

# TOXTALK<sup>®</sup>



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**Jeri Roper-Miller, Ph.D. F-ABFT**  
2026 SOFT President

### THE BALL IS ROLLING!

As the first issue of 2026 ToxTalk reaches you, SOFT has already made strong progress in these opening months. Our Board, SOFT Office, Committees, and Annual Meeting volunteers are fully engaged in advancing the Society's priorities, and the momentum is energizing. While far more is happening across

SOFT than I can cover here, I'm pleased to share five key updates that highlight our direction for 2026.

#### #1 – Appointments and Committee Selections Completed

We began the year with several important appointments. **Teresa Gray**, Editor of the 2026 SOFT Special Issue of JAT, and the Publications Committee have received all your submissions and are preparing an excellent issue for release in September. In January, **Michelle Peace** joined the Board of Directors as our newest Counselor.

My sincere thanks to the hundreds of volunteers serving on SOFT's 20+ committees—your work is central to our mission. Committee rosters for 2026 are now posted online. While the new application process has improved participation, you do not need to be an appointed member to contribute. Reach out to Chairs or Vice Chairs and ask, *"How can I participate?"* Your involvement strengthens SOFT's collaborative, member driven culture.

#### #2 – New Presidential Task Groups Underway

Two new Presidential Task Groups launched this year to support SOFT's long term direction.

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Chris Heartsill, B.S., D-ABFT-FT

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TOXTALK

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

The **Business and Operations Strategy Task Group (BOS TG)** will lead development of a forward looking strategy for SOFT's operations, sustainability, and governance. As SOFT expands beyond the Annual Meeting with new programs and services, this work will help ensure our structure and resources can support continued growth. With our last long range strategic plan completed many years ago, this effort is both timely and essential. **Laurel Farrell** will serve as Chair.

The **Membership Survey Analysis and Reporting Task Group (MSAR TG)** is reviewing and synthesizing results from the 2025 Membership Survey, conducted last September. This survey introduced new questions reflecting evolving member needs, and the group is preparing a member focused report for release later this year, with the option of a broader public summary. These insights will help guide future priorities.

## #3 – SOFT Committee Handbook Updates

Secretary **Dayong Lee**, together with **Beth Olson** and **Abby Russo**, is leading a comprehensive update and harmonization of all SOFT Committee Handbooks. These revisions will modernize guidance, strengthen consistency across committees, and improve continuity year to year. Updated handbooks will clarify expectations, support leadership transitions, and ensure alignment with SOFT's mission. These handbooks shape the volunteer experience and will help ensure our committee structure remains efficient, supportive, and adaptable.

## #4 – A Year of Opportunities: Training, Awards, and the 2026 Meeting

SOFT enters 2026 with expanded training, recognition, and engagement opportunities. Our Professional Development resources continue to grow, offering new pathways for learning across forensic toxicology. I encourage members to explore workshops, webinars, and other training opportunities (e.g., ToxHub, JAT, Regional Toxicology Liaison initiatives, literature compilations) throughout the year.

Planning for the SOFT-TIAFT 2026 Joint Meeting is well underway. From **September 19–24**, we will gather in Chicago for an exceptional week of scientific sessions, workshops, and networking alongside colleagues from around the world. Our Hosts, **Andre Sukta** and **Luke Rodda**, are leading the Planning Committee efforts. This is a unique opportunity for global collaboration, and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Every year, SOFT offers the Annual Awards; Dal Cortivo Award; Educational Research Award (ERA); Experimental Design and Impact on Toxicology Award (EDIT); SOFT Huestis & Smith Toxicology International Travel Award; Young Scientist Meeting Award (YSMA)] to recognize individual contributions to SOFT and the field of forensic toxicology. Just another way you can honor excellence and leadership within our field. Don't wait until the last minute to consider who among your colleagues really stands out for 2026 recognition and go to the Awards webpage to "plot your course" and get those nominations in!

## #5 – Federal Investments Address Emerging Drug Threats

The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO) recently released its summary of the FY26 federal budget, highlighting major investments in forensic toxicology. Congress directed the **National Institute of Justice** to prioritize research on emerging drug threats. The **Paul Coverdell program** received **\$32.5 million**, including **\$17 million** dedicated to opioid and synthetic drug challenges, and another **\$17 million** under **Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA)** will strengthen laboratory capacity nationwide.

The budget also maintains significant support for surveillance and public health efforts. The CDC's Opioid Overdose Prevention and Surveillance program received more than \$500 million, and NIST's RaDAR program continues to provide essential data on shifting drug landscapes. I encourage members to stay informed as these initiatives evolve—your expertise is vital in helping shape national responses to emerging toxicology challenges. The FY26 Budget Brief is located on the CFSO website where all newsletters reside!

Thank you for your dedication and partnership as we begin 2026. SOFT remains strong and forward looking because of our committed membership, and I am grateful for all you do to support the Society.

*Jeri Ropera-Miller*

## Join SOFT: Membership & Promotions

The Society of Forensic Toxicologists (SOFT) offers several categories of memberships to support individuals at all stages of their careers in forensic toxicology. Whether you are a student exploring the field, an experienced professional, or a long-time member transitioning into retirement, there is a membership type tailored to level of involvement.

Each category has specific eligibility requirements and sponsorship guidelines. Please review the details online to determine the membership type that best fits your qualifications and professional status. If you are a current member seeking to update your membership category, information on membership promotion is also provided.

Please feel free to reach out to the Membership Committee with any questions or if you need assistance with your Membership Application

### MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Chair: **Dayong Lee**  
Michele Glinn  
Marissa Finkelstein  
Justin Grodnitzky

**Apply Now**

# How to Apply for SOFT Membership

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

## STEP 01

### Select your Membership Level

Determine the level you qualify for. Review the requirements and sponsorship needs.



