



# The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors

"Excellence Through Leadership in Forensic Science Management"

## 2017-2018 National Outreach Priorities & Agenda

### ➤ **Accreditation**

ASCLD supports mandatory accreditation of forensic science service providers (FSSPs). ASCLD believes the accreditation of all FSSPs is an essential quality component. This applies to all FSSPs including public, private, or academic crime laboratories, digital/multimedia laboratories, crime scene units, law enforcement identification units, or similar organizations that perform testing in the field or laboratory in which the end-product results in issuing a conclusion and/or the potential of rendering an expert opinion. Accreditation, with ISO/IEC 17025 and/or 17020 based international standards as currently offered by our strategic partners, provides confidence and assurance to a parent organization, its employees, the criminal justice community, and the public that the provider can meet the most comprehensive forensic quality management system requirements. Resources must be provided to achieve and maintain accreditation.

### ➤ **Ethics**

The fair and objective practice of forensic science is critical to the successful administration of justice. FSSPs and practitioners bear a tremendous responsibility to perform their duties professionally and with integrity. ASCLD supports the Department of Justice's "Code of Professional Responsibility for the Practice of Forensic Science" adopted in 2016. ASCLD encourages the adoption of this Code by all FSSPs including incorporating it into FSSPs' quality management system for all staff.

### ➤ **Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Program**

ASCLD supports the continual funding of the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Program to the levels authorized in the 2016 Reauthorization of the Justice for All Act (JFAA). It is imperative the Coverdell program continues to focus on capacity building, backlog reduction, accreditation of FSSPs, and training for forensic professionals. Requisite appropriations should match the authorized amounts. Future authorizations and appropriations should continue to increase with profession needs and technology advancements. Current grant funding is restricted to accredited FSSPs or FSSPs using funding to seek accreditation. ASCLD supports enforcement of this provision.

### ➤ **Grant Reform and Funding of the Forensic Science Profession**

Federal funding of forensic initiatives is a significant factor in the advancement of the forensic profession and the criminal justice system. Current and future funding should be supported by the Administration and authorized and appropriated by Congress for continuing efforts. Future levels should also increase to meet forensic science mission needs and technology advancements. This includes programs such as DOJ, HHS, DOD, NIST, and DOT grant programs.

ASCLD also recognizes there is an enormous inequity between funding for DNA and all other forensic disciplines. Forensic DNA capabilities in the US have been fundamentally improved through focused grant funding over many years. Federal grant funding should be expanded and funding levels increased to meet the needs of all forensic disciplines. ASCLD encourages the federal government to utilize the information gained through the authorized 2016 JFAA Needs Assessment and other forensic profession assessments to guide and inform the expansion of federal grant funding programs for non-DNA forensic disciplines.

The Federal government's role is the equal application of justice. It should continue to play a critical role in assisting the FSSPs through major core services such as national databases (e.g. - NDIS, NIBIN, ABIS). Federal resources are needed to implement standards equally.

Additionally, state and local governments should assess the needs of their jurisdictions and provide adequate support for sufficient staffing, technologies, and infrastructure. Ninety-five percent of all forensic work is delivered at the state and local level. Funding for these organizations should be primarily a state and local function. Without sufficient support at the state and local levels, long-term advancement of forensic science will lag and backlogs will persist.

ASCLD generally recognizes that current NIJ grant application and management processes are overly burdensome to many FSSPs. Efforts should be made available to assist in meeting these requirements successfully through training, administrative support, and improvements in grant management technologies.

➤ **Sexual Assault Evidence Backlog Reduction**

ASCLD encourages the collaboration of all criminal justice stakeholders to build comprehensive programs to include the collection, inventory, tracking, submission, analysis, investigation, and appropriate prosecution of sexual assault cases that are trauma-informed and victim-centered. Sexual assault cases often include evidence beyond the sexual assault kits. Testing of the additional evidence requires a multidisciplinary approach (e.g. toxicology, latent prints, digital evidence, drug chemistry, firearms, and trace evidence). ASCLD supports increased, sustainable funding for all disciplines to be used for the training and analysis of sexual assault evidence. ASCLD also supports legislation designed to reduce the number of sexual assaults that occur. Funding, research, and training for more efficient laboratory methods are needed to address this criminal justice issue.

➤ **Rapid DNA**

ASCLD recognizes and supports the development, validation, and implementation of proven technologies to include Rapid or Fast Capture DNA and appreciate the importance of these advances to forensic science. To ensure the criminal justice system can fully benefit from the potential of this technology, we believe a methodical and measured approach is critical to its success and widespread implementation. In addition to field studies, appropriate levels of secure information infrastructure need to be built, meaningful policy must be developed, and appropriate training programs need to be devised and delivered.

Rigorous, scientifically defensible validation studies performed by crime laboratory scientists and researchers are critical to demonstrating the suitable application of Rapid DNA technology to the appropriate types of forensic samples. Protocols, procedures and training manuals that describe how these devices can be employed in a crime laboratory, crime

scene or law enforcement environment need to be developed and standardized. Users of the devices must be sufficiently trained to correctly interpret results, recognize non-conformities and troubleshoot technical issues involved in the DNA profile acquisition and operation of these devices.

