



Minnesota
**Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Relatives**
Office

Legislative Report

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office 2025 annual
report, January – December 2025

June 19, 2026

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Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office 2025 annual report

Executive summary

This report is prepared as required by [Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 6.](#)

This past year can be described as a year of contradictions. Crime statistics from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) show declines in several major violent crime categories, but high-profile incidents of violence plagued urban Indigenous communities of Minneapolis.

- Two shootings occurred just three blocks apart and claimed the lives of four young Indigenous people. Two others were critically injured.
- Gunfire wounded seven people at a South Minneapolis encampment that was home to many Indigenous residents.
- A group of residents near Little Earth came forward during a public safety forum to ask the city to do more to address violence in their neighborhood.
- Families of women who went missing or died under suspicious circumstances continue to advocate for domestic violence reform and staged several visible acts of protest.

While missing person reports and homicide numbers declined in the general population, the numbers from the BCA and new case registrations with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) Office tell another story for Indigenous people in Minnesota. Indigenous women continued to be overrepresented in reported missing person cases. Last year, Indigenous women accounted for 11.8 percent of all reported missing women in the state. That represents a jump of almost 2 percentage points from 2024. In 2025, Indigenous people made up just over 2 percent of Minnesota's population, yet they represented nearly 9 percent of reported missing persons and over 9 percent of homicide victims in the state. By far, the highest concentration of Indigenous homicides was in Hennepin County.

Despite these trends, the MMIR Office achieved several noteworthy milestones in 2025:

- The official opening and implementation of the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund tip program and expansion to include 21 unsolved MMIR cases.
- Deployment of the last of five MMIR search kits, one of which was used in North Dakota to locate two missing relatives.
- The development of a statewide MMIR prevention framework grounded in evidence-based prevention strategies and cultural education for educators, parents and caregivers.
- Digitization of the MMIR intake process to improve responsiveness in new cases.

Throughout the year, the office focused on growing and deepening partnerships — both new and long-standing — to strengthen the collective response to MMIR across the state. These efforts were guided by the understanding that this epidemic is not a series of isolated cases. It is rooted in historical trauma, systemic inequities and ongoing vulnerabilities that cannot be addressed by a single agency alone. In 2025, this engagement looked like:

- The first formal collaboration with the Office for Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls (MMBWG).
- The first criminal prosecution connected to a case registered with the MMIR Office.
- An intentional effort to visit with family from all open cases in-person.
- Community outreach and prevention activities that reached more than 2,400 Minnesotans through 27 presentations, 10 community tabling events and multiple panel discussions.
- Expanded regional and international partnerships that reached Canada, North Dakota and South Dakota.
- Deeper collaboration with other state agencies to share information, awareness materials and case referrals.

The progress documented in this report reflects the collective efforts of impacted families, Tribal Nations, community advocates, law enforcement partners, state agencies and advisory board members who have contributed their time, expertise and leadership to this work.

As Minnesota continues to confront violence against Indigenous people in all its forms, the work of the MMIR Office is needed more than ever. The milestones achieved by the office in 2025 demonstrate meaningful progress, but the more that is done, the clearer it becomes that more work remains. The office has committed to sustained investment in practical tools to help families during their most difficult moments and to foster partnerships that center families and victims in building the next solutions. In this way, the MMIR Office will ensure Indigenous relatives are not only counted, but protected, supported and remembered.

Snapshot of statistics

Office caseload as of year-end 2025

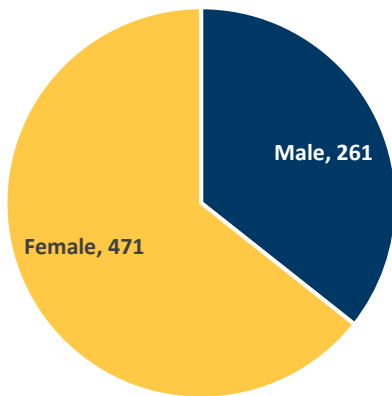
- 27 active cases
 - 13 homicide or death investigations
 - 14 missing persons cases
- 12 cases closed in 2025
 - 10 found safe
 - 1 found deceased
 - 1 prosecution
- 12 official requests for technical assistance from law enforcement or medical examiner offices
- 63 contacts to the office unrelated to a registered case

Missing Indigenous persons in Minnesota

The annual BCA reports on missing persons for 2019-2025 are publicly available on the [BCA's Missing Person Data site](#).

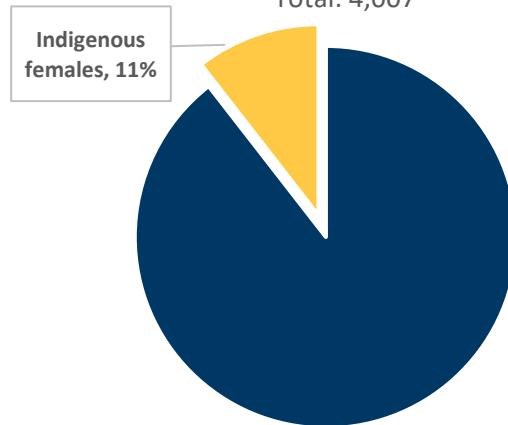
Indigenous persons reported missing in 2025