## STEP 02

### Contact Your Sponsor

Reach out to a current SOFT member to discuss sponsorship and request they e-sign the "sponsor Form" in your application.



## STEP 03

### Create Your Profile & Pay

Create your Membership Profile, submit your information, upload necessary documents. Pay your dues upon sponsor approval.



## STEP 04

### Submit Your Application

Finalize your Membership Application by submitting the information to the Membership Committee for review.

- Submit in PDF format (fillable PDF) or as scanned PDF (PDF release via email)





# CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Unlock a treasure trove of knowledge with our live and on-demand webinars, designed for forensic toxicologists at every stage of their career. Whether you're a seasoned professional or just starting out, these sessions are crafted to enrich your understanding of cutting-edge topics and industry challenges.

SOFT Learning Center Offers:

-  **EXCLUSIVE ACCESS**
-  **AFFORDABLE LEARNING**
-  **ON-DEMAND FLEXIBILITY**



**ACCESS THE LEARNING CENTER!**



# Upcoming Webinars

## Effective Courtroom Testimony for Oral Fluid Drug Testing

Webinar Date Tuesday, April 7, 2026

Chairs: Mandi Mohr and Curt Harper

This webinar is sponsored by the SOFT/AAFS Oral Fluid Committee in collaboration with the Regional Toxicology Liaison (RTL) Program. It leverages combined expertise in oral fluid drug testing and forensic testimony to provide focused training addressing both the scientific foundations of oral fluid drug testing and the real world demands of expert testimony.

The first half of the webinar will focus on how toxicologists can clearly and effectively articulate why oral fluid test results are accurate and reliable, how analytical methods are validated and generally accepted, and how oral fluid drug testing has been used for decades across multiple sectors and international jurisdictions. Topics will include result interpretation, addressing common misconceptions, and navigating challenges frequently encountered during courtroom testimony.

The second half of the webinar will emphasize practical direct- and cross-examination scenarios, including strategies for explaining oral fluid results to judges and juries, responding to Daubert or Frye challenges, and integrating toxicological findings with behavioral evidence such as SFSTs and DRE evaluations, while remaining compliant with ASB Standard 037, Standard for Reports and Testimony in Forensic Toxicology.

Find out more and register for the webinar [Here](#).

## Reviewing Abstracts: Tips and Tricks

Webinar Date, Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Chairs: Heather Barkholtz and Austin Ciesielski

This webinar will utilize approved and anonymous SOFT abstract submissions as training models. The Publications committee has worked with the SOFT 2026 Scientific Chairs to develop a set of guidelines for reviewing abstracts and these guidelines will be reviewed in detail. Breakout rooms will be used to then review and go through abstract examples and provide insight to the attendees on how to evaluate them. The initial and final versions of these abstract examples will be used to demonstrate how the guidelines and discussions led to any necessary changes to the submissions to produce scientifically sound abstracts. The webinar aims to provide toxicologists new to the reviewing process a strong foundation and confidence to volunteer in the coming years.

Find out more and register for the webinar [Here](#).

# 2025 TRAVEL AWARD RECAP!



The [Huestis and Smith Travel Award](#) was established in 2024 with the first recipients traveling in 2025. The Award was established to honor the enduring legacies of Dr. Marilyn A. Huestis and Dr. Michael L. Smith, two esteemed leaders in forensic toxicology and seeks to continue their work by supporting SOFT members in attending and presenting their research at TIAFT annual meetings. Here is what the awardees had to say about their travel:

## Kei Osawa

Attending TIAFT 2025 was an immensely valuable experience, both professionally and personally, and it would not have been possible without the generous support of the Society of Forensic Toxicologists through the Huestis and Smith Toxicology International Travel Award. As a first-time attendee of a TIAFT meeting, this opportunity allowed me to engage with the international forensic toxicology community in a meaningful way and significantly contributed to my career development.

The scientific program at TIAFT 2025 was diverse and informative, covering topics that were both directly relevant to my work and broadly applicable to the field. Sessions addressing emerging drugs, postmortem toxicology, analytical challenges, and interpretation issues were particularly impactful. Hearing how laboratories around the world approach similar analytical and interpretive challenges provided new ideas and perspectives that I can apply in my own work. The high level of scientific rigor combined with open discussion made the sessions both educational and engaging.

I had the privilege of presenting an oral platform presentation titled "Mitragynine: Distribution in Postmortem Specimens Plus Three Interesting Cases." This presentation focused on the distribution of mitragynine in postmortem specimens and included case examples that illustrated the complexities associated with interpretation. Sharing this work with an international audience was a highlight of the meeting. The questions and feedback I received prompted engaging scientific discussion and offered valuable insight into how mitragynine-related findings are viewed and interpreted in different regions of the world. This experience strengthened my confidence as a presenter and underscored the importance of contributing to the broader scientific dialogue within forensic toxicology.

One of the most rewarding aspects of TIAFT 2025 was the opportunity to build new professional connections while strengthening existing ones. The meeting brought together toxicologists from around the world, representing a wide range of laboratories, research interests, and professional roles. Interacting with colleagues from different countries highlighted both the shared challenges faced by forensic toxicologists and the diversity of approaches used to address them. These conversations led to thoughtful exchanges that expanded my perspective and fostered connections I hope to maintain throughout my career.

