

2026 Brief Update on Status of Tribal Recommendations

Prepared for
**U.S. Department of Justice 21st Annual Government-to-Government
Consultation on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native
Women**

Tulalip, WA September 9-11, 2026

This document summarizes selected testimonies Tribal leaders and their designees gave at the 20th annual Tribal consultation required by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), as amended. It provides brief updates related to points of consensus across testimonies pertaining to violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women. As the 20th annual consultation was delayed from November 2025 to January 2026, and the 21st annual consultation is taking place before the end of the fiscal year, this brief update will be followed by the usual update report later in 2026.¹

The recommendations described below are organized according to the four areas in which the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of the Interior (DOI) are required to receive Tribal feedback at these annual consultations (see 34 U.S.C. § 20126(b)). The updates provided in each section are preliminary responses, as efforts in many areas are evolving and will be addressed through ongoing communication and collaboration with Tribes.

1. Administering Tribal Funds and Grant Programs

Comprehensive and flexible funding: Tribal leaders and designees expressed appreciation for federal resources and partnerships while also emphasizing that current funding levels fail to meet the scope and scale of the needs of victims and their families and are insufficient for responding to offenders.

Elimination of competitive grants: Tribal leaders and designees called for ending the competitive processes through which Tribes must compete for resources. Recommended alternatives included formula or block grants, increased base funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), increased use of set asides earmarked for Tribes, and options for Tribes to combine funding streams. Many emphasized that these alternatives should come with additional resources and not replace or dilute grant funding specifically for improving Tribal responses to domestic and sexual violence.

Sustained funding with predictable application and award cycles: Tribal leaders and designees overwhelmingly urged stable funding with predictable notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) seasons and award timing to allow for preparation and budget planning.

¹ Prior update reports are available on Office on Violence Against Women's website at <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/tribal-consultation>.

Greater flexibility: Tribal leaders and designees requested more administrative flexibility regarding award conditions including allowing funds to be used for meals for staff and community gatherings; streamlining grant reporting and application processes; and shortening the length of time between when an award is made and funds are available/budget is approved.

UPDATE: These recommendations echo prior testimony, including comments that DOJ previously received in response to a 2024 [framing paper](#) on reforming DOJ funding mechanisms. DOJ issued a [report](#) summarizing the feedback from Tribes on the framing paper and responding to specific concerns and recommendations. As stated in the report, DOJ is using this feedback to continue efforts to make grant funding more accessible, predictable, and flexible, while also recognizing that competitive grants alone cannot meet the needs identified by Tribes.

DOJ's grantmaking offices – the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) – are working together to streamline their grant management processes and take a uniform approach to grant review and administration in fiscal year (FY) 2027 and beyond. These changes will make it easier to apply for and use grants. An example of these efforts can be seen in the simplified NOFO template deployed in FY 2026. Tribal recommendations regarding timing and flexibility have informed these efforts and will continue to do so.

Another example is simplifying and reducing grant reporting requirements. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) encourages federal agencies to reduce reporting burden with a focus on measuring progress toward program goals and using data to demonstrate results. In response to this OMB guidance, as well as Tribal feedback, OJP has been working to consolidate performance reporting into a single platform and narrow the focus to measuring achievement of program goals. Similarly, OVW has reduced reporting for its Tribal programs by more than 70 percent and moved to a web-based tool that Tribes have reported is much easier to use than prior forms. Further streamlining efforts are in the works.

Finally, OVW has moved all OVW grants to Tribes – whether under a Tribal-specific grant program or not – to OVW's Tribal Affairs Division. Each Tribe now has one OVW grant manager, located in the division of OVW that focuses on maximizing flexibility for Tribes under statutes, regulations, and DOJ policies. In addition, OVW's next regional grant implementation workshop with Tribes is scheduled for November 18-19, 2026, in Reno, Nevada. These workshops, originally launched in 2017, have increased Tribes' success in implementing their grant-funded work and have brought in new applicants for OVW's Tribal grant programs.

Maintain OVW as a distinct, standalone DOJ component: Most Tribal leaders and designees urged that OVW remain a distinct component and not merge with other DOJ offices, including the COPS Office and OJP. They cautioned that consolidation would increase their administrative burdens, create bureaucratic confusion, and stymie the effectiveness of staff with specialized expertise in supporting Tribes in responding to violence against women.

