



Who are we?

The *National Institute of Justice* (NIJ) is the research, evaluation, and development arm of the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ). NIJ actively supports research and evaluation (R&E) with American Indian and Alaska Native communities on issues of crime and justice. In doing so, NIJ is committed to ethical and engaged efforts in line with responsible research conduct and federal trust responsibilities.

What is our challenge?

Although we strive to fund projects related to tribal crime and justice, few grants in this area get funded. While the lack of funded grants has many causes, one factor is that many applications have research-trained staff with little to no experience in working with tribal communities *as partners* in the R&E process.

What is our goal?

Our ultimate goal is to increase the number of successfully funded grants for R&E on issues related to tribal crime and justice. We also hope to create a pool of trained researchers and evaluators that can assist tribes with their R&E tribal projects in the future.

How will we achieve our goal?

NIJ is considering creating a ***Tribal Investigator Development Program (TIDP)*** that will:

- Provide training to researchers and evaluators on the principles of ethical and engaged research with tribal communities.
- Provide training to tribes on the R&E process and the development and/or implementation of best practices to ensure equitable and mutually beneficial R&E partnerships.
- Facilitate tribal-investigator-mentor partnerships that result in tangible and mutually beneficial projects.

Who will benefit?

NIJ believes that a TIDP has the potential to benefit multiple partners, including:

- ***Tribes*** by providing access to highly qualified and trained researchers and evaluators to develop, implement, and assess the effects of programs and practices. Additionally, it will aid tribes in being more confident, competitive, and successful in applying for grant opportunities from USDOJ grant agencies (OJP, COPS, and OVW) and other federal agencies (CDC, NIH, NSF) for the direct benefit of tribal citizens.
- ***Investigators*** by providing applied experience in working with tribal communities and serving as a foundation for successful grant applications in the future. For investigators from tribal communities, it will also increase the representation of American Indian and Alaska Native investigators in justice systems R&E.
- ***NIJ*** by creating a pool of qualified and interdisciplinary investigators better equipped to apply for grant opportunities, ultimately resulting in more funded R&E on issues of tribal crime and justice.

How can you help us achieve our goal?

Share your thoughts. To ensure that a TIDP results in equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships, we are seeking feedback from tribal leaders, organizations, program staff, and citizens on what they think would be most necessary and beneficial in a TIDP. This feedback is *essential* to the success of the TIDP. All input will be considered thoroughly and will be greatly appreciated as we continue through this information gathering process.



Justice Systems Research & Evaluation

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Current Paradigms in R&E “Evidence”

Best practices generally are determined by the extent to which they can demonstrate their effectiveness in producing a given outcome. When shown effective, programs and practices are often then designated as “evidence-based.” The evidence itself, including the types of information that can serve to show program effects and the methods that are used to gather and analyze this information, are generally dictated by Western approaches to scientific knowledge production.

These Western approaches, however, are often not appropriate when it comes to understanding the effects of cultural practices and customs in tribal communities. While a randomized controlled trial might be appropriate to test the effects of a medication, it is not ethical to withhold a person’s culture to see what happens. Likewise, the collection and/or release of data required for Western evaluation could be a violation of the cultural practice itself. Thus, the power of cultural practices and programs on various outcomes, including criminal justice outcomes, remains relatively understudied.

Bridging Paradigms in Tribal R&E

NIJ’s ultimate goal is to enhance the ability of tribal communities to demonstrate that their cultural practices and programs effect and/or sustain positive change. This goal will be achieved through the investigation of 1) the various types of information that can be used as “evidence” to understand that practice or program effect, and 2) the methods that can be used appropriately and ethically to collect and analyze this information.

Building the Bridge

NIJ is considering the development of a system or set of criteria through which the effects of the culture-based practices and programs on various outcomes can be determined. Although various frameworks and approaches that incorporate culture in the R&E process exist (e.g., culturally-responsive evaluation and assessment, indigenous evaluation framework), this initiative would place culture itself as the focus of R&E efforts.

Who will benefit?

NIJ believes that this initiative has the potential to benefit multiple partners, including:

- **Tribes** by equipping them to understand the effects of their cultural customs and traditions on the health and wellbeing of their citizens, and to assess these effects in ways that are appropriate and acceptable within tribal cultures themselves. Further, the data generated through this process will enable tribes to be more competitive in applying for funding that requires such information.
- **NIJ** by providing an enhanced understanding of the multiplicity of types of “evidence” and methods that exist that can provide meaningful conclusions about the effects of a program or practice.



How can you help us achieve our goal?

Share your thoughts. Cultural traditions, customs, and practices vary greatly from one tribal community to another. To ensure that any system or criteria developed as part of this initiative is inclusive, comprehensive, and broadly useful, it is imperative that NIJ receives input from a variety of stakeholders. All input will be considered thoroughly and will be greatly appreciated as we continue through this information gathering process.