Total: 732

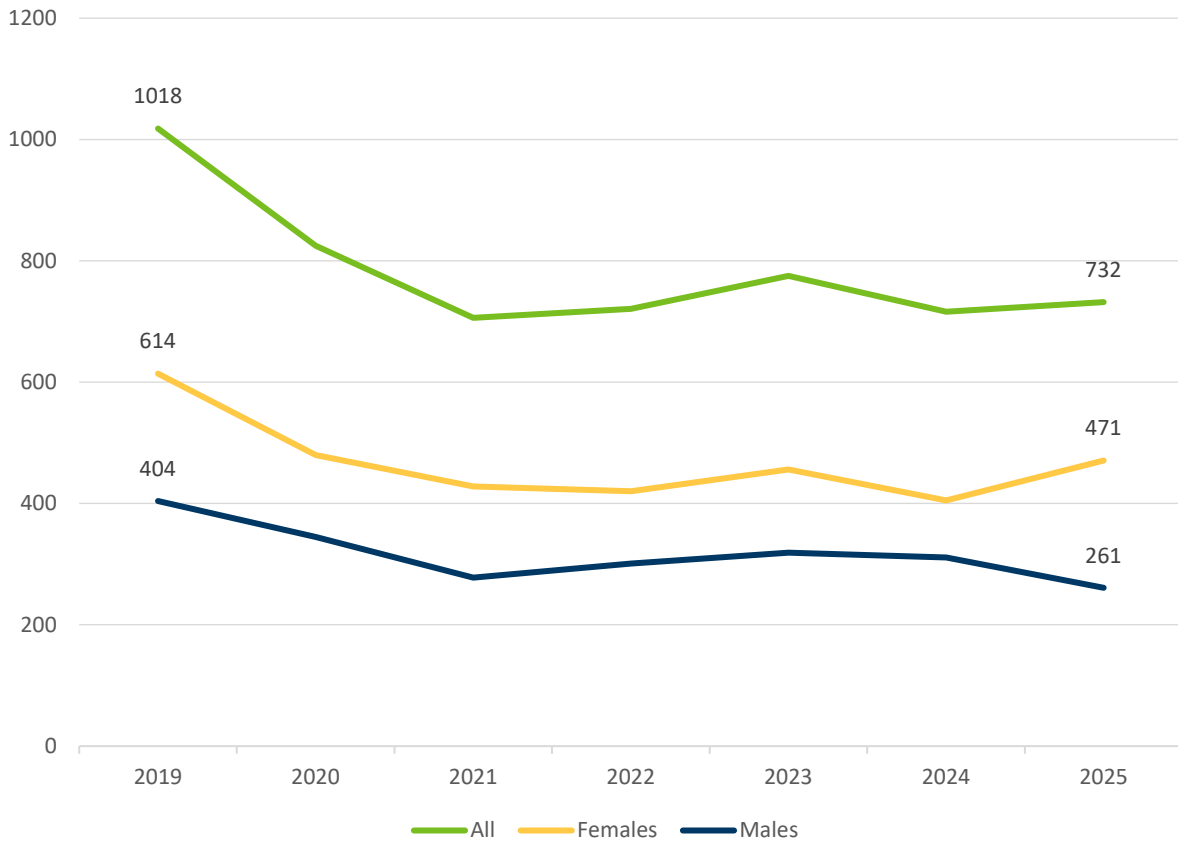


Females reported missing in 2025

Total: 4,007

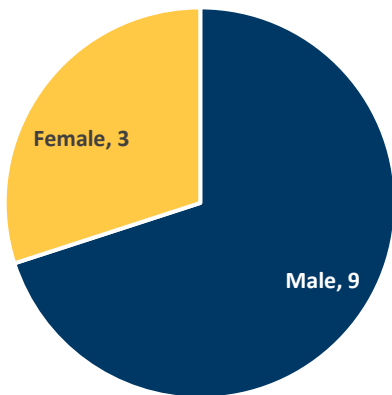


Trends in Indigenous persons missing reports

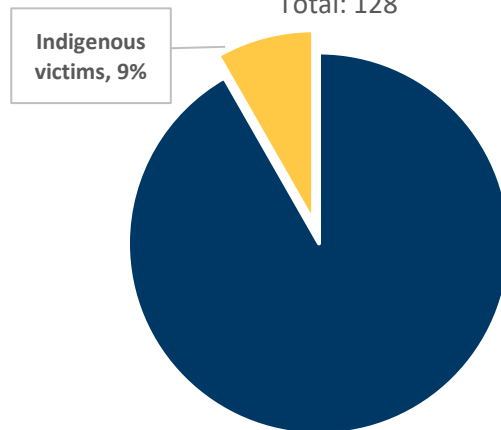


Indigenous homicide victims

Indigenous homicide victims in 2025
Total: 12



Minnesota homicide victims in 2025
Total: 128



Homicide data is sourced from the BCA [Minnesota Crime Data Explorer](#), accessed December 2025. Data on the Crime Data Explorer is updated regularly, so numbers may be different depending on the date of data access.

Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund

- 23 total cases eligible for rewards
 - 8 are homicide or suspicious death cases
 - 15 are missing person cases
- Balance available at end of calendar year 2025: \$480,034.30

MMIR specialty license plates according to DVS

- 5,291 total registered MMIR license plates

MMIR community activities

- 2,471 people touched by MMIR community outreach
- 22 separate communities reached
- 10 community tabling events
- 27 presentations

Background and statutory mandates



Gov. Tim Walz signing the legislation to create the MMIW Task Force in 2019.

In 2019, the Minnesota Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Task Force was created through unanimous bipartisan support of the Minnesota Legislature and Governor Walz. The MMIW Task Force and Wilder Research delivered [a report to the Legislature in December 2020](#). In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature established the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) Office in [Minnesota Statutes, sec. 299A.85](#).

For the December 2020 report, researchers reviewed published articles, summarized laws and policies, accessed relevant data from state systems, interviewed experts and heard public feedback to paint a comprehensive picture of the legacy of historical trauma, colonization, racism, sexism and sexual objectification of Native American women and girls that underpin the current MMIR epidemic. The report also detailed other risk factors including poverty, homelessness, system involvement, domestic violence, human trafficking, substance use and mental health. The report included 20 recommended mandates to effectively respond to the MMIR epidemic in Minnesota. The scope of the mandates was broad and addressed to policymakers.

In the 2021 legislative session, the Legislature translated the mandates from the task force report into legislation that created the office and detailed the duties for the office.

MMIR Office statutory duties

Statute requires the office to use the original 2020 MMIW Task Force Report as a guiding document and assigns it 13 core duties ([Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 4](#)). In accordance with this mandate, these duties form the operational foundation of the office. Those duties are to:

- Advocate for legislative and agency action to advance the mandates of the 2020 MMIW Task Force Report.
- Develop recommendations for legislative and agency actions to address inequities in the criminal justice response to MMIR cases.
- Facilitate research to refine task force recommendations and evaluate their effectiveness.
- Create tools and processes to measure implementation and impact of statewide MMIR efforts.
- Track and collect statewide MMIR data.
- Provide technical assistance to law enforcement and other agencies during active MMIR cases.
- Conduct case reviews including cold cases, suspicious deaths, and prosecution and sentencing patterns.
- Prepare draft legislation necessary to secure data access to conduct case reviews.
- Review sentencing guidelines and recommend improvements related to MMIR-related crimes and advocate for their implementation across Minnesota courts.
- Maintain communication with DPS divisions regarding MMIR cases and investigative procedures.
- Coordinate with federal and regional partners involved in MMIR and cold case work.

