



NATIONAL POLICING INSTITUTE

Pursuing Excellence Through Science and Innovation

THE ACCREDITATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN MEXICO

MAY 2024



NATIONAL POLICING INSTITUTE

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ABOUT NPI

The National Policing Institute is a non-partisan and independent nonprofit organization dedicated to pursuing excellence in policing through science and innovation. We envision police and communities working together to implement best practices that are informed or supported by research, resulting in safe, healthy, economically thriving, and mutually trusting communities. Learn more at www.policinginstitute.org.

ABOUT THE BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS (INL)

The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) was created in 1978 to reduce drug trafficking into the US from Latin America. INL has two complementary core competencies: helping partner governments assess, build, reform, and sustain competent and legitimate criminal justice systems and developing and implementing the architecture necessary for international drug control and cross-border law enforcement cooperation.



ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, INC. (CALEA)

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation whose purpose is to improve the delivery of public safety services by maintaining a body of professional standards that support the administration of accreditation programs. It is not part of, or beholden to, any governmental entity.

For more than four decades, CALEA has demonstrated the capacity to deliver accreditation services through industry-accepted best practice standards. The organization has also provided the service internationally in a manner that maintains program integrity in a portable format. CALEA has developed regional program manager resources for Mexico in support of the country's cultural needs.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This report reflects a compilation of information gathered from many individuals who contributed to its creation. Participating in interviews or providing information for this report does not imply endorsement of the expressed findings, recommendations, or opinions.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

With the culmination of nearly eight years of engagement throughout Mexico to advance the professionalization of public safety, we reflect on this investment of time and resources as the beginning of an evolution, as shown by many significant accomplishments.

The primary goal of the funding generously provided by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), US Department of State was to support Mexican public safety agencies in their pursuit of international accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). Indeed, 70 law enforcement agencies, communications centers, and training academies successfully earned accreditation representing a major leap forward for the country of Mexico.

Earning the distinction of CALEA accreditation is significant and signals not only the intention to be a highly professional organization but also, that an agency has shown a commitment to change from within. A key goal of the National Policing Institute (NPI) was to embed advanced thinking, decision making, and policing practices throughout the agencies to help them meet and exceed the accreditation standards within their policy frameworks. NPI also infused evidence-based principles and innovation in our technical assistance and training. Though difficult to measure in terms of impact, we are encouraged by the creation of the Accreditation Coalition for Public Security Institutions of Mexico (CAISPMEX), changes to policy and practices, and the work of many agencies to maintain accreditation beyond INL's funding support.

We are also encouraged by the strong commitment to change and professionalization demonstrated by so many public safety leaders and staff throughout Mexico. If there are any regrets from this work, it is that the American public and others around the world did not have the opportunity to see the incredible leadership and dedication to effective and accountable public safety that we consistently saw throughout this project.

While this report cannot detail every change and every benefit of the support provided to Mexican public safety agencies, we are pleased to highlight some of the many changes that have taken place and will continue to take place in the future.



NPI is grateful for INL's support and partnership, CALEA's collaboration, and the efforts of many public safety leaders throughout Mexico who contributed to this project. We look forward to continuing to support change, professionalism, and accreditation across Mexico's public safety landscape.

Sincerely,
James H. Burch, II

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a final horizontal stroke.

President

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I. INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC SAFETY IN MEXICO

Mexico's civil-law justice system and federal-state-municipal policing infrastructure are comprised of more than 450,000 law enforcement and public safety personnel (Mastrofski et al., 2007). This presents a unique set of challenges that must be considered when undertaking any policing initiative. In addition, there are other critical factors impacting the country's law enforcement efforts.

For almost a decade, violence and crime perpetrated by warring criminal organizations has threatened citizen security and governance in parts of Mexico. While the illicit drug trade has long been prevalent in Mexico, an increasing number of criminal organizations are fighting for control of smuggling routes into the United States and local drug markets. This violence resulted in more than 60,000 deaths in Mexico during the Felipe Calderón Administration (December 2006-November 2012) (Seelke & Finklea, 2011).

To combat these record-high violent crime rates, Mexico has focused on disrupting the drug cartels, confronting corruption, and attempting to professionalize policing in Mexico's federal, state, and municipal police agencies.

In addition to the high-profile, drug-related violence plaguing Mexico, general violence, property crime, and corruption have also been on the rise. The 2015 National Victimization Survey, conducted by Mexico's National Institute for Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI]), estimated that only 10.5% of crimes are reported by Mexican citizens, with two-thirds of victims indicating they did not report crimes because they did not trust the authorities and/or they thought



it was a waste of time (Meyer, 2014). The data also revealed that concerns about safety and security are top-of-mind among survey respondents, outpacing fear of losing employment, poverty, health issues, and education.

US-MEXICO RELATIONSHIP

The United States and Mexico have deep and longstanding economic ties, common security concerns, and a shared border. Consequently, the US has a vested interest in assisting Mexico with developing successful initiatives to combat these violent crime issues. Additionally, Mexico serves as a significant source of drugs coming to the US—it is the largest supplier of heroin as well as a major transit point for cocaine within the US market (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2021). While the illicit drug trade has long been prevalent in Mexico, an increasing number of criminal organizations are fighting for control of local drug markets and smuggling routes into the US. As a result of this violence, Mexico ended 2017 with the highest number of murders in modern history (Dittmar, 2018), and many citizens have lost faith in the Mexican justice system and the rule of law.

