

Accreditation may be
the answer

Can Your Police Department Pass Muster?

BY BERNARD GAVZER

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Sgt. Phil Howell of Mount Dora, Fla., police pauses to chat with a citizen. His force was the first in the country to win accreditation.

EVERYONE KNOWS—or thinks he knows—what makes a good cop: honesty, strength, dedication, persistence, street smarts, compassion. But what makes a good police department?

How do you know whether the organization behind the men and women in blue is employing their talents most efficiently and professionally in delivering police services?

You know how to judge schools because of objective tests and standards. The same is true of hospitals.

And now, there's the promise of a sort of revolution in police work. For the first time, there is a nationwide program to accredit entire police departments.

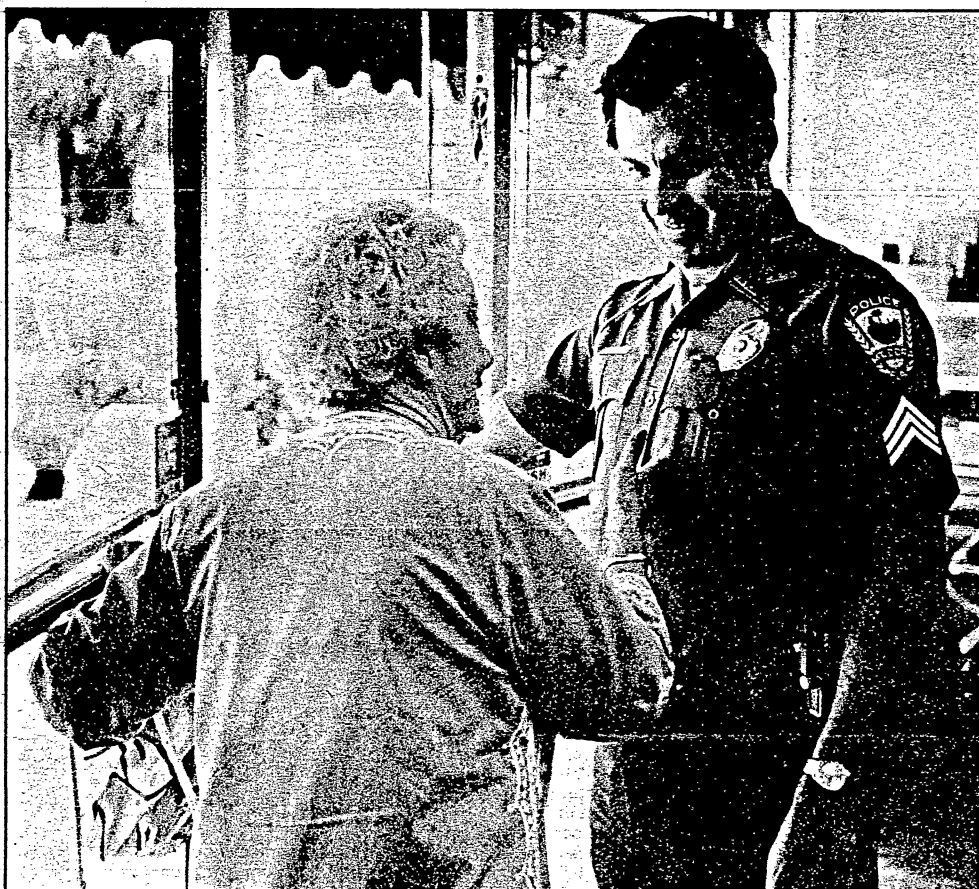
This can be done through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, headquartered in Fairfax, Va. It is an independent, non-profit, nongovernmental organization operating since 1983 with the goal of raising police work from a blue-collar job to a profession.

"Our goal is to involve every eligible law-enforcement agency in the country in the accreditation program," says James Cotter, executive director of the commission. More than 15,000 agencies could be eligible.

