



Division of Criminal Justice Services

Pride
Progress
Professionalism

Blueprint for Effective Law Enforcement

New York State
Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program

Prepared by

**New York State
DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES
Office of Public Safety**

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INTRODUCTION

The **New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program** provides law enforcement agencies with a mechanism with which to evaluate and improve the overall effectiveness of their agency and the performance of their staff; and gives formal recognition to agencies that meet or exceed general expectations of quality in the law enforcement field.

In order to be considered for accreditation, chiefs of police and other agency program staff must be able to clearly demonstrate that they have developed, implemented, and adhered to a variety of sound policies that comply with the standards set by the council in the areas of administration, training, and operations.

PROGRAM HISTORY

In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice was tasked, in part, with examining the causes of crime and the adequacy of law enforcement in dealing with crime. In an effort to make the law enforcement system more effective, the commission called for significant improvements in all aspects of the American criminal justice system. In particular, the commission urged law enforcement agencies to implement sweeping reforms in personnel structure, officer selection and training, community relations, and overall management practices. It also advocated enhanced coordination of services and greater clarification of operational policies.

In response to this challenge, the New York State Sheriffs' Association developed an accreditation program for its members, the first such organization to do so in the country.

The success of the Sheriffs' program led to a growing demand for an accreditation program for all New York State law enforcement agencies. To meet that demand, a committee comprised of representatives from the State Association of Chiefs of Police, the State Sheriffs' Association, the State Police and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), explored the feasibility of developing a statewide accreditation program. Article 36 §846-h of New York State Executive Law established the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Council, a 17-member body representing local and state police agencies, county sheriff's offices, municipalities, and more.

On March 20, 1989, the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Council held their very first meeting where they reviewed the work of two specially formed committees. One committee was charged with developing rules and regulations to guide the program; and the other committee developed the program standards that would act as the basis for the accreditation program. To further broaden the input, copies of the draft program standards and rules and regulations were distributed to State legislative leaders and the heads of every law enforcement agency and municipality in the state. Finally, a comprehensive pilot test of the accreditation program was conducted for the purpose of identifying issues that might occur during implementation and to determine if the program standards could be successfully implemented by law enforcement agencies of all size. Upon the success of the pilot, the program became fully operational in December 1989.

Through the years, the impact of New York State's accreditation initiative has not gone unnoticed. It received national recognition in 1992 when the Council of State Governments determined that the program "dealt with a significant problem in an effective and innovative manner and has the potential to be transferred to other states." As time went on, more than half of the other states in the nation requested information about New York's accreditation program, with law enforcement officials from as far away as California, Virginia, Oklahoma,

Michigan, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Kentucky studying the New York program before developing one within their own state.

In the more than 20 years since the New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program began, it continues to grow and improve. The council has undergone a periodic review of the program standards for the purpose of verifying their continued relevance; identifying

standards that should be clarified, consolidated, or otherwise modified; and identifying new issues and laws to gauge the need for additional standards. In addition, the council occasionally reviews its policies and procedures to ensure that the program continues to evolve in ways that are consistent with changing legal and social developments. Most critical is that the program remains one of meaning and integrity and continues to be responsive to the needs of New York's law enforcement community.

*"The Troy Police Department consistently utilizes the standards set by the NYS Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program as an invaluable reference for crafting legally sufficient policies, thus reducing the potential of litigious actions against the department."
-City of Troy Police Chief John F. Tedesco*

PROGRAM GOALS

The New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program provides a formal mechanism by which the activities of law enforcement agencies can be systematically updated, measured and evaluated. The program has four principal goals:

- To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement agencies utilizing existing personnel, equipment and facilities to the extent possible;
- To promote increased cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies and other agencies of the criminal justice system;
- To ensure the appropriate training of law enforcement personnel; and
- To promote public confidence in law enforcement.

Participation in the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program is voluntary and no direct charges are imposed on agencies that opt to participate.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

The New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program enables administrators to strengthen existing procedures while simultaneously creating a solid foundation for the agency's future. Just some of the benefits of accreditation include:

- The knowledge that agency policies comply with professional standards;
- Assurance of regular review of the agency's written directives;
- Diminished vulnerability to civil law suits and costly settlements;
- Enhanced understanding of agency policies and procedures among all personnel;
- Greater administrative and operational effectiveness, and;
- Greater public confidence in the agency

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

- The **Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Council** is responsible for setting the overall direction of the program. New York State Executive Law establishes the makeup of the council, which includes incumbent police chiefs nominated by the New York State Association of Chiefs' of Police; incumbent sheriffs nominated by the New York State Sheriffs' Association ; a deputy sheriff nominated in collaboration by the New York State Deputies Association and the Sheriff's Association; the Superintendent of the New York State Police; the Commissioner of the New York City Police Department; an official of a statewide police labor organization; and a college professor of criminal justice. Other appointments include one representative each nominated by the Association of Counties, the Association of Towns, the Conference of Mayors, the State Senate, and the State Assembly. With the exception of the Senate and Assembly appointees, all members of the Law Enforcement Accreditation Council are appointed by the Governor upon nomination by the entities noted above.