In December of 2008, during the Calderon Administration, the US took strong steps to establish the Mérida Initiative, an unprecedented bilateral partnership, which signified a joint effort to combat drug-fueled violence. The US assistance focuses on (1) disrupting organized criminal groups, (2) institutionalizing the rule of law, (3) creating a 21st-century border, and (4) building strong and resilient communities (Seelke & Finklea, 2011).

Since its implementation, the initiative has led to a “new architecture for bilateral security cooperation, provided tangible support to Mexico’s security and judicial institutions, and helped to galvanize joint efforts to stop the flow of weapons and money, and the demand for drugs” (Ocampomi, 2021, para 1).

Despite the considerable progress made through the Mérida Initiative, there were calls for more to be done. A report from the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), in response to reforms to provide “accreditation” for new police officers hired in Mexican law enforcement agencies, called for the following:



It is not enough to certify individuals; corrupt and abusive practices are fomented within the police force itself. For example, Mexican researchers Elena Azaola and Miguel Ángel Ruiz conducted interviews with police officers from the Federal District who were imprisoned for the crime of kidnapping. Azaola and Ruiz found that many of the agents started to participate in these crimes because their superiors were also involved. Evaluating police agencies through certification processes, such as the US-based Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), would allow for the formal assessment of police institutions to ensure that they have adequate policing and operational procedures that are based on standards developed by law enforcement professionals. CALEA has already certified Mexican municipal police forces, including Chihuahua City and Guadalajara. These forces met clear law enforcement standards in the areas of organization, management, administration, law enforcement operations, and operational support. Such local experiences, among others, can serve as important examples for other police forces in Mexico. (Meyer, 2014)

Daniel Sabet, a noted expert on Mexico's law enforcement reforms, also stressed the importance of CALEA accreditation. He said, "The CALEA process has helped consolidate substantial changes in policing in Chihuahua...The presence of an external audit and a formal accreditation that police and city leaders can show off to the public helps incentivize leaders to overcome the benign implementation challenges to ... professionalization reforms." With this in mind, he concluded, "There has perhaps never been such an opportunity for real reform" (Sabet, 2010).



II. THE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

In response to these pressing needs and this unique opportunity for reform, the National Policing Institute (formerly known as the Police Foundation, and hereafter referenced as NPI) entered into a unique collaboration with the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). The organizations agreed to assist Mexican public safety agencies in obtaining accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA) according to international standards and maintain compliance in support of reaccreditation. This vital work supports INL's mission to minimize the impact of international crime and illegal drugs on the US and its citizens. In addition, it advances INL's priority objective of building criminal justice systems by institutionalizing the rule of law and strengthening law enforcement effectiveness in Mexico.

The goals and objectives of this project, known as the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies in Mexico (and hereafter referenced as the cooperative agreement), also directly support the goals and cooperation areas outlined within the Mérida Initiative. The Mérida Initiative was reaffirmed in January 2022, on the 200th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations, resulting in the [US-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities](#). Through this framework, the two nations seek to:

- [provide] support for safer communities;
- enhance violence prevention and community outreach policing to foster peaceful communities;
- promote human rights and protect vulnerable populations;
- reduce homicides and high-impact crimes;
- strengthen capacity to prevent and respond to homicides and related crimes;
- reduce impunity for homicides and related crimes;
- increase capacity to investigate and prosecute financial crimes related to corruption and transitional criminal organizations;
- expand information sharing and develop [a] community of expertise to modernize approaches to disrupt illicit finance;
- improve legal and regulatory frameworks to better enable effective targeting, seizure, and sanctioning of criminal networks and their illicit finances;
- strengthen [the] capacity of security and justice sector actors to investigate and prosecute organized crime; and



- strengthen the capacity of security and justice sector actors to reduce impunity for crime and protect human rights (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs [INL], 2022).

With these key objectives in mind, this report details how the accreditation process has provided Mexican public safety agencies with a strong foundation that includes improved policies and procedures, heightened public trust, and increased professionalism. This foundation can be leveraged to support additional goals of the Mérida Initiative, thereby supporting the US/Mexico strategic partnership.

Project Methodology

This project was implemented by INL through a strategic collaboration with NPI and CALEA that leveraged each organization's strengths. NPI provided approved agencies with pre-accreditation technical assistance and training, while CALEA administered on-site accreditation reviews, regional staff support, and accreditation management training. CALEA then awarded accreditation to those agencies that successfully satisfied all the requirements for accreditation.

While the three organizations (INL, NPI, and CALEA) worked together in a collaborative and highly coordinated manner, CALEA's accreditation process remained completely independent. To ensure objectivity and impartiality, NPI was not involved in the actual on-site assessment and accreditation determination process, nor was CALEA involved in providing preparatory technical assistance to the agencies beyond what is normally provided to other enrolled agencies seeking accreditation.

