

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Law Enforcement Accreditation  
Is It The Answer?**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
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## ABSTRACT

### Law Enforcement Accreditation

Law enforcement accreditation is gaining momentum as many chief executive officers recognize the need for it. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was formed in 1979 by representatives from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) and the National Sheriff's Association (NSA).

CALEA was formed to develop a set of voluntary standards that would define, guide, and control how police agencies (of all sizes) would conduct their business. This group had several goals in mind as they developed the following standards: Increase law enforcement agency capabilities to prevent and control crime. Increase cooperation and coordination with other law enforcement agencies and with other agencies of the criminal justice system.

This research could help agencies, which are contemplating the idea of law enforcement accreditation to make a decision based on the findings set forth in this paper. If more administrators are convinced to get their agencies accredited, the law enforcement community will be affected. By 1983 the first police agencies in the United States were accredited (Baker, 1995). Accreditation standards define, provide stricter accountability, guide and control how police agencies conduct their business.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement accreditation is gaining momentum as many chief executive officers recognize the need for it. Many police administrators feel the long-term commitment of resources, finances, and personnel are worth the benefits that will eventually be realized by both their agencies and the law enforcement community as a whole.

A long standing issue in the law enforcement community is gaining professionalism in the eyes of the communities they serve, as well as the officers who choose to do the job. Many agencies have raised their standards in particular areas to try and address this issue. Education is one major area which has been changed across the law enforcement community. We have seen higher educational standards for entry-level officers. Some departments are now requiring applicants to have a particular number of college hours, or a degree, to meet their minimum qualifications. Agencies have started giving “incentive pay” based on college degrees and implemented programs, to help pay for current employees to go back to college and obtain a degree.

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was formed in 1979 by representative from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) and the National Sheriff’s Association (NSA). CALEA was formed to develop a set of voluntary standards that would define, guide, and control how police agencies (of all sizes) would conduct their business. This group had several goals in mind as they developed the following standards:

- Increase law enforcement agency capabilities to prevent and control crime.
- Increase cooperation and coordination with other law enforcement agencies and with other agencies of the criminal justice system
- Increase effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of law enforcement services

- Increase citizen and employee confidence in the goals, objectives, policies, and practices of the agency

The purpose of this research is to determine if law enforcement accreditation is having the desired effect on police agencies and if the benefits are worth the costs in terms of resources, finances, and personnel. The author anticipates this research will confirm becoming accredited is well worth the effort put forth by any agency, who voluntarily commits to enter and complete the process. The agencies will realize the goals set forth by the members who originated CALEA and will be seen as a more professional organization both externally and internally.

This research could help agencies, which are contemplating the idea of law enforcement accreditation to make a decision based on the findings set forth in this paper. If more administrators are convinced to get their agencies accredited, the law enforcement community will be affected.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The image of the police is slowly being changed as a result of the incorporation of high standards of performance and conduct by many departments through the process of accreditation. A growing number of police agencies have demonstrated their desire to be considered among the best in the profession by undergoing the painstaking, lengthy process of accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (Cox, 1990).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, law enforcement administrators, government officials, and researchers have explored the possibility of professionalizing law enforcement agencies and officers (Baker, 1995). The lack of standards governing how law enforcement services would be provided to the public, led to inconsistency between different jurisdictions (Jones, 1988). It was argued that citizens deserve to receive essential police services of equivalent high quality, no matter where they live. This argument was generally accepted by professional police (Baker, 1995). Through the years many panels and commissions were formed to try and professionalize law enforcement with little success (Baker, 1995). In 1979 representatives of four law enforcement associations that represented a majority of police

executive officers from around the United States formed a corporation called, CALEA. After its formation, CALEA drafted well over 1,300 standards in its preliminary organizational meetings. The proposed standards were then sent to police practitioners across the nation for evaluation. To insure the standards received wide support from the entire criminal justice community, copies of the standards were also sent to judges, business leaders, attorneys, academicians and government leaders for study and commentary (Medeiros, 1987). In 1981, a select group of law enforcement agencies was asked to participate as test cases for the accreditation process. They were representative of the broad spectrum of police agencies. There were state, county, and municipal agencies that ranged in size from very small (under 25 employees) to very large (over 1,000). By 1983 the first police agencies in the United States were accredited (Baker, 1995)

Accreditation standards define, guide and control how police agencies conduct their business. Accreditation standards also govern minimum qualifications and specify selection criteria for police officers. Ultimately, the standards affect every facet of law enforcement from administration to personnel issues and delivery of service (Fulton, 1990).

According to (Falzarano, 1999) accreditation provides a number of tangible benefits, including:

- ✓ Controlled liability insurance costs. Accredited departments can obtain and increase insurance more easily and often have lower premiums.
- ✓ Fewer lawsuits and citizen complaints, as well as the ability to better defend against those they do face. With written policies and procedures and well-trained employees, agencies not only handle situations more appropriately, but they also can document and defend themselves when problems do occur.
- ✓ Stricter accountability within the agency. The accreditation process provides for written directives, sound training, clearly defined lines of authority and routine reports that support decision-making and resource allocation.

- ✓ Support from government officials, who gain confidence in the accredited agency's commitment to operating efficiently and meeting community needs, as well as its ability to do so.
- ✓ Increased community advocacy. For departments who have not yet adopted community policing, the accreditation process provides a framework for the department to work with citizens to solve community problems.
- ✓ Recognition for a department's ability to meet established standards. It represents the culmination of a long, but ultimately rewarding, process.

