



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

NIST
National Institute of
Standards and Technology
U.S. Department of Commerce

Recommendation to the Attorney General Proficiency Testing

Subcommittee
Accreditation and Proficiency Testing

Date of Current Version	08/12/2016
Approved by Subcommittee	08/15/2016
Approved by Commission	09/12/2016
Action by Attorney General	

Commission Action

The Commission voted to adopt this Recommendation on September 12, 2016 by a more than two-thirds majority affirmative vote (97% yes, 3% no, 0% abstain).

Note: This document includes recommendations developed and adopted by the National Commission on Forensic Science and proposes specific acts that the Attorney General could take to further the goals of the Commission. The portion of the document directly labeled “Recommendations” represents the formal recommendations of the Commission. Information beyond that section is provided for context. This document does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Justice or the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The National Commission on Forensic Science is a Federal Advisory Committee established by the Department of Justice. For more information, please visit: <https://www.justice.gov/ncfs>.

Overview

The National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) has previously adopted the policy recommendation on the Universal Accreditation of all Forensic Science Service Providers (FSSPs)¹ and a *Views Document on Proficiency Testing in Forensic Science*. Proficiency testing is a recognized quality-control tool, and although proficiency testing is required of all accredited FSSPs, it should also be implemented by nonaccredited FSSPs in disciplines where proficiency tests are available from external organizations.

ISO/IEC 17043:2010 identifies proficiency testing as an evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria by means of interlaboratory comparisons² for the determination of laboratory performance. The benefits of discipline-specific proficiency testing include:

¹ See National Commission on Forensic Science [Views Document on Definitions](#).

² ISO/IEC 17043:2010 Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Proficiency Testing, 3 Terms and Definitions, 3.7.

- Evaluation of the performance of FSSPs for specific tests, measurements, or activities, and monitoring of FSSPs' continuing performance;
- Identification of problems and initiation of root cause analysis and corrective actions to improve testing procedures to prevent, for example, inadequate test or measurement procedures, ineffectiveness of staff training and supervision, or equipment out of calibration; and
- Establishment of the effectiveness and comparability of methods and processes.

It is important for proficiency tests to be sufficiently rigorous and representative of the challenges of forensic casework. It is equally important for test takers to utilize standard operating procedures when performing the testing. Proficiency test results can be a valuable tool in the evaluation of competence of the forensic community as it relates to the test and for guiding new research. Proficiency test providers should be willing to share their data in the aggregate. They should also strive to collect demographic data, method/process information, and standard report wording to enable a meaningful review of the population's results as an indicator of the strength of the proficiency test or the competence of the forensic community as it relates to that test (e.g., methodology or technology used).

Recommendations

The National Commission on Forensic Science recommends that the Attorney General:

- **Recommendation #1: Require all Department of Justice (DOJ) FSSPs to participate in a proficiency testing program applicable to the area(s) in which they conduct forensic analysis within 3 years of acceptance of this recommendation.**
- **Recommendation #2: Encourage all FSSPs to participate in proficiency testing programs using the tools available to DOJ, including grant funding, training and education, and preferential selection to FSSPs that engage in proficiency test programs for grants and work on Federal cases.**
- **Recommendation #3: Require all DOJ FSSPs to seek proficiency testing programs that provide sufficiently rigorous samples that are representative of the challenges of forensic casework.**
- **Recommendation #4: Encourage external vendors that provide proficiency tests to DOJ to share their aggregate data with entities doing research and analysis.**