This accreditation process proved to be a powerful management model. It presented the chief executive officers (CEOs) of participating agencies with a blueprint that promotes the efficient use of resources and improves service delivery—regardless of the agency's size, geographic location, or functional responsibilities—for many years following its award. The process, supported by NPI technical assistance teams, included preparing agencies for a self-assessment, establishing a work plan to ensure policies and practices were compliant with applicable CALEA accreditation standards, assisting agencies in developing proofs of compliance, conducting preliminary on-site assessments—including a comprehensive document review at each agency in coordination with INL—and developing assessment reports with recommendations.

This methodology gave each agency a sustainable foundation for maintaining accreditation once achieved while enhancing community trust and police accountability. Furthermore, the CALEA accreditation process includes built-in sustainability by



requiring reaccreditation every four years. Well-defined steps for the accreditation and reaccreditation processes also provide progress measurement of the initiative in a simple and standardized way.

REPORT OVERVIEW

Since the project's implementation in late 2015, the cooperative agreement team members (INL and NPI) supported more than 80 Mexican public safety communications centers, training academies, and law enforcement agencies (hereafter referred to as Mexican agencies) in their pursuit of accreditation by providing hands-on, remote, and continuous technical assistance. These agencies have received direct guidance and training to assist with developing processes, policies, and management practices that adhere to internationally recognized standards. The process of accreditation—i.e., adoption of internationally recognized standards—has increased the volume of law enforcement services delivered and the overall professionalization of public safety agencies within Mexico.

Purpose of Report

This report presents an overview of the accomplishments, challenges, best practices, and lessons learned in support of this cooperative agreement. These findings can be used to support and enhance program expansion in Mexico or to replicate this program within another country.

The primary goal of this cooperative agreement was to assist Mexican agencies in obtaining accreditation according to international standards and to maintain compliance in support of reaccreditation. Success is demonstrated through the following metrics:

- increased number of Mexican agencies accredited to international standards;
- formalized policies, directives, and management procedures within accredited agencies;
- improved confidence in the accredited agencies, both internally (staff) and externally (citizens);
- enhanced public safety due to the professionalization of policing services; and
- greater understanding of the benefits of accreditation throughout Mexico.

NPI project teams captured the data and information used for this report through various means, including surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, and agency reports. The overarching goal of this report is to summarize the feedback and



observations from project administrators and Mexican agencies and use the knowledge gained to provide a roadmap for program replication.

To that end, included in this report is an overview of the CALEA accreditation process itself, outlining the purpose of CALEA and the benefits associated with accreditation. This is followed by a detailed description of the project implementation in Mexico, including strategy, goals, deliverables, and technical assistance components. The remainder of the report is dedicated to detailing achievements and obstacles that were overcome through innovative solutions. The promising practices and lessons learned are key to sustaining the progress made in Mexico, expanding the program there, or implementing an accreditation project in another country.

CALEA ACCREDITATION OVERVIEW

Creation and Purpose of CALEA

Due to the social turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s, police agency accreditation became a strategy to increase professionalism in law enforcement (Alpert & MacDonald, 2001; Teodoro & Hughes, 2012) within the US. While some states have created their own state-level accreditation programs, CALEA remains the most prominent and widespread accreditation program with the goal of increasing professionalism in policing (Doerner & Doerner, 2012).

CALEA Process

The CALEA accreditation process is a modern management model that, when implemented and practiced, provides a blueprint for the efficient use of resources and improved service delivery—regardless of an agency's size, geographic location, or functional responsibilities. The process allows law enforcement agencies to demonstrate they meet an established set of professional standards that:

- require the development of a comprehensive, uniform set of written directives that provide necessary direction to personnel for reaching administrative and operational goals;
- provide necessary reports and analyses to make fact-based, informed management decisions;
- require a preparedness program so agencies are ready to address critical incidents;



- strengthen an agency's accountability, both internally and externally, through a continuum of standards that clearly define authority, performance, and responsibilities; and
- limit liability and risk exposure by demonstrating internationally recognized standards for law enforcement, as verified by a team of independent CALEA-trained assessors.

CALEA reaccreditation is required every four years to ensure the agency maintains a body of up-to-date standards developed by public safety practitioners, covering a wide range of public safety initiatives. The CALEA accreditation process improves the delivery of public safety services by requiring agencies to meet the following goals:

- strengthen crime prevention and control capabilities;
- formalize essential management procedures;
- establish fair and nondiscriminatory personnel practices;
- improve service delivery;
- solidify interagency cooperation and coordination; and
- increase community and staff confidence in the agency.

CALEA has established a successful partnership with an international software company (PowerDMS) for the management of its accreditation process and requires agencies to use this resource for remote monitoring of compliance and agency support.

Impact of CALEA Accreditation

Research studies have documented the benefits of CALEA accreditation for agencies within the US and provide insights into the effects of police accreditation on various outcomes of interest. For example, some studies have noted a positive relationship between agency accreditation and community-related factors.

Studies have found that officers in accredited agencies are more receptive or committed to community policing (Gingerich & Russell, 2006; Teodoro & Hughes, 2012), while another study found that CALEA accreditation was significantly related to self-reported success in implementing community-oriented policing (Mastrofski et al., 2007).

CALEA accreditation has also been linked to positive community perceptions of law enforcement. Holliday and Wagstaff (2021) found that CALEA accreditation was significantly associated with community members' increased trust and satisfaction in the police and beliefs that police will treat everyone equally, police will be held accountable, and police are building positive community relationships. Teodoro and Hughes (2012) found that "accreditation sends an important signal to rank-and-file officers about the



priorities of the agency's executive leaders. Officers in accredited agencies recognize that community-oriented policing is a high priority."

