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The Cover: During the dog days of summer, a police K-9 shares an ice cream cone with a youngster. Photo courtesy of Joe Riplinger, Norfolk, Virginia, Police Department.

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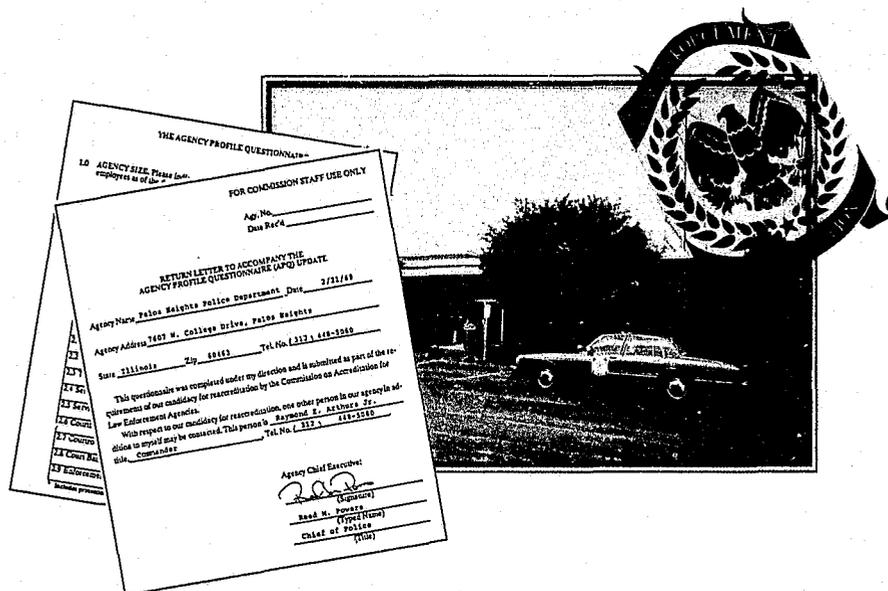
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Accreditation

A Small Department's Experience



By
RAYMOND E. ARTHURS, JR.

Over a decade ago, four major law enforcement associations joined together to form the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).¹ The primary purpose of the commission was to establish and administer an accreditation process for law enforcement agencies. Accreditation was one way to professionalize the police and to improve the delivery of law enforcement services to the communities they served.

To this end, CALEA researched, tested, and approved standards for law enforcement administration and operations. These

standards were then made available to agencies through an accreditation program. Today, they still serve as the basis for law enforcement agencies to demonstrate voluntarily that they meet professional criteria.

This article provides a brief overview of the standards approved by CALEA and the accreditation process. It then covers the process and methods used by the Palos Heights, Illinois, Police Department to achieve accredited status.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

CALEA adopted some 900 standards, which are organized into

48 chapters. The standards address six major law enforcement topics.² Designed to reflect the best professional practices in each of the six areas, the standards concentrate on the "what to do" and leave the "how to do" up to the individual agencies.

Each standard is composed of three parts—the statement, the commentary, and the level of compliance. Agencies must comply only with standards applicable to the individual agency, based on size and the functions it performs. For example, the commission designated a number of standards that are not applicable to smaller agencies.

This is because small departments cannot be expected to employ specialists and perform certain functions that larger departments should and would be expected to do.

Also, standards fall into two categories—mandatory and non-mandatory. All agencies applying for accreditation must comply with each mandatory standard, if it is applicable to the agency. However, with nonmandatory standards, agencies must meet only 80 percent of them, and only if they are applicable to the particular agency. The commission staff usually determines nonmandatory standards for each agency after reviewing its application and documentation.

ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The accreditation process consists of five phases—application, application profile questionnaire, self-assessment, on-site assessment, and final review by the commission. The process is designed to bring law enforcement agencies into com-

pliance with the established standards. CALEA then awards accredited status to those agencies that meet or exceed all requirements of the standards.

THE PALOS HEIGHTS EXPERIENCE

The Palos Heights Police Department initially applied for accreditation and was accepted by CALEA in 1984. However, when a number of staffing problems developed, the department put the accreditation process on hold. Two years later, in March 1986, the chief decided to seek accreditation again.

Application and Application Profile Questionnaire

To begin, the department requested information on accreditation and an application package from CALEA. Once the department completed and returned the questionnaire, the commission sent the agency the Application Profile Questionnaire. The department

filled out the questionnaire and provided all additional information requested by the commission. After reviewing the completed questionnaire, the commission confirmed the agency's eligibility and forwarded the self-assessment package.

