

DARYL FOX: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's webinar, Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program - Competitive Solicitation, hosted by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. At this time, I'd like to introduce Andrea Borchardt, Senior Forensics Policy Advisor with the Bureau of Justice Assistance for some welcoming remarks and to begin the presentation. Andrea?

ANDREA BORCHARDT: Thank you, Daryl. Welcome everybody to the solicitation release webinar for the FY 22 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program, the competitive solicitation. Again, my name is Andrea Borchardt and I'm the Senior Forensics Policy Advisor overseeing this competitive program. Today's agenda will focus on aspects of the Coverdell competitive solicitation. While I present today, I will be referencing page numbers, so I encourage you to open the current solicitation which can be found on BJA.gov under the funding and awards tab and access the available funding dropdown. I will discuss the program goals and objectives, changes to the solicitation from previous year, eligibility, and application submission requirements. There are two major steps when applying for funding opportunities in JustGrants. Step one, the applicant must submit by the Grants.gov deadline, the required Application for Federal Assistance standard form, SF-424, and a Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, SF-LLL form, when they register in Grants.gov. This is due June 22nd, 2022, at 8:59 p.m. eastern time. Step two, the applicant must then submit the full application including attachments in JustGrants at JustGrants.usdoj.gov. This is due June 27th, 2022, at 8:59 p.m. eastern time.

This presentation is not a tutorial on how to navigate Grants.gov or JustGrants. This is specifically an informational webinar about the FY 22 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program competitive solicitation. Should you need tutorials on Grants.gov or JustGrants, there are many resources available on the BJA website, as well as the BJA YouTube channel. The one displayed on this slide can be found on our website, which links you to our YouTube channel and is a very helpful tutorial on the first steps for applying for grants. I also encourage you to access the JustGrants website where you can find a wealth of tutorials on navigating the system. In order to be timely with your application, you will want to make sure you're very familiar with the application systems and have enough time to complete the necessary steps. For the program overview, BJA seeks to improve forensic science and medical examiner and coroner services, including services provided by laboratories operated by states and units of local government. Please note that we have launched a website for our forensics programs and the link for the Coverdell Program is displayed on this page. The Coverdell Program has two separate yet related solicitations. One is formula, and specific just to State Administering Agencies or SAAs. The other is competitive, and it's open to the SAAs, as well as units of local government. This webinar is focusing on the competitive solicitation. Again, I'm only talking about the competitive solicitation in this webinar. The Grants.gov

deadline, again, is June 22nd, 2022, at 8:59 p.m. If you miss this deadline, you cannot proceed to the JustGrants step. The JustGrants deadline is June 27th, 2022, at 8:59 p.m.

The result of Coverdell grants should demonstrate improvement over current operations in 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. A reduction in forensic analysis backlogs is considered an improvement in timeliness of services. The funds must be used for one or more of the following six purposes, and I'm sorry to bore you, but I'm actually going to read this whole slide because it's very important.

One, to carry out all or a substantial part of a program intended to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner services in the state, including such services provided by the laboratories operated by the state and those operated by units of local government within the state. Two, to eliminate a backlog in the analysis of forensic science evidence, including firearms examination, latent prints, impression evidence, toxicology, digital evidence, fire evidence, controlled substances, forensic pathology, questionable documents, and trace evidence. Three, to train, assist, and employ forensic laboratory personnel and medicolegal death investigators, as needed, to eliminate such a backlog. Four, 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. Five, to educate and train forensic pathologists. And six, to fund medicolegal death investigation systems to facilitate accreditation of medical examiner and coroner offices, and certification of medicolegal death investigators.

The next two slides highlight the change in language and expansion of eligibility for forensic science laboratories defined. So we have a big X on this one, because I don't really want you to see all of the content, because this is what we changed from last year to this year. But previously, we did define a forensic science laboratory as a laboratory that employs one or more full-time scientists with a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a natural formal science. And its principal function is to examine, analyze, and interpret physical and/or digital evidence in criminal matters and provide reports and testimony to courts of law regarding such evidence. We are no longer using this definition. What we are using is a definition in FY 22 for the Paul Coverdell Program is, for the purposes of this solicitation, any state or local government entity performing forensic science services is considered a "forensic science laboratory." Medical examiner and coroner offices are considered forensic science laboratories for purposes of this solicitation.

So an important aspect of this year's program includes an increase in the award cap from \$250,000 last year, up to \$500,000 in FY 22. And note, you do not have to request the maximum amount, but we did want to increase this to allow some laboratories the ability to purchase equipment that they may not ordinarily have and the budget to acquire, like a LIMS system or something like that. And given this increase, we do expect to make approximately 10 to 15 awards. The period of performance is 36 months, and the start date will be October 1st, 2022. As can be found in the solicitation starting on page 8, here's a summary of permissible expenses: salary and benefits of laboratory personnel or laboratory employees; overtime for laboratory staff; computerization for forensic analyses and data management; laboratory equipment; supplies; accreditation, including application and maintenance fees charged by appropriate accrediting bodies; education, training, and certification; facilities and renovation directly attributable to improving forensic science or medical examiner/coroner services; and administrative expenses, but not more than 10% of the total funds.

