



Indian Country Research

The Comprehensive Indian Resources for Community and Law Enforcement Project Evaluation

The CIRCLE Project was a collaborative effort between several Department of Justice agencies and three tribes — the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Pueblo of Zuni — to improve criminal justice systems within these communities by reducing crime and improving safety.

Tribes focused their CIRCLE funds on different objectives, depending on their needs. For example, the Pueblo of Zuni stressed building a management information system, expanding community policing, developing a model to decrease youth and family violence, and strengthening law enforcement, corrections and domestic violence service agencies. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe focused on creating a better tribal court system, building a juvenile detention and rehabilitation center, expanding victim services and expanding the police force. Finally, the Oglala Sioux Tribe worked on expanding youth services as well as the police force and improving the tribal court system and victim services.

How Effective Was the Program?

NIJ sponsored a 48-month participatory evaluation of the CIRCLE Project. All the project stakeholders

were deeply involved in the evaluation work. Researchers worked closely with federal and tribal partners to learn how effective the CIRCLE Project was in improving tribal criminal justice systems and to what extent the Justice Department succeeded in helping the tribes.

Given the tribes' diverse approaches toward the broad goals of reducing crime and improving safety, evaluators examined the accomplishments of each tribe individually and in significant detail. However, they did draw some general lessons from their specific findings.

They noted that addressing sustainability at the beginning helps tribes to plan their changes according to projected long-term effects. In addition, tribal partners wanted the CIRCLE Project to support self-determination. Participants wanted the freedom to shape tribal institutions and design changes tailored to the particular needs of their communities. Evaluators also recognized the great need, in system reform, for nation-building and creating criminal justice processes (not merely outcomes) that are culturally fitting. These tailored solutions, respecting self-determination and

tribal sovereignty in creating institutions, nation building and designing culturally suitable processes, were identified as important for program momentum and sustainability.

Comprehensive change is possible, as shown by the successes of the Pueblo of Zuni. Although crime reduction cannot definitively be attributed to CIRCLE, such change can likely reduce crime. However, one of the most important lessons from this evaluation concerns the approach that agencies take to justice system enhancements in Indian Country. Local data-gathering and an understanding of conditions specific to locale help to identify opportunities for action. While not all tribes are ready for system-level changes, this should not deter them from making targeted changes on a smaller scale. This more incremental course saves money, time and effort and can lead to long-term success.

► **Read the full report:** <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221081.pdf>

To learn more about NIJ's tribal crime and justice research go to:

► <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/tribal-justice/welcome.htm>

