

# Law Enforcement Accreditation: The Desirable Future or Just Another Passing Phase?

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## Abstract

*This exploratory field study sought the opinions of the chief executive officers of 228 law enforcement agencies in North America about agency accreditation. Each of these agencies have been accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). Their opinions were solicited through a single mail questionnaire to determine the viability of their agencies remaining with CALEA, seeking an alternative accrediting agency, or foregoing accreditation in the future. This study found that, although there are problems with accreditation, there is overwhelming support for the process in general and for CALEA specifically.*

## Introduction

The question addressed in this study is twofold: will the trend of accreditation continue to become the "desirable future" of law enforcement agencies, and should the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., (CALEA) continue to be the authority for that accreditation? (Morrison, Renfro, & Boucher, 1984)

Law enforcement agencies in the United States and Canada have long sought the goal of professionalism. Every blue ribbon commission dealing with law enforcement has called for this professionalism. It was many years after the 1929 Wickersham Commission before concrete steps would be taken to establish the professional standards by which all law enforcement agencies in the United States and Canada could be measured (Tafoya, 1986).

The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). In September, 1979, LEAA awarded a grant to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to develop and maintain an accreditation program for law enforcement agencies (Dean, 1980). In December of that year, IACP, working with the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the National Sheriff's Association, and the Police Executive Research Forum, founded the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) (Cotter, 1985).

In May, 1984, CALEA accredited its first law enforcement agency (Mount Dora, Florida) and, as of August, 1992, a total of 228 agencies in the United States and Canada have achieved the standards of professionalism as set out by CALEA.

## Literature Review

Preliminary research was conducted on accreditation through extensive reading. Over 84 articles on the subject dating back to 1980 were found in such periodicals as The National Sheriff Magazine, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Crime Control Digest, CALEA Commission Update, The Police Chief, and Law and Order.

In 1989, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) published Making the Grade: The Benefits of Law Enforcement Accreditation, by Chief Gerald L. Williams of the Aurora, Colorado Police Department. The PERF discussion paper is an abridged

version of Chief Williams' 1988 doctoral dissertation.

In his dissertation, Chief Williams studied various law enforcement agencies which had been accredited, or were in the process as of December 31, 1986:

*The premise of the study is that the national accreditation program, by mandating an in-depth organizational self-assessment and compliance with nationally developed standards, is addressing two of the major prerequisites of organizational professionalization. (Williams, 1989, p vii)*

Chief Williams designed a questionnaire to gauge the impact of accreditation in four areas:

- Delineation of agency goals and policies
- Use of deadly force
- Police pursuits
- The collection and preservation of evidence.

The questionnaire also asked for information on agency characteristics, the direct and indirect costs of accreditation, the changes that had occurred as a result of accreditation, and the benefits and disadvantages of accreditation for police personnel, the agency as a whole, and the community. Finally, the chief executives were asked whether they would seek reaccreditation (Williams, 1989).

Chief Williams' discoveries are interesting and enlightening, however, the concerns of this study are mainly the "also asked" information on Chief Williams' questionnaire. A real test of the worth of any action or program is the answer to the question, "would you do it again?" Chief Williams asked the question, "Will you initiate and follow through with reaccreditation when your initial five years has expired?" One agency did not respond to the question. The remaining agencies said they would seek reaccreditation when their current five-year accreditation expired.

As no agency in his study indicated that it would not seek reaccreditation, it can be inferred, except for the one who failed to answer, that the rest were committed to seek reaccreditation. However, since his survey, several of these agencies have withdrawn from CALEA. This seems fairly significant if it represents a reversal of an agency's determination to remain committed to the accreditation process. Of special significance is the withdrawal of the San Diego County, California Sheriff's Office from the process.

The San Diego County Sheriff's Office participated in Chief Williams' study, and Sheriff John F. Duffy wrote the foreword to Chief Williams' PERF discussion paper. Sheriff Duffy was sheriff of San Diego County in 1986, when the department "became the largest agency in the nation to achieve accreditation" (Williams, 1989). At the time he wrote the foreword, Sheriff Duffy was serving as chairman of the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc.

In March, 1990, Wayne I. McCoy, of the Westerville Division of Police, Ohio, produced Stop the Rhetoric: Can Accreditation Really Work? for the FBI National Academy. In his study, McCoy addressed the question, "Is accreditation viable for the law enforcement community?" To accomplish this, he designed a questionnaire to provide insight into the "benefits and difficulties of the accreditation process". The

questionnaire was sent to 35 randomly chosen agencies involved in the accreditation process. Of the 35 agencies, 32 returned their questionnaires. Seventeen of the responding agencies were accredited at the time and 15 were not.

