

Assessing the Benefits of Accreditation for the Guilford Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: 

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Abstract

This applied research project, as part of The National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program, dealt with the process of fire department accreditation through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. The problem was the Guilford Fire Department did not know what benefits would be realized through the accreditation process. The purpose of this applied research project was to determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with the process, so that the Guilford Fire Department could make an informed decision regarding the process. Using the descriptive research method, consisting of a review of current literature paired with original research in the form of survey instruments distributed to two unique samples, this author attempted to answer the following research questions: a) What is involved in the process of accreditation? b) What is the total cost of becoming accredited, including fees, salary, and travel? c) What benefits do fire departments realize through the accreditation process? d) Why is New England slow to move toward accreditation?

Research indicated there are four benchmark steps in the process of accreditation as well as considerable document preparation. The Guilford Fire Department could expect to incur accreditation costs in excess of \$17,000. Research returned numerous reported benefits associated with accreditation including; increased efficiency, increased transparency, and lowered ISO public protection classification. It was determined that New England is slow to move toward accreditation because of traditionalist attitudes and small, longstanding government entities.

The results of this research were analyzed against recommendations from a 2004 fire service study conducted in Guilford. Said analysis proves sufficient overlap to endorse the pursuit of accreditation. It is recommended that Guilford use these results at the committee level

to make an informed decision regarding the process of fire department accreditation through The Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

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Assessing the Benefits of Accreditation for the Guilford Fire Department

The Guilford Fire Department (GFD) has undergone significant structural change in the course of the last 20 years transitioning from a completely volunteer organization to a combination department where the majority of the calls for service are handled by the career members. With this change came budget increases rocketing the fire department to one of the most expensive departments in the towns overall budget. Accreditation through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International appears to be a legitimate tool to help justify the department's budget and progress. The problem is the Guilford Fire Department does not know what benefits would be realized through the accreditation process.

The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) is to determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with the process so that the Guilford Fire Department can make an informed decision regarding the process. The descriptive research method was employed for this project. The research approach includes a robust literature review of Executive Fire Officer papers in the National Fire Academy Library, as well as journal articles on the topic, post graduate work on the topic, as well as publications from the Center for Public Safety Excellence regarding accreditation. In an effort to gain the most current data set, a survey was sent to current accreditation managers; the resulting data was compiled, as well as a survey sent to a purposive sample of fire chiefs in the New England area to gain local perspective regardless of their relationship with the accreditation process.

Answering the following research questions will allow the GFD to accurately determine a course regarding the accreditation process. a) What is involved in the process of accreditation? b) What is the total cost of becoming accredited including fees, salary and travel? c) What

benefits do fire departments realize through the accreditation process? d) Why is New England slow to move toward accreditation?

This ARP comes at a time when now, more than ever before, the department needs to scrutinize every new budget item. All town departments are being asked to do more with less and the GFD needs data to justify the pursuit of accreditation. That said, the potential benefits may assist the department as it continues to move forward.

Background and Significance

Like much of early America, Guilford Connecticut was settled by a group of English puritans seeking religious asylum in the new world. Settled in 1639, Guilford's economy was primarily built on agriculture, and proximity to the ocean until nineteenth century travel made Guilford a destination for vacationers as it remains to this day. During this time numerous industrial endeavors grew as well to support and propagate the town ("Historical overview," n.d.). Presently Guilford is predominantly a bedroom community classified as rural in nature. A current population estimate is 22,375 spread throughout 47 square miles (Census Bureau, 2010).

The Guilford Fire Department can trace its history almost as far back. Steiner (1975) recounts discussions of organized fire protection and ordinances regarding outside burning as early as 1645. More formal structure came with the purchase of equipment for fire suppression, and the organization of fire companies in the 1850s (Steiner, 1975). Guilford's volunteer fire companies that are still existing today trace their roots to 1852 with a fourth company added significantly further north in 1946 (Schaefer, 2014). An early progressive step for the Guilford Fire Department was the addition of emergency squads in the 1950s to respond to calls for medical assistance (Schaefer, 2014). This system of 4 fire companies and the emergency squad remained virtually unchanged for approximately 30 years. 1992 brought paramedic training to

the employees of the town ambulance service and soon after, the fire department assumed control of the town ambulance service as well as the communications center with those employees reporting to the fire marshal (Schaefer, 2014).

Organizationally, the fire department at this time was led by a volunteer set of officers including a chief and two assistant chiefs as well as each fire company electing a captain and two lieutenants. It is worth noting that during this period of time the fulltime paid position of town fire marshal and that of the volunteer fire chief elected by the membership were held by the same individual concurrently. Although aligned nowhere in policy or procedure, overall supervision and management of the employees of the ambulance division, as well as the overall supervision and management of the volunteer fire department rested with the same person.

Although the ambulance division and the fire marshal's office employed people, said job descriptions were void of any fire suppression duties (Bushnell, 2001). It wasn't until a 2001 revision to the town charter precipitated the official transition to a combination service delivery model. This was in response to an increase in calls for service and a declining volunteer response, a trend that influenced all future fire department expansion as well. The charter revision included changing the fire marshal job description to include fire chief and to change the duties of the fire inspector/pre-planner to that of assistant chief of operations. Furthermore, the career EMTs and paramedics of the ambulance division became firefighters as well, and future hiring would be for firefighters.

Currently the GFD employs forty-three uniformed members with four shifts of one captain and nine firefighters per shift. This somewhat meteoric rise in staffing, although directly related to rising calls for service and the declining volunteer response, is not without scrutiny.

The fire department operating budget has risen from \$851,913 in 1999 to \$4.6 million in 2019 with a drastic increase in full-time salary illustrated in table 1.

Table 1- Twenty-Year Budget Increase

Budget	1999	2019	Change
Town Operating	\$18,789,434	\$40,124,315	+113.54%
Fire Department	\$851,913	\$4,653,919	+446.29%
Full-Time Salary	\$354,986	\$2,885,473	+712.84%

Source: Town of Guilford Legal Notices

This financial impact needs to be justified. Third party accreditation seems to be a productive way for the GFD to help justify its expansion and budget increases both currently and in the future. The problem is the Guilford Fire Department does not know what benefits would be realized through the accreditation process. As the department's budget continues to increase there is less and less room for new programs unless the benefits are clearly worth the cost. The Purpose of this applied research project (ARP) is to determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with the process so that the Guilford Fire Department can make an informed decision regarding the process.