Overall, TIAFT 2025 was an unforgettable experience that significantly contributed to my professional growth and development. The Huestis and Smith Travel Award played a crucial role in making my participation possible, and I am sincerely grateful to SOFT for this support. I left the meeting feeling inspired, motivated, and eager to remain engaged with both the TIAFT and SOFT communities. This experience reinforced the value of international collaboration and scientific exchange and will have a lasting impact on my career in forensic toxicology.



# 2025 TRAVEL AWARD RECAP!



**Gillian Sayers**

As a SOFT member for over 15 years, having been to many meetings over that time, I thought that I already knew what to expect from a conference on forensic toxicology. After attending TIAFT for the first time, I am happy to say I was very wrong about that!

TIAFT was a new and enriching experience that brought me so many different perspectives outside of my North American 'bubble' and allowed me to see what is happening globally in forensic toxicology research, casework, public health, and more. It was great to not only be able to attend, but also to have the opportunity to present my work and participate in the conversation – also something I had never done before. As we can all appreciate, analytical challenges are universal in forensic toxicology, and if the work I presented at TIAFT (Development and validation of a general purpose, broad-spectrum LC-QTOF screening method in blood, serum/plasma, and urine using minimal sample volume) is able to help just one other laboratory overcome some of these challenges in their work, then I can count this among my greatest professional accomplishments.

It was humbling to casually share meals seated next to researchers whose work I have relied upon throughout my career, to put faces to names, and get answers to questions directly from the experts who know best. Everyone was so welcoming, and showed me that whether at SOFT or TIAFT, we really are a small and tight-knit community in forensic toxicology internationally. The connections I made at TIAFT will not only benefit my career going forward, undoubtedly leading to method collaborations in the future, but the ability to connect with international experts has already had a ripple effect to others in my professional orbit. As a direct result of attending TIAFT, I was able to connect a police investigator directly with an expert who presented a solution at TIAFT to a very specific problem that we have been working on for months. Although it was bittersweet to attend my last event as a Young Forensic Toxicologist before crossing that milestone birthday only one week later, I was filled with so much hope for the future of forensic toxicology after meeting the talented group of young people that will carry the next generation of our discipline forward with such innovation and enthusiasm.

I am so grateful to Dr. Marilyn A. Huestis and to Dr. Michael L. Smith for their generous support. After giving so much to the field already, funding of the Huestis and Smith Travel Award allows forensic toxicologists like me such an incredible opportunity that would have otherwise not been possible. I strongly encourage other SOFT members to consider applying in future years and sharing their work with the TIAFT community.

Finally, to be able to experience my first TIAFT meeting in a place as spectacular as New Zealand was a real 'pinch me' moment. After the conference, I was lucky to spend my birthday in Milford Sound (one of the most beautiful places on Earth!) and a pack of wild dolphins even joined me for the occasion. Thank you as well to our TIAFT hosts and organizers for a wonderful meeting. I hope to see some you again at a SOFT meeting in the future.



# 2025 TRAVEL AWARD RECAP!



## Madison Shackmuth

On the third day of the 2025 TIAFT conference, I presented on the cytochrome P450s (CYPs) responsible for isotonitazene metabolism (2B6, 2D6, 3A4, and 3A5 in case you missed it). Three primary metabolites were produced including N-desethyl isotonitazene, the non-specific 4-hydroxynitazene, and an N,O-dealkylation. Surprisingly, the 5-aminoisotonitazene nitro-reduction was not observed. Most concerning is the induction of enzymes responsible for producing the N-desethyl isotonitazene metabolite which is more potent than the parent analog and sometimes abused as a drug independent of the parent analyte.

The TIAFT conference brought together a great number of diverse projects, and I enjoyed getting a chance to listen to them all. I was especially interested in hearing about all the GHB detection methods given the analyte is not as prevalent outside of drug-facilitated crimes within the United States. The early morning vendor sessions taught me about novel instrumentation and avenues for further research opportunities. I also enjoyed speaking with other researchers at the Young Scientist events and connecting the people I met with their presentations.

The funding from the Huestis Smith SOFT Travel Grant removed financial barriers that would have otherwise limited my ability to attend the conference. This support allowed me to participate in 2025 New Zealand TIAFT. Presenting at this conference was especially meaningful for me because my journey into forensic science began with a study opportunity at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. When I returned from this trip, I pursued my doctoral research on fentanyl and nitazene analog characterization at Sam Houston University. My presentation at TIAFT was a product of the final phase of my doctoral research. Together, these experiences feel like I've completed a chapter of my scientific career. I currently work at the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education where I'm able to participate in drug surveillance efforts within the United States.

After the conference, I had a wonderful time immersing myself in New Zealand's natural beauty over the course of a week. I completed a two-day hike in the Pinnacles and a three-day hike over the Mt Taranaki Pouākai circuit. Both hikes were wonderful even though I spent the majority of my time on Mt Taranaki tramping through the rain. Thankfully my clothes and shoes were able to dry off by the fire each evening. My six-year-old cousin's Flat Stanley project arrived shortly before I left the States, so I brought it with me to share the experience. You may spot him in a photograph or two.

I look forward to seeing you all at SOFT-TIAFT 2026 in Chicago!

