

SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2024 CENSUS OF PUBLICLY FUNDED FORENSIC CRIME LABORATORIES

A. JUSTIFICATION

Overview

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) requests clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to administer the 2024 Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories (CPFFCL; OMB #1121-0269) (see **Attachment A** for the full survey and example screenshots of web instrument). The survey builds on the previous CPFFCL data collections that used 2002, 2005, 2009, 2014, and 2020 reference years. BJS plans to field the 2024 CPFFCL during 2025. The goal is to gather and report national statistics on the operations of forensic crime labs in the United States, including their budget, staffing, workload, policies, and procedures. Several key improvements have been made to the survey to reduce burden and enhance its utility, including—

- New definitions and examples of key terms to improve clarity and ensure accurate data collection.
- New questions on emerging topics including (1) laboratory oversight from a forensic science board or commission, (2) median turnaround time, (3) reasons labs outsourced services, (4) uses of new and advanced technologies, (5) greatest resource needs, and (6) challenges faced during 2024.
- Consolidation of functions performed, workload (i.e., received, completed, and backlogged requests), and outsourcing questions with new skip patterns to reduce redundancy and burden.
- Removing questions deemed no longer relevant or important to the field by expert panel.

The 2024 CPFFCL will be conducted among all federal, state, and local crime labs that meet the following eligibility criteria—

1. Employs one or more full-time analysts whose principal function is the examination of physical or digital evidence in criminal and investigative matters;
2. Provides reports and testimony to courts of law with respect to such evidence;
3. Does not engage exclusively in evidence collection and documentation (such as fingerprint recovery and development, crime scene response, and photography).

The CPFFCL excludes all private labs and publicly funded agencies that engage exclusively in:

1. Evidence collection and documentation, such as latent print recovery and development, crime scene response, and photography; or
2. Analysis of digital evidence and perform no other forensic functions.

The 2020 CPFFCL was conducted among 423 individual federal, state, and local crime labs, including 326 standalone labs and multi-laboratory systems. About 30 new individual labs have been added to the 2024 frame using the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) membership list, the BJS Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) National Forensic Laboratory Information Management System (NFLIS) dataset, increasing the total from 423 in 2020 to 453 in 2024. Among the 453 individual labs that are part of a multi-laboratory system (e.g., a state

lab system with four regional labs), BJS expects that in most situations the main laboratory will respond to the CPFFCL on behalf of the entire multi-lab system, reducing the overall number of actual respondents from 453 to 350.

With a census design rather than a sample, the 2024 CPFFCL will comprehensively inform national, state, and local policymaking and budget planning. The CPFFCL is critical to understanding of the state of forensic crime labs and allowing governments to assess where additional resources are needed for development, improvement, and the expansion of forensic capabilities.

BJS will use a primarily web-based survey for the 2024 CPFFCL to promote high response rates, rapid data collection, and simplified data verification and report preparation. The census administration will use best practices in data collection technology to establish shorter cycles for future surveys. RTI will collect various paradata (e.g., respondent response mode, time required to answer each question, total time for survey completion, and the time interval between respondent access to the survey and completion of the survey) that will allow BJS to evaluate the impact of promoting online data collections and methods to reduce respondent burden. This information will also enable BJS to develop strategies to encourage greater online data collection for future surveys.

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.

Under Title 34, United States Code, § 10132, BJS is authorized to collect and analyze statistical information concerning the operation of the criminal justice system at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels (**Attachment B**). BJS disseminates critical high-quality information and statistics to inform policymakers, budget directors, researchers, criminal justice practitioners, and the public. The CPFFCL furthers the Department of Justice’s mission by providing insight into the nation’s forensic crime laboratory system infrastructure, functions, needs and challenges.

In the United States, crime labs are funded by federal, state, and local governments which legislate their operational jurisdiction of criminal cases and their legal authority to process, analyze, and render results and interpretations concerning evidence to its jurisdictional court systems and sometimes beyond. A 2023 National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) roundtable highlighted needs within crime labs that are studied through the CPFFCL, including personnel wellness, proficiency testing, information management, and demands for resources.¹

Publicly funded crime labs are a vital part of the criminal justice system, involving roles in law enforcement investigations, court proceedings, corrections, and public safety. Although key to the criminal justice system, they often contend with issues that challenge efficiency,

¹ Swofford, H. (2023). Long-Term Vision and Strategic Priorities for Forensic Science in the United States: Summary Report of a Roundtable Discussion with Thought Leaders. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Special Programs Office, Laboratory Programs. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.SP.2100-06>

effectiveness, and capacity. More data are needed to understand the need for resources (e.g., staffing and equipment), quality assurances, and the impact of forensic evidence analysis.

BJS is the only federal agency to collect comprehensive administrative, budgetary, and staffing related information from all crime labs across each forensic discipline. According to the 2020 CPFFCL, publicly funded crime labs employ more than 15,000 full-time employees and have a combined budget approaching \$2 billion annually.² They are relied upon to analyze criminal evidence through millions of requests for forensic services each year yet continue to face significant challenges to meet the demands. The 2024 CPFFCL is needed to assess changes since 2020 across the personnel, resources, and practices in the nation's forensic crime labs.