Now and for the foreseeable future, the Guilford Fire Department will need a system of tools that allows for tracking and interpretation of data, ensures the department remains current with industry best practices, and remains transparent regarding finances as well as policy. Accreditation through CFAI proclaims to provide all of this. If proven worth the expense this program should ease the criticism of the department's budget as well as validate the progress the department has made in such a short time.

With strong roots in education, the accreditation model has been a priority for some fire service leaders since the late 1970's (French, 2016). Ten years of work by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International City/County Management Association brought the Commission on Fire Accreditation International to life in 1996 (Bruegman, 2018). As accreditation for fire departments grew and interest in professional credentialing gained popularity as well, the organization changed structure and name. Finally, in 2006 the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) was born, overseeing the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) as well as the Commission on Professional Credentialing (CPC). The CPSE defines the accreditation process as an "established process of organizational self-assessment and analytical review" (Center for Public Safety Excellence [CSPE], 2015, p. 9). Interested departments must complete a series of steps on the path to accreditation including self-assessment, peer review, and a face-to-face hearing with CFAI officials. If completed within the established time lines the process should take from three to five years (CSPE, 2015).

During similar research Long (2016) reports 220 CFAI accredited departments in 2016. Today the CPSE website advertises 266 departments, an increase of 21 percent in three years, demonstrating a continued interest in the program (Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2019). The Guilford Fire Department is eager to jump on board provided the program is cost effective and the benefits realized do in fact assist the department justify its needs and validate its programs.

The Guilford Fire Department's problem associated with the accreditation process relates directly to the curriculum studied at the National Fire Academy in the Executive Development course. In unit two students learn about the transformational leadership model. The student manual references Bass and Riggio's 2006 description of transformational leadership as a style

of leadership that “inspires followers to commit to a shared vision and goals” (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2018, p. 2-13). In order for the GFD to move toward accreditation the leadership will need to inspire and galvanize the membership to embark on the journey together. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) also teach students the value of this style of leadership advising leaders to “show them the future” (p. 120), and that “by answering, in every possible way, the “why” question, you increase people’s willingness to endure the hardships that come with the journey to a better place” (p. 121). Unit eight covers resilience under stress, a basic survival technique for today’s executive leaders. In unit eleven the importance of applied research is discussed and the need for real, thoughtful, data rich evaluation of problems such as this one is examined. Without this applied research project, the Guilford Fire Department would not have the necessary data to make an informed decision regarding accreditation.

One of the U.S. Fire Administration’s strategic goals is to “Advance the professional development of fire service personnel” (U.S. Fire Administration [USFA], 2013, p. 13). The mission of the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE), of which the CFAI is a subsidiary, is: “To lead the fire and emergency services to excellence through the continuous quality improvement process of accreditation, credentialing, and education.” (Bruegman, 2018, para. 6) Conducting scholarly research to evaluate a program that would lead the GFD to excellence aligns this project with the strategic goals of the USFA.

Literature Review

Literature review for this applied research project started while the author was in residence at the National Fire Academy attending the Executive Development course as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP). The on-campus library was utilized to gather trade

journal articles on the topic as well as other applied research projects completed by Executive Fire Officer students on the topic of accreditation. After completion of the on-campus coursework literature review continued, primarily via internet searches, to gather additional relevant pieces including some post graduate dissertations on the topic of fire department accreditation as well as the ninth edition of the Fire and Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual (FESSAM); a document published by the Center for Public Safety Excellence as a road map of sorts.

What is involved in the process of accreditation?

The CPSE self-assessment manual clearly lays out the four benchmark levels of affiliation on the path to accreditation. Those levels are; registered agency, applicant agency, candidate agency, and accredited agency (CSPE, 2015). Each benchmark has associated requirements that must be met prior to moving forward in the process, as well as a time frame for completing those requirements.

The entry level of affiliation is the registered agency level. Based on the work load associated with this stop on the journey departments that enter the process have three years to complete the requirements needed to move on in the process (CSPE, 2015). Although this is the first official step in the process some will argue that there needs to be a dedication to the concept of continued self-improvement before beginning the journey (Eastman, Jones, & Stephenson, 2010). When evaluating accreditation for the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, Long (2016) gathered information affirming the concept that early team establishment as well as early communication with stakeholders is crucial during, if not before this registered agency step.

The self-assessment manual indicates three significant documents that need to be developed during this initial registered agency phase. A strategic plan, a risk assessment, and a

standard of cover document (CSPE, 2015) need to be developed if they do not exist currently. When evaluating the value of accreditation for the Lake Stevens Fire Department, Messer (2017) describes the strategic planning process as a series of joint meetings and planning sessions with department leaders as well as community stakeholders to discuss key issues facing their jurisdiction and how to align department goals with community needs. Strategic Planning alone can be a monumental undertaking. A review of Guilford Fire Department internal documentation revealed a strategic staffing plan published in 2004 and updated in 2010. This document is in response to a staffing study commissioned by the board of finance in 2004 (MMA Consulting Group, 2004). This plan addresses staffing of firehouses and emergency response, but would require significant work to meet the CFAI's more wholistic model.

The risk assessment process is also focused on all the programs and services the department provides not limited to emergency response (CSPE, 2015). Stouffer (2016) defines risk assessment as the "identification of potential and likely risks within a particular community, and the process of prioritizing these risks" (p. 2). This author's internal document review brought no formal risk analysis of any kind, eluding to significant work needed in this area. In 2016 the Center for Public Safety Excellence published Community Risk Assessment: Standards of Cover, a detailed manual to assist the accreditation team work through constructing these initial required documents. Confirming this authors suspicions, French (2016) reports in excess of 1,500 research hours being routine to create these documents.

Applicant agency is the second benchmark in the process and departments are advised to move to this step once the strategic plan, risk assessment, and standard of cover are complete (CSPE, 2015). During this second step in the process the agency has 18 months to dedicate to completion of the self-assessment manual (CSPE, 2015). Described as the "backbone of the

process” (Eastman et al., 2010, p. 2), this is where departments explain how they meet the 252 performance indicators set forth by the CFAI. Performance indicators are described as “a best management practice framework for running an agency” (CSPE, 2015, p. 10). It is at this step that a mentor is assigned to oversee and guide the process.

The penultimate step before becoming accredited is candidate agency status.

