



Criminalistics Section – 2009

A66 FORESIGHT Update: A Business - Metric Study of Forensic Laboratories

Max M. Houck, MA, 1600 University Avenue, 208 Oglebay Hall, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506-6217*

After attending this presentation, attendees will have been presented the study model and metrics for the evaluation of 17 forensic science laboratories in their operations in a business setting.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by providing a study model for any operational forensic laboratory that wishes to improve its quality, efficiency, or costs.

FORESIGHT is a business-guided self-evaluation of forensic science laboratories across North America. The participating laboratories represent local, regional, state, and federal agencies. Faculty from the WVU College of Business and Economics are providing assistance and guidance. The process involves standardizing definitions for metrics to evaluate work processes, linking financial information to work tasks and functions. Laboratory managers can then assess resource allocations, efficiencies, and value of services—the mission is to measure, preserve what works, and change what does not. While the Census of Public Crime Laboratories and the International Association for Identification Forensic Service Providers Survey approach the forensic industry broadly, FORESIGHT will show processes, strategies, resources, and allocations at a highly detailed level. A project of this magnitude for forensic laboratories has not been carried out anywhere.

Seventeen laboratories, ranging from local to federal, are voluntarily participating in this study. Only those laboratories performing the top 25 percentile were identified: The goal of the study is to improve performance not punish “poor” performance. Because all the laboratories are using the same definitions and measuring all the metrics in the same way, the laboratories can use the results of the study to compare results between laboratory demographics of which are similar, such as size of jurisdiction, and services offered, a number of employees. Initial indications are that improvement should come quickly; for example, the cost per sample for a solid dose drug analysis had a range of an order of magnitude. Local economics obtain, of course, and costs such as salaries, overhead, and supplies will vary by locale but not to that degree. FORESIGHT will be useful in the short term to improve laboratories immediately but the real payoff will come as the project continues in out years and trends begin to emerge. Unless and until forensic laboratories operate more like business as, the logjam of resources, cases, and lag time will only increase.

FORESIGHT, Efficiency, Costs