So continuing on page 9 of the solicitation, here is a summary of expenses that are not permitted. Funds to conduct research, though applicants may address emerging forensic science issues and technology through implementation of new technologies and processes into public laboratories. Any expenses other than those listed in the permitted expenses section. Costs for any new facility that exceeds limits described in the solicitation. Recipient administrative expenses, direct or indirect, that exceed 10% of the total grant amount, and the use of funds for the purchase and/or lease of vehicles, such as crime scene vans. And finally, a new expense that is not permitted is the use of BJA grant funds for unmanned aircraft systems, UAS, including unmanned aircraft vehicles, UAVs, and all accompanying accessories to support UAS/UAV is unallowable.

So if you can please turn your attention to page 10, apologies for those sounds, where I can outline the eligibility for this solicitation. State governments, through the SAA, county governments and city or township governments. And for the purpose of the Coverdell Program, the term "state" means each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. A continuation of the eligibility is that the funds must be used for forensic science laboratories. Again, in FY 22, this definition was revised to mean that any state or unit of local government entity performing forensic science services is considered a "forensic science laboratory." Medical examiner and coroner offices are considered forensic science laboratories for the purposes of this solicitation. We get a lot of questions about accreditation with respect to eligibility.

So I do want to read you this whole slide. So the question, "Do I have to be accredited in order to apply?" The answer--applicants do not have to be currently accredited to apply.

However, Coverdell awardees must use grant funds to prepare and apply for accreditation of any FY 2022 Coverdell grant-funded unaccredited forensic laboratory system, including any laboratory operated by units of local government within the state, no more than two years after the FY 2022 Coverdell award date. Medical examiner and coroner offices are exempt from this accreditation requirement. The accrediting body must be "a signatory of an internationally recognized arrangement" and one that "offers accreditation to forensic science conformity assessment bodies using an accreditation standard that is recognized by that internationally recognized arrangement." On a related note, we also have a lot of law enforcement entities, so law enforcement but not forensic accreditation seeking funding from this program. So I'm going to read you this slide. Quote--I mean, question, "Our law enforcement agency is accredited, such as CALEA, are we eligible to apply?" With few exceptions, law enforcement agencies with law enforcement accreditation, rather than the forensic laboratory or medical examiner accreditation, are not eligible for Coverdell funding. For eligibility, the applicant must meet the definition of a forensic laboratory. Recall from the last slide, the accrediting body must be a "signatory to an internationally recognized arrangement" and one that "offers accreditation to forensic science conformity assessment bodies using an accreditation standard that is recognized by that internationally recognized arrangement."

So if you turn to pages 10 and 17, the Coverdell law provides that, to request a grant, each applicant must submit five certifications specific to the Coverdell Program. And please note that applicants requesting funds for only medical examiner offices or coroner offices are not required to submit the certification regarding accreditation. For the certifications, all must be completed by an official familiar with its requirements and authorized to certify on behalf of the applicant agency. All five certifications must be completed using the BJA templates, and certifications made on behalf of subrecipients of award funds, rather than certifications made on behalf of the agency applying directly to BJA, are not acceptable to satisfy the certification requirements. There's a link in the solicitation to each of the certifications, and there's a link at the bottom of this slide for the certifications. This is a summary of the certifications required by law, whether you are a forensic lab or a medical examiner/coroner. So you can see all of the five certifications are required by the forensics lab, and only four of the five are required by medical examiner/coroner.

I do want to bring your attention to the use of funds for new facilities certification. That is required even if you're not using funds for new facilities. You have to acknowledge the information in that certification, and that must be submitted. A note to any projects proposing to use funds for Forensic Genetic Genealogical DNA Analysis and Searching, or FGGS, you must take note of the following. There are no DNA profiles, including SNP, Small Nucleotide Polymorphism, or SNPs, profiles generated for FGGS testing, generated

with funding from this award may be entered into any nongovernmental databases such as GEDmatch, without prior express written approval from BJA. Additionally, any program activity involving FGGS is subject to the DOJ Interim Policy on Forensic Genetic Genealogical DNA Analysis and Searching, or the final policy when it's issued. All right.

