



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

NIST
National Institute of
Standards and Technology
U.S. Department of Commerce

Recommendation to the Attorney General on Proficiency Testing

Subcommittee
Accreditation and Proficiency Testing
Status
Initial Draft

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Overview

The National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) has previously adopted the policy recommendation on the Universal Accreditation of all Forensic Science Service Providers (FSSPs)¹ and a Views Document on Proficiency Testing in Forensic Science. Proficiency testing is a recognized quality control tool, and although proficiency testing is required of all accredited FSSPs, it should also be implemented by non-accredited FSSPs in disciplines where proficiency tests are available from external organizations.

ISO/IEC 17043:2010 identifies proficiency testing as an evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria by means of interlaboratory comparisons² for the determination of laboratory performance. The benefits of discipline-specific proficiency testing include:

- Evaluation of the performance of forensic science service providers for specific tests, measurements, or activities and monitoring forensic science service providers' continuing performance;
- Identification of problems and initiation of root cause analysis and corrective actions to improve testing procedures to prevent, for example, inadequate test or measurement procedures, ineffectiveness of staff training and supervision, or equipment out of calibration;
- Establishment of the effectiveness and comparability of methods and processes

It is important for proficiency tests to be sufficiently rigorous and representative of the challenges of forensic casework. It is equally important for test takers to utilize standard operating procedures when performing the testing. Proficiency test results can be a valuable tool in the evaluation of competence of the forensic community as it relates to the test and for guiding

¹ See National Commission on Forensic Science [Views Document on Definitions](#)

² ISO/IEC 17043:2010 Conformity Assessment – General Requirements for Proficiency Testing, 3 Terms and Definitions, 3.7

new research. Proficiency test providers should be willing to share their data in the aggregate and strive to collect demographic data, method/process information and standard report wording to enable a meaningful review of the population's results as an indicator of the strength of the proficiency test or the competence of the forensic community as it relates to that test (e.g. methodology or technology used).

Recommendations

The National Commission on Forensic Science recommends that the Attorney General:

- **Recommendation #1: Require all DOJ FSSP's to participate in a proficiency testing program applicable to the area(s) in which they conduct forensic analysis within three years of acceptance.**
- **Recommendation #2: Encourage other federal, state & local FSSP's, to participate in proficiency testing programs by all means possible, with any available enforcement mechanism.**
- **Recommendation #3: Require all DOJ FSSP's to seek proficiency testing programs that provide sufficiently rigorous samples that are representative of the challenges of forensic casework.**
- **Recommendation #4: Encourage external vendors that provide proficiency tests to DOJ to share their aggregate data with entities doing research and analysis.**