I am pleased to present to the Membership the NFSTC 2002 Annual Report.

This report illustrates the substantial corporate growth that took place during the year and the positive impact that the NFSTC has had on our key user stakeholders.

Michael G. Sheppo  
President  
Largo, FL  
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OVERVIEW

The Federal budget for FY 2002 included $8.5 million in support for programs provided to public state and local crime laboratories under the NFSTC’s Cooperative Agreement with the NIJ. Working with member organizations and other key stakeholders, we developed the content of the proposal submitted to the NIJ covered by this directed funding.

As with earlier phases of the Cooperative Agreement, the proposal focused on competency in service delivery. Core competency at the practitioner level was evidenced by a series of workshops and by the extension of the academy concept, which was piloted in the first half of the year.

The 2002 proposal incorporated a commitment to capture content wherever possible for conversion later to technology based delivery. Face-to-face instruction can be costly in lost staff time, even if direct participation is supported. As we demonstrated with the highly successful Laboratory Auditing CD-ROM, technology based delivery can offer a very attractive alternate delivery medium.

Several initiatives demonstrated laboratory competency. One of these initiatives, the provision for an external compliance audit for DNA laboratories every two years, was recognized during the deliberations of the Attorney General’s Working Group on DNA Laboratory Backlogs. We are pleased to report that, during the year, the NFSTC provided services to all 50 states, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

The Cooperative Agreement has had a major impact on the NFSTC corporation. The size of the funds allocated to the programs and the fiscal controls associated with them makes the management of the Cooperative Agreement a significant task for the NFSTC administration. The proportion of total annual revenue that originated in the Cooperative Agreement reached 80 per cent in 2002, compared to 78% in 2001, and 63% in 2000.
Staff numbered 21 at the end of 2002, compared to nine the previous year and eight in 2000 – the first year of the Cooperative Agreement. The growth is due entirely to the additional staff required for program delivery and award management.

The development of our 2002 Cooperative Agreement proposal coincided with the NIJ initiative to coordinate all cooperative agreements under its management in an effort to maximize the benefits to State and Local crime laboratories. As a result, it identified these programs – provided by the NFSTC, the University of Central Florida’s National Center for Forensic Science, the Marshall University Forensic Science Program, and the West Virginia Forensic Science Program – as the Forensic Resource Network (FRN).

Non-NIJ business conducted by the NFSTC was reviewed during the year. The Board supported continued development of our ISO 17025 accreditation services based upon customer demand. Furthermore, the provision of these services contributes to the quality delivery of forensic science services, which is in the interest of everyone employed in forensic science.

Therefore, we pressed ahead vigorously with our application for recognition by the NACLA as an ISO 58 compliant Accreditation Body. The initial response from the NACLA requested that we establish a clearer separation of our ISO accreditation services from the balance of the business conducted by the NFSTC. We achieved this by establishing three distinct business units: FQS, FQS-I, and NIJ. FQS and FQS-I each has its own separate, but linked logo.
A new logo was also introduced for the parent company.

“NIJ” is responsible for all of the NIJ Cooperative Award business, which provides needed services to state and local crime laboratories under the Cooperative Agreement. In addition to the NIJ supported programs, the NFSTC provides fee for service programs through the FQS and FQS-I business units.

- FQS-I is Forensic Quality Services – ISO, the business unit that provides ISO accreditations.
- FQS is Forensic Quality Services, the business unit that provides all other programs in NFSTC.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The NFSTC delivered services valued at over $3,000,000 in 2002. Information about some of the programs is presented below, with the view of giving a reasonable snapshot of the range and impact of our work. Internal development as well as service delivery is covered.

**Drug Academy**

Probably the most significant implementation of our commitment to personal competency was the design and delivery of a 16-week basic Drug Academy, which commenced at the end of January. The objective was to test the concept that a compressed learning, academy-style induction course would be more effective than the traditional mentoring model. Developed with the DEA, the program and many aspects of the content – such as the strong focus on academic rigor – reflect the views of both partners. The shared purpose is the establishment of a sound platform of knowledge of drug chemistry and not a rote process of how to operate instrumentation.

Eleven students completed the program and received their certificates from the NIJ Director Sarah Hart at a ceremony on May 30, 2002.

“Of the eleven students, ten laboratories rated the experience as good to excellent.”
**DNA External Audit Program**

The National Quality Assurance Standards for DNA Testing require a compliance audit each year and external participation in the audit at least every other year. Planning and funding (whether by paying a contractor or repaying a peer laboratory in kind) is a drain on laboratory resources. Utilizing our external audit program permits the laboratory to dedicate its resources to testing. The combination of sound program management and selected auditors who have completed the FBI DNA audit class provides the additional benefit of consistency to the process.