Cornerstones of this phase are the peer review team site visit as well as review of all the documents completed thus far (CSPE, 2015). CPSE states “the purpose of the peer team is to verify and validate that the agency is doing what they say they are doing.” (CSPE, 2015, p. 15) During this phase the candidate agency will receive feedback on their performance and must remain objective and take criticisms as a necessary constructive element of the process (Eastman et al., 2010). The peer review team will then recommend accredit, defer, or deny (CSPE, 2015). Finally, the agency must appear in person before the CFAI to review the report and answer any questions from the board. It is worth noting that there are continued requirements to maintain accreditation as well, however they are outside the scope of this research.

What is the total cost of becoming accredited including fees, salary, and travel?

When determining the monetary costs associated with accreditation the CFAI does not lay the information out in the self-published Fire and Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual, rather the reader is directed to publicsafetyexcellence.org to obtain that information. Assumedly, this is due to the potential for pricing to fluctuate more rapidly than the FESSAM is revised. The cost for a department to establish a relationship with CFAI and become a registered agency is \$570. The registered agency fee covers a three-year term and includes two texts; the fire and emergency services self-assessment manual, and the Community Risk assessment: standards of cover (Center for Public Safety Excellence, n.d.). Once the registered agency is

ready to move to the applicant agency stage the fees payable to CFAI become population driven.

Table 2 below demonstrates the fee schedule for a town of Guilford's statistic.

Table 2: CFAI Fee Schedule

Agency Stage	Fee
Registered	\$570
Applicant	\$6,250
Candidate	\$0
Accredited	\$1,250
Total	\$8,070

Source: <https://cpse.org/accreditation/how-to-get-accredited/>

It is important to note that although there are no fees for the candidate stage the CFAI recommends budgeting \$6,000 for travel expenses of the peer assessment team (Center for Public Safety Excellence, n.d.). Furthermore, there are mandatory training sessions for members to attend as well as employee compensation which can vary enormously based on factors such as geographic location, salary vs. hourly compensation, and structure of accreditation team.

This literature review found a range of estimated monetary cost to consider. Messer (2017) while researching a department in the same population bracket as Guilford identified costs of \$19,870 through the five-year process to achieve initial accreditation. This is consistent with research conducted at Eastern Kentucky University which reports a range of cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000 (Hickel, 2016). Hickel (2016) goes on to report that "the majority of interviewees cited cost as being a severe drawback to the pursuit of accreditation" (p. 25).

Although personnel cost vary widely throughout the country reports of 1,500 research hours are not uncommon and would need to be budgeted for appropriately (French, 2016).

What benefits do fire departments realize through the accreditation process?

Reviewing current literature revealed several purported benefits realized through accreditation including streamlined policy/procedure and the ability to justify budgets and

programs. The FESSAM considers the self-assessment process itself as the foremost benefit of accreditation (CSPE, 2015). This claim is rooted in the fact that the self-assessment model will allow departments to justify themselves when faced with performance-based budgeting, government accountability, or any new or greater oversight the department is subjected to on the basis of political or economic shift (CSPE, 2015). This ongoing process of self-assessment can bring to light not just what the department needs to improve on but can showcase how the department is currently meeting the needs of the community (Eastman et al., 2010). Jenkins (2017) agrees that the self-assessment process is the true take away. Members of the organization become accustomed to continuous improvement and feel the department is constantly heading forward.

Messer's 2017 research for Lake Stevens Fire reports 95% of respondents showed improved policy and procedure systems after completing the accreditation process. Hickel (2016) corroborates these results indicating streamlining policy and procedure and "defining roles and responsibilities" (p. 22) as major benefits to accreditation. Long (2016) also received similar results with what he calls "enhanced management performance" (p. 24) identified as the greatest benefit.

Current politics and economics dictate the need for data justified budgets and programs. That is a common theme throughout this research and essentially the incipience for this applied research project. Fagan (2017) relates the self-assessment standard of cover to a business contract between the community and the fire department. Allowing the stakeholders to know exactly what services they are getting, as well as why certain metrics are so important based on data, will paint a better picture as to why the fire department costs what it does. Seventy four percent of those asked the question in 2017 reported accreditation helped to justify their

programs and budget (Messer, 2017). Research has also shown that budget justification can be easier when addressing specific recommendations from a third-party review (Mera, 2014).

Why is New England slow to move toward accreditation?

This literature review revealed no evidence of existing research on this specific question. This shows the need for more investigation into the subject. Expanding an internet-based search away from fire department accreditation and to keywords such as: New England, traditionalist, mindset, perspective, and culture yielded some interesting results that help the author infer a connection to the original research question.

In a 2017 blog post on Medium.com Frank Ontario discusses the finer points of the New England mindset from his perspective growing up in Connecticut and moving to California at age 30. Ontario (2017) makes a short list of bullets related to the New England mindset; two of which have relevance here. “Fiercely independent” (para. 9), being the first, does not relate well to the peer review model of the CFAI program, and could be a reason local departments are not rushing to open their doors to accreditation. Ontario goes on to explain:

Tradition - is very important even if it is invisible and tradition is parochial within communities. Some homes and institutions were established in the 1600s giving a rich heritage and foundation in the past, and this lends to a conservative stance in all areas not just political. (Ontario, 2017, para. 11)

Having a traditional view as a cultural norm in an organization that prides itself on tradition as fire departments do could easily equate to lack of interest or desire in perceived “new” programs such as accreditation.

In 2012 George Mattei wrote an article focused on urban development and economic growth between New England and the Midwest. He has lived in both areas for substantial

periods of time, has a robust background in urban development, and lends interesting insight.

The beginning of the article discusses how people describe where they are from in both regions and why it differs. Mattei (2012) cites New England's long fixed political borders as a factor in identity of community. Other regions change borders through annexation quite regularly which could lead to a lack of firm city/town identity/tradition. This is also evident in Messer's 2017 research for Lake Stevens Fire where a series of annexations moved borders and added territory and population raising a possibly more obvious need for programs like strategic planning and accreditation. Politically, Mattei (2012) references "small box governments" (para. 16), meaning every town and city has complete autonomy in New England, coupled with a distinct lack of county government as factors contributing to the area's resistance to change.

Although slightly dated the theme here can be summed up by a quote from a 2005 *Hartford Courant* article: The Essence of Being a New Englander. In the article Greg Morago (2005) interviews then Editor of Yankee Magazine, Michael Carlton. Carlton explains what it is to be a New Englander in the following Quote: "We are more detached from the rest of the United States than any other region. We are prideful. Slower to change. Less adaptable. Surer of our values. Rooted in our history" (para. 13). All of these points make a perfect argument for why this region has yet to embrace the idea of fire department accreditation.

