

**OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
904 TASK FORCE VIRTUAL MEETING  
SUMMARY OF MEETING**

June 17, 2024, 1:00pm ET

The 904 Task Force was convened for a virtual meeting on June 17, 2024. Sherriann Moore, Deputy Director of Tribal Affairs Division, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) introduced Director, Rosemarie Hidalgo, as the Designated Federal Officer for the meeting.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public.

**Task Force members present:**

Judge Holly Bird  
Dr. Emily Wright  
Francys Crevier  
Interim Chief of Police Chris Rutherford  
Investigator Julia Oliveira

**Federal Staff in attendance, in addition to Sherriann Moore and Rosemarie Hidalgo, were:**

Dr. Monica Mean, Office Director, Office of Violence and Victimization Prevention, National Institute of Justice (NIJ)  
Dr. Janine Zweig, Executive Science Advisor, National Institute of Justice  
Cathy Poston, Attorney Advisor, Office on Violence Against Women  
Jenny Mills, Grants Management Specialist, Office on Violence Against Women

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Others present for all, or a portion of the meeting were:

Caroline LaPorte, Facilitator

**OPENING**

Judge Holly Bird opened the proceedings with a traditional prayer and invocation.

**HOUSEKEEPING**

Sherriann Moore welcomed members of the public in attendance and informed them that chat and public comment capabilities would be enabled towards the end of the session when the public comment period opened. She reviewed the agenda for the afternoon and introduced Director Rosemarie Hidalgo.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Director Hidalgo thanked Judge Bird for her opening prayer and expressed her sincere thanks to the members of the Task Force for their important work. Director Hidalgo also thanked the members of the public and invited them to participate in the public comment period either during the meeting or by

submitting written comments. Director Hidalgo expressed her appreciation for Caroline LaPorte's facilitation and the combined efforts of OVW and NIJ staff to bring the Task Force members together.

Director Hidalgo discussed the missions of OVW and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act. This was followed by a brief description of the 2022 reauthorization's expansion of Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction to include a broader set of covered crimes. Other topics discussed included OVW's 19th Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation, coordinated community response, the National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, the expansion of OVW's Tribal Affairs Division, and the imminent recharter of the Task Force for an additional two years.

#### **DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS DIVISION REPORT**

Deputy Director Moore discussed the work of the Tribal Affairs Division and the National Institute of Justice. She discussed the work of the Task Force and how it impacts the work of OVW and the federal response to violence against American Indian and Alaska Native people. She then turned to updates about the Tribal Affairs Division including the continued growth of statutory grant programs administered by the division and the launch of special initiatives including the STCJ Tribal Reimbursement Program, Alaska Pilot Program, and the Healing and Response Teams Special Initiative.

#### **FACILITATOR REMARKS**

Facilitator LaPorte introduced herself and then requested each Task Force member introduce themselves

#### **TASK FORCE MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS**

The Task Force members introduced themselves including their name, location, Tribal affiliation, and professional background.

#### **FEDERAL STAFF INTRODUCTIONS**

The federal staff members introduced themselves including their name and role. Each expressed their appreciation of the work of the Task Force members and noted the importance of their contributions. Attorney Advisor Poston briefly discussed the role of federal advisory committees.

#### **FACILITATOR REMARKS II**

Facilitator LaPorte provided some grounding, historical context, acknowledgements, and then introduced Dr. Zweig of NIJ to provide NIJ's report.

#### **NIJ REPORT**

Dr. Zweig discussed NIJ's role and mission. The initial focus of NIJ's program of research, as it relates to Tribes, was on Native women living in Indian Country or Alaska, and the response or lack thereof to crimes by justice involved actors at the federal, state, local and Tribal levels. Through subsequent reauthorizations, additional work was included: sex trafficking added in the Reauthorization Act of 2013, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP), and requested analyses of Native Hawaiians in the VAWA reauthorization of 2022. The original statute suggested a single study could accomplish all of this, but this was not possible. Different research methods and different types of analyses must be undertaken, and this is why NIJ refers to the mandate as a research program on violence against Indian women.

Dr. Zweig also discussed NIJ's participation on the Not Invisible Act Commission (NIAC) where Senior Social Science Analyst Christine Crossland served as a Federal Co-Chair of the Policies & Programs – Reporting and Collecting Data on Missing, Murdered, and Trafficked Persons Subcommittee.

