

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

---

---

**The Effect of Professional Standards  
Accreditation Programs on Law Enforcement**

---

---

**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

---

---

**By  
John Van Ness**

**Benbrook Police Department  
Benbrook, Texas  
July 2013**

## **ABSTRACT**

Law enforcement is still viewed by many as a vocation and not a profession. It is important for the public to see “their” police officers and the departments they represent as professionals working in professional organizations. The public needs reassurance that law enforcement understands the awesome responsibilities it is entrusted with. Every decision they make can have a major impact on someone’s life and the importance of that fact can never be taken for granted or abused. Recognition will come when agencies, large and small, take the necessary and voluntary steps and open their doors to seek accreditation from outside, unbiased, and trusted organizations trained to evaluate all aspects of a law enforcement agency. In order to be viewed as professional organizations, law enforcement must become a professional organization.

Many sources will be researched to support this point, to include journals, articles, books, internet sites, periodicals, and procedural manuals. Factors to be considered by agencies considering this important decision should include difficulty of the undertaking, time it will take to complete the project, cost associated with seeking accreditation, compliance in all required areas, ongoing evaluation, and recertification. Most importantly, agencies must have the commitment to see the project through to its completion.

In summary law enforcement agencies should seek accreditation in a professional standards recognition program. It is not important which program they chose. If professionalism is what they seek, these programs will take them there.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction . . . . .	1
Position . . . . .	2
Counter Position . . . . .	7
Conclusion. . . . .	10
References . . . . .	13

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are over 18,000 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States (Reaves, 2011). This number may well be on the decline. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were 18,769 law enforcement agencies operating in the US as of 1996 (Goldberg & Reaves, 1998). The number of state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States is calculated every four years.

With regard to professional standards, each agency sets its own. None are required to establish, much less maintain, a minimal level of standards. With no clear-cut standard to follow, many agencies are found to be lacking in some of the basic arenas. A well-articulated set of standards is needed for those agencies wishing to deliver the highest level of service to their communities. Such standards should be measurable, thus providing a manner in which the agency can demonstrate both competence and transparency.

The law enforcement community has taken great strides in recent years to transform itself from the perception of being a vocation to being a true profession. Accredited agencies garner greater respect among the academic community, and it is thought that accredited agencies will garner similar credibility within their own communities. It can almost certainly be concluded that police departments, regardless of size, will be viewed in a negative light without accreditation (Snow, 1992).

On a consistent if not daily basis, one can find an example of a police agency under fire for improper conduct on the part of a police officer or on the department in general. Police are held to a higher standard and need to embrace that higher standard and be recognized for it. In order for this recognition to be credible, it must come from

outside the department by an independent, unbiased organization. This organization should not be profit driven and should have the singular focus of assisting agencies in achieving greater professionalism and transparency. There should be standards established to address all the major functional areas engaged by the agency, including training and career development, disciplinary procedures, traffic administration, patrol procedures, property and evidence management, security protocol for intelligence databases, courtroom security, and readiness inspections.

In order to be perceived as professional organizations, law enforcement agencies should be required to demonstrate both qualitatively and quantitatively that it meets standards set by competent accreditation organizations. In order to achieve this, law enforcement agencies should seek recognition from a professional standards accreditation program either on the state or national level. What is an option today will most likely be a requirement tomorrow. The public demands and deserves the most professional law enforcement agency available.

## **POSITION**

Professional standards accreditation increases more than just the operating efficiency of a law enforcement agency. Accreditation can boost morale within the organization, give the community more confidence through transparency, and protect the agency from liability by ensuring all policies and procedures are up-to-date. It is important to continually monitor all agency functions to ensure consistency and quality, and “accreditation can serve as an important tool in that pursuit” (Wilcox, 2004, p. 19).

In 1979, four major law enforcement associations, 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 Sheriffs' Association (NSA) formed the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). Their intent was to create a voluntary program for agencies to measure themselves against a set of national standards. Accreditation through CALEA relied primarily on meeting the standards established by a report to the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, entitled *Report on Police* (Daughtry, 1996). This report was published in the early 1970s, and it showed that the trailblazers of law enforcement realized the importance of professional policing. The 688-page United States Department of Justice sponsored report was a call for law enforcement agencies to renew a commitment toward self-improvement and quality service delivery (Daughtry, 1996).