In summary, the steps in the process to accreditation, as well as the costs associated, and the benefits realized have all been well researched and have been presented in a straight forward nature. The work reviewed helped to develop survey questions for this project. Research question four regarding New England specifically is not well researched, this realization led this author to a more focused survey instrument distributed to a different sample.

Procedures

While in residency at the National Fire Academy attending the Executive Development course as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program this author began information collection regarding fire department accreditation. This information gathering led to the development of a problem statement: The Guilford Fire Department does not know what benefits would be realized through the accreditation process. This problem statement led to the development of a purpose statement: To determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with the process so that the Guilford Fire Department can make an informed decision regarding the process. The problem and purpose statements facilitated the development of 4 research questions, a) What is involved in the process of accreditation? b) What is the total cost of becoming accredited including fees, salary and travel? c) What benefits do fire departments realize through the accreditation process? d) Why is New England slow to move toward accreditation?

With these questions established, literature review began at the National Fire Academy library. Journal articles along with other EFO research papers on the topic of accreditation were gathered and reviewed. This review of current literature led to the development of 2 surveys for distribution; one to all current accreditation managers, and one to fire chiefs in the New England states.

The initial survey was sent to all current accreditation managers via email along with a cover letter explaining the research (appendix A). Contact information was gained from the CFAI and included 258 contacts. It was noted during the literature review that survey instruments do not always yield a high percentage of responses for this reason the author did not

narrow this sample based on population or any other criterion (Messer, 2017). Survey questions were developed to answer research questions a-c, and a second survey was developed to attempt to answer research question d based on the uniqueness of the question. This second survey was sent to members of the New England Fire Chiefs' Association, Inc. This distribution was facilitated by the Second Vice President of the organization through email contact from the author and was delivered electronically to 150 members along with a cover letter (appendix B). Because answering this research question required regionally specific experience the author chose to use the technique known as "judgmental or purposive sampling" (Kumar, 2014, p. 244), as this is useful when researching a topic that has been scarcely published to date (Kumar, 2014). Results for both surveys were then compiled and analyzed to determine research results and recommendations for the Guilford Fire Department. These results are available in appendices C and D respectively.

Limitations

As with most research there are some notable limitations associated with this project. The first notable limitation being the authors inexperience conducting and documenting this type of research. This project is the authors first of this magnitude and as with any vocation, experience will sharpen the results. Another limitation is the low return rate on both survey instruments.

The first survey to accreditation managers returned 69 responses out of a possible 258 recipients is a 25.9 percent yield and the second survey sent to the purposive sample returned only 11 or a possible 150 for just 7.3 percent return. These return rates are low and indicative of a need for further research in this area. It was pointed out by respondents that the survey question regarding other town/city agencies being accredited was flawed in that it needed to have a "none of the above" available response. Without that option potential respondents may have abandoned

the survey. The surveys were built in a web-based records management program that the Guilford Fire Department currently uses. Although this has proven effective one limitation is that all the questions defaulted to mandatory which may have inadvertently deterred some respondents.

Results

The purpose of this applied research project is to determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with the process so that the Guilford Fire Department can make an informed decision regarding the process. Based on a review of current literature and an analysis of the survey instrument responses the Guilford Fire Department has the information needed to make that informed decision. Utilizing the descriptive research method, results of the literature review as well as survey responses argue that accreditation will prove worthwhile for the Guilford Fire Department.

What is Involved in the Process of Accreditation?

This question was answered primarily by the review of current literature on the topic published by the CFAI itself as well as other authors and researchers. As stated in the literature review section there are 4 benchmarks on the path to accreditation; registered agency, applicant agency, candidate agency and accredited agency (CSPE, 2015). During a fire department's quest for accreditation there are several documents that need to be produced including a strategic plan, risk assessment, and standard of cover. Furthermore, the department must address the 252 performance indicators outlined in the self-assessment manual (CSPE, 2015). Literature review indicates 1,500 hours to complete these tasks (French, 2016; Messer, 2017).

Survey respondents were asked to approximate how many hours were spent on accreditation weekly. Thirty six of 69 or 52 percent responded less than 20 hours, 29 of 69 or 42

percent responded between 20 and 39 hours, and only 4 of 69 or 6 percent indicated 40 or more hours weekly spent on accreditation. Survey respondents were also asked to indicate the single largest roadblock to accreditation. Thirty seven of 69 respondents or 54 percent indicated time management as the largest roadblock to accreditation, 25 of 69 or 36 percent of respondents indicated justification of the program to agency members, 4 of 69 or 6 percent of respondents indicated financial impact, while 3 of 69 or 4 percent indicated justification of program to government officials.

What is the Total Cost of Becoming Accredited including Fees, Salary, and Travel?

Literature review determined that structured fees are set by CFAI and published on their website. A department serving a population of approximately 22,300 such as Guilford would pay \$8,070 in structured fees (Center for Public Safety Excellence, n.d.). further review of the Self-Assessment Manual reveals recommended travel budget for the peer review team during the candidate agency phase of \$6,000 (CSPE, 2015). The Self-Assessment Manual goes on to reveal that during the registered agency phase members must attend a four-day training session entitled: quality improvement through self-assessment, which Guilford will need to budget \$3,000 for based on current location of program and current travel rates. This brings the total fees and travel to \$17,070 for Guilford to achieve accreditation. This number is consistent with research conducted by Messer (2017) who identified costs of \$19,870, and Hickel (2016) who identified between \$10,000 and \$30,000.

Original research in the form of survey responses further corroborates these estimates. When asked if the CFAI's estimate of \$6,000 for peer review team travel is accurate 47 of 69 respondents or 68 percent agreed it was accurate while 19 of 69 respondents or 27 percent stated the cost was higher, and only 3 of 69 or 4 percent of respondents argued the cost was less than

\$6,000. The survey instrument also asked: at first look the CFAI appears to be upfront about the hard costs associated with accreditation. During the process did your agency incur any surprise expenses? Responses are as follows: 51 of 69 or 74 percent reported no surprise cost. Less than \$1,000 as well as \$1,000-\$5,000 each received 7 of 69 responses or 10 percent respectively, while more than \$5,000 was reported 4 of 69 times or 6 percent. The 6 percent of responses indicating over \$5,000 in surprise costs all serve populations more than double that of Guilford. Of the 18 total respondents that indicated surprise cost of any value, 13 or 72% serve larger populations than Guilford.