#### **NIJ UPDATES ON CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS**

Dr. Zweig discussed the National Baseline Study (NBS) – the flagship project under the Task Force's program of research. NIJ drafted the original baseline questionnaire and started testing study protocols and sampling techniques between 2009 and 2011. The plan was further refined in 2012 and 2013. The NBS was implemented in 2014 via contractors but immediately faced setbacks: recruitment of participating sites and long delays in securing study approvals. The original contracts had to be closed, and new contracts had to be entered into including longer periods of performance. In 2018, NIJ began to work on the study again, including updating the study instrument, finalizing sample link protocols, and recruiting and securing participating Tribes. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant delays to the NBS implementation and 2023 NIJ put the project on hold. NIJ is currently revisiting the study's overall design and sampling frame and assessing the best means of moving forward with the available resources.

The Adaptation and Evaluation of the Fourth R Youth Dating Violence Curriculum for Indigenous Communities project is being decommissioned because the funded research team could not secure the necessary Tribal sites to implement and complete the study. The funded organization is relinquishing the award.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's project related to gender-based violence on campuses continues. They have partnered with a Tribal college or university to complete an organizational assessment of strengths and needs and develop a tribal centered campus climate assessment. The research team worked with an advisory board to complete the strengths and needs assessment and delivered it to the college's Dean of student services and other leadership. They also worked with the Advisory Board to develop the Tribal centered campus climate assessment, which was also delivered to the Dean of Dean of Students and other leadership. The Dean will continue to meet with the Advisory Board and plans to deploy the campus climate assessment in the fall of 2024 semester. The final report will be released in Fall of 2024.

The Identifying the Scope and Context of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) in New Mexico and Improving MMIP Data Collection, Analysis, and Reporting is a comprehensive research endeavor, examining publicly available data on MMIP over 12 months sourced from the New Mexico Missing Persons Information Clearinghouse, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Navajo Nation Missing Persons Registry, the Albuquerque FBI IP List and open source data such as Facebook missing persons groups and missing persons websites. The project will provide crucial insights into the contextual factors associated with missing Native persons in New Mexico. The findings will shed light on potential linkages with violence and homicide involvement in the child welfare system and case resolution.

Dr. Zweig announced a new study involving the relationship between crime, victimization, and extractive industries. The study will look at crime and victimization rates before, during, and after extraction efforts began and include a review of legislation and court cases involving extractive and industries impacting Indigenous peoples and documenting justice and the Tribal system response. The overall findings are anticipated to summarize gaps in the research literature and help guide NIJ's future research

investments. NIJ is convening several engagements to seek input on how to improve the quality and relevance of crime and justice research in American Indian and Alaska Native communities generally, and the violence against and Indigenous women programs specifically. NIJ acknowledged that studies are lacking crucial Tribal perspective and studies that do not adhere to community based participatory research principles may not effectively address the public safety issues most relevant to Tribal communities.

NIJ has encountered several challenges leading them to implement new approaches and initiatives to solicit funds and build Indigenous focused research and capacity.

### **NIJ UPDATES ON NAMUS**

NIJ has hired Cornelia Perry as their NamUs Tribal Liaison and NamUs has been actively working to increase awareness of its resources among Tribal community members, thereby promoting a higher rate of reporting for MMIP cases. Since her onboarding the program has witnessed a significant 20% increase in Tribal cases, a clear testament to the positive impact of her work related to training and outreach. Dr. Zweig also shared that between October 2023 and June 2024, the NAMUS staff participated in 45 conferences and presentations. Finally, the NamUs program will be releasing a framing paper in anticipation of the 19th Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation that will seek input from Tribal leaders on a wide range of issues.

### **QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NIJ**

Judge Bird shared two recommendations related to the work on extractive industries: (1) NIJ should review the work of the International Indian Treaty Council and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and (2) NIJ should look at the Brave Heart Society's mapping study of the effects of man camps and extractive industries.

NIJ also answered questions about whether the extractive industries study would include Oklahoma's oil industry, and they responded that they would share that recommendation.