Of the 17 accredited agencies, six have achieved reaccreditation and the remaining 11 have not reached the five year reaccreditation point as of this writing. None have withdrawn.

Of the 15 agencies who were "in the process," three have been accredited, four have withdrawn from the process and no longer seek accreditation through CALEA. Eight have not achieved accreditation as of May 1992, although some have been "in the process" for over two years.

In his study, McCoy discussed the "dark side" of the accreditation process. His study indicated that for every agency that identified positive benefits of accreditation, each agency also identified problem areas. Although his study highlighted a long list of difficulties with the accreditation process, he states "this list of difficulties is not insurmountable. They are realities that must be dealt with if an agency is to receive accreditation. Awareness of and preparation for known problems will decrease the number of bad surprises in the process" (McCoy, 1990).

He concluded that there are "obvious, substantial benefits to be gained" by the accreditation process...but "if the decision is made to pursue accreditation, it must be made with adequate resources, political commitment, and great confidence in the ability and willingness of all of the agency's personnel" (McCoy, 1990).

In 1990, the Florida Statistical Analysis Center of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) conducted a survey of Florida chiefs of police who were members of the Florida Police Chiefs Association. Of the 167 agencies who replied to the survey, 129 (77.25%) were not accredited nor were they involved in the accreditation process.

Of the 167 departments which responded, 63% felt that police departments should be accredited. Several mentioned problems associated with the direct (funds) and indirect (personnel) costs involved with accreditation, and the majority of respondents (70.06%) agreed that state revenue should be available to local agencies for accreditation. More than half felt that Florida should develop its own accreditation program.

In addition to this preliminary research, numerous key people involved with law enforcement accreditation were interviewed for their input: Michael Brown, Legislative Aide to the Honorable James Moran, Democrat, Virginia, author of the Law Enforcement Responsibility Act of 1991; Captain Tony O'Brien, President of the Florida Police Accreditation Coalition; Chief Lee McGehee of the Ocala Police Department; and Sergeant Ward D. Rheintgen of the Northfield, Illinois Police Department, who is conducting similar research for a master's thesis.

## Methodology

The goal of this study was to survey law enforcement agencies accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) in order to get their opinions, experiences, and feelings on various subjects dealing with law enforcement accreditation in general, and specifically with CALEA.

**Table 1  
Respondents by  
Number of Years Accredited**

Years Accredited	# Respondents
0 - 1.49	37
1.50 - 2.49	26
2.50 - 3.49	34
3.50 - 4.49	33
4.50 - 5.49	26
5.50 - 6.49	20
6.50 - 7.49	14
7.50+	9

*Years accredited is based on the date of first accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) to August 10, 1992.*

**Table 2  
Respondents by Agency Size**

Agency Size	Number of Respondents
1 - 9	0
10 - 24	10
25 - 49	29
50 - 199	87
200 - 599	38
600 - 999	18
1000 - 2999	14
3000+	4

To answer the two-part question of this study, a survey questionnaire was mailed to the chief executives of the 228 organizations that had achieved accreditation through CALEA between May 25, 1984 and July 1992. In addition, the results of those responding to the survey were compared against existing data on accreditation, in general and CALEA specifically.

In July, 1992, a questionnaire of 57 questions was tested with members of the Charter Class of the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute, Senior Leadership Program; the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Statistical Analysis Center; and selected members of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office.

As a result of the feedback received from the pilot test mentioned above, a final questionnaire of 59 questions was developed. A Likert-style format was chosen due to the severe time restraints of most chief executive officers and the necessity that the questionnaire be self-administered. In addition, this format is much easier to code (deVaus, 1986). An attempt to overcome the disadvantages inherent with this format was made by providing

space for respondents to comment.

Anticipating that many chief executive officers would be reluctant to personally fill out another survey, a letter asking their cooperation and participation in the survey was sent by Sheriff Neil J. Perry to each chief executive officer.

Responses were received from 200 of these agencies resulting in a respectable 87.72% response rate. (A breakdown of these agencies is given in Tables 1 - 3, at left.) Of the eight agencies listed by CALEA as withdrawn, responses were received from seven (87.50%). Their answers were included with the agencies not listed as withdrawn.

**Table 3  
Respondents by Agency Type**

Agency Type	# Accredited	# Respondents
Police Dept	181	155
Sheriff's Ofc	32	30
Other	15	15

It is suspected that there are more agencies who consider themselves withdrawn than are shown on the CALEA list, but not many more, as the percentages of statements dealing with this subject ap-

pears to be between 4% and 6% which is consistent with the "withdrawn" percentage of 3.51% shown by CALEA.

