

# CTAS Listening Session

## December 6, 2022

### Summary Report

The U.S. Department of Justice hosted a Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) listening session on December 6, 2022, to help inform enhancements to the CTAS grant making and grant management process. The session was facilitated by a representative from The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). Approximately 33 attendees were present representing 15 tribes.

To better understand the needs of the Tribes, representatives from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) asked a series of questions focusing on CTAS. The goal of the session was to identify what is working well, gaps and barriers to the grant application and grant management process, and recommendations to address gaps and barriers. The Department of Justice intends to use the information gathered to identify and prioritize improvements for FY 2024.

The Department of Justice is committed to helping tribes access funding and resources to help tribal communities address public safety needs. Each year, the Department of Justice seeks feedback from the tribes through an annual assessment, listening sessions, consultations, and more. Examples of improvements made includes the creation of CTAS, a single application process that allows tribes to apply for multiple grants and extending the grant award period to five years.

The following provides questions asked and responses provided during the listening sessions.

#### Question 1: What has worked well with the CTAS?

A single application process is helpful as it standardizes the grant requirements across purpose areas. The CTAS process helps tribes with their strategic plan across departments to identify and coordinate comprehensive justice system needs to best serve their communities.

**Standardized Forms.** Standardized forms used across the purpose areas, such as the community and justice profile are helpful. The profile allows the tribe to highlight their community and their needs.

**Responsiveness.** Department of Justice staff are responsive when there are questions or issues during the application and post award process. They offer constructive/useful feedback.

## Question 2: What challenges do Tribal governments face in receiving, implementing, managing, and sustaining CTAS grant projects?

**Peer Review.** In some cases, it seems peer reviewers were not reviewing the community and justice profile, or at least were unable to connect the data in the profile to the needs identified in the purpose area narrative(s). This resulted in low-rated purpose area narratives. Reviewers need instruction on the purpose of the community and justice profile and its connection to each purpose area narrative.

**Time Constraints.** Time constraints continue to be a challenge for the tribes. For small tribes with a single grant writer, it is difficult to prepare multiple program narratives in 90 days. The standardized forms help reduce duplication of effort; however, writing multiple program narratives requires time. For smaller tribes or tribes with a single grant writer, it limits the number of purpose areas they can apply for. A solution could be to stagger the due dates by Program Office.

**Project Limitations.** Tribes often cannot adequately provide solutions to justice challenges when the construction of new facilities is unallowed. Construction-based projects in cold weather climates have added challenges with timing and inability to complete the projects on time. A project awarded in winter months cannot move forward until weather permits, delaying a project start for several months.

**Communication on Training and Technical Assistance Providers.** Assigned training and technical assistance (TTA) providers are not clearly communicated. Examples provided during the listening session outline the need:

Purpose Area 4: A PA 4 grantee spent a substantial amount of time planning before learning that TTA providers were available. Time and resources would be saved if the award letter included this information.

Purpose Area 1: A PA 1 grantee needed information on how to start a new police department. This grantee needed resources and assistance with the process on starting the department from policy review to ensuring practices meet national standards. CRITAC was able to help the grantee from the onset in developing and reviewing policies, bringing in subject matter experts for consultation, and offering peer to peer consultations.

**Indirect Cost Rates.** Renewal of indirect cost rates (IDC) is confusing when applying and knowing which rate to use. The submitting agency must use the rate that aligns with dates during the projected active award period. However, if the agreement is in the renewal process, the rate may change. The IDC can be adjusted after the award period; however, if the rate increases, it may take away funds from other budget categories and line items needed to provide services and meet project deliverables. A representative from Klamath indicated the Bureau of Indian Affairs, SAMHSA and HHS use a slightly different process that may allow the use of expired rates throughout the project period. The Department of Justice will explore how other processes work.