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

BJS Needs and Uses

BJS will be unable to describe the number of employees in crime labs, their budgets and resources, and the critical forensic services they provide without the CPFFCL. It also provides BJS with systematic knowledge about the policies, practices, and quality assurances used to complete the millions of requests for forensic analysis that crime labs receive each year. In addition, comparisons of the 2024 data to the prior CPFFCL data will provide important national statistics on trends over time and emerging issues. These statistics are disaggregated by lab size, jurisdiction served, and other characteristics to increase the utility of the results. The key CPFFCL measures include:

- Number and types of employees
- Operating budgets and expenditures
- Type of forensic functions performed
- Number of forensic requests received, completed, and backlogged
- Outsourcing forensic services
- Quality assurances
- Safety and wellness resources
- Advanced technology and procedures
- Emerging issues and challenges

Since 2002, BJS has published a series of reports on data obtained from previous CPFFCL surveys to document key characteristics of crime labs including staffing, infrastructure, resources, and technology. These reports are often cited in textbooks, research articles and public discussions as the authoritative source on the characteristics of forensic crime labs. Key BJS reports using the CPFFCL data include:

- [Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020](#)
- [Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories: Quality Assurance Practices, 2014](#)

² Brooks, C. (2023). Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/pffcl20.pdf>

- [Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories: Resources and Services, 2014](#)
- [Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2009](#)
- [Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2005](#)
- [Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2002](#)

Other Uses

The CPFFCL statistics are used to inform funding, planning, and development to strengthen and expand forensic capabilities. In February 2024, BJS presented the results from the 2020 CPFFCL to forensic science practitioners and policymakers at the annual conference of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). To further engage with stakeholders on the CPFFCL, BJS and RTI conducted a webinar titled “A National Snapshot of Publicly Funded Crime Laboratory Operations” in April 2024 to discuss trends from the CPFFCL and to better understand how lab directors and practitioners use the data. When asked during the discussion whether the CPFFCL’s workload, staffing, budget, or quality assurances statistics were the most useful for their work, each section was mentioned by multiple attendees with most of them indicating more than one section was useful for their work. Many of the attendees expressed that the CPFFCL is a valuable tool for comparing their staffing, budget, and backlog to the national average or to similar labs to justify the need for additional resources. Exploring future career paths was another important use mentioned by a student.

In addition to the CPFFCL publications on its website, BJS makes the dataset available at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). During 2024, the 2020 CPFFCL documentation or data were downloaded 316 times by 93 users.³ The data are used by criminal justice practitioners and government officials as the authoritative source on the types of forensic science disciplines, backlogs, and quality assurances that exist across the nation’s crime labs.

BJS references the CPFFCL when responding to queries from the U.S. Congress, Department of Justice, Supreme Court, state officials, international organizations, researchers, students, the media, and others interested in criminal justice statistics, to include:

Federal Agencies – Other federal agencies use the CPFFCL to understand the operations of forensic crime labs. For example, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is currently updating its 2019 Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices with the recent findings from the 2020 CPFFCL and other relevant data sources. The CPFFCL data are also used by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to inform the Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program that aims to enhance the quality and timeliness of crime lab services by implementing new technologies, training staff, and helping to eliminate backlogs. In addition, the CPFFCL data have been used by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science to

³ United States Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2024-01-29. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR38901.v1>

assess the extent to which crime labs have implemented national forensic science standards across the United States.⁴ Other uses of the CPFFCL data by federal agencies include:

- NIST report Forensic Science Environmental Scan 2023.⁵
- NIJ Forensic Technology Center of Excellence (FTCOE) report titled Forensic Science State Commissions and Oversight Bodies – A 2022 Update report.⁶
- AAFS testimony in 2019 on lab accreditation before the U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.⁷
- NIJ report to Congress in 2019 titled Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices.⁸
- NIJ report Fiscal Year 2016 Funding for DNA Analysis, Capacity Enhancement and Other Forensic Activities.⁹

Media – The media have also used CPFFCL data to address timely questions about crime lab operations by referencing the CPFFCL statistics.

Academia and Independent Researchers – Several academics have used CPFFCL data to conduct research on a range of criminal justice topics. Journal articles using the CPFFCL data within the last five years include:

- Whitford, A.B., Yates, J., Burchfield, A., Anastasopoulos, L.J., Anderson, D.M. (2020). The Adoption of Robotics by Government Agencies: Evidence from Crime Labs. *Public Administration Review*.
- Ropero-Miller, J.D., & Speaker, P.J. (2019). The hidden costs of the opioid crisis and the implications for financial management in the public sector. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 1, 227-238.
- Gardner, B.O., Kelley, S., Murrie, D.C., & Dror, I.E. (2019). What do forensic analysts consider relevant to their decision making? *Science & Justice*, 59, 5, 516-523.
- Matusiak, M.C., King, W.R., Campbell, B.A. (2020). The multi-dimensional environment of publicly funded U.S. crime laboratories and its impact on lab priorities, *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 43, 3, 362-376, DOI: 10.1080/0735648X.2019.1673792

⁴ OSAC Standards Bulletin (October 2024). OSAC Registry Standards Implementation Across the “Traditional” Forensic Landscape. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. Retrieved from <https://www.nist.gov/magazine/osac-standards-bulletin/october-2024>.