Coordination with other organizations

The MMIR Office collaborates with a broad array of public safety, government, legal and community partners who influence the collective response to MMIR across the state ([Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 5](#)). These coordination responsibilities include engagement with:

- Eleven federally recognized Tribal Nations within the state of Minnesota
- Tribal law enforcement agencies
- State, county and local law enforcement partners
- BCA and Minnesota Sheriffs' and Chiefs of Police Associations
- County attorneys and federal prosecutors
- Medical examiners and coroners
- State agencies including departments of Health, Human Services, Education, Corrections and Public Safety
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC)
- Indigenous advocacy organizations, legal service providers and victim services groups
- Urban and statewide Indigenous community leaders
- National and international partners involved in trafficking, cold case review and Indigenous justice issues

This broad and ongoing coordination is essential to dismantle systemic gaps, improve investigative responses, strengthen statewide data and ensure trauma-informed and culturally rooted support for Indigenous families and communities.

Measurable outcomes achieved

The Minnesota Legislature established the MMIR Office to coordinate response and prevention efforts and to improve outcomes for Indigenous relatives, families and communities impacted by MMIR. The impacts of this work are most visible during points of crisis when stress and emotions run high. But addressing crises alone does not build systemic change. As documented in the foundational reports to establish the office, the root causes of MMIR are systemic and deeply interconnected. They require sustained, coalition-based work to build true capacity for change.

The MMIR Office advanced this mandate in 2025 by intentionally taking a broad view of how success is measured. In addition to operational improvements, tools and programs, the office prioritized relationship-building across jurisdictional and agency lines, engaged partners to build trust, and centered Indigenous voices and feedback from impacted families at every turn.

The success stories outlined below demonstrate progress toward the Legislature’s intent that the MMIR Office function as both a coordinating body and a catalyst for systemic change. They reflect the reality that while one-off responses are necessary, building increased capacity for preparedness, regional collaboration and proactive prevention will move Minnesota closer to a public safety system better equipped to respond when Indigenous relatives go missing and prevent it from occurring in the first place.

The long journey for impacted families

For families of missing or murdered Indigenous relatives, the relationship with public safety agencies is rarely clear or linear. The 2020 MMIW Task Force Report characterized the relationship as one of long-standing mistrust. In that report, families described challenges in filing missing person reports, delayed investigations, inconsistent communication and lack of cultural understanding when they sought help. Though Minnesota has worked to address these institutional failures, these experiences continue to shape how MMIR-impacted families engage with government systems, including the MMIR Office.

The MMIR Office approaches its work with the knowledge that trust in institutions cannot be assumed. It must be earned through consistent engagement, transparency and a sustained, helpful presence.

As a result, the MMIR Office deliberately emphasized direct in-person engagement between the MMIR victim specialist and families with cases registered with the office. These visits were not limited to moments of crisis or timed with case developments. They were designed to meet families where they are emotionally and physically with the intent to prioritize the relationship, create a space for listening and show up with genuine compassion for relatives in the community.

It is crucial to emphasize that beyond the legislative mandates and official crime statistics, one of the purposes of the MMIR Office is to build trust, presence and continuity of support. This intentional effort to rebuild a foundation of trust is a core component of the systemic change needed to ultimately eliminate the MMIR crisis.



A candlelight vigil for an MMIR victim in northern Minnesota.

This relationship-centered approach came into play this past year during the first criminal prosecution connected to a case registered with the office. The journey toward justice for the victim began as this office was being created, and the path to healing for her family will likely continue well after her killer's sentence is served. Throughout the process, several Duluth-based community organizations provided a foundation of stability for the family that is rooted in trust, kinship and cultural understanding. The MMIR Office showed up daily during the trial and worked in partnership with local community organizations to extend their efforts to include coordination with victim services providers and prosecutors. The office also provided media assistance at the time of sentencing to ensure news outlets would tell the story of the victim as she lived, not as she died.

The MMIR Office also began its first official collaboration with the Office for Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls (MMBWG) in 2025. These first-of-their kind offices are working together on a homicide case in which the victim shares Black and Indigenous identities.

Families and advocates have long understood violence against Indigenous and Black women is interconnected and the working relationship on this case reflects that reality. The MMBWG Office will provide case and family support, and the MMIR Office has registered this case with the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund. By coordinating support rather than duplicating or fragmenting it, both offices ensure families experience a cohesive and supportive state presence.



Sen. Mary Kunesh addresses the crowd at the Feb. 14 Day of Remembrance and Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives at the Minneapolis American Indian Center.

Beyond case-specific duties, the MMIR Office sought to center the voices of impacted families through several acts of visibility, remembrance and community connection. Each year, the office participates in events, including the annual Feb. 14 Day of Remembrance for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives and the May 5 National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives. Last year, the office also supported the efforts of artist Anita Lovelace to create a jingle dress that bore the names of MMIR victims. The office donated dozens of bandanas to dancers from Minnesota who wanted to

commemorate their opening dance at the Black Hills Powwow in South Dakota to MMIR victims and boarding school survivors.

These efforts reflect the central premise that centering Indigenous voices and prioritizing families is not a symbolic addition to the office's work; it is core to its ongoing mission. Families consistently expressed that the acts of public acknowledgment, cultural respect and visible remembrance matter deeply, especially when they come from a system that has historically overlooked Indigenous lives.

Search kit deployment has regional impact

After the MMIR Office assisted in its first search effort in 2023, families and Tribal governments began requesting access to equipment and operational guidance to safely and effectively conduct organized searches. The office developed a search kit initiative under [Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 5](#) and [sec. 299A.85, subd. 4\(7\)](#), which directs the office to provide technical assistance to jurisdictions and agencies to improve responses to MMIR cases.

The purpose of the search kit initiative is to ensure that organized searches are conducted safely, effectively



and in coordination with law enforcement so that any evidence recovered would be usable in an investigation.

The office placed the last of five search kits with the Lower Sioux Tribal Police Department in May 2025. Kits are also located in Red Lake Nation, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

Kits are available for use by the public and law enforcement agencies. One additional kit is located at the MMIR Office in St. Paul and remains with staff for rapid deployment as needed.

Ana Negrete delivers the last search kit to the Lower Sioux Indian Community in Morton, MN.

Each kit contains:

- 10 two-way radios to mitigate communication barriers and keep communication open between all search groups
- 10 GPS devices for precise and accurate mapping of grid lines and to keep track of what areas have not been searched
- 100 high-visibility safety vests
- 10 walking sticks
- Traditional medicines such as tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass
- Additional consumables for 100 volunteers such as first aid kits, rain ponchos and whistles
- Manuals with logistical guidance for community-led and law-enforcement led searches

By placing kits in advance, the MMIR Office strengthened local capacity to ensure searches are not delayed due to lack of equipment or logistical readiness. The initiative represents a scalable, practical model for supporting Indigenous communities during their most urgent and traumatic moments in accordance with the office's statutory mission. The office continues to refine this approach with updates to written guidance and equipment.