Another challenge is that IDC rates are based off previous financial statements. In some cases, the IDC rate is a substantial amount of the budget. For example, the IDC is used to help offset law enforcement hiring requirements to allow for cross training. It was pointed out from a DOJ staff that Tribes use existing staff at a percent to help sustain a program rather than hiring all new staff to increase the sustainability of the project.

**Budget Clearance:** It usually takes a year to be able to begin spending on an award because of the time it takes to receive budget clearance. From an end user, it usually takes the first year to ramp up a program so the loss of the year waiting for budget clearance makes this process very difficult. Because of this, tribes have to request non cost extensions, which uses additional resources to complete.

### Question 3: What additional support could the DOJ provide to assist Tribal governments in managing CTAS grant funding throughout the grant lifecycle. (e.g., planning, project development, application, grants management, closeout).

**Funding Notification and Peer Review.** Notifications on non-awards should include peer review information on strengths and weaknesses. It was suggested that Department of Justice staff have conversations with tribes receiving high scores, but are not funded, on what they can do to make changes in the next year to have a better chance at getting future funding. Feedback is often used when preparing the next application.

There is a need to make the peer review process more consistent. Tribes expressed they make changes based on the peer review comments from the previous year and then receive conflicting feedback on the changes made. Department of Justice staff will continue efforts to provide clear instructions to peer reviewers to improve the review process.

Peer review comments are currently set to go to the authorized representative listed in JustGrants. If there is a change in administration, peer review comments are not shared. It would be helpful if peer review feedback is shared with the grant application team. A DOJ staff member mentioned looking into JustGrants to add the application submitter to also be listed as a feedback recipient.

Tribes were interested to see if past years peer review comments are available for request. Guidance from Department of Justice staff recommended the tribes have the Authorized Representative listed in JustGrants request the comments or ask that a specific individual receive the comments.

**Funding Levels.** Funding levels for purpose areas shift from year to year. This impacts the number of awards made each year. Tribes asked if funding could be set aside by region. Doing so would allow a fair opportunity in each location to received funding.

DOJ staff shared that even strong applications are sometimes not awarded because of limited funding from year to year. Geographic diversity is considered in the award process as well as the total amount of funding a single tribe can receive through CTAS in a year. DOJ will continue to assess how the award process can be more holistic.

**Application Resources.** Workshops and resources are helpful when preparing an application. It was recommended to continue holding the workshops prior to the solicitation and offer additional resources throughout the application process. Recordings are available online. DOJ staff provided the website: [www.ncjtc.org/ctasresources](http://www.ncjtc.org/ctasresources).

The DOJ staff shared that TTA providers are available to discuss project ideas; they are not able to help with the application writing process.

**Collaboration.** For some tribes, it is difficult to foster partnerships with local law enforcement. Grant opportunities to focus on collaboration and working across jurisdictions would be helpful in fostering those partnerships.

There are TTA providers available to help tribes work on multi-jurisdictional partnerships. Another resource available is the Walking on Common Ground website (<https://walkingoncommonground.org/>).

Working across jurisdictions in a PL-280 state often requires a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Having a resource for developing MOUs would be helpful. Western Oregon University is working on a project to develop a repository of MOUs and other agreements to serve as a resource for tribes in need of developing their own MOUs.

**Sustainability.** Funding should be more sustainable. When funds are used to hire project staff, positions are often not sustainable after the grant funding ends. The Department of Justice should explore alternative options such as non-competitive grants or continuation grants.

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) offers non-competitive funding through the Tribal Victim Services Set Aside (TVSSA) Program. TVSSA funding may cover some positions such as a victim advocacy officer or positions that focus on child abuse/neglect. TVSSA funds can be used to serve victims of all crimes and all ages. However, unlike the Children's Justice Act Partnerships for Indian Communities Program (CTAS purpose area 6), TVSSA funds cannot be used to cover investigation or prosecution. The DOJ will explore additional options for continuation or renewal projects for expiring grants. This option may allow a grantee to extend for a year or two.