The high response rate means that survey responses generally represent the attitudes of both accredited and withdrawn agencies. The distribution of responses does not indicate that a specific group is dissatisfied with accreditation or has concerns about the questions on the survey.

The questionnaire was designed to provoke response. Some of the questions were phrased in a confrontational manner in order to stir respondents' emotions. There was no hidden agenda in the survey. The sole objective of the study was to get to the honest feelings of the respondents. Honest feelings are sometimes very difficult to uncover in an area that is fraught with political pitfalls.

To illustrate the dilemma, an agency which had received the survey asked if there would be any way that the respondents could be identified in the finished study, because the agency was concerned that its governing body would be displeased if they knew how the agency really felt about accreditation. Even with personal assurances of anonymity, the agency decided not to respond. Their fear was that they might be identified during analysis by agency size or state. Other agencies refused to respond because of suspected bias contained in the survey.

Of the 200 completed questionnaires received, 84 submitted comments. In many cases it was difficult to determine who had actually written the comments. The best estimate is that approximately 50 percent were written by the Chief Executive Officer and 50 percent were written either by the current accreditation manager or a senior staff assistant. In all cases, it is assumed that the comments were approved by the Chief Executive Officer prior to transmittal. It is possible that these comments, even more than the questionnaire results, indicated the "bedrock" feelings of the law enforcement accredited agencies in North America.

### Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed by agency type and size, years accredited, and subject groups. (A complete copy of the survey and total responses is provided in Appendix A, at the end of this paper.) During analysis the two largest agency size categories were consolidated, in order to reduce the possibility of determining the identity of a particular agency with a particular question.

The results of applicable questions of previous studies were compared to the results of like questions in this study. The sample size of the FDLE survey is somewhat similar to the sample size of this study. The FDLE survey dealt only with Florida police departments, of which most were not accredited nor involved in the accreditation process; whereas this study dealt on a national scale exclusively with agencies which had achieved accreditation.

These differences notwithstanding, it is interesting to note that 138 out of 167 respondents in the FDLE survey felt that police departments should be accredited, but only 38 were actually accredited or were involved in the process. Of the 100 agencies not accredited or involved in the process, the most commonly cited reasons for not seeking accreditation were:

1. Too costly in time and money, especially for small agencies
2. Supports state accreditation
3. Benefits don't justify the costs
4. Don't believe in concept
5. Not flexible to geographical location
6. No proof it helps
7. Standards too broad

By far the reason most stated for not seeking accreditation was that it was too costly in time, money, and staffing, especially for small agencies. The argument has not been substantiated by this study, as 30 of the 39 agencies (76.92%) with 10 to 49 employees reported that reaccreditation is worth the money. In addition, 28 of these same agencies (71.79%) reported that the manpower requirements necessary to maintain accreditation status is an acceptable cost. Only 2 of the 39 (5.12%) indicated that they would be able to eliminate at least one position should they drop accreditation. The majority of the agencies (employing 10 to 49) who responded to this study disagreed with the above statements, except for number 2.

The actual experiences of the smaller agencies should give some hope to these agencies that accreditation can be accomplished at an acceptable cost.

The second most stated comment in the FDLE study is that many chiefs are not supportive of a national accreditation for law enforcement, but are supportive of a state run accreditation process. Of the agencies with 10 to 49 employees responding to this survey, only 13 out of 39 (33.33%) would consider a statewide accrediting body in addition to CALEA, or support a state process should CALEA fail. Also, 34 out of 39 (87.18%) agreed that for accreditation to have any real impact on the professionalization of law enforcement, it must be national in scope.

Although there is little support for state control of law enforcement accreditation in this study, there is nevertheless considerable interest nationwide in state accrediting bodies. There are several statewide organizations which administer law enforcement accreditation programs, and in July 1991, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services announced the formation of a "National State Law Enforcement Accreditation Network." In addition, there is at least one statewide organization in Florida that has recently completed the development of standards for a statewide accrediting body. However, they are not ready to promulgate at this time.

It is the author's opinion that most of the law enforcement activity at the state level is in direct response to the financial burden the accreditation fees (as opposed to the cost of maintaining accreditation) place on small law enforcement agencies. If, as this study indicated, "In order for accreditation to have any real impact on the professionalization of law enforcement, it must be national in scope," then this activity at the state level could be counterproductive to the overall goal of the professionalization of law enforcement.

