



B137 FORESIGHT: A Business Approach to Improving the Nation's Forensic Laboratories

Max M. Houck, MA, West Virginia University, WVU Forensic Science Initiative, 3040 University Avenue, PO Box 6217, Morgantown, WV 26506-6217*

The goal of this presentation is to inform the attendees about the FORESIGHT Project, its methods, and preliminary results.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an understanding of how forensic laboratories function as “businesses” and why, through an in-depth metric analysis, they can enhance and improve their functions.

Managers of scientific laboratories see themselves as scientists first and managers second; consequently, they tend to devalue the managerial aspects of their jobs. Forensic laboratory managers are no different but the stakes may be much higher given the importance of quality science to the criminal justice system. The need for training and support in forensic laboratory management has been recognized for many years but little has been done to transition the tools of business to the forensic laboratory environment.

A study in Europe, called *Quadrupol*, did an in-depth analysis of four forensic laboratories in the European Union. At the 2006 International Forensic Business and Economics Colloquium, it was decided that a similar study would benefit United States forensic laboratories. FORESIGHT is a business-guided self-evaluation of forensic science laboratories across North America. The participating laboratories represent local, regional, state, and federal agencies. Faculty from the WVU College of Business and Economics are providing assistance and guidance. The process involves standardizing definitions for metrics to evaluate work processes, linking financial information to work tasks and functions. Laboratory managers can then assess resource allocations, efficiencies, and value of services—the mission is to measure, preserve what works, and change what does not. While the Census of Public Crime Laboratories and the International Association for Identification Forensic Service Providers Survey approach the forensic industry broadly, FORESIGHT will show processes, strategies, resources, and allocations at a highly detailed level. A project of this magnitude for forensic laboratories has not been carried out anywhere. The ten laboratories involved operate at the local, state, and federal level. They are:

- Centre of Forensic Sciences (Toronto, Canada)
- Colorado Bureau of Investigation
- Georgia Bureau of Investigation
- Illinois State Police
- Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
- Orange County Forensic Science Service (California)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Forensic Laboratory (Texas)
- Virginia Division of Forensic Sciences
- Washington State Patrol
- West Virginia State Police

Definitions were kept as similar as possible to the *Quadrupol* study. Differences in human resource and management structure made some topics unrelated or irrelevant, while others had to be redefined for use in the United States. The results of FORESIGHT will be comparable to other studies that will be conducted in Europe and in Australia. It is hoped that international cooperation will improve forensic laboratory performance and increase the quality and efficiency of their services to their respective justice systems. This project is being conducted with support from the National Institute of Justice.

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