

**Priority 1:**

*Funding for CSI/Pattern disciplines, especially at local agency levels*

- Committee was unable to find specific funding set aside for crime scene and pattern evidence.
- The largest funders that can provide forensic funding are Byrne JAG and Coverdell
  - Byrne JAG has many earmarks setting aside funds, which reduces the money in the competitive pool, which forces FSPs to compete with many other projects, including those outside the forensic domain
  - Latest Coverdell solicitation was heavily focused on opioids
  - Coverdell does not have dedicated funds for CSI or Pattern Evidence
  - The current Coverdell structure gives too much discretion to the State agencies on how funds are to be distributed, often leaving local, county, municipal, and tribal FSPs unfunded
  - Coverdell funds that are general can be allocated to training or personnel; many managers would choose to use these funds for personnel, resulting in funds not getting allocated for training, which is also needed.
  - Coverdell funding requires Forensic Science Service Providers (FSSPs) to be accredited. However, unaccredited FSSPs also (in some cases, more so) need funding in order to approve and be in a position where they can seek accreditation.
- **We request CFSO advocate for specific carve-outs in Byrne and Coverdell funding for CSI and pattern evidence support. This funding should also have significant percentages set aside for award to local, county, municipal, and tribal agencies. We additionally request that a new funding stream be created to help FSSPs that are not currently ready to achieve accreditation get ready. These funds could be contingent upon demonstrating a commitment to implementing OSAC standards and working toward doing so. Once an FSSP achieved accreditation, they would become eligible for Coverdell funds and no longer be eligible for this new funding stream. Finally, we request a specific carve-out in Coverdell funds for training only that cannot be used for other purposes.**

**Priority 2:**

*Funding to support implementation of OSAC standards*

- OSAC standards are being promulgated that are designed to improve the quality and reliability of work done by forensic FSSPs.
- Many FSSPs, especially smaller ones, have challenges in implementing these standards and guidelines due to costs, training, personnel needs, etc.
- **We request federal funds to support FSSP in the implementation of OSAC standards.**

**Priority 3:**

*Training opportunities in CSI and pattern evidence*

- Training funds may come from JAG or Coverdell, but there are not other consistent sources (see Priority 1 for challenges around small agencies accessing these funds)
- A separate carve out for quality training in CSI and pattern evidence is needed
- These training opportunities should be offered to practitioners at no cost up to the attendance cap, much as the old FBI training courses or Pattern and Impression Symposia trainings were
- **We strongly support a broad initiative to identify and fund groups who can offer free (i.e., government funded), high-quality training in CSI and pattern evidence topics**

**Priority 4:**

*Accreditation of forensic certification programs, FSSPs, and certification of practitioners*

- Forensic Certification programs have been widely called for as a measure of examiner competence in their fields and have been lauded by organizations such as NCFS and NRC as desirable in every forensic discipline
- To ensure excellence in the offered certification programs, rigorous standards should be met, which are best evaluated through the accreditation of these programs
- This is a time-consuming and very costly process – the costs often exceed what can be recouped from certification fees, without raising those fees to cost-prohibitive levels
- Likewise, the costs of achieving accreditation and certification are generally high and often cost-prohibitive.
- **For the improvement of the forensic science field, federal funds should be made available to non-traditional FSSPs seeking to achieve accreditation for their forensic certification programs and to FSSPs seeking accreditation and individuals seeking certification.**

**Priority 5**

*AFIS Interoperability*

- NIST has developed a data format (ANSI/NIST-ITL 1-2011 NIST Special Publication 500-290 Edition 3) that allows for interoperability but needs to be implemented by vendors and agencies. This includes an Extended Feature Set (EFS)
- NIST has also developed administrative guidelines for RFPs for AFIS and MOUs for interoperability
- NIST regularly performs benchmark tests of multiple AFIS systems
- NIST is developing a tool to allow agencies to test their system's entries for interoperability
- What is needed is a pilot test with selected agencies to develop workflows and SOPs, assess performance, identify barriers, and measure impacts. This would provide the data

needed for the final push to implementation of AFIS interoperability to vendors and agencies.

- **We request that funding be made available for federal and state entities to do the necessary pilot test, followed by an outreach program to inform agencies of what is possible and how to get their vendors to support interoperability.**

**Priority 6:**

*Establishment and funding of case management units within FSSPs*

- The NAS “Strengthening forensic science in the U.S.” publication in 2009 illustrated concerns that forensic scientists were vulnerable to cognitive and contextual biases.
- The National Commission on Forensic Science also focused on the issue of contextual biases in Forensic Science and began to define what is “task-relevant information” forensic scientists need to render reliable conclusions.
- William Thompson published an NIJ-sponsored paper (2018) based on research he did on “developing effective methods for addressing contextual bias in Forensic Science” <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252784.pdf>
- Now is the time to focus funding on helping FSSPs and Agencies begin to implement processes that shield FSSPs from task irrelevant information.
- **We strongly support the allocation of funding to: 1) support LIMS vendors to change how the FSSP sees the information that was entered when a case was submitted and 2) make funding available to labs to establish case management protocols that minimize task-irrelevant information being passed on to FSSP and to support sequential unmasking, when required in a case**

**Priority 7:**

*Mental Health*

- Forensic practitioners, in particular CSI personnel, are exposed to a variety of visual stimuli, stories, and other potentially psychologically traumatic events in their line of work that put them at risk of adverse mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and a suite of effects commonly known as “vicarious trauma” that include post-traumatic stress disorder, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout
- These mental health conditions can negatively impact both employee and workplace, manifesting in symptoms and outcomes such as anxiety, intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, numbness, absenteeism, self-medication, performance decrements, and suicidality, among others
- An emphasis on self-care, mental health support for forensic practitioners, training in mental health responses, and research and implementation supporting interventions in the forensic workplace are needed

- **We strongly support funding for research into interventions to ameliorate the potential psychological trauma that forensic practitioners are exposed to, including earmarked funds to assist agencies with implementation and culture shifts to better support resiliency amongst forensic practitioners**