



Criminalistics Section – 2005

B62 Census of Publicly Funded Crime Laboratories - 2002

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By attending this presentation, attendees will receive an overview of a recently completed census of the nation's publicly funded crime laboratories.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing forensic laboratories and policy makers with crime laboratory's staffing patterns and caseload characteristics, as well as their resource needs.

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The Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), in collaboration with the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD), was funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to undertake a census of all publicly funded crime laboratories throughout the United States. Because this was to be a census, responses were sought from every, individual crime laboratory in the nation. UIC was asked to gather baseline statistical information for 2002 on the operations and workload of crime laboratories, and to assess where added resources were needed. The objective was to improve public understanding of the work performed and resources committed to crime laboratories.

Staff worked extensively with ASCLD and the crime lab community to develop a comprehensive listing of laboratories. The survey itself had six primary areas: Organization, Budget, Staff, Workload, Outsourcing, and Quality, Training, & Research. First the governmental entity and population of jurisdictions served was determined, and types of forensic functions performed in each laboratory. Next, the budget breakdown of each laboratory was examined, and source of funding. We then determined laboratories' workloads and queried labs about the number of cases received and backlogged, and the volume of requests received, worked and backlogged in 2002. Also determined was the performance expectations that laboratories had of various examiner specialists, and what added resources would be needed to reduce backlogs. Questions were asked about the number of requests outsourced, as well as the cost and funding sources for such testing. Lastly, laboratory accreditation was determined, the types of proficiency tests in which they were engaged, and the dedication of resources to training and research. Facilities had the option to respond either via paper or electronic form.

The process began with a mailing list of 469 facilities that were queried to ascertain if they met the definition of a publicly funded crime laboratory. Ultimately, 126 entities were excluded that were either duplicates, bad addresses, or did not meet the definition of a laboratory; e.g., many crime scene and police ID units were excluded. Three hundred forty three (343) laboratories remained on the list as bona fide crime laboratories. Once it was determined that all survey responses from all laboratories willing to complete the primary survey were received, an abbreviated (short) survey was developed and directed to the remaining, nonresponding laboratories. Two hundred eighty-six 286 full and 25 short (partial) surveys were received from participants – a total of 311 individual laboratory responses, representing a response rate of about 90%. Also received were 15 aggregate responses representing multiple laboratories in state or federal systems.

Data were initially compiled and published via a BJS Fact Sheet for the fifty largest state and local laboratories in the United States. These facilities employed more than 4,300 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel in 2002 and had budgets exceeding \$266 million. Laboratories received almost one million cases in that year, including over 1.2 million requests for forensic services. The requests represented about *half* of all requests for forensic services handled by publicly funded laboratories nationally. These labs ended the year with over 93,000 backlogged cases including about 270,000 requests for forensic services – more than *twice* the backlog that existed at the beginning of the year. It was DNA analysis were backlog was increasing the fastest; i.e., for every DNA analysis request completed in these laboratories in 2002, an estimated two requests were added or remained outstanding at yearend. A summary of all data collected will be presented at the meeting.

Crime Laboratories, Survey, Backlog