While designed for use in Minnesota, the impact of the search kit program has extended beyond state borders under the context of [Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 4\(13\)](#). Tribal partners in North Dakota engaged in extended search efforts for multiple missing Indigenous relatives from the Spirit Lake region, several of which utilized the MMIR Office's search kit. In 2025, two relatives were located in North Dakota using that search kit.

The regional use and relevance of these kits highlight the importance of continued investment in shared capacity-building strategies. The MMIR Office's search kits have contributed to a broader regional emphasis on preparedness, standardized search practices and interstate cooperation. North Dakota is now working on its own search kits and other MMIR mitigation strategies based on shared learnings from Minnesota. The next planned step to support these efforts will be to work with Tribal Nations interested in developing a Tribal community response plan.

Building a statewide prevention education framework

While the MMIR Office was created with a clear and urgent mandate to prevent and end the targeting of Indigenous relatives, the MMIR epidemic cannot be addressed by one office alone. Rooted in this reality, the MMIR Office violence prevention coordinator established a prevention framework with school partnerships, public awareness, cross-agency coordination and community engagement activities in 2025.

The office intentionally grounded this framework in Indigenous knowledge, as well as strengths-based and trauma-informed practices. Rather than a prescriptive curriculum, the office curated curricula that could be adapted locally while maintaining consistency with evidence-based prevention principles. Such flexibility respects the varied needs of Indigenous communities, which span urban, rural and Tribal settings as well as a variety of age and cultural groups.



Violence prevention coordinator, Tawny Smith-Savage hands out prevention information at a community event.

Central to this effort was collaboration with schools and parents. The violence prevention specialist presented to 11 K-12 school groups and one postsecondary/graduate-level class. These sessions addressed MMIR awareness, protective factors, healthy relationships and pathways to safety in an age-appropriate manner. The office coupled community outreach with handouts and printed literature about how to access state resources such as the Minnesota Department of Health's Safe Harbor and BCA Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force services.

This on-the-ground presence was bolstered by work with the Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC) and the American Indian Parent Committees (AIPACs). These relationships will help guide outreach strategies and informed engagement for 2026 and beyond.

Overall, prevention efforts reached more than 2,400 individuals through 27 presentations, 10 community tabling events and multiple panel discussions including focused engagement during Feb. 14 and May 5 events. These events provided opportunities to share prevention messaging with youth, families, elders, service providers and allies. They reinforced the idea we are all part of the solution to the epidemic of violence we call MMIR.

Deepening community engagement and public awareness

The MMIR Office deepened community engagement and public awareness efforts in 2025 ([Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.86, subds. 4\(a\)\(1\), \(4\); 5](#)). Trust, visibility and consistent presence in community are key to building effective prevention and response. Through several different channels, the MMIR Office incorporated an ongoing practice of relationship-building rooted in respect, reciprocity and accountability to the Indigenous communities across Minnesota.



MMIR Advisory Council Chairman Monte Fronk speaking about his experience as part of an MMIR-impacted family.

The MMIR Office visited more than 20 communities in the state, including urban, rural and Tribal locations. It held engagement activities at cultural events, health fairs, Tribal schools and colleges, conferences, remembrance gatherings and community-led awareness events. These engagements enabled the office to share information about MMIR prevention and response while hearing directly from families, survivors, elders, youth and advocates.

Public awareness activities focused on elevating the voices of Indigenous relatives and community leaders. During the annual Minnesota American Indian Institute on Alcohol and Drugs conference in Fond du Lac, the office

worked with attendees to develop a brief video in which participants reflected on how MMIR has impacted them and how they have healed using cultural practices.

The MMIR Office expanded its digital and media presence to support education beyond in-person engagement. The office added a new prevention section to the website specifically for educators and prevention practitioners. There they can find curated, culturally grounded curricula, toolkits and a booklist for students and educators. The office shared these resources with schools, service providers and community partners to support ongoing learning.

Community engagement in 2025 also included co-organizing film screenings and awareness campaigns for Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Throughout the year, community members consistently expressed appreciation that the MMIR Office visited not only during crises but showed up during opportunities for prevention activities as well. The visibility helped build trust in state systems, increased awareness of available support systems and reinforced that prevention and education are integral to public safety.

A steep increase in calls for technical assistance

As the MMIR Office invested in relationships with community partners and families in 2025, it did the same with law enforcement, medical examiners, prosecutors, Tribal Nations and other public safety partners. The relationships resulted in a marked increase in requests for technical assistance.

These requests occur most often when jurisdictional boundaries, data limitations or multiple vulnerabilities such as trafficking, substance use or suspicious deaths complicate an investigation. Partners now routinely turn to the office to assist with complex cases, navigate sensitive situations and help bridge gaps across agencies and jurisdictions.

Key partnerships of 2025 driven by technical assistance

- In conjunction with a BCA investigator, the MMIR Office developed a case study addressing the intersection of MMIR and human trafficking. The case began as a child protection concern but revealed human trafficking targeting Indigenous women. The case study follows the challenges and MMIR intersections from investigation through prosecution and was presented at the International Association of Human Trafficking Investigators Conference. This led to an invitation for MMIR's intelligence specialist to be the keynote speaker at North Dakota's Human Trafficking Bakken Summit.
- The MMIR Office developed a close collaboration with the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office. Subsequently, the office's intelligence specialist was invited to speak at the Minnesota Medical Examiners statewide conference about MMIR and how medical examiners can help improve statewide data. The presentation opened new relationships with other medical examiners and death investigators across the state.
- The MMIR Office had already built strong relationships with law enforcement and community partners on both sides of Minnesota's northern border. Those relationships were strengthened when the office assisted with the return of a suspected trafficking victim in 2024. The office's intelligence specialist and community planner were invited to an all-expenses-paid speaking engagement for a second year by the EmpowerMen Project Conference in Canada to present on key issues impacting trafficking responses and investigations.

Digital improvements reshape the case intake process

The MMIR Office modernized one of its most time-sensitive protocols, the case intake process, in 2025. This process provides the legal disclosure and notification requirements that give law enforcement permission to communicate with the office about case details. Crucially, it also gives the MMIR Office authorization to legally distribute missing persons materials with the name, photograph and case information for missing person and homicide cases.

Previously, case intake was an email- and paper-based process that was difficult for those without access to a printer or who might be working primarily from their phone. Staff sometimes traveled across the state to obtain the necessary signatures, adding hours if not days to the process of formally onboarding a case and releasing flyers to the community.

