

Putting Your Taxpayers' Money Where Your Mouth Is

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As the forensic science community gears up to respond to the increasing demand for more timely DNA testing of more items of evidence and the expansion in the use of data banks, the issue reduces itself, as most things do in life, to one of money.

That's where I and my fellow laboratory managers come in; it is our job to provide our examiners and researchers with the wherewithal to perform their work with the necessary speed, skill and accuracy to meet established standards of performance and the goals of our agencies. Our ultimate goal at the local, state and federal level remains to provide sufficient capacity to be able to provide probative investigative information to our law enforcement agencies as soon as technically and logistically possible. The extent to which we are successful in meeting this goal defines the ultimate success of the program.

As Chairman of the Laboratory Funding Working Group of the Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence, we have been working toward determining, on a national level, how much money would be needed for facilities, supplies/equipment, training, accreditation, continuing education, etc. This is a formidable task by itself, but obtaining those funds is quite another. It is at this point that we are called upon to establish a positive cost (risk) v. benefit analysis. Predicting costs, as difficult as it may be, is more quantifiable than benefits, which go far beyond cost saving. This paper will explore these cost/benefit issues, concentrating on predicting the benefit side of the equation, and how we must deliver on these benefits.