



The Navajo Nation  
Office of the President and Vice President

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## Navajo Nation implements the *Nihí K'ei dóó B'éedahoozinígíí Náalkaa Bikégó Naaltsoos*, the Navajo Nation Guidelines for Missing Persons



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, First Lady Phefelia Nez, Navajo Nation Executive Branch division directors, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah U.S. Attorney's Offices, and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials during the Navajo Nation Guidelines for Missing Persons Executive Order signing ceremony at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort on October 24, 2022.

**LEUPP, Ariz.** – On Monday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez were joined by Navajo Nation Police Chief Darryl Noon, Navajo Nation Executive Branch division directors, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah U.S. Attorney's Offices, and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials as they issued an Executive Order to adopt and implement the *Nihí K'ei dóó B'éedahoozinígíí Náalkaa Bikégó Naaltsoos*, the Navajo Nation Guidelines for Missing Persons, to investigate and locate missing Navajo persons on the Navajo Nation in a manner that is empathetic to victims and their families.

The Navajo Nation Guidelines for Missing Persons is a component of the Tribal Community Response Plan (TCRP) to establish solutions to help find missing persons and to help heal victims and families. The plan will guide the Navajo Nation and its local, state, and federal partners to build response capacity, collaboration, and support for missing persons and their loved ones. The plan includes four components, including law enforcement response, victim support services, media strategies, and the integration of community-based resources.

“Many families know the personal heartbreak and trauma of missing loved ones on the Navajo Nation and throughout Indian Country. Multiple jurisdiction systems have historically failed the victims and their families. Reporting, collecting, and sharing missing persons data among various jurisdictions characterizes this problem’s true scope. The executive order will set a new tone of hope on this issue that impacts our nation. The plan will help local, state, and federal law enforcement and social service agencies to work together to bring missing loved ones home. The purpose is to reunite, restore, and heal our families and communities,” said President Nez.

Under the leadership of President Nez and First Lady Nez, the Navajo Nation executive branch, in partnership with their local, state, and federal counterparts, have established a systemic response to Navajo families' call for justice. The efforts will recognize Navajo Nation laws while pioneering a new era of cooperation between the Navajo Nation, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“Historically, investigation and prosecution of Navajo Nation missing persons cases have been entrusted to the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office due to potential violations of federal laws. Unfortunately, such deference to federal agencies has often resulted in Navajo families being kept in the dark and their cases not prosecuted. The Navajo Nation Guidelines for Missing Persons asserts that any missing person case on the Navajo Nation is a potential violation of Navajo Nation law and should be treated accordingly. There is a need for proactivity, collaboration, and support within the justice and public safety systems to protect our people. Our deepest hope is that working together will heal, restore, and reunite families,” said First Lady Nez.

The TCRP states that any missing person case impacts K’é, kinship, harmony, and balance and should involve the victim’s immediate family, relatives, and community. The TCRP committee leaders, including Navajo Nation Police Chief Darryl Noon, Criminal Investigation Director Michael Henderson, Chief Prosecutor Vernon Jackson, Emergency Management Director Harland Cleveland, Division of Social Services Executive Director Deannah Neswood-Gishey and Department of Behavioral and Mental Health Services Director Dr. Michelle Brandser developed guidelines that coordinate Navajo Nation law enforcement and victim service response to reflect the best interest of victims and their families at the center of each case.

“The *Nihí K’éi dóó Bédahoozinígíí Náalkaa Bikégó Naaltsoos* also engages non-tribal partners and agencies in a collaborative response plan and map of the entire criminal justice landscape that Navajo victims and their families must navigate from their first emergency call through the ultimate resolution of a case. Most importantly, it will guide the Navajo Nation and its partners to

build response capacity, collaboration, and support for missing persons and their loved ones," added President Nez.

Furthermore, the Executive Order will initiate implementation of these guidelines within the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, Navajo Nation Department of Justice, Navajo Nation Division of Social Services, and Navajo Department of Health, which includes the training of all Navajo Nation employees within divisions and departments that share responsibility for missing person cases on the Navajo Nation.

"Creating this plan was a tremendous undertaking for all internal and external partners because it considered the entire Navajo Nation's 27,413 square mile land base. As the largest land base tribe in the country, the Navajo Nation's TCRP required extensive collaboration with more partners than any other TCRP in Indian Country. Non-tribal stakeholders include the U.S. Attorney's Office, FBI, multiple public safety agencies within Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico, sheriffs and emergency responders in thirteen counties, and local police departments in neighboring cities and towns. Overall, we are grateful for all partners for their involvement in bringing our loved ones home," added First Lady Nez.

The TCRP is part of the U.S. Attorney General's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative, and the Navajo Nation is among the first of 11 TCRP pilot sites in Indian Country, including other tribes in Arizona, New Mexico, Montana, Oklahoma, Michigan, Utah, Nevada, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska.

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