⁵ Swofford, H. (2024). Forensic Science Environmental Scan 2023. NIST Interagency/Internal Report (NISTIR), National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.8515>, https://tsapps.nist.gov/publication/get_pdf.cfm?pub

⁶ Ropero-Miller, J.D., and N. Jones. Forensic Science State Commissions and Oversight Bodies—A 2022 Update. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved from <https://forensiccoe.org/private/654825e11c28b>

⁷ Matthew Gamette, American Academy of Forensic Sciences (2019). Raising the Bar: Progress and Future Needs in Forensic Science.” [C8A0E946CCA853F2C3382C28B4DF93CE.2019-09-10-testimony-gamette.pdf \(house.gov\)](https://www.house.gov/committees/science/aaafs-testimony-gamette-2019-09-10)

⁸ National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2019). Report to Congress: Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices. National Institute of Justice, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/olp/page/file/1228306/download>

⁹ National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2017). Fiscal Year 2016 Funding for DNA Analysis, Capacity Enhancement and Other Forensic Activities. National Institute of Justice, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250552.pdf>

- Campbell R. Fehler-Cabral G. (2020) “Just Bring Us the Real Ones”: The Role of Forensic Crime Laboratories in Guarding the Gateway to Justice for Sexual Assault Victims, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, DOI: 10.1177/0886260520951303.
- Bollinger, K., Salyards, J., Satcher, R., and Shute, R. (2020). A landscape study of laboratory information management systems (LIMS) for forensic crime laboratories. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.
- Wickenheiser, R. (2022) Expanding DNA database effectiveness. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 4. DOI: [10.1016/j.fsisyn.2022.100226](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2022.100226). Jones, N.S., and Grassel, J. (Eds). (2022). 2022 Firearm and Toolmarks Policy and Practice Forum. RTI Press Publication No. CP-0014-2204. DOI: [10.3768/rtipress.2022.cp.0014.2204](https://doi.org/10.3768/rtipress.2022.cp.0014.2204).
- Attaway, P., Williams, C., Daye, C., Bynum, N., Weinstein, L., Johnson, R. (2023). The New DNA: Recommendations for agencies to consider implementing to improve digital evidence processing and analysis. https://forensicrti.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Digital-Evidence-In-Brief_FINAL.pdf
- Shaik, M., Gunjan, N. K., Suraj, S. (2022) Critical Components of the Criminal Justice System, the Medical-Legal Autopsy and Forensic Science Laboratory. *Journal of Cardiovascular Disease Research*, 13:08, 2303-2308, ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also, describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

The 2024 CPFFCL will use the same multi-mode design as the 2020 CPFFCL that directs respondents to a web survey through mailed and emailed invitations. The web survey will be hosted by RTI International (RTI) at www.bjsforensics.org. RTI will keep an updated database of contact information, which will further allow the team to send emails to respondents with a hyperlink to the questionnaire. Each respondent will have a unique Case Identification Number and password provided to access the website to complete the questionnaire. The web survey application will incorporate consistency checks to validate data entries and machine edits that check for inconsistent, out-of-range, or missing responses. These automated processes will help improve data quality and minimize respondent burden resulting from follow-up contact to resolve data discrepancies or other issues. Respondents will be able to start the survey, save their responses and later resume from the point in the survey where they last entered data. The survey software allows for real-time online tracking of respondents, thereby allowing BJS to monitor the completion of each agency’s responses. In addition, the web system supports the export of survey data and paradata in various formats specified by BJS.

Although online completion of the survey is preferable for many reasons, agencies may have several reasons why they do not respond via the internet. For example, some might not have reliable internet access, and others might find it difficult to complete online because of the need to involve multiple people in preparing the response. Agencies that require paper access will have multiple methods of receiving paper versions of the instrument.¹⁰ Agencies will be able to

¹⁰ Paper surveys accounted for only about 5% of submissions in the 2020 CPFFCL.

download a PDF version of the survey from the survey site that can be printed or e-mailed to agency staff. Respondents can then gather data in hard copy and enter it into the online survey instrument or scan and return the completed survey form via mail or e-mail. Hard copies will also be sent via mail during routine non-response follow-up.

To process completed hard copy surveys, RTI will use a software package that employs Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to electronically convert scanned images of handwritten, typewritten, or printed text into machine-encoded text. Data captured via OCR will be manually reviewed to ensure accuracy. Use of this technology will minimize paper handling, reduce processing time, increase reliability, and enhance retention of written survey responses.

Upon completion of the project, the final dataset and supporting documentation will be made available to the public for free and without restriction in an online archive (NACJD) in multiple statistical platform formats. Access to these data permits analysts to identify the specific responses of individual agencies and to conduct statistical analyses about labs. These data will have agency- and jurisdiction-specific identifiers that will permit public use in combination with other data files with similar identifiers.

The BJS-produced findings from the 2024 CPFFCL will be provided to the public in electronic format. The report will be available on the BJS website.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item A.2 above.

