
National Institute of Justice Framing Paper on the National Baseline Study on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women

BACKGROUND

As part of the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Congress enacted Title IX, Section 904(a), which, as amended in 2013, required the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), in consultation with the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), to conduct a national baseline study (NBS) to examine violence against American Indian women in Indian country and Alaska Native villages. The NBS is part of NIJ's program of research on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women, the purposes of which are to gain a deeper understanding of issues faced by AI/AN women, expand the body of criminal justice research, and help formulate policies and prevention strategies to decrease the violence committed against AI/AN women.

THE HISTORY OF THE NBS

Initially, the NBS was developed as a survey to ask participants about:

- 1) Their health, well-being, and resiliency;
- 2) Their lifetime and last 12-month experiences with psychological aggression, coercive control and entrapment, physical violence, stalking, and sexual violence; and
- 3) The impact of their victimization and service needs.

The NBS survey was to be administered among Tribal communities throughout the United States, with randomly selected households being chosen from each of the 574 federally recognized Tribes. Between 2009 and 2011, NIJ developed and tested the NBS survey and study protocols (survey administration mode, and Tribe and participant recruitment). The study sampling plan was developed and refined between 2012 and 2013. In 2014, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP—the umbrella agency in which NIJ is housed) procured three-year contracts to implement the NBS. However, the recruitment of participating sites (Tribes) took much longer than anticipated and the study was closed in late 2017. In 2018, a new contract was awarded for a five-year period of performance. Unfortunately, there were significant delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, significant changes around budgets and new sampling considerations require NIJ to revisit the study's sampling frame and the overall study design. For example, since NIJ developed the sampling frame, seven new Tribes have received federal recognition and the U.S. Supreme Court's July 2020 landmark decision, *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, expanded the geographic area covered by the NBS. Further, as previously designed, the study requires a



much larger budget than what is currently appropriated.¹ NIJ must revisit the research design to ensure feasibility within the given resources.

Despite the difficulties with implementing the NBS, NIJ has been supporting Tribal specific research in the interim. For example, in 2016, an oversampling of AI/AN data from the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), led to a [Tribal specific report](#) highlighting violence impacting AI/AN women and men. In addition, NIJ has supported other research projects, including [missing and murdered Indigenous persons in Nebraska and New Mexico](#), [when and how Tribal judges use restorative approaches](#), [a survey of Tribal courts regarding assessment practices and technology needs](#), [developing and implementing services for Indigenous women recovering from sex trafficking](#), [identifying the needs of criminal justice agencies in small, rural, Tribal, and border areas](#), and [enhancing forensic data from Native American populations](#), to name a few.

Given this history and that the originally planned NBS was designed 15 years ago, we recognize that the needs of Tribes may be different now compared to then. Thus, this framing paper describes some ideas on how NIJ, in collaboration with Tribes, can identify the current needs of Tribes to move forward with Tribal specific research. Specifically, NIJ would like to receive guidance and feedback from Tribes on (1) the concerns regarding violence against AI/AN women that could be addressed through research, and (2) what topics relating to violence against AI/AN women would Tribes like to focus on (e.g., identify risk and protective factors, program implementation and evaluation, etc.).

THE NBS MOVING FORWARD

Although the NBS was originally developed as a survey that would be distributed among all federally recognized Tribal communities across the United States, it may not be feasible to carry out such a large survey study. For example, NIJ would need to gain approval from each Tribe wanting to participate which could be very time consuming. It would also require a much larger budget than NIJ currently has and could require multiple versions of the survey to meet the needs of each Tribe, making data collection difficult. Instead, the NIJ Tribal research portfolio could be different from the NBS and comprise of Tribal-specific research projects relating to violence against AI/AN women. Further, if requested by Tribes, the research project(s) need not focus solely on AI/AN women living in Indian Country and Alaska Native Villages, but could include AI/AN women who live in urban and rural environments as well.

¹ Congress is appropriating \$1 million each year of VAWA funding for research on violence against Indigenous women.

It is important that the research projects be a collaboration between Tribes and NIJ in recognition of Tribal sovereignty and that Tribes are not monoliths, and to gain a better understanding of the violence impacting AI/AN women. Therefore, the goal of the NIJ Tribal research portfolio is to be Tribal-centered, with the knowledge, strengths, needs, and resources of each Tribe being valued and included.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What Tribal issues/topics would Tribes like to have included in the NIJ Tribal research portfolio?
2. What type(s) of violence against AI/AN women should research focus on (e.g., stalking, domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, homicide, MMIWR)?
3. Violence against AI/AN women is a sensitive and traumatizing topic. What efforts would Tribes like to have in place to protect both Tribes and individuals who may choose to participate?
4. What types of research methods do Tribes think would be most appropriate for Tribal-specific research (e.g., survey, interviews, focus groups, Indigenous methodologies, community-based participatory research (CBPR))?
5. The goal of the Tribal research portfolio is to be Tribal-centered. How involved would Tribes like to be during the development, implementation, and dissemination of the research projects?
6. If NIJ were to create grant solicitations for Tribal-specific research projects, what are some barriers for Tribes in applying for NIJ grant funds? What are some ways to improve access to NIJ grant funds?
7. What types of capacity building would Tribes like to see come from research projects?
8. What are some long-term goals or benefits that Tribes would like to see from research projects?

NIJ MISSION

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) supports and shares evidence-based knowledge and tools from objective and rigorous scientific research to promote safety and advance justice. For over 50 years, NIJ has had a significant federal role in assisting local, Tribal, and state governments. NIJ uses different ways to exchange information among these communities to build connections and solutions and help bridge the gap among different worlds. NIJ's six objectives are (1) research, (2) development, (3) evaluation, (4) testing, (5) assistance, and (6) sharing information. NIJ achieves its mission through the "Listen, Learn, Inform" model — we listen to communities' needs, learn how to meet them by funding research and development projects, and then inform communities about what we learned.



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NOTE: This paper is not a statement of official Department policy. It is intended to provide information and suggest questions to be considered by Tribal leaders and representatives as they prepare to participate in the 19th Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation. The Department welcomes all input from the Tribes on this and other matters of concern to Tribal communities.