Self-Assessment

Before beginning the self-assessment stage, the department developed a set of procedural guidelines. Then, the department held meetings to explain and discuss the accreditation process with all members of the department. These meetings also provided a forum to seek input and assistance from all personnel in order to complete the accreditation process successfully.

The first step in the self-assessment phase was to appoint an accreditation manager, who was relieved of all official duties in order to devote full time to the accreditation project. For the entire period that it took to complete this stage of the accreditation process, the accreditation manager served as the focal point.

The accreditation manager's duties included preparing all the necessary files, keeping a log of standards either being worked on, reviewed and completed, and ensuring compliance with all mandatory and nonmandatory CALEA standards. Other responsibilities of the accreditation manager were to keep the chief informed of the progress of the project and to obtain any proof of compliance that might be needed from other city departments, commissions, or criminal justice entities. Also, during this phase, the accreditation manager served as



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Chief Arthurs served as the accreditation manager for the Palos Heights, Illinois, Police Department. He currently heads the Willowbrook, Illinois, Police Department.

liaison with the CALEA staff member assigned to the agency.

Then, individual files were prepared for each standard needed to achieve accreditation. Once this was done, the accreditation manager assigned chapters of standards to department members for review, revision, and level of compliance. For example, the department's detectives received the chapters concerning investigations, organized crime, juvenile operations, intelligence, and internal affairs. In a small department, the same two or three people basically handle these functions. Therefore, they were tasked with completing the necessary work on standards involving their area of expertise.

Personnel assigned to review departmental operations were selected because of their experience in a particular area, interest, availability, and assignment. For example, in the Palos Heights Police Department, the shift sergeants worked on chapters pertaining to patrol and traffic operations. The evidence officer handled the chapters on evidence and property management, while the accreditation manager completed the chapters on personnel structure and processes and records and communication. Chapter assignments on law enforcement roles, responsibilities and relationships, as well as organization, management, and administration, went to the patrol commander.

The accreditation manager kept track of the progress of the review and set a time frame for completion. If problems developed with

standard compliance or with assigned tasks, the accreditation manager held meetings twice a month to resolve these problems. These meetings also kept the program on track and served to hold the interest of members involved.

To assist with the self-assessment phase, the department obtained copies of general orders and

to participate in a local accreditation managers association, if one exists. Unfortunately, when the Palos Heights Police Department was in self-assessment, the local group for northern Illinois, the Northern Illinois Police Accreditation Coalition (NIPAC), was just forming. Since then, NIPAC expanded to become a statewide organization now known as the Illinois Police Accreditation Coalition (IPAC). The association is composed of accreditation managers of those agencies in Illinois that are either accredited, in self-assessment, or other law enforcement professionals interested in police accreditation. The group meets monthly to discuss problems experienced with accreditation or compliance with standards. IPAC is currently assembling a library of manuals from various agencies to assist law enforcement agencies in the accreditation process.

To continue with its self-assessment, once the department completed the new manual of general orders, the accreditation manager reviewed the proposed new orders to ensure compliance was met. Noted in the margin of each new order was the standard number adjacent to the proof of compliance. Written documentation also included the page, section, and paragraph where the proof of compliance could be found.

After initial review by the accreditation manager, all division commanders, shift supervisors, detectives, and the police chief received copies of the proposed new general orders. Each received a

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rules and regulations from a number of accredited agencies to use as resource information. Personnel then reviewed current departmental rules and regulations, general orders, and policies, as well as local and State law, to determine agency compliance with the standards. In many cases, the department had a rule or order on a particular standard, but that rule or order needed to be revised or substantially altered to bring it into compliance with accreditation standards. In fact, soon after beginning the self-assessment, police administrators decided to revise totally the department's rules and orders into one new manual of general orders.

At this stage in the accreditation process, it is extremely beneficial to an agency in self-assessment

review sheet that was to be completed indicating their review and incorporating comments regarding the proposed new orders. The only specific requirement with regard to review was that any comments or recommended changes must still result in compliance with the applicable standard.

Also, supervisors were instructed to obtain feedback from members of each shift. The benefit realized from having input from all members of the department was acceptance of the orders when they were finally issued. Allowing all department members to review each new general order led to a high level of personal involvement and a sense of accomplishment by all when the department achieved accredited status.

After obtaining feedback, the accreditation manager conducted a second review and prepared a final version for distribution. At this point in the self-assessment phase, the shift supervisors provided any needed instruction and training as a result of the new general orders. Personnel were required to document that they were advised of and understood the new orders and that they received the necessary training. Then, the patrol commander placed copies of these sign-off sheets in each personnel file.

