



Frequently Asked Questions

EXTENDED VERSION

Certipol

Center for Professional Certification of Police Agencies

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1. What is police certification?

Police certification is the recognition granted when a police agency's institutional practices comply with the international standards recognized for police work in a democratic state.

These standards are based on successful police management practices that, using a systematic and integrated approach, have proved to be effective in the administration of police services to ensure that they are professional, community-oriented and respectful of human rights.

2. Why is it useful?

Police certification is useful to promote a higher quality of police services, and provides a means to enhance the level of trust and respect between the agency and the community. It also allows police work to develop in a safer environment in terms of their physical integrity, job stability and legal responsibility.

In order to obtain certification, an agency must implement mechanisms that allow for continuous improvement through institutional training and learning processes. Meanwhile, the adoption of accountability practices that accompany certification allow the community to influence this learning process, stay informed about progress, and be assured of the police agency's appropriate management and control.

For their part, the members of an agency will have written guidelines for the performance of their duties. These guidelines provide clarity on their expected performance, which give the officers greater control of the legal and administrative limits within which to operate. Said guidelines contain procedures which are developed based on institutional experience and international practices to offer greater physical security for the officer during the performance of his or her duties. Likewise, certification demands clear rules that provide certainty to officers about their permanence and development within the institution, because both these issues depend exclusively on his or her decisions and performance.



3. How is it done?

Through using standardized certification processes, the institutional guidelines and practices of police agencies are audited with pre-established criteria that consider local requirements as well as internationally recognized best practices.

The standards were not developed to implement a hegemonic police force, and thus they are limited to the establishment of minimum guidelines based on internationally applicable principles.

4. Who does it?

The Center for Professional Police Certification, which is an independent organization with specialized personnel in the techniques necessary to follow the standardized, audited and credited processes. The Center's independent character and multidisciplinary approach allow it to value compliance with standards based exclusively on objective technical criteria.

5. Is it a mandatory process?

Police certification is a voluntary process to enhance and support political and police leaders who wish to reform their police agencies in order to achieve international police standards in a democracy. Because it is voluntary, those agencies entering into certification illustrate their commitment to excellence in policing.

However, once a agency has decided to participate in a certification process, it must commit to obtaining the resources and adopting the necessary measures to ensure the participation of all the members of the agency in order to achieve and maintain certification, because they have enter into a commitment to the community.



6. What criteria does the certification include?

In order to certify a police agency, we verify: that clear and sufficient guidelines have been established that allow officers to precisely understand how they are expected to perform in the different situations they must face; that the scope of the action defined by the guidelines is appropriate in terms of the applicable legislation, respect for human rights, and professional practice and ethics; that effective control mechanisms are in place to ensure that police performance is compliant with the guidelines; that the officers have the knowledge, skills and equipment necessary to act according to the guidelines; that there are established procedures to correct performance that does not comply with the guidelines, both individually and institutionally; and that the agency has incorporated accountability mechanisms that allow the community to be aware of the progress and the challenges of their police force's performance.

7. What is certified?

That the agency has implemented and follows the management practices to run, supervise and correct their officers' actions under standards both internationally recognized and accepted by the community.

A certified agency does everything in its power to ensure that their officers can fulfill their duty by providing them with guidelines, incentives, training and the equipment they need. It also has mechanisms to ensure that the performance of its members falls within the established guidelines and the capacities necessary to correct any deviation, both individually and institutionally.

8. Why start with use of force?

Adequate or inadequate use of force is the most determining factor in the relationship between police agencies and their communities. Because police certification is an effort to improve the quality of police services in relation to the standards expected by the community, use of force is the most important area for this objective to succeed.



A process of institutional change like the one set in motion by certification is complex, takes time and requires resources. Thus, it is strategic to focus the reform efforts towards priority areas in order to obtain more control over the change process and improve chances of success. Starting with use of force, which is linked to the institution's legitimacy in order to fulfill its mandate, is, thus, a priority. Obtaining certification in use of force implies that, at least within this fundamental area, the agency's performance is at the level of those police forces that most respect human rights in the world. Once this transcendental change has been certified in an institution, other important areas of police management can be developed and certified, through previous experience and collaboration with the community.

9. What does certification guarantee?

Certification guarantees that the police agency has undertaken important actions so that the institution's and the officers' performance comply with the standards accepted by the community and recognized internationally.

With this the individual actions of each member of the certified organization can be expected to be efficient, effective, honest, legal, democratic and respectful of human rights; and that when this does not occur, the necessary corrective and preventive measures are taken.

10. Is it the institution that is certified, or the individuals that belong to it?

The institution is certified. However, in order of it to be certified, the agency must have internal procedures to certify that every officer is competent in the function he or she has.

Within the criteria for granting certification, we verify that the agency permanently evaluates its officers to ensure that they have and apply the necessary knowledge and skills to adequately operate their equipment and satisfactorily perform the tasks assigned to them. This means that the agencies must have the different functions and their relation to equipment and skills well defined, as well as the instruments necessary to evaluate the officers' preparation and performance.