UPDATE: OVW, the COPS Office, and OJP will be distinct offices in the new Bureau of Justice Grants (BJG), all reporting to an Assistant Attorney General who will lead the BJG. DOJ is establishing this new bureau in response to calls for simpler and more effective grants. For too long, agencies that serve crime victims and keep communities safe have urged the Department to reduce the administrative burden that comes with applying for and managing federal grants. They have expressed frustration at having to work through multiple offices to determine which grants they can apply for. Then, when they receive grants, they find themselves complying with multiple sets of requirements.

DOJ is thoughtfully designing the BJG's organizational structure and processes to make it easier to apply for and manage grants. The goal of BJG is to reduce administrative burden, enabling organizations to devote more time to their vital work making communities safer, assisting victims, and preventing crime. All these objectives are consistent with longstanding recommendations from Tribes.

In addition, the Department [invited](#) Tribes to consult on how best to address Tribes' existing concerns about DOJ grant funding through the consolidated bureau. DOJ held two online consultation sessions in August 2026 and provided [framing questions](#) asking for feedback on BJG implementation, including specific measures to increase the impact of DOJ grant funding on safety in Tribal communities and anything else DOJ should consider so that consolidation addresses the needs of such communities. The Department will issue a report summarizing and responding to oral and written comments on these questions.

Finally, the Department is continuing to conduct cost and efficiency analyses to inform decisions about how the Bureau will operate. While the transition may involve several changes, DOJ remains firmly committed to providing the same level of service and support to grantees and applicants, including direct communication with staff and access to subject-matter expertise that supports the vital work that Tribes and Tribal organizations carry out across the country.

2. Enhancing the Safety of Indian Women from Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, Homicide, and Sex Trafficking

Comprehensive Tribal infrastructure is essential for victim safety and healing and Tribal sovereignty: Testimony consistently emphasized the need for robust Tribal-specific infrastructure to support justice and healing for victims. These needs include

funding and support for adequate staffing for law enforcement, court systems, Tribal-led child protection programs that work alongside Tribal Indian Child Welfare Act staff, construction of facilities (courts, jails, etc.) and shelter and transitional housing for victims, prevention programs, medical care and sexual assault response teams, and substance abuse programs. Tribal leaders stressed that without sustained investment in comprehensive infrastructure, Tribes cannot meaningfully exercise self-determination.

Reservation and community-based housing options are essential to public safety:

Tribal leaders explained that lack of housing in Tribal communities has created a public health crisis. Some reported that overcrowded, multi-generational households contribute to increased substance use and domestic violence. Testimony repeatedly underscored how the lack of affordable housing and inadequate supportive housing (e.g., residential substance abuse programs, reentry housing) contribute to violence.

Alaska Native villages need urgent infrastructure and local law enforcement

support: Alaska Native Tribal leaders urgently called for increased funding to recruit and retain local law enforcement capable of responding promptly to violent crime including homicide. Without local law enforcement, investigations are often delayed for weeks or months resulting in lost or stale evidence and leaving offenders unaccountable. Many leaders cited weather impacts – such as thawing of permafrost and increased typhoons – that have disrupted subsistence living practices, contributing to the loss of cultural identity, increased substance abuse, and high rates of violent crimes against women.

UPDATE: These recommendations are consistent with testimony from prior consultations. DOJ recognizes how difficult these longstanding infrastructure challenges are to overcome and strives to address them through grants and other support for Tribes, as well as interagency coordination and collaboration. These types of concerns have informed DOJ's approach to grantmaking, from the Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation's strategic planning option to revisions OJP's Office for Victims of Crime has made to [allow](#) certain types of renovations and construction costs under its Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside Program. In addition, the COPS Office provides [grants and other resources](#) to support Tribes in building or enhancing law enforcement services in their communities. OVW's Tribal Governments Program grants can be used for housing for victims, and the team managing OVW's Transitional Housing Grant Program is working to make the program more accessible to Tribes.

In recognition of the feedback discussed above that competitive grants are not the only solution to infrastructure and public safety challenges in Tribal communities, OVW has worked to increase participation by other federal agencies in these annual consultations. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has sent representatives to hear about and assist with strategies related to housing needs, and HHS's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration similarly has attended in recent years and

provided responses to Tribal feedback. OVW intends to continue these interagency efforts and again will welcome representatives from HUD, the Department of Homeland Security, DOI, and HHS to the 21st annual consultation.

