

Best Practice Recommendations for the Resolution of Conflicts in Friction Ridge Examination



WHAT IS AN AAFS STANDARD FACTSHEET?

The AAFS produces clear, concise, and easy-to-understand factsheets to summarize the contents of technical and professional forensic science standards on the OSAC Registry. They are not intended to provide an interpretation for any portion of a published standard.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STANDARD?

This standard outlines best practice recommendations for forensic science service providers (FSSPs) on handling conflicts during the technical review or verification processes of friction ridge examinations. These conflicts may arise from disagreements between examiners regarding the suitability of impressions for further analysis or the opinions drawn from such analyses.

The best practice recommendation assumes the examiner has completed the friction ridge examination and submitted the impressions to a second examiner for verification. The determination for which suitability decisions and source opinions should be verified or whether technical review is conducted in conjunction with verification is dictated by the FSSP's policy.

This standard does not address differences of opinion that occur at the consultation level or any organizational response once an error is discovered or the conflict(s) are resolved.

For consultation requirements, refer to ANSI/ASB 145, 1st Ed., 2023.

WHY IS THIS STANDARD IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

Friction ridge impression interpretation can be subjective, particularly where the observed data quantity and quality are low for an impression. Because of this, there is potential for differing suitability decisions or source conclusions.

This standard aims to enhance the quality and consistency of friction ridge examination practices by providing best practice recommendations for conflict resolution with regard to friction ridge examinations.

HOW IS THIS STANDARD USED, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS?

This best practice recommendation stresses the importance of FSSPs having a policy for conflict resolution, which may include discussions between examiners, blind verification, consensus review, or external agency review. The policy should include which suitability decisions and source opinions require verification.

Key recommendations for resolution when conflicting suitability decisions (value/no value) or source opinions occur, include:

- Conflicts should be resolved through discussion; however, escalation should proceed to management if an agreement cannot be reached.
- A managerial review should determine the next steps to be taken, such as blind verification, seeking consensus among a larger group of examiners, or using an outside FSSP.
- Documentation of the conflict and its resolution is crucial, including all decisions, discussions, and outcomes.
- Reported results should indicate if a conflict resolution process was used.
- FSSP management should track the causes and frequency of conflicts to improve practices.