In order to identify salary costs the external survey asked what staffing model is used for the position of accreditation manager and whether or not respondents felt the model in place was working. Fifty seven percent reported using a full-time staff member with accreditation as a collateral duty. Nineteen percent reported using a full-time staff member with accreditation as a sole duty. Thirteen percent reported using one line person with accreditation as a collateral duty and four percent reported using multiple line persons in the same format. Seven percent reported other, meaning use of a contractor, etc. Adding an additional staff officer to the Guilford fire department for accreditation would cost a minimum of \$82,169 based on the current collective bargaining agreement pay rate for a Captain (*Firefighters contract, 2017*).

What Benefits do Fire Departments Realize Through the Accreditation Process?

All current literature reviewed for this applied research project indicates that the benefits of accreditation are plenty and certainly worth the investment. Major benefits revealed during said review are improved policy/procedure, better justification for programs and budgets, and lower public protection classification rating from the Insurance Services Office. The self-

assessment model is reported to be transformational in itself and can benefit organizational culture (Eastman et al., 2010).

Survey respondents were asked two questions regarding associated benefits. First, they were asked to report any tangible financial benefit to the program. Forty five of 69 respondents or 65 percent reported a lower PPC from the Insurance Services Office. Forty eight of 69 or 70 percent of respondents reported increased efficiency equaling cost savings. Forty eight of 69 or 70 percent of respondents reported increased transparency equaling a streamlined budget process. Twenty-nine percent of respondents also indicated other tangible financial benefits in their own words which are too lengthy to recount here but can be summed up as; improved labor/management relations, improved focus on short and long-term goals, improved political credibility, becoming a grant recipient, and increased support to fund improvements. Those comments are listed in appendix E.

The second survey question related to this research question asked respondents to select benefits advertised by CFAI that their agency realized. These results are tabulated below in table 3.

Table 3: Benefits Realized Through Accreditation

Advertised benefit	Surveyed	Responded yes	Percentage
Raise the profile of your agency within your community.	69	56	81%
Emphasize your agency's dedication to excellence to your stakeholders.	69	61	88%
Establish an agency-wide culture of continuous improvement.	69	52	75%
Assist with communicating your leadership's philosophies.	69	42	61%
Build positive relationships with your labor groups.	69	24	35%
Offer independent verification and validation of your agency's operations.	69	61	88%
Provide tangible data and information for your elected officials.	69	60	87%

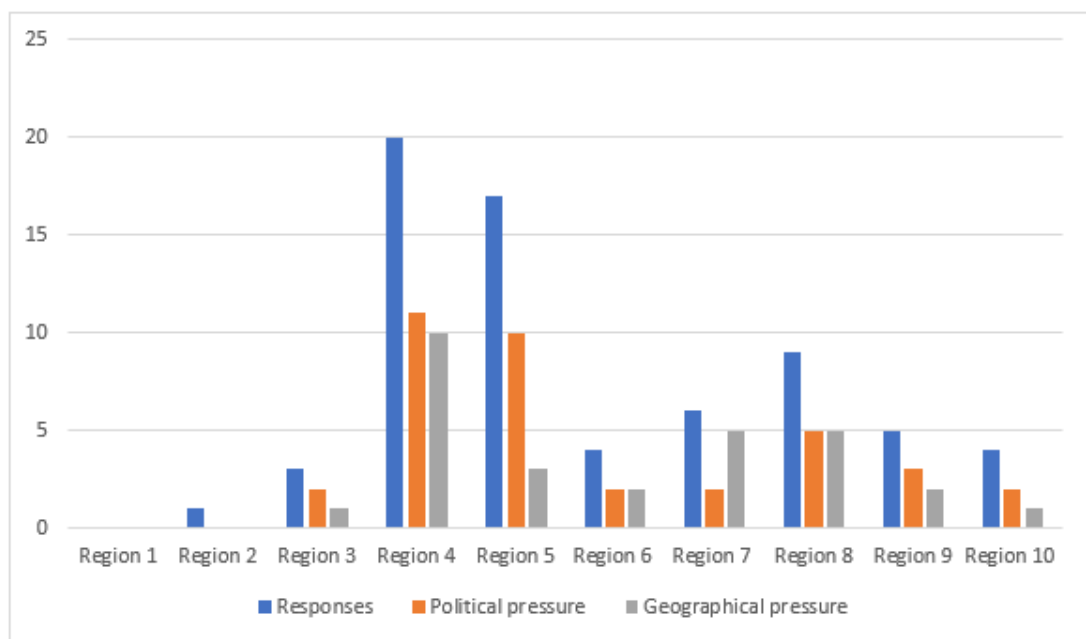
Source: *Executive Fire Officer accreditation external survey.*

Why is New England Slow to Move Toward Accreditation?

Answering the final research question proved more challenging when reviewing current literature as most of the available work on the topic is not related to fire departments and is also more opinion and observation than scholarly research. This question is deserving of further research. Respondents to the original survey sent to accreditation managers were asked to indicate which FEMA region they are located in as well as if they feel any political or geographical pressure to remain accredited. These survey questions were meant to reveal

whether or not accreditation has taken hold and has more value associated with it in certain areas. Overall 54 percent of respondents reported feeling political pressure to remain accredited while 42 percent reported feeling geographical pressure to remain accredited, meaning it is viewed as important in their respective area. Figure 4 below shows these results broken out by FEMA region.

Figure 1: Political and Geographical Pressure by FEMA Region



Source: *Executive Fire Officer Accreditation External Survey*

Based on the Results displayed in figure 1, accredited agencies in areas where it has become popular do feel external pressures to remain accredited. This information supports the idea that departments in New England (FEMA region 1) do not feel pressure to become accredited because it is not yet popular in the area. A survey question asking if other agencies with in the respondents’ jurisdiction are accredited, such as the police department or communication center, had no bearing on the results.

A separate survey instrument was sent to a purposive sample of New England fire chiefs and although the return rate was low indicating the need for further research, some conclusions can be drawn. When asked if the respondents' fire department had a relationship of any kind with CFAI at the time of the survey 100 percent reported no relationship. This sample was asked a similar question regarding the benefits advertised by CFIA as the previous sample. In this case the advertised benefits were laid out and the respondents were asked to choose benefits they felt would enhance their respective agencies, those results are displayed in table 4 below.