**Grant Management Resources.** Grant management resources focus on the most recent awarded grants. Most awards are 3-5 years. Tribes would like to have time to meet with the DOJ grant program managers to get feedback on their tribal staff managing the grants.

The DOJ staff shared they would explore adding quarterly office hours for CTAS grantees. This would be an "open office hours" concept to provide general grant discussions and feedback.

Tribes expressed the need for a time tracking system. Staff often work on multiple projects and there is a need for staff to report hours by project. JustGrants houses budget and programmatic information. Could the system include time tracking?

### Are there successes or challenges with JustGrants?

**Broadband.** Tribes located in Alaska and rural areas experience broadband issues. The JustGrants system disconnects due to limited internet connectivity. Grantees experiencing broadband issues must submit their applications via paper copy. This creates additional challenges in the grant application submission process.

**JustGrants Roles/Passwords.** Tribes experience high staff turnover which can result in JustGrants password issues. This creates delays in the application submission and grant management processes.

**Functionality.** When there are system function issues, it can take several days to fix.

## Question 4: What additional steps could DOJ take to increase Tribal applications to the CTAS and other DOJ discretionary grant funding to help ensure that grant funds reach more Tribal communities?

**Non-Competitive Grants.** Non-competitive grant opportunities for tribes would be helpful. Could funds be placed into a set-aside grant opportunity?

The DOJ shared that funding appropriations do not allow for non-competitive opportunities and appropriations support only 30-60% of applications. These amounts are not large enough to develop a formula-based program. The DOJ will continue discussions on non-competitive grant opportunities.

Additionally, the DOJ will explore options in the grant application system to allow tribes to indicate if they would like to be considered for similar non-tribal funding categories.

The DOJ representatives encouraged tribes to apply for non-tribal specific grant opportunities. A representative from the Bureau of Justice Assistance shared in the past few years, nearly 100% of tribes applying for a number of non-tribal specific programs such as Adult Drug Courts and COSSAP were funded. Examples include funding around school safety, healing to wellness courts, etc.

**Maintenance.** DOJ grants require more maintenance than other grants. It would be helpful to have more in-depth information on grant management to make this process easier. For example, more information or training on how to complete a budget modification.

DOJ staff shared information on the OVC Tribal Financial Management Center, a training and technical assistance provider. This provider offers post-award assistance to address financial issues.

**Interviews.** Under OVC's Tribal Victim Services Set Aside Program, applicants have the option of participating in an interview with an OVC staff member in lieu of submitting a traditional program narrative. During this interview, the OVC staff member completes a checklist that documents the applicant's plan for the funding. The interview process also helps OVC gain a better understanding of the tribe's community needs. This process could be helpful for CTAS.

**Condense Funding Streams.** Could there be a funding stream that would include all law enforcement officer needs? This would include resources to address drugs, social work, detox, mental health, and transports. Could these services be condensed to 1 stream of funding under CTAS?

DOJ staff shared they received earlier feedback that having 1 funding stream would be more restrictive. For example, if the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) was put into the CTAS application, funding amounts could be underestimated, and tribes would not receive funding to the level needed. This past year, tribes applying for the COSSAP non-tribal specific grant funding were awarded at nearly 100%. DOJ staff acknowledged that having these funds under 1 funding stream makes the application process easier. They will explore ways to make the application process easier for programs that are not tribal specific, but apply to the tribes.

**Communication and Coordination.** Better communication across agencies would be helpful. For example, there were a number of listening sessions today and it was hard to follow times and locations of each. It would be nice to have had the sessions coordinated better and co-located.

## Question 5: What Tribal justice projects and activities do you want CTAS to fund/support?

**Strategic Planning for Retiring Staff.** It is difficult to properly cross train new staff when there are retirements. Many grant budgets only allow for existing staff to be covered. There is a need to have funding to hire the replacement officers that allows for side-by side training. It is important for the trainee to work alongside the retiring officer for hands-on training purposes.