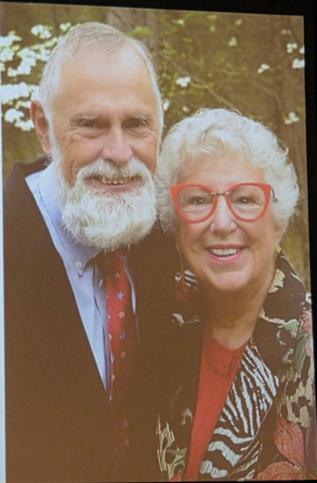


# 2025 TRAVEL AWARD RECAP!



### Other Grants/Awards

- ▶ TIAFT Huestis & Smith International Travel Award
  - TIAFT members go to SOFT (TIAFT Award)  
**Karolina Nowak** (Poland), **Asli Atasoy Aydin** (Türkiye) and **Jari Rubbens** (Belgium)
  - SOFT members go to TIAFT (SOFT Award)  
**Kei Osawa** (USA), **Madison Schackmuth** (USA), **Gillian Sayer** (Canada)



# Upcoming Important Deadlines for 2026

## Annual Meeting Important Dates & Deadlines

**Workshop Proposals Due:** Friday, March 13, 2026

**Abstract Submissions Due:** Thursday, April 30, 2026

**Early Bird Registration Begins & Room Block Opens:** Tuesday, May 19, 2026

**Standard Registration Begins:** July 15, 2026

**Onsite Registration Begins:** September 9, 2026

[To learn more and view the full SOFT calendar visit the SOFT Website](#)

### *Welcome to the new SOFT committee members*

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Name</b>
Applied Analytical Toxicology Committee	Jocelyn Abonamah
Applied Analytical Toxicology Committee	Britni Skillman
Awards Committee	Michael Wagner
Continuing Education Committee	Sara Schreiber
Continuing Education Committee	Aimee Wong
Culture, Values and Diversity Committee	Megan Grabenauer
Culture, Values and Diversity Committee	Faith Pilacik
Culture, Values and Diversity Committee	Jose Valdez
Drug Facilitated Crimes Committee	Kenson Jean
Drug Facilitated Crimes Committee	Robert Kronstrand
Drugs & Driving Committee	Jen Limoges
Ethics Committee	Tate Yeatman
Membership Committee	Michele Glinn
Mentoring Committee	Jeremey Smith
NPS Committee	Stuart Kurtz
NPS Committee	Christina Smith
Oral Fluid Committee	Kialee Daniel
Oral Fluid Committee	Rob Duckworth
Oral Fluid Committee	Richard Maguire
Postmortem Toxicology Committee	Craig Chatterton
Postmortem Toxicology Committee	Maiko Kusano
Publications Committee	Cassandra Duvall
Publications Committee	Kari Midthun
Toxicology Resource Committee	Jenna Plummer
Toxicology Resource Committee	Becky Wagner
Young Forensic Toxicologists Committee	Chase Perkins
Young Forensic Toxicologists Committee	Traci Reese

## WELCOME TO CHICAGO

This year we bring together two great organizations, to provide an international collaboration of excellence in science. Planning for the upcoming SOFT-TIAFT meeting in Chicago, Illinois, is well underway, and we are excited to welcome you back to the city. The last time SOFT met in Chicago was in 1989, when China White (3 methyl fentanyl) dominated discussions. While much has changed since then, fentanyl derivatives remain a critical focus in today's toxicological landscape—making Chicago a fitting place to continue these important conversations.

The meeting will take place from **Saturday, September 19 through Thursday, September 24, 2026**. It will begin Saturday evening with a joint SOFT Young Forensic Toxicologist and TIAFT Young Forensic Scientist Symposium, followed by two days of workshops, and two and a half days of scientific presentations. Throughout the week, attendees can also participate in additional lunch-and-learn opportunities, welcome events, committee and business meetings, interact with a range of vendors, and a variety of social activities both within and around the conference venue. Information and programming for accompanying guests will also be available. Please note that there are no scientific sessions scheduled on Friday, with the Presidents' Banquet and Gala Dinner serving as the final event.

After several years of early planning, we have assembled an outstanding Planning Committee that now meets monthly. In collaboration with our Scientific and Workshop Coordinators, the program is developing into a strong, comprehensive, and forward-looking agenda. Please see below for key details on these core aspects of the meeting.

Meanwhile, our Social Coordinators are hard at work engaging with venues, developing budgets, and organizing events designed for networking, relaxation, and enjoyment. In addition, the Food

and Beverage team, Audio Visual team, and SOFT office staff will participate in the March site visit to conduct a comprehensive walk-through and ensure a seamless experience for all attendees.



## 2026 HOSTS



Andre Sukta



Luke Rodda

### SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM COORDINATORS

SUMAN RANA

DONNA COY

JENNIFER SCHUMANN

BRIGITTE DESHARNAIS

### WORKSHOP COORDINATOR

CRAIG CHATTERTON

SUE PEARRING

KAREN SCOTT

### VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

SARAH DOUGLAS

SVANTE VIKINGSSON

### SOCIAL COORDINATOR

BRIAN JONES

### FUN RUN COORDINATOR

DOMINIQUE GIDRON

### JAT SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR

TERESA GRAY (SOFT)

JENNIFER SCHUMANN (TIAFT)

### MOBILE APP

ROXANE RITTER

SUNDAY HICKERSON

TYLER DEVINCENZI

### AV COORDINATOR

FRANK WALLACE

### FOOD & BEVERAGE

ANN MARIE GORDON

DENICE TEEM

DELISA DALGLEISH

### YOUNG FORENSIC TOXICOLOGISTS

WHITNEY BROWN

### YOUNG FORENSIC SCIENTIST

BRONWEN DAVIES

### REGISTRATION COORDINATOR

RICHARD COVEN

SEPTEMBER 19-24, 2026

# ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE - CHICAGO, IL

Our host venue, the **Hilton Chicago**, first opened in 1927 as the largest hotel in the world. At the time, it featured 3,000 guest rooms, a 27-chair barbershop, a pharmacy, a candy shop, a five-lane bowling alley, a 1,200-seat movie theater, and even an 18-hole miniature golf course on the roof. Its first registered guest was Vice President Charles Dawes.

