



# The American Society of Crime Lab Directors

*"Excellence Through Leadership in Forensic Science Management"*

## 2018-2019 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. With the ISO/IEC 17025 and/or 17020 based international standards as currently offered by our strategic partners, accreditation 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 encourages laboratories to adopt a code of ethics based on the ASCLD Model Policy for a Code of Professional Responsibility and incorporate 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 at or above 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 or exceed the authorized amounts. Future authorizations and appropriations should continue to increase with the profession's needs and technology advancements. Current grant funding is restricted to accredited FSSPs or FSSPs using funding to seek accreditation, and 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, 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, CDC, and DOT grant programs.

ASCLD also recognizes there is significant inequity between DNA funding and funding for 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. The 2016 JFAA Needs Assessment and other assessments of the forensic profession should 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 assist the FSSPs through major core services such as national databases (e.g., NDIS, NIBIN, AFIS/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, long-term advancement of forensic science will lag and backlogs will persist.

Current NIJ grant application and management processes are overly burdensome to many FSSPs. Most FSSPs do not have funding for full-time grant managers. More assistance meeting grant requirements is needed, through training, administrative support, and improvements in grant management technologies.

➤ **Sexual Assault Evidence Backlog Reduction**

ASCLD encourages all criminal justice stakeholders to collaborate on comprehensive programs for the collection, inventory, tracking, submission, analysis, investigation, and appropriate prosecution of sexual assault cases. These should also be trauma-informed and victim-centered. As sexual assault cases often include evidence beyond the sexual assault kit, testing of 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 training and analysis of sexual assault evidence in all related disciplines. Funding, research, and training for more efficient laboratory methods are needed to address this criminal justice are needed for timely and comprehensive analyses of sexual assault evidence.

➤ **Rapid DNA**

ASCLD recognizes and supports the development, validation, and implementation of proven DNA technologies such as Rapid or Fast Capture DNA to advance 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, an appropriate secure information infrastructure needs 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 when determining the suitable application of Rapid DNA technology to appropriate 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 handle samples, interpret results, recognize non-conformities and troubleshoot technical issues involved in the DNA profile acquisition and operation of these instruments.

➤ **National Forensic Initiatives**

ASCLD supports national initiatives to coordinate and sustain efforts in strengthening and advancing the forensic science profession, including:

- Development of scientific standards for the practice of forensic science;
- 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;
- Establishing 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; and
- Leadership with practical forensic science experience, fundamental scientific education, and crime laboratory management skills.

➤ **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**

FSSP's must be completely autonomous and independent from outside influence on all work products, including analytical methods, reporting, results, conclusions, opinions, etc. [Include ISO cite here] Most FSSP's work within parent organizations and governmental structures, and discussions about case priorities, funding, resources, and staffing are common. However, FSSP's should operate with budgeting and operational independence as much as possible while working to accomplish the requests of stakeholders. In all situations, FSSP's should be protected from extraneous pressures that compromise the ideals of independence and objectivity; this includes freedom from undue influence from stakeholders, interest groups, parent agencies, and the judicial system.

➤ **Certification and Licensure**

ASCLD supports the certification of all forensic science professionals, if appropriate certification programs exist. 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 manage 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 research can be performed successfully by a variety of entities 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” or similar advisory/feedback mechanism that includes participation from federal, state, and local forensic science practitioners in the advisement of research needs, research projects, 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 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 are necessary to produce high-quality results for the criminal justice system. As a requirement of ISO/IEC 17025, 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, and continuing technical education.

ASCLD supports the following as best practices:

- ASCLD supports a Bachelor of Science degree in an applicable science (e.g., natural, computer, or forensic) as a minimum hiring requirement for new entry level scientific positions within an FSSP for employees who may testify as expert witnesses.
- 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 trial(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 (e.g., understanding of root cause, preventative action processes, and cognitive bias).
- Wherever possible, on-boarding of forensic science professionals should include information about all 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.