



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

FISCAL YEAR 2018 REPORT ON THE  
**PAUL COVERDELL FORENSIC SCIENCE  
IMPROVEMENT GRANTS PROGRAM**

SEPTEMBER 2018

## Fiscal Year 2018 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

Section 2806(b) of Public Law 90-351, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, mandates the submission of a report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate concerning grants made under the Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program in each fiscal year. This letter and the enclosed abstracts respond to that requirement.

The Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program, managed by the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ), provides funding to states and units of local government to improve forensic science and medical examiner services, in accordance with the Coverdell Act. For the purposes of the Act, the District of Columbia and the five U.S. Territories are considered states. NIJ executes the Coverdell Grants Program through two grant solicitations, one for the formula and one for the competitive component. Only states are eligible to apply for the formula component.

To help meet opioid-related challenges to the forensic science community, NIJ identified opioid-focused forensic science needs as a priority purpose (see 34 U.S.C. § 10102(a)(6)) for Fiscal Year 2018 under the Coverdell Grants Program. In accordance with the Congressional explanatory statement accompanying the Coverdell Act, NIJ requested that applicants identify items related to addressing the opioid crisis in their narratives and budgets. The precise sum that will be directed towards these efforts will depend upon "need" as expressed in the aggregate dollar value of budget items designated as addressing the opioid crisis as submitted by successful applicants.

The Coverdell Act requires that 85 percent of the total program funds be awarded to states through State Administering Agencies (SAAs). Formula awards are based on the state's population and made to all eligible SAAs that apply. The Coverdell Act requires that the remaining 15 percent of program funds be awarded competitively. The competitive funds may be awarded to SAAs or dispersed directly to units of local government based on the merits of the respective applications. States and local governments that provide forensic science or medical examiner services may apply for the competitive funding. Applications for competitive funding are reviewed by an independent panel made up of subject-matter experts from the forensic science community. The panelists review and rate the applications individually based on specific evaluation criteria specified in the solicitation.

On March 7, 2018, NIJ released the solicitations seeking applications for funding under the Fiscal Year 2018 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program. NIJ received 170 applications; 58 applications were received for formula funding and 112 applications were received for competitive funding. Under the formula solicitation, two applications were received from ineligible entities and removed from further consideration, and four applications were received that were duplicative. Under the competitive solicitation, 80 applications were received from units of local government and 32 applications were received from states. Twenty-three competitive applications were denied due to various circumstances such as duplicate applications (9), failure to meet basic minimum requirements (11), or non-responsiveness to solicitation criteria (3).

NIJ made 77 awards totaling \$27,195,042; 46 states received formula awards, 6 states received both formula and competitive awards, and 19 units of local government received competitive awards. Abstracts about each project as written by the awardees are available at <https://nij.gov/funding/awards/pages/awards-list.aspx?fiscalyear=2018&tags=NFSIA>

Since its inception, the Coverdell Program has resulted in 1,358 grants to states and units of local government. In its administration of the Coverdell Program, NIJ monitors each award to ensure compliance with federal statutes, regulations, and policies to ensure that federal funds are used appropriately. This monitoring includes diligent review of Coverdell grantees' budgets to ensure they are in accord with the work promised in the grant application and consistent with Coverdell Program statutory and policy requirements.

NIJ is grateful for the opportunity to help improve forensic science and medical examiner services throughout the nation. We look forward to continuing these efforts through important programs such as the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program.