

Letter to the Editor—Effectiveness of FSF Acorn and Lucas Grants

Sir,

For almost two decades, the Forensic Sciences Foundation (FSF), an affiliate of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), has been awarding monetary grants for research investigations. This began in 1990 when Acorn Grants of up to \$500 were first awarded. The name of the grant was changed from Acorn to Lucas in 1995 in honor of Dr. Douglas Lucas, Past President, Distinguished Fellow and Gradwohl Laureate of the AAFS. In 2003, The Board agreed to fund the Lucas Grants at a higher level, up to \$5000, and to reinstate the Acorn Grants at the lower funding level capped at \$500. The Acorn Grants are intended to help the investigator initiate original problem-oriented research. The Lucas Grants are intended to help the investigator in original in-depth problem-oriented research. These grants are open to members of affiliates (at any level) of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. From 1990 to the present, a total of \$122,000.00 has been awarded by FSF in support of 158 grants. Thus, these grants have averaged less than \$1000 per approved and funded proposal. Can these relatively small dollar amounts be effective in promoting and supporting research? A limited survey was undertaken to provide an answer to this question.

The grant years 2000–2007 (inclusive) were selected because the start date is recent enough to expect reasonably reliable recollection and records for the grantees. The closing date was selected because the two grant cycles after 2007 are too recent to allow full realization of the results of those awards. The grantees (in all but three instances, the principal investigator) were interrogated via emailed or faxed one-page questionnaires designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the grant support in terms of resultant scholarly activity (no addresses were available for investigation of seven of the 53 grants).

During the selected trial period, 21 Acorn Grants and 32 Lucas Grants totaling \$57,200 were awarded to 70 principal and co-

investigators. Responses were obtained from 43 of the 53 grants, a whopping 81% return!

Of the 43 grants responding, 33 led to further research in the same field. The prodigious scholar output attributed wholly or in part to the FSF grant support included: 34 oral presentations (plus two more submitted for 2009); 27 posters; 44 published abstracts (plus one more submitted for 2009); 16 published papers (plus two more already submitted and two in preparation); six book chapters; two books (plus two more in preparation); six theses or dissertations for advanced degrees; two awards; two scholarships; and one grant was largely responsible for a high five-figure grant from the National Institute of Justice.

This study indicates that the modest FSF Acorn and Lucas Grants have long legs, represent a great bargain and an unusually profitable long-term investment in the future of the forensic sciences. They are supported entirely by contributors to the FSF through a variety of opportunities for individual and group giving programs: the FSF Endowment Fund Contributions, the “I Gave an Hour” program; the FSF-sponsored Silent Auction at the AAFS annual meeting; the new “Five for Forensic Sciences ReSearch” program, and annual gifts from several sections of AAFS.

At present, fewer than half of deserving proposals can be funded and virtually none at the full amount requested. Twice the funds currently available for the FSF Acorn and Lucas Grants research support program easily could be awarded to deserving proposals with no dilution of overall quality.

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