Advanced DNA Testing for Other Violent Cold Cases

Research from National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) sites has demonstrated that a significant number of violent serial offenders can be linked to cold case sexual assaults. Not only are these offenders committing sexual assaults, they are also frequently responsible for homicides and other violent offenses. Many of these offenders are still actively committing violent crimes and pose a serious public safety threat. A resounding theme from law enforcement agencies (LEAs) is that funding is critically needed to support state and local cold case units to achieve SAKI's goals. However, despite the overwhelming need, many LEAs are currently unable to sustain a cold case unit due to staffing and financial constraints. As a result, hundreds of thousands of cases across the country are not investigated. (The FBI estimates that there are over 240,000 unsolved homicides dating back to the 1980s.)

LEAs face a range of challenges in setting up effective processes for investigating and solving cold cases. These limitations not only prevent crimes from being solved but also mean that the same perpetrators will go on to commit additional offenses. To address these needs, the scope of the SAKI Training and Technical Assistance (SAKI TTA) national program has expanded to include all cold cases, especially homicides. The inclusion of all violent cold cases under SAKI TTA provides support to LEAs with cold cases; this support includes access to forensic testing, crime analysis, and other training and education support required to implement and sustain local or state cold case units.

Overview of Funding Opportunity

The Bureau of Justice Assistance’s SAKI program is a competitive grant program that supports multidisciplinary community response teams to accomplish the following:

- Inventory, track, and test previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits (SAKs)
- Produce protocols and policies that improve coordination among laboratory personnel, police officers, prosecutors, and victim services providers to enhance the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases
- Optimize victim notification protocols and services to better engage and support survivors
- Improve case outcomes by enhancing the collection of lawfully owed DNA and entry of case information related to serial, violent offenders into the FBI’s Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) national database.

The Advanced DNA Testing for Other Violent Cold Cases solicitation supports SAKI sites with the investigation of future, new, active, and old/inactive cases to solve and reduce violent crimes. Ultimately, this funding will help agencies resolve more cases (cold and active), thereby increasing public safety by preventing future crimes and providing long-awaited answers to survivors and/or their families.

SAKI TTA, led by RTI International (RTI), is releasing this solicitation on BJA’s behalf. Under this solicitation, up to five current SAKI grantees will be awarded; each subaward will be up to $50,000 for a 24-month period. The subawards under this solicitation will be cost-reimbursable subawards to RTI. Subawardees will be required to complete a rudimentary inventory of cold cases, develop a plan for implementing a process for tracking this evidence, and develop an approach to address case resolutions. To support the subawards, SAKI TTA will ensure the selected sites receive cold case investigation training and guidance about research opportunities from case outcomes.

Grant funds may be used to support the following activities:

- **DNA Testing for Other Violent Cold Cases:** The subaward amount is to be allocated for DNA testing of violent cold case crime evidence—other than cold case sexual assault—to include homicides, attempted homicides, kidnappings, and missing and unidentified persons associated with suspicious circumstances. DNA testing can include the following:
  - Y-STR testing for (1) samples that fail to yield a CODIS-eligible profile but for which male DNA was detected and a known suspect sample is available for direct
comparison, (2) complex mixtures for which known suspect samples are available for direct comparison, or (3) jurisdictions in which a local Y-STR suspect database has already been implemented.

- Testing of additional evidence that was previously deemed not appropriate for DNA testing, but for which advancements to DNA technology has now made testing possible.
- Familial DNA searches (if legally allowed in the subawardee’s state) of DNA profiles attributed to violent serial offenders associated with cold case evidence. An unknown offender’s profile must have previously been uploaded to CODIS but has yet to generate a hit associated with a known suspect in the database. Funds can support costs associated with overtime for laboratory personnel, as well as Y-STR testing to evaluate potential familial matches and investigative activities associated with the location, collection, and analysis of suspect DNA samples for comparison to—and identification of—the actual perpetrator.
- Forensic genetic genealogy (FGG) processing and searches of DNA profiles attributed to violent serial offenders associated with cold case evidence. A profile of an unknown offender must have previously been uploaded to CODIS but has yet to generate a hit associated with a known suspect in the database. Funds can be used to outsource forensic genealogy searches; to pay overtime for laboratory personnel; to evaluate potential familial matches using Y-STR testing; or to conduct investigative activities associated with the location, collection, and analysis of suspect DNA samples for comparison to—and identification of—the actual perpetrator. Familial DNA searches (if legally allowed in the applicant’s state) must also be performed to try to identify a suspect before pursuing forensic genealogy searches.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include current SAKI grantee jurisdictions that have
- tested at least 75% of their SAKI inventory of unsubmitted SAKs,
- received CODIS hits from testing their SAK inventory and have a CODIS hit follow-up plan that aligns with the SAKI model,
- entered cases into ViCAP, and
- established a competitively sourced relationship with a commercial DNA vendor. **Note: You do not need to have an established contract with a genealogy vendor.**