Being accredited would be the equivalent of saying about a department that it "is in an outstanding category, that it rightfully has an uncontested status and that its accreditation is a guarantee that it conforms to a desirable standard," says Cotter. By that definition alone, you could be reasonably sure that, if your department was accredited, at least the professionals regarded it as good.

Charles Plummer, police chief in Hayward, Calif., addresses the issue with emotion, saying: "If you had a heart attack, how'd you feel being wheeled

'We finally have standards of what a good department ought to look like and be, put together by professionals'



into a hospital that's not accredited? Would you send your kid to a college that's not accredited? If you want standards for health and education, by God, why not for public safety? Why wouldn't any community insist on a police department that meets professional standards?"

His department is seeking accreditation.

So far, five police departments have been accredited. In addition to the 17-member force in Mount Dora, Fla., which was the first to win accreditation, they are the 290-member Arlington County Police Department in Virginia, the 1370-member Baltimore County Police Department in Maryland, the 44-member department of North Providence, R.I., and the 51-member Elkhart County Sheriff's Department in Indiana. (Figures

in this article are for full-time members of a department, but part-time police also must pass muster.)

Thirty-six departments, including those in Denver, Tampa and Atlanta, are in a preliminary stage leading to accreditation, while 130 others—including departments in Boston, Phoenix, Houston and Louisville—have applied. The accreditation is for five years.

Mount Dora was one of five departments that took part in a test to design an accreditation program. "It's not a 'good ole boy' department anymore," says the former police chief, Earl Gooden, who was in command during the process. And his successor, Bob Roberts, says, "The beauty of accreditation was proved right here because, when Earl left, there was no concern about policy

changes or interpretations or who would do what. I think it was the most orderly change of authority I ever heard of."

Chicago's force of 12,000, according to Deputy Superintendent Ira Harris, is "in the self-assessment phase of moving toward accreditation." That would make it the largest department in the nation to pursue accreditation.

Like many other big-city departments, Chicago has had its share of grief over corruption, which is the major problem of every police department, regardless of size. "The heritage of American policing is one of brutality and corruption," says Joseph McNamara, chief of the San Jose Police Department in California and a highly regarded but controversial commentator on police matters. He adds that it's been that way since New York City formed its police department in 1845. "The police were manipulated by politicians," says McNamara. "And it is as true today as then that where you have a politically controlled police system, the motives and goals of the political machine are foremost, and you have scandal, brutality and corruption."

McNamara believes accreditation can turn that image around.

The need caused four leading police executive organizations to act. They are the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, which Chicago's Ira Harris heads. Their aim was to find a way to develop a realistic, workable strategy to raise the status of police work, deal with its problems and make it truly professional.

"There couldn't have been more credible, knowledgeable and professional police organizations involved," says Hubert G. Locke, dean of the University of Washington Graduate School of Public Affairs. "It bodes well for accreditation."

The organizations created the Commission on Accreditation in 1979 and picked Jim Cotter to run it. Cotter had headed the FBI National Academy for 18 years, until his mandatory retirement. On the commission are 11 law-enforcement professionals and 10 representatives from the public and private sectors.

They came up with 1000 standards they thought should be met by most departments. These were sent to 358 randomly selected departments. The number of standards later was pared to 944. If you don't meet them, you can't be accredited. Obviously, a small department without a crime lab wouldn't have to meet standards relating to crime labs.

One revolutionary aspect is that the public has a say in the accreditation. This happens when the inspection team visits the community, inviting the public to say, in effect, if there is any reason accreditation should be withheld. Traditionally, police departments are very cool to the notion of inviting citizens to

take such a close look.

Jim Cotter says accreditation can work "for any size department, whether it's the 25,000-member New York City force or the four-member department at Painted Post, N.Y." But Sheriff Richard Elrod of Cook County, Ill., a commission member and former president of the National Sheriffs' Association, sees some problems for big agencies.

"It can be difficult in a large department—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles—because of a need to possibly change existing policies, criteria and standards," he says. "It is not an easy task changing longtime practices."

