

Purpose of the Project

Why DPS Is Applying

The Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS) seeks funding to establish the Alaska Cybercrime Response Network, a statewide initiative designed to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of cybercrimes against individuals in Alaska's rural and remote communities. The project will combine regional multidisciplinary training, standardized digital investigation equipment, victim-centered practices, and continuing support from the Alaska Bureau of Investigation (ABI).

The ABI Digital Forensics Laboratory (DFL) serves as Alaska's statewide digital forensic laboratory, providing examination and investigative support to more than 28 state, local, Tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies representing more than 375 investigators. During State Fiscal Year 2026, the DFL received 213 requests for service involving more than 700 digital devices. At the time of this application, the laboratory maintains an unassigned backlog of approximately 72 cases, and the overall examination work cycle is approaching 180 days. These services are provided by four digital forensic examiners, one evidence custodian, and one laboratory supervisor.

Digital evidence is frequently essential to identifying offenders, corroborating victim accounts, documenting patterns of conduct, establishing probable cause, and supporting prosecution. Although comprehensive laboratory examinations remain necessary in complex cases, investigators must often identify and preserve digital evidence and make time-sensitive decisions during the earliest stages of an investigation.

Those challenges are amplified by Alaska's geography. More than 80 percent of Alaska's communities are not connected to the state's road system and are accessible only by aircraft or seasonal marine transportation. Many rural agencies have limited staffing and no dedicated digital forensic personnel or field equipment. Evidence may not reach the DFL for weeks, increasing the importance of local investigators having the knowledge, equipment, and technical support necessary to preserve evidence and conduct limited field triage when appropriate.

Over the three-year project period, ABI will conduct 18 four-day Alaska Cybercrime Investigator Academies in rural and regional communities. Participating agencies will receive standardized Digital Investigation Kits and continuing access to ABI and DFL consultation. By placing trained investigators and field-capable equipment closer to the communities where cases originate, the project will shorten the interval between an initial report and the lawful identification, preservation, and investigative use of relevant digital evidence. The project will extend the DFL's reach, support earlier investigative decisions, and allow comprehensive laboratory examinations to focus on evidence requiring advanced analysis.

Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of the Alaska Cybercrime Response Network is to increase Alaska's capacity to investigate and prosecute cybercrimes against individuals by expanding access to specialized training, digital investigation resources, victim-centered practices, and continuing technical assistance in rural and remote communities.

The project will pursue four objectives:

Objective 1: Expand statewide investigative capacity. ABI will conduct 18 regional Alaska Cybercrime Investigator Academies providing multidisciplinary instruction in cybercrime investigation, digital evidence, victim-centered response, legal process, and prosecution.

Objective 2: Increase local digital investigation capability. Participating agencies will receive standardized Digital Investigation Kits and hands-on instruction in their lawful and appropriate use for evidence preservation and limited field triage.

Objective 3: Improve victim-centered investigations and offender accountability. Academy instruction will be developed with a statewide victim service provider and experienced prosecutors and will address victim safety, trauma-informed communication, informed and limited consent, privacy, appropriately scoped evidence collection, discovery, and case presentation.

Objective 4: Strengthen statewide collaboration and technical assistance. ABI and the DFL will provide continuing consultation, investigative assistance, mentorship, and forensic support following Academy completion.

These objectives were selected because rural Alaska's digital evidence challenges cannot be addressed through training, equipment, or centralized forensic examinations alone. The Academy establishes a common investigative foundation; the Digital Investigation Kits allow participating agencies to apply that training; victim service and prosecutor involvement connects evidence collection to victim safety and successful prosecution; and continuing ABI and DFL support provides assistance when complex issues arise.

Communities That Will Be Served

The Alaska Cybercrime Response Network will serve rural, remote, and geographically isolated communities throughout Alaska, particularly those with limited access to specialized cybercrime training, digital forensic equipment, and immediate technical assistance.

DPS anticipates conducting Academies in 18 regional locations:

Bethel, Dillingham, King Salmon, Nome, Kotzebue, Utqiagvik, Galena, McGrath, Delta Junction, Unalaska, Sand Point, Kodiak, Ketchikan, Sitka, Petersburg, Wrangell, Valdez, and Cordova.

These locations provide coverage across Western and Southwest Alaska, the Arctic, the Interior, the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island, Prince William Sound, and Southeast Alaska. Many serve as regional transportation, public safety, health care, government, and commercial centers and are more accessible to surrounding communities than Anchorage.

The listed communities are anticipated Academy hubs rather than the full geographic limit of the project. Investigators from surrounding villages and jurisdictions will be invited to participate, including personnel from municipal police departments, the Alaska State Troopers, Tribal law

enforcement organizations, and other agencies responsible for investigating cybercrimes against individuals. Academy locations or sequencing may be adjusted based on regional need, agency readiness, transportation, weather, instructor availability, and suitable facilities while maintaining 18 regional deliveries and broad statewide coverage.