SAKI TTA welcomes applications under which two or more entities would carry out the subaward; however, only one entity may be the applicant. Additional entities must be proposed as subrecipients (subgrantees). The applicant has the primary responsibility for carrying out the subaward—including administering the funding, managing the program, and delivering required reporting metrics—utilizing already existing resources under their current SAKI award(s). Administration requirements include the following:

- **Inventory of Cold Case Evidence**
  - Subawardees must inventory only the cold case evidence submitted for DNA testing under this subaward. The following metrics must be captured:
    - Number of cases
    - Type of offense
  - The following metrics are ideal to capture but are not required:
    - The number and types of evidence items
    - The overall range of dates for which evidence has been in the agency’s possession
    - The victim’s age
    - The date of the offense, the date of evidence collection, and the law enforcement incident number (or another unique identifier)

- **Cold Case Inventory Tracking**
  - Subawardees must track only the cold case evidence submitted for DNA testing under this subaward.
  - Minimum requirements for cold case evidence tracking include the following:
    - A unique identifier
    - The number of evidence items submitted for each case
    - The type of evidence submitted, submission, and testing status for each piece of evidence (this should include dates of submission, to whom it was submitted, and whether testing is in progress or completed)
  - Testing results—including DNA profile obtained, CODIS-eligibility uploaded to CODIS (date of upload), CODIS hit/FGG recommendation returned, date and type of hit (e.g., to offender, to another case)
  - Current status of the investigation (e.g., open/active, closed, cleared by arrest, exceptional clearance)
Applicant Requirements

We seek applicants that demonstrate the following:

1. Willingness to form or leverage an existing multidisciplinary team to work collaboratively on the proposed activities that includes representation from—at minimum—LEAs (LEA representation can include crime analysts), prosecutors, crime laboratory personnel, medical examiners, and victim and/or family advocacy professionals.

2. Capacity and resources under their current SAKI award(s) to support the additional level of coordination needed to effectively execute the proposed activities for this solicitation.

3. Commitment to creating and employing sustainable cold case unit strategies, including participation in SAKI TTA trainings and research collaborations.

4. Ability to work with BJA; its federal partners, including the FBI’s ViCAP; SAKI TTA; and other SAKI sites to deepen the collective understanding of effective investigation and prosecution of cold case violent crimes.

Phased Approach

Each project is expected to include an inventory and a testing phase. The following sections describe expected deliverables during each phase.

Inventory Phase

Subawardees will be required to engage in an inventory phase no longer than 6 months post-subaward. The completed inventory must include the required data elements and be reviewed by BJA before evidence can be submitted for testing using SAKI funding. Supplanting is not permitted. Site inventories cannot include any cases that occurred after this solicitation’s application date.

Testing Phase

All applicants should provide a preliminary indication of the testing activities they anticipate performing. However, we recognize that subawardees may wish to modify their strategies after completing the inventory phase. Subawardees must submit a final budget as well as a revised project plan that includes the final cases selected (1) for testing and (2) for approval prior to submitting any evidence for DNA testing.

During this phase, sites must submit quarterly performance metric reports to SAKI TTA; these metric reports are associated with the evidence selected for DNA testing.

The application should demonstrate understanding of the performance data reporting requirements for the SAKI program and detail how the required data will be gathered if funding is approved.

Selection Criteria

SAKI TTA is committed to ensuring a fair and open subaward process. Submitting a project proposal will not guarantee project funding. BJA and SAKI TTA will evaluate all proposals submitted by the application deadline. Applications will be reviewed and scored by SAKI TTA, with BJA providing final review and approval. All selection decisions are final. BJA reserves the right to make any final decisions regarding all subawards and any aspects of the subawards. An applicant’s submission will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Statement of the Problem

Score Weight: 20 percent

The applicant should describe current challenges for responding to other cold case violent crimes based on existing data, the need for federal funds, and any alignment between the proposed activities and existing strategic plans or initiatives. The narrative should describe how the proposed activities support the jurisdiction’s SAKI goals and objectives.

Project Plan

Score Weight: 60 percent

Each applicant should describe their proposed plans for inventorying and tracking cold case evidence, case/evidence review and selection methodology, evidence submission plans, investigative initiatives, protocol/policy development, performance metrics tracking, and participation in trainings.

