

A HIDTA SUCCESS STORY

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The Tohono O'odham Nation (Nation) is the third largest Native American land base in the U.S. and is comparable in size to the State of Connecticut. The Nation is comprised of eleven districts with over 59 recognized communities that share an approximate 70-mile border with Mexico. The geography of the Nation extends from non-contiguous metropolitan environments in both the Tucson and Phoenix areas, to remote rural communities adjacent to the International border. The Nation also recognizes and extends tribal enrollment privileges to its members who physically reside in Mexico on aboriginal Tohono O'odham Lands.

Recognizing the unique and diverse border-related challenges on the Nation, in 2013, the Tohono O'odham Police Department (TOPD) and U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) formalized a task force to address drug smuggling and other border-related crime occurring on the Nation. At the time, HSI was endorsing its task force model called BEST (Border Security Enforcement Task Force).

It was determined, the HIDTA program provided a much better platform for this particular task force:

- First, HIDTA allows for grant funding to offset the costs of State, Local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies to participate in a National Drug Control Strategy.
- Second, HIDTA gives State, Local, and Tribal agencies direct access to National, International, and Regional drug intelligence through its HIDTA Intelligence Support Centers.
- Third, HIDTA allows for the development of a local and regional drug enforcement strategy tailored to the needs of specific local areas that addresses both actual and emerging drug threats in local communities that may, or may not, directly align with Federal agency national policies. Its autonomy under the Office of National Drug Control Policy is a unique strength and significant reason to participate in the HIDTA program.
- Fourth, and perhaps most important for the local tribal communities within the Tohono O'odham Nation, HIDTA allows for the TOPD to lead the initiative to build better support from the communities for the task force than seeing yet another Federal Government program pushed into the communities.

Native American Targeted Investigation of Violent Enterprises (NATIVE) Task Force

In mid-2013, Arizona HIDTA recognized Native American Targeted Investigation of Violent Enterprises (NATIVE) as an Arizona HIDTA Task Force. NATIVE was first funded in 2014 as the first and only Tribal-led HIDTA Task Force in the United States and began receiving both local and national recognition during its first year. With the complexities that accompany criminal jurisdiction on Tribal Lands, NATIVE now has full-time, co-located participation from every Federal Law Enforcement agency with either a "Border" or "Drug Enforcement" responsibility on the Nation to include designated Assistant United States Attorneys who prosecute all Federal cases investigated by NATIVE.

Since its inception, NATIVE has focused primarily on four types of investigations:

1. *National and International Drug Smuggling Conspiracy Investigations* that address the hierarchy of the Mexican Drug Cartels smuggling drugs through the Tohono O'odham Nation. For generations the Nation has been a preferred smuggling corridor for the Sinaloa Cartel extending back to the days of the Guadalajara Cartel which predated today's Sinaloa Cartel. NATIVE employs a unique strategy in its conspiracy investigations by utilizing all available criminal jurisdictions – Tribal, Federal, and when possible, State – to “carve out” as much of the existing criminal infrastructure as possible, while working up the chain. This is a departure from the old OCDETF strategy of racing to the top of an organization to “cut the head off the snake.” There is a more sustainable impact by dismantling the infrastructure as the investigations progress, so the Cartel takes much longer to reestablish itself after its hierarchy has been removed.
2. *Reactive Investigations* that stem from a patrol traffic stop by either the Border Patrol or TOPD patrol officers that don't yet fit into a conspiracy investigation.
3. *Community Impact Cases* that involve the hand-to-hand sale of “hard narcotics” in the communities.
4. *Develop and analyze drug intelligence* that involves Cartel violence occurring in the Tohono O'odham communities south of the U.S. Border.

“The Storm is coming...”