While other federal and non-federal surveys are sent to crime labs, they are not inclusive of the nationwide coverage of all forensic disciplines and the broad range of topics included in the CPFFCL. The DEA's NFLIS surveys of crime labs that handle drugs and toxicology (OMB# 1117-0034) are more limited in scope and content compared to the CPFFCL. The NFLIS also differs from the CPFFCL because it includes private labs. In addition to including all public crime labs that perform any type of forensic analysis, the CPFFCL provides important administrative information from labs that NFLIS does not, including budget, staff size and types of lab positions. On the other hand, the NFLIS toxicology survey provides in depth details not available from the CPFFCL on toxicology testing (e.g., postmortem, human performance) and analytical methods used for toxicology screening.¹¹ The NFLIS drug survey provides detailed information, not available from the CPFFCL, on the policies of labs for submitting and analyzing drug cases and the types of quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted on drugs.¹²

In 2007, with the support of NIJ, Project FORESIGHT was created by Dr. Paul Speaker at the West Virginia University in which participating labs provide operational data through the Laboratory Reporting and Analysis Tool (LabRAT). Project FORESIGHT only includes a subset of the nation's public labs along with some international labs that are outside the scope of the

¹¹ Diversion Control Division. (2022). National Forensic Laboratory Information System: 2021 Toxicology Laboratory Survey report. U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

¹² U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Diversion Control Division. (2019). NFLIS-Drug 2019 Survey of Crime Laboratory Drug Chemistry Sections Report. Springfield, VA: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

CPFFCL. This project is designed to provide labs upon request a self-evaluation of its performance and allocation of resources with a benchmarking report and assessment of the effectiveness of its current business processes.¹³ While this service asks labs about their workloads and expenditures as is done in the CPPFCL, Project FORESIGHT does not provide the official, nationwide statistics available through the CPFFCL that the forensic laboratory community has relied on since 2002.

The BJS Census of Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices (CMEC; (OMB# 1121-0296) is designed to complement the CPFFCL. Although a small number of medical examiner and coroner offices are within a crime laboratory, the CPFFCL asks questions relevant to a broader array of forensic sciences conducted by those agencies, while the CMEC is limited to questions on medicolegal death investigations.

The BJS Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA; OMB# 1121-0346) also includes a small overlap in the agencies included in the CPFFCL. However, the CSLLEA collects information on the officers employed by law enforcement agencies and their duties and excludes the crime labs within those agencies.

Akin to the CSLLEA, the BJS Census of Federal Law Enforcement Officers (CFLEO) surveys all federal law enforcement agencies, some of which have crime labs. However, the CFLEO focuses on the personnel with firearm and arrest authority, including their recruitment and training, equipment, and operations.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

The CPFFCL data collection will involve small labs that have few full-time employees. BJS continues to use web-based data collection instruments to ease reporting and reduce the need for follow-up due to errors in reporting and incorrect skips caught by programmatic edit checks. Questions on the CPFFCL instrument have been streamlined such that most responses allow respondents to select from a list of options without needing to provide narratives or consult raw data pulls. Additionally, cognitive testing and expert panel participants included representatives from small labs who provided feedback that was used to further reduce burden. Most notably, the CPFFCL is now better designed to allow the main lab to respond for all labs in the same multi-lab system, reducing the burden on small agencies. While we anticipate that all labs, regardless of size, will be able to submit the survey electronically, the census will also be available via paper and phone.

6. Describe the consequence to federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Should the 2024 CPFFCL not be fielded, the 2020 data will remain the most comprehensive information about the publicly funded crime lab system. These data are dated and provide limited insight into the access and use of new forensic technologies that have been developed

¹³ <https://business.wvu.edu/research-outreach/forensic-business-studies/foresight>

and evolved since the 2020 CPFFCL. Lab operations have evolved in response to two major national health crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid epidemic, while dealing with the national forensic staffing pipeline shortage. Moreover, federal programs aimed to support the crime lab system through a funding stream, such as BJA's Coverdell grants, will continue to base some of the funding and programmatic needs on these old, outdated data.

BJS understands from the leadership from ASCLD that there is great interest and continued support of the CPFFCL to update national understanding of the state of the forensic crime lab system. Keeping these collections on this schedule will allow BJS and others to examine trends in the uses of forensic science in the criminal justice system more broadly.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

- **requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**
- **requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**
- **requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**
- **requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**
- **in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**
- **requiring the use of statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**
- **that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or**
- **requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.**

There are no special circumstances.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the *Federal Register* of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

- **Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**

- **Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years -- even if the collection-of-information activity is the same as in prior periods. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained**

The research under this clearance is consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.8(d). The 60-day notice for public commentary was published in the Federal Register, Volume 89, Number 229, pages 93663-93664 on November 27, 2024 (**Attachment C**). BJS advertised this notice on its webpage and social media feeds. The comment period ended on January 27, 2025. In response to the 60-day notice, BJS did not receive any comments. The 30-day notice for public commentary was published in the federal register following the expiration of the 60-day comment period (**Attachment D**).

Based on feedback received from crime lab directors from various sized agencies and states through an expert panel meeting in March 2024 (**Tables 1 and 2**), the new instrument features questions that have been refined to minimize burden, increase clarity, and improve response options where needed. The expert panel, including a forensic scientist from NIJ’s Office of Investigative and Forensic Sciences, were provided the 2020 CPFFCL survey and asked about how well they understood the questions, any potential issues with responding, the relevance of the topics to the field, and new topics and emerging issues to be included in the 2024 CPFFCL.