Organizational Commitment

Score Weight: 10 percent

Each applicant should describe the lead agency (or agencies) and how the proposed activities will be managed in concert with the current SAKI award. Applicants should also describe how they will develop or leverage a multidisciplinary workgroup; explain their current relationship with a private, commercial DNA vendor; and highlight how these partnerships will assist with completing the proposed activities. Finally, applicants should agree to work directly with BJA, the FBI’s ViCAP, and SAKI TTA.
**Project Budget**

**Score Weight: 10 percent**

Budgets should be complete, cost-effective, and allowable (e.g., reasonable, allocable, and necessary for project activities). Budget narratives should demonstrate cost-effectiveness in relation to potential alternatives and project goals. The budget submitted with the application is not expected to be final because testing activities may change after the inventory phase; however, the budget should reflect total anticipated costs for all required and proposed activities.

**Applications are to be brief and concise and not to exceed two pages in length.**

**Submission Deadline**

Responses must be submitted by 11:59 pm ET on Friday, May 29, 2020. All required documents must be submitted via email to SAKITTA@rti.org.

**Application Requirements**

Please include the following documents in your submission.

Documents may be submitted as Word files, Excel files, or PDFs.

- **Eligibility Checklist**
  Attach a completed copy of the eligibility checklist (Appendix A).

- **Proposal Narrative**
  Attach a narrative, not exceeding two pages in length, that includes the following sections:
  - Statement of the problem
  - Project plan
  - Organizational commitment

- **Timeline**
  Attach a timeline with a start date of Wednesday, July 1, 2020. The applicant may choose any format for the timeline; however, the timeline should outline activities in the inventory phase and the testing phase. The timeline should also include milestones and reporting deadlines.

- **Budget Documentation**
  Applicants may choose to utilize the Department of Justice (DOJ) Budget Detail Worksheet (https://ojp.gov/funding/Apply/Forms/BudgetDetailWorksheet.htm) or their own budget template. The proposed budget should present a complete itemization and explanation for all proposed costs. For questions pertaining to budget and examples of allowable and unallowable costs, see the DOJ Grants Financial Guide at https://ojp.gov/financialguide/DOJ/index.htm.

**Optional Application Attachments**

**Letters of Support and/or Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement**

Applicants may include letters of support and/or an interagency agreement between any partner agencies and offices to show commitment to participate in proposed activities. Please scan a dated and signed letter of commitment. Letters should include a statement indicating that the supportive member understands the following:

- The funding subaward is to be used for the proposed activities.
- The proposed activities must exclusively support violent cold cases other than cold case sexual assaults/homicides, which are eligible under SAKI.
- The funding is not to be used for the exclusive benefit of any one consortium member.

**Post-Subaward Requirements**

**Monthly Updates**

Subawardees will be expected to provide updates related to the subaward’s progress through their regular SAKI monthly check-ins with their assigned SAKI site liaison.

**Reporting**

Subawardees under this solicitation will be required to submit

- monthly progress reports with financial reporting (template to be provided)
- quarterly performance measures
- regular invoices

Future awards and fund drawdowns may be withheld if reports are delinquent.

**Applicable Federal Laws and Regulations**

All subawards are subject to the availability of appropriated funds and to any modifications or additional requirements that may be imposed by law. Subawardees must agree to comply with additional legal requirements upon acceptance of a subaward. Additional information for each requirement can be found at https://ojp.gov/funding/index.htm.
Applicant Process

Please review the following timeline that highlights important dates in the applicant process; all dates occur in 2020.

Optional Applicant Webinar: Tuesday, April 14, at 2:00 pm ET.

The webinar itself is optional. If you plan to attend, preregistration is required. Please register for the webinar at https://bit.ly/SAKI_RFP.

Registered attendees may submit questions to SAKITTA@rti.org no later than Friday, April 10, at 11:59 pm ET. Emails should include the registered attendee's name and agency, and question(s).

Application Deadline: Friday, May 29, at 11:59 pm ET

Application Review: Monday, June 1–Friday, June 12

Subaward Notification: No later than Friday, June 19

Projects Begin: Wednesday, July 1

The recorded webinar will be posted online no later than Monday, April 20.

Application Checklist

(Please name all files appropriately)

- Eligibility Checklist
- Proposal Narrative
- Timeline
- Budget Documentation
- Letters of Support and/or Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement (optional)

All supporting documents and attachments should be emailed to SAKITTA@rti.org by Friday, May 29, at 11:59 pm ET.

The contents of this document were developed by RTI International and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.
Appendix A: Eligibility Checklist

Please review the following checklist items and mark the appropriate checkbox for each true statement. Please include the completed document with your proposal submission.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction is a current SAKI grantee.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction has tested at least 75% of its SAKI inventory of unsubmitted sexual assault kits (SAKs).

☐ My agency/jurisdiction has received Combined DNA Index System hits from the testing of its SAKI inventory of unsubmitted SAKs.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction actively enters cases in the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, including cases from its SAKI inventory.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction has an established, competitively sourced relationship with a commercial DNA vendor.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction can meet this subaward’s inventory requirements under its current SAKI award.

☐ My agency/jurisdiction can perform the tracking requirements for this subaward under its current SAKI award.