The new digital workflow significantly reduces time spent on manual processing and travel, enabling the team to focus on direct support to families and coordination with law enforcement. The new intake-to-flyer workflow electronically captures required approvals, documentation and information so staff can begin to draft a flyer with a pre-approved template within minutes of receiving a case. The office's ability to move quickly and accurately while remaining grounded in relationship-building has strengthened trust with community and improved the visibility of cases statewide.

Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund

The Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund was established by [Minnesota Statutes, sec. 299A.86](#) in 2023 and is administered through DPS. At the time it was established, the Legislature provided the reward fund account with a one-time transfer of \$250,000 from the general fund.

The reward fund's goal is to provide a concrete tool to help advance unresolved cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous relatives in Minnesota. This model ensures the reward fund remains both community-supported and publicly accountable.



Sen. Mary Kunesch speaks at the official opening of the MMIR reward fund on Jul. 23, 2025.

This historic initiative offers rewards of up to \$10,000 for tips on eligible investigations into missing persons, suspicious deaths and homicides. It was specifically designed to complement, not replace, law enforcement investigations by creating a structured and transparent pathway for actionable tips. It also supports awareness efforts, searches and community-led initiatives.

The initiative reflects years of advocacy by families, Tribal Nations and community partners who called on the state to create new investigative momentum for MMIR cases that had gone unsolved for far too long.

In Ojibwe, the name Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag means “They will be remembered forever.” It was selected to center remembrance, dignity and visibility for both victims and the families who have translated their grief into action at the state level.

Although the goal of the reward fund's tip program is simple, the underlying policy and procedure took time, careful attention to detail and collaboration across multiple agencies and partners. MMIR staff worked diligently to build a process that maintains a tipster's confidentiality throughout the reward evaluation and award process while preserving the integrity of the information provided.

It also created fiscal checks and balances in conjunction with the reward fund advisory group to ensure the proper stewardship and accountability for the fund's monies. The reward fund was officially opened to accept tips, pay out rewards and accept requests for community initiatives on July 23, 2025.

Families who have been impacted by MMIR, Tribal representatives and community members were consulted on how funds from the reward account will bring awareness to cases, educate the public and prevent future violence. [Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.86, subd. 5](#) explicitly authorizes the MMIR director, in consultation with the reward advisory board, to spend up to 4 percent of available funds on an advertising or public relations campaign to increase public awareness on the availability of rewards.

Families with an open case or a community impacted by MMIR may request support from the reward fund for printing billboards or flyers, making press announcements and social media, or paying for specialized search equipment and logistical support.

License plates helped build sustainable funding stream



A central feature of the reward fund’s plan for long-term sustainability is the MMIR specialty license plate program. Developed in partnership with DPS’ Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) division, the license plate, introduced in February 2024, provides Minnesotans with a visible way to demonstrate solidarity with efforts to combat MMIR while contributing directly to the reward fund through their annual tab renewal.

The MMIR license plate features a red handprint, which symbolizes the historic silencing of the violence Indigenous people have faced for generations and the dedication to hearing those voices moving forward. The ribbon skirt on the license plate includes the sacred colors — red, white, yellow and black — of the four directions: north, south, east and west.

Each MMIR license plate includes a \$25 annual contribution deposited into the Minnesota Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives account. As of mid-November 2025, 5,291 active registrations display MMIR license plates, including 99 motorcycle plates. Funds in the account are available for MMIR investigation of unsolved cases and for rewards related to missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. The steady growth in MMIR license plate registrations demonstrates broad public support from everyday Minnesotans who want to play a role in advancing justice in MMIR cases.

Criteria for rewards

The reward fund operates under clear, publicly defined criteria to ensure integrity, transparency and equitable application across all eligible cases. To be eligible for an award, cases and tips must meet certain criteria:

- Eligible cases: Cases must have completed the MMIR intake process and be open with a law enforcement agency.
- Tip value: Tips must provide specific and actionable information that advances the investigation.

- Exclusions: Tipsters involved as suspects or accomplices are not eligible for payout, nor are deceased tipsters.

The amount of the award is determined by the lead law enforcement agency investigating the case. The reward fund’s policy outlines defined reward amounts in terms of their impact on the investigation. A conviction is not required for any reward tier.

- Between \$1,000 and \$2,500: For tips that result in significant investigative progress identifying persons of interest, primary suspects or accomplices.
- Up to \$5,000: For tips that lead to the arrest of a suspect or suspects, or substantial progress in the investigation.
- Up to \$10,000: For tips on long-term missing or homicide cases that result in location of remains, support the decision to prosecute or result in case closure.

These criteria were intentionally structured to balance investigative needs with community trust, ensuring rewards encourage meaningful participation without compromising case integrity.

Table 1: Full list of reward-eligible cases as of Dec 31, 2025

Name	Case type	Notes
Amarie Alowonle	Homicide	Joint case with MMBWG
Jojo Boswell	Missing	
Melissa Burt	Missing	
Leo Coleman Cortez	Missing	
Mato Dow	Missing	
Armando Day	Homicide	
Melissa Eagleshield	Missing	
April Geyer	Missing	
Eleanore Halverson	Missing	
Jeremy Jourdain	Missing	
Nevaeh Kingbird	Missing	
Allison Lussier	Suspicious death	
Peter Martin	Missing	Additional \$5,000 from Bureau of Indian Affairs
Taylor Mahto	Homicide	
Douglas McFarlane	Homicide	
Kateri Mishow	Missing	
Frank Ortley	Homicide	
Mario Martinez Ramirez-Hernandez	Homicide	

Name	Case type	Notes
Sheila St. Clair	Missing	
Timothy Stone	Missing	
David Storbakken	Missing	
Robert Taylor	Homicide	

Balancing governance, oversight and community trust

The reward fund is supported by a seven-member Reward Fund Advisory Group, whose role is central to ensuring the program operates with fairness and accountability. The board brings together representatives from law enforcement, community and impacted families to consult with the MMIR Office on the reward fund’s progress and implementation.

As outlined in [Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.86, subd. 4](#), the advisory group is tasked with making recommendations on:

- Paying rewards
- Supporting community-based efforts through funding community-led searches and search kits
- Funding for community-led communications and outreach, including but not limited to billboards and other media-related expenses
- Funding activities and programs to gather information on missing and murdered Indigenous women, children and two-spirit relatives and to partner with and support community-led efforts
- Developing, implementing and coordinating prevention and awareness programming based on best practices and data-driven research
- Any other funding activities and needs

Current members of the advisory group are:

- Chair Nicole Matthews, chief executive officer, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition
- Merlin Deegan, public safety director, White Earth Nation
- Selena Garza, licensed independent clinical social worker
- Rene Ann Goodrich, MMIW218
- Kim Mammedaty, attorney, Hennepin County Attorney’s Office
- Caroline Palmer, interim supervisor, Violence Prevention Programs Unit, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
- Ana Negrete, community planner, MMIR (non-voting member)

Creating new pathways for justice

The reward fund was officially opened to operation July 23, 2025, and the first six months of accepting tips has already marked a meaningful shift in how unresolved MMIR cases are supported in Minnesota.

