

COLD CASE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST

Jason Moran, JEMM Consulting LLC

A cold case is defined as an unresolved murder, long-term missing person, unidentified human remains, open criminal sexual assault, or undetermined death. One of the first elements of a proper cold case investigation is the examination of the documents and evidence that constitute the original case file. This process is called “case review.” Below is a list of items that may be available in the case file for review. The list can aid investigators in reviewing the defined cases that range from historic to modern. Items that are not available in the case file may be obtained through further investigation. Sometimes, the items listed have been lost to time or are simply not pertinent to a specific case. The list offers investigative ideas as an individual/team conducting a case review. Completing the list as comprehensively as possible can increase case solvability.

This paper is not designed to be a procedure or a list of investigative processes. For additional information on defining cold cases, solving cold cases, or using science in investigations please refer the National Resource and Technical Assistance Center for Improving Law Enforcement Investigations (NRTAC) website (<https://centerforimprovinginvestigations.org>).

ORIGINAL REPORTS:

- First Responder/Patrol Officer Reports/Notes
- Investigator/Detective Follow-up Reports/Notes
- Victim, Witness, and Suspect Statements
- Dispatch Tickets/CAD System Data and 9-1-1 Calls
- Associated Calls for Service in the Area of the Incident Being Investigated to Include Ordinance Violations
- Analysis of Similar Crimes/Incidents in Geographic Area of Incident Being Reviewed
- Reports of Postmortem Examination: Protocol, Autopsy Photographs, Toxicology, Skeletal Analysis, Dental Autopsy, and Further Studies
- Forensic Specialist Reports (e.g. Anthropologist, Odontologist, Entomologist, etc.)
- Crime Laboratory Evidence Analysis Requests/Findings/Reports

ORIGINAL REPORTS: *CONT.*

- Crime Scene Log and Contamination Log
- Crime Scene Sketch(es), Photographs, and Video(s)
- Composite/Computer Generated Sketch of Suspect
- Motor Vehicle Reports (e.g. tow reports, crash, etc.)
- Historic Aerial Photographs
- Historic Weather Reports
- Telephone Record Analysis: Landline, Cellular, Pager, Mud and Tolls/AMA Study of Incoming and Outgoing Calls, Cell Phone/Cell Tower Data
- Fire Department/Paramedic Reports
- Hospital Chart(s) and Records
- Neighborhood Canvass Reports, Video Canvass Reports/Footage, Roadblock Reports, and License Plate Reader (LPR) Data
- Financial Records Analysis: Bank/Checkbook/Credit Cards/Safe Deposit Box
- Life Insurance Policies
- Victimology Survey
- Polygraph/Voice Stress Analyzer Reports
- Funeral Home Visitors Log Book
- Media Coverage of Incident at Time of the Event and Since the Occurrence
- National Missing and Unidentified Person System (NamUs) Reports
- Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) Reports
- Criminal Profiling Reports
- Forensic Examination of Computers/Electronic Devices (Electronic Messages, Social Media, etc.)

ORIGINAL REPORTS: *CONT.*

- Timeline Report
- Prosecuting Authority Reports
- Lists of Parolees and/or Sex Offenders Residing in Area of Incident
- Related Bulletins (Law Enforcement Related or Public)
- National Crime Information System (NCIC) Off-line Search Report(s)
- Sex Offender Registry Data

EVIDENCE:

- Visual Review of All Evidence
- Photograph All Items of Evidence and Reconcile with Original Inventory Sheets
- Identify Missing Evidence and Attempt to Learn Its Disposition. Identify Unconsumed Evidence at the Crime Laboratory.
- Convert Case File to Electronic Format
- Review Crime Laboratory Evidence Analysis Requests/Findings/Reports
- Identify Items of Evidence to Be Re-Submitted for Examination (E.g. DNA, Fingerprint, etc.) to Take Advantage of Contemporary Forensic Testing Processes
- Identify Forensic Testing Processes Not Available to the Original Investigators That Can Be Employed
- Identify Level of the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) Where the Profiles Are Situated (e.g. Local, State, Or National)
- Identify Required Experts That Can Further the Case Review (e.g. Blood Spatter Evidence, etc.)
- Would The Evidence Benefit From Use Of Contemporary Forensic Technologies (E.g. Alternative Light Sources)?

COLD CASE REVIEW TEAM

A Cold Case Review Team is typically comprised of both investigative and forensic personnel. If possible, the Review Team should interview the original investigating officers and forensic personnel who were involved in the case from its inception. Prepare an Investigative Summary outlining the case facts and investigative processes. Consider completing a Solvability Matrix. A supervisor should be assigned whose job it is to monitor case progress and conduct report review. Periodic briefings should be conducted to assess case progress on a regular basis. Consider tracking progress through a Lead Sheet System.

> AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE "CASE REVIEW" THE TEAM SHOULD EXAMINE THE CASE FROM THE FOLLOWING PERSPECTIVES:

	YES	NO	N/A
Are there questions that need to be resolved?			
Are there additional interviews that need to be completed (e.g. to clarify something or because a previous interview was not completed)?			
Are there documents or evidence that need to be located?			
Has the scene been revisited for additional evidence and/or information? Was the canvass incomplete and in need of additional interviews? How about a canvass or surveillance on or near the anniversary of the incident?			
Was a motive identified? Was the scene organized or disorganized?			
If a suspect was identified during the original investigation, what has he/she been doing since the incident?			

Is there a “weak link” suspect?

What errors were made and/or what items were missed during the original investigation? Can these items be resolved/obtained?

What new forensic processes can be applied to the evidence (testing not available to our predecessors)?

Have the relationships between the victim(s), witness(es), and/or suspect(s) changed over time?

Was the suspect incarcerated since the original incident? If so, where, when, and who did he share space with?

Has Solvability Matrix been completed?

	YES	NO	N/A
Is there a “weak link” suspect?			
What errors were made and/or what items were missed during the original investigation? Can these items be resolved/obtained?			
What new forensic processes can be applied to the evidence (testing not available to our predecessors)?			
Have the relationships between the victim(s), witness(es), and/or suspect(s) changed over time?			
Was the suspect incarcerated since the original incident? If so, where, when, and who did he share space with?			
Has Solvability Matrix been completed?			