



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

FISCAL YEAR 2019 REPORT ON THE
**PAUL COVERDELL FORENSIC SCIENCE
IMPROVEMENT GRANTS PROGRAM**

SEPTEMBER 2020

Fiscal Year 2019 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

On April 5, 2019, NIJ released two solicitations seeking applications for funding under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program. NIJ received 140 applications — 55 for formula funding and 85 for competitive funding. One application for formula funding was a duplicate of an earlier application. Twenty-four competitive applications were denied for various reasons, such as duplicate applications, failure to meet basic minimum requirements, or submission by an ineligible agency.

NIJ made 80 awards totaling \$27,370,932; 54 states received formula awards, and eight states and 18 units of local government received competitive awards. Abstracts for each project as written by the awardees are available at https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/list?subtopic=19471&field_fiscal_year_value=2019#-1.

The Coverdell Act requires that 85% of the total program funds be awarded to states through State Administering Agencies (SAAs). For the purposes of the Act, the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories are considered to be states. Formula awards are based on the state's population and are made to all eligible SAAs that apply. The Coverdell Act requires that the remaining 15% 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 evaluation criteria specified in the solicitation.

To help meet the opioid-related challenges faced by the forensic science community, NIJ identified opioid-focused forensic science needs as a priority purpose (see 34 U.S.C. § 10102(a)(6)) for FY 2018 under the Coverdell Program. In accordance with the 2019 congressional explanatory statement accompanying the 2019 Department of Justice Appropriations Act, and per Senate Report 115-275 (page 102), NIJ requested that applicants identify items related to addressing the opioid crisis in their narratives and budgets. The precise sum that will be directed toward these efforts will depend upon need, as expressed in the aggregate dollar value of budget items designated for addressing the opioid crisis in successful applications.

Since its inception, the Coverdell Program has resulted in 1,438 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, and to ensure that federal funds are used appropriately. This monitoring includes diligent review of Coverdell grantees' budgets to ensure that they are in accord with the work promised in the grant application and are consistent with Coverdell Program statutory and policy requirements.

The project descriptions and the corresponding letters addressed to the President Pro Tempore and House Speaker constitute the mandated report requirement as outlined by Section 2806(b) of Title I of Public Law 90-351, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968.