

National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative

Tribal Elder Protection Team- Toolkit

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What is a Tribal Elder Protection Team

A Tribal Elder Protection Team (EPT) is a group of professionals, the elder, family members, and community members from diverse disciplines.

- ❖ The EPT provides assistance to the elderly person to promote coordination among service programs available to elders.
- ❖ Improve lines of communication to efficiently address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- ❖ Various professional disciplines are represented on the EPT.
- ❖ Membership is limited and is not open to all service providers, or members of the public.

** Involving the elders as the central focus of the group is specific to Native American Elder Protection Teams as some non-Native teams do not include elders in the conversation. The EPT may be as diverse as their communities in which they serve.*

Who is a EPT Member?

One of the most successful models for addressing elder abuse in Indian Country is utilized by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) in Oregon. The CTWS-MDT representatives have served their tribal community since 1999 through a multidisciplinary team approach. The CTWS- MDT members include representatives from:

- The Senior Wellness Center,
- Tribal Police,
- Tribal Prosecutor's Office,
- BIA/Tribal Social Services,
- Tribal Housing Authority,
- Indian Health Service (IHS),
- Community Health Representatives (CHR),
- Victims of Crimes Office,
- Assisted Living, and
- the Oregon Adult Protective Services.

Why create a EPT?

- ❖ To reduce stereotypes around elder abuse
- ❖ To address a lack of standardized protocols which may limit resources available to elders
- ❖ To improve appropriate responses to elder abuse
- ❖ To improve communication and coordination among service agencies, thereby saving valuable time locating advocates and addressing safety concerns for the elder
- ❖ To improve elder abuse training for professionals, thereby gaining trust in providers, and better utilizing
- ❖ To reduce underreporting of elder abuse
 - In 2013, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported that 1 in 23 cases of elder abuse were reported to any agency; only 1 in 44 cases of financial abuse were reported, and 1 in 57 cases of neglect.

Why are Elder Protection Programs different?

Elder Protection programs vary across Indian Country in terms of:

- ❖ Available infrastructure including agencies and personnel responding to incidents
- ❖ Jurisdictional considerations
- ❖ Availability of traditional justice systems
- ❖ Tribal and/or State civil or criminal courts



Who is the EPT Coordinator?

To make sure an EPT is managed appropriately, and to increase accountability of team members, it is recommended to designate an EPT Coordinator or Director. This individual may have dual roles on the EPT as the coordinator, and as a representative for a tribal agency (e.g. Title VI Director).

This team member will facilitate a group of professional community members in the unification of collaborative efforts to assist elders who may be experiencing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Some tribal communities are able to hire a full-time EPT Coordinator as they may have funding to sustain this position, where other tribal communities many not have funds available. In these cases, this would require a highly motivated individual who would volunteer their time to this position.

How to Develop a Tribal EPT?

Initiating a Tribal Elder Protection Team (EPT) in your community may be complex, time consuming, and can be difficult to plan. Take the time in this developmental process to consider all of the potential barriers and to identify areas of concern. This will greatly benefit the creation of a successful EPT in your tribal community.

Getting Started

1. Build a team of professionals.
2. Identify the tribal community's concerns for elders through a Community Needs Assessment
3. Complete a Statement of Needs summary report
4. Develop organizational rules for the EPT
5. Develop a tribal elder protection code
6. Learn about State and Tribal Laws in your area
7. Program considerations include: Identify technical experience available to launch the EPT (e.g., computer resources)
 - ❖ Determine if there are sufficient economic resources available
 - ❖ Determine the legal requirements or restrictions for the EPT
 - ❖ Develop a business plan and budget addressing how the EPT will operate
8. Develop a sustainability plan

EPT Challenges

- ❖ Attendance issues (not having a large variety of agencies represented),
- ❖ A lack of commitment from representatives to attend meetings regularly,
- ❖ A lack of cases presented
- ❖ A lack of knowledge of other agencies' policies and mandates, that often leads to a negative perception that some agencies are non-cooperative
- ❖ Frustration among agencies in dealing with seemingly unsolvable cases
- ❖ Maintenance of confidentiality
- ❖ Costs, travel time to meeting location
- ❖ Mandated Reporter policies