The Council meets quarterly to establish policy, issue program standards, and grant accreditation status.

- The **New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services** is the administering agency for the Accreditation Program. Staff members within the Division's **Office of Public Safety** provide support to the Law Enforcement Accreditation Council, and administer all aspects of the program with regard to the participating agencies. They offer general information about the accreditation program; assist in interpreting the intent of standards; provide technical assistance by guiding agencies through the development of their program; and provide feedback on the policies and program files developed to comply with accreditation program standards.

"Having met the rigorous and demanding standards set forth by the New York State Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program, the Livingston County Sheriff's Office.....is better positioned to promote increased cooperation among law enforcement agencies, ensure appropriate training of law enforcement personnel, and promote public confidence in law enforcement."

-Livingston County Sheriff John M. York

PROGRAM STANDARDS

Currently, one hundred thirty-three (133) program standards are established to ensure the professionalism, efficiency, and effectiveness of every law enforcement agency seeking to become or remain accredited. The program standards are separated into three main categories.

- **Administration** – 69 standards address topics such as agency organization, fiscal management, personnel practices, and records management.
- **Training** – 12 standards encompass basic and in-service instruction as well as training for supervisors and specialized or technical assignments.
- **Operations** – 52 standards deal with such critical and litigious topics as high-speed pursuits, roadblocks, patrol, and unusual occurrences.

The standards are a blueprint for professionalism that every law enforcement agency in the State is equipped to meet. They are:

Credible: The Accreditation Program has been endorsed by major law enforcement management and labor groups in New York, as well as by the leading state associations of elected officials. Several private insurance companies have been known to factor an agency's accredited status into the cost of the premium.

Realistic: Program standards were drafted by experienced law enforcement professionals with the practitioner in mind. There is no requirement to establish specialized units or purchase expensive new equipment. Agencies of all sizes have successfully implemented every program requirement.

Flexible: Program standards specify what an agency must do to achieve accreditation; not how the agency should go about doing it. The standards allow chief law enforcement officers to address local concerns in ways most appropriate to their agency.

Uniquely Suited to New York State: Program standards incorporate key provisions of New York State laws, Codes, Rules and Regulations, and Municipal Police Training Council requirements. The standards were designed by New York State law enforcement professionals and are specific to New York State law enforcement agencies.

Effective: The implementation of program standards has helped agencies of all sizes enhance the quality of the service they provide in specific, cost-effective ways. The program has earned the confidence and support of law enforcement executives throughout the State.

Community-minded: The Accreditation Program offers specific standards in the areas of community relations and public information to guarantee that clear lines of communication exist between law enforcement and citizens in the community.

BECOMING ACCREDITED

There are several distinct stages to the accreditation process:

Application

Applications can be downloaded from the DCJS Accreditation website at <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ops/docs/index.htm>. Applications must be signed by both the agency's chief law enforcement officer and by the municipality's chief elected officer. The *Agency Participation Agreement*, which specifies the mutual responsibilities of the agency and Accreditation Council, must also be signed by the chief law enforcement officer.

Program Development

A file folder must be created for each and every standard. The file folders are the mechanism by which the program manager can organize the standards, policies and documentation, but they also serve as the main method by which the assessors will verify compliance with the standards. Many agencies still have 'hardcopy' file folders, but the number of accreditation programs that are transitioning to electronic files is increasing.

To become accredited, agencies must have in place policies and procedures which sufficiently comply with all of the program standards. The chief law enforcement officer and accreditation program manager of an agency often begin developing the program by identifying program

standards that are already met by existing policies/practices within the agency. In general, agency staff can expect three variations in development:

1. If a current policy or practice meets a standard(s), preparation may be as simple as: a) the chief law enforcement officer signs off on the policy to verify that it's still in effect; b) the policy is distributed to agency personnel to ensure they are familiar with it, and; c) a file folder is created for the standard(s).
2. Sometimes, an agency will have in place current policies/practices that address portions of a standard(s) but not every component. In those cases, adjustments to the current policy/practice need to be made in order to meet the standard.
3. Many times, brand new policies and/or procedures need to be developed and implemented in order to meet the standards.

Each and every program standard must have a corresponding file which includes the standard, the written directive (if required by the standard) and documentation that demonstrates compliance with the standard. Ideally, program files should be color-coded (or otherwise catalogued) to expedite the assessors' review of the files and reassure agency staff that the standard has been met and documentation is complete. Traditionally, program files have been hardcopy, kept in large filing cabinets. Paper files are still acceptable, but more and more agencies are attempting to convert their paper files into electronic files.