Although the hotel has undergone multiple renovations over the decades, one of the more recent remodels resulted in guest rooms that no longer meet current size standards. While this posed a challenge, it has also created unique room configurations, including rooms with two beds and two bathrooms, an excellent option for attendees who may wish to share accommodations for economic reasons.



We also want to openly acknowledge the broader geopolitical climate and concerns surrounding international travel and perceptions of the current U.S. administration. While these issues are beyond our control, please know that we are paying close attention and are committed to supporting both international and regional attendees by providing timely information and reassurance whenever possible. Please visit the SOFT-TIAFT meeting website for additional information as it becomes available, including a letter of invitation for those who may find it helpful.

Chicago remains a top tier travel destination, known for its world class architecture, renowned museums, and diverse, vibrant food scene. Our conference program is entirely contained within the Hilton Chicago with the exhibit hall is located on the lower level, main scientific sessions directly above, and workshop rooms on the floors above that. Our off site social events are within a short walk from the conference hotel, creating an efficient and convenient experience for all participants.

We look forward to sharing more details as planning continues and cannot wait to welcome you to Chicago.  
SOFT-TIAFT 2026 Meeting Hosts

*Andre Sukta and Luke Rodda*

**[For more information on the meeting visit the SOFT website](#)**

## SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**  
**Deadline: April 30, 2026**

The SOFT–TIAFT 2026 Scientific Program Coordinators invite abstract submissions across all areas of forensic and analytical toxicology. Abstract submission **close on April 30, 2026**. Alternative matrices, analytical methods, artificial intelligence, data analysis, new psychoactive substances, pediatric toxicology, postmortem toxicology, roadside and workplace drug testing, or technological advancements – whatever your interests, we want to hear about your insights and innovations!

In addition to the usual oral platform and poster presentations, **the 2026 scientific program will include ‘lightning’ presentations** as part of the main scientific program. These brief, high-impact presentations will be half the time of oral platforms and are designed to highlight emerging ideas and innovations directly to attendees.

As is customary for SOFT–TIAFT meetings, two parallel scientific sessions will be held to highlight scientific advances from around the world. Get ready to showcase your work!

SOFT-TIAFT 2026 Meeting Scientific Program Coordinators

*Donna Coy, Brigitte Desharnais, Suman Rana and Jennifer Schumann*



Donna Coy



Brigitte Desharnais



Suman Rana



Jennifer Schumann



## WORKSHOPS

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**Deadline: March 13, 2026**

Your 2026 Workshop Coordinators are seeking workshop proposals, and in conjunction with attendee surveys and feedback, we aim to present up-to-date information concerning research and development, advances in technology and laboratory information management systems. In addition, we hope to deliver education opportunities to attendees on a wide range of toxicology topics ranging from traditional, fundamental principles to new strategies and insights. Workshops provide the ideal platform to refresh and renew training requirements; we are confident that SOFT-TIAFT 2026 will go beyond your scientific expectations - but this requires your help and input!

The workshop component will occupy the first two full days of the meeting; six workshops will be scheduled for the morning sessions and a further six workshops in the afternoon. In total, there will be 24 half-day (4-hour) workshops for attendees to choose from. Two half-day sessions can be paired together (e.g., differing experience levels on a given topic).

We very much encourage you to submit workshop ideas to us for consideration. A joint meeting provides an opportunity to present a broad, international base of perspectives, applications and learning opportunities. We rely on you to help us create a strong and insightful schedule of workshops in Chicago. Your workshops, your topics! Please put on your thinking caps, email your colleagues/speakers and get that collaboration set up!

Please notify the workshop coordinators if you plan to submit a workshop proposal or have questions about the submission process. We look forward to some amazing international collaborations this year as our SOFT and TIAFT colleagues unite in the Windy City.

SOFT-TIAFT 2026 Meeting Workshop Coordinators

*Sue, Craig and Karen*



# YOUNG FORENSIC TOXICOLOGISTS (YFT)

The Young Forensic Toxicologist (YFT) Committee wishes everyone a Happy New Year as we are excited to welcome three new members to the committee this year: Traci Reese from the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, Chase Perkins from the Houston Forensic Science Center, and Melinda Hector from the Johnson County Sheriff's Office Criminalistics Laboratory. We look forward to seeing what the YFT Committee will accomplish together at the upcoming SOFT-TIAFT 2026 Joint Meeting in Chicago this year!

The committee would like to thank Elisa Shoff for serving as the 2025 YFT Chair. Elisa will be transitioning to Immediate Past Chair as we welcome Whitney Brown as the YFT Chair for 2026. Erika Pennings will serve as the YFT Vice Chair and Aracelis Velez as YFT Secretary.

The YFT Committee is actively planning activities for 2026 and will keep everyone updated in the upcoming issues of ToxTalk. If you have any questions or suggestions for the committee, please feel free to reach out to us at [YFT@soft-tox.org](mailto:YFT@soft-tox.org).

## Member Spotlight

### Whitney Brown, M.S., D-ABFT-FT 2026 YFT Chair



Whitney Brown is a board-certified forensic scientist (D-ABFT-FT) currently serving as a Forensic Scientist III in the Toxicology Unit of the Mesa Forensic Services Division in Mesa, Arizona. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Pre-Forensic Chemistry with minors in Biology and Mathematics from Northern Arizona University in 2012. Whitney began her career in forensic toxicology at the Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner (MCOME), where she joined the Toxicology Laboratory as an intern in 2012 and was subsequently hired as a Forensic Chemist in 2013.