New York and Los Angeles are in states whose police chiefs' associations have reservations about the accreditation commission. "We object to a national commission as an intrusion on local government," says Joe Dominelli, executive director of the New York police chiefs' outfit. "We go along with standards and accreditation but want it done on a statewide basis." The California chiefs' group says standards of the Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) are good enough. It expresses a fear that the accreditation commission could lead to having to deal with a Big Brother out of Washington.

"You know what they're afraid of is what happened with the 21-year-old drinking age because of drunk drivers," says Howard Runyon, chief of police in Sterling, N.J., and former president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. "States that wouldn't set a 21-year minimum age were threatened with losing federal funds. They think maybe one day there'll be someone—the commission—saying if you don't get accredited, you can't get funds."

Thomas J. Sardino, the current head of the international police chiefs' group, says there's an option open to departments that fear the national commission might become an interfering Big Brother. "That is for meshing the standards to comply with standards set within their own states," he says, "whether it's POST or, in New York, the Municipal Police Training Council."

"The council's standards on use of deadly force, for example, differ only in minor ways from the accreditation commission's, so it's not much of a problem in New York," adds Sardino, who is chief of the 400-member police department in Syracuse, N.Y. "But in Tennessee that is a very heated issue right now because of considerable differences relating to the use of deadly force. States like Tennessee may not want to meet the commission's standards—or may not be able to because of state law—so they are not likely to go along with the commission."

Sardino clearly favors accreditation as a step toward police professionalism. He says the Syracuse department already meets most of the commission

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standards and will very likely seek accreditation.

Jim Cotter says the accreditation commission has no control over any federal or state funds going to police organizations. He also insists there is no way accreditation can lead to a national police force any more than school or hospital accreditation has led to nationalization of hospitals and schools.

The standards aim to prevent or correct problems confronting every police department. "Procedures have been thought through and put down on paper as clear directives on how to handle such diverse events as corruption, abuse of suspects, delinquencies by police, hazardous waste spills, mass murder, domestic violence, crowd control, missing persons, runaway children and traffic control," says Cotter.

To deal with corruption, for example, there is a strict system of accountability and a sophisticated process for seeing what goes on within a department. Even so, no one is prepared to say there can't be human failure.

As for excessive force, many states permit police to shoot at fleeing felons or suspects. But the standards say such force may be used *only* if the life of the officer, or others in the immediate area, is threatened... and only then.

"We finally have standards of what a good department ought to look like and be, and put together by professionals," says Neil Behan, chief of the Baltimore police. "These are humanistic standards."

Gary Hayes, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, recommends those things stressed by the accreditation commission: leadership, training, written policy.

Charles Sorrentino, a former director with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, says such leadership would be shown by any police chief moving toward getting accreditation because "he is telling them he wants to be professional."

Charles Seiger, chief of the department in Egremont, Mass., with two full-time members, says it would be great to have the same standards apply to all departments. "It's crazy that they should differ from one place to another."

And Dean Locke says the cost—from \$3800 to \$15,000, depending upon size—should play no role, "especially when you realize that whom you select for a chief or what you do for your department is as important as whom you choose for the local football coach or team." □

WHERE TO WRITE

For further information about accreditation, write to the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Dept. P, 4242B Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax, Va. 22030.



City of Cambridge

2.

COUNCILLOR D. SULLIVAN

IN CITY COUNCIL
January 14, 1985

WHEREAS:

The attached article in the December 30, 1984 Parade magazine reports that a new program of accreditation for police departments is being conducted by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, an independent, non-profit organization; and

WHEREAS:

The purpose of this accreditation is to certify that a police department is an outstanding, professional organization; therefore, be it

ORDERED:

That the City Manager and Chief of Police be requested to consider whether to submit the Cambridge Police Department for accreditation, and to report their decision to the City Council.

In City Council January 14, 1985.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 8 members.
Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

Order # 2

F-19

C.D. Sullivan order re: City Manager & Chief
of Police be requested to consider whether
to submit the Cambridge Police Dept. for
accreditation & to report their decision to
the Council.

In City Council,

January 14, 1985

1/14/1985

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