Investigator Oliveira asked whether there was a plan to do a study on the types of assistance needed for Tribal members who live in other states away from their Tribes. She provided an example of an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation needing assistance with an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) case in California, the current state of residence. NIJ noted the recommendation to look at this as a potential research focus. A brief discussion followed in which Task Force members described other options for accessing services, such as through Urban Indian Organizations or other local Tribes and increasing awareness about service eligibility.

### **TASK FORCE FACILITATED DISCUSSION**

Caroline LaPorte then began the facilitated discussion by explaining the ground rules.

Question 1: If the National Institute of Justice were to be aspirational in its approach to research, what would the Task Force members recommend that the NIJ focus on?

Dr. Wright made two recommendations. First, we need to start thinking about relationships as outcomes and looking at building relationships between Tribal leaders/members and researchers/practitioners. Second, starting from the ground up in identifying the issues that are most important and most salient to

the Tribal communities and then looking at how federal priorities overlap with those issues. Dr. Wright identified the focus on MMIP as being driven from the ground up because of the large interest from Tribal communities. Ms. Crevier described work with other federal task forces that prioritized timelines over relationships.

Ms. Crevier mentioned the NIAC's practice of holding field hearings and fundraising for families to be able to attend. The NIAC made a lot of efforts to build relationships that led to an effective end result with the Not One More report. She also suggested including attorneys in research discussions because they will also have review of contracts and agreements with researchers. If they are not included in the discussions, they may identify critical issues related to data sovereignty that might otherwise be missed. She also suggested working with the 12 Tribal Epidemiology Centers which have a lot of existing data on Tribes and work on behalf of Tribes. She also explained the need to engage with a range of Tribes because Tribal nations are not a monolith.

Interim Chief of Police Rutherford mentioned that state and federal governments are proprietary about Tribal data, and it is difficult to access the Tribe's own data from these institutions. He discussed the lack of a single clearinghouse for law enforcement data and how NamUs is not a law enforcement database so there are still difficulties with identifying MMIP cases. States in his region are looking at building a regional database to share this information but NIJ should consider examining better ways for law enforcement to share this information.

Judge Bird discussed representation, having Indigenous people in research positions, positions of power, and in the decision-making places concerning Indigenous people. She discussed the concept of relationships as outcomes and recommended investing in investigating Indigenous science and ways of knowing vs relying solely on Western, linear cause and effect science. She discussed a 12<sup>th</sup> person model where if 11 people agree on one answer, they continue to investigate the non-answers in case they were wrong.

Investigator Oliveira mentioned considering jurisdictional differences and discrepancies when doing research – PL-280 states will have different resources and outcomes than non-PL-280 states.

Dr. Wright acknowledged Dr. Jeremy Braithwaite as the person who has been promoting the concept of relationships as outcomes. She suggested NIJ approach Tribes directly to ask them what data they are missing and examining whether not having the data is causing the community harm. She also advocated for focusing on more strengths-based research: what protective factors are in place and how could they be used for prevention or intervention?

#### Question 2: How can the NIJ incorporate Indigenous knowledge and data practice into its work?

Ms. Crevier mentioned maintaining access to resources that have been approved under previous administrations. She also discussed consistency across federal agencies in the way they access and count data would be helpful.

Judge Bird revisited the topic of representation, stating that science has been incorporated based on Western viewpoints. Indigenous methods of gathering data include oral stories which have been treated like folklore. Indigenous data and science methods focus on a deep respect and understanding of the interconnectedness of things and that is not always seen in Western methods. She explained it as global thinking vs linear thinking. She mentioned an Indigenous data toolkit from Canada. She also explained

approaching research by asking questions like who is it that does this for you and who is it that you identify as being an expert for your people in this area.

Dr. Wright said there is a need to get information from Tribes about what is important to them and why is it important to them. They need to be consulted on how to get the information and what would make that information useful for them. Tribal voices need to be at the table for discussions about research in or on their communities. She also had recommendations for NIJ's funding of research. She said funding needs to be increased significantly to support relationship building, including face to face meetings. She suggested having an Indigenous member on the research team who is either from or currently living in the community to maintain the connection to the Tribe. She also advocated for paying Tribal community members for their time, through a stipend or incentive. Her other recommendations included funding for startup costs for the time involved in going through Institutional Review Boards (IRB)s and longer project periods to account for the length of time the IRB process takes.

