

Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

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Program

The Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program (the Coverdell program) awards grants to states and units of local government to help improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner/coroner services. Among other things, funds may be used to eliminate a backlog in the analysis of forensic evidence and to train and employ forensic laboratory personnel, as needed, to eliminate such a backlog. State Administering Agencies (SAAs) may apply for both "base" (formula) and competitive funds. The Department of Public Safety is the SAA for the State of Maine. Units of local government may apply for competitive funds.

A state or unit of local government that receives a Coverdell grant must use the grant for one or more of the following purposes:

- To carry out all or a substantial part of a program intended to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services in the State, including those services provided by laboratories operated by the State and those operated by units of local government within the State.
- To eliminate a backlog in the analysis of forensic science evidence, [1] including, among other things, a backlog with respect to firearms examination, latent prints, toxicology, controlled substances, forensic pathology, questioned documents, and trace evidence.
- To train, assist and employ forensic laboratory personnel as needed to eliminate such a backlog.
- To address emerging forensic science issues (such as statistics, contextual bias, and uncertainty of measurement) and emerging forensic science technology (such as high throughput automation, statistical software, and new types of instrumentation).
- To educate and train forensic pathologists.

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- To fund medicolegal death investigation systems to facilitate accreditation of medical examiner and coroner offices and certification of medicolegal death investigators.

Eligibility

States and units of local government may apply for National Forensic Sciences Improvement Act (NFSIA) funds. States may be eligible for both "base" (formula) and competitive funds. Units of local government within States may be eligible for competitive funds and may apply directly to National Institute of Justice (NIJ). Any State application for funding must be submitted by the Coverdell State Administering Agency (SAA). (Other interested state agencies or departments must coordinate with their respective SAAs.) Each applicant must satisfy the specific application requirements outlined in this announcement, the general requirements for NIJ and OJP grants, and all other applicable legal requirements.

The Coverdell law (at 42 U.S.C. § 3797k(4)) requires that, to request a grant, an applicant for Coverdell funds must submit:

- A certification and description regarding a plan for forensic science laboratories.
- A certification regarding use of generally accepted laboratory practices.
- A certification regarding forensic science laboratory accreditation.
- A certification and description regarding costs of new facilities.
- A certification regarding external investigations into allegations of serious negligence or misconduct. See below for important notes and guidance regarding this certification.

Expected Results and Outcomes

The result of Coverdell grants to applicant States should be a demonstrated improvement over current operations in the quality and/or timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services provided in the State, including services provided by laboratories operated by the State and services provided by laboratories operated by units of local government within the State. Reduction of forensic analysis backlogs is considered an improvement in timeliness of services. The result of Coverdell grants directly to units of local government should be a demonstrated improvement over current operations in the quality and/or timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services provided by the local jurisdiction.

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Use of Funds

The types of expenses listed below generally may be paid with Coverdell funds:

- Personnel. Funds may be used for forensic science or medical examiner/coroner personnel, overtime, fellowships, visiting scientists, interns, consultants, or contracted staff.
- Computerization. Funds may be used to upgrade, replace, lease, or purchase computer hardware and software for forensic analyses and data management.
- Laboratory equipment. Funds may be used to upgrade, lease, or purchase forensic laboratory or medical examiner/coroner equipment and instrumentation.
- Supplies. Funds may be used to acquire forensic laboratory or medical examiner/coroner supplies.
- Accreditation. Funds may be used to prepare for laboratory accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD-LAB), Forensic Quality Services (FQS), the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA), or other appropriate accrediting bodies. Funds also may be used for application and maintenance fees charged by appropriate accrediting bodies.
- Education, training and certification. Funds may be used for appropriate internal and external training of staff that are directly and substantially involved in providing forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services. In appropriate cases, funds also may be used for fees charged by appropriate certifying bodies for certification of staff in specific forensic discipline areas. All education, training, and certification activities must be designed to improve the quality and/or timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services. The grant application should demonstrate that the proposed training or certification is directly related to the job position and duties of the individual(s) receiving the training or seeking certification.
- Facilities. Funds may be used for program expenses relating to facilities, provided the expenses are directly attributable to improving the quality and/or timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services. Funds also may be used for renovation and/or construction undertaken as part of the applicant's program to improve the quality and/or timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services. See the specific year's solicitation to which you are applying for detailed on limitations on use of funds for costs of new facility.

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- Administrative expenses. Not more than 10 percent of the total amount of a Coverdell grant may be used for administrative expenses.

The following expenses that are not permitted:

- Expenses other than those listed above (including expenses for general law enforcement functions or non-forensic investigatory functions).
- Costs for any new facility that exceed the limits described above.
- Administrative expenses that exceed 10 percent of the total grant amount.

Match requirement

There is no state or local match required under the Coverdell program.

Allocation of Funds

“Base” funds for States

Approximately 85 percent of the funds available for Coverdell grants will be allocated among eligible States based on population. See the specific solicitation to which you are applying for the approximate amount for each eligible State.

Competitive funds for States and units of local government

Fifteen percent of the available funds will be allocated among States and units of local government through a competitive process. The average annual number of part 1 violent crimes reported by each State to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in prior years, existing resources, and current needs of the potential grant recipient will be considerations in award decisions.

Units of local government that provide forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services (whether through a forensic science laboratory, medical examiner’s office, or coroner’s office) may apply directly to NIJ for competitive funds. A State may apply through its SAA for competitive funds for forensic sciences improvements above and beyond those it can accomplish with its estimated amount of base funds.

Minimum awards to States

The Coverdell law sets a floor for the total amount an eligible applicant State will receive as its Coverdell grant. If the amount a State would otherwise receive as its total Coverdell grant (including both base funds and any competitive funds) is less than the minimum grant amount set by the Coverdell law, NIJ will increase that state’s total grant to the minimum grant amount.

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All awards are subject to the availability of appropriated funds and to any modifications or additional requirements that may be imposed by law.

Links to Additional Information

Fiscal Year 2016 Report to Congress on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

<https://www.nij.gov/topics/forensics/lab-operations/capacity/nfsia/Pages/2016-report.aspx>

Why Is There an Evidence Backlog?

Video <https://www.nij.gov/multimedia/Pages/video-why-is-there-an-evidence-backlog.aspx>

Transcript <https://www.nij.gov/multimedia/Pages/video-why-is-there-an-evidence-backlog-transcript.aspx>