Once finalized, the folders for each chapter of standards were then forwarded to the accreditation manager for one last review before being entered into the permanent accreditation files. If, during this final review, the accreditation

manager determined there was a problem with proof of compliance, the chapter was returned to the member who initially worked on the review with a request that the problem be corrected.

At this point, when the agency nears completion of the self-assessment phase, a mock on-site assessment should be held by a team of assessors from a local accreditation

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support group, if one exists. Unfortunately, the Palos Heights Police Department did not have this luxury, since the local accreditation support group was just forming. However, a mock on-site assessment gives a department an unbiased review by police professionals who are familiar with the accreditation process. This mock on-site assessment is basically an abbreviated form of the real on-site review performed by CALEA, with particular emphasis on accreditation files. It is better to determine any problem or noncompliance with standards before CALEA assessors arrive.

The self-assessment phase is the most critical stage in the accreditation process, and it takes the longest amount of time. Locating proofs of compliance, writing new

rules and orders or revising them, distributing new orders, and training personnel in new procedures developed to comply with standards require a substantial amount of time and effort.

On-site Assessment

When the department completed its self-assessment, it notified the commission staff in writing.

CALEA then requested that certain random standards with proofs of compliance be forwarded for its review. The random standards requested vary from agency to agency, but usually deal with the critical issues facing law enforcement today. If CALEA determines that there are no perceived problems with the standards submitted, the on-site assessment begins.

For the on-site assessment, CALEA identifies a team of assessors and then allows the candidate agency to review those selected to avoid possible conflicts of interest. For Palos Heights, the on-site team consisted of three out-of-state chiefs of police. Then, the commission sets a date for the assessment.

The department and the commission's staff jointly prepared for the on-site assessment. Departmental staff members arranged for transportation and lodging. Also, a commission staff member joined the team at the assessment site to train the assessors and to participate in the on-site assessment. The accreditation manager provided the assessment team and commission staff member a tour of the facilities and the community and gave them

access to a department vehicle. Following the tour, the assessors and staff member conducted a review of the accreditation files as part of the assessors' training.

Then, the actual assessment began with a meeting between the assessors and the chief of police. The assessors started with a more extensive review of files and by conducting whatever interviews and inspections that were needed.

On the first evening of the actual on-site assessment, a public hearing was held. A public hearing is now mandatory, although this was not the case when Palos Heights was going through the accreditation process. In addition to the public hearing, hours were set during a 2-day period for assessors to hear telephonic comments from the public. Times for the public hearing and call-in comments were advertised by the agency through the printed and electronic media. The telephone number used for public comments was an untapped line and one that could be answered directly by the on-site assessment team leader or a designate.

At the conclusion of this phase, the assessors conducted an exit interview with the chief of police and the accreditation manager. Any problems found that could not be corrected through issuing or revising an order to bring an agency into compliance with a standard, or changes in the facility or operation, were discussed. By the completion of the exit interview,

the agency had a good idea of what work needed to be done within the next 10 days before the assessment team report was sent to CALEA.

Once completed by the team leader, the assessment report was forwarded to the commission staff for review. Because the team determined the department to be in compliance with all applicable mandatory standards and at least 80

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percent of nonmandatory standards, CALEA notified the agency to appear at its next scheduled meeting to be presented for accreditation.

Commission Review

The department's chief executive officer and the accreditation manager attended the commission meeting when the department was presented for accreditation. Through a telephone hookup, the on-site assessment team leader participated in discussions of the final report and the candidate agency's consideration for accreditation. During this meeting, any questions regarding the final report and any other topic regarding accreditation

may be posed to the chief executive and the accreditation manager by commission members. At the conclusion of the hearing, the commission for accreditation voted to award accreditation to the Palos Heights Police Department.

CONCLUSION

The Palos Heights Police Department received accredited status in July 1987, approximately 16 months after the process began. The move toward accreditation involved input from the entire department. The process required many procedural changes to meet the standards of the commission, but these changes benefited the entire agency. For this department, accreditation was a process to professionalize, review, and improve the agency and its ability to provide law enforcement services to the citizens and community it serves.

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Footnotes

¹ The four associations were the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). The 21-member commission is composed of 11 law enforcement professionals and 10 representatives from the public and private sectors. Commission members are appointed for 3-year terms by unanimous consent of the president and executive director of each of the four law enforcement associations.

² The standards address the role, responsibilities, and relationships with other agencies; organization, management, and administration; personnel administration; law enforcement operations, operation support and traffic law enforcement; prisoner and court-related services; and auxiliary and technical services.