U.S. Department of
JUSTICE

# Department of Justice Implementation of Gold Standard Science

## 2026 Annual Report



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## I. Introduction

This report presents the Department of Justice's progress in implementing Gold Standard Science (GSS) in fiscal year 2026 pursuant to Executive Order 14303 (EO 14303), "Restoring Gold Standard Science." This annual report documents the Department's (Department or DOJ) ongoing commitment to the nine tenets of GSS and describes implementation progress and new initiatives in fiscal year (FY) 2026.

## II. Foundations of Gold Standard Science in the 2025 Report

The Department published *The Report of the Attorney General Pursuant to Executive Order 14303: Department of Justice Implementation of Gold Standard Science in the Conduct and Management of Scientific Activities* in September 2025 (the 2025 Report).[1] The 2025 Report described an extensive set of policies, practices, and activities across DOJ components that support the nine tenets of GSS. It documented the Department's longstanding commitment to scientific rigor and integrity and described how various DOJ components implement GSS principles in their respective missions. The 2025 Report is incorporated herein by reference and remains the authoritative description of the Department's foundational GSS framework.

### A. The Nine Tenets: Summary of Implementation Activities Described in the 2025 Report

Below is a summary of how the Department implemented the nine tenets of the GSS in 2025.

1. **Reproducible:** The 2025 Report described ongoing frameworks for ensuring reproducibility and replicability across its scientific activities. The Department has implemented this tenet through: the Office of Justice Program's (OJP's) National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) requirement that all grants include data management, sharing, and archiving plans with data deposited in the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD); OJP's Bureau of Justice Statistic's (BJS's) public release of methodologies, code, and microdata through NACJD; forensic science divisions' validation requirements for all analytical methods; and documentation standards across all components conducting scientific research.

2. **Transparent:** The 2025 Report described the Department's ongoing commitment to transparency within appropriate constraints for classified, law-enforcement sensitive, and protected information. The Department has furthered transparency through the following: accreditation for Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) forensic laboratories from the ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB); NIJ's open competitive grant processes, with published review criteria and public access to final reports through the National Criminal Justice Reference Service

[1] The Report of the Attorney General Pursuant to Executive Order 14303: Department of Justice Implementation of Gold Standard Science in the Conduct and Management of Scientific Activities, available at https://www.justice.gov/olp/media/1411436/dl?inline.

(NCJRS); BJS's publication of data collection methods, survey instruments, and annual publication calendars; use of Uniform Language for Testimony and Reports (ULTR) by forensic examiners; and documentation of evaluation methodologies.

3. **Communicative of Error and Uncertainty:** The 2025 Report described ongoing practices for acknowledging limitations and quantifying uncertainty, including: ULTR requirements that forensic conclusions include appropriate qualifications and limitations; statistical quantification of uncertainty in DNA analyses; NIJ requirements that funded research include study limitations and assumptions; and BJS publication of product corrections when errors are discovered and explicit discussion of data limitations in BJS statistical reports.

4. **Collaborative and Interdisciplinary:** The 2025 Report documented collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and organizations. Examples include: NIJ's multidisciplinary research teams spanning social sciences, forensic sciences, and engineering; the Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science program connecting researchers with practitioners; BJS partnerships with justice system stakeholders at all levels of government; FBI's leadership of the Scientific Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods (with more than 50 federal, state, local, and international participants); FBI's use of cooperative research and development agreements to foster collaborative relationships; and DEA and ATF collaborations with foreign counterparts, universities, and state and local partners.

5. **Skeptical of Findings and Assumptions:** The 2025 Report documented the Department's ongoing culture of constructive skepticism through: NIJ's support for critical assessments of assumptions in study designs and interpretations of findings; BJS's exploration of alternative explanations when unexpected data trends appear; objective verification processes by qualified BJS staff, other than the original author; and FBI's rigorous validation experiments for forensic methods designed to test analytical assumptions.

6. **Structured for Falsifiability of Hypotheses:** The 2025 Report described ongoing approaches designed to support hypothesis testing, including: the Department's Evaluation Policy requirement for pre-specification of evaluation designs and methods; NIJ's emphasis on randomized controlled trials and rigorous quasi-experimental designs; NIJ's requirements for logic models in program evaluation proposals, DOJ's forensic examiners' use of competing hypotheses in ULTR-compliant conclusions;; and FBI's use of likelihood ratios to evaluate competing hypotheses in DNA analysis.

