



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

December 5, 2014

Dear Colleague:

This letter alerts all social and behavioral science researchers to the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) interest in receiving proposals that examine the social science questions related to the effective use of forensic evidence to identify and process criminal offenders and to explore the impact of these advances on the criminal justice system. NIJ has been building its portfolio on social science research on forensic science for several years, and prospective applicants are encouraged to review the January 2013 report from the Social Science Research on Forensic Science Topical Working Group Meeting, available on NIJ.gov keywords "social science research on forensics meeting."

NIJ's Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) has several areas of interest for continued work on social science research on forensic science and practice, including understanding newer forensic practices such as the capture of digital evidence, exploring the use and potential of ballistics evidence, and building knowledge on emerging forensic technologies such as 3-D crime scene scanners. ORE also encourages applicants to propose other social science projects in the area of forensic science.

Note that research designed to strengthen the forensic sciences and expand forensic analysis and methods is reserved for NIJ's Office of Investigative and Forensic Sciences.

Please see below for more detail on areas of interest in social science research on forensic science for fiscal year 2015:

- **Digital forensics.** NIJ convened a topical working group in January 2013 to discuss major issues in forensic sciences and the state of social science. (See above for the reference to the meeting and the link to the summary of it.) Among the items discussed at the meeting were the need to explore other forensic evidence besides DNA and the need to understand the use of forensic evidence to identify suspects. The use of digital and cell phone forensics in criminal investigations has expanded in recent years. This has the potential to offer a quick and cost-effective way to identify suspects and to corroborate or discredit alibis. Yet little is known about the prevalence of the use of digital forensics in investigations and the impact of digital forensics on arrest and prosecution outcomes (as in plea negotiations and convictions).
- **Ballistics forensics.** A recently completed NIJ-funded study that looked at the process of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives-sponsored ballistic identification found ballistic evidence frequently did not produce investigative leads. NIJ would like to stimulate further inquiry into the use of ballistic forensic evidence in prosecutions. How

probative is the evidence in general? What is the impact of this type of evidence in producing convictions or successful plea negotiations?

- **Crime scene scanning technology.** NIJ built its portfolio of social science research on forensics to understand the application, production, processing and impact of forensic evidence. Implicit in this charge is understanding how new technologies may impact the use of forensic evidence in investigations or the courtroom. One new piece of technology—3-D forensic laser scanners—has the potential to revolutionize the standard of evidence presented in the courtroom. These devices can create reproducible, three-dimensional images of a crime scene that can be used to corroborate or discredit witness statements and the prosecution’s theory of the crime. Yet little is known regarding the prevalence of 3-D forensic scanners, how they are used in the field, or how effective such evidence is when presented in court.

Search past awards for examples of related current and completed projects on NIJ.gov, keywords “past awards.”

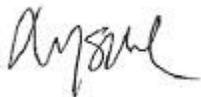
Interested prospective applicants are highly encouraged to consult with relevant project officers prior to submitting a proposal. In the case of social science research on forensics, Mr. Eric Martin at Eric.D.Martin@usdoj.gov and Dr. Katharine Browning at Katharine.browning@usdoj.gov are the appropriate project officers.

This is not a special competition or a new program. Proposals in response to this Dear Colleague Letter must meet the requirements and deadlines of the solicitation for which they are submitted.

The appropriate vehicle for responding to topics covered in this letter will be NIJ’s “Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems” solicitation. To receive an e-mail when NIJ issues a solicitation, subscribe to NIJ.gov. You also can follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/OJPNIJ) and Facebook (facebook.com/OJPNIJ).

The “Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems” solicitation should be available on the NIJ website in early 2015.

Sincerely,



William J. Sabol, Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institute of Justice