



# The Massachusetts Police Accreditation Program

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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The **Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission** offers and oversees an accreditation program for the Commonwealth's law enforcement community.

Like accreditation programs in other disciplines, the accreditation process for the police profession consists of two major components:

1. the establishment of a body of standards that promotes best practices for the profession; and
2. the administration of a *voluntary* assessment process by which agencies can be publicly recognized for meeting those standards.

The Commission currently offers two program awards: *Certification* and *Accreditation*. A third award for agencies with ten or fewer full-time Officers is underway.

### **Below are some ANSWERS to frequently asked questions about the Program:**

#### **What does it cost to participate in the program?**

The annual fee for FY2018 is \$1,250 (July 1 – June 30). For those agencies that become program members in mid-year, there is a pro-rated fee of \$100 per month. For agencies that employ ten or fewer full time officers, the annual fee is reduced 50% (\$625). It may also be helpful to know that MIIA Members are eligible to participate in a reimbursement program (Call MIIA's Loss Control Department: 617-426-7272 or the Commission for more information).

#### **Who is eligible to participate?**

Entities having mandated responsibilities to enforce laws and having personnel with general or special law enforcement powers are eligible to participate in the Program. These entities include municipal, state and specialized (e.g. campus, transit and housing) law enforcement agencies.

#### **How will participating in the program benefit us?**

The benefits of police certification and accreditation are many and are likely to vary among participating agencies based on the state of the agency when it enters the process. In other words, the benefits will be better known when the agency quantifies the *changes* that it made in agency-operations as a direct result of participating in this process to comply with program standards. Generally, these changes involve policy updates, minor facility improvements, and in some cases, equipment upgrades. Participating in professional credentialing programs such as police certification and accreditation are also effective risk management tools for preventing and reducing loss in professional liability claims.

#### **Aside from applying, what do we do next to begin the process?**

All applicants must appoint an Accreditation Manager. This position is responsible for managing the agency's accreditation process and is the agency's primary liaison with the Commission on all matters concerning accreditation. A *Sample Job Description* is available identifying the Accreditation Manager's major duties and responsibilities. A suggested *Checklist for Getting Started* is also available and one of the initial start-up tasks on the list is contacting the Commission for a schedule of upcoming training for Accreditation Managers and others who will be involved in the process.

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## **How long does the process usually take?**

The answer to this question is unique to each agency. Once enrolled in the program, agencies will initiate a comprehensive *self-assessment* of their agency. In other words, a thorough examination of the agency, by the agency. Without a doubt, it is the most labor intensive and time-consuming phase of the process because the activities in this phase initially begin with a review of the certification standards and include all of the activities associated with preparing compliance documentation for the agency's on-site assessment by Commission-appointed assessors.

It is important to note that the role of the Accreditation Manager is not to do all of the work but to manage and delegate it for the initial on-site assessment and subsequent assessments. Achieving certification and accreditation should be an agency-wide effort utilizing the expertise of agency personnel in policy development and/or in reviewing proposed drafts, particularly those that will affect them. Departments using a *team approach* to this project will generally have the best and *quickest* results.

## **Are there any time limits?**

No, there are no time limits for achieving initial certification. However, once certification or accreditation are achieved, agencies will need to be re-assessed every three years in order to maintain their certification or accreditation status.

## **What is the difference between Certification and Accreditation?**

In terms of the *number of standards*, Accreditation has approximately double the number of standards than Certification.

Certification requires that you meet 159 standards all of which are mandatory. These carefully selected standards impact officer and public safety, address high liability/risk management issues, and generally promote operational efficiency throughout an agency.

Accreditation requires an additional 98 mandatory standards to be met as well as a *percentage* of a group of 125 *optional* standards; the percentage being based on agency-size. So for example, an agency that decides to pursue accreditation that has fifty (50) or fewer full-time police officers would be required to meet 326 standards: 257 *mandatory* standards (159 + 98) plus 69 *optional* standards (55%) based on its size.

Since the 159 standards for certification are part of the 257 mandatory standards for accreditation, *certification is a significant milestone towards accreditation.*

## **Once certified, do you have to get accredited?**

Pursuing accreditation is an agency decision so *no*, you don't have to get accredited. Certification awards are granted for three-year periods so you would be assessed for re-certification to maintain your status.

## **Do you have to be certified before being assessed for accreditation?**

Yes. Agencies must successfully achieve certification before being assessed for accreditation.

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## **What do the standards focus on?**

Generally, standards focus on high liability, high risk areas of law enforcement operations:

- Agency Authority, Jurisdiction and Use of Force
- Selection and Promotion of Personnel
- Training, Discipline and Internal Affairs
- Patrol, Traffic Operations and Criminal Investigations
- Victim/Witness Assistance
- Emergency Response Planning
- Detainee Transportation and Holding Facilities
- Records and Communications
- Collection and Preservation of Evidence, and Property and Evidence Control

## **What if a standard doesn't apply to our agency?**

Any standard that is not a function or responsibility of the agency will be deemed *not applicable* and will be waived through a formal waiver process.

## **Is there any training available?**

Yes. The Commission offers *introductory* workshops throughout the year such as Program Orientation and Getting Started (described below) and there is no cost to attend. The Commission also hosts three-day conferences during which introductory training and presentations on current issues affecting law enforcement are offered. For a list of upcoming workshops, please contact the Commission. In the meantime, here are the workshop descriptions for the Program Orientation and Getting Started Workshops....

Program Orientation: Police Certification and Accreditation – This workshop is designed for those who are new to the process or who have been in the process and need refresher training. It is NOT a sales pitch, but an overview of the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Program detailing what agencies need to know and do in order to get their department certified (and maybe accredited later). Attendees will hear about the nature and scope of the on-site assessment; the standards for certification including those impacting police facilities, equipment and personnel; the cost to participate; the workload involved; and finally, what support services are available from the Commission.

Getting Started – Your department has decided that certification is a worthy goal and wants to be certified; now what? This workshop provides direction on *how* and *where* to begin the process, focusing on start-up tasks, written directive systems and policy writing. The first part of the workshop focuses on a Checklist and Guide for Getting Started. The second half focuses on standards dealing with written directive systems because they are the foundation for complying with accreditation standards. Particular attention will be given to: *types* of directives; *formatting* directives; *methods* for disseminating them; *systems* to acknowledge when directives have been read; and finally, how to keep them updated.

## **Where can I get additional information now?**

- Contact the Commission at 978-834-5180 or send an e-mail to [donna@masspoliceaccred.net](mailto:donna@masspoliceaccred.net)