So let's now talk what's needed for your application submission. If you please turn to page 14, if you're following along at home, please turn to page 14 of the solicitation. The following application elements must be included in the application submission for an application to meet the basic minimum requirements, what we call BMR, in order to advance to peer review and receive consideration for funding. So the first thing is the proposal abstract, the next is the proposal narrative, the next is the budget worksheet and budget narrative, the web-based form, and then all five certifications required by the Coverdell law except, of course, an exemption for medical examiner and coroner offices that are not required to submit the certification regarding accreditation. The application must be submitted by an eligible type of applicant. So this is actually once everything is submitted to BJA through JustGrants, we actually evaluate it according to this whole list, so that the application must be submitted by an eligible type of applicant, that the application must request funding within the programmatic funding constraints, if applicable. The application must be responsive to the scope of the solicitation. And the application must include all items necessary to meet BMR or the basic minimum requirements. All right.

So now, we can talk a little bit about the peer review. And during peer review, BJA selects subject matter experts to review the applications according to the merit review criteria. These can be found on pages 14 to 16 and page 20 of the solicitation. The peer reviewers will score the application according to the statement of the problem and description of the issue, the project design and implementation, capabilities and competencies, the plan for collecting the data required for the solicitation's performance measures, and the budget. So for example, if you turn to page 15, under project design and implementation, the applicant will be scored according to how they describe the strategy to address the needs identified in the description of the issue or the statement of the problem, particularly any areas of special concern, and the relevance to the goals and objectives of the program. So I do encourage you to pay close attention to these merit review criteria sections when developing your project and writing up your proposal. All right.

Once you believe you've finished all your paperwork, you finished everything, you will turn to the application checklist found on pages 22 to 24. This is a screenshot of a portion of the application checklist. And this will help you make sure that you followed all of the required steps for a successful application. For your reference, I've broken down the past four years of applications and awards for this program, most recently in FY 21. We

received 62 applications and were able to make 23 awards. So about 37% of the applications received were funded. So you can see this has varied a little bit over the years. Typically we receive 80 to 100 applications. So, last year is a little bit lower. You know, a lot of possibilities for this but, you know, I do expect the application numbers to probably be in the 80 to 100 range again this year. Since the funding has increased we will have less awards, so this is a very competitive program. All right.

As we wrap up the informational session, this webinar up, and I want to draw your attention again to the important dates of this solicitation. The Grants.gov deadline is June 22nd at 8:59 p.m. The JustGrants deadline is June 27th at 8:59 p.m. If you fail to meet the Grants.gov deadline, you cannot proceed to the JustGrants portion of the process. If you run into any problems with the application, there are various resources available to assist you depending on where you encounter the issues. So here's one where you may reach out to Grants.gov. The email or the hotline is listed in this slide. Please take note of the email address, the website, and the phone number. If you encounter issues with JustGrants, this slide outlines JustGrants resources to assist you. So again, please take note of the date, I mean the hours of operation, the customer support hotline number, the email, and the web page for user support. If you have questions about the solicitation or need general assistance, you may also reach out to the OJP Response Center. This provides solicitation support and general assistance, this will typically not be something specific to hurdles you encounter on Grants.gov or JustGrants. Please here, take note of the email. There's also web chat and a phone number and please note the response center hours of operation. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication in the field of forensic science. And thank you for attending this webinar, we will now take questions in the Q&A.

DARYL FOX: Thanks for that, Andrea. Just a reminder to everybody on today's webinar that the PowerPoint recording and transcript will be posted to the BJA website. So, you'll get a notice once those items are available in the email that you registered with today. If you do have a question, enter it in the far bottom right, three dots, send to all panelists, and we'll go through those with the remaining time we have today. There's a question that's come in, "Is it allowable to use grant funds solely for accreditation and associated costs?" They're a crime scene unit with no backlog. They're questioning if they meet any of the six objectives that were discussed.

ANDREA BORCHARDT: Alan, do you want me to take this one or would you prefer to take this?

ALAN SPANBAUER: Sure. Go ahead, Andrea. That's fine.

ANDREA BORCHARDT: Okay. This is a good question. So there are a lot of aspects in the Coverdell Program as you can tell, through this reading of the solicitation release information. So without having further information but based directly on your question, the grant funds could be used for accreditation and associated costs. The accreditation would have to meet the standards listed in this solicitation, you would need to be able to properly certify according to the accreditation certification and you would have to justify within one of the six purpose areas, so backlog is only one aspect of the six purpose areas of Coverdell. So if you believe you would fit into other aspects, then yes, it seems like it probably would be a good eligible use of funds.

DARYL FOX: That's the end of the questions in the queue at this time. We'll just wait a few more moments. If you do have something, please go ahead and enter that in. And earlier in the webinar, I did provide the link to the solicitation in the chat. So if you need to go back and reference anything specifically in there, you can do so from that link. While you're thinking of questions, we'll just put this slide back up, the two-step process and the deadlines for both JustGrants and Grants.gov.