Program development can take anywhere from two months to two years depending on the amount of work that needs to be done to meet the standards and the resources an agency can devote to the process. DCJS program staff members are available for consultation throughout this process. Agency staff is also encouraged to utilize the experience of staff from already-accredited agencies.

Assessment

Once an agency is fully prepared to undergo an assessment of their accreditation program files, OPS program staff will work with the chief law enforcement officer and agency program manager to coordinate an 'on-site' assessment. Agencies will be vigorously evaluated by experienced assessors on their administrative, training, and operational policies and practices as they pertain to the standards. Every assessor is approved by the council and required to have experience with the program. In addition, they are fully trained by DCJS, and follow specific guidelines to ensure that every agency is assessed objectively and equally.

"Accreditation instills a sense of professionalism... members are proud of achieving this accomplishment and wear their accreditation pins with pride. Accreditation standardizes law enforcement, and ensures agencies are following recognized standards for the betterment of their agency and the citizens they serve."
-Genesee County Sheriff Gary Maha

The assessment is not intended to be an adversarial experience. The assessors are trained to understand that minor deficiencies that can be easily corrected on-site should not keep the team from recommending accreditation to the council. However, agencies that require a great deal of additional work to bring them into compliance could face having to delay achieving their status of accreditation until they have more time to spend preparing their policies and files. The interaction DCJS staff members have with the agency program staff prior to the assessment is designed to reasonably ensure that an agency is prepared prior to the on-site

assessment being conducted. Agencies are also encouraged to consider having a 'mock' assessment conducted prior to the 'official' assessment.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the assessors will meet with the agency head and program manager to discuss the team's findings. Most of the time, the team will recommend accreditation. If compliance is a concern, the assessors will voice any reluctance they have with regard to recommending accreditation to OPS program staff so that a course of action can be agreed upon prior to the report being forwarded to the council.

Accreditation

A detailed summary of the assessment team's findings and recommendation is sent to the Accreditation Council for review and approval at their next quarterly meeting. Agency and municipality officials are invited to attend the council meeting where they will be presented with a mounted 'Certificate of Accreditation'.

Program Maintenance

In order to remain in good standing, agencies must maintain compliance with all program standards throughout the period of accreditation. The key to successfully maintaining accreditation hinges on the commitment that the agency makes to the program and to ensuring the files, policies, procedures and records are up-to-date. *Annual Compliance Surveys* are required to attest to ongoing compliance and identify instances of non-compliance early on, before those instances become critical lapses that might not be overcome during an assessment.

The process for reaccreditation is quite similar to the process for accreditation at the end of the first five-year period of accreditation. The biggest difference is that when assessed for reaccreditation, each program file must contain five years-worth of documentation of compliance, as opposed to only three month's-worth for initial accreditation.

Agencies that are facing reaccreditation for a second time or more undergo what's known as a *Compliance Audit*. Compliance audits are generally conducted by one assessor who will review approximately one-third of the standards off-site, then spend one day on-site conducting interviews, making observations, and following up on the files that were reviewed. Some agencies that have had difficulty with compliance in the past may face a full reaccreditation despite the number of times they have been reaccredited. The council has the discretion to make this determination.

RESOURCES FOR INTERESTED AGENCIES

Technical Assistance

Becoming accredited may seem overwhelming at times, but OPS program staff is available to offer technical assistance throughout the process. Experienced DCJS program staff can provide additional information about any aspect of the program; help interpret standards; and offer valuable insight regarding the best way to approach a variety of situations. In addition, staff is available to review draft procedures to determine compliance and discuss a department's unique circumstances and how that might affect the way in which a given standard should be implemented.

Forms and Publications

In addition to personal assistance, a variety of useful tools and publications are available on our website at <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ops/docs/index.htm>. Some of what can be found there is:

The Agency Accreditation Master Plan and the Agency Manager Log Sheet – both of these forms developed by OPS staff can be very useful in keeping agency program staff organized and the development of the program on track.

The Implementation Guide – provides more in-depth information on the necessary steps for implementing a program within an agency.

The Standards Compliance and Verification Manual contains all 133 of the current standards in place and strategies for how to show proof of compliance with them.

The Guide to Maintaining Accreditation and Preparing for Reaccreditation provides useful information about what to do post-accreditation.

Networking

Agency personnel often wish to speak directly with officials who have completed the accreditation process. You may e-mail the accreditation program (below) or go to the accreditation section of the DCJS webpage at <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ops/accred/accredited-agencies.htm> for the List of Accredited Agencies to obtain information which may be useful in facilitating networking.

Training

The Office of Public Safety offers training for agency program managers. This training focuses on the day-to-day tasks leading to accreditation and incorporates the most useful insights acquired since the program became operational.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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