11. If an institution is certified, what happens to an officer that does not meet the criteria?

A certified agency has specially developed control mechanisms to improve its capacity to detect problems that may eventually lead to inadequate performance of an officer; these mechanisms allow the agency to intervene preemptively. These very mechanisms also allow the agency to precisely and quickly identify individuals whose performance does not meet the criteria. In turn, this lets agencies be more effective in correcting individual problems, be it through training, change of function for the officer, separation from service or whatever else may proceed, depending on the case.

Further, through knowledge of the probable institutional causes behind each individual shortcoming, and by being able to identify patterns in police performance, a certified agency has the necessary tools for institutional learning, and can take measures to prevent situations that, otherwise, would be reiterative.

12. Who pays for certification?

The cost of certification must be covered by the interested police agency, with their own funds or through other financing methods.

While the first beneficiary of certification, and thus the one that must cover the costs, is the agency itself, there are other beneficiaries of a process of this nature that could be interested in sharing the financial obligations. The three powers of government would be directly benefited by the certification of police agencies in their jurisdictions, so it is likely that they would allocate resources to this end.

13. How long does certification take?

The certification process, in all of its stages, can take anywhere from a few months to three years, depending on several factors such as the size of the agency and the areas subject to certification.



Certification contemplates a preparation stage for the agency, during which, besides working intensively on development, implementation and compliance with guidelines, it must make important efforts of internal communication and work with those outside the institution in order to prepare its members for the continuous change process that certification will bring about. This stage and its important challenges will take different amounts of time for the agencies involved in a certification process, depending on their institutional development, internal morale, and political will, among other factors.

14. Can certification be revoked?

Yes, when the annual evaluation that accompanies certification concludes that the agency has stopped complying with the criteria that originated certification.

However, a agency that has obtained certification will be immersed in a permanent review and learning process that will strengthen its capacity to successfully face the challenges ahead, so it is unlikely that it will lose its certification without a deliberate change in the institution's policies that are implicitly endorsed by the community.

15. What happens if a agency is not certified?

A more and more competitive environment is expected in public safety. In time, the legitimacy of certified agencies will surpass all those that are not certified. A certified agency implies a better offer of public safety and support for the development of the community. On the other hand, in the mid-term, an uncertified agency could imply, among other consequences, an impediment for the creation of social harmony and a competitive economical environment. The lack of certification represents greater political, financial and legitimacy risks for the institution and the governments responsible for its control, as well as labor, legal and physical risks for the agency's officers.



16. How can agencies' that are far from professional standards reach certification?

The certification process may become complex and slow for a agency with practices far from professional standards. However, by becoming involved in a continuous improvement process, in which different standards can be obtained one by one, agencies' can eventually reach certification, which would make their practices comparable to those of the best police forces. The monetary, technical and human challenges are considerable for a agency in this situation, but the only indispensable element for achieving certification is the will of the political and police leaders of the institution.

17. Why not certify agencies in the United States, where there are already organizations doing it?

Our country's agencies require a certification process that caters to the challenges that exist in this country's reality and in the Mexican police model, independent of the fact that this model may reflect successful international experiences. Even when the principals of police action are the same in every democracy, differences in the organization, legal competences and training, among other factors, make it difficult to apply a certification model designed for agencies in the United States to Mexican agencies. On the other hand, it is very important, in our country, in order gain the trust of the community, that the carrying out and supervision of certification involves civil society, and not only police authorities.

18. Does it have international validity?

The Center for Professional Certification of Police Agencies has established a collaboration network with institutions of international prestige, in order for police certification standards that comply with internationally accepted principles for police services in a democracy, which gives certification international validity.



19. Why would a police agency in Mexico want certification?

Aside from such benefits as greater security for their officers and better management mechanisms, it would obtain legitimacy and trust from the community it serves and must work with.

For political leaders, certification implies the possibility of demonstrating effective progress in the short and medium terms, which would otherwise be difficult to perceive for the community. For police institutions, certification is important for their legitimization, improvement on risk management and in order to provide the necessary support based on evidence of best practices in policing. For the members of a agency, certification implies more security in all areas.

20. Why believe in this, if no previous effort to improve the police has been successful?

International experience has shown that it is possible to reform police agencies to achieve a truly democratic police service that is respectful of human rights.

Police certification has a systematic and participative focus that previous efforts in Mexico lacked. It seeks to improve police work by permanently evaluating all the aspects related to it, and making results available. It is not a specific, temporary improvement program, such as training or equipment for operative personnel. It is rather a continuous improvement process of police services, focused on the needs of the community, through the improvement of police management practices or their permanent review.

21. How can we know that this process won't be corrupted?

The certification process will be open, transparent, and subject to a scrupulous accountability process. Review of the process is relatively simple, as it is based mainly on the evaluation of objective criteria that can be corroborated and thus, guarantee the process' impartiality and integrity. Periodically, there will be independent audits, and the whole process will be permanently reviewed by a Board of Advisors, made up by



representatives from the community and police agencies.

22. Are there successful certification examples in the world?

The use of police certification has been important in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, in order for police agencies there to improve the levels of recognition and trust by the communities they serve, which have accepted their methods and recognize the quality of their services. Certification has been fundamental for the development of other sectors and professions in which, due to the delicate nature of their functions, it is indispensable to provide the users or beneficiaries with certainties about the quality of the services and products provided.