Question 3: Would a study regarding distrust specifically around data, collection and ownership or dissemination be useful to the field, and how?

Judge Bird responded that even when Indigenous organizations are doing the work, there is still mistrust of data collection. Victims get tired of sharing their stories repeatedly, especially when they don't know what is being done with the information. Representation would help and if representation is not possible, working with allies who are culturally competent is important. Understanding where the information is going and what it is being used for is critical. Checking back in with study participants, keeping them informed, and being transparent is important. Tribes need to understand the nexus between the data and what might eventually come from it or how it has been used to help Tribes in the past. Judge Bird pointed towards the creation of the Task Force and some of the changes in VAWA reauthorizations as examples.

Judge Bird also talked about automatic distrust of federal agencies due to past government policies and current issues related to the removal of children from their homes at high rates in Tribal communities: "You're gonna have an automatic distrust of, you know, who you are and what you're doing, sort of like that bad apple spoils the bunch. But we're talking about 500 years of spoilage." Finally, Judge Bird also discussed transparency and confidentiality concerns. Tribal community members may have significant concerns about the confidentiality of their information within their own community and outside researchers may not understand how common confidentiality issues can be within the community.

Dr. Wright advocated for research on distrust with a focus on community-identified solutions and recommendations to address the issues of distrust and confidentiality.

Ms. Crevier agreed with Judge Bird and Dr. Wright. She added that this issue of distrust is significant when it comes to healthcare too and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acting Chief of Police Rutherford spoke about the importance of community engagement. Research and data collection cannot work if the community can't ask questions or are only interacting with strangers. Including community members in the information-gathering could increase trust and build connections. He suggested having community meetings with food, spending time with the community, getting to understand social norms in the community, and bringing the information back to the community.

Question 4: What do you feel are the barriers to meaningful Tribal participation in NIJ funded studies and how can the NIJ overcome some of these barriers?

Acting Chief of Police Rutherford reemphasized his points about community engagement and food.

Dr. Wright discussed data repositories. She identified funders requiring data be made publicly available in a repository as a large barrier and encourage NIJ to think about including waivers, as other funding agencies do, to increase Tribal participation. She said that more and more Tribes are refusing to share their data publicly because the data belongs to them and funders are going to need to adapt to this.

Ms. Crevier reemphasized the importance of food in Tribal communities and how stringent most federal agencies were about this. She suggested that NIJ look at how the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) handles this as they have been flexible with Tribes. She discussed the NIAC's struggles with participation because food was not allowed. Urban Indian Organizations and NIAC members fundraised to provide food to increase participation. She also advocated for data repository waivers. Ms. Crevier also mentioned that NIJ may need to think through language they are using related to Tribal research because it may overlook Tribal members living off-reservation in urban areas or non-Tribal members who may be living on the reservation and/or married into the community and eligible for community services.

Judge Bird echoed the food idea and then discussed being mindful that many Tribal members, particularly victims, are in survival mode, living day-to-day, and may need additional resources to help them participate, like childcare, trauma-informed practices, etc. She discussed the importance of transparency and less formal approaches. She discussed a breastfeeding study that involved community focus groups and informal discussions over lunch. The researcher was also able to provide small stipends and traditional gifts like bags of medicines. She was transparent about the research, how she was doing it, why she was doing it, what it should accomplish, and what the report eventually looked like.

Investigator Oliveira discussed difficulties for Tribal members in rural communities. They may not have access to transportation, phones, internet, etc. She identified problems in using community gatherings to conduct surveys because people may be in ceremony but acknowledged it may a good way to at least get an idea of who people are who may need to be contacted later. She also emphasized that Tribal members with mental health issues and/or substance use issues should have their voices included. Their voices are incredibly valuable because they may have more frequent interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system and insight into the areas NIJ would like to research.

Question 5: How can the NIJ approach a national study that does not over generalize the American Indian and Alaska Native population?

Judge Bird recommended looking at cultural groups instead of regional groups, for example looking at the Anishinaabe instead of a Bureau of Indian Affairs region, geographic region, or state. Tribes that come from the same cultural group may have more commonalities than those that are grouped together based on land designations. She provided an example of how a member of a Pueblo Tribe may feel like they have less voice or impact when living in Anishinaabe territory. She also reemphasized the need for representation.