Additionally, Teodoro and Hughes (2012) found that officers in CALEA-accredited agencies hold more positive attitudes about their agencies than officers in non-accredited agencies. Specifically, officers in CALEA-accredited agencies were significantly more likely to believe that their agencies were better equipped to handle the challenges their agencies faced and that accredited agencies have higher standards for their officers.

Other research comparing CALEA-accredited and non-accredited agencies demonstrates significant differences across various outcomes. For example, several studies show that CALEA-accredited agencies were more likely to have greater representation of female officers (Burlingame & Baro, 2005; Schuck, 2014; Shjarback & Todak, 2019). Accredited agencies had significantly lower rates of use of force than non-accredited agencies (Parker et al., 2005). Accredited agencies are also more likely to provide field training than non-accredited agencies (McCabe & Fajardo, 2001). Finally, in other studies, small but significant relationships were found between CALEA accreditation and an agency having specialized units—including crime analysis units, drug units, and child abuse units (Abner et al., 2022; Giblin, 2006; McCabe & Fajardo, 2001).



III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEXICAN ACCREDITATION PROJECT

OVERVIEW

INL, through NPI and CALEA, developed a unique partnership to assist Mexican public safety agencies in achieving accreditation in compliance with internationally recognized standards for police professionalism. As previously mentioned, this work supports the INL mission to minimize the impact of international crime and illegal drugs on the US and its citizens. This project also directly supports INL's priority objective of building criminal justice systems by institutionalizing the rule of law and strengthening law enforcement effectiveness in Mexico.

Grant funding for this collaborative agreement was issued in late December 2015. The original project goal was to provide technical assistance to 10–12 Mexican agencies interested in becoming accredited by CALEA by the end of 2018. The grant proposal foresaw a mix of municipal and state law enforcement agencies, public safety training academies, and public safety communication centers as grant clients. Subsequently, it was determined that focusing on municipal agencies would not be as productive as focusing on state agencies since, at that time, municipal mayors only served for three years and could not serve concurrent terms. Given that the average time needed to become accredited is two to three years, and a change of administration could derail the progress toward accreditation, the focus shifted to state and federal agencies. This was because the term of office for state governors and the Mexican president was six years.

This timeframe gave the state or federal agencies sufficient time to get CALEA accreditation firmly established before a new administration took over. However, late in the grant period, Mexican federal law was changed to allow municipal mayors to succeed themselves for one additional term in office. As a result, municipal agencies became eligible for project participation, and by the end of the grant period, six municipal agencies had joined. For a full list of agencies, please see [Appendix 1](#).

The original grant award was issued on December 28, 2015 and provided \$1.3 million in funding over a three-year period. Initially, the goal was to enroll 10–12 Mexican public safety agencies in the CALEA accreditation process. In 2017, INL provided supplemental



funding in the amount of \$1 million, and the grant period was extended an additional year. As supplemental funds continued to be added, the agency accreditation goal expanded as well. The target number of agencies to receive accreditation increased until the final modification established the goal of engaging 80 Mexican agencies in the accreditation process.

COMPONENTS OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROCESS

Program Strategy

NPI, using subject matter experts, police executives, and other policing consultants with expertise in the CALEA standards assessment and accreditation processes, worked collaboratively with CALEA and INL to identify potential agencies for inclusion in the project. Once these agencies were formally approved, NPI notified the agencies of their eligibility to participate in the accreditation process.

Once agencies were notified, NPI's role was to manage the provision of grant services and funds and organize teams of subject matter experts (SMEs)—referred to as technical advisors—who provided direct, onsite, and remote technical assistance to program agencies. Each site visit team consisted of two advisors with accreditation experience, with at least one fluent in Spanish and based in Mexico and the other having US law enforcement and/or accreditation expertise. [See Appendix 3](#) for the roles and responsibilities of regional managers, team leaders, and technical advisors.

CALEA's role was to provide, on a fee-for-service basis, the same support it provides to all agencies who submit to the CALEA accreditation process. As is standard, CALEA charges any agency entering its accreditation process an enrollment fee and charges for the expenses associated with the required on-site review. Additionally, should an agency not be ready for the CALEA on-site assessment in the time established within the contract, CALEA charges an extension fee, allowing the agency additional time to continue preparing for the on-site assessment. After an agency is accredited, CALEA charges a set annual continuation fee for the next four years, which covers the cost of the reaccreditation on-site review required to maintain accreditation. Grant funding was used to cover these required fees for all participating Mexican agencies.



DELIVERABLES

Once INL approved an agency for participation, NPI conducted an initial evaluation. This covered topics that include:

- roles, responsibilities, and relationships with other agencies;
- organization, management, and administration;
- personnel administration;
- law enforcement operations, operational support, and traffic law enforcement;
- detainee and court-related services; and
- auxiliary and technical services.