ALAN SPANBAUER: Andrea, this is Alan. Just to reiterate, the five required certifications are important in our basic minimum requirements. So, please be sure to read and be able to sign those--an appropriate person to sign those certifications. And even if you're not doing anything with facilities, all five certifications are required except for the one caveat for the medical examiner/coroner's office. Please be sure to read all five until it goes out.

DARYL FOX: "Regarding the five certifications, who's eligible to sign those?" This particular person is with a law enforcement agency.

ALAN SPANBAUER: There are examples in the solicitation of who may be eligible--or an appropriate authority. It may be the chief of police if you're a police laboratory, it may be the laboratory director. It is anybody who has the authority to review, understand, and sign the certification.

DARYL FOX: "Are there examples of previous award winners that one may be able to look at for reference?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: Yes, we list all of the funded abstracts on our website. So, if you go to--I believe that can all be found on the Coverdell forensic website that I had addressed in the previous slide. If you go on to the BJA website, you go into topics and forensic science you can navigate there pretty quickly, and that will have the abstracts of previously funded awards so you can see what they have done.

DARYL FOX: This particular person, a small police township department looking to increase digital forensic capabilities, such as the purchasing of forensic workstation and Magnet AXIOM to parse the data. "Is that eligible for the use of funds for this program?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: This is Andrea. So the activities that, you know, digital forensics is something that can be funded but to, again, highlight something Alan indicated is those five certifications are going to be critical. So, again, the certification regarding accreditation is likely going to be the biggest thing to highlight, given the question asked, so as long as the entity is accredited and is a forensic science service provider, and is accredited according to the definitions that I described, so it's not just the law enforcement accreditation, but it's like a forensic science accreditation. Again, the language is specific in this certification. So, if they can find that, then digital evidence is something that could be funded.

DARYL FOX: "Regarding the signatures on the certifications, is there a form to sign or should they submit them from agency letterhead?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: You should not submit the information to letterhead. You must submit them on the forms that we provided. There are links in the solicitation, and multiple links within the solicitation under that certification section. So, it must be submitted using the forms provided by BJA. Again, the links are in the solicitation in the certification section.

DARYL FOX: Somebody asked if the links for the abstracts could be provided. "Is that something available outside of the solicitation?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: So again, you'll want to go to the BJA website. There was a link on one of the slides, Daryl, if you can go back to slide seven. So, if you go to this slide, at that link in the blue at the bottom has Coverdell overview. Once you launch onto that website, there is a drop-down to the right of that site that will have previously funded awards, or previous years funding, and then you should be able to access the abstracts through there.

DARYL FOX: And that link was posted in the chat to that person. So you can actually click that hyperlink or cut and paste it as you'd like. The Coverdell/Overview. This particular person is planning for a CT scanner for their coroner's office and an accredited office at that. That will obviously be a larger project. "Is that acceptable? And is there a limit to the funds awarded for that?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: I think that's a fantastic project personally, I love that you're thinking outside the box. Right now the cap of funding for this is \$500,000. There are no exceptions to that cap. So hopefully, that can help you along the way if you are looking to apply.

DARYL FOX: And if we do conclude, and you still have a question that may come up that you didn't get to ask today, you can go ahead and contact the OJP Response Center, as mentioned earlier, grants@ncjrs.gov. And they'll be able to answer anything specific to this solicitation and the program requirements. Okay. So, that seems to be the end of the questions at this point. Andrea, is there anything in closing that you wanted to mention?

ANDREA BORCHARDT: No, I do see one question that came in. It says it's from Rick Pender, it says "it certainly does, I'm just confused about all of the five certifications." So if you go to the solicitation, each of the certifications has language that explains what they are looking for and what they are referencing. Make sure you can understand them, again, if you're having trouble understanding them, and they're still complicated, you're welcome to reach out to the OJP Response Center. Their information was presented later in this presentation. And you're welcome to reach out to them for further information that we can perhaps provide guidance on the certifications, if that's still something that's holding you up. But if there's no other questions, Daryl, that is all I have to say except for thank you all for attending. Oh, wait. Is there one more question?

DARYL FOX: Yeah, another one came in. Thanks for that. "Could more than 15 awards be granted if requests don't exceed the amount available?"

ANDREA BORCHARDT: Yes. The 15 is an estimate, you know, based on previous years, how much we're typically funding. It is an estimate. We will likely make awards until all of the funding is completely used up. We don't want to leave anything on the table. We know how limited funding is for forensic sciences and medical examiners and coroners. We want to make sure all of these valuable resources can get out to you guys.

DARYL FOX: Okay. That seems to be it for the questions in the queue. So, on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance and our panelists, we want to thank you for joining today's webinar. This will end today's presentation.