Table 1. Lab characteristics of 2024 CPFFCL expert panel participants

Lab Characteristics	Count
Total Participants	8
Region	
Northeast	1
South	3
Midwest	1
West	2
Federal organization	1
Government Type	
Municipal	2
County	2
State	3
Federal	1
Multi-laboratory System	
Yes	3
No	4
Functions Performed*	
Controlled Substances	5
Toxicology	2
Trace Analysis	4
Impressions	3
Firearms and Toolmarks	6

Digital and Multimedia Evidence	1
Latent Prints	6
Questioned Documents	1
Crime Scene Investigation	3
Forensic Biology	6
Number of Full-Time Staff	
Fewer than 50	2
Between 50 and 100	2
Between 100 and 200	3

Table 2. Lab name and position of 2024 CPFCL expert panel participants

Lab Name	Position of representative
Broward Sheriff’s Office Crime Laboratory	Director
Greensboro Police Department	Director of Forensic Services
Idaho State Police Forensic Services Laboratory System	Director
Missouri State Highway Patrol Crime Laboratory Division	Director
National Institute of Justice	Physical Scientist
New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner	Chief of Laboratories
North Carolina State Crime Laboratory	Assistant Director
San Diego Sheriff’s Crime Laboratory	Director

Following the expert panel meeting, BJS conducted a fireside chat at the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) Symposium in May 2024 to receive additional input from forensic science practitioners on ways to improve the CPFCL, reduce burden on the respondents, and emerging topics that the 2024 survey might include.

Following the survey development phase, nine labs with diverse characteristics participated in cognitive testing of the 2024 CPFCL instrument from June to July 2024 (**Tables 3 and 4**). The participants were asked about question wording, response categories and layout, and to identify any issues with recall or ability to complete the instrument. Results from cognitive interviewing were used to make final revisions to the instrument (**Attachment E**).

Table 3. Lab characteristics of 2024 CPFCL cognitive testing participants

Lab Characteristics	Count
Total labs	9
Region	
Northeast	1
South	4
Midwest	0
West	2
National (Federal)	2
Government Type	
Municipal	1
County	3
State	3
Federal	2
Multi-laboratory System	
Yes	4
No	5
Functions Performed*	
Controlled Substances	8
Toxicology	7
Trace Analysis	7
Impressions	6
Firearms and Toolmarks	8
Digital and Multimedia Evidence	2
Latent Prints	8
Questioned Documents	3
Crime Scene Investigation	6
Forensic Biology	8
Number of Full-Time Staff	
Fewer than 25	2
Between 25 and 250	4
Over 250	3

Table 4. Lab name and position of 2024 CPFCL cognitive testing participants

Lab Name	Position of representative
Acadiana Criminalistics Laboratory	Director
Ada County Sheriff's Office (Forensic Lab)	Forensic Lab Manager
Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner Forensic Laboratory Division	Laboratory Director
Arizona DPS Crime Laboratory	SAB Quality Assurance Manager

ATF Fire Research Laboratory (Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms & Explosives)	Senior Technical Advisor
FBI Laboratory	Senior Scientist
Houston Forensic Science Center	Director
Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation	Director
Virginia Department of Forensic Science	Director

Several items from the 2020 CPFCL that are no longer relevant to the operations of the crime labs were removed from the 2024 CPFCL. BJS has evaluated all comments and recommendations for revision from cognitive testing and have incorporated these changes for improvement into the new CPFCL instrument. In addition, the survey was reorganized and streamlined to reduce burden on participants. The 2024 instrument has 86 items across 6 sections.

1. Section A – Organization

This section collects information on whether an individual lab is part of a multi-lab system, the level of government under which the lab operates, the type of agency or government body with lab oversight, and whether the lab has a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). Based on discussions with the expert panel on important issues for policymakers and practitioners, two questions from the 2014 CPFCL on LIMS capabilities and uses of national databases by crime labs were added to the 2024 CPFCL. New to this iteration of CPFCL, based on feedback from the expert panel, are questions about lab oversight from a forensic science board or commission, and whether it has a regulatory or advisory role.

Cognitive testing and discussions with the expert panel resulted in improvements to wording in certain items. In item A4, one example was removed from one of the answer choices, “Department of Justice”, to reduce any potential confusion surrounding law enforcement entities. However, item A8 received clarification through additional wording, by providing examples across these three answer choices, “Tracking by criminal case status”, “Generating reports”, and “Paperless reporting”. Similarly, one of the answer choices was updated in A9 to include the new name for Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) – now Next Generation Identification (NGI), as two cognitive testing participants noted a shift in the field. Based on recommendations from the expert panel, the item pertaining to whether a lab is part of a multi-lab system, and its subsequent item, were moved to the beginning of Section A; this was generally well received during cognitive testing.

2. Section B – Budget

This section collects information on total operating budgets available to the labs, other sources of funding (e.g., asset forfeitures, donations, fees, and grants), expenditures (e.g., equipment, supplies, outsourcing, and training) and the budget year start and end dates. Cognitive testing participants agreed this section was generally clear and would be easy to answer.

3. Section C – Staffing

Section C collects information on the number of full-time, part-time, and vacant positions across various lab positions and the number of hires and separations in 2024. A new question captures reasons why staff left the lab in 2024. The data collected from this section will provide BJS with the ability to describe any staffing shortages and provide a national picture of why labs might be facing staffing challenges, which are critical to maintain integrity of forensic science work within the criminal legal system. Cognitive testing participants found this section to be generally clear and expressed ease in providing the requested data. Thus, cognitive testing resulted in two changes for this section. Item C2 received a new header, “Primary function”, in the staffing category column to ensure labs are reporting based on staff’s primary function, as staff can often perform multiple functions within the lab. For item C3, examples were added to the second answer choice of “Separations”, to now read, “Separations (e.g., voluntary, involuntary, and retirements)”, as a few participants requested clarification surrounding what was meant by “separations”.