Participating training academies were evaluated on major training academy areas, such as:

- credentialing
- organization
- direction and authority
- human resources
- recruitment, selection, employment, and promotion
- instructional systems
- training administration
- instructors
- students

Participating communication centers were evaluated on major communication center areas such as:

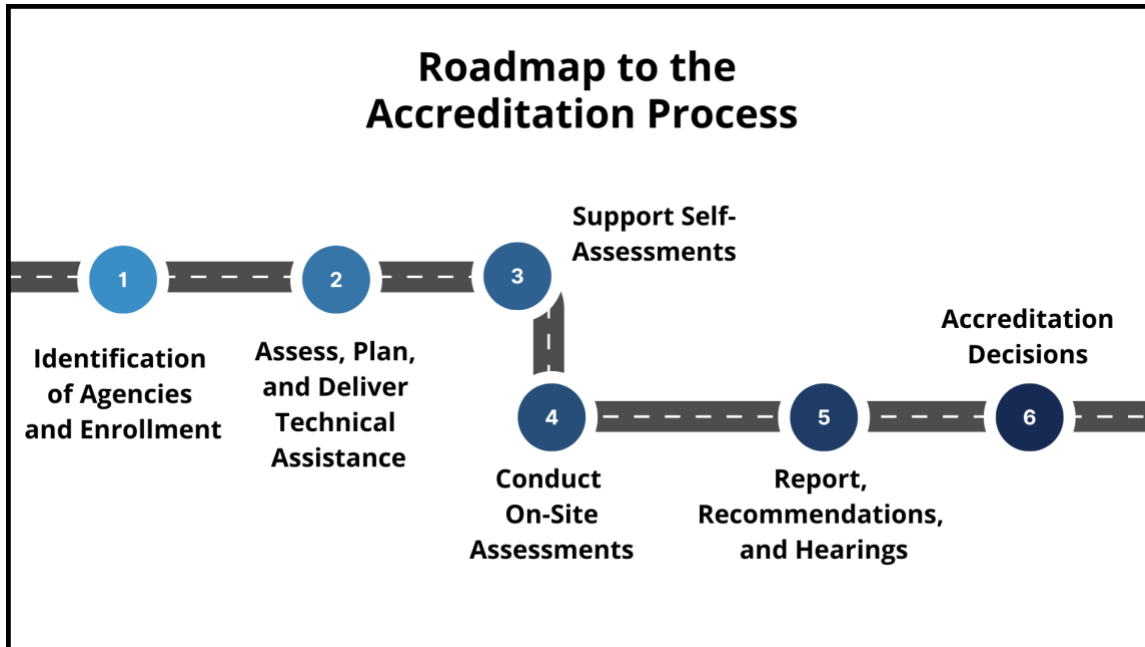
- organization
- direction and supervision
- human resources
- recruitment, selection, and promotion
- training
- operations
- critical incidents, special operations, and homeland security

Achieving CALEA accreditation typically takes two to three years from the moment an agency signs an enrollment agreement with CALEA. In collaboration with project partners, NPI developed a process-driven system to get Mexican agencies accredited.



The process evolved over the course of the grant, and with input from participating agencies, resulted in the following:

Figure 1: Roadmap to the Accreditation Process



Once NPI received a grant application from a Mexican agency and determined the agency met CALEA's eligibility requirements to participate in one of its accreditation programs, the grant application was sent to INL for approval. After INL approved the agency's participation in the grant, NPI assigned the agency to one of NPI's regional managers based on the agency's location within Mexico. The regional manager would then assign a team to work with the agency. Each site visit team consisted of two advisors with accreditation experience, with at least one fluent in Spanish and based in Mexico and the other having US law enforcement accreditation expertise. Each team managed their assigned agencies throughout the project and stayed in frequent contact through bi-weekly or, at a minimum, monthly calls with the agencies.



Enrollment and Initial Needs Assessments

Once an agency was approved as a grant recipient, the NPI project team contacted the agency's CEO (or a representative of the CEO) to arrange for an initial evaluation visit. During that visit, the regional manager and the assigned team leaders (TLs) and technical advisors (TAs) toured the agency's facilities and reviewed their operations. In addition, they began to familiarize the agency's staff with the relevant CALEA Standards Manual and the process by which the technical assistance team would help the agency get accredited. The project team also identified and met with key officials and points of contact for follow-up and coordination, collected and reviewed policies and procedures, and conducted an informal readiness evaluation. This allowed them to determine the extent to which documentation of essential management procedures/policies (i.e., written directives) existed.

Implementation Plans and Agency Profile Questionnaire

Another component of the initial site visit was to assist the Mexican agency with completing the paperwork required to participate in the CALEA accreditation process. This included the formal CALEA application and the Agency Profile Questionnaire (APQ), which provided basic organizational information. ([See Appendix 2](#) for a sample APQ.) When an agency's CEO signed the application to participate in the grant, they agreed to produce an accreditation Implementation Plan (IP) within three months of signing. The IP was utilized as a tool for the agency to plan and track the completion of the self-assessment process in a timely manner. It captured the required activities (e.g., the development of written directives), implementation tasks and timelines, collection of proofs of compliance, training needs, date setting for pre-assessments, CALEA-required reviews, and other activities. It was a working document that was updated regularly to capture achievements and reflect any challenges, issues, and delays. Additionally, the CEO agreed to assign a person to be a designated full-time accreditation manager (AM). A job description for the AM was provided to the CEO and can be viewed in [Appendix 4](#).

