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Florida Department of Law Enforcement
Overview of Accreditation in Florida

In recent weeks, much has been said regarding accreditation and the need for law enforcement agencies to attain accreditation status. In order for an accreditation program to be successful:

- The program must be founded with legitimacy;
- The reviewing body must have a degree of independence;
- Standards must be relevant and current;
- Standards must, to the extent possible, not place an undue financial burden on the agencies; and
- Agencies must be held accountable for non-compliance.

Mission Statement

The Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation establishes standards, oversees an accreditation program, and awards accreditation to compliant Florida law enforcement agencies. The Commission strives to improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to deliver professional public safety services.

Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, Inc. (CFA)

In 1993, Florida Statute 943.125 encouraged the Florida Sheriffs Association (FSA) and the Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) to create an independent voluntary law enforcement agency accreditation program.

Representatives from FSA and FPCA developed an accreditation program, which requires compliance with approximately 250 professional standards designed specifically for Florida law enforcement agencies. These standards are practical, easily understood, and achievable for all law enforcement agencies. The program has the following objectives:

- Establish and maintain standards that represent current professional law enforcement practices
- Increase effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of law enforcement services
- Establish standards that address and reduce liability for the agency and its members
- Establish standards that make an agency and its personnel accountable to the constituency they serve.

A feasibility study and status reports were delivered to the Speaker of the House of Representatives in November 1993. A joint FSA/FPCA Charter Review Committee was then formed, headed by then Sheriff Neil J. Perry of St. Johns County. This committee

developed the charter for the CFA and established the overall framework for its operation. The CFA awarded its first agency accreditation in 1996.

The Commission

The CFA was established by charter December 13, 1994 and incorporated on February 9, 1995. It is an independent, not-for-profit corporation designated as the accrediting body for Florida law enforcement and inspector general accreditation. The Commission's purpose is to establish a program for accreditation that can be achieved by all Florida law enforcement agencies and inspector general investigations offices. The Commission is comprised of 15 volunteer members:

- Five sheriffs appointed by the FSA
- Five police chiefs appointed by the FPCA
- One representative appointed by the State Law Enforcement Chiefs Association
- One mayor, city commissioner, city manager, or other representative appointed by the Florida League of Cities
- One County commissioner appointed by the Florida Association of Counties
- One Appellate or Circuit Court Judge appointed by the Florida Supreme Court
- One representative appointed by the Office of the Chief Inspector General

The Role of the Commission

The Commission sets forth all policies and procedures for the accreditation process. It is responsible for the direction and operation of the Florida Accreditation Office (FAO).

The Commission holds three meetings annually for reviewing agencies for accreditation or reaccreditation. Assessors play a key role in this review process by serving as representatives of the Commission. Commissioners determine an agency's accredited status based on the information provided by the assessment team. The Commission hears all appeals and is responsible for resolving any conflicts that cannot be resolved during the assessment.

The Philosophy of the Commission

The Florida accreditation process is designed to reflect best practices in the areas of law enforcement, inspectors general, administration, operations, and support services. The Commission expects agencies to maintain compliance and presumes agencies operate in compliance with their established directives.

Commission Staff

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) provides funding for positions in an effort to support the Commission and agencies going through the accreditation process. In conjunction with the FDLE, the CFA appoints the Executive Director, who manages the FAO staff and the accreditation programs.

The Executive Director and staff have the responsibility and authority to carry out all policies, procedures, and activities of the Commission and its committees. This includes supporting agencies working toward accreditation or reaccreditation, overseeing the assessment process, coordinating Commission meetings and review, and handling all business matters and daily operations.

The FAO serves as the Commission's information and materials resource center. Training classes are regularly held for accreditation managers and new assessors. Specialized training is also offered during each accreditation conference.

Program Overview

The Commission currently offers three ways for a law enforcement agency to become state accredited: full compliance, comparative compliance or participation in the CFA Core Competencies program. Agencies addressing all applicable state standards will be candidates for full compliance accreditation. Agencies currently accredited through the Commission for Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) Advanced Law Enforcement accreditation may participate in the comparative compliance process or the CFA Core Competencies program.