Table 4: Advertised Benefits That Would Enhance Department

Advertised benefit	Surveyed	Responded yes	Percentage
Raise the profile of your agency within your community.	11	10	91%
Emphasize your agency's dedication to excellence to your stakeholders.	11	9	82%
Establish an agency-wide culture of continuous improvement.	11	11	100%
Assist with communicating your leadership's philosophies.	11	6	55%
Build positive relationships with your labor groups.	11	4	36%
Offer independent verification and validation of your agency's operations.	11	9	82%
Provide tangible data and information for your elected officials.	11	9	82%

Source: *Executive Fire Officer Accreditation New England Survey*

The sample of New England chiefs was also asked to identify the largest perceived roadblock on the path to accreditation. Nine percent of respondents reported time management as the largest perceived roadblock, while 18 percent of respondents indicated justification to government officials, and justification to agency members respectively. The majority of respondents at 54 percent reported financial impact as the leading perceived roadblock to accreditation.

Based on information gathered during the literature review, a list of potential causes for New England's low involvement in fire department accreditation was developed. Survey respondents were asked to indicate which of those they felt was a contributing factor. Six of 11 respondents or 55 percent indicated traditionalist attitudes as a contributing factor. Four of 11 respondents or 36 percent indicated lack of strong regional/ county government. Five of 11 respondents or 45 percent indicated longer standing communities/ governments feel less need for third party justification. Four of 11 respondents or 36 percent indicated lack of regional pressure. Finally, six of 11 respondents or 55 percent indicated that the advertised benefits do not justify the cost of the program.

Discussion

While researching and attempting to evaluate the process and results of fire department accreditation it was noted that a portion of the literature reviewed, for example the Fire and Emergency Services self-assessment manual, is produced by the CFAI or its representatives and may be potentially biased or overstate the benefits. To combat this potential bias this researcher used several other pieces of original scholarly research to help answer the stated research questions. In his doctoral dissertation at Western Michigan University French (2016) conducted a metaevolution of the CFAI process; "the meta-evaluator gave the evaluation of the CFAI

agency accreditation process an overall rating of 88.5%, or very good...” (pp. 96-97). French goes on to state:

This rating represents the goal of the CFAI agency accreditation, to improve the ability for communities to recognize and reduce risk while improving the quality of life for citizens within the community; this goal is primarily being met with the current process (p. 97).

While conducting original research pertaining to the reported benefits of accreditation French’s (2016) research was confirmed and the accreditation process was again validated. Of the seven advertised benefits of fire department accreditation, over 60 percent of surveyed departments reported realizing all but one. Although difficult to measure one of the most significant reported benefits of accreditation is the self-assessment process itself (Eastman et al., 2010). A large part of this process is development of a strategic plan, if one does not exist, as it does not currently in Guilford. This benefit is also in line with the fire services study conducted at the request of the Town of Guilford in 2004. The final report of said study recommends development of a strategic plan that includes “time lines and measures of success” (MMA Consulting Group, 2004, p. 4). Criterion 3A in the CFAI Self-assessment model deals with strategic planning and requires a published plan that is “guiding the activities of the agency” (CSPE, 2015, p. 118). The 2004 fire service study goes on to advise Guilford’s department leadership to “develop performance standards to measure response effectiveness” (MMA Consulting Group, 2004, p. 5). The CFAI’s self-assessment model is broken into 45 criteria with 252 individual performance indicators (FESSAM page 113). Criterion 2C deals with “current deployment and performance” (CSPE, 2015, p. 116) while criterion 2D deals with “planning for maintaining and improving response capabilities” (CSPE, 2015, p. 117). The 2004 fire service

study also calls for the department leadership to continuously measure fire department response against internally developed performance standards (MMA Consulting Group, 2004). Literature review as well as original research conducted during this applied research project conclude that the CFAI accreditation model of continuous improvement is largely what these consultants recommended for Guilford's fire service.

Evaluating the cost of the entire program proved difficult because travel expenses and salary cost are variable. This authors research indicates that the fees of accreditation would be \$8,070 and travel costs are estimated at \$9,000. This estimate of \$17,070 is consistent with research conducted by Messer (2017) who identified costs of \$19,870, and Hickel (2016) who identified between \$10,000 and \$30,000. Original research conducted confirms accuracy as 68 percent of survey respondents indicated CFAI's estimated travel budget is accurate.

The only staffing model that will add cost to the program is that which will incur overtime. Guilford's staff officers are salaried and the line officers are hourly. Staffing the accreditation manager as a collateral duty for a staff officer or a line officer during normal shift hours will not increase the cost. Fifty seven percent of those surveyed for this applied research project indicated they staff the accreditation manager as a collateral duty or a full-time staff officer, and of those respondents, 67 percent report the model serves their respective agency well. In the event the Guilford Fire department pursues accreditation with this model, all programs managed by the perspective accreditation manager should be evaluated. Accreditation is reported to consume less than 20 labor hours per week by 52 percent of survey respondents while 42 percent reported 20-39 hours per week. It may prove less likely for current programs to suffer if the duties were shared by line officers who could commit 4-5 labor hours per week during normal shift hours as not to incur additional cost and not to neglect other current

programs managed by staff officers. Adding additional personnel for the sole purpose of accreditation would prove cost prohibitive based on the current economic climate. Another recommendation from the 2004 fire service study conducted in Guilford was to add an assistant chief that would be the fire marshal and oversee that division (MMA Consulting Group, 2004). This position has yet to be instituted but there is potential for adding accreditation to this job description at inception and further research is warranted in this area.

“Fiercely independent” (Ontario, 2017, para. 9), and “detached” (Morago, 2012, para. 13), are not terms associated with forward progress and continuous improvement. Although current literature is sparse and survey responses were low indicating the need for further research, some useful information regarding accreditation and the New England area can be gathered. Although not currently affiliated with the CFAI in any way 100 percent of the New England chiefs surveyed reported that the advertised benefits of accreditation would in fact positively impact their respective departments. The Guilford Fire Department has a history of progress exceeding many of its neighboring comparable agencies (Steiner, 1975). This progressive nature coupled with the results of this applied research project and the comparison against the 2004 fire service study conducted to evaluate the departments structure and resource deployment make a strong argument for the Guilford Fire Department to pursue accreditation.

Transforming a rural New England fire department into an accredited agency will prove to be an “adaptive challenge” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 13), for Guilford’s leadership. Time Management and justification of the program to agency members are the two leading reported road-blocks on the path to accreditation. The benefits to the program including streamlined policy/procedure and the ability to better justify budgets and programs are proven and worthwhile. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) also teach leaders to “Hold Steady” – “maintaining your

poise so that you can plan the best next step” (p. 114). With the results of this research the Guilford Fire Department has the information needed to make an informed decision regarding the accreditation process.