Ongoing Technical Assistance and Support

The TL and TA provided ongoing technical assistance to support each agency in achieving its goals (both virtually and onsite). They identified key points of contact within the agency for any area of concern and submitted monthly progress reports summarizing the agency's progress toward accreditation. Following the initial visit, an overall, project-wide assistance plan was created by TAs for each agency to identify common themes and to promote efficiency in the delivery of assistance. These plans provided strategies and timelines to address identified areas of weakness by the agencies and the advisors, as



well as other political, organizational, or contextual factors that could impact the process (e.g., anticipated leadership or staffing changes).

Pre-assessments (Mocks) & Compliance with CALEA Standards

Once the agency was ready for review, the NPI project team conducted a pre-assessment to confirm readiness or identify any remaining gaps that must be addressed before an official CALEA assessment. During the pre-assessments, the TAs and TLs reviewed policies, procedures, and proofs of compliance provided by the agency's AM and compared them against every applicable CALEA standard. They would also verify readiness through inspections, interviews, and observations. The TLs documented their findings and provided the AM with their compliance evaluations at the end of the pre-assessment.

CALEA Site-based Assessments

Once NPI provided customized accreditation assistance, including support in the self-assessment process, the agency requested that CALEA initiate the assessment. This process included an online review of files in the PowerDMS platform conducted by CALEA's compliance services members (CSMs), followed by the site-based assessment. It is important to note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, site assessments were conducted remotely.

Site-based assessments consisted of a team of CALEA-trained and sponsored assessors who visited each eligible agency and interviewed agency personnel to verify compliance with CALEA standards. They also observed agency operations and conducted a public information session. After the site visit, the assessment team prepared a report with their findings. This report was submitted to the agency for review and comments, and once the agency provided feedback, the report was finalized and submitted to the review committee (delegates). CALEA then used this report to determine if the agency would be awarded accreditation and under what conditions.



CALEA Conference, July 2023, Oaxaca Agencies

CALEA Accreditation Achieved

Once the site-based assessments and reports were completed, qualified agencies were invited to the next CALEA conference. The CALEA Commission Review Committee conducts hearings at their conferences, which are held three times per year. At this event, eligible agencies participated in a public presentation on the final day, after which the CALEA board held a formal vote, and agencies officially received accreditation. The commission awards accreditation for a four-year period, allowing the agency to display the CALEA program's Mark of Excellence.

Annual CALEA CSM Reviews for Accredited Agencies

Once an agency achieves initial accreditation, CALEA requires the agency to become reaccredited every four years. Each year after achieving initial accreditation, the agency must submit to an online review of agency accreditation files by CALEA's CSMs. The project teams for each site continued to provide technical assistance to the agency's AM during this four-year timeframe.

Program Activities

The following table illustrates how NPI's and CALEA's roles were aligned to meet the objectives outlined in the cooperative agreement.



TABLE 1 – PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Objective	NPI Role	CALEA Role
Objective 1: Provide on-site and remote technical assistance to Mexican agencies preparing for a self-assessment by complying with applicable CALEA standards, developing proofs of compliance, and preparing for the CALEA on-site assessment in coordination with INL.	Contact agencies upon notification by INL. Provide all necessary assistance and document progress for INL.	Enter into accreditation contract with approved grant Mexican agencies.
Objective 2: Conduct on-site assessments in Mexican agencies for the purposes of evaluating accreditation against CALEA standards, including a comprehensive documented review at each agency in coordination with INL.	Provide all necessary assistance in preparing for on-site and document progress for INL. Assist agencies in determining when ready for on-site CALEA assessment.	Conduct on-site assessment with independent assessors trained by CALEA.
Objective 3: Produce on-site assessment reports and make recommendations regarding accreditation based on those reports in coordination with INL.	N/A	Conduct and document on-site assessment of agency readiness for accreditation and share assessment with INL.
Objective 4: Consistent with CALEA processes, conduct a panel hearing with Mexican agencies' staff to review the report and address any issues therein in coordination with INL. Upon completion of hearings, grant accreditation to Mexican agencies upon a determination that the agency is in compliance with all applicable standards in accordance with the CALEA process.	N/A	Conduct hearings for Mexican agencies ready for accreditation. Grant accreditation as appropriate and notify NPI and INL of results.
Objective 5: Consistent with CALEA processes, assist agencies in maintaining compliance with CALEA standards.	Assist agencies in modifying policies and procedures as personnel assignments change, political transitions take place, and during other occurrences that may have a negative impact on continued accreditation.	Conduct annual online reviews of agency accreditation files by CALEA-trained CSMs.
Objective 6: Make recommendations to INL of equipment and training needs of Mexican agencies.	Based on observations from agencies, make recommendations to INL.	N/A
Objective 7: Deliver monitoring and evaluation reports on a quarterly basis to INL in the format proposed.	Submit reports to INL.	Provide information to NPI as necessary.



TIMELINE

The original grant award was issued on December 28, 2015, and provided \$1.3 million in funding over a three-year period. Initially, the goal was to enroll 10–12 Mexican public safety agencies in the CALEA accreditation process. Due to the early successes of the agencies involved in the accreditation process and the aggressive recruiting of new agencies thereafter, the goals, objectives, and timeline for the project were extended and modified several times over the years. Supplemental funds from INL provided an additional \$1 million to extend the award period one year and increase the number of Mexican agencies to 57 on August 11, 2017.

