

Guidelines for Latent Print Proficiency Testing Programs

DRAFT FOR COMMENT

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Proficiency testing is part of the quality assurance program that an agency shall have in place. A proficiency testing program is a reliable means of assuring that the quality of each examiner's work is being maintained and may ensure that the agency's technical procedures are valid.

Proficiency testing is not a measure of methodological error rate. Proficiency testing measures individual performance and identifies areas where improvements may be needed.

Proficiency testing is not a replacement for overall training and maintaining competency. Refer to SWGFAST guidelines for "Training to Competency for Latent Print Examiners" and "Quality Assurance Guidelines for Latent Print Examiners".

1. OBJECTIVE

This document provides guidelines for a proficiency testing program. A program should include planning, design, administration, evaluation, and documentation.

2. SCOPE

2.1 A proficiency test should target individual Latent Print Examiner analysis, comparison, and evaluation competency, and may also target casework procedures, such as documentation, processing, verification, evidence handling, etc.

2.2 Only Latent Print Examiners trained to competency should be proficiency tested.

3. PROGRAM PLANNING

3.1 At a minimum, a proficiency testing program should include the following:

- 3.1.1 Who is to be tested
- 3.1.2 When the examiner is to be tested
- 3.1.3 What knowledge, skills, and abilities are to be tested
- 3.1.4 Test design
- 3.1.5 Test materials
- 3.1.6 Test format
- 3.1.7 Test source
- 3.1.8 Difficulty of questioned and known impressions

- 3.1.9 Quantity of questioned and known impressions
- 3.1.10 Test administration
- 3.1.11 Test validation
- 3.1.12 Test evaluation
- 3.1.13 Test feedback
- 3.1.14 Corrective actions
- 3.1.15 Documentation

4. TEST DESIGN

- 4.1 There are two purposes for proficiency testing. The design of the test can be one of the following:
 - 4.1.1 A test assessing an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities to accurately analyze, compare, and evaluate latent prints with known exemplars; or
 - 4.1.2 A test assessing an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities plus agency procedures such as documentation, verification, evidence handling, and related administrative actions.
- 4.2 A Latent Print Examiner shall be involved in the design of tests. That examiner shall have successfully completed a proficiency test from another provider.
- 4.3 Proficiency tests shall be designed in one of the following three formats:
 - 4.3.1 Open. In open testing, Latent Print Examiners are aware they are being tested.
 - 4.3.2 Blind. In blind testing, Latent Print Examiners are not aware they are being tested.
 - 4.3.3 Doubleblind. In doubleblind testing, neither the examiner nor the agency is aware they are being tested.
- 4.4 Test Materials
 - 4.4.1 Test materials shall include at least eight latent friction ridge impressions and at least four sets of known friction ridge exemplars.
 - 4.4.2 Latent friction ridge impressions and known exemplars should be representative of those routinely analyzed.
 - 4.4.3 Photographic images of friction ridge impressions should be in focus and,

when digital, should comply with SWGFAST guidelines.¹

4.5 Controls ensuring origin of test impressions

4.5.1 When test impressions are generated, the test maker should have direct knowledge of the source of the latent and known prints.

4.5.2 Reexamination of casework is an acceptable testing method when validated.

4.6 Test Validation

4.6.1 The ability of a proficiency test to reliably assess Latent Print Examiner performance shall be validated prior to final production and distribution.

4.6.2 Validation is accomplished through predistribution testing of three or more Latent Print Examiners, preferably from different agencies.

4.6.3 To validate the test, predistribution test results shall correspond with the preparer's specifications.

5. TEST ADMINISTRATION

5.1 Each Latent Print Examiner trained to competency should be proficiency tested at least annually.

5.2 Latent Print Examiner trainees should not be proficiency tested.

5.3 Undue time constraints should not be imposed.

5.4 There is no requirement to proctor tests.

5.5 Test administrators should ensure independent conclusions are produced as appropriate to a test's purposes. If the purposes of the test include testing agency procedures, then consultation between Latent Print Examiners is permitted.

5.6 Test location and conditions should reflect a normal working environment.

6. TEST EVALUATION

6.1 Criteria for Successful Completion

6.1.1 Successful completion shall be defined in the program plan.

6.1.2 Failure to effect all possible individualizations may constitute successful completion depending on an agency's policy, test design, and test purpose.

6.2 Corrective actions

6.2.1 Corrective action shall be taken when an erroneous individualization occurs.

¹ SWGFAST Digital Imaging Guidelines

6.2.1.1 Clerical or administrative errors are not erroneous individualizations, for example, writing the wrong finger number.

6.2.2 All failures to individualize and clerical or administrative errors shall be reviewed for corrective action.

7. DOCUMENTATION

7.1 The following should be documented and maintained for at least five years:

- 7.1.1 Program Plan
- 7.1.2 Test procedures
- 7.1.3 Program director
- 7.1.4 Test purpose
- 7.1.5 Test designers
- 7.1.6 Test validation
- 7.1.7 Test participants
- 7.1.8 When tested
- 7.1.9 Test materials
- 7.1.10 Test results
- 7.1.11 Test feedback
- 7.1.12 Corrective actions
- 7.1.13 Corrective action management
- 7.1.14 Test record maintenance