Recommendations

The purpose of this applied research project is to determine the benefits of becoming accredited, as well as the cost associated with this process so that the Guilford Fire Department can make an informed decision regarding the process. Using the results of a literature review coupled with original research in the form of survey instruments, this ARP provides the information needed to make that informed decision. The following recommendations are offered to assist the Guilford Fire Department leadership team navigate this decision-making process.

- Hold information session with town government officials to explain the process, display the benefits, discuss the cost, and establish support.
- Hold information session with fire department members to explain the process, display the benefits, and establish buy-in as this is reported to be a potential road-block.
- Remain aware of the presence of the traditional New England attitudes and perceptions, and the potential for resistance.
- Solicit interested members to serve on an ad-hoc committee to evaluate feasibility.
- Create a realistic time line based on work load and available labor hours, consider the use of project management software, as time management is often reported as a threat to the process.
- Continue evaluation of recommendations from the 2004 fire service study and the 2010 strategic staffing plan against the CFAI model to determine overlap.

- Develop and evaluate a program budget based on the results of this research and the chosen staffing model.

This ARP contains the information needed for the leadership team of the Guilford Fire Department to make an informed decision regarding the process of accreditation based on cost and benefit. While 97 percent of accreditation managers surveyed agree the process is worthwhile, that is not an indication of feasibility for Guilford. Whether or not a move toward accreditation is feasible at this time is deserving of further research.

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Appendix A



THE OLD STONE HOUSE

Town of Guilford

Fire Department
390 Church Street
Guilford, Connecticut 06437

Ph. 203 463-9156
Fax 203 433-8005

1 March 2019

Dear Accreditation Manager:

As you are the AM of an accredited agency through the CFAI, I am writing to respectfully request your help with an applied research project associated with the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program.

I am currently researching the benefits and costs associated with the Guilford Fire Department pursuing accreditation through the CFAI. Your departments experiences will be instrumental in steering us in the right direction and helping us make an informed decision regarding the process.

To assist with this project please complete the survey at the link provided, or if you feel it should be forwarded to the Chief or someone else in your agency please do so. Your responses will prove to be most helpful as we make our decision. Survey responses will be compiled on Friday March 15th, 2019.

If you have any questions or issues with the survey please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and assistance with this project.

Respectfully:



Captain Clint Haverkamp
Guilford Fire Department
Mobile: 203.223.6046

Appendix B



Town of Guilford

Fire Department
390 Church Street
Guilford, Connecticut 06437

Ph. 203 453-8056
Fax 203 453-8005

15 March 2019

Dear Chief:

As the Chief of a fire department in New England I am writing to respectfully request your help with an applied research project associated with the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program.

I am currently researching the benefits and costs associated with the Guilford Fire Department pursuing accreditation through the CFAI. Regardless of your level of knowledge and or experience with the process your experience will be useful in determining if accreditation is right for Guilford.

To assist with this project please complete the survey at the link provided, or if you feel it should be forwarded to someone else in your agency please do so. Your responses will prove to be most helpful as we make our decision. Survey responses will be compiled on Friday March 29th, 2019.

Survey link: [New England Chiefs accreditation survey](#)

If you have any questions or issues with the survey please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and assistance with this project.

Respectfully:

Clint Haverkamp

Captain Clint Haverkamp
Guilford Fire Department

Appendix C

Executive Fire Officer Accreditation External Survey Results

1. Population served		
Less than 10,000	2 of 69 or 3%	
10,000-20,000	5 of 69 or 7%	
20,000-30,000	6 of 69 or 9%	
30,000-50,000	8 of 69 or 12%	
More than 50,000	48 of 69 or 70%	
2. Area served		
Less than 10 square miles	5 of 69 or 7%	
10-25 square miles	11 of 69 or 16%	
25-40 square miles	9 of 69 or 13%	
40-50 square miles	9 of 69 or 13%	
More than 50 square miles	35 of 69 or 51%	
3. Number of uniformed personnel		
Less than 50	4 of 69 or 6%	
50-75	19 of 69 or 28%	
75-100	6 of 69 or 9%	
100-125	10 of 69 or 14%	
More than 125	30 of 69 or 43%	
4. Which FEMA region are you located in?		
Region 1	0 of 69 or 0%	
Region 2	1 of 69 or 1%	
Region 3	3 of 69 or 4%	
Region 4	20 of 69 or 29%	
Region 5	17 of 69 or 25%	
Region 6	4 of 69 or 6%	
Region 7	6 of 69 or 9%	
Region 8	9 of 69 or 13%	
Region 9	5 of 69 or 7%	
Region 10	4 of 69 or 6%	
5. Form of government your agency reports to		
Council-Manager	19 of 69 or 28%	
Mayor-Council	26 of 69 or 38%	
Commission	22 of 69 or 32%	
Town meeting	1 of 69 or 1%	
Representative Town Meeting	1 of 69 or 1%	
6. The CFAI recommends a budget of \$6000 for the peer team travel expenses. In your experience is this an accurate estimate?		
Yes	47 of 69 or 68%	

	No actual cost is less	3 of 69 or 4%
	No actual cost is higher	19 of 69 or 28%
7.	At first look the CFAI appears to be upfront about the hard costs associated with accreditation. During the process did your agency incur any “surprise expenses”?	
	No	51 of 69 or 74%
	Yes less than \$1000	7 of 69 or 10%
	Yes \$1000-\$5000	7 of 69 or 10%
	Yes more than \$5000	4 of 69 or 6%
8.	What staffing model does your agency use for the position of accreditation manager?	
	Full time staff member sole duty	13 of 69 or 19%
	Full time staff member collateral duty	39 of 69 or 57%
	Line personnel collateral duty	9 of 69 or 13%
	Multiple line personnel collateral duty	3 of 69 or 4%
	Other	5 of 69 or 7%
9.	Do you feel this staffing model serves your agency appropriately?	
	Yes	47 of 69 or 68%
	No	22 of 69 or 32%
10.	Labor hours per week spent on accreditation.	
	Less than 20	36 of 69 or 52%
	20-39	29 of 69 or 42%
	40 or more	4 of 69 or 6%
11.	Has your agency/community realized any tangible financial benefits as a direct result of the accreditation process?	
	Lower ISO PPC	45 of 69 or 65%
	Increased efficiency equaling cost savings	33 of 69 or 48%
	Increased transparency equaling a streamlined budget process	48 of 69 or 70%
	Other	20 of 69 or 29%
12.	The CFAI advertises the following benefits to accreditation. Based on your experience, please indicate all benefits realized by your agency.	
	Raise the profile of your agency with your community	56 of 69 or 81%
	Emphasize your agency’s dedication to excellence to your stakeholders	61 of 69 or 88%
	Establish an agency-wide culture of continuous improvement	52 of 69 or 75%
	Assist with communicating your leadership’s philosophies	42 of 69 or 61%
	Build positive relationships with your labor groups	24 of 69 or 35%
	Offer independent verification and validation of your agency’s operations	61 of 69 or 88%
	Provide tangible data and information for your elected officials	60 of 69 or 87%
13.	Are other departments in your city/county accredited?	
	Police department	52 of 69 or 75%
	Communications center	35 of 69 or 51%
	Department of public works	22 of 69 or 32%
14.	Do you feel political pressure to remain accredited?	