While employed at MCOME, she obtained a Master of Science in Forensic Toxicology from the University of Florida in 2018. In 2019, Whitney joined the Mesa Forensic Services Division as a Forensic Scientist II in the Toxicology Unit and was promoted to Forensic Scientist III in 2021. In 2023, she expanded her expertise through cross-training in the Controlled Substances Unit.

Whitney is an ANAB technical assessor and an active member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, and the Society of Forensic Toxicologists (SOFT), where she currently serves as Chair of the Young Forensic Toxicologists (YFT) Committee.



#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

WHITNEY BROWN, CHAIR

ERIKA PENNINGS, VICE CHAIR

ARECELIS VELEZ, SECRETARY

ELISA SHOFF, PAST CHAIR

CHASE PERKINS

SARAH TOMA

LUKE GARCIA

MAHAGANI THOMAS

KIMBERLY KARIN

TRACI REESE

SARA WALTON

MELINDA HECTOR



Committee Members oversee the planning and coordination of the YFT Symposium, Professional Development Fair, Student Enrichment Program, and the Leo Dal Cortivo Awards at the annual SOFT meeting



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The final quarter of 2025 brought major activity and visibility for the Regional Toxicology Liaison (RTL) Program, including the addition of Dr. Matt Slawson as the newest RTL. Dr. Slawson's region includes the following states: Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. The RTLs played a central role at the 2025 SOFT Annual Meeting in Portland, co hosting the conference, chairing workshops on mental health, prescription drug impairment, and testimony training, and providing program updates to the membership.

A key training effort in December was the four day alcohol interpretation course delivered in partnership with the California Criminalistics Institute (CCI). The training opened with a full wet-lab day, featuring special guest appearances by the California Highway Patrol to conduct the Standardized Field Sobriety Tests (SFST). During the wet-lab, six volunteers were dosed with alcohol and observed performing SFSTs while providing breath samples; blood samples were collected later in the day for comparison and analysis. Students then used these data to conduct retrograde calculations following [ASB 122](#), with the remaining days focused on alcohol pharmacology, legal considerations, standards and guidelines in forensic toxicology, and case based instruction. The hands on, evidence driven format was well received, and the RTL Program will partner with CCI again in 2026 to offer the course in Southern California.

Across all regions, the RTLs continued to support prosecutors, forensic laboratories, State Highway Safety Offices, DRE programs, and judicial partners through targeted training, legislative engagement, and participation in impaired driving task forces. The team also contributed significantly to standards development, including ongoing revisions to [ASB 037](#), and played a key role in national efforts to strengthen workforce training, scientific quality, and toxicology data systems.

The RTLs are pleased to announce that Chris Heartsill is the recipient of the [2026 Robert F. Borkenstein Award](#). Congratulations Chris!

Please direct any questions about the RTL program to any of the RTLs.

*Amy Miles*

[VISIT THE RTL WEBPAGE!](#)

# PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM

The Professional Mentoring Program (PMP) committee hopes that everyone's 2026 has gotten off to a great start. The committee opens the call for participants after the annual meeting with applications due by December 15th. By January, the previous years' program is wrapping up with commencement activities and the PMP committee is also working on reviewing applicants and pairing mentors and mentees for the new program year. This means that the program year runs from January to January. At the time of this Tox Talk publication, new pairs for 2026 have been assigned and are starting their mentoring relationship and working on completing their agreements to establish goals and expectations.

To start off this year, here is some background on how pairing works. The application will ask if the member would like to be a mentor, a mentee, or both. Choosing mentee will prompt further questions on goals. Choosing mentor will prompt questions around experience. If an applicant answers both, then they will be prompted to answer both sets of questions. The committee will mainly use the primary goal of the mentee to match them with a mentor whose experience matches that primary goal, so the more detailed your goals and experience information is, the higher chance of a suitable match. The secondary goal will be matched if availability of mentors and their experience allows.

This year we have a total of **51 pairs, with 33 new and 18 continuing pairs**. This increase in continuing pairs shows the program's high level of engagement. A major benefit of the program during its first five years has been networking and for a new mentoring pair, program participation is a great way to expand one's network. We are beginning to better appreciate that the SOFT membership values relationship-building beyond the first program year. There are numerous reasons a pair may decide to continue their relationship. One benefit is finishing projects that go longer than a year with the same mentor who already knows the background of the project, the progress, and has developed a rapport with the mentee. Because this pairing has worked, more goals have been created leaving the mentee with a dependable and dedicated sound board for ideas and discussions as well as collaborations on projects, presentations, and papers. For some, it is about finding a mentor they trust, and after previous experiences, they want something they know works rather than taking a chance that the next pairing may not work as well. Whether a pair is new or continuing their mentoring journey together, the committee is dedicated to providing support to help set up the pair for success.

Resources provided from the program can span both new and continuing pairs. Tox Hub provides a great platform to house PMP resources that have been historically sent through emails that may be hard to archive effectively. This year, the committee will incorporate resources into ToxHub to help foster new or continuing relationships. This includes past webinars, book references, and links to other resources like podcasts in addition to email communications to those participating in the 2026 program. We're excited for another successful year!

*Ashley Ann Johnson*

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM](#)

## SOFT/AAFS Drugs and Driving Update

The SOFT/AAFS Drugs and Driving Committee held three events at AAFS 2026 in New Orleans, Louisiana:

**1) Open Committee Meeting:** held Thursday February 12th 5:00 – 6:00 pm

The committee hosts two in-person meetings a year at SOFT and AAFS in addition to one virtual meeting. All are welcome to attend to gain insight into committee activities.

