

International Association for Identification



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Request for Information

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The National Institute of Standards and Technology Office of Law Enforcement Standards (NIST/OLES) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) have assembled an Expert Working Group to improve the process of latent fingerprint examination and analysis. The working group, which will meet regularly over the next two years includes key representatives from the International Association for Identification (IAI), forensic scientists from federal and state laboratories, members of the academic and legal communities, various non-forensic domain professionals such as statisticians and risk assessment professionals, and a number of practicing latent print examiners.

NIST and NIJ are particularly interested in what makes any given latent print identification difficult or easy, based on the skill and expertise of latent print examiners. Also of significant interest are both the strengths and vulnerabilities associated with current methods of latent print identification at both an individual and at a systemic level.

The leadership of the IAI believes that the experiences of its membership could be an extremely helpful resource for this Working Group. That is why we are writing to you now with this request for information. Rather than just relying on the knowledge base of the members of the Working Group, we would like to incorporate the experiences and wisdom of the broader latent fingerprint community. We are hopeful that many of you will be willing to draw on this experience to help assist in this important process.

The purpose of this request is to gain a better understanding of what circumstances might create a risk, a vulnerability, or an environment where it might be easier for a mistake to occur. Specifically, we would be grateful for your thoughts on the following:

- (1) What, in your opinion, is the most difficult identification or exclusion you have ever made, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible about what aspects of the case made it an unusually difficult one.
- (2) Are there cases that you can recall in which you, or someone with whom you worked, came close to making an incorrect conclusion, but made the correct identification or exclusion in the end? If so, what were the circumstances in which this 'near-miss' occurred? What practices, strategies, or procedures prevented the 'near -miss' from becoming an actual error?
- (3) Are there cases that you can recall in which you, or someone with whom you worked, did in fact reach an incorrect conclusion? If so, what were the circumstances in which this occurred? What, in your opinion, might explain what happened?
- (4) Are there cases that you can recall in which you, or someone with whom you worked, took an action or made a suggestion that prevented incorrect conclusions? If so, what were the circumstances in which this occurred? What action was taken, and how did this action come about?
- (5) Are there other instances that you can recall in which something occurred within your latent print unit that should not have happened, that was not anticipated and that makes you say "that should not happen in my unit, and I don't want it to happen again". It can be small or large, administrative

or procedural – anything that you identify as something to be avoided in the future.

We want to hear your thoughts and experiences! Please provide as much detail as you can; but, we also understand that you may wish to provide information ‘cleansed’ of any identifying markers, names, etc. While we will accept anonymous submissions, we would strongly prefer that you include your contact information along with your submission, so that we may follow up as necessary for clarification, additional information, or detail. *However, please note that the data that we provide to the NIST working group will be anonymous; all personally identifiable information (names, agency, etc) will be redacted prior to providing the data for the consideration of the committee.*

If you do have thoughts or reactions to our questions, and we very much hope that you do, please email them to the IAI’s Chief Operations Officer Joe Polski joseph.polski@theiai.org or by regular mail to IAI, 2535 Pilot Knob Road, Suite 117, Mendota Heights, MN 55120. Please submit responses by February 13, 2009.

We are confident that the skill and experiences of our membership can provide an important resource for assisting the Working Group, and we very much look forward to hearing from you. Thank you very much in advance for your willingness to participate in this important initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph P. Polski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Joseph P. Polski
Chief Operations Officer

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