

This applicaton is for:	Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award
Project Title	Tri-County Biological Science Center
County or Counties	Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester
Application Contact	Lauren Knapp Counter Threat Manager
Application Email Address	lknapp@charlestoncounty.org
Presenter(s) Name and Title	Lauren Knapp Counter Threat Manager
Main Presenter's Email Address	lknapp@charlestoncounty.org

Project Written Submission

Project Summary

The Tri-County Biological Science Center in North Charleston marks a groundbreaking achievement for Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties. As South Carolina’s first regional forensic DNA lab, this state-of-the-art facility represents a bold step forward in regional collaboration, scientific advancement, and public service.

The Center was designed using a data-driven approach to serve the Tri-County area, delivering critical DNA analysis services to support local law enforcement, coroners, and the judicial system. By significantly reducing processing times, the lab will accelerate investigations, enable faster case resolution, and help ease detention center overcrowding and court backlogs while advancing both public safety and community trust.

The creation of the Tri-County Biological Science Center demonstrates the transformative power of regional partnerships. From concept to execution, this initiative exemplifies how shared vision, and joint investment can yield high-impact solutions. With the support of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), the Center is positioned to play a critical role in strengthening the criminal justice system and improving the delivery of forensic services across the region.

Beyond speeding up justice, the Center also stands as a model of innovation and efficiency in public infrastructure. It ensures that local agencies no longer need to rely solely on overburdened state labs for timely forensic results, making justice not only faster, but fairer.

This facility is more than just a lab; it is a powerful symbol of our region’s commitment to public safety, scientific excellence, and responsive government. The Tri-County Biological Science Center sets a new standard for what’s possible when communities come together to address urgent challenges with forward-thinking solutions.

Project Effort/Difficulty

Tri-County Regional Biological Science Center: A Regional Solution to Forensic Challenges

Charleston County is leading efforts to establish the Tri-County Regional Biological Science Center in response to the growing demand for efficient forensic services across one of South Carolina’s fastest-

growing regions. Designed to serve Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties, the Center will deliver faster DNA analysis, support the criminal justice system, relieve pressure on the state's primary forensic lab (SLED), and promote timely case resolution.

Challenges Faced

Financing Needs: Project costs are estimated between \$26.4 million and \$31.4 million, and we are currently within budget with projected savings. While Charleston County committed \$6.5 million, and state appropriations provided \$3 million, Berkeley and Dorchester counties each submitted 1 million dollars to the initial project start costs. A \$5 million request was submitted to the state for FY25 and given the limited funding sources for brick-and-mortar projects federal grant opportunities were not available.

Construction & Supply Chain Pressures: This project started at the end of COVID, and the Charleston County team had to navigate escalating and unknown costs along with supply chain delays, however with excellent project management and leadership we were able to accelerate the construction timeline to prevent further budget impacts.

Sustaining Operational Costs: Charleston County will fund ongoing operational and reoccurring expenses, which has required detailed long-term financial and staffing needs across all partner counties.

Collaborations

Tri-County Partnership: The project is a collaborative effort among Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties, with each county contributing financially and administratively. All three counties' Sheriffs and Coroners, along with the 1st and 9th Circuit Solicitors, are in full support of the lab.

Charleston County staff used a data-driven approach to engage stakeholders and gather input on their priorities for the lab. Combined with population growth projections, this informed a lab design that meets current needs and has a projected lifespan of 30 years, with capacity for future expansion.

Charleston County: Took the lead with \$6.5 million in funding for design, programming, and operations. Charleston County Council unanimously approved this commitment in February 2022.

Berkeley and Dorchester Counties: Each approved \$1 million in capital contributions (Berkeley in 2024; Dorchester in 2022), reflecting regional alignment.

Broad Political Support: Strong advocacy from local officials, including Sheriff Carl Ritchie, Former Sheriff Kristen Graziano, Sherri Duane Lewis, Sheriff LC Knight, Solicitor Scarlett Wilson, Solicitor David Pascoe, Coroner Bobbi Jo O'Neal, helped ensure the Center meets regional law enforcement and judicial needs.

Funding Strategy

Local & State Investment: Combined local commitments and state appropriations form the funding base, with ongoing requests to the state to close the remaining gap.

Regional Resource Sharing: Joint investment reduces duplication, spreads costs, and ensures high-quality service delivery across all three counties.

Forecasted Measurable Benefits

Faster DNA Processing: Processing times reduced from months to weeks, accelerating court cases and ensuring faster justice for both victims and suspects.

Reduced Detention Overcrowding: Quicker case resolution decreases pre-trial detention times, relieving pressure on local facilities.

SLED Relief: With the Center handling local caseloads, SLED can refocus efforts on other counties, improving statewide forensic services.

Timeline and Next Steps

Design & Programming: Completed Q1 2023
Construction Start: Scheduled Q2 2024
Completion & Occupancy: Expected Q4 2025

The Tri-County Regional Biological Science Center is a landmark example of regional collaboration solving critical public safety challenges. Through shared investment, political will, and strategic planning, this project enhances forensic services and strengthens the criminal justice system for the entire Tri-County region.