The program began mid-2002 and 33 audits were completed. The response from users has been very positive:

“The experience of NFSTC and its auditors was obvious and very beneficial.”

“We have had numerous audits and none came close to the skills and expertise shown during this one. It was thorough, organized, professional, knowledgeable, and extremely helpful.”

“When the tone is set well at the beginning, the staff embraces the process. Even our administrative staff understood. I would recommend the audit program to anyone.”

**Georgia Bureau of Investigation Accreditation Ceremony**

The certificate of accreditation for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation laboratory system was presented at a ceremony at the GBI headquarters in January. The addition of NFSTC’s accreditation to their ASCLD/LAB recognition meant that the GBI became the first regular crime laboratory in the U.S. to achieve accreditation to ISO 17025.

On the international front, the NFSTC assisted the Standards Council of Canada with ISO 17025 assessments of the RCMP laboratories and provided ISO internal audit training to the Centre for Forensic Sciences in Toronto.
**ASCLD Meeting Support**
The NIJ approved a request from the ASCLD for support of their annual meeting and crime laboratory development symposium. The NFSTC was able to incorporate the required funding into our 2002 program, thereby making it possible for the ASCLD to hold a highly successful meeting. Delegates warmly received the event for its professional content. The social program (supported by FQS and FTI) recognized that the meeting extended over the Halloween period.

Support was also given to the ASCLD/LAB and to the IACP, as part of our desire to respond to community needs that fit within the scope of our NIJ program.

**Corporate Culture / Strategic Plan**
This report opened with a description of how the 2002 NIJ Cooperative Agreement program was based on community input, obtained through facilitated discussions at the time of our annual meeting of members. The work on the program was only one part of a larger strategic planning exercise, which focused on the NFSTC and identification of the corporate culture of the organization.

**Vision**
Our Vision is that the forensic science community and its users have complete confidence in the quality of forensic science services provided to the justice community.

**Mission**
Our Mission is that we are an organization dedicated to assisting the forensic sciences in achieving the highest level of quality services for the justice system.

**Values**
- We are dedicated to the application of science to serve the needs of justice.
- We place a high importance on the quality of service delivery, so that our work has a positive impact.
- We are an organization of professionals; we all treat each other and our stakeholders with respect, and we all contribute to our success.
- We recognize that we must be flexible in meeting the needs of our clients, while retaining a clear sense of direction and purpose.
Hair Initiatives
At the same time that major stakeholders such as the Attorney General and the media are focusing on DNA, forensic scientists are becoming concerned about the potentially detrimental effects of the loss of basic skills in areas such as microscopy. DNA and microscopy come together in the assignment of origin of hairs.

A perspective of the magnitude of the problem is seen in the response to a one-week basic hair analysis workshop that we conducted. Within a week of the posting of the announcement, over 100 requests for one of the 12 available places were received.

“… thank you and the staff at NFSTC for this training opportunity. James and Max were excellent presenters and I am sure the information will prove to be useful in casework. Not only was the course great, but the accommodations were also comfortable and convenient. I will be sure to pass this positive experience on to co-workers …”

Experience with the class, and similar workshops, has identified a need for a consensus approach to hair classification. The consensus scheme can be used as the basis for training programs and quality assurance testing. With the support of the NIJ, we have begun the process of working with FRN partner West Virginia University to identify the base analytical system to be developed into a validation kit.

New Building
Applying the now very substantial funds available to us through the NIJ Cooperative Agreement, and maintaining our commitment to our FQS and FQS-I clients, requires an infrastructure considerably larger than the one that served us well in previous years. A very visible manifestation is the 20,000 square foot addition to our Largo facility. Housing all staff and extensive classroom accommodations, the new building is linked to the previous 8,800 square foot facility by a covered walkway. Remodeling the original facility provides chemistry, DNA, and microscopy teaching laboratories, as well as a library and study room. The leasing of both buildings minimizes the cost impact.
State Needs Analysis

A needs analysis project, culminating in the development of a state plan, was completed for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and for the State of Arizona during the year. One significant outcome is that funding has been provided for a new laboratory facility in Massachusetts. We have now completed reviews for five states covering more than 40 individual laboratories with feedback from over 100 key user stakeholders.

