A little bit of FORESIGHT goes a long way; benefits of Project FORESIGHT participation

Idaho State Lab Director Matthew Gamette, Toronto Canada Centre of Forensic Sciences Director Tony Tessarolo, Orange County California Director Bruce Houlihan, Retired North Carolina State Lab Director John Byrd, and Utah Laboratory Director Jay Henry present use case scenarios for Project FORESIGHT data. Project FORESIGHT is a West Virginia University/NIJ collaboration that has developed into a submission group of hundreds of forensic science service providers. Data generated by each provider is collated into reports that help laboratory directors to make good policy and operational decisions. FORESIGHT data provides an excellent comparison of national casework norms. Understanding best practice in each forensic discipline, including differences among areas, allows us to learn of possible improvements and share lessons learned. However, it is the cost and resource models where FORESIGHT can really make a difference. FORESIGHT publishes data where ratios are compared against total cases and evidence. The ratios may be cost/case, cases/FTE (full-time equivalent), or other metrics that allow leaders to scale efficiency and performance appropriately based on lab size and annual casework. Moreover, when challenges to lab operations are made concerning case outputs (e.g. why are turn-around times longer, or why is there a backlog in a particular discipline), FORESIGHT can directly address laboratory capacity, appropriate staffing levels, and the hidden costs of exceeding a lab's capacity. Finally, challenges to resource requests usually begin with claims that a laboratory is inefficient. By using the FORESIGHT data to demonstrate competent case management, especially when compared against FORESIGHT's excellent understanding of national norms, the dialogs then focus on funding services congruent with the expectations of our clients rather than dismissing due to accusations of laboratory performance. This presentation will discuss use of the FORESIGHT metrics and models to achieve these goals.

Director Gamette will present on lessons learned from his first FORESIGHT submission. Topics include understanding definitions and submission criteria, estimating personnel time tracking, working with lab financial personnel on budget categories, and use of the LabRat submission tool. He will also discuss the plans for the FORESIGHT User Group and how labs can get more from their data by participation in this group.

Director Tessarolo will discuss the early days of FORESIGHT and working with partner laboratories to establish initial definitions and data collections through a series of collaborative discussions. He will further discuss how his laboratory has used FORESIGHT data extensively to establish measures that monitor cost-effectiveness of its operations, to inform strategic decision-making about service delivery, and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. Examples of such applications of FORESIGHT metrics will be shared as part of this presentation.

Director Houlihan will discuss use cases for FORESIGHT in his laboratory to make important decisions. He has been a long-time contributor and supporter of the project and will discuss ideas for lab directors to gain even more insights from their data. He will discuss potential ideas for researchers and others to make use of the more than ten years of data collected from labs all over the country.

Director Byrd will present how functionally a crime laboratory utilizes FORESIGHT data to generate annual reports to the state legislature and other oversight and funding entities. He will talk about using data not only to give the report, but to forecast the future needs of the laboratory. He will discuss establishing trust with funding entities and decision makers by presenting FORESIGHT data in a meaningful way.

Director Henry will discuss using FORESIGHT data to establish project details. He will talk about several large projects his upper management assigned him to accomplish. He will present information about how he utilized FORESIGHT to scope out these projects and obtain necessary resources for a successful implementation.