Regional delivery will reduce airfare, lodging, travel time, and the staffing burden associated with sending rural officers to Anchorage. Participants will return to their agencies with training, equipment, professional relationships, and continuing access to ABI and DFL support, extending the benefit of each Academy beyond the host community.

The ultimate beneficiaries will be victims of technology-facilitated harassment, threats, stalking, coercion, intimidation, extortion, sextortion, nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, and related cybercrimes against individuals. Victims in rural communities may face additional barriers caused by geographic isolation, limited transportation and services, close community relationships, and reduced access to specialized investigators, prosecutors, forensic examiners, and victim service providers.

By building capability where these cases originate, the Alaska Cybercrime Response Network will create a more timely, informed, and victim-centered statewide response to cybercrimes against individuals.

This project advances OVW Public Safety Priority 2 by strengthening the investigation and prosecution of cybercrimes against individuals in small towns and rural, remote, and Tribal communities.

What Will Be Done

Over the 36-month project period, the Alaska Bureau of Investigation (ABI) will implement the Alaska Cybercrime Response Network through four integrated activities: regional multidisciplinary training, distribution of standardized digital investigation equipment, collaboration with victim service and prosecutorial partners, and continuing technical assistance to participating agencies.

Objective 1: Expand Statewide Investigative Capacity

ABI will conduct six four-day Alaska Cybercrime Investigator Academies each year, for a total of 18 regional Academies. Investigators from host agencies and surrounding jurisdictions will be invited to participate.

Sergeant Nathan Bucknall will lead development of the investigative curriculum; Brandon Hunter will lead the digital evidence curriculum; Assistant Attorney General Bailey Woolfstead will lead the prosecutorial curriculum; and the project's victim service partner will ensure that all developed curriculum maintains a victim-centered focus. Each curriculum lead may designate qualified personnel from their agency or organization to assist with instruction and Academy delivery.

The Academy will provide practical instruction in cybercrimes against individuals; victim and witness interviews; search warrants, consent, preservation requests, and electronic provider process; recognition, seizure, and preservation of digital evidence; mobile-device, computer, social

media, messaging, and cloud evidence; field triage; case development; discovery; charging; and courtroom presentation. Practical exercises will use scenarios involving technology-facilitated domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, threats, sextortion, and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images.

The Academy will improve victim safety by teaching investigators to recognize digital evidence, obtain it through appropriate legal authority, and preserve it without unnecessary intrusion or delay. Offender accountability will be strengthened through improved evidence documentation, legally sound collection, and earlier coordination with forensic examiners and prosecutors.

DPS will track Academy locations, investigators trained, agencies and communities represented, course completion, and multidisciplinary participation. Pre- and post-training assessments and participant evaluations will measure changes in knowledge, confidence, preparedness, and course effectiveness.

Objective 2: Increase Local Digital Investigation Capability

DPS will purchase, configure, and distribute 18 standardized Digital Investigation Kits, one for each designated participating agency in each Academy region. Each kit will include a laptop configured for digital investigations, mobile-device acquisition and triage equipment, hardware write-blocking equipment, external storage, cables, adapters, and reference materials.

DFL Manager Hunter and DFL personnel will establish equipment specifications, configure the kits, incorporate them into Academy exercises, and provide instruction in their lawful and appropriate use. Participating agencies will designate trained users, maintain the equipment, follow applicable legal and evidence-handling procedures, and consult ABI or the DFL when a proposed examination exceeds local training or capability.

The kits will provide limited field capability and will not replace comprehensive DFL examinations. Devices requiring advanced analysis will continue to be referred to the laboratory.

Regional access to standardized equipment will allow investigators to preserve evidence, determine whether a device must be retained, narrow collection when appropriate, and identify when advanced assistance is required. These practices will reduce unnecessary retention of victim devices and collection of unrelated private information while improving the consistency and integrity of evidence used to hold offenders accountable.

DPS will track kits distributed, designated kit users, reported use in qualifying investigations, and equipment or maintenance issues. Participating agencies will provide aggregate utilization information without personally identifying victim information.

Objective 3: Improve Victim-Centered Investigations and Offender Accountability

ABI will collaborate with a statewide victim service provider and AAG Woolfstead to develop and deliver the victim-centered and prosecutorial components of the Academy.

The victim-centered curriculum will address trauma-informed communication, technology-facilitated abuse, victim safety, privacy, informed and limited consent, modification or withdrawal of consent, the consequences of surrendering a device, appropriately scoped evidence collection, discovery concerns, and referrals to services. Investigators will be trained to explain the digital evidence process in understandable terms and consider alternatives to prolonged device retention when appropriate.