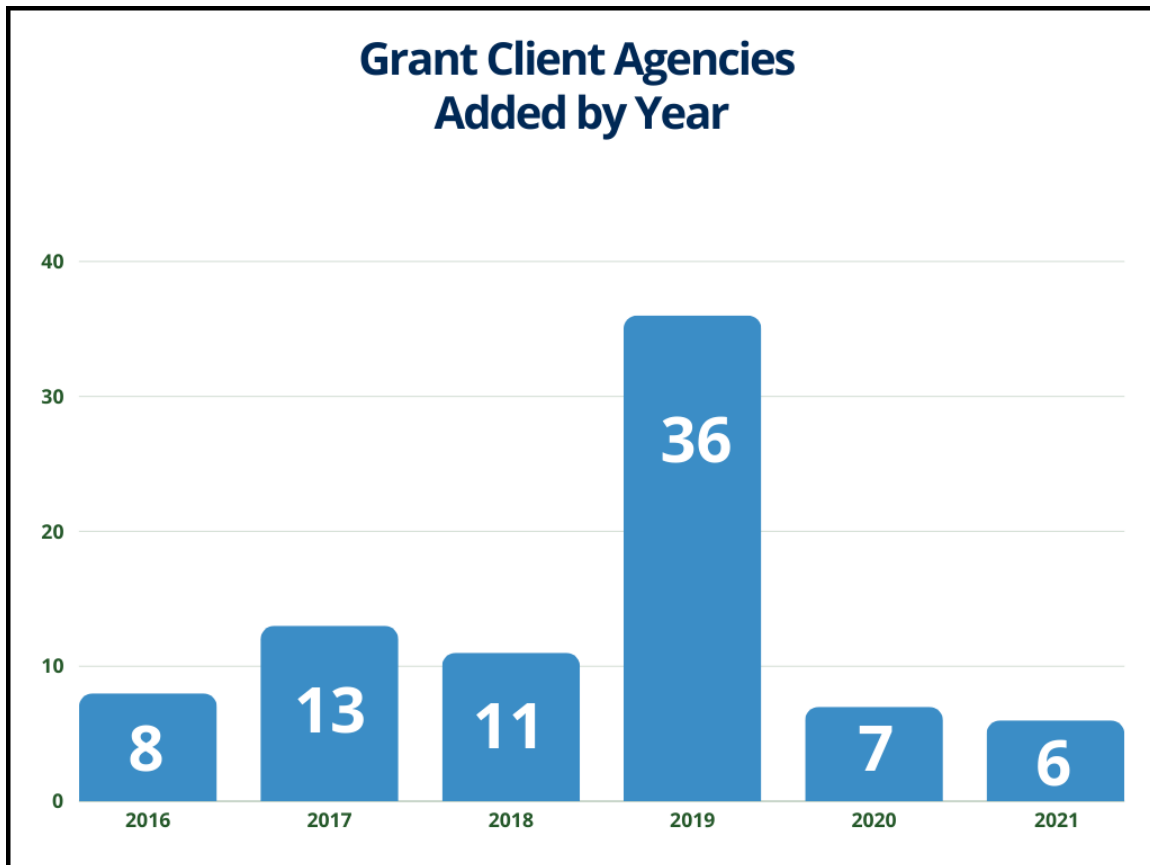
On August 16, 2018, \$2.2 million was awarded to extend the performance period an additional four years with a goal of engaging 80 Mexican agencies. Stage II of the project would provide remote and on-site technical assistance to Mexican agencies preparing for accreditation. The previous grant ended on December 31, 2019; the new grant ended on January 31, 2024.

As of January 1, 2024, project partners exceeded that goal: a total of 82 agencies were enrolled in the accreditation process. During the award period, 70 agencies achieved accreditation, with one agency receiving two awards—one for Tier 1 Accreditation and one for Advanced Accreditation. The agencies included 29 public safety training academies, 19 public safety communications centers, and 23 law enforcement agencies in 27 of Mexico's states, including Mexico City.

Thirteen agencies were removed from the project due to one of the following reasons: non-compliance with the implementation plan, voluntary withdrawal, failure to meet financial obligations, and, on one occasion, the revocation of accreditation status by CALEA. Five agencies continued to pursue accreditation beyond the award period. These five agencies are projected to be presented for accreditation consideration in 2024.



Figure 2. Grant Client Agencies Added by Year





IV. ACHIEVEMENTS & OBSTACLES

PROGRESS

This project has introduced innovative strategies to combat the global problems of transnational crime and the drug trade, addressing them at the root through enhanced law enforcement capabilities in Mexico. Improving Mexico's public safety agencies through CALEA accreditation has created a strong policy foundation on which Mexican agencies can consistently operate and which will continue to bolster community relations and trust between Mexican officers and community members. It has been proven that the substantial increase in the number of accredited agencies in Mexico has had a multiplier effect, where additional agencies have become interested in increasing professionalism through accreditation.