Daughtry (1996) concluded that many agencies were lacking in training. More importantly, the selection processes used by some agencies contained questionable, if not discriminatory, elements. He found that directives were not always written, and when they were, they tended to be ambiguous and outdated (Daughtry, 1996). At different times throughout history, there have always been periodic breakdowns in communications and relationships between police and the public they serve. Daughtry (1996) noted that officers were "unresponsive to their communities and not respected as professionals" (Daughtry, 1996, p. 20).

There are many different areas addressed by CALEA, including crime prevention, control capabilities, formalized management procedures, equitable and consistently-practiced personnel practices, service delivery, effective interagency, and cooperation and coordination. Improvement in these and other areas would enhance

the image of and increase confidence in law enforcement (Daughtry, 1996). Others have concluded that law enforcement accreditation enhances accountability by clearly defining an organizational structure with clear lines of authority. It provides a mechanism for assessing training needs and other essential functions (Wilcox, 2004).

The Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA) developed a Best Practices Recognition Program in 2006. Since then, more than 50 Texas law enforcement agencies have earned “recognized” status. The program consists of a voluntary process where agencies demonstrate compliance with 164 individual “Best Practices.” The program has been embraced by agency heads because the “standards” were established by Texas police chiefs and not some outside consulting or loss prevention firm. The Recognition Program does not dictate directives but reviews the agency’s own directives to ensure they contain the critical components (TPCA, 2012b).

There are many areas of concern that should be addressed by an accreditation program, and while all are important, some are inherently more important than others. Patrick Gallagher identified twelve critical areas that have been shown to be major areas of concern for law enforcement agencies (TPCA, 2012b). Agencies will have to decide for themselves which areas warrant more concern than others. Sheriff departments may place a greater emphasis on care, custody, and control of prisoners than a police department, as they control a much larger segment of the population with respect to prisoners. The critical areas identified by Gallagher are use of force, emergency vehicle operations, and search, seizure, and arrest. Some other important areas addressed are care, custody, and control of prisoners, domestic violence, and agency employee domestic misconduct as well as off-duty conduct. Beyond these,

critical areas also include selection and hiring, sexual harassment, and dealing with the mentally ill or developmentally disabled. Lastly, but, equally important, are the areas associated with narcotics, SWAT and high risk warrant service, and property and evidence management (TPCA, 2012b).

Accreditation programs transform agencies into more professional organizations by properly documenting procedures through written directives. The directives should be consistent in form, and the agency should establish procedures to ensure all stakeholders have read them. The programs should embrace a proactive approach by requiring agencies to anticipate critical issues and by having policies in place before the fact, rather than post-incident (Snow, 1992).

Falzarano (1999) stated, "Police Leaders interested in seeking accreditation should resolve two issues. First, are they prepared to change, and second, the agency must have the financial and personnel resources needed to undergo the assessment and make the required changes" (p. 3). An agency's level of commitment will ultimately decide the success or failure of the program. Careful consideration must be given when deciding to seek accreditation. When a department seeks accreditation, it simply cannot be forced upon the department by the agency head. Rather, the agency head should make the effort to explain how and why accreditation will make the agency better, and leadership should get members to take ownership. To do otherwise would prove counterproductive (Clauser & Carpenter, 1988).

Personnel considerations are generally the primary area addressed by accreditation programs, particularly in the area of selection and training. One study found that accredited agencies are more likely to provide newly-hired officers with field



training and twice as likely to require drug testing for police candidates (McCabe & Fajardo, 2001). Over time, it is probable that the more qualified and promising police candidates will seek employment with accredited agencies over non-accredited ones.

Professional standards accreditation will increase the public's trust and confidence in a law enforcement agency. Entering the accreditation process is like accepting a challenge whereby the agency agrees to have its entire operation scrutinized by outside assessors and the findings made public. For this reason and more, agencies seeking accreditation tend to find "staunch support from government officials; agencies earn this support through their commitment to excellence in leadership, resource management, and in the delivery of their services" (Wilcox, 2004, p. 19). Moreover, accreditation offers a, "framework in which police and citizens can work together to address the challenges confronting law enforcement" (Wilcox, 2004, p. 19).

Baker's (1995) study found that an agency's success is measured by how well that agency's members treat members of the community. He maintained that agency heads should accept the challenge of accreditation and reject the long-standing notion that law enforcement must operate in a vacuum or risk losing efficacy. Others see it differently, citing the benefits accreditation that has brought in areas of personnel selection, retention, training, and career development (Baker, 1995).