**2) Workshop 6 Ketamine: The Clinical Renaissance and Traffic Safety Implications:** held Monday February 9th 8 am – 12:00 pm

The SOFT/AAFS Drugs and Driving Committee present an engaging workshop that explores the increased research and medicinal use of ketamine, the basic pharmacology of ketamine, the implications of ketamine side effects on human performance and recognize the potential for impairment of normal facts and the impacts to traffic safety.

**3) Drugs & Driving Special Session:** held Thursday February 9th 10:30 am – 11:30 am

The Drugs & Driving special session highlights platform presentations focusing on drugs and driving. Case studies, trends, best practices, and methodologies tailored to DUID casework are emphasized in the special session.

*Stephanie Olofson*

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOFT/AAFS DRUGS AND DRIVING COMMITTEE](#)

## SOFT NPS Committee: NPS Roster Review - 2026 Lineup

Donna Papsun<sup>1 5</sup>, MS, D-ABFT-FT, Elisa Shoff<sup>2 5</sup> MS, D-ABFT-FT, Kayla Ellefsen<sup>3 5</sup>, PhD, Alex Krotulski<sup>4 5</sup>, PhD  
<sup>1</sup>NMS Labs, Horsham PA

<sup>2</sup>Miami-Dade Medical Examiner Dept, Miami FL,

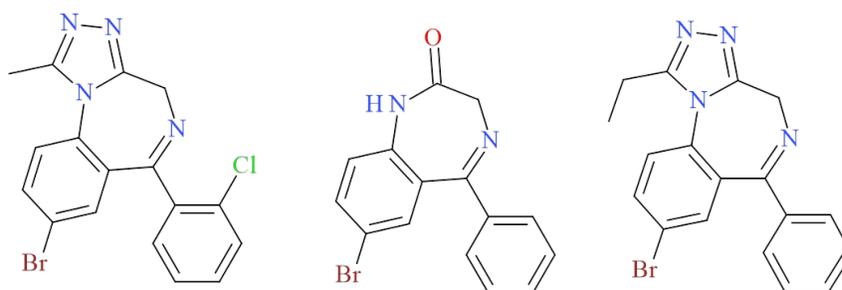
<sup>3</sup>Travis County Medical Examiner, Austin, TX, USA

<sup>4</sup> Center for Forensic Science Research and Education, Horsham PA

<sup>5</sup>SOFT NPS Committee

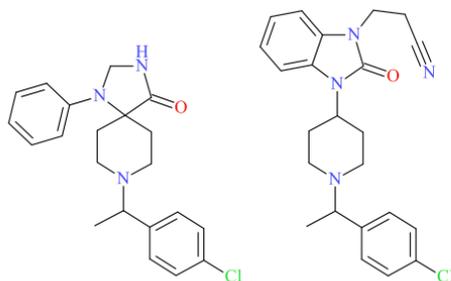
Roster reviews are performed periodically as a structured, multi-layered evaluation process. The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to reflect and take stock in what is happening in the field - or on the court - including the identification of rising stars, assessment of bench depth, and consideration of which legacy players are nearing retirement with an eye towards potential successors. Applied to the NPS landscape, this framework conceptualizes individual substance subclasses as “teams” that can be evaluated through performance analytics.

Bromazolam started to emerge in late 2019 and dominated the NPS benzodiazepines as the “all-star”. However, as is often observed with NPS, prominence is eventually followed by decline, particularly with age. Positivity for bromazolam has declined over time, suggesting waning market influence. A potential replacement could be phenazolam (Figure 1), which was first reported by CFSRE in 2022 but has subsequently climbed the ranks. Phenazolam is positioned to assume a more dominant role within this subclass, despite additional players such as desalkylgidazepam and ethylbromazolam vying for cap space.



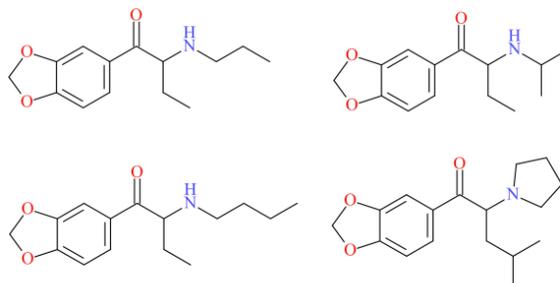
**Figure 1: Phenazolam [Left], Desalkylgidazepam [Middle], and Ethylbromazolam [Right]**

In some cases, broader roster changes are required in response to major market shifts. There appears to be a notable transition within the novel synthetic opioids (NSOs) landscape taking place, marked by the replacement of ‘nitazene’ analogs (e.g. metonitazene, protonitazene, N-pyrrolidino protonitazene) with new substances of the ‘-orphines’ subclass. Brorphine, a benzimidazolone, emerged in 2020 and was reported in numerous forensic cases before its scheduling by the DEA. More recent emergent players include N-propionitrile chlorphine (also known as cychlorphine) and spirochlorphine (Figure 2). This shift in NSO subclass is not unexpected given Chinese control efforts targeting nitazene-related drugs beginning July 2025 [1], but as with any good sports bets, the outcomes remain up to larger forces.



**Figure 2: N-Propionitrile Chlorphine (or Cychlorphine) [Left] and Spirochlorphine [Right]**

Within the synthetic stimulant team, no clear dominant replacement has emerged following the scheduling of N,N-dimethylpentylone. Instead, the landscape is characterized by a deep bench of structurally related compounds, including N-propyl butylone, N-isopropyl butylone, N-butyl butylone, and MDPiHP (Figure 3). While depth can be an asset, positional redundancy presents challenges, particularly to analytical laboratories as scientists can not predict who will be on injury report or who will play each week. In this context, isomerism continues to complicate synthetic stimulant surveillance. Co-eluting or unresolved isomers can create analytical blind spots, particularly when multiple isomeric forms are simultaneously present in the recreational drug market.