All available literature on the subject of law enforcement accreditation suggests that any department considering becoming accredited should take into account the resources, which will be required to follow through with the commitment. Starting with at least one full time employee committed to nothing but the accreditation process, the fees associated with CALEA, the possible changes to the building to meet requirements, and the cost associated with training personnel about accreditation and all the changes that have come about throughout the process.

Research is a key ingredient to starting the process of accreditation. CALEA standards must be thoroughly reviewed by both the chief executive officer and by the command personnel. Time should be spent to compare present practices and procedures to compliance levels required by the standards. Command officers should document their findings and make recommendations for changes needed to bring their organization into compliance with the standards relevant to their agency. In every case where the agency is not in compliance with a particular standard the decision must be made whether or not the changes are feasible (Clouser & Carpenter, 1988).

Law enforcement agencies wishing to become accredited by CALEA must complete a five-step process. These steps are:

- Complete an application for accreditation which CALEA uses to determine the agency's eligibility to enter the process. Once eligibility is confirmed, a contract is signed between CALEA and the agency.

- Complete an agency profile questionnaire. This is used by CALEA to determine the size, jurisdiction, and functions of the agency, which in turn determines the standards, which will be applicable to that agency.
- Conduct a self-assessment process by which the agency determines whether or not it is in compliance with all of the applicable standards. During this phase, the agency will prepare a folder on each individual standard, which will contain proof that the agency is in compliance with that standard.
- Have an on-site assessment by a team of assessors selected by CALEA. This assessment usually lasts from two to four days depending upon agency size and consists of an exhaustive review of the proofs of compliance to determine if the agency is actually in compliance with all applicable standards.
- A Commission review of the results of the on-site assessment. Based upon the results of this review, the members of the Commission will either grant accredited status to the agency or defer accreditation until such time when all standards have been complied with. If deferred, they will inform the agency as to what it must do to come into compliance.

Some complaints about accreditation by employees' are the considerable amount of paperwork required by the process, and the unusual or unexpected costs related to accreditation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research is to determine if law enforcement accreditation is having the desired effect on police agencies and if the benefits are worth the costs in terms of resources, finances, and personnel. The author anticipates that this research will confirm that becoming accredited is well worth the effort put forth by any agency that voluntarily commits to enter and complete the process. The agencies will realize the goals set forth by the members who originated CALEA and will be seen as a more professional organization both externally and internally.



The author conducted a survey of agencies all over Texas which are accredited. Each agency was either contacted by faxing the survey to their acting accreditation manager, or they were contacted by telephone. Twenty agencies responded to the survey instruments. The author was surprised to find only twenty-five agencies in Texas are accredited. Nineteen more agencies show to be in the process of becoming accredited. The survey was designed to find out the positives and negatives experienced by each department resulting from being accredited. The researcher will list the top five most frequent positive and negative responses by the departments. This survey was conducted using only departments listed on the CALEA website as accredited agencies, so it does not reflect any responses from agencies accredited in the past, or those who considered becoming accredited and opted not to participate in the program. The survey can be found in the appendix section of this document.

## **FINDINGS**

The responding agencies ranged in size from 20 sworn Officers and three non-sworn, to 570 sworn and three non-sworn. These agencies have been accredited from less than one year to 17 years. The number one response: Improvement to policies and procedures. By having more defined policies and procedures, job performance improved. The policies are updated more often and the inconsistencies and conflicts eliminated. The second highest response: Improved interagency communications. Divisions within the department communicate more effectively. It is required information be passed up and down the chain of command. The next benefit listed: Fair and non-discriminatory personnel practices established. The hiring process had overall improvement. The promotional process is standardized. The disciplinary process becomes consistent. All employees have structured accountability establishing clearly defined responsibilities for each employee in the department. Agencies reported increased confidence from staff and the citizens they serve.

The top negative response: Fees associated with the program. The second negative response: The redundancy within the CALEA standards. It was made clear from all research and from the agency responses to the survey; the self-assessment phase of the accreditation process

places a significant workload on the department. The entire process is very “manpower intensive.” The process requires one full-time employee to manage it.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this research is to determine if law enforcement accreditation is having the desired effect on police agencies and if the benefits are worth the costs in terms of resources, finances and personnel. The author anticipates that the research will confirm that becoming accredited is well worth the effort put forth by any agency that voluntarily commits to enter and complete the process. The agencies will realize the goals set forth by the members who originated CALEA and will be seen as a more professional organization both externally and internally.

This research suggests the general idea of law enforcement accreditation is sound and is a good confidence builder for the departments who achieve it, as well as, the communities in which they serve. It is clear the people at almost all agencies charged with the maintenance of the accreditation program, believe it has been worth the cost and manpower required to complete and maintain the program. I have found no direct evidence that an accredited agency can save any money on insurance cost, or the cost associated with law suits just because they are accredited. I contacted TML (Texas Municipal League) to ask if they offered any discounts to an accredited agency versus a non-accredited agency and the answer was no. The representative did say usually an accredited agency requires more training for their officers. The experience points will bring down the amount they have to contribute. This research did not produce the elements necessary to suggest that any police agency willing to go through the accreditation process, would find it well worth the effort and resources put forth to do so. It clearly shows some benefits are achieved by becoming accredited, while some of the expectations which come with the program are never achieved. The question of whether or not becoming accredited is worth the resources and energy it takes will have to be answered by each individual agency. The research available is non-conclusive.

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# APPENDIX A

## Accreditation Survey

1. What is the size of your agency?

Sworn

Civilian

2. How long have you been an accredited agency?

3. List top 5 benefits experienced by your agency due to accreditation.

4. List any negatives experienced due to the program.

5. Have you observed any evidence of reduced liability cost, either in insurance or litigation due to accreditation?