Benefit/Importance of Project

The creation of the Tri-County Biological Science Center was driven by the urgent need to improve forensic capabilities and public safety services across Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties. These three counties represent some of the fastest-growing areas in South Carolina, and with increasing population growth comes a corresponding rise in criminal cases requiring DNA analysis. Previously, forensic evidence had to be submitted to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), contributing to significant backlogs in processing times and delays in justice.

One of the primary reasons behind the establishment of the Center is to relieve SLED of a portion of the DNA analysis workload from these high-growth counties. By handling local cases, the Center enables SLED to focus its resources on serving other counties statewide, improving forensic service delivery across South Carolina to shorten the judicial process.

DNA evidence is critical in criminal investigations, but long delays in processing have led to extended court case timelines and overcrowded detention centers. The Center was created to reduce these delays, allowing for quicker case resolutions and more efficient court proceedings. This benefits all populations who are affected by crime and who are both victims and suspects. With this facility it allows for victims to gain resolution to their cases sooner and for suspect who maybe innocent or guilty it provides for expedited resolution in those cases.

Strengthened Regional Collaboration: The Tri-County area recognized the value of regional cooperation to address the growing demand for forensic services. By pooling resources and expertise, the three counties created a shared facility that offers high-quality DNA analysis and forensic support.

Significance to the Tri-County Area:

Enhanced Public Safety: The Center plays a key role in ensuring public safety by providing law enforcement agencies with timely and accurate forensic evidence. This expedites criminal investigations, aiding in the swift apprehension and prosecution of offenders.

Judicial Efficiency: By reducing the time it takes to process DNA evidence, the Center helps prevent case backlogs in the courts and shortens the time defendants spend in pre-trial detention, which reduces overcrowding in local detention centers.

Economic Impact: The Center not only improves public safety but also generates economic benefits for the region by moving cases through the legal system more efficiently. This reduces costs associated with long-term incarceration and extended court delays.

Reduction in DNA Processing Times: By removing the reliance on SLED for DNA analysis, local law enforcement agencies have seen processing times reduced from several months to just weeks. This expedites criminal investigations, bringing faster justice to victims and reducing the burden on the courts.

Decreased Detention Overcrowding: The faster processing of forensic evidence has led to quicker case resolutions, which helps reduce the time individuals spend in pre-trial detention, addressing overcrowding issues at detention centers.

Increased SLED Capacity: With the Tri-County Biological Science Center now handling local DNA analysis, SLED can dedicate more of its resources to serving other counties across South Carolina, ultimately improving forensic services throughout the state.

Overall, the Tri-County Biological Science Center serves as a model for how regional collaboration can

address critical needs in public safety, enhance the efficiency of the criminal justice system, and provide long-term benefits to both the local community and the state.

Project Originality/Innovation

Regional Collaboration and Shared Resources: One of the most innovative aspects of the Center is the regional collaboration it represents. Unlike any other forensic facility in South Carolina, the Tri-County Center brings together three counties; Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester, to pool their resources for a shared solution to forensic challenges. By working together, these counties have created a unique partnership that leverages regional expertise and funding to develop a high-impact facility that serves multiple jurisdictions.

This center will be unique as it will have independent structure, scientific integrity driving decisions allowing for equal voice in the justice system. The regional approach starting with design also aligns with the 2009 National Academy of Sciences recommendations for strengthening forensic sciences in the United States. This regional approach is particularly innovative in a state where forensic services have traditionally been centralized at the state level, primarily through the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED).

Localized DNA Analysis to Relieve State Burden: The creation of the Tri-County Center is a direct response to the state's growing need for timely forensic services. By establishing a facility that can handle DNA analysis locally, the Center alleviates the burden on SLED, which previously managed all DNA processing statewide. As Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties are among the fastest-growing areas in South Carolina and in the United States, this localized approach is crucial for reducing backlogs, expediting case processing, and improving the overall efficiency of the state's criminal justice system.

The decentralization of DNA analysis to the tri-county region is a unique model that could be replicated in other parts of the state, offering a blueprint for regional innovation in public safety services.

State-of-the-Art Forensic Technology: The Center's focus on biological DNA services sets it apart from other facilities, as it is designed to house advanced forensic technology tailored specifically to the needs of the tri-county region. With an emphasis on high-quality, rapid DNA analysis, the facility will incorporate cutting-edge techniques, consistent training for law enforcement and technologically superior equipment that were previously unavailable at the local level.

This innovation will enable law enforcement agencies to process samples more efficiently, leading to faster case resolutions, reduced pre-trial detention times, and improved outcomes for victims of crime.

Integrated Judicial and Law Enforcement Support: In addition to its technical capabilities, the Center stands out for its integrated support of both the criminal justice and judicial processes. By streamlining forensic services within the region, the Center supports law enforcement, coroners, and judicial partners in their efforts to deliver timely, accurate results. This seamless integration between different arms of the criminal justice system is key to the Center's success and reflects a forward-thinking approach to public safety and training.