The prosecutorial curriculum will address probable cause, search warrants, consent, electronic provider process, charging decisions, grand jury presentation, discovery, authentication and admissibility, additional forensic needs, trial preparation, and courtroom presentation of digital evidence.

Integrating victim services, prosecution, investigation, and digital forensics will help ensure that victim autonomy and effective investigation are treated as complementary goals. Appropriately scoped and legally sound evidence collection can protect victims' privacy, reduce repeated requests or unnecessary delays, and produce evidence that can be effectively used in charging and prosecution.

DPS will track partner participation and relevant pre- and post-training assessment results. Partner and participant feedback will inform curriculum revisions. Grant reporting will not include personally identifying victim information.

Objective 4: Strengthen Statewide Collaboration and Technical Assistance

After each Academy, participating investigators will retain access to ABI and the DFL for consultation, mentorship, and case-specific assistance. Support may be provided remotely or through direct coordination during an active investigation.

Assistance may address investigative strategy, electronic legal process, evidence preservation, Digital Investigation Kit use, field triage, victim-device considerations, interpretation of preliminary results, submission of evidence, and coordination of advanced laboratory examinations. Prosecutorial and victim-service partners may be consulted when issues involve charging, legal authority, consent, privacy, safety, or service coordination.

Continuing assistance will help investigators avoid evidence loss, overly broad collection, unnecessary device retention, unsupported technical conclusions, and delays in obtaining legal process. It will also connect rural agencies with specialized investigative, forensic, prosecutorial, and victim-service expertise that they cannot independently maintain.

DPS will track technical-assistance requests by requesting agency or region and general category, cases coordinated for advanced DFL examination, recurring issues identified through case support, and participant feedback regarding the usefulness and availability of assistance. Recurring issues will be incorporated into later Academy sessions and reference materials.

Accessibility, Implementation, and Continuous Improvement

The regional delivery model will reduce geographic, financial, and staffing barriers that prevent rural agencies from accessing specialized training. Investigators from state, local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies in host regions and surrounding jurisdictions will be invited to participate.

Academy instruction, materials, Digital Investigation Kits, and continuing technical assistance will be provided without cost to participating agencies. Materials will be available electronically, reasonable accommodations will be provided for participants with disabilities, and DPS will work with project partners to address identified language or communication needs.

The victim service partner will help ensure that Academy content recognizes barriers experienced by victims in rural, remote, and Tribal communities, including geographic isolation, limited transportation and services, close community relationships, and dependence on a mobile device for safety and daily life. Continuing assistance will remain available after participants return to their communities and will not depend on proximity to Anchorage.

During the initial project phase, DPS will finalize partner agreements, curriculum, evaluation tools, regional scheduling, equipment specifications, procurement, and distribution procedures. DPS will then conduct six Academies during each project year. Digital Investigation Kits will be distributed in coordination with Academy completion, and technical assistance will begin immediately following each delivery.

After each Academy, DPS will review attendance, assessment results, participant and instructor feedback, equipment issues, technical-assistance activity, and partner recommendations. Lessons learned will be incorporated into later Academy sessions to keep the project responsive to changes in technology, law, victim needs, and investigative practice.

Who Will Implement the Project

The Alaska Department of Public Safety, through the Alaska Bureau of Investigation (ABI), will manage and implement the Alaska Cybercrime Response Network. The multidisciplinary project team will include leaders in digital forensics, cybercrime investigation, rural prosecution, and victim services. Each curriculum lead may designate qualified personnel from their agency or organization to assist with instruction, technical assistance, and Academy delivery.

Project Director and Digital Forensics Curriculum Lead

Brandon Hunter, Digital Forensics Laboratory Manager, Alaska Bureau of Investigation, will serve as Project Director and lead development of the Academy's digital evidence and forensic curriculum.

DFL Manager Hunter will oversee project implementation, Academy scheduling, partner coordination, equipment procurement and distribution, performance measurement, grant compliance, and OVW reporting. He will also establish technical standards for the Digital Investigation Kits, develop standardized field workflows, coordinate digital forensic instruction, and oversee continuing technical assistance to participating agencies.

DFL Manager Hunter has worked as a digital forensic examiner in Alaska for nearly 20 years and currently manages the ABI Digital Forensics Laboratory. He holds a Graduate Certificate in Digital Forensic Science from Champlain College and a bachelor's degree from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He serves as a volunteer staff member, course developer, and peer-review certification coach for the International Association of Computer Investigative Specialists and as Sumuri's Senior macOS Training Instructor.