The Texas Police Chiefs Association stated, "The Best Business Practices Manual is the compilation of what Texas law enforcement professionals believe are basic business practices needed to address the most critical of law enforcement tasks in our state" (TPCA, 2012a, p. 6). The honesty and transparency of the agency, the

commitment to upholding the laws of the Constitution of the United States and State of Texas, and the overall wellbeing of the agency are considered (TCPA, 2012b).

The likelihood of an agency being drawn into liability situations should greatly diminish with the conformance to these standards. Professional standards accreditation provides for a layer of insulation from claims, allegations of unfairness, and inconsistent enforcement. Indeed, accreditation may aid in preventing such claims from being made in the first place. Research has found that accredited agencies may enjoy more favorable liability rates offered by insurers (Wilcox, 2004).

### **COUNTER POSITION**

Professional standards accreditation programs can be very costly to a law enforcement agency. Some agencies will look at the smaller picture and allow the dollars and cents up front to dictate their long term situation, but cost-benefit studies indicate the upfront cost of accreditation is more than worth it (Wilcox, 2004). To see the benefits, one needs only to look at a study conducted for 16 municipalities in Ohio. The 10-year study of the financial liabilities suffered by accredited agencies compared to non-accredited agencies found that accredited agencies lost 42% less (Wilcox, 2004). Notwithstanding the long-term financial incentives, the upfront costs need to be considered. The CALEA program ranges from \$1,500 to \$23,000, depending on the number of officers within an agency. Costs to enter the Texas Police Chiefs Association Best Practices Program range from \$350 to \$2,400, based on the number of officers within an agency. Texas agencies may find the Texas Best Practices Recognition Program more cost-effective, given the substantially lower entry costs and the fact that standards are developed by and are thus more applicable to Texas agencies. Both

CALEA and Texas Best Practices recommends the agency appoint a program manager, whose role it is to coordinate the data from various sections, divisions, or bureaus within the agency. The program manager should keep the department head apprised of progress and potential issues while encouraging all members to buy into the program. Program managers need not be full-time employees, nor do they need to be sworn members, although that is recommended. Upfront costs can be substantial, but over time, cost savings can be realized in other areas.

A case in study is Long Hill Township PD in New Jersey. The department covers 12 square miles, has a population of 10,000 people, has 28 sworn officers and handles over 27,000 calls a year. Long Hill was able to decrease its insurance premiums by \$3,000 as a result of accreditation. With all things considered, “the cost of accreditation becomes insignificant compared to the expense of civil liability or the ill will that develops when the citizens feel they cannot trust the police to protect and to serve them” (Falzarano, 1999, p. 5).

Typical expenses that can be expected from the accreditation programs can be the cost of reprinting an agency’s operating procedures manual, general orders manual, and special orders manual. Signage on the building indicating organizational structure as well as controlled access areas will need to be properly marked. Locking systems to secure areas, such as confidential records and employee files may need to be upgraded or replaced. The changing of locks and combinations as employees leave the agency’s employment will need to be addressed. Some of these expenses can be minimal, but some can be in the multi hundred-dollar range.

The candidate agency is responsible for hotel accommodations and travel expenses for the program assessors. Usually, two assessors are sent for the on-site inspection. Agencies can submit many of their proofs of compliance electronically to reduce time and cost. If the agency requests that all proofs of compliance be reviewed in person, a third assessor will be required and the additional expense charged to the candidate agency. The agency may also elect to provide meals for the assessors if they chose. These costs usually do not exceed \$1000 (Falzarano, 1999).

Professional standards accreditation programs can be manpower intensive to the agency. The manpower referred to here involves employees directly related to the program, mainly the program manager and his staff if any. In some agencies, a large number of directives will need to be written to address deficiencies. While writing new policies can be time-consuming, many law enforcement agencies already comply with the procedural aspects of the various standards, but they lack the written policies to verify that they conform to the standard. In other words, they do it correctly; they just do not have it written down. For example, the Long Hill study found that the agency operated under the presumption that its officers were taught basic traffic control safety techniques while in the basic academy, yet the directive addressing traffic control did not specifically require officers to wear reflective safety vests (Falzarano, 1999).

Professional standards accreditation programs do not have a deterrent effect on crime. To date, this statement cannot be proven or disproven. Crime reduction will always be an important goal of law enforcement agencies, but it is not the primary goal of accreditation. While professional standards cannot be proven to be directly responsible for a reduction in crime, one would certainly argue that an agency, which

ran more efficiently, would almost certainly benefit indirectly in its crime-fighting role. All agencies attempt to provide effective and efficient police services, protect lives and property, and prevent offenders from the hope of escape. That being said, one could conclude that an agency that is spending less time and money defending itself from civil litigation and liability would have more time and resources to commit to reducing crime.

