

## Supporting Forensic Technologies and the Criminal Justice Community

In 2007, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) established the Forensic Technologies Center of Excellence (CoE) as part of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system. Hosted by the National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC) in Largo, Fla., in conjunction with four partner agencies, the CoE supports NIJ research, development, testing and evaluation activities within the DNA and general forensics programs.

Forensic Technologies CoE Director Kevin Lothridge says the partner agencies — the National Clearinghouse for Science, Technology and the Law (NCSTL) at Stetson College of Law; the National Center for Forensic Science (NCFS) at the University of Central Florida; Marshall University Forensic Science Center; and the Midwest Forensic Research Center — all had provided services to NIJ in the past. The CoE formed them into one cohesive unit with members that work together more closely than when they were independent of each other. Requests for information and assistance are channeled through NFSTC and relayed to the appropriate partner. The CoE's goal is to become a "one-stop shop" that meets the forensic needs of the criminal justice community, and a great deal of effort has gone into creating webcasts and podcasts and providing educational outreach to them.

Each partner agency has an area of specialization. NCSTL provides extensive library services, Marshall specializes in DNA-related services, NCFS maintains the Y-STR database and the Midwest Center works on projects related to technology as well as training process improvement. NFSTC offers a number of training courses and manages a nationwide DNA laboratory audit program and Grant Progress Assessment program for NIJ.

"We're the first adopters of new technology and help transition it to the end users," Lothridge says. "We look at everything, from things that officers and investigators would use at a crime scene, to tools for the crime lab and ultimately evidence in the court room."

"We have a very full outreach calendar where all the CoE partners attend and help us staff the booths," he adds. "The community doesn't know what we are, and we have to explain this through our outreach. They come by, they learn and ask questions, and say they wish they would have known about us before. We have a pretty broad group of people that we try to serve, because forensics technology is being used more often by almost all agencies, even small ones."

In light of that growing use of forensics technology, NIJ has tasked the Forensics Technologies CoE with the following responsibilities:

- Identifying technology requirements.
- Supporting NIJ's research and development programs.
- Testing, evaluating and demonstrating technologies.
- Supporting the adoption of new technology.
- Developing technology guidelines.
- Providing specialized technology assistance and support to criminal justice agencies on a national basis.

The CoE also hosts and supports the General Forensics Technology Working Group and the DNA Forensics Technology Working Group, which are composed primarily of practitioners. These groups help NIJ identify priorities for its program plan. The CoE manages demonstrations that are part of the Expert System Testbed project and hosts technology transfer workshops.

For more information, visit <http://www.justnet.org> and <http://www.nfstc.org/>.

## NATIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY CENTER ACTIVITIES

The National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC) supports the National Institute of Justice forensics program through a variety of projects. These include training programs on topics as diverse as crime scene investigation, pattern evidence and even forensic DNA training in Spanish. NFSTC offers DNA analyst training at the entry level and in advanced, specialized workshops, and provides both classroom and Web-based training. NFSTC manages a number of other projects, some of which are profiled elsewhere in this issue.

*For more information on NFSTC programs and projects, visit <http://www.nfstc.org/>.*

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This article was reprinted from the Spring 2010 edition of *TechBeat*, the award-winning quarterly newsmagazine of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System, a program of the National Institute of Justice under Cooperative Agreement #2009-MU-MU-K261, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

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