### ➤ **National Forensic Initiatives**

ASCLD supports national initiatives to coordinate and sustain efforts to strengthen and advance the forensic science profession including:

- The development of scientific standards for the practice of forensic science.
- The accreditation of all FSSPs.
- Advocacy for resources to enable research and development, testing and evaluation, technology, information exchange, training and capacity building for the forensic infrastructure.
- A central, independent body within the Department of Justice that coordinates DOJ efforts related to forensic science with a mission that is solely forensic science focused.
- Leadership with practical forensic science experience, fundamental scientific education, and crime laboratory leadership.

### ➤ **Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC)**

ASCLD supports the ongoing development of policy that includes significant forensic practitioner involvement and leadership. ASCLD commits to providing members to contribute and participate in the development of national standards for the practice of forensic science. This initiative must be funded in a long-term capacity for maximum success and sustainability.

### ➤ **FSSP Organizational Structure**

FSSPs must be autonomous and independent from a parent organization per ISO standard requirements and should operate with independent budgets and operations. Independent scientific forensic analysis is a key foundation for the effective application of justice. Therefore, FSSPs that operate autonomously and independently, are protected from extraneous pressures that could compromise the ideals of independence and objectivity. Freedom from undue influence must be ensured from stakeholders, interest groups, parent agencies, and the judicial system.

### ➤ **Certification and Licensure**

ASCLD supports the certification of all forensic science professionals. Certification programs in conjunction with laboratory accreditation ensure a robust quality system that encompasses the technical, quality assurance, and managerial aspects of FSSPs. Further, certification can demonstrate a practitioner's level of discipline specific understanding and dedication to the forensic science profession in general.

ASCLD encourages certifying bodies of forensic professionals pursue accreditation of their operations and certificate offerings under relevant international standards such as ISO/IEC 17024.

ASCLD urges FSSPs, and parent agencies, to foster and encourage the pursuit of qualified practitioners to be certified. Certification programs must be funded long-term by the FSSP and applicable parent agency. Once certified, agency resources, policies, and agreements will be required to meet and keep certifications, as well as deal with the personnel implications if an individual fails to maintain certification.

ASCLD believes state licensure could be an acceptable alternative to certification if it requires a technical competence, continuing education, and accountability for malpractice.

➤ **Forensic Research**

ASCLD supports the promulgation of basic, applied, and developmental research in all scientific disciplines in the forensic sciences. ASCLD believes in multiple models that can execute this research to include academic institutions, research laboratories, and FSSPs. The research should be sensitive to the needs of the forensic science profession, address technology transfer challenges, and be in collaboration with FSSPs wherever possible.

Each federal agency (e.g. HHS, NIST, DOJ, DHS, DOD, and DOT) should have a “forensic science research advisory board” with federal, state, and local forensic science practitioners participating in the advisement of research needs, research project approvals, technology transfer, and coordination with state and local labs.

➤ **Forensic Stakeholder Education**

ASCLD believes education for forensic science stakeholders is necessary for the development of appropriate laws and policy related to forensic science, the fair and impartial administration of justice, and the preservation of the constitutional rights of all US citizens. Therefore, ASCLD provides education and training for legislators, officers of the court, law enforcement, stakeholders, and partners in forensic science. Additionally, local and national endeavors to deliver education and training to these stakeholders are of interest to all and should be pursued by FSSPs and their partners for the betterment of the impact of forensic science in our communities.

➤ **Forensic Training**

Training of forensic science professionals is a critical aspect of a productive and successful FSSP. Properly trained staff is necessary to produce high-quality results to the criminal justice system. As a requirement of the ISO:IEC 17025:2005 international standards, laboratory management shall ensure the competence of all who are responsible for producing laboratory work products to include tests, calibrations, evaluation of results, test reports, calibration certificates, and/or expert witness testimony. Competence can be established through minimum hiring requirements and a post-employment training program. The training program should include: discipline specific training, ethics, quality assurance/quality control training, annual proficiency testing, and continuing technical education.

ASCLD supports the following as best practices:

- ASCLD supports a Baccalaureate degree in an applicable science (e.g. natural science, computer, or forensic science) with at least 15 hours in science and 3 hours

- in statistics as minimum hiring requirements for new entry level scientific positions within an FSSP for employees responsible for providing expert witness testimony.
- Post-employment training programs, either in-house or external, should be standardized and incorporate practical and classroom activities culminating in written examination(s), oral board(s), competency testing, and mock court(s). Successful completion of the training program is necessary prior to beginning casework.
  - Annual continuing education of at least 16 hours is required for each analyst or technical support personnel.
  - Training in quality assurance practices, ethics, and human factors is mandatory for all forensic practitioners and management (understanding of root cause, preventative action processes, and cognitive bias).
  - Wherever possible, on-boarding of forensic science professionals should include information about and exposure to the spectrum of other forensic science disciplines.
  - Continuing education should be offered in multiple modalities to increase access and reduce costs.
  - Training and education should also exist at the leadership levels to help scientists transition from bench-level assignments to supervisory, management, and directorship responsibilities.