## **CONCLUSION**

Law enforcement agencies should seek accreditation in a professional standards program. A set of standards is necessary for those agencies who wish to provide the very best in police service to the communities they serve. Law enforcement agencies have long sought to be recognized as professional organizations. These programs provide an avenue to accomplish this goal. Professional standards accreditation allows an agency to increase its operating efficiency by addressing problems before they occur. They increase the public's trust and confidence in the agencies that serve them, and they can greatly reduce the risk of liability.

The argument that these programs are too expensive and that they are manpower intensive is simply short-term thinking. An agency's exposure to a civil action is greatly decreased when they run their organization in a highly professional manner and when they can show that they have voluntarily taken the extra step to do the very best that they can. These agencies show a great deal of transparency when they allow an outside body to come in and critique their organizations.

One of the most important things in law enforcement to consider is that, "Police Officers exercise governments most awesome powers- the power to stop and question a citizen, the power to arrest a citizen, and the power to use force in that process", and

most agencies' officers rely only on themselves and their training to make life and death decisions (TPCA, 2012b, p. 1). The outcome of those decisions can and do hold great consequence for all involved. It is absolutely necessary that the officer involved makes the correct decision. The Texas Police Chief's Association (2012b) stated, "The recognition program ensures an agency has addressed the most critical law enforcement issues in both policy as well as actual operation" to help the officer in the decision making process (p. 1).

When an agency has been recognized or achieved accreditation, it means no stone was left unturned. Clauser and Carpenter (1988) stated, "No agency could put on a façade for the assessors. Any agency having achieved accreditation has done so because they earned it" (p. 62). A law enforcement agency's efficacy is measured in terms of the value and extent that it places on delivering fair and equitable service. Agency leaders must create an atmosphere of transparency and must have the ability to demonstrate – to anyone who asks – how their agencies meet that challenge. One of the most effective means of doing this is by seeking and receiving accreditation (Baker, 1995).

There is currently only one nationally-recognized program. A handful of states, including Texas, have their own. It is both hoped and believed that many states will follow suit with their own accreditation programs. Those two programs are the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) and the Texas Police Chief's Association Best Practices Recognition Program. CALEA has 459 standards that have to be met to gain accreditation. Best Practices has 164 standards that must be met in order to gain accreditation in its program. The program chosen is

not important, although depending on the state the agency is in, it may determine which program best fits the agency's needs. The important thing is for all law enforcement agencies to take their agency to the highest level possible, and to achieve this, they need to be recognized as professional organizations: these programs will do that.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, S. (1995). *Effects of law enforcement accreditation*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Clauser, F. J., & Carpenter, G. E. (1988, January). Law enforcement accreditation: Getting it done. *Police Chief*, 65(1), 60-62.
- Daughtry, S. (1996, November). Time to take another look at law enforcement accreditation. *Police Chief*, 63(11), 20-23.
- Falzarano R.J. (1999, November). Law enforcement accreditation: One department's experience. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 68(11), 1-5.
- Goldberg, A.L., & Reaves, B.A. (1998, June 1). *Census of state and local law enforcement agencies, 1996*. Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=541>
- McCabe, K., & Fajardo, R. (2001, March-April). Law enforcement accreditation: A national comparison of accredited vs. nonaccredited agencies. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 29(2), 127-131.
- Reaves, B.A. (2011, July 26). *Census of state and local law enforcement agencies, 2008*. Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2216>
- Snow, R. L. (1992, September). Accreditation: A 21<sup>st</sup> century necessity? *Law and Order*, 40(9), 84-88.
- Texas Police Chiefs Association. (2013a, January). *Texas law enforcement agency best practices recognition program*. Retrieved from [http://rp.tpcaf.org/index.php?\\_m=downloads&\\_a=viewdownload&downloaditemid=476&nav=0](http://rp.tpcaf.org/index.php?_m=downloads&_a=viewdownload&downloaditemid=476&nav=0)



Texas Police Chiefs Association. (2013b, January). *Texas law enforcement recognition program manual*. Retrieved from

[http://rp.tpcaf.org/index.php?\\_m=downloads&\\_a=viewdownload&downloaditemid=466&nav=0,1](http://rp.tpcaf.org/index.php?_m=downloads&_a=viewdownload&downloaditemid=466&nav=0,1)

Wilcox, L.W. (2004, February). Focus on accreditation: A small police department's success. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 73(2), 18-21.