7. **Subject to Unbiased Peer Review:** The 2025 Report documented ongoing peer review processes, such as: BJS's independent, multi-level review of major statistical reports by various subject matter experts; BJS's internal verification processes requiring review by staff other than the author; and transparent, well-defined review criteria for all funding opportunities.

8. **Acceptance of Negative Results as Positive Outcomes:** The 2025 Report described ongoing policies valuing null and unexpected findings: the Department's Evaluation Policy requirement to report all program evaluation results (favorable, unfavorable, or neutral); NIJ's mandatory reporting regardless of outcomes, and data deposit requirements inclusive of null results; and BJS Statistical Support Program testing that identifies methodological issues before large-scale implementation.

9. **Without Conflicts of Interest:** The 2025 Report documented broad conflict of interest (COI) policies and procedures: mandatory annual ethics training for all Department employees; the Department's Scientific Integrity Policy requirements for COI disclosure; International Organization for Standardization and International Electrotechnical Commission accreditation requirements for forensic laboratories, including impartiality standards; and OJP and Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) requirements for COI disclosure, with documented recusal procedures.

## III. 2026 Implementation Progress and New Initiatives

Department components made substantial advances in GSS implementation during FY 2026. This section highlights significant new initiatives across components, with detailed reporting from components whose missions center on scientific activities.

### A. Component Spotlight: Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics

BJS continues to adhere to regulations and policies that set standards for the integrity, objectivity, and quality of statistical information produced by statistical agencies, which directly support several GSS tenets (for example, reproducibility, transparency, communicative of error and uncertainty, skeptical of findings and assumptions, and subject to unbiased peer review).[2]

BJS continues to provide relevant ongoing training and has created new trainings and professional engagement opportunities over the past year to reinforce its obligations related to GSS, data quality, integrity, and confidentiality protection. For example:

- BJS developed and administered new staff trainings that focus on report production to ensure accuracy, transparency, objectivity, and confidentiality.

- Senior BJS leadership hosts regular office hours to provide staff with guidance on statistical methods and analysis. This continually reinforces and enhances staff knowledge and expertise, including verification, rounding rules, and significance testing and reporting

- BJS plans to administer new statistical standards trainings to continue improving the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information that BJS collects and produces.

[2] See 5 CFR Part 1321, Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units; Office of Management and Budget, Laws, Policies, and Guidelines Relevant to the U.S. Federal Statistical System, available at https://statspolicy.gov/policies; and Bureau of Justice Assistance, Data Quality Guidelines Overview, available at https://bjs.ojp.gov/bjs-data-quality-guidelines/overview.

- BJS plans to develop new staff guidance and trainings around artificial intelligence (AI) use, including how to make its statistical data AI-ready while protecting privacy and confidentiality consistent with GSS and other relevant federal guidance.

BJS has revised or developed new performance measures across all its programs to assess adherence to GSS principles. These measures are organized to directly align with the tenets of GSS, with targeted metrics to assess implementation, including:

- Metrics supporting data quality and completeness, which evaluate how well BJS programs ensure accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date data (e.g., automated criminal history record conversion rates, record accuracy percentages, and dataset revision intensity).

- Metrics supporting transparency and reproducibility, designed to track whether data, documentation and methodological materials are openly available and consistently archived (e.g., monitoring dataset archiving, documentation completeness, and public report availability).

- Metrics supporting communication of error and uncertainty, which measure how effectively BJS identifies and conveys potential sources of error in its statistical products (e.g., assessing quality assurance compliance and nonresponse bias).

- Metrics supporting collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches, which capture how BJS incorporates external expertise and stakeholder engagement into methodological planning (e.g., tracking formal partnerships, stakeholder consultations, and expert panel engagement).

- Metrics supporting management of conflicts of interest, which help ensure adherence to security, confidentiality, and ethics practices (e.g., measuring security compliance and confidentiality training rates).

