

OSAC RESEARCH NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM



Title of research need:	The future of forensic document examination services in the United States – FDE services and standards gap	
Keywords:	Forensic Document Examination, Questioned Documents, Casework, Handwriting, Emerging Technologies, Standards development	

R&D Need Rank: Low, Medium, High	Medium	SAC Approved Date:	1/13/2026
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Submitting subcommittee(s):	Forensic Document Examination
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Research Need Summary:

The purpose of these research needs is to build a stronger scientific foundation for forensic science standards. The information provided herein will help to evaluate and strengthen existing standards, and/or fill any standards related gaps. In the space below, please provide a brief narrative of the need to be addressed. This should include:

- The identity of any specific standards that would be affected/improved/evaluated
- A discussion on gaps that exist within the standards or standards related gaps that need to be filled
- How this work would fill those gaps
- An overview of any current or past research efforts that may be relevant to this effort
- A discussion regarding how this research might improve current laboratory capabilities and/or forensic services within the criminal justice system
- Any relevant references

In the United States, there are almost 18,000 police agencies serving local, state, and federal jurisdictions. There are approximately 400 forensic laboratories in the United States serving these jurisdictions, but less than 7% of the total forensic laboratories in the US provide document examination services. Accredited forensic service providers^{1,2} that provide forensic document examination services include approximately 8 local agencies, 10 state agencies, and 9 federal agencies, following the closure of forensic document examination units by three state laboratories in 2024 and 2025. However, this does not include the number of for-hire forensic document examiners (i.e., in private practice) who conduct work in both criminal and civil cases. Forensic service providers and forensic document examiners have noted changes in casework and evidence submissions based on changes in technology.

Research in the form of a national survey is recommended like that which was completed by the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency National Institute of Forensic Science (ANZPAA NIFS) Document Specialist Advisory Group (DocSAG) and published in 2024.³

- 1) What are the current forensic document examination capabilities within the US forensic laboratories?
- 2) What are the emerging case and evidence types due to technology changes now and in the future?
- 3) What steps should forensic document examiners, forensic service providers, and relevant professional organizations (e.g., AAFS, ASQDE, ABFDE, SWAFDE, SAFDE) undertake to continue to retain relevancy as a forensic discipline?

4) What steps should forensic service providers undertake to promote and expand their laboratory's forensic document examination capabilities as well as plan for training and succession of staff?

Consensus based standards^{4,5} relevant to forensic document examinations are under development and publication, but is the field prepared for future case demands? Following the completion of the above research answers, standards developing organizations can assess:

1) What forensic document examination services are being conducted that do not have a current and relevant standard?

2) What standards should be considered for future development to support emerging case and evidence types?

References:

¹ANAB Directory of Accredited Organizations <https://search.anab.org/>

²A2LA Directory of Accredited Organizations
<https://customer.a2la.org/index.cfm?event=directory.index>

³Bird, C., Epple, R., Smith, S., & Kogios, R. (2024). Forensic document examination: where to from here? *Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 56(sup1), 157–159.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00450618.2024.2324767>

⁴Academy Standards Board <https://www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board>

⁵Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science
<https://www.nist.gov/osac/subcommittees/forensic-document-examination>

ANSI/ASB Standard 011 Scope of Expertise in Forensic Document Examination (2022)

ANSI/ASB Standard 035 Standard for the Examination of Documents for Alterations (2020)

ANSI/ASB Standard 044 Standard for Examination of Documents for Indentations (2019)

ANSI/ASB Standard 070 Standard for Examination of Handwritten Items (2022)

ANSI/ASB Standard 117 Standard for Examination of Stamping Devices and Stamp Impressions (2020)

ANSI/ASB Standard 127 for the Preservation and Examination of Charred Documents (2022)

ANSI/ASB Standard 128 Standard for the Preservation and Examination of Liquid Soaked Documents (2022)

ANSI/ASB Standard 155 Standard for Minimum Training Requirements for Forensic Document Examinations (currently not published)

ANSI/ASB Standard 172 Standard for Examination of Mechanical Checkwriter Impressions and Machines (2024)

OSAC 2022-S-0034 Standard for the Expression of Source Opinions in Forensic Document Examination

OSAC 2024-S-0017 Standard Guide for Forensic Physical Fit Examination of Documentary Evidence

This research need has been identified by one or more subcommittees of OSAC and is being provided as an informational resource to the community.