#### Possible funding source

In June 1991, Dr. Betty B. Bosarge, the Managing Editor of Washington Crime News Services, published an article in Crime Control Digest in which she severely

criticized a proposed funding source for law enforcement accreditation.

The proposal was "The Law Enforcement Responsibility Act of 1991", H.R. 4270, which was introduced in the House of Representatives on February 19, 1992 by Congressman James Moran, Democrat, Virginia. On a survey question concerning the proposed bill, 75% of the responding agencies indicated that they were unfamiliar with it.

Most of the law enforcement agencies in North America are small agencies. In the United States there are over 17,000 law enforcement agencies. It seems quite apparent to this author that the small agencies (1-49 employees) should comprise the majority of the agencies accredited by CALEA. This is not the case and it appears that the situation will not be corrected until some alternate funding mechanism can be developed for the small agencies. Hohensee (1992) might be correct when he indicated CALEA has "become available to only those fortunate agencies who have the resources to spare, both monetary and in personnel. Smaller, less well financed agencies who might benefit most from such an initiative, are precluded from participation."

In this author's opinion, the defeat of any proposed funding source which might alleviate this situation would be counterproductive to law enforcement professionalization.

### Conclusions

There were many thought-provoking and intelligent opinions offered by the respondents. The solutions to the problems of law enforcement accreditation may very well be found in these statements. In the author's opinion, the statement that best exemplifies the status of law enforcement accreditation in North America was submitted by one of the respondents:

*I see law enforcement accreditation as a positive step toward true professionalism in police service over and above the process itself. It is, above all, a dynamic process with far reaching potential. The current process has fostered substantial interaction between the mid-managers at the local, regional, state, and national levels through coalitions and other help groups. These are folks who are actively and directly involved in the delivery of the service. They are also the future leaders in the law enforcement community. These interactions have provoked the ever increasing exchange of problems and ideas. This increased communication among law enforcement practitioners provides a good foundation for providing efficient and quality police service today and in the future. (anonymous)*

After serving in the U.S. Air Force as an aeronautical navigator and a staff intelligence officer, Director DuPont joined the St. Johns County, Florida Sheriff's Office in 1971. He was promoted to Director of Operations in 1985 and served in that capacity until his appointment as Director of Planning and Research in 1991. Director DuPont attended the FBI National Academy and the Charter Class of the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute's Senior Leadership Program.

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Appendix A

Accreditation Survey				
Subject Group	Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Undecided	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
1	Accreditation was a good step toward the professionalization of this agency.	93.50%	3.50%	3.00%
3	My staff is committed to maintaining our accredited status through CALEA. (Disregard if withdrawn)	94.2	4.2	1.6
6	I would consider a statewide accrediting body in addition to CALEA. (Disregard if withdrawn)	37.2	22.3	40.5
1	Creativity and progressiveness was improved in this agency due to accreditation.	80.8	8	11.2
6	In order for accreditation to have any real impact on the professionalization of law enforcement, it must be national in scope.	83	8	9
6	Statewide Law Enforcement Accreditation Coalitions or PACS are beneficial.	82.4	14	3.6
3/5	The awarding of "string-free" grants to agencies for accreditation and reaccreditation would strengthen my resolve to remain with CALEA.	58.7	14.3	27
5	The Law Enforcement Responsibility Act of 1991 proposed by Congressman James Moran (D-VA), "will result in massive Federal control of state and local law enforcement" (Bosarge, 1991). (If you are unfamiliar with this Act, please do not answer this question.)	48	28	24
6	Any law enforcement accreditation body that is governmentally administered (either state or federal) will most likely lead to government control of local law enforcement.	49.2	20.8	29.9
6	Governmental control (State or Federal) is ultimately bad for local law enforcement.	54.1	20.4	25.5
3/6	If CALEA should fail for any reason:			
	1. The State Police Accreditation Coalitions (PACS) should form a private commission/ corporation and administer the accreditation process.	28.6	30.2	41.1

	2. An existing national private organization such as the National Sheriff's Association or Chief's Association should take over the accreditation process.	33	32	35
	3. An existing state private organization such as the Florida Sheriff's Association or some such organization should take over the accreditation process.	8.9	27.4	63.7
	4. Each state government should take over the accreditation process.	13.9	23.2	62.9
	5. The federal government should establish an independent commission to administer the accreditation process.	23.3	23.3	53.4
3	CALEA will not fail.	61.2	33.2	5.6
3	CALEA should be more responsive to the state coalitions.	66.3	17.9	15.8