by Name** – Invest in learning the names, families, and histories of the people you serve. This is the foundation of every effective patrol relationship.
- **Follow Through on Commitments** – Nothing erodes trust faster than unfulfilled promises. Only commit to what you can deliver, and always follow up.
- **Acknowledge the History** – Be willing to acknowledge the legacy of harm done by law enforcement to Native communities. Accountability builds respect.
- **Collaborate with Community Healers** – Partner with traditional healers, elders, and cultural practitioners who hold community trust that officers cannot access alone.
- **Measure Relationship Quality, Not Just Enforcement Stats** – Track community satisfaction, response feedback, and trust indicators alongside traditional enforcement metrics.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Community Policing Programs | www.nativejustice.us

■ FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

Community Policing Funding

- **COPS Community Policing Development (CPD) Grants** – Funds innovative community policing strategies including tribal programs. cops.usdoj.gov
- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Supports tribal police staffing, training, and community engagement. cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources
- **BJA Tribal Justice Programs** – Funds tribal courts, law enforcement, and community justice programs. bja.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice

Prevention & Youth

- **OJJDP Tribal Youth Programs** – Supports juvenile justice and youth prevention in tribal communities. ojjdp.gov
- **DOJ Community Capacity Development Office** – Supports community-based violence prevention and capacity building. justice.gov
- **SAMHSA Tribal Behavioral Health Grants** – Funds mental health and co-responder programs supporting community policing. samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac

■ 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 Community Policing Plan Develop a documented community policing strategy with specific goals, engagement activities, and accountability measures. Review annually.	Train Officers in Cultural Competency Regular cultural competency training — developed with community input — is essential for effective relation-based policing in tribal contexts.
Establish a Community Advisory Board Create a formal advisory structure that gives community members a meaningful voice in policing priorities and department accountability.	Track and Publish Community Satisfaction Data Regular community surveys and published results demonstrate transparency and commitment to relation-based accountability.

■ 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
COPS Community Policing	cops.usdoj.gov
OJJDP Tribal Youth Programs	ojjdp.gov
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