

PS COMMITTEE #3
February 2, 2012
Update

MEMORANDUM

January 31, 2012

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst 

SUBJECT: **Update – MCFRS Accreditation Process**

Today the Public Safety Committee will receive an update on the accreditation process currently underway in the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS). Fire Chief Richard Bowers will be present to update the Committee.

MCFRS has provided briefing information on the accreditation process and timeline on circles 1-4. Council staff has provided brief background materials from the accrediting agency on circle 5-7.

MCFRS is seeking to renew its accredited status with the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). MCFRS first received accreditation in 2007, and is up for re-accreditation in FY13-17.

The purpose of today's worksession is for the Committee to understand the benefits and purpose of attaining this accreditation, the process and timeline for the effort, and the workload impact on MCFRS.

BRIEFING ON FIRE DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

FOR PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 2, 2012



FIRE DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

WHAT IS FIRE DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION?

- **A comprehensive self-assessment and evaluation model that enables fire departments to examine service levels and performance and compare them to industry best practices**
- **Accreditation status expires after 5 years unless re-awarded**
- **Annual Compliance Report is required**

FIRE DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

WHAT ORGANIZATION AWARDS ACCREDITATION?

- Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI)
- Center for Public Safety Excellence – CFAI's parent organization

HOW MANY FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ACCREDITED?

- 1 in NCR and Maryland: MCFRS
- 140 in United States
- 144 world-wide

MCFRS ACCREDITATION CHRONOLOGY

- MCFRS initially accredited in 2007
- MCFRS given 25 recommendations by Peer Team in 2007
 - 23 recommendations addressed or in progress
 - Others not accepted/applicable
- Four Annual Compliance Reports submitted: 2008-2011
- MCFRS is a "Candidate Agency" for re-accreditation during FY12, although still officially accredited through FY12
- Next re-accreditation cycle: FY13-17

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

- **Enables continuous improvement**
- **Promotes excellence within FRS**
- **Helps to define FRS mission**
- **Identifies priorities, needs, strengths, and weaknesses**
- **Helps define levels of risk**
- **Supports needs for Fire/Rescue/EMS resources**
- **Promotes professional growth within FRS**
- **Promotes FRS recognition among County residents and elected officials and FD peers world-wide**

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR ACCREDITATION

- **Self-Assessment Manual (SAM)**
- **Risk Assessment**
- **Standards of Cover (SOC)**
- **Strategic Plan / Master Plan**

Note: Above documents have been completed or are nearing completion as of 1/31/12

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA AND RECOMMENDATIONS

261 Performance Indicators (competencies) in 8th edition FESSAM

- 82 core competencies
- 179 non-core competencies
- All competencies to be addressed in Self-Assessment Manual

25 recommendations (from 2007 Peer Team)

- 10 "strategic" recommendations
- 15 "specific" recommendations

RE-ACCREDITATION TIMELINE

- Feb 2012 Submit required documents to Peer Team Leader
- March 2012 Submit revised docs based on review comments.
Preparations for Peer Team visit in April.
- April 2012 Peer Team conducts on-site assessment
- May/June 2012 Peer Team report of findings and recommendations
submitted to CPSE/CFAI Board and to MCFRS
- July 2012 CPSE/CFAI Board awards Accreditation Status* at
CPSE Conference

*Award of Accreditation Status anticipated

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Agency Accreditation

About Accreditation & CFAI

CFAI Commissioners

List of Accredited Agencies

The Benefits

The Process

The Cost

Application Information

Video Library



HOME » Agency Accreditation » About Accreditation & CFAI

About Accreditation & CFAI

Local government executives face increasing pressure to "do more with less" and justify their expenditures by demonstrating a direct link to improved or expanded services. Particularly for emergency services, local officials need criteria to assess professional performance and efficiency. The CFAI accreditation process provides a well-defined, internationally recognized benchmark system to measure the quality of fire and emergency services.

CFAI Mission

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) is committed to assisting and improving fire and emergency service agencies around the world in achieving organizational and professional excellence through its strategic self-assessment model and accreditation process to provide continuous quality improvement and enhancement of service delivery to the community and the world at large.

CFAI Program

The CFAI program is a comprehensive self-assessment and evaluation model that enables fire and emergency service organizations to examine past, current, and future service levels and performance and compare them to industry best practices. This process leads to improved service delivery by helping fire departments:

- Determine community risk and safety needs.
- Evaluate the performance of the department.
- Establish a method for achieving continuous organizational improvement.