BJS has also implemented timeliness metrics to ensure deliverables meet established deadlines; response-rate achievement measures to assess data collection rigor; and stakeholder consultation requirements to ensure that methodological and analytical plans are informed by diverse subject matter expertise. BJS is currently developing tools to analyze performance data and make findings available to stakeholders.

BJS continues to explore how AI tools can maximize efficiencies and support its statistical mission and operations, including the implementation of GSS, compliance with DOJ and OJP established AI use guidelines and policies, adherence to OMB and BJS data quality standards, and strengthening of its confidentiality protections. The following use cases highlight some of the ways BJS has used AI or is exploring AI's capabilities to support these goals.

- BJS is assessing how AI tools can support its operations and statistical mission, including GSS implementation, by assisting with disclosure reviews, data quality checks, and other activities to validate and improve data integrity and quality.

- BJS has used large language models to enhance its operations, including to:

    - Perform environmental scans to facilitate the strategic integration of a wide range of expertise, methodologies, and perspectives across disciplines and sectors to address emerging statistical issues related to crime.

    - Develop statistical programs that use simulated data to facilitate collaboration, reproducibility, and transparency in crime statistic production.

    - Assist staff with coding, code review, documentation, and workflow development in ways that support reproducible and transparent statistical production, subject to staff review and existing quality-control processes.

- BJS staff loaded publicly available quality and statistical standards into the AI agent built into Atlas.TI, a qualitative data handling software, and prompted AI to build out best practice themes and trends with supporting quotes from the original standards. This significantly reduced the time needed to produce recommendations for BJS standard refreshment.

## IV. Component Spotlight: Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice

NIJ provides training to all staff on GSS principles and tenets. The Department's scientific integrity official is positioned within NIJ and provides technical assistance, as necessary, to support NIJ scientists. Beginning in FY 2025, NIJ added a requirement to all notices of funding opportunities (NOFOs) that applications must include a clear statement of commitment to complying with GSS principles and tenets. NIJ also added a website page dedicated to describing the GSS tenets and providing guidance for applicants and recipients of NIJ funding.[3] This guidance includes information relevant to all stages of the scientific process, including designing studies, applying for funding, preparing final research reports and final technical summaries, and archiving study data and related materials.

NIJ moved forward with its Public Access Plan to provide transparency and access to peer-reviewed journal articles. Starting in FY 2025, all NIJ NOFOs require award recipients to (i) deposit author-accepted manuscripts (derived from NIJ-funded research) for peer-reviewed publications in a publication repository designated by NIJ and (ii) use the NIH National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central repository, enabled through an interagency agreement, as the designated free full-text archive for depositing manuscripts.

NIJ expanded the amount of information published about its research portfolios and now provides more detail about key research questions and priorities.[4] NIJ research portfolios organize ongoing research and development activities by topic, use multiple scientific disciplines

[3] About the National Institute of Justice, Gold Standard Science, available at https://nij.ojp.gov/about/gold-standard-science.
[4] About the National Institute of Justice, NIJ Research Portfolios, available at https://nij.ojp.gov/about/nij-research-portfolios.

and methods to build knowledge, and support evidence-based practices and solutions to justice challenges. To enhance opportunities for reproducibility and replication, NIJ invited applications for replication studies in two FY 2025 NOFOs, offering up to $8.7M in combined funding. Specifically, the FY 2025 "Research and Evaluation of Policing Practices" NOFO invited proposals for replication studies and evaluations, and the FY 2025 "Research and Evaluation on Violence Against Women" NOFO invited proposals for replication of seminal studies.

NIJ continues to develop performance measures and metrics for GSS compliance. NIJ measures performance through archived datasets in NACJD and other archival repositories; archived final research reports and technical summaries; staff compliance with ethics training requirements; and responses to identified conflicts of interest.

## V. Additional Component Highlights from Across the Department

Other DOJ components took various steps to enhance their implementation of GSS tenets and principles:

- ATF integrated GSS-focused training into all new employee training plans and as part of a refresher for employees on an as-needed basis.

- ATF advanced collaborative and interdisciplinary science by building a new laboratory on the Innovation Campus at Wichita State University to foster partnerships with students and faculty in relevant fields of study and research.

