

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE FACT SHEET

MISSING AND UNIDENTIFIED HUMAN REMAINS PROGRAM

Program Summary

According to the Justice Department's National Institute of Justice's, [National Missing and Unidentified Persons System \(NamUs\) Program](#) database, over 600,000 individuals go missing in the United States every year. In addition, it is estimated that 4,400 unidentified bodies are recovered each year, with approximately 40,000 remaining unidentified at any given time.

Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022, BJA's Missing and Unidentified Human Remains (MUHR) Program provides funds to eligible entities to improve the reporting, transportation, forensic testing, and identification of missing persons and unidentified human remains, including migrants, utilizing various forensic disciplines such as anthropology, odontology, and DNA. The MUHR Program augments and complements the existing services available through the NamUs Program. NamUs is a free, national, centralized

repository, and resource center for locating and identifying missing persons, unidentified human remains, and repatriating unclaimed persons.

In contrast to NamUs, the MUHR Program fills a gap in the national field by providing federal resources directly to jurisdictions. As a result, the MUHR Program assists jurisdictions in addressing missing persons and unidentified human remains cases.

Three purpose areas are funded under the MUHR Program:

- Purpose Area 1: Statewide Agencies
- Purpose Area 2: Counties and/or Units of Local Government
- Purpose Area 3: Services to Assist Small, Rural, and/or Tribal Entities

Program Funding & Awards

Since FY 2023, the MUHR Program has made 19 awards totaling \$13,124,479 million.

FY	Statewide Agencies (Purpose Area 1)		Counties and/or Units of Local Government (Purpose Area 2)		Services to Assist Small, Rural, and/or Tribal Entities (Purpose Area 3)	
	Number of Awards	Funds Awarded	Number of Awards	Funds Awarded	Number of Awards	Funds Awarded
2022	2	\$1,992,090	3	\$1,488,120	1	\$996,042
2023	7	\$5,699,676	6	\$2,948,551	0	\$0



Program Details

Purpose Area 1 and Purpose Area 2:

- **Inventory:** Inventory all missing persons and unidentified human remains cases in their jurisdictions that fall directly under their authority, or those entities that are servicing jurisdictions that have yet to be processed.
- **Report:** Report into systems such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and NamUs, as well as notifying the relatives of missing persons/unidentified remains, as applicable.
- **Identify:** Establish a multidisciplinary team comprised of forensic experts, investigators, victim advocates, etc., to establish the best method of identification for each inventoried case.
- **Repatriate Human Remains:** Develop and implement a plan to return human remains to appropriate relatives, as determined by law.

Purpose Area 3:

- Serves small, rural, and/or tribal entities on a national scale by funding transportation, testing, and identification for missing persons and unidentified human remains, including migrants. As such, the intent of this purpose area is to ensure that cases in the above jurisdictions receive the critical resources to assist with resolution.
- **Report:** Work with/assist submitting agencies to ensure their jurisdiction's missing persons and unidentified human remains cases are reported into systems such as NCIC and NamUs, as well as notifying the relatives of missing persons/unidentified remains, as applicable.
- **Identify:** Accept cases from small, rural, and/or tribal entities for identification efforts utilizing forensic technologies.

- **Repatriate Human Remains:** Develop and implement a plan to assist submitting agencies with the return of human remains to appropriate relatives.

Since the inception of this program:

- 6 identifications were made via CODIS associations
- 8 identifications were made via direct DNA comparisons
- 123 identifications were made via other methodologies such as fingerprints
- 131 cases were repatriated back to the relatives or next of kin

Learn More

For additional information about this program, see the [MUHR Program webpage](#). There is also Training and Technical Assistance for this program. Learn more here: <https://www.forensicstta.org/>

ABOUT BJA

BJA helps America's state, local, and tribal jurisdictions reduce and prevent crime, lower recidivism, and promote a fair and safe criminal justice system. BJA provides a wide range of resources—including grants, funding, and training and technical assistance—to law enforcement, courts and corrections agencies, treatment providers, reentry practitioners, justice information sharing professionals, and community-based partners to address chronic and emerging criminal justice challenges nationwide. To learn more about BJA, visit bja.ojp.gov or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/DOJBJA) and X (@DOJBJA). BJA is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.