What type of feedback would we like?

We welcome all opinions and ideas. Some framing questions that we are interested in getting your feedback on are:

- To what extent does the current “evidence-based” paradigm influence your program and practice choices?
- How does the need for existing data or a program evaluation plan influence your decision to pursue funding opportunities?
- Which alternative approaches might NIJ consider when it comes to researching and evaluating programs and practices?
- What types of information would be okay to gather in order to better understand the effects of traditional cultural programs and practices on outcomes related to crime and justice?
- How should this information be collected? Who should collect this information? How should this information be used?

Any and all feedback will be greatly appreciated and thoroughly considered as we move forward with this process. If you have any suggestions, feedback, or questions, please contact us at TribalResearch@usdoj.gov.

NIJ will be holding a listening session on this new proposed system at the 15th National Indian Nations Conference being held at the Renaissance Palm Springs Hotel, Thursday, December 8, 2016 from 3:30 to 5:00 PM PST in the Smoke Tree D/E conference room. We encourage you to join us at this session to discuss this program with other tribal stakeholders. For more information on the conference and to access the agenda, please go to <http://www.ovcinc.org/home>.



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

October 3, 2016

Dear Colleague,

This letter alerts all tribal leaders, citizens, researchers, evaluators, and program personnel to the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) interest in receiving feedback on two new initiatives it is exploring to enhance tribal crime and justice research and evaluation (R&E). Specifically, NIJ is interested in developing a system to understand the effects of culture-based programs and practices, and in creating a tribal investigator development program to enhance tribal R&E capacity. These initiatives would serve to improve the foundation underlying justice systems R&E generally, and R&E with tribal communities specifically.

NIJ has an active and diverse portfolio of R&E projects related to crime and justice in Indian country and Alaska Native villages. Fulfilling its federal trust responsibilities, NIJ works in partnership with tribal nations on a government-to-government level to ensure all of its R&E efforts are designed and implemented in an ethical and engaged manner. For more information on NIJ's work with tribal communities, please visit <http://nij.gov/topics/tribal-justice/Pages/welcome.aspx>.

To improve its R&E work with tribal communities, NIJ would like to receive feedback from tribal leaders, researchers, evaluators, program personnel, and citizens to understand the appropriate scope and approach to pursuing these initiatives:

Acknowledging Culture-based Programs and Practices. NIJ understands and values the significance of culture to tribal communities. As a scientific agency, NIJ also realizes that tribal communities are pressured to provide "evidence" of program and practice effectiveness for grant applications and funding opportunities. Further, the current "evidence-based" paradigm values certain types of evidence—including certain methods for gathering and assessing it—that are not necessarily congruent with tribal cultures or customs. Ultimately, this initiative would help NIJ to determine more broadly how "effectiveness" can be understood and measured, and aid tribal communities in better assessing the effects of their traditional practices and programs on various outcomes in ways that are respectful of the tribe's culture and practices themselves.

Tribal Investigator Development Program. NIJ is interested in cultivating researchers and evaluators who can advance tribal crime and justice R&E priorities through equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships with tribal communities. NIJ's ultimate goal is to ensure that future funding opportunities for tribal R&E are awarded and the projects are successfully completed. This initiative would entail tribal-researcher

partnerships and provide training to both parties on various aspects of the R&E process from the perspectives of both the tribal and research communities.

As part of the development process, NIJ will be hosting listening sessions at the 15th Annual Indian Nations Conference in Palm Springs, California from December 7-9, 2016. Please see the attached flyers for more information on each initiative, including the types of questions on which we would appreciate your feedback. Any questions or input can also be sent to TribalResearch@usdoj.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Rodriguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and a stylized "R".

Nancy Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Director
National Institute of Justice



Justice Systems Research & Evaluation

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**What type of feedback would we like?**

Anything and everything. We welcome all opinions and ideas. Some framing questions that we are interested in getting your feedback on are:

- Is there a need for this type of program?
- What are the key areas that should be included in a training curriculum for tribal investigators?
- Is there a need to provide training to tribes on R&E partnerships?
- What should a tribal-researcher/evaluator partnership look like?
- What benefits would tribes like to see in a R&E partnership?
- How can NIJ best facilitate these partnerships?
- What would be the most important elements of R&E collaborations between tribal communities and scientists?

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NIJ will be holding a listening session on this new proposed program at the 15th National Indian Nations Conference being held at the Renaissance Palm Springs Hotel, Thursday, December 8, 2016 from 1:30 to 3:00 PM PST in the Smoke Tree D/E conference rooms. We encourage you to join us at this session to discuss this program with other tribal stakeholders. For more information on the conference and to access the agenda, please go to <http://www.ovcinc.org/home>.