One of the most significant milestones occurred when the reward fund received its first formal case referral from law enforcement to consider an active investigation for reward eligibility. The referral represents more than momentum in a single case. It sends a clear signal that the reward fund is being actively integrated into investigative practice across the state.

This success was the result of months of behind-the-scenes coordination, including the development and refinement of supporting policy and procedure, education for investigators on eligibility criteria and assurance that reward decisions could be made without any delay or compromise to tipster anonymity.

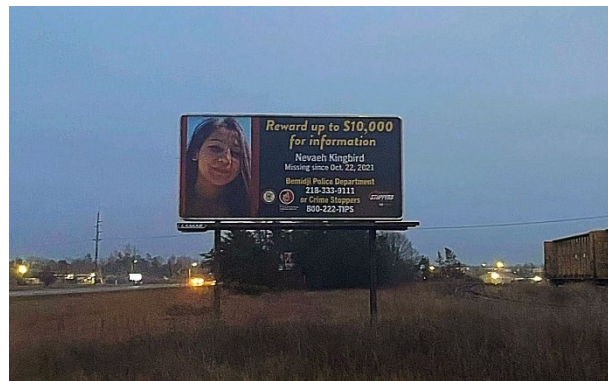
The successful submission of this request helped pave the way for a replicable model for case referrals that will be fully operational and readily available to all law enforcement and system partners in 2026 and beyond. Prior to this referral, the MMIR Office would only accept cases that were accompanied by an enrollment from family members or loved ones. For the first time, the referral has allowed law enforcement to leverage community-held information aided by a transparent, state-supported reward program.

This major step forward for the reward fund sends a strong signal Minnesota and the MMIR Office are prepared to invest sustained operational resources to create new tools that advance justice for Indigenous relatives.

Expanded partnerships and public awareness

Recognizing a reward for information is only effective if communities know it exists, the MMIR Office prioritized outreach and awareness efforts as core components to the reward fund's implementation in 2025.

Clear Channel Communications entered into a zero-dollar contract with the MMIR Office in 2024 to raise awareness of unsolved MMIR cases. Billboards publicized eight long-term missing cases to several hundred thousand drivers in Minneapolis, Burnsville, Shoreview, Mounds View, Maplewood and Columbus Township. Thanks to an expansion of the partnership with Clear Channel Communications, the office expanded the cases advertised on billboards to include all reward-eligible MMIR cases.



Billboard in Bemidji advertising rewards of up to 10,000 in an active MMIR case.

In accordance with statute, the reward fund supports awareness efforts tied to individual cases.

The office has instituted a request process whereby families may request professionally printed flyers or additional billboards in locations specific to each case. The office tries to process those requests in the order the cases were originally enrolled with the office, but due to billboard availability and varied print needs, requests are fulfilled on an as-available basis.

Billboard advertising can be expensive. The MMIR Office leveraged its long-standing relationships with both Clear Channel Communications and Lamar Advertising to ensure reward fund monies can stretch as far as possible. Both companies have generously donated community-specific advertising space. Although negotiations are ongoing, in many instances, the MMIR Office has only been asked to pay for the cost of printing static billboards.

Billboard placements are designed to:

- Increase visibility of reward opportunities in specific communities relevant to each case.
- Reach individuals who may not engage with traditional media or social platforms.

- Reinforce awareness that actionable information can make a difference.

These partnerships significantly extend the reach of the reward fund and reflect a broader strategy of meeting communities where they are both geographically and culturally to encourage participation.

Table 2: Reward Fund expenditures

Date	Purpose	Amount
October 2025	Spirit Lake Resort – Meeting with Council President and family	\$100
October 2025	MINNCOR flyer printing	\$535

Data and statistics on missing and murdered Indigenous relatives

Statewide trends in missing Indigenous relatives 2019-2025

As we look back on missing person report data from the BCA, across Minnesota the total number of missing person reports has steadily declined over the past six years. Overall reports fell from more than 10,500 cases in 2019 to just over 8,300 in 2025, a decrease of over 21 percent. Missing person reports for Indigenous relatives show a similar downward trajectory, dropping 28 percent during the same time period.

Despite this progress, a disproportionate number of Indigenous people go missing in Minnesota every year. Indigenous people make up 1.5 percent of Minnesota's population, yet even with declines in overall missing person numbers, they consistently represent between 8 and 10 percent of all reported missing person cases.

The picture is even more complex for Indigenous women.

Even as absolute numbers of Indigenous women who go missing in Minnesota fell, they continue to represent between 10 and 12 percent of all women who go missing statewide every single year and roughly 5 to 6 percent of all missing person cases. That number declined slightly during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic but spiked sharply in 2025, rising from 10.1 to 11.8 percent. Given this disparity has not shifted over time, it suggests there are structural risk factors at play that continue to increase the risks for Indigenous women and girls in Minnesota.

Although Indigenous women make up only about 1 percent of Minnesota's population, they account for 6 percent of all missing person reports. That is roughly six times their population share. And the sad reality is we know this data does not capture the full picture because this crime is underreported.

At the same time, we also see a gradual shift in the gender distribution within Indigenous missing person cases. While the cases for both men and women have decreased over the past six years, the decline has been steeper among men. As a result, Indigenous women now make up a slightly larger proportion of Indigenous missing person reports than in earlier years.

The persistence of these disparities over time, despite significant declines in case volume, confirms what was laid out in the 2020 MMIW Task Force report: the epidemic of violence we call MMIR is driven by systemic risk factors, and within Indigenous communities, it hits women the hardest. These trends underscore the continued urgency of the MMIR Office's work to improve prevention, response, data collection and partnership across the state.

Table 3 and Table 4 present missing persons data in Minnesota from the BCA. The annual BCA data reports on missing persons for 2019-2025 are publicly available on the [BCA's Missing Person Data site](#).

