



**CONSORTIUM OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
ORGANIZATIONS (CFSO)**

FLASH BRIEF

APRIL 2017

The mission of the CFSO is to speak with a single forensic science voice in matters of mutual interest to its member organizations, to influence public policy at the national level, and to make a compelling case for greater federal funding for public crime laboratories and medical examiner offices. The primary focus of the CFSO is local, state, and national policymakers, as well as the United States Congress.

-SPECIAL EDITION-

COVERDELL FORENSIC SCIENCE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

A BRIEF HISTORY

On December 16, 2016 the Justice for All Reauthorization bill became law. Following a two-plus-year effort in the United States Senate and then fiscal policy challenges in the House, the Justice for All Reauthorization Act of 2016 was signed into law at the end of the year.

Contained within this piece of legislation is the reauthorization of a grant that forensic science service providers depend on – the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants.

Simply referred to as “Coverdell” by many forensic science laboratories, the Paul Coverdell National Forensic Sciences Improvement Act originated in 2000, which was sponsored by Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), now Attorney General. The grant had been reauthorized in both the Justice for All Reauthorization of 2004 and of 2009. Upon expiration in 2014, however, Congress continued to fund it despite it not being proposed as part of the DOJ budget by the previous Administration.

RECIPIENTS AND PURPOSE

The Coverdell program awards grants to states and units of local government to aid in the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner services. Goals include:

- Eliminate backlog in analysis of forensic science evidence.
- Training
- Address emerging forensic science issues
- Educate and train forensic pathologists
- Fund Medico-Death Investigation (MDI) systems to facilitate accreditation of ME-C offices and MDI certification.

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There are two types of Coverdell grants: “base” (formula) and competitive. States may be eligible for both types of funds and units of local government may be eligible for competitive funds. In the reauthorization process that formula was restructured to be 85% formula and 15% competitive.

Historical Coverdell Appropriations:

- 2012 = \$10M
- 2013 = \$11M
- 2014 = \$12M
- 2015 = \$12M
- 2016 = \$13.5M
- 2017 = CR \$13.5M?

New Coverdell Authorizations (JFAA Reauthorization):

- 2018 = \$18.5M
- 2019 = \$19M
- 2020 = \$21M
- 2021 = \$23M

CFSO Recommended and Implemented Changes to Coverdell in the JFAA Reauthorization:

- Coverdell AUTHORIZED FY17 to FY21 tier increase to combat the House Cut-Go rules
- Changed: 75% formula to 85% formula
- Changed: minimum requirement a state receives from .06% to 1%
- Inserted: impression evidence after latent prints
- Added: impression evidence, digital evidence and fire evidence to funding allowances
- Added: to address emerging forensic science issues (such as statistics, contextual bias, and uncertainty of measurement) and emerging forensic science technology (such as high throughput automation, statistical software, and new types of instrumentation)
- Added: to educate and train forensic pathologists
- Added: To work with the States and units of local government to direct funding to medicolegal death investigation systems to facilitate accreditation of medical examiner and coroner offices and certification of medicolegal death investigators
- Agreed: new language on accreditation allowing labs more accreditation options

(1) in section 2802(2) (42 U.S.C. 3797k(2)), by inserting after “bodies” the following: “and is accredited by an accrediting body that is a signatory to an internationally recognized arrangement and that offers accreditation to forensic science conformity assessment bodies using an accreditation standard that is recognized by that internationally recognized arrangement, or attests, in a manner that is legally binding and enforceable, to use a portion of the grant amount to prepare and apply for such accreditation not more than 2 years after the date on which a grant is awarded under section 2801”;

USE OF FUNDS

At the 2017 AAFS Meeting, Luther Schaeffer, Physical Scientist/Program Manager, at the Office of Investigative and Forensic Services at the NIJ, shared a presentation entitled *What Can We Learn from the Coverdell Grants?: Data Mining the Coverdell Grants to Assess their Impact on the Forensic Community*. The presentation shares information from a data mining project in which the FY2015 and FY2016 budget details were reviewed to qualitatively assess how Coverdell funding has been allocated. Special thanks to Luther Schaeffer and NIJ OIFS for allowing CFSO to publish this data in this newsletter.

	Applications Received	Awards Granted			
		Formula (Base)	Competitive	Both	Total
FY2015	173	49	20	2	71
FY2016	161	52	20	2	74

	Amount Funded		
	Requested	Awarded	% Funded
FY2015			
Base		\$8,075,665	
Competitive	\$16,062,290	\$2,541,888	16
Total		\$10,617,553	
FY2016			
Base		\$9,171,293	
Competitive	\$16,716,264	\$2,716,525	16
Total		\$11,887,818	

After review of the budget details and narratives, allocations were categorized into 5 general categories:

- General survey of expenditures
- Conference & Travel
- Workshops & Courses
- Certifications
- Accreditation

General Survey of Expenditures

Forensic science service providers used grant funding to purchase 42 pieces of laboratory instrumentation, maintenance, parts/accessories, and service contracts in FY2015 and FY2016. The most common instrument purchased was a GC/MS followed by FTIR/FTIR Accessory, GC-FID and UV/Fluorescence Spectrometer.

General laboratory equipment was also purchased with these grants with DSLR cameras and accessories, forensic/alternative/laser light sources, and microscopes making up the top three types of equipment.

Grant recipients also used funding to purchase software and licenses with lab management and impression evidence software being most popular. In addition, labs used grant funding to purchase digital hardware with computers being most popular.

Other expenditures in the general category included outsourcing and overtime.

Trainings

Of the total funds awarded, 41% were used to allow personnel to attend 19 different conferences/meetings. The International Association of Identification (IAI) National meeting, Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE) Annual Training Conference, and American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Annual Scientific Meeting were the top three meetings attended by grant recipients.

Categorizing the conferences and training attended by discipline, general forensic science trainings that included multiple forensic disciplines was most popular, followed by conferences with training specific to fingerprints/latent prints, and firearms.

Workshops & Courses

Fifty-four percent of the grants were used to fund training. By far, chemistry and toxicology training were the most popular among grant recipients followed by trace/physical evidence and fingerprints/latent prints.

Of the 296 registrations for chemistry and toxicology training courses, 115 of these were for general forensic chemistry training. General toxicology training comprised 110 of the registrations funded by the grants. The remaining course registrations were in DEA drug training, SOFT conference workshops, Agilent (or similar) GC/MS Training, and clandestine lab investigation.

Certifications

The FY2015 and FY2016 grant awards included 83 budgeted certification fees. International Association of Identification (IAI) was the largest request with a variety of certifications in crime scene, latent prints, bloodstain pattern analysis, and footwear as examples. The American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigation (ABMDI) was most frequent followed by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) and the American Board of Criminalistics (ABC). Various IT and computer forensic courses rounded out the certifications funded. These professional certifications require candidates to be engaged and experienced in the profession, successfully complete examinations, and maintain the certification with continuing education and professional development.

Accreditations

Forensic science service providers used grant awards to assist in accreditation. Twenty-four labs used awards toward ASCLD/LAB accreditation and 11 labs used grant funding toward ANAB accreditation. Five labs used awards toward ABFT/ANAB accreditation, five others used the awards to fund accreditation from an unspecified organization, and two labs used awards toward NAME accreditation. In 2016, the accrediting body ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) acquired ASCLD/LAB.