

September 28, 2015 Rio Grande Identification Project Panel Meeting:
Policy Recommendations and Requested Forensic Science Commission Action

1. Encouragement of stakeholder collaboration in the identification process
 - a. Share contact information between stakeholders.
 - b. Encourage open communication between agencies and offices, with confidentiality of family members in mind when sharing information.
 - c. Educate judges, law enforcement and other stakeholders on proper processing of unidentified human remains.
 - d. Emphasize the importance of thorough, documented information-gathering across agencies and stakeholders for each potential missing persons case.
 - e. Develop policies and base-line protocols for the processing, documentation, handling, and information-gathering for human remains to increase potential for identification.
 - f. Develop unified approach to processing and identification of human remains across medical examiner and forensic pathologist's practices in Texas.

2. Development of process for comparison of biological information between disparate databases
 - a. Develop process for sharing information between identification databases, such as CODIS, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) database of family reference samples and various private DNA lab databases.
 - b. Work with stakeholders to address FBI concerns related to the collection and processing of family reference samples outside of traditional law enforcement settings.
 - c. Develop consent forms that comply with United States law for families wishing to identify missing loved ones using CODIS.
 - d. Address concerns related to the confidentiality of information submitted by families to EAAF, including development of mutually acceptable procedures for meeting needs of forensic pathologists, DNA analysts and forensic anthropologists while respecting the concerns of the families.

3. Refrigeration, storage and burial issues
 - a. Address lack of proper refrigeration and other cold-storage facilities for unidentified, intact remains.
 - b. Make recommendations regarding the development of an organized, state-based burial system for unidentified human remains to relieve financial pressures on counties.
 - c. Consider revisions to Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Chapter 49, applicable to inquests upon dead bodies.
 - d. Assess the possibility and cost of requiring RFID Chips for the burial of unidentified human remains so they may easily be identified in the future.
4. Equipment and technological needs
 - a. Address the need for reliable, quick-capture fingerprinting and impression technology such as DEXUS for assistance in the identification process.
 - b. Address the possibility of RFID chips as discussed above in 3. e.
 - c. Increase counties' access to cold storage for intact remains.
5. Consider statutory recommendations for Justices of the Peace
 - a. Educate JPs on the procedures for processing unidentified human remains and the importance of sending remains to forensic pathologists/medical examiners.
 - b. Encourage collaboration and consistency throughout jurisdictions by creating best practices.
 - c. Consider statutory recommendations to ensure consistency across Texas jurisdictions.
6. Funding issues
 - a. Address cost barriers to proper storage and refrigeration of unidentified human remains.
 - b. Address cost barriers for counties to send remains to forensic pathologists/medical examiners versus sending them straight to funeral homes where there is no process for collecting DNA.
 - c. Consider recommendation for state funding for cemeteries for unidentified human remains, including the possibility of using RFID chips.