4. Section D – Workload

This section collects information about the individual lab’s workload across requests for different types of forensic disciplines and services, backlogged requests, outsourced requests, and median turnaround time by forensic discipline. This section also includes questions regarding any mandated turnaround time by law, forensic functions included in that mandate, and the reasons why labs outsourced their requests (and to whom) in 2024. Information from this section will allow BJS to describe the amount of work labs undertook in 2024 and the polices as well as potential challenges surrounding their labor.

Following current best practices in survey methodology, this entire section was reorganized from the previous iteration, to produce a more seamless question flow and to reduce burden on respondents. Two improvements included the removal of what was previously a large grid of workload questions and moving the questions on types of functions performed from Section A to this section to simplify the workload questions. Questions by discipline on the overall number of pending requests were replaced with median turnaround time to provide more context to the counts of backlogged requests. Instructions at the introduction of this section were refreshed or added for clarity. For example, definitions for “outsourced request” and “median turnaround time” were added. Most participants found these changes straightforward and clear, thus no changes resulted from cognitive testing regarding these items. Cognitive testing also resulted in wording improvements, such as changing “Print development analysis” to “Latent print development” in D28, per subject matter expertise and guidance. For item D40, examples were provided to “Casework analysis” for increased clarity and understanding. For item D55, three new answer choices were added to the list as a result of cognitive testing, relating to why a lab might have outsourced their requests in 2024.

5. Section E – Quality Assurance

Section E will collect information about whether the lab was required to be accredited and if any forensic disciplines within the lab were accredited. This section also includes questions concerning resources dedicated to research, if a lab conducted proficiency testing, the level of technical reviews performed, and if lab staff had access to any safety and wellness resources. Based on cognitive testing, improvements in wording were made to a few items. For item E1,

participants found this question to be clear and straightforward, however for additional clarity the question was revised to include “accredited by any local, state, or federal jurisdictions that your serve.” Item E6 was also well received, but two participants noted that the level of technical review can vary by discipline, thus, a new set of instructions were added. E7 received a minor wording change in the instructions, switching from “analysts/examiners” to “staff” for more inclusivity, in addition to examples being provided for two answer choices, along with the addition of a new answer choice “Physical fitness.”

6. Section F – Emerging Topics

Section F, a new section developed with the expert panel, will collect information regarding whether multiple analysts within the same discipline performed work on the same evidence, the types of advanced procedures and technologies the lab used or was in the process of implementing in 2024, needs for additional funding in the lab, types of challenges labs faced in 2024, and a final item that provides a place for respondents to share any comments with BJS regarding the CPPFCL. Cognitive testing resulted in minor wording changes across multiple items. For items F2 and F3, “in-house” was added to the end of the instructions for clarity, in addition to replacing “Expert systems” with “Expert systems, or software to process data without human intervention.” For item F5, the term “key personnel” was replaced with “staff,” for more inclusivity similar to Section E, and this change flowed into item F6 as well.

The 2024 CPPFCL was developed for a web-based data collection and includes filter questions, built-in skip patterns, and data checks. The sections on functions performed, workload, and outsourcing were consolidated in the 2024 instrument with new skip patterns to further reduce burden and avoid redundancy for labs that don’t perform certain functions. To further reduce burden on the respondents, the questions on workload and outsourcing counts and median turnaround time were developed with crime lab experts to ensure the responses can be extracted from existing information on forensic services in their Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS). It was also designed with best practice web layouts, including matrices, yes/no questions, and additional instructions where appropriate to simplify the response options and provide additional context.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No government funds will be used as payment or for gifts to respondents. Participation is voluntary and no gifts or incentives will be given.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

BJS, its employees, and its data collection agents will use the data it collects only for statistical or research purposes. BJS is authorized to conduct this data collection under Title 34 United States Code, Section 10132. BJS may use the information it collects only for statistical and research purposes and must gather it in a manner that precludes its use for law enforcement or any purpose relating to a private person or public agency other than statistical or research purposes [Title 34 U.S.C. Section 10134]. By law, BJS is required to protect the confidentiality

of information identifiable to a private person and safeguard it against unauthorized disclosure or misuse [Title 34 United States Code Sections 10134 and 10231]. The [BJS Data Protection Guidelines](#) provide more detailed information on how BJS and its data collection agents will use and protect data collected under BJS's authority.

The data collected through the 2024 CPFFCL represent institutional characteristics of crime labs. Information collected from these organizations is considered within the public domain. The first page of the survey instrument will include information regarding how participation in this survey is voluntary and how information about individual agency responses will be available to the public after the conclusion of the survey. However, it will also be made clear to responding agencies that BJS and RTI will not archive or otherwise release the names, phone numbers, or email addresses of the actual persons responsible for completing the 2024 CPFFCL instrument.