Since 2010, DFL Manager Hunter has provided digital forensic training to Alaska law enforcement personnel and has also instructed state and international law enforcement agencies. In total, he has delivered more than 1,700 hours of specialized instruction to more than 1,500 students, including personnel from the California Department of Justice, the European Union's Anti-Fraud Office, An Garda Síochána, Finnish Poliisi, the Swedish Police Authority, Thüringer Polizei, the Bank of Tanzania's Internal and External Fraud investigation teams, and the New Zealand Customs Service. His technical, managerial, course-development, and instructional experience equips him to direct the project and lead the Academy's digital forensic curriculum.

Investigative Curriculum Lead

Sergeant Nathan Bucknall, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Bureau of Investigation, will lead development of the Academy's cybercrime investigative curriculum, including investigative strategy, interviews, legal process, electronic provider records, internet investigations, digital evidence, and case preparation.

Sgt. Bucknall has served with the Alaska State Troopers since 2000 and currently supervises the Technical and Financial Crime Units. His experience includes rural patrol, child abuse, financial crime, online child exploitation, hacking, fraud, sexual assault, homicide, and other complex investigations involving digital evidence.

Sgt. Bucknall helped establish the Alaska Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and has extensive experience in computer and mobile-device forensics, online investigations, cryptocurrency, open-source intelligence, and cellular-record analysis. He holds an FBI Instructor Development Certificate, has provided approximately 239 hours of instruction to approximately 883 students since 2016, and developed a cell-phone forensics training program for Alaska law enforcement. He has conducted more than 1,700 mobile-device examinations and supervised approximately 1,000 additional examinations. His investigative, supervisory, technical, and instructional experience makes him well qualified to develop practical training for investigators serving rural Alaska.

Prosecutorial Curriculum Lead

Bailey Woolfstead, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Special Prosecutions, Rural Prosecutions Unit, Alaska Department of Law, will lead development of the Academy's prosecutorial curriculum. She will provide instruction and consultation concerning legal process, charging, grand jury presentation, discovery, admissibility, trial preparation, and courtroom presentation of digital evidence.

AAG Woolfstead earned her law degree from William & Mary School of Law and has served as a criminal prosecutor since 2013. She currently serves as Alaska's statewide rural sexual crimes prosecutor and has extensive experience prosecuting sexual assault, sexual abuse, domestic violence, child torture, homicide, and other serious offenses. She regularly works with multidisciplinary teams, investigators, victim service professionals, victims, and families throughout Alaska. Her statewide rural prosecution experience will connect investigative and forensic instruction with the legal, evidentiary, logistical, and victim-centered requirements of successful prosecution.

Victim Services Partner

DPS will partner with a statewide victim service provider to lead development of the Academy's victim-centered curriculum and participate in Academy delivery. The partnership will be documented through the required memorandum of understanding.

The victim service partner will provide expertise in trauma-informed communication, technology-facilitated abuse, victim safety, informed and limited consent, privacy, autonomy, discovery concerns, the consequences of surrendering a mobile device, referrals to services, and barriers experienced by victims in rural, remote, and Tribal communities. The partner will review curriculum, assist with instruction, evaluate participant feedback, and recommend revisions throughout the project period.

Additional Instructors and Participating Agencies

Qualified personnel from ABI, the Digital Forensics Laboratory, the Alaska Department of Law, and the victim service partner may assist with instruction based on subject-matter expertise and operational availability. All instructors will use the standardized curriculum approved by the curriculum leads.

Participating law enforcement agencies will nominate appropriate investigators, support Academy attendance, designate trained users for the Digital Investigation Kits, maintain grant-funded equipment, provide aggregate utilization information, and consult ABI or the DFL when an examination exceeds local training or capability.

Coordination, Capacity, and Sustainability

DFL Manager Hunter will provide overall project leadership and coordinate scheduling, equipment, reporting, evaluation, and technical assistance. Sgt. Bucknall will oversee the investigative curriculum, AAG Woolfstead will oversee the prosecutorial curriculum, and the victim service partner will ensure that victim safety, privacy, autonomy, informed consent, and access to services remain integrated throughout the project.

The curriculum leads will coordinate during course development and review participant feedback, equipment use, technical-assistance trends, and emerging legal or technical issues. Integrated scenarios will demonstrate how victim interaction, investigative strategy, legal authority, digital evidence practices, and prosecution affect one another throughout a case. Lessons identified

through Academy evaluations and subsequent technical assistance will be incorporated into future deliveries.

DPS, ABI, and the DFL possess the personnel, infrastructure, instructional experience, and forensic capability necessary to implement the project. After federal funding ends, participating agencies will retain trained personnel and grant-funded equipment, while DPS will retain the curriculum and field workflows and ABI and the DFL will continue providing statewide investigative and forensic assistance.