**Figure 3: N-Propyl butylone [Top Left], N-Isopropyl Butylone [Top Right], N-Butyl Butylone [Bottom Left], and MDPiHP [Bottom Right]**

Finally, MDMB-4en-PINACA and 5F-ADB (Figure 4) continue to demonstrate durability in the synthetic cannabinoid space, analogous to legacy players with specialized niche skill sets. These drugs are fairly frequently encountered in well-defined populations, such as jail and prison settings, and may persist due to their high potency, ability to be impregnated onto inert materials then smuggled into correctional institutions, and lack of standardized testing protocols. Despite their longevity, confirmatory testing for 5F-ADB remains analytically challenging, due to the necessity for sensitive reporting limits and compound instability/biotransformation driving the need for metabolite-inclusive assays. These findings underscore that testing difficulties may persist even for non-emergent substances.

## SOFT NPS Committee: NPS Roster Review - 2026 Lineup

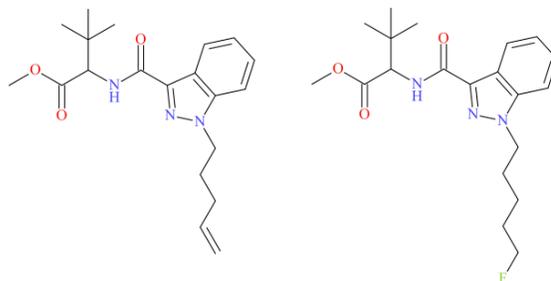


Figure 4: MDMB-4en-PINACA [Left] and 5F-ADB [Right]

Routine “roster reviews” for NPS are essential to ensure analytical capabilities remain aligned with a rapidly evolving landscape. Surveillance tools such as the SOFT NPS Scope Recommendations assist agencies in “scouting” emerging substances and trends, including free agents like 7-hydroxymitragynine or mitragynine pseudoindoxyl that have difficulty landing on a specific team [2]. Identifying the unique attributes of each NPS subclass – including regional distribution, vulnerable populations, and market responses to control measures – remains critical for maintaining effective toxico-surveillance and forensic readiness. Let’s put up Hall of Fame numbers this year for NPS testing – without the asterisk for “limited scopes of testing”.

### References:

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. July 2025 – Announcement of class scheduling of ‘nitazene’ analogues. [News: July 2025 – China: Announcement of class scheduling of ‘nitazene’ analogues](#) (accessed 29 January 2026)
2. Krotulski AJ, Ellefsen K, Mata D, Papsun DM, et al. Recommended Scope for NPS Testing in the United States: Q4 2025. [Scope Recommendations](#). (accessed 12 January 2026)

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOFT NPS COMMITTEE](#)



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## 2026 COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS

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**Continuing Education Committee:** *Kei Osawa & Sarah Douglas*  
**Culture, Values and Diversity Committee:** *Frances Scott & Danielle Boden*  
**Drug Facilitated Crimes Committee:** *Celeste Wareing & Marcela Velasco*  
**Drugs & Driving Committee:** *Sara Dempsey & Rebecca Hartman*  
**Ethics Committee:** *Michele Crosby*  
**Finance Committee:** *Robert Johnson*  
**Meeting Resource Committee:** *Erin Spargo & Denice Teem*  
**Membership Committee:** *Dayong Lee*  
**Mentoring Committee:** *Kim Samano & Marta Concheiro-Guisan*  
**Nominating Committee:** *Chris Heartsill*  
**NPS Committee:** *Alex Krotulski & Elisa Shoff*  
**Oral Fluid Committee:** *Mandi Mohr & Greg Sarris*  
**Policies & Procedures Committee:** *Dayong Lee*  
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**Publications Committee:** *Heather Barkholtz & Austin Ciesielski*  
**SOFTopics:** *Vanessa Meneses, Alanna deKorompay & Brennon Foster*  
**Toxicology Resource Committee:** *Joey Jones & Scott Larson*  
**Young Forensic Toxicologists Committee:** *Whitney Brown & Erika Phung*

## TOXTALK

### EDITORS

Robert Johnson, Ph.D., F-ABFT & Chris Heartsill, B.S., D-ABFT-FT

### 2026 PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

Issue 1: Due by Jan 30, Published week of Feb 23  
Issue 2: Due by May 01, Published week of May 18  
Issue 3: Due by July 17, Published week of Aug 10  
Issue 4: Due by Oct 30, Published week of Nov 16

### SUBMISSION CATEGORIES

- **Organizational Updates:** News from SOFT, Annual Meeting details, Committee Updates, Award Announcements, Continuing Education Opportunities, and other information valuable to members.
- **Scientific Submissions:** Research articles, case reports, and scientific studies related to forensic toxicology. Submissions must include an abstract. Published abstracts will feature direct links to the full articles.

### SUBMISSION PROCESS

- [Submit an Article for ToxTalk](#)
- **Review and Acceptance:** All submissions undergo editorial review. The editorial team reserves the right to edit for clarity, grammar, and style. Acceptance notifications will be communicated promptly.

## FUTURE MEETINGS



**SOFT 2027**  
Rhode Island Convention Center  
Providence, RI  
September 26-October 1, 2027  
Hosts: Sabra Jones & Dani Mata



**SOFT 2028**  
Baird Center  
Milwaukee, WI  
October 15-20, 2028  
Hosts: TBD



**SOFT 2029**  
CHI Center  
Omaha, NE  
October 21-26, 2029  
Hosts: TBD

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