In FY2016, NATIVE recognized the Nation was on the fringe of a major influx of methamphetamine both smuggled through the Nation and being sold within the Nation's communities. Prior to FY2016, most drugs, other than marijuana, were smuggled through the recognized Ports of Entry that border the Nation's land base on both the East and West. A very small portion of the smuggled narcotics through NATIVE's area of responsibility make their way back onto the Nation. Smuggling organizations deliver their drugs to staging areas in greater Phoenix and Tucson for subsequent distribution throughout the U.S. Even as large amounts of drugs are smuggled through the Nation's lands, local “drug dealers” purchase their drugs for sale from smuggling organizations and wholesale suppliers in the Phoenix and Tucson areas.

Through both intelligence and investigations, NATIVE was convinced a major influx of methamphetamine would soon significantly impact the Nation. Simply put, “the storm was coming!” To prepare for the storm, in 2016, NATIVE began introducing HIDTA's Meth 360 presentations to communities and districts. At that time, the communities were not yet significantly impacted by methamphetamine. Most communities had developed some tolerance to alcoholism, and cocaine use remained the preferred illicit drug of abuse. Not yet feeling the true impact of methamphetamine, the Meth 360 presentations initially did not resonate in the communities.

“The Storm's Aftermath”

In late-2016, TOPD began to see and feel a dramatic increase in domestic crimes, including aggravated assault, assaults, domestic violence, attempted suicides, and overdoses. TOPD Patrol cases for possession of methamphetamine were also increasing dramatically. Now feeling the full effects of the impact of methamphetamine to the Nation, NATIVE reintroduced the Meth 360 presentations to communities and districts that had requested the presentation. Almost immediately, community members began reporting methamphetamine sales within their own communities along with much more reporting concerning all forms of substance abuse. The TOPD statistics below describe the impact methamphetamine had on the Tribal communities from FY2017-FY2018:

- Domestic violence cases increased by 22.93% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Assault cases increased by 40.09% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Overdose numbers more than doubled, increasing 166% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Attempted Suicide numbers increased by 86.96% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Controlled Substance problem calls answered by TOPD Patrol increased by 38.92% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Marijuana seizures by NATIVE decreased by 44.06% in FY2018 from FY2017
- Methamphetamine seizures by NATIVE increased **2763%**, from 29.1339 kilograms in FY 2017 to 834.388 kilograms in FY2018

“We have weathered the storm...”

By FY2018, NATIVE community impact cases which had previously been predicated on patrol stops of personal use narcotics were now almost exclusively predicated from investigative leads provided by the communities and district leadership. The communities’ participation at all levels against substance abuse, along with targeted criminal investigations by NATIVE and aggressive proactive patrol functions, have resulted in a more positive trend, as reflected by the following statistics in FY2019:

- TOPD recognized a 24.5% decrease in all alcohol related crimes
- DUI cases decreased by 27%
- “Intoxicated Person” calls decreased by 12.3%
- Domestic Violence cases increased by only 2.25% compared to a 22.93% increase in FY2018
- Aggravated Assault cases decreased by 2.1%
- Assault cases decreased by 13.4%
- Overdose calls increased by 50% compared to a 166% increase in FY2018
- Attempted Suicide calls decreased by 14%
- Patrol generated controlled substance cases decreased by 44.6%
- NATIVE methamphetamine seizures decreased by 69.3%

The NATIVE Task Force has received multiple awards and has been recognized both locally and nationally for its accomplishments. Recognizing there is still a lot of work ahead to keep these numbers trending in the right direction, NATIVE is most proud that through its intelligence networks they have been able to accurately predict a dramatic increase in methamphetamine which would inevitably affect the Nation’s communities; provide notice and outreach to the communities; solicit and gain the communities’ assistance in addressing the problem; and together noticeable strides are being made to reduce the impact methamphetamine and other substances are having on the Nation so communities throughout Arizona and the United States will be safer.

Wm. Rodney Irby has over 42 years of law enforcement and intelligence experience on the Southwest Border. In 2014, Mr. Irby retired as Assistant Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations and is currently serving as Assistant Chief of Police for the Tohono O’odham Nation.