Concluding Remarks

The Tri-County Regional Biological Science Center is a model of innovation in both its regional cooperation and technical advancement. Its ability to localize DNA analysis, help alleviate statewide forensic backlogs, and provide cutting-edge services to law enforcement and the judicial system makes it a unique and transformative project. By enhancing public safety and improving the efficiency of the criminal justice system, the Center sets a new standard for forensic services in South Carolina.

To our knowledge, no other regional jurisdiction in South Carolina has implemented a shared forensic laboratory with this level of integration, making the Center a replicable model for statewide implementation. As a forward thinking, sustainable investment in justice and public safety, The Tri-County regional Biological Science Center paves the way for a smarter, faster and more equitable criminal justice system across South Carolina.



TRICOUNTY BIOLOGICAL
SCIENCE CENTER

LS3P

Media Article Links:

Work begins on \$29M first-of-its-kind bio science center in North Charleston

<https://charlestonbusiness.com/work-begins-on-29m-first-of-its-kind-bio-science-center-in-north-charleston/>

Berkeley County invests \$1M on Leeds Avenue's new Tri-County Biological Science Center

<https://abcnews4.com/news/local/berkeley-county-gives-1m-to-tri-county-biological-science-center-berkeley-county-news-police-news-wciv-news-4>

Leaders break ground on Tri-County Biological Science Center

<https://www.counton2.com/news/leaders-break-ground-on-tri-county-biological-science-center/>

Construction for Tri-County Biological Science Center to begin next month

<https://www.counton2.com/news/construction-for-tri-county-biological-science-center-to-begin-next-month/>



BERKELEY COUNTY SC

RICH HISTORY.
BRIGHT FUTURE.
One Berkeley

John P. Cribb
SUPERVISOR

August 5, 2025

Ms. Anna Berger and Members of Judging Panel
SC Association of Counties
Post Office Box 8207
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

RE: Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award Competition

Dear Ms. Berger and Judges:

It is with great pleasure that Berkeley County Government supports the submission of the Tri-County Biological Science Center for the 2025 Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award Competition. We are proud to have worked collaboratively with our neighboring counties-Charleston and Dorchester-as well as their respective Sheriff's Offices, Administrations, and County Councils to help bring this vision to life.

This regionally significant project has been in the works since 2021. The creation of the Tri-County Biological Science Center was driven by the urgent need to improve forensic capabilities and public safety services across Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties. These three counties represent some of the fastest-growing areas in South Carolina, and with increasing population growth comes a corresponding rise in criminal cases requiring DNA analysis. Previously, forensic evidence had to be submitted to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, contributing to significant backlogs in processing times and delays in justice for victims, their families, and suspects who may be guilty or innocent.

We are proud to add our support to this project application and are certain the creation of the Tri- County Biological Science Center demonstrates the transformative power of regional partnerships. This initiative exemplifies how shared vision, and joint investment can yield high-impact solutions.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (843)719-5088 or Johnny.Cribb@berkeleycountysc.gov.

Sincerely,

Johnny Cribb
Berkeley County Supervisor
Berkeley County Government

JPC:alh

Rev. Dr. Kylon Jerome Middleton – Chair
Larry Kobrovsky – Vice Chair
Joe Boykin
Henry E. Darby
Jenny Costa Honeycutt
C. Brantley Moody
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CHARLESTON COUNTY COUNCIL
LONNIE HAMILTON, III PUBLIC SERVICES BUILDING
4045 BRIDGE VIEW DRIVE
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
29405-7464

July 25, 2025

Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Competition
SC Association of Counties
Attn: Anna Berger and Competition Judges
PO BOX 8207
Columbia, SC 29202-8207

Dear Ms. Berger and Competition Judges:

It is with great pleasure that the Charleston County Council and County Administrator support the submission of the Tri-County Biological Science Center for the 2025 Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award Competition. We are proud to have worked collaboratively with our neighboring counties—Berkeley and Dorchester—as well as their respective Sheriff's Offices, Administrations, and County Councils to help bring this vision to life.

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Sincerely,


Rev. Dr. Kylon Jerome Middleton
Chairman
Charleston County Council


William L. Tuten
County Administrator
Charleston County Government

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Jason L. Ward
County Administrator

**OFFICE OF THE DORCHESTER COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
201 JOHNSTON STREET
ST. GEORGE, SOUTH CAROLINA 29477**

August 4, 2025

Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Competition
South Carolina Association of Counties
Attn: Mrs. Anna Berger and Competition Judges
PO Box 8207
Columbia, SC 29202-8207

Dear Mrs. Berger and Competition Judges,

Dorchester County is excited to send this Letter of Support for the **Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award** application being submitted by Charleston County for the **Tri-County Biological Science Center**.

The **Tri-County Biological Science Center** will serve the citizens of the Tri-County area, Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester, by helping our law enforcement agencies and coroners offices to expedite the examination of physical evidence such as DNA and to identify bodily remains. This center will help us solve crimes and provide closure to the victims of crime and their families. Therefore, we are excited that this project is on track to be completed by December 1, 2025.

Thanks in advance for your consideration of this application for the Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award.

Best regards,

Jason L. Ward, County Administrator
Dorchester County, South Carolina