Initial Accreditation

Agencies begin the accreditation process with an application. Once the application is completed and submitted to the Commission for review to determine eligibility, an agreement and invoice are sent to the applicant agency. The formal accreditation process begins when the agency executes this agreement, which specifies the obligations of the agency and the Commission. The agency has 24 months to complete the self-assessment phase from the date the executive director signs the accreditation agreement.

Reaccreditation

Initial accreditation is valid for three years and annual reports must be submitted by January 31st of each year. The agency accreditation manager continuously evaluates the agency's progress toward meeting accreditation standards by monitoring changes to the written directive system and how they affect agency compliance.

Proofs for a reaccreditation are required to show compliance from assessment to assessment. The Commission review for reaccreditation will occur on or about the agency's anniversary date.

Assessments

Assessors must meet certain experience criteria before they are allowed to participate in assessor training. They are carefully selected from several different types of law enforcement backgrounds and specialties to ensure professional and thorough assessments. A prospective assessor must complete two days of training and successfully pass an examination. Typically, three-person teams are assigned to assessments to conduct file reviews, interviews and observations of agency practices over three days. The teams produce a final report detailing the agency's status of compliance with each standard. Any standards found out of compliance must be addressed by the agency with some form of action plan to avoid such violations in the future. The final decision on initial accreditation or reaccreditation rests with the Commission.

The Standards – Scope

The Commission expects accredited agencies to maintain compliance and live by the letter and spirit of the standards. The Commission presumes agencies operate in compliance with their written directives. The agency must consider its mission, its legally mandated responsibilities, and the demands of its service community when determining which standards are applicable and how to comply with applicable standards. The standards in most cases provide a description of "what" must be accomplished by the applicant agency. The agency has wide latitude in determining "how" to achieve compliance.

Applicability

Standards may or may not be applicable depending upon the functions performed by the agency. Assessors must review all standards to identify those not applicable by function. For example, if an agency does not perform the court security function, then the chapter dealing with court security becomes not applicable (N/A). However, simply because an agency may not perform the function, the standard may still apply. For example, standards in the communication chapter of the CFA standards manual would need to be addressed even if the agency does not perform these functions internally. Standards are considered applicable if the function is an integral element for improving the delivery of services or professional management of an agency. Standards beginning with an "if" statement indicates a conditional requirement. If the condition pertains to a function not applying to the agency, the standard becomes N/A. Assessors will verify that functions are not applicable during the assessment. The

Commission reserves the right to require compliance with any standard.

Standards that are mandatory address life, health, and safety issues; legal matters; or essential law enforcement requirements. These standards have a letter “M” placed immediately following the standard number. The agency is required to meet all of these standards unless a standard does not apply to the agency’s function.

If an agency is prevented from complying with an applicable mandatory standard due to circumstances beyond its control, such as labor contracts, court decrees, it may ask the Commission to waive the obligation to comply. The agency must make the request in writing during the self-assessment phase. Assessors will verify waiver conditions during the assessment and complete the form. The Commission will make a final determination during the agency’s review.

All remaining standards are non-mandatory and address good business practices. Law enforcement agencies may select any of these standards to satisfy accreditation requirements, but must comply with at least 80 percent of the applicable non-mandatory standards.

New or Amended Standards

New or amended standards are normally proposed to the Standards Review and Interpretation Committee (SRIC) for discussion and recommendation to the full Commission. The Commission will vote on such recommendations at their formal meetings held three times per year.

Unless otherwise directed by the Commission, new or amended standards are effective upon publication. Agencies seeking initial accreditation, reaccreditation, or having already achieved accreditation or reaccreditation must demonstrate compliance with new or amended standards at the next assessments following the publication dates of those standards.

Subject Material

The Commission’s standards are listed in 32 specific chapters dealing with a myriad of subjects. Among those are Use of Force, Conduct and Discipline, Recruitment, Selection, Training, Investigations, Misconduct Complaint Processing, Evidence and Special Operations.

Current Accreditation Totals

115 Municipal Police Departments
36 Sheriff’s Offices

17 State and University Departments
16 Agencies in Process