



# The American Society of Crime Lab Directors

*"Excellence Through Leadership in Forensic Science Management"*

## 2020-2021 National Outreach Priorities & Agenda

The ASCLD National Outreach Priorities & Agenda (NOPA) is the 2020-2021 ASCLD Board of Director's position on key forensic science issues.

### ➤ Accreditation

ASCLD supports mandatory accreditation of forensic science service providers (FSSPs). ASCLD believes the accreditation of all FSSPs is an essential component of quality assurance. 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 where results, conclusions, and expert testimony are rendered. Accreditation to programs based on the ISO/IEC 17025 and/or ISO/IEC 17020 standards provide confidence and assurance to stakeholders and customers, including the criminal justice community and the public that the provider meets the most comprehensive forensic quality management system requirements. Resources, such as personnel and ongoing funding, 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 that 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. ASCLD also supports the restriction of Coverdell funding to accredited FSSPs, or to FSSPs using funding for accreditation

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

Federal funding of forensic initiatives significantly advances 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 funding levels of grant programs supporting forensic science (e.g., Department of Justice, Centers for Disease Control, Department of Transportation, Health and Human Services, National Institute of Science and Technology, Department of Defense) should increase to meet the needs of forensic science service providers, forensic science initiatives, and technology advancements. The needs of public FSSPs continue to grow as submissions increase, more comprehensive analyses are requested, and quality assurance/regulatory demands grow. These must be addressed with matched funding and resources.

ASCLD recognizes a significant inequity between funding of DNA programs 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 2019 [Report to Congress: Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices](#)

and other assessments of the forensic profession should guide and inform the expansion of federal grant funding programs for non-DNA forensic disciplines.

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

Current BJA/NIJ grant application and management processes are overly burdensome to many FSSPs. Most FSSPs do not have funding for full-time grant managers. They must author grant applications and adjustment notices themselves, including the grant awards and to other administrative and casework responsibilities. 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 survivor-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 for timely and comprehensive analyses of sexual assault evidence.

Full position statements: [Sexual Assault Evidence Kit White Paper \(2020\)](#), [NIJ National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach \(2017\)](#) and [Volume of Untested Sexual Assault Evidence Kits \(2019\)](#)

➤ **DNA Technology**

Full position statement:

[2020 Rapid DNA Position Statement with Overview](#)

[Investigative Genetic Genealogy Position Statement](#)

Note: The Position Statement on Rapid DNA dated November 2017 was superseded by the 2020 Rapid DNA Position Statement.

➤ **Forensic Science Standards Development**

ASCLD supports policies that support the ongoing development of standards with significant forensic practitioner involvement and leadership. ASCLD encourages members to participate in the development of both national and international standards for the practice of forensic science.

ASCLD supports Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) and the OSAC registry of standards and encourages forensic science service providers to evaluate and implement the standards on this registry whenever possible. The OSAC initiative must be funded in a long-term capacity for maximum success and sustainability.

ASCLD supports the development of international standards through ISO by serving as the administrator to the United States Technical Advisory Group. This group represents the United States through ANSI in the ISO forensic science technical committee (TC 272).

➤ **FSSP Organizational Structure**

FSSP's must be autonomous and independent from outside influence on all work products, including analytical methods, reporting, results, conclusions, opinions.<sup>1</sup> Most FSSP's work within law enforcement 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 accomplishing the requests of stakeholders. In all situations, FSSP's should be protected from extraneous pressures that compromise the ideals of independence and objectivity; including 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.

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<sup>1</sup> ISO/IEC 17025:2017 Clause 4.1.1, which reads "Laboratory activities shall be undertaken impartially and structured and managed so as to safeguard impartiality."

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ASCLD encourages certifying bodies of forensic professionals to 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 certification of qualified practitioners. 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 adoption challenges, and be in collaboration with FSSPs wherever possible.

Each federal agency (e.g., EPA, 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**

Educating 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. Informing stakeholders about aspects of forensic science including quality assurance and accreditation, limitations of testing, and challenges encountered in the laboratory strengthens partnerships. ASCLD provides education and training for legislators, officers of the court, law enforcement, and other stakeholders and partners in forensic science. Additionally, local and national endeavors to deliver education and training to these stakeholders benefits 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, and necessary to produce high-quality results for the criminal justice system. Laboratory management must ensure the competence of all who are responsible for producing laboratory work products, including: 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.

In addition to technical training competence, ASCLD encourages training and continuing education of those in management roles in FSSPs.

ASCLD supports the following as best practices:

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- A minimum hiring requirement of a Bachelor of Science degree in an applicable science (e.g., natural, computer, or forensic) 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), practical competency testing, and mock trial(s). Successful completion of the training program is necessary prior to beginning casework.
- 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.
- Annual continuing education of at least 16 hours should be required for each analyst or technical support personnel.
- Continuing education should be offered in multiple modalities to increase access and reduce costs.
- Training and education should also exist at all levels, up to and including top management, to help staff transition from bench-level assignments to supervisory, management, and directorship responsibilities.