Table 3: Number of missing persons in Minnesota from the BCA, 2019-2025

Year	Total	Females	Males	Indigenous total	Indigenous females	Indigenous males
2025	8,358	4,007	4,351	732	471	261
2024	8,599	3,995	4,301	716	405	311
2023	8,993	4,491	4,502	775	456	319
2022	8,489	4,328	4,161	721	420	301
2021	8,226	4,158	4,068	706	428	278
2020	9,265	4,658	4,607	825	480	345
2019	10,521	5,230	5,291	1,018	614	404

Table 4: Percentage of Indigenous missing persons in Minnesota from the BCA 2019-2025

Year	Indigenous total	Indigenous females as percentage of missing females	Indigenous females as percentage of total missing	Indigenous males as percentage of missing males	Indigenous males as percentage of total missing
2025	8.8%	11.8%	5.6%	6.0%	3.4%
2024	8.3%	10.1%	4.7%	7.2%	3.6%
2023	8.6%	10.2%	5.1%	7.1%	3.54%
2022	8.5%	9.7%	4.95%	7.2%	3.55%
2021	8.59%	10.3%	5.2%	8.5%	4.2%
2020	8.9%	10.3%	4.4%	7.49%	3.7%
2019	9.68%	11.74%	5.84%	7.64%	3.84%

Missing Indigenous relatives cases filed with the MMIR Office

[Minnesota Statutes, sec. 299A.85](#), directs the MMIR Office to “track and collect Minnesota data on missing and murdered Indigenous women, children, and relatives, and provide statistics upon public or legislative inquiry” and to include data and statistics on these cases in its annual reports “to the extent the data is publicly available.” This disclosure is one way the office fulfills those statutory duties while also complying with data classifications under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. Information classified as private, confidential, non-public or protected non-public has been withheld or redacted consistent with those legal requirements.

Cases become active with the MMIR Office when families or survivors seeking assistance in an MMIR case formally register through the office’s intake process. Once a case meets the office’s eligibility criteria, it is tracked for the purposes of support and coordination in accordance with statute.

Table 5: Anonymized data on missing person cases filed with the MMIR Office

Date missing	Sex	Lead law enforcement agency	Resolution
January 2025	F	Fond du Lac Police Department	Found safe
March 2024	M	Fond Du Lac Police Department	Missing
October 2014*	F	White Earth Police Department, Becker County Sheriff’s Office	Missing
November 2023	F	Itasca County Sheriff’s Office	Missing
September 2005*	F	Owatonna Police Department, Minneapolis Police Department	Missing
January 2019*	M	International Falls Police Department	Missing
May 2025	M	St. Paul Police Department	Missing
August 2025	M	Minneapolis Police Department	Missing
January 2025	F	Fond du Lac Police Department	Found safe
October 2017*	M	Redwood Falls Police Department, BCA	Missing
August 1998*	F	BCA	Missing
August 2015*	F	Duluth Police Department	Missing
March 2024	M	Fond du Lac Tribal Police Department	Missing
January 2007*	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Missing
October 2021*	F	Bemidji Police Department	Missing
October 2016*	M	Bemidji Police Department	Missing
July 1981*	M	Anoka Police Department	Missing
July 2025	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
August 2025	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
September 2025	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
September 2025	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
October 2025	M	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
November 2025	F	Minneapolis Police Department	Found
July 2025	F	Anoka County	Found

*Denotes a missing person case that predates the founding of the office.

Statewide trends in homicides of Indigenous relatives

Homicide data from the BCA for the past five years shows a persistent and disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities in Minnesota, despite a significant drop in the homicide rate statewide. Although Indigenous people make up just over 2 percent of the statewide population of Minnesota, they account for between 3 and 9 percent of all homicide victims. Most notably in 2025, when the state saw one of its lowest homicide totals in recent memory, Indigenous victims represented their highest share of statewide cases.

Data available on the Crime Data Explorer shows a clear geographic concentration of this homicide activity in Hennepin County. In the past five years, the majority of Indigenous homicide victims each year were killed within Hennepin County. Beltrami County accounts for the second-highest number of Indigenous homicide victims during this same period.

Table 6: Homicide data from the BCA, 2021-2025

Homicide data is sourced from the BCA [Minnesota Crime Data Explorer](#), accessed December 2025. Data on the Crime Data Explorer is updated regularly, so numbers may be different depending on the date of data access.

Year	Homicides in Minnesota	Indigenous homicide victims	Percentage Indigenous homicide victims	Indigenous male homicide victims	Indigenous female homicide victims	Indigenous homicide victims in Hennepin County
2025	128	12	9.38%	9	3	9
2024	304	12	3.95%	8	4	9
2023	172	8	3.09%	7	1	3
2022	244	12	4.92%	10	2	7
2021	304	5	1.64%	4	1	4

Table 7: Anonymized data on homicide cases filed with the MMIR Office

Sex	Date of death	Lead law enforcement agency	Reward status	Case status
M	April 25, 2019	FBI	Not eligible	Open
M	Dec. 31, 2023	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	June 20, 2025	FBI, Red Lake Nation Police Department	Not eligible	Open
M	July 4, 2025	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	Aug. 4, 2020	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	Dec. 2, 2006	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	Nov. 17, 2020	BCA, Mille Lacs Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	Oct. 28, 2022	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	April 29, 2025	Minneapolis Police Department	Not eligible	Open

Sex	Date of death	Lead law enforcement agency	Reward status	Case status
M	Aug. 3, 2025	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open
M	Nov. 17, 2020	BCA, Mille Lacs Police Department	Eligible	Open
F	May 4, 2025	Robbinsdale Police Department	Eligible	Open

Suicide, overdose and other suspicious death cases under review

The Legislature charges the MMIR Office with duties to conduct case reviews for cold cases, suspicious deaths that have been ruled as suicide or overdose, and reviews of prosecution and sentencing where perpetrators committed violent crimes against Indigenous people, with an emphasis on identifying repeat offenders (Minn. Stat., sec. 299A.85, subd. 4-9).

Using existing staff, the MMIR Office has fulfilled this duty in a limited, project-based capacity and leveraged strong partnerships and interagency working groups to assist. Notably, multidisciplinary team partnerships with MDH and the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office have been able to focus on select cases. The efforts highlight the additional need to focus on complex MMIR cases where shared learning could improve future investigations or system response.