- ATF laboratories have evaluated AI for the examination of fired cartridge casings to be incorporated in batch processing of similar evidence. The current NIBIN-supported workflow requires substantial manual review of candidate results. That burden affects both time and effort. ATF is interested in whether AI can materially improve the process by reducing the number of items requiring review, reducing duplicate or redundant candidate returns, improving the ordering of candidates for review, and reducing the time required to perform review activities.

- The Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) Office of Research and Evaluation updated its Research Program Statement for the first time since 1999 to align with GSS and the Department's Scientific Integrity Policy and Evaluation Policy.[5]

- DEA continues to lead the international Scientific Working Group for the Analysis of Seized Drugs, reinforcing the Department's commitment GSS tenets through transparent publication of forensic guidelines, reproducible analytical protocols, and rigorous quality assurance standards.[6]

- The DEA's Basic Forensic Chemist Course is the first forensic chemist training program accredited through the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation Program

[5] U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement Research, available at https://www.bop.gov/policy/progstat/1075_001.pdf.
[6] Scientific Working Group for the Analysis of Seized Drugs, available at https://www.swgdrug.org/.

(FLETA). FLETA maintains transparency by publishing ongoing updates. such as accreditation status reports, which are publicly available at https://www.fleta.gov/site-page/performance-and-activity-reports.

- The DEA's Digital Evidence Laboratory has implemented technology that supports computer assisted review in the form of image categorization from exploited cellular devices. This technology is deployed to all DEA offices with cellular device exploitation capabilities.

- The FBI's Laboratory Division (LD) has integrated GSS tenets into its policies and standard operating procedures. Adherence to these procedures is part of the LD's quality management system. Each LD unit incorporates the tenets into its training curriculum.

- The FBI LD's Latent Print Support Unit (LPSU) is partnering with a private vendor to investigate if an AI algorithm can assess captured latent print images and determine the optimal digital image processing steps to prepare them for forensic examination. The LD captured over 12,000 latent print images from submitted evidence last year; nearly all required additional image processing for use in automated searches or examiner comparisons. If successful, this effort would replace latent print technical personnel's manual work and free resources to focus on more critical steps in the workflow. This two-year project is approximately halfway through its scheduled timeline. In March 2026, LPSU received the first deliverable for testing and feedback. Testing showed initial promise for some capture types, specifically fluorescent images, and identified other areas needing further improvement.

- OJP, which includes BJS and NIJ, archives research and statistical datasets and related materials in NACJD. NACJD employs strong data documentation practices for its archived codebooks and data dictionaries that support GSS tenets and provide a foundation for AI use. These rigorous documentation practices, which NACJD has employed for decades, support federal data AI-ready requirements.

- OVW integrated GSS principles into its FY 2025 and FY 2026 research and evaluation NOFOs. These updates focused on pre-specification, data archiving requirements, and conflicts of interest.

- OVW continues to use external peer reviewers for all research and evaluation NOFOs. All peer reviewers are required to submit documentation of COIs and sign a COI declaration. OVW removed peer review consensus calls to mitigate any agreement bias where conflicting viewpoints better inform OVW's funding decisions.

- OVW hosts "Learning Hours" once a month, with OVW-funded researchers. These events share research findings, including null findings, transparently and with attention to uncertainty and error.

- USMS supports reproducibility by using established scientific research methodologies, performing appropriate statistical analyses, and maintaining project documentation and data so results may be independently verified and reproduced by others.

## VI. Goals for the 2027 Report

For the 2027 GSS Report, the Department looks forward to providing additional information on GSS implementation, including the process of selecting a senior GSS appointee. The Department will also provide information on its work to establish internal processes to evaluate alleged violations of the requirements of EO 14303 and other applicable agency policies that govern the generation, use, interpretation, and communication of scientific information. The Department also intends to provide updates on our efforts to leverage technology and AI to advance GSS; develop GSS training and provide resources to ensure Department personnel understand and adhere to GSS tenets; and develop standardized metrics and evaluation mechanisms to assess adherence to GSS tenets and their impact on scientific quality.

## VII. Conclusion

The Department of Justice continues to fully support the tenets of GSS. These tenets align with the Department's enduring commitment to conducting rigorous and relevant science that follows professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity in all scientific matters. The Department will continue to pursue new avenues for advancing these tenets to achieve the highest standards of scientific inquiry and integrity.