Alabama Project

The various quality system tools that we have developed, such as the laboratory auditing CD-ROM and our Laboratory Auditing workshop, are only as good as the use that is made of them. We were given an excellent opportunity to test their value and to pilot working with Marshall University, a partner agency that is part of the NIJ’s Forensic Resource Network. We responded to a request from the Alabama Division of Forensic Science to assist in its compliance with the National QA Standards for Forensic Testing and to prepare for the ASCLD/LAB accreditation.

Marshall University assisted the laboratory in bringing the ABI 3100 on-line and using the platform to attack its DNA backlog. The NFSTC addressed the quality system issues through workshops for internal auditors and lead auditors/corrective action managers. The success of the project is demonstrated by the improvement in compliance with the ASCLD/LAB Essential Criteria, which moved from an average of 66.7% in February 2002, to 94.1% in August.

“You’ll never know how much we appreciate NFSTC and all of your hard work and timely assistance on behalf of the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences Laboratory System. The observations and comments from these audits and reports will help us to reach our goal of accreditation.”

“The message I got from our scientific staff, put simply, is that – ‘Accreditation Works’.”

“The ADFS personnel assigned to these audit teams have benefited greatly from the Team Captains’ tutelage. Your Captains provided great learning atmospheres that helped no only the audit teams but also the Laboratories themselves understand the Standards. Furthermore, with the PLA training, you have given a large number of our employees a set of tools that has helped them help their Laboratory and coworkers.”

“I would like to express our gratitude for the specific advanced auditor training we received last week in Largo at your NFSTC facilities. ADFS will benefit from this class for many years to come. Your informative responses to specific questions and concerns will help this group solve many of the current and future non-compliance issues. You and the NFSTC staff have given ADFS the needed tools to help us understand and obtain our goal of system wide goal of accreditation.”

“I want to take a moment to thank you for your assistance in the audits conducted last week. We are excited about improving our laboratory system and greatly appreciate your support.”
UF Online and Other University Teaching
The Drug Academy and Hair Workshop are part of our NIJ Cooperative Agreement. However, there have been significant developments in programs delivered through FQS that address personal competency. Chief amongst them is our contract with the University of Florida to develop and deliver a suite of graduate programs in Forensic Toxicology. These programs range from certificate classes to a Master’s degree. The programs attracted 200 students in 2002.

"The access distance students have to instructors is remarkable."

"This program is well organized. I am very impressed with the ease of getting to all the info."

"This is the first time I have had the opportunity to study a specialty that is so closely related to my position."

"Your responses to my questions were always quick and you seemed to take a real interest in the students’ experience. The course was certainly a learning experience for me."

"This is my 6th class in this program. I really enjoy them and have learned more this way than any traditional class I have ever taken."

"This is my third semester of taking on-line courses through UF. I enjoy the on-line format immensely, due its flexibility (i.e. family considerations, work schedule fluctuations, and being able to access school even while out of town)."

"A very informative and rewarding class."

The other end of the academic spectrum – undergraduate students who may well become user stakeholders rather than service providers – is covered by an agreement with the University of South Florida under which we developed and taught an introduction to Forensic Science class to criminal justice students.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The audited balance sheet and statement of income and disbursements are distributed as received from the auditors.

LOOKING TO 2003

Two areas are brought to the attention of members as requiring some consideration in the 2003 fiscal year. The first is the impact of the Cooperative Agreement funds on the corporation. These funds permit us to provide a range of much needed services to public
state and local crime laboratories, some of which they would not be able to access on a fee for service basis.

However, providing these programs accounted for 80% of the NFSTC expenditures in 2002. Consequently, there are several downsides. For example, the funds are provided as a cooperative agreement award rather than a service contract. The conditions for administration of such awards are designed for grants to universities and governments and are unfavorable to corporations structured like the NFSTC. They require a substantial investment in administrative resources and are a net drain on the corporation. The board has repeatedly asserted that the corporation must be able to balance the valuable services provided under the Cooperative Agreement while not just maintaining but growing the FQS and FQS-I business. Only in that way will the NFSTC continue as a strong, sound corporation.

Growing FQS and FQS-I business leads to the second issue facing us in 2003. In round figures, we ended the year three times larger than we began it. The whole face of the NFSTC is changing.

Successful operations based on the close integration and control exercised by a few dedicated staff and a willing board have been replaced by systems that are more impersonal. As an example, already in 2003 the Board has supported the decision to outsource all financial processing. It is our intent to continue in this direction, but we trust that we will never become so large and impersonal that we lose touch with our key stakeholders – our clients in the forensic sciences.