**BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS & EXPLOSIVES**
**NATIONAL FIREARMS EXAMINER ACADEMY**

**BACKGROUND:** The National Firearms Examiner Academy (NFEA) was a collaboration among the Office of Science and Technology's National Laboratory Center, the Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE), and a private consultant. This committee developed the academic curriculum for the NFEA, establishing 18 distinct modules of instruction divided into four phases:

MODULE A - Administrative Matters (Laboratory Protocols and Safety/Health)

MODULE B – History of Black Powder

MODULE C – Evolution of Early Firearms

MODULE D – Modern Ammunition Evolution and Manufacture

MODULE E – Modern Firearms Development and Operating Systems

MODULE F – Manufacture of Modern Firearms

MODULE G – Firearms Identification, History, Principles, Equipment and Current Developments

MODULE H – Microscopy and Instrumentation

MODULE I – General Preliminary Examinations of Firearms

MODULE J – Test Firing for Known Specimens and Operability

MODULE K – Bullet Examinations and Comparisons – Shotshell Projectiles

MODULE L – Cartridge, Cartridge Case, Shotshell and Fired Shotshell Examinations and Comparisons

MODULE M – Toolmark Examinations, Comparisons and Identifications

MODULE N – Restoration of Obliterated Markings

MODULE O – Terminal Ballistics, Gunshot Residues, Shot Patterns, Distance Determinations, Bullet Path Analysis and Wound Effects

MODULE P – Quality Assurance

MODULE Q – Research Project

MODULE R – Oral Presentations, Court Testimony, and Admissibility

Several modules involve extensive pre-course reading and research to establish a solid knowledge base.

Each session of the academy is divided into four distinct phases:

**PHASE I** – Following student selection and notification, students will have a three-month period to complete reading and researching pre-course assignments as provided by the academy staff. This also includes the beginning of a research project, to be approved by Academy instructors and the student's trainer, that will be presented on in Phase IV.

**PHASE II** - A 17-to-18-week instructional session at ATF's Forensic Science Laboratory - Washington in Ammendale, Maryland. Instruction and practical exercises in Modules A-R are covered. This phase also includes a trip to ammunition manufacturers and a 10-day trip to firearms and tool manufacturers in the New England area. This session is very content-intensive and for the student to self-develop there is a considerable amount of studying, working on assignments, and research during many evenings and weekends.

**PHASE III** - A four-month period in which the student returns to their own agency laboratory. During this period the student will complete their research project at their agency's laboratory. The student will also complete simulated firearms and toolmark cases prepared by Academy instructors. These will be presented in a courtroom scenario in Phase IV.

**PHASE IV** - A two-week follow-up school in Maryland which guides the student in preparation for the presentation of expert testimony. This will include pretrial conferences, the preparation of exhibits and mock case testimonies. Students will also present their research projects.

**APPLICATION CRITERIA**: Student selection is conducted by the NFEA Staff and is dependent on several criteria. To be considered, the applicant must:

- Be a U.S. citizen
- Have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in a related area (sciences, criminal justice, etc.)
- Be employed full time in a trainee status to perform the duties of a Firearm and Toolmark examiner
- Have a senior Firearm and Toolmark examiner assigned to oversee their training or have an external trainer on a MOU (a copy of the signed MOU must be submitted prior to the application deadline)
- Have agency submit certification on agency letterhead of the satisfactory completion of a background investigation

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**STUDENT REQUIREMENTS:** All student trainees selected for the NFEA will be evaluated throughout the program for continuance in the academy. Evaluations, at a minimum, will be based upon completing assignments on time, passing exams and practical exercises with a grade of at least 80% and meeting the criteria in the NFEA Honor Code.

**APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS:** Application deadline for the 2026-2027 NFEA class is **July 20, 2026**. Completed application and documents are to be emailed to NFEATRAINING@atf.gov by July 20, 2026 and an email receipt will be sent within three days. Required documentation:

- NFEA Application
- Successful completion of an agency background investigation
- Trainer's CV/Resume (new requirement)
- For applicants with an external trainer, a copy of the signed MOU (new requirement)

**CLASS DATES:** Tentative class dates - October 12, 2026 through September 24, 2027

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Questions concerning the program can be directed to the NFEA staff listed below.

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