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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

REPORT

Fiscal Year 2011 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

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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 to units of local government to improve the quality and timeliness of 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 a grant solicitation that has both a formula and a competitive component. Only states are eligible to apply for the formula component.

The Coverdell Act requires that 75 percent of the total program funds be awarded to States through State Administering Agencies (SAAs). These "base" awards are based on the State's population and made to all eligible SAAs that apply. The Coverdell Act requires that the remaining 25 percent of program funds be awarded competitively. These "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 component.

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 cited in the solicitation.

On April 6, 2010, NIJ released the solicitation seeking applications for funding under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program. NIJ received 222 applications; 28 States applied for base funding, while 25 States applied for a combination of base and competitive funding. The remaining 169 applications were received from units of local government for competitive funding. Thirty-nine applications were denied due to various circumstances such as duplicate applications, failure to meet basic minimum requirements, and non-responsive to solicitation criteria.

NIJ made 106 awards totaling \$27,643,760; 49 States received base awards, 4 States received combination base and competitive awards, and 53 units of local government received competitive awards.

NIJ has successfully administered the Coverdell Program since 2002. NIJ monitors each award to ensure compliance with federal statutes, regulations, and policies which further ensure that federal funds are used appropriately. Coverdell applicants' budgets are reviewed to ensure they are in accord with the work promised in the grant application and consistent with Coverdell Program statutory and policy requirements.

Since its inception, the Coverdell Program has awarded 856 grants to States and units of local government to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science services. Although NIJ was able to maintain the maximum competitive award of \$175,000 in FY 2011, it is important to note a significant impact of reduced funding for base awards. As a result of a 17-percent decrease in funding from FY 2010 to FY 2011, minimum base awards to States (and territories) fell from \$199,728 to \$166,108. Such a reduction is likely to have criminal-justice and public-safety impacts, including an increase in the backlog of evidence awaiting testing; completion of less casework; increased workload for current crime lab staff; greater difficulty in meeting mandatory training and education requirements for lab accreditation; and challenges in both staying abreast of and utilizing the most current technological advancements.

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

View FY 2011 Coverdell funds awarded to State Administering Agencies and to units of local government within those states:

<https://nij.gov/funding/pages/funding-detail.aspx?solicitationid=2815>

The table includes funding amounts and a short program description for each award.