Finally, the Department's [Alaska Pilot Program](#) under the 2022 reauthorization of VAWA offers a three-track process built around feedback from Alaska Tribes that they need technical assistance and funding to ready their criminal justice systems to exercise special Tribal criminal jurisdiction (STCJ). These tracks include (1) participating in an Alaska-specific inter-Tribal working group (ITWG) through which Tribes receive targeted assistance to enable them to explore exercising STCJ and (2) working with a federal project liaison to identify and address unmet needs, with the ultimate goal of seeking Attorney General designation to exercise STCJ under the pilot (track 3). DOJ is in the process of consulting with Tribes, including at the 21st annual consultation under VAWA, on the results to date of the pilot program, including any modifications to law necessary to facilitate improved law enforcement in Alaska Native Villages. The [invitation](#) and [framing paper](#) contain additional details.

3. Strengthening Federal Responses to Violence Against Women Crimes

Research on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women: In preparation for the 20th annual Tribal consultation under VAWA, DOJ issued a [framing paper](#) with questions for Tribal leaders on options for completing the national baseline study (NBS) of violence against Indian women in Indian country and Alaska Native villages as provided by statute.² Many Tribal leaders expressed concern over delays in fully implementing the NBS. Some Tribal leaders supported Tribal-led, community-specific data collection rather than one large study, but others noted that not all Tribes are well-positioned to conduct such data collection. Throughout related testimony, Tribal leaders emphasized the need to document and understand rates of violence to inform decision-making.

UPDATE: After conferring with OJP's National Institute of Justice (NIJ), OVW developed a plan to fund Tribal-led data collection on the prevalence of crimes against Indian women in Indian country and Alaska Native Villages. OVW expects to release a call for concept papers in fall 2026. OVW's Tribal Affairs Division will administer the grants and consult NIJ for scientific expertise to guide the effort. Using current-year and carryforward balances from OVW's Violence Against Indian Women Research appropriation, OVW anticipates funding Tribes' own data collection and a statistical support hub to facilitate Tribes' data

² The statutory mandates for the NBS and the Task Force were enacted by the Department of Justice and Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-162, 119 Stat. 2960, 3078-79 (2006), and amended by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113-4, § 907(a), 127 Stat. 54, 125.

collection and analyses.³ This will be an extraordinary step in fulfilling a 20-year-old statutory mandate.

4. Improving Access to Local, Regional, State, and Federal Crime Information Databases and Criminal Justice Information Systems

To help ensure offender accountability, Tribes called upon DOJ to provide access to criminal databases and information systems to all federally recognized Tribes, including information-sharing on violent crimes that take place on Indian land and related decisions by federal investigative or prosecutorial authorities not to pursue an investigation or prosecution. Tribes also requested that DOJ establish a central repository of missing or murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP) cases with status updates and to consult with Tribes before enacting or implementing new database policies.

UPDATE: DOJ annually expands the [Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information](#) (TAP). TAP provides Tribal governments with means to access, enter, and exchange data with national crime information systems, including those maintained by the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division. TAP enables Tribes to access and share critical crime data in real time, helping Tribes and other law enforcement partners solve crimes, locate fugitives, and keep victims and communities safe. With 152 Tribes and more than 500 Tribal government agencies participating in TAP, the Department most recently [sought](#) to expand these numbers with an open application period from July 13 to August 31, 2026. Tribes selected to participate will be notified later in September.

Regarding MMIP, in August 2026, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) [announced](#) the Voices Not Forgotten initiative to increase monetary rewards associated with unsolved investigations into homicides, kidnappings, and missing persons suspected to be victims of homicide in Indian country. The initiative [webpage](#) brings attention to investigations where law enforcement agencies are seeking the public's assistance and includes a searchable and interactive map for FBI Indian country that links posters seeking information about violent crimes in Tribal communities. DOJ's [MMIP webpage](#) also connects Tribes and Tribal organizations with data and research resources, including the NIJ-funded National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), which reports Tribal-specific data in their monthly reports available [here](#).

³ The original statute authorized an appropriation of \$1,000,000 each year for the NBS (and the related task force) for fiscal year (FY) 2007 and FY 2008. This amount was reauthorized in 2013 for FY 2014 and FY 2015. Congress has appropriated \$1,000,000 annually since FY 2012. For FY 2026, the amount appropriated was increased to \$2,000,000.