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature in the proposed 2024 CPFFCL.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should:

- **Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. Unless directed to do so, agencies should not conduct special surveys to obtain information on which to base hour burden estimates. Consultation with a sample (fewer than 10) of potential respondents is desirable. If the hour burden on respondents is expected to vary widely because of differences in activity, size, or complexity, show the range of estimated hour burden, and explain the reasons for the variance. General, estimates should not include burden hours for customary and usual business practices.**
- **If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form.**
- **Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories. The cost of contracting out or paying outside parties for information collection activities should not be included here. Instead, this cost should be included in Item 14.**

Approximately 350 agencies will be invited to participate in the 2024 CPFFCL. BJS has estimated the total respondent burden for the 2024 CPFFCL at 581 hours (**Table 5**). The 2024 CPFFCL burden estimate was calculated using an estimate of 90 minutes (or 1.5 hours) per respondent for the completion of the questionnaire being completed by an estimated 350 agencies totaling 525 hours of burden. In addition, BJS plans to conduct data quality follow-up with approximately 225 agencies at 15 minutes (or .25 hours) per respondent, totaling 56 hours.

The 90-minute estimate for the 2024 CPFFCL is based on the estimate from the 2020 CPFFCL, the input of the 2020 and 2024 expert panels, and estimates provided during cognitive testing for the 2024 CPFFCL. This includes the time needed by responding agencies to research the information being requested on the form.

Table 5. Summary of annual burden hours associated with the 2024 CPFFCL

Collection	Number of Respondents	Freq.	Total Annualized Responses	Participation Time (minutes)	Total Burden (Hours)	Hourly Rate	Monetized Value of Respondent Time
All labs	350	1	350	90	525	\$35.67	\$18,727
Data Quality Follow-Up	225	1	225	15	56	\$35.67	\$1,998
Total	350		350		581		\$20,725

Assuming a pay rate approximately equivalent to the GS-12 / 01 level (\$74,441 per year), the estimated agency cost of employee time would be approximately \$35.67 per hour. Based on the estimated time burden of 90 minutes (or 1.5 hours) per response and employee pay rate, the total respondent employee time cost burden to complete the census form is estimated at \$18,727. Additionally, BJS estimates that for about two thirds (or 225) of the 2024 CPFFCL responses, we will conduct data quality follow up, taking approximately 15 minutes (or .25 hours) to complete. The additional estimated respondent employee cost burden for the 225 data quality follow-up hours is \$1,998. There are no anticipated costs to respondents beyond the employee time needed to complete the survey and participate in data quality follow up. Therefore, the total cost burden to respondents associated with this clearance request is \$20,725.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).

- **The cost estimate should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start up cost component (annualized over its expected useful life); and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of service component. The estimates should take into account costs associated with generating, maintaining, and disclosing or providing the information. Include descriptions of methods used to estimate major cost factors including system and technology acquisition, expected useful life of capital equipment, the discount rate(s), and the time period over which costs will be incurred. Capital and start-up costs include, among other items, preparations for collecting information such as purchasing computers and software; monitoring, sampling, drilling and testing equipment; and record storage facilities.**
- **If cost estimates are expected to vary widely, agencies should present ranges of cost burdens and explain the reasons for the variance. The cost of purchasing or contracting out information collection services should be a part of this cost burden estimate. In developing cost burden estimates, agencies may consult with a sample of**

respondents (fewer than 10), utilize the 60-day pre-OMB submission public comment process and use existing economic or regulatory impact analysis associated with the rulemaking containing the information collection, as appropriate.

- Generally, estimates should not include purchases of equipment or services, or portions thereof, made: (1) prior to October 1, 1995, (2) to achieve regulatory compliance with requirements not associated with the information collection, (3) for reasons other than to provide information or keep records for the government, or (4) as part of customary and usual business or private practices.

There are no anticipated costs to respondents beyond the employee time expended in gathering advance information or completing the instrument. Respondents are not being asked to purchase anything or maintain any services as part of this data collection. Furthermore, purchase of outside accounting or information collection services, if performed by the respondent, is part of usual and customary business practices, not specifically required for providing information to BJS.

14. Provide estimates of the annualized cost to the Federal Government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 into a single table.

The total expected cost to the Federal government for the 2024 CPFFCL is about \$907,000. BJS personnel costs are calculated based on Office of Personnel Management’s salary tables. This work consists of planning the project, developing the questionnaire, preparing the materials, collecting the data, evaluating the results, generating the data reports, and responding to media and external inquiries. A BJS GS-14 Statistician will oversee RTI’s work on this project. **Table 6** shows the estimated project budget for the 2024 CPFFCL.

