

Law Enforcement Agencies and the Provision of Forensic Services

Presentation to the
National Commission on Forensic Sciences
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NCFS Directive Recommendation

The Attorney General should direct the Bureau of Justice Statistics to create a proposal for the development of a nationally representative survey to determine forensic capabilities for those who write reports and offer testimony within federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and for medical examiner and coroner offices. The survey instrument should be developed in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders organizations by the next commission meeting.

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NCFS Member Input Discussion

Purpose for gathering information on entities providing forensic services:

- to determine the impact of recommending accreditation requirement for forensic service providers

What makes up the universe of forensic service providers?

1. Publicly-funded labs
2. Law enforcement agencies
3. Private labs

NCFS Member Input Discussion

How to collect data from law enforcement agencies?

1. Two-stage sample design
 - a. Establishes a set of measures on which to stratify agencies for the 2nd stage survey;
 - b. Can address concepts more comprehensively;
 - c. Requires significantly greater resources to field, including additional funding;
 - d. Results would not be realized for several years.
2. Utilize newly developed sample-based data collection vehicle
 - a. Will yield results more quickly;
 - b. Provides a broad understanding of the issues;
 - c. Not suited to a detailed examination of the component topics.

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Summary of survey platform

The system is designed to:



- Conduct ongoing data collection from a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies;
- Field surveys that are short (approximately 30 questions; burden of 20 minutes or less) and provide findings within 6 months of initial survey administration;
- Collect and distribute information through an interactive website.

Specific elements for survey

1. Which law enforcement agencies are performing forensic services in their facilities?
 - Choose services from pick-list of options
2. Is the lab accredited? By what body?
3. Does the LEA require that analysts are certified? By what body?
4. Among LEAs with an internal facility, how many analysts do they employ in each discipline
5. What areas of forensic services does the LEA NOT cover?
 - Where do they send items for processing?

Specific elements for survey

6. Number of cases for which the LEA provided forensic services during the reference period
 - Need to define “case”
7. Number of facilities with which the LEA contracts
 - Commercial facilities
 - Public facilities
8. If state lab is available, reasons why the LEA does not use it
 - Provide pick-list of reasons (Too long to process, too costly per specimen, etc.)
9. Funding for services

Additional issues to consider for survey

What additional information is needed to assess the impact of establishing accreditation and/or certification standards for LEAs?

- Backlogs?
- Cost to agencies?
- Amount of staff time required for accreditation and/or certification?
- Measures to determine how evidence processing burden will shift to other labs?
- Other information?

Next steps

1. Work with Commission members to develop survey instrumentation – Spring 2015
2. Test and finalize survey instrumentation – Summer 2015
3. Explore options for surveying federal law enforcement agencies regarding forensic services – Summer 2015
4. Engage in discussions with other federal agencies (i.e. NCHS) about identifying forensic services provided by MEs and coroners – Summer 2015

Contact information

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