**Legal Services.** There is a need for funding that allows for more in-depth work with legal. Many tribes experience legal challenges when working with child custody issues, probate, etc. Funding that allows a tribe to have a legal aid without having to run a full healing to wellness court would be helpful.

**Workplan Adjustment.** Can a grant cover items outside the approved workplan? DOJ staff advised tribal attendees to talk with their program managers to have items added to the workplan. For example, Purpose Area 3 allows a workplan to focus on more than one key area, i.e., talk to the program manager to add another focus area to the workplan within the approved funding amount.

**Infrastructure Funds.** There is a need for more grant funding opportunities that support infrastructure. There is a need to be able to build new facilities and/or expand existing facilities. This is especially important in PL-280 states.

**Child Welfare Services.** Tribes in rural areas need grant funds for transportation services. In some cases, the child welfare manager needs a whole day for transportation.

DOJ staff shared that OVC Set Aside funding can be used to help with transportation issues.

**Refreshments.** It is important to offer coffee/refreshments at conferences and events such as this where food plays a role in the cultural context of the overall event. In Indian country, tribes view each other as relatives. Food is both good medicine and joins relatives together. DOJ staff shared the findings from a prior audit that resulted in grants banning food and refreshments. The new administration is looking at ways to be able to provide light refreshments. It is noted, however, that this is a decision made at a higher level.

**Feedback Response.** Tribes are asked to bring up needs in talking circles and listening sessions. They would like to hear feedback on the main talking points. They would like to know the status on key needs and proposed solutions.

DOJ staff will plan to prepare a report out on what will be incorporated into FY 2024 funding because of listening sessions and talking circles.

## Conclusion

Department of Justice staff received feedback from multiple tribal representatives during the listening session. The following are key action items to explore in FY 2023.

**Application Time Constraints.** Stagger the due dates by Program Office.

**Communication on Training and Technical Assistance Providers.** Communicate Training and Technical Assistance provider information in the grant award letter.

**Indirect Cost Rates.** Renewal of indirect cost rates is confusing when applying and knowing which rate to use. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, SAMHSA and HHS use a slightly different process. The Department of Justice will explore how other processes work.

**Funding Notification and Peer Review.**

- Department of Justice staff should have conversations with tribes receiving high scores, but are not funded, on what they can do to make changes in the next year to have a better chance at getting funded.
- The peer review process must be more consistent. Department of Justice staff will continue efforts to provide clear instructions to peer reviewers to improve the review process.

**Grant Management Resources.** Tribes would like to have time to meet with the Department of Justice grant program managers to get feedback on their tribal staff managing the grants.

- The Department of Justice staff shared they would explore adding quarterly office hours for CTAS grantees.
- There is a need for a time tracking tool for tribes to properly track hours worked across multiple grant projects. Could JustGrants offer a solution for time tracking?

**Non-Competitive Grants.** Non-competitive grant opportunities for tribes would be helpful.

- The Department of Justice will continue discussions on non-competitive grant opportunities.
- The Department of Justice will explore options in the grant application system to allow tribes to indicate if they would like to be considered for similar non-tribal funding categories.

**Interviews.** The CTAS team should consider interviews over the phone with tribes to gain a better understanding of the tribe's community needs.

**Communication and Coordination Between DOJ Offices.** The Department of Justice Offices should work to improve communication and collaboration. This will reduce confusion when events are co-located.

**Future CTAS Funding Needs.** CTAS funding in future years should incorporate the following: funding to support cross training for retiring staff; legal services; infrastructure, child welfare services, and refreshments. In addition, CTAS funding should allow purpose areas to focus on more than one key area.

DOJ staff will review key areas of focus and make recommendations for Fiscal Year 2024. A report will be prepared to outline changes made to funding opportunities because of the December 2022 listening sessions. Tribes were encouraged to continue to share comments via the [tribalgrants@usdoj.gov](mailto:tribalgrants@usdoj.gov) email address.