Dr. Wright said that there are likely broad thematic points that are important for a wide range of Tribes, but they may look, feel, or mean something slightly different to each Tribe. She said it may be possible to

do a scale study, but some of the takeaways or broad themes may not apply for all the different Tribes. To understand what those differences are, researchers need to hear from the Tribes.

Question 6: What foundational information should be established via NIJ research and what is missing that feels like a gap in the knowledge base?

Judge Bird talked about the importance of understanding the uniqueness of Tribes and that many people and institutions do not understand the diversity that exists amongst Tribal nations. She says there is a mindset that believes changing the way this work is done would be inefficient. She remarked that European countries have very distinct personalities and very distinct governments, but it was still possible to create a European Union and it's possible to replicate this in the way we work with Tribes.

Investigator Oliveira discussed bringing information back to the community. Tribes know the research is happening, but they don't see or hear the outcomes. They need to see tangible evidence that the information they are sharing is turning into things that will help their community.

Acting Chief of Police Rutherford advocated for accurate data, commitment from the state and federal governments to act on that data, and tangible evidence that the data is having an impact.

Dr. Wright is interested in knowing more about information that is missing, but possibly beneficial to the Tribes and whether it would be the same information for the federal government. If not, how might the two intersect? She said research can be used to enhance, beef up, address gaps in victim services provision, how services are provided, and everything in between, but it needs to be Indigenously led.

## **BREAK**

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

SAMANTHA THORNSBERRY:

Ms. Thornsberry introduced herself and said she agreed with almost everything the Task Force members said. She said that distrust was at the forefront of conversations and is the largest barrier Tribes face in preventing victim violence in Tribal communities as well as responding to it. She spoke about contradictions in federal grant funding (increased attention to MMIP but prohibitions on using grant funds to address it) and decreased federal funding having a large impact on Tribal victim services programs.

She spoke about many community members not understanding what was being done with Tribal data and not seeing results of the research. She addressed lack of law enforcement responses or prosecution of crimes. She appreciated the discussion about not using a one-size fits all approach to Tribes and the difficulty in identifying common denominator themes that help illustrate something meaningful to Tribes while still acknowledging and respecting each Tribe's own unique identity. She also encouraged a return to in-person meetings.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Deputy Director Moore made closing remarks thanking Ms. LaPorte for her facilitation. She said that there were some big takeaways for OVW and NIJ that will inform the work the agencies do. Data sovereignty is a key issue to be addressed and mentioned there had been discussion of this topic during Trilateral Workgroup meetings with Canada and Mexico. Deputy Director Moore also acknowledged the



discussion of food, transportation, and childcare and how offering these to Tribal members may substantially increase participation and enable researchers to hear about the lived experiences and stories that need to be heard.

Deputy Director Moore discussed some of OVW's Tribal Affairs Division programs and OVW's upcoming 19th Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation and acknowledged the support of her executive assistance, Grace Addo Danquah.

Director Hidalgo made closing remarks thanking the Task Force members for their work and noting the importance of the federal advisory committee. She thanked the public attendees, Ms. LaPorte for her facilitation, and NIJ for their update and collaboration.

Director Hidalgo said it was excellent that the beginning of the day's dialog centered on the notion of thinking of relationships as outcomes – sometimes you can go faster alone but you can go farther together. Director Hidalgo highlighted the discussion of distrust and mistrust and how they might be acknowledged in furtherance of this work and enable better future collaboration. Director Hidalgo also talked about the importance of looking at protective factors, resilience, and utilizing a strengths-based approach in research rather than deficits-based approach.

Director Hidalgo talked about the importance of input from survivors and community members in informing OVW's work. She acknowledged the difficulty in sharing these stories and not understanding what was being done with those stories because of drive-by research practices that do not include transparency or discussion of the impacts of the research. She discussed the importance of the NIAC listening sessions and recommendations that came out of the listening sessions. She noted OVW's Healing and Response Teams Special Initiative, which will address the intersection of gender-based violence and MMIP, was created in direct response to the recommendations of the NIAC. Finally, Director Hidalgo discussed the recharter of the Task Force and the plan to open additional membership seats on the Task Force.

Judge Bird provided a closing prayer and Deputy Director Moore thanked the attendees.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm ET.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Jenny Mills  
Grants Management Specialist  
Office on Violence Against Women