	Yes	37 of 69 or 54%
	No	32 of 69 or 46%
15. Do you feel geographical pressure to remain accredited? In other words, is it important in your area?		
	Yes	29 of 69 or 42%
	No	40 of 69 or 58%
16. What do you see as the single largest road block to accreditation?		
	Time management	37 of 69 or 54%
	Financial impact	4 of 69 or 6%
	Justification of program to government officials	3 of 69 or 4%
	Justification of program to agency members	25 of 69 or 36%
17. After completing the process and having your agency accredited, in your opinion, is the accreditation process through the CFAI a worthwhile endeavor for fire departments?		
	Yes	67 of 69 or 97%
	No	2 of 69 or 3%
18. What is your agency status with the CFAI?		
	Accredited	54 of 69 or 78%
	Applicant	3 of 69 or 4%
	Candidate	4 of 69 or 6%
	Registered	8 of 69 or 12%

Appendix D
Executive Fire Officer Accreditation New England Survey Results

1. Population served		
	Less than 10,000	5 of 11 or 45%
	10,000-20,000	1 of 11 or 9%
	20,000-30,000	2 of 11 or 18%
	30,000-50,000	2 of 11 or 18%
	More than 50,000	1 of 11 or 9%
2. Area served		
	Less than 10 square miles	0 of 11 or 0%
	10-25 square miles	6 of 11 or 55%
	25-40 square miles	3 of 11 or 27%
	40-50 square miles	2 of 11 or 18%
	More than 50 square miles	0 of 11 or 0%
3. Number of uniformed personnel		
	Less than 50	7 of 11 or 64%
	50-75	0 of 11 or 0%
	75-100	2 of 11 or 18%
	100-125	1 of 11 or 9%
	More than 125	1 of 11 or 9%
4. Form of government your agency reports to		
	Council-Manager	2 of 11 or 18%
	Mayor-Council	3 of 11 or 27%
	Commission	0 of 11 or 0%
	Town meeting	4 of 11 or 36%
	Representative Town Meeting	1 of 11 or 9%
	Other	1 of 11 or 9%
5. The CFAI advertises the following benefits to accreditation. Based on your experience, please indicate all benefits realized by your agency.		
	Raise the profile of your agency with your community	10 of 11 or 91%
	Emphasize your agency's dedication to excellence to your stakeholders	9 of 11 or 82%
	Establish an agency-wide culture of continuous improvement	11 of 11 or 100%
	Assist with communicating your leadership's philosophies	6 of 11 or 55%
	Build positive relationships with your labor groups	4 of 11 or 36%
	Offer independent verification and validation of your agency's operations	9 of 11 or 82%
	Provide tangible data and information for your elected officials	9 of 11 or 82%
6. What do you see as the single largest road block to accreditation?		
	Time management	1 of 11 or 9%

Financial impact	6 of 11 or 55%
Justification of program to government officials	2 of 11 or 18%
Justification of program to agency members	2 of 11 or 18%
7. The Commission on Fire Accreditation International was established in 1996 and currently there are 258 accredited fire departments. Only 1 of those is a municipal fire department in New England. In your opinion, what are the leading causes of New England's low involvement.	
Traditionalist attitudes	6 of 11 or 55%
Lack of strong regional/county governments	4 of 11 or 36%
Longer standing communities/governments fell less need for third party justification	5 of 11 or 45%
Lack of regional pressure	4 of 11 or 36%
Advertised benefits do not justify cost of program	6 of 11 or 55%
8. Going from unaffiliated to accredited can take approximately 5 years and cost tens of thousands of dollars. Assuming proper planning, would this be feasible for your agency based on current economical/political climate.	
Yes	1 of 11 or 9%
No	6 of 11 or 55%
Conditional	4 of 11 or 36%
9. Is your agency currently involved with the CFAI in any way?	
Registered	0 of 11 or 0%
Applicant	0 of 11 or 0%
Candidate	0 of 11 or 0%
Accredited	0 of 11 or 0%
No affiliation	11 of 11 or 100%

Appendix E

Executive Fire Officer Accreditation External Survey Results:

Other Tangible Benefits Realized through Accreditation

- Support from council and City leadership to fund improvement or enhancement opportunities. Which in turn have a tangible ROI either in efficiency or other areas.
- Relationship with community and connection with accreditation and outcomes
- We have vastly improved how we analyze our performance. We have instituted a AAR program, changed dispatch center to improve call processing by over 60 seconds. We recognized that our SOGs were outdated and needed to be reviewed. We completely reworked out Strategic Plan. I can go on and on about what accreditation has led us to improve
- None - First Accreditation
- None yet.
- Continual improvement on our programs
- Eliminated contract services by adding a 24-hr ALS squad
- automatic aid partners are also accredited and therefore play by the same rules. our health and safety program is much better now. We send a much better response package to incident rated as moderate and high
- We are a DoD Agency. while it has helped secure funds, it was not the sole reason
- Relocated and ambulance based on response data and Council chose to add another apparatus and staffing to satisfy their constituents in the district that lost the ambulance.

- FEMA SAFER Grants
- actual performance-based objectives that are measurable; these translated into hard data for a successful tax increase and additional staffing/ambulance
- Political Status/Credibility
- We are in process at this time, complete
- First-I think it is important to point out that you get the full benefit of accreditation by having it built into your way of business. It is not something “extra” that should be a burden or that you have to justify with the number of hours spent on it, financial benefit, etc. It is a model that helps hold you accountable and you benefit by being transparent and getting outside experts that will come in and review your processes and give you recommendations.
- increased staffing / resources
- Better justification for budgetary allocation for needs. Improved cooperation between labor/management. Improved identification and focus upon long- and short-term goals/objectives
- 3 additional apparatus and 3 stations