

Accreditation Program Overview

Accreditation is the ongoing process whereby agencies evaluate policy and procedure against established criteria and have compliance with that criteria verified by an independent and authoritative body. The criteria, or standards, are policy development guidelines that represent a level of quality service delivery. The true indicator of compliance, however, lies with an evaluation by trained, independent professional peers. The establishment of meaningful and professional standards and an evaluation of compliance with those standards are, therefore, the two fundamentals of an accreditation program.

The New Mexico Association of Chiefs of Police, the New Mexico Municipal League and the New Mexico Self Insurers' Fund pursued the concept and development of a voluntary statewide law enforcement accreditation program for New Mexico. Their efforts resulted in the formation of the New Mexico Law Enforcement Professional Standards Council (NMLEPSC). The Council consists of the executive committee of the New Mexico Association of Chiefs of Police, the Executive Director of the New Mexico Municipal League, and two sheriffs representing the New Mexico Association of Counties Sheriffs Affiliate. The Council is the accrediting body tasked with developing and maintaining a formal accreditation process specific to the needs of New Mexico Law enforcement agencies. The New Mexico Municipal League serves as the coordinating agency for the Council activities, while the Municipal League, the Self-Insurers' Fund and the New Mexico Association of Counties are the funding agencies.

The goals of the NMLEPSC are to:

- strengthen crime prevention and control capabilities;
- formalize essential management and administration procedures;
- establish fair and nondiscriminatory personnel practices;
- improve service delivery;
- solidify interagency cooperation and coordination; and
- boost citizen and staff confidence in the agency.

The attitudes, training and actions of personnel of New Mexico's law enforcement agencies best reflect compliance with formulated standards. Policy and procedure based on Accreditation will not ensure a crime-free environment for citizens, nor will it ensure an absence of litigation against law enforcement agencies and executives. However, effective and comprehensive leadership through professionally based policy development, directly influences the law enforcement program that is comprehensive, obtainable and based on standards that reflect professional service delivery. In developing the program, the Council recognized the somewhat limited financial and manpower resources of a great many law enforcement agencies and constructed standards that would not place overwhelming demands on those resources.

The standards are the basis of an accreditation program that affects every component of the agencies involved. Through the dedication to service and professionalism evidenced by the attainment of accredited status, law enforcement agencies can positively affect the communities they serve.

The development of department policy is the most significant duty of Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs. Therefore, this program contains no recommendation on policies or procedures. The standards developed by the Council are only guidelines for *what* should be done, not *how* it should be done.

Policies on many topics, for instance the use of force, may be very similar among most agencies. On the other hand, policies dealing with disciplinary actions may vary greatly. Policy development that complies with these standards, however, remains dependent on the judgment of the chief executive officer of the law enforcement agency.

This program represents hours of effort by a number of New Mexico law enforcement personnel. At the onset of the program, the NMLEPSC conducted a critical review of every proposed standard and is responsible for updating and enacting new standards.

New Mexico law enforcement agencies now have the framework to:

- reduce liability;
- initiate a restructuring;
- embark on a program of self-improvement;
- officially verify their excellence; and
- be ranked with *the best*.

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