



### H72 The National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Laboratory Collaboration: Using Next Generation Identification (NGI) to Solve Unidentified Persons Cases

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand new efforts that resulted in the identification of more than 190 Unidentified Persons (UP) cases over the course of six months.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining how new technology and enhanced methods for fingerprint identification can be used to solve UP cases.

In 2007, NIJ reported on the "Nation's Silent Mass Disaster," describing the more than 100,000 active missing persons cases and more than 40,000 sets of unidentified human remains in the United States.<sup>1</sup> At the time, resources to assist with unidentified remains and missing persons were minimal and disjointed and something needed to be done. Two principal needs were identified. The first was a centralized repository for the nation's unidentified and a way to capture essential information, including biometrics that would allow for comparisons with open missing persons cases. The second was a way to close the communication gap among agencies, jurisdictions, and the public so they could share information, collaborate on cases when needed, and help relatives searching for family members. To help meet these needs, the NIJ created the NamUs. By the end of 2007, NamUs' unidentified decedent database was online, followed by the missing persons' database. NIJ continued to expand the system and added another complimentary database for unclaimed persons that includes deceased people who have been identified, but for whom no next of kin has been located to claim them. As of July 2017, 14,389 UP cases have been entered into NamUs, but 11,483 of these cases remain open. Many of the unidentified human remains residing in NamUs are not readily identifiable. Of the active UP cases in NamUs, only 24% were noted to have recognizable faces. Factors that prevent visual recognition of the decedent include, but are not limited to, burning/charring, insect predation, traumatic injury, decomposition, or skeletonization of the body due to environmental factors.

In February of 2017, the FBI Laboratory and NIJ's NamUs initiated a partnership to begin searching all UP fingerprints through the FBI's NGI system. NGI provides the criminal justice community with the world's largest and most efficient electronic repository of biometric and criminal history information.<sup>2</sup> Using a different type of capability that allowed a more pointed search of each individual finger, a total of 2,184 individual fingerprint images (both 10-print cards and individual recordings) representing 1,465 individual UP cases were submitted to the FBI Laboratory Latent Print Support Unit and, within four months, a total of 193 identifications were effected. Of the 193 UP cases, 12% of the cases were ruled homicides and 31% were undetermined.

Many criminal justice agencies, including medical examiners and coroner's offices, are not aware of this program or have not considered re-examining fingerprints from unidentified decedent cases, especially since the implementation of NGI which came online in 2013. The new searching capabilities and enhanced methodology now available can more effectively identify fingerprints and should be considered by all medical examiners' and coroners' offices, even if previous searches resulted in unsuccessful outcomes.

#### Reference(s):

1. Ritter, N. (2007, January). Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains: The Nation's Silent Mass Disaster. *NIJ Journal*. (256).
2. Next Generation Identification at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/fingerprints-and-other-biometrics/ngi>.

#### Unidentified Remains, NamUS, Next Generation Identification