



## Jurisprudence Section - 2016

---

### F6 The Value of a Customer Working Group: A Customer's Perspective

*Kristine Hamann, JD\*, 360 First Avenue, #10C, New York, NY 10010*

---

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the benefits of having an ongoing relationship between senior members of a public forensic laboratory and senior members of its regular customers — the police and prosecutors. Such a Customer Working Group (CWG) can provide essential input to the laboratory on a variety of issues including backlogs, irregularities in the laboratory, and the implementation of new procedures and reports.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by improving coordination between public forensic laboratories, police, and prosecutors so that backlogs, irregularities, and improvements can be discussed appropriately, efficiently, and quickly.

Forensic work is improving as scientific standards for forensic laboratories are evolving and becoming more rigorous. The demand for forensic work continues to increase and is spurring an increase in the number of forensic scientists and forensic disciplines. The boom in forensic science comes with new responsibilities and tasks, particularly for the laboratory director of a public forensic laboratory. Laboratory directors have to manage a diverse workforce, deal with budgetary constraints, and stay abreast of developing science, all while maintaining a quality system and dealing with growing backlogs based on requests from a criminal justice system hungering for more scientific evidence. Maintaining accreditation, improving efficiency, hiring and training scientists, as well as the responsibility of triaging of work to avoid backlogs, are all ongoing issues for a laboratory. In grappling with all of these matters, especially backlog concerns, laboratory directors will benefit from working closely with their regular customers.

A preliminary question is, “Who is the customer?” Though there are many stakeholders of a public forensic laboratory, including the criminal justice system as a whole, the funding authority, judges, law enforcement, the defense, and the agency to which the laboratory reports, these parties are not all regular customers of a laboratory. Police and prosecutors provide the vast majority of work to the laboratory and are the laboratory’s regular customers. General guidelines for a laboratory’s relationship with customers can be found in the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 17025, Section 4.7. It emphasizes the value of ongoing communication and cooperation between the laboratory and the customer in order to clarify customer requests and to allow customers to monitor the laboratory’s performance. Thus, it is important that the laboratory receives regular feedback from its regular customers — the police and prosecutors.

This presentation will outline the value of a CWG to a public forensic laboratory. The CWG can be instrumental in giving the laboratory director input on high-level policy issues of mutual concern, such as backlog reduction, how to respond to irregularities in the laboratory, the implementation of new forensic tests, problems with Laboratory Information Management Systems, and the updating of report-writing protocols. A CWG provides a forum through which its members can learn from each other, develop a consistent means of communication, and generate ideas for improving the laboratory.

---

#### **Customer Working Group, Prosecutors, Police**