Table 6. Estimated Costs for the 2024 CPFFCL

	Project Year			Total
	2024	2025	2026	
BJS cost				
Staff salaries				
GS-14 Statistician (25%)	\$34,849	\$35,894	\$36,940	\$107,683
GS-15 Supervisory Statistician (5%)	\$8,198	\$8,444	\$8,690	\$25,332
GS-14 Lead Editor (5%)	\$6,970	\$7,179	\$7,388	\$21,537
GS-13 Other Editorial Staff (3%)	\$3,539	\$3,645	\$3,751	\$10,935
GS-14 Information Technology Specialist (5%)	\$6,970	\$7,179	\$7,388	\$21,537
GS-15/SES/SL BJS leadership (1%)	\$6,078	\$6,260	\$6,442	\$18,780
<i>Subtotal salaries</i>	\$66,603	\$68,601	\$70,599	\$205,803
Fringe benefits (30% of salaries)	\$19,981	\$20,580	\$21,180	\$61,741
<i>Subtotal: Salary & fringe</i>	\$86,584	\$89,181	\$91,779	\$267,544

Other administrative costs of salary & fringe (15%)	\$12,988	\$13,377	\$13,767	\$40,132
Subtotal: BJS cost	\$99,571	\$102,559	\$105,546	\$307,676
Data collection agent cost				
Personnel	\$96,529	\$75,803	\$34,644	\$206,976
Fringe Benefits	\$42,473	\$33,353	\$15,243	\$91,069
Travel	\$7,736	\$0	\$0	\$7,736
Equipment	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Supplies	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Consultants/Contracts	\$0	\$18,395	\$15,761	\$34,156
Other	\$1,091	\$2,957	\$811	\$4,859
<i>Total Direct Costs</i>	\$147,829	\$130,508	\$66,459	\$344,796
Total Indirect	\$118,944	\$93,133	\$42,634	\$254,711
Subtotal data collection agent cost	\$266,773	\$223,641	\$109,093	\$599,507
Sum of BJS and agent cost	\$366,344	\$326,200	\$214,639	\$907,183

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

The overall burden hours have decreased from 1,312 hours for the 2020 collection to 581 hours for the 2024 collection. More burden hours, including pre- and post-survey time, were estimated for the 2020 CPFFCL because, at that time, the plans were to have each lab in multi-lab systems complete the survey instead of the new approach for the 2024 CPFFCL to have the main lab complete it for the entire multi-lab system.

There have also been adjustments to the instrument (as discussed in #8). The 2024 CPFFCL will allow for needed comparisons of the results and trends with the previous administrations of the CPFFCL, and the proposed instrument has been revised to include modifications to some previous items and new items stemming from expert and methodological reviews, as well as cognitive testing of the survey.

With 95% of the 2020 CPFFCL respondents completing the survey online, BJS expects that the vast majority of 2024 CPFFCL respondents will complete the survey online as well, thus, web-based system functions will be in place to ease the burden. RTI uses an intelligent log-in program for data collection, which will store agency information and responses, allowing for multi-session completion of the survey instrument. Since many labs, particularly the larger ones, will need to seek multiple information sources within their organizations to answer different sections, this will reduce burden by facilitating data entry from different sources. It will also reduce burden by allowing respondents to pause in completing the survey pending confirmation of information from others in the agency.

Since some respondents will complete the CPFFCL using paper forms, survey methodologists have evaluated the questions and layout to ensure that the instrument is formatted appropriately for what is being asked of respondents. This includes ensuring that instructions and questions are clear, adjacent to one another, and definitions for terms are provided as necessary and placed near the question to which they refer. This evaluation, along with feedback from expert panelists and cognitive interview participants, has helped refine the current survey instrument.

RTI will also provide assistance by phone and email. A toll-free help line will be established, and staff will be available during regular business hours. When staff are not available, calls will be routed to voicemail. Messages will be responded to within 24 hours. A dedicated CPFFCL help email address will be provided with all written materials and emails. Phone numbers and email addresses will be provided to respondents to ensure timely communications.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulations, and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

Pending OMB approval, the 2024 CPFFCL data collection is scheduled to begin in March 2025. The data collection period (see **Table 7**) is scheduled to end in October 2025.

Table 7. 2024 CPFFCL project schedule

Task	Start Date	End Date
Data collection	March 2025	October 2025
Notification of impending due dates, nonresponse follow-up, thank you letters	March 2025	October 2025
Data editing, verification, final callbacks	March 2025	October 2025
Production of final analytic file and documentation	September 2025	December 2025
Analysis	December 2025	February 2026
Report writing, editing, and release	February 2026	July 2026

The dataset and supporting documentation will be made available for download without charge at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). Around the same date as the archiving of the data, BJS plans to release at least one report presenting findings from data gathered from this collection. Access to these data permits analysts to identify the specific responses of individual laboratories and to conduct statistical analyses.

For details on the project schedule and process for collecting the information, see Supporting Statement B.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

We are requesting no exemption.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

This collection of information does not include any exceptions to the certificate statement.

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS.

This collection contains statistical data.

List of Attachments

Attachment A: CPFFCL survey and screenshots of web instrument

Attachment B: BJS authorizing legislation

Attachment C: 60-day federal register notice

Attachment D: 30-day federal register notice

Attachment E: Cognitive interview report

Attachment F: Survey invitation letter

Attachment G: Endorsement letter

Attachment H: Survey invitation email

Attachment I: CPFFCL flyer

Attachment J: ASCLD survey launch announcement

Attachment K: First reminder email and postcard

Attachment L: Second reminder email and letter

Attachment M: Third reminder email and letter

Attachment N: Fourth reminder letter

Attachment O: Fifth reminder email and postcard

Attachment P: Sixth reminder email from ASCLD

Attachment Q: Telephone follow-up scripts for data quality

Attachment R: Telephone follow-up scripts for nonresponse

Attachment S: Critical items list

Attachment T: Critical items survey letter

Attachment U: Critical items email

Attachment V: End-of-study letter

Attachment W: End-of-study email

Attachment X: Completion thank you email