A task force of highly qualified and dedicated chief fire officers, trainers, city/county administrators, and academic professionals worked together to create the self-assessment model—the basis for CFAI accreditation. The goals that guide the development process emphasize that the system must be:

- Applicable across the broad spectrum of the fire service industry
- Challenging
- Contemporary, not revolutionary
- Able to evolve over time
- Achievable!
- Useful for a comprehensive organizational evaluation
- A practical management tool for fire and EMS agencies

5

Agency Accreditation

[About Accreditation & CFAI](#)

[CFAI Commissioners](#)

[List of Accredited Agencies](#)

[The Benefits](#)

[The Process](#)

[The Cost](#)

[Application Information](#)

[Video Library](#)



[HOME](#) » [Agency Accreditation](#) » [The Process](#)

CFAI Accreditation Process

Performance Evaluation Categories

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) accreditation model includes a full range of performance evaluation categories:

- Assessment and Planning
- Essential Resources
- External Systems Relations
- Financial Resources
- Goals and Objectives
- Governance and Administration
- Human Resources
- Physical Resources
- Programs
- Training and Competency

Each category includes a measure or index on which a judgment or division can be based, as well as indicators that define the desired level of ability to perform a particular task.

The Accreditation model includes a comprehensive research and information collection guide with checklists, exhibits, benchmarks, references, and activities broken down by category. Several appendices address additional topics including defining the elements of response time, creating standards of response coverage, and developing master or strategic plans.

Four Steps to Accreditation

The process of achieving accreditation includes four steps or levels:

Step 1. Becoming a Registered Agency

Any agency seeking accreditation may become a Registered Agency. This status allows a department to be involved with the Accreditation process at a low cost for three years. Registered Agencies can access to the CFAI network, receive the CFAI newsletter, and obtain a copy of the latest edition of the Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment manual, the resource on which self-assessment and accreditation is based. The period of this status is the best time for an agency to send its fire chief and accreditation manager to the CFAI basic workshop training.

Step 2. Becoming an Applicant Agency

Agencies that are ready to make the commitment to accreditation use the Applicant Agency Status Form to notify the CFAI program manager and submit the appropriate fee. The agency then receives an Applicant Agency packet of the materials needed to proceed. While holding this status—over 18 months for career agencies and 24 months for volunteer agencies—an Applicant Agency is assigned a volunteer mentor via the CFAI SharePoint website to serve as a resource. A SharePoint site is created for the agency so the mentor can review document drafts and offer feedback and advice.

Step 3. Becoming a Candidate for Accreditation

Following the self-assessment process—including the community risk analysis, standards of cover, and strategic planning components—a Candidate Agency's completed documents are uploaded to the CPSE website for peer review. When the Candidate Agency's documents are approved, an on-site peer assessment is conducted. The peer assessment team submits a final report on its recommendation for accreditation to the agency and the commission.

Step 4. Achieving Accreditation

The commission hears the candidacy report from the peer assessment team leader in the presence of the Candidate Agency's representatives during the commission's spring or fall meeting. At this point, the commission grants, denies, or defers accreditation. Accreditation is valid for five years.

Maintaining Accreditation

At least 45 days prior to the anniversary date of accreditation, an Accredited Agency must submit to the commission an Annual Compliance Report (ACR) with the annual accreditation fee.

Renewing Accreditation

To renew accreditation, an agency follows the process outlined in Steps 3 and 4 in accordance with current CFAI Policy and Procedure.

Special Challenges for Volunteer Agencies

Volunteer or partially volunteer agencies may face special challenges in the self-assessment process. Some common barriers and their potential solutions include:

Time Constraints. Volunteer agencies rely on their membership for staffing and administration, and these volunteers may have limited time to conduct the self-assessment process. By including good writers, great researchers, and people with institutional knowledge on the self-assessment team, an agency can make it easier to locate resources and references and ensure that the documents comprise a useful end product. In addition, the establishment of firm timelines and goals can help keep the assessment on track.

Lack of Focus. For many small agencies, self-assessment seems overwhelming. To fuel the process, concentrate on obvious problem areas and areas that will provide immediate success. The agency will not only more easily complete these parts of the self-assessment, but also see immediate positive effects from using the self-assessment document to "trouble-shoot" problems or issues and devise solutions.

High Turnover. Because small agencies often experience turnover on the self-assessment team, it is important to obtain commitment of the team and the entire department as well as the chief or leadership. This group of people needs to ensure that the process is completed properly. It may be wise to add team members who aim to advance in the department and have an incentive to stay with a process that provides a great deal of experience and departmental knowledge.

Unclear Purpose. Realizing the importance of accreditation and the self-assessment process is key to success. Volunteer departments may not understand that in the face of more community scrutiny than ever before, the self-assessment and accreditation process will help them develop compelling written plans and justifications detailing what they are doing and why they are doing it. The agency and self-assessment team need to recognize the practical benefits of investing in rigorous self-assessment.