



ENGAGING WITH NATIVE COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

Building Respect and Open Communication

When working in Native communities for a missing children's case, building and maintaining respect and open lines of communication with family, tribal agencies, and community members is of the utmost importance. Understanding jurisdictional complexities, tribal community services and facilities, tribal culture, and history can also greatly aid in the investigation process.



Best Practices for Effective Coordination and Communication

Law enforcement professionals conducting an investigation(s) in Native communities can take several steps to build mutual respect and communication lines with family members of the missing person and tribal law enforcement agencies involved. For example, begin to research and learn about the history and culture of the tribe or tribes/Nation(s) you are working with so that you will have that understanding when an investigation needs to be launched.

Gather information on the local jurisdiction and tribal protocols for missing persons and for engaging families. You may want to reach out to your professional counterparts and ask to visit and learn about each other's successes and challenges when it comes to missing AI/AN youth (for further reading, please read [AI/AN Youth & Status Offense Disparities: A Call for Tribal Initiatives, Coordination & Federal Funding](#)). As with any community, building trust through consistent and open communication is key.

What to Consider

Jurisdiction and Reporting

Effective and coordinated responses can be impeded when state and tribal stakeholders are unsure of who has the authority to intervene in a particular case. Criminal jurisdiction in Indian Country depends on several factors, including where a crime was committed, who committed the crime, nature of the crime committed and against whom. Any number of law enforcement agencies may have jurisdiction to arrest offenders or conduct investigations depending on those factors.

An additional piece of information to keep in mind is that data on crime in Indian Country suffers from under-reporting to tribal authorities and thus under-reporting to federal authorities. There is no Federal or Native



American agency/organization that systematically collects the information of missing Native children. Not having an established protocol for when a child is reported missing will directly affect a case during the initial response.

Local Culture(s)

Before or at the start of your investigation it will be worthwhile to conduct research on the community and jurisdiction you will be working in, and/or are surrounded by. Independent research can also be done through various means (both online and through books).

Sources

- AMBER Alert in Indian Country Website, <https://amber-ic.org>
- Litt, Jonathan and Heather Valdez Singleton, "AI/AN Youth & Status Offense Disparities: A Call for Tribal Initiatives, Coordination & Federal Funding." *Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Tribal Law and Policy Institute*, <http://files.ctctcdn.com/31e4a892301/5e0511a9-1707-4ffa-83d0-082b339f9ad4.pdf>