Table 8: Anonymized data on suspicious death cases filed with the MMIR Office

Sex	Date of death	Lead law enforcement agency	Reward status	Case status
M	Jan. 20, 2024	Duluth Police Department	Not eligible	Open
M	Feb. 22, 2024	Minneapolis Police Department	Eligible	Open

Technical assistance to law enforcement

The MMIR Office’s intelligence specialist offers technical assistance in the form of specialized expertise, tools and resources to law enforcement, medical examiners, Tribal Nations, service providers and other partners in cases involving missing or murdered Indigenous relatives. As a non-law enforcement agency, the MMIR Office does not conduct investigations, nor does it supersede jurisdictional authority. It is designed to be additive and is available to assist law enforcement and medical examiner’s offices with:

- Victim identification and case linkages
- Creation of multidisciplinary teams and facilitate information sharing across agencies
- MMIR, trafficking or substance use disorder expertise
- Analysis of open-source public data
- Data recovery
- Trainings, presentations and briefings
- Cultural considerations, statewide data gaps and best practices
- Case consultation or case review

The MMIR Office experienced a significant increase in complexity and volume of technical assistance requests in 2025. As awareness of the office grew and relationships with partners began, more agencies turned to MMIR’s technical assistance services to help navigate complex investigations, especially on cases that intersected with human trafficking, suspicious deaths and vulnerabilities for MMIR.

Table 9: Requests for technical assistance in 2025

Date	Requestor	Request
January	St. Paul Police Department	Request to assist in responding to questions from a family regarding the medical examiner’s ruling on cause of death. The intelligence specialist reviewed the autopsy report and investigative steps taken. Also contacted the Family Violence Unit investigator and a Victim Specialist within the City Attorney’s Office as a resource for domestic violence.
March	Shakopee Police Department, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office	Facilitated clarification and correction of jurisdictional authority over a case listed with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
March	St. Paul Police Department, Ramsey County Medical Examiner	Assisted medical examiner and St. Paul Police Dept. with the identification of a deceased Indigenous female.
April	Duluth Police Department	Assisted with family contact for an emergent missing person case.
July	Office of Justice Programs, Minneapolis Police Department	Background research on a call received about a murder in Minneapolis from the 1990s.
September	Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, Minneapolis Police Department	This case is an active long-term missing person investigation with the MMIR Office. Assistance from the intelligence specialist requested to analyze information, engage with family members to obtain additional context and review individuals who were not interviewed.
September	St. Paul Police Department	Assistance from the intelligence specialist to support information sharing and coordination between law enforcement and family on investigative details.

Date	Requestor	Request
September	MMIR victim specialist	Family requested to explain the process and jurisdiction concerns when a missing person reported in Minnesota is believed to have traveled to another state.
October	Bloomington School District	Assembled multidisciplinary team and advised on practical steps for a high-risk youth.
November	Hennepin County Medical Examiner	Technical assistance provided to help in coordinating culturally appropriate cremation services with an individual's last-known next of kin.
November	BCA	Technical assistance was requested regarding a case that is eligible for the Reward Fund.
December	Community member, BCA Minnesota Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force	Ongoing assistance to BCA agent with identifying survivor-centered strategies to maintain a sex trafficking victim's engagement with law enforcement and support services upon jail release.

Looking ahead

Launch of the new three-year strategic plan

As the MMIR Office enters its next phase, it has reached a pivotal moment for strategic alignment and long-term planning.

The office was created with a wide-ranging set of legislative mandates. Early efforts to implement the mandates as written highlighted the need for further alignment between legislative expectations, staff capacity and the realities of operating within Minnesota's state government system. The MMIR Office commissioned an independent consultant in 2025 to conduct a review intended to help the office refine the path forward and create a roadmap that builds on existing strengths.

The strategic planning process was not intended to be a full-scale overhaul of the office. Over the course of seven weeks, the office gathered input from impacted families, advisory council members, reward fund advisors, law enforcement and victim services partners, grassroots advocates and colleagues from other state agencies. They gave input on ways the office could strengthen its foundation, clarify long-term priorities and expand the tools available for meaningful action.

Across the board, these partners called for clearer communication, stronger alignment between mandates and staff capacity, and more intentional coordination across systems.

At the core of the strategic plan is a renewal of the office's commitment to the findings in the 2020 MMIW Task Force Report. That report demonstrates how the root causes of MMIR intersect with current risk factors to increase the risks to Indigenous relatives in Minnesota. The report identifies an urgent need for coordinated, culturally grounded responses across public safety, health, justice and social systems.

The strategic plan embraces the ideas laid out in the MMIW Task Force Report but categorizes the legislative mandates into core priorities, items that require additional resources, data or authority, and long-term macro-level changes. The result is a shared roadmap of the office's work for the next three years that will be refined in partnership with community, partners and families through a coordinated rollout throughout 2026.

In addition, the office will undertake a significant reorganization of its advisory board to better align the board's structure with the scope and urgency of the office's work. This revamp will include:

- Establishing working subcommittees focused on priority areas such as prevention, data and case review, family support and systems coordination
- Clarifying roles and expectations to ensure the board functions as an active, solution-oriented body rather than a solely advisory forum
- Appointing a new board chair and co-chair

This renewed structure is intended to elevate family voices, deepen subject matter expertise and support sustained progress on complex, cross-system challenges.

Strategic priorities 2026-2029

The strategic planning process of 2025 outlined five priorities for the MMIR Office to focus on from 2026-2029.

Throughout 2026, these will be refined and validated through a series of intentional community consultations throughout Minnesota. These consultations will serve a dual purpose:

- To ensure that the priorities of the MMIR Office align with the needs of community,
- To communicate and build familiarity with the goals of the MMIR Office.

Priority 1: Center impacted families and Indigenous leadership

The MMIR Office exists because of the relentless advocacy of impacted families. This priority affirms their leadership and ensures all aspects of the office's work are grounded in lived experience, cultural knowledge and community-defined healing and justice.

Priority 2: Strengthen partnerships and cross-system coordination

The MMIR epidemic is bigger than any one agency. This priority affirms the MMIR Office's role as a connector. By building trust, clarifying roles and strengthening response systems, the office can support more coordinated and culturally grounded action.

Priority 3: Clarify and deliver on mandates

The MMIR Office was created through a bold set of legislative mandates shaped by years of advocacy. These mandates are foundational, but they vary in complexity, feasibility and scope. This priority focuses on moving forward with integrity and honoring the intent behind each mandate while building realistic pathways for implementation.

Priority 4: Build visibility, understanding and public awareness

The epidemic of MMIR is ongoing and often invisible. This priority focuses on building public understanding, expanding access to information and creating culturally grounded tools that help families, communities and partners engage with the office. Visibility is not just about recognition; it is about connection, education and safety.

Priority 5: Sustain the work through policy, data and infrastructure

The epidemic of MMIR cannot be addressed with short-term responses. Sustained change requires strong internal systems, reliable data, strategic funding and long-term planning. This priority ensures the MMIR Office is built to last while staying grounded in cultural accountability and community needs.