The Tri-Arc Award

The first highlight occurred in November 2017, when CALEA granted accreditation to the first two grant Mexican agencies: the Guanajuato Training Academy and Guanajuato Communications Center. The secretario of the Guanajuato Public Safety Agency was presented with CALEA's prestigious [Tri-Arc Award](#) for having achieved accreditations for all three programs: law enforcement, communications, and training academy agencies. It should be noted that the Guanajuato State Police achieved accreditation prior to the implementation of the project.

CALEA allows public safety training academies and communications centers 24 months to complete the self-assessment process.



Guanajuato's initial site visits occurred in September 2016 and they earned accreditation 14 months later, confirming the power and impact of targeted assistance in facilitating the accreditation process.

While the experience of Guanajuato State Police is not typical, it demonstrated the appetite for and appreciation of the support INL provided to Mexican agencies through this project.

As a result of this early success and aggressive recruiting in the summer and fall of 2017, project teams were able to add 11 new agencies to the grant by late September 2017. Once INL saw the progress being made by the 21 Mexican agencies, they provided supplemental funding in August 2018 to expand the project to include an additional 35 Mexican agencies, increasing the goal by the end of the grant period to a total of 57 Mexican agencies. Due to steadfast recruiting by INL and NPI project team members, the team successfully met that goal four months ahead of schedule. Ultimately, the grant funding was increased to accommodate up to 80 total agencies, which was achieved during the grant performance period.

This success is also sustainable because the accreditation process, once completed, provides a proven contemporary management model and presents the CEO with a blueprint that promotes the efficient use of resources and improves service delivery—regardless of the size, geographic location, or functional responsibilities of the agency—for many years thereafter.

Project team members provided support to the grant Mexican agencies during the initial years of the accreditation process and then gradually built their capacity to be self-sustaining. Additionally, the [sustainability guide](#) (detailed later in this section) was created to assist agency CEOs in actively involving the community to further ensure their long-term success. By helping Mexican public safety agencies measure themselves against and achieve the accepted international “gold standard” of CALEA accreditation, the project partners directly improved the quality and consistency of law enforcement operations in the Mexican agencies they assisted.



Figure 3. Participating Project Client Agencies



Participating agencies are in 27 states within Mexico.

Participating Mexican Agency Totals:

- There were 82 agencies enrolled in the grant.
 - One agency was removed for failing to sign the CALEA agreement.
 - One agency was removed for non-compliance.
- A total of 71 Mexican agencies achieved accreditation.

Participating Mexican Agencies by Type:

- 24 communication centers, of which 19 agencies are accredited;
- 27 law enforcement agencies, of which 23 agencies are accredited; and
- 31 training academies, of which 29 agencies are accredited.



CHALLENGES

Before this project, many of Mexico's public safety agencies were unfamiliar with the process of applying for accreditation and the benefits associated with accreditation itself. So, too, were the country's citizens, including everyone from community members to government officials. In many cases, the lack of accreditation translated to a lack of standards and accountability within Mexico's public safety agencies (training academies, communication centers, and law enforcement agencies).

The CEOs of these agencies are politically appointed, and the Mexican culture is such that it is acceptable and expected that when a new administration is sworn in, the executive staff and policies will change. Without documentation (i.e., written policies and procedures), a new agency CEO can easily dictate changes to procedures based on personal interests rather than evidence-based research and proven best practices. Such changes were generally communicated orally since documentation was severely lacking within most of the agencies. These cultural practices proved to be a significant hurdle for team members, who had to essentially start from scratch to achieve the following:

- convince agency CEOs of the benefits of investing considerable time and effort to achieve accreditation;
- explain the process and timeline for accreditation;
- search for existing documentation of policies and procedures to modify and/or capture the current policies and procedures;
- work with the CEO to identify the correct people to serve as the agency's AM and assemble an accreditation team;
- overcome language barriers;
- assist each agency with drafting the myriad of policies/documentation necessary for accreditation, often with little cooperation and coordination with other participating agencies due to the culture of individualism;
- train participating sites on the use of PowerDMS;
- coordinate with CALEA and PowerDMS to get a Spanish-language version for the Mexican agencies;
- work with agencies that achieved accreditation on ways to maintain it; and
- manage expectations of internal and external stakeholders who anticipated an immediate difference instead of realizing that change takes time, effort, and dedication to the cause.



At the conclusion of the project's third year, NPI organized focus group discussions to track the progress and challenges of participating Mexican agencies. (For additional discussion of findings and recommendations, see V. Impact of Accreditation Process; Focus Groups.) Through these discussions, NPI identified challenges, promising Practices and Lessons Learned that were then used to refine and improve the project methodology. One finding that concerned the team was that agencies appeared to be focused on getting the accreditation requirements done quickly (i.e., checking a box) rather than treating accreditation as an ongoing process and establishing mechanisms to maintain it.

Accreditation is not intended to be a “one-and-done” activity. Rather, it is a process that must be institutionalized so that the agency can retain compliance with international standards regardless of which administration takes over or how many personnel changes occur.

Therefore, the long-term goal of this project was to help each Mexican agency establish a manageable accreditation process that would not require continued support once they were accredited. The expectation was that when an agency achieved initial accreditation, it would have an experienced accreditation team established that could, for the most part, handle reaccreditation on its own (though technical assistance was available and provided for the project's duration to all participating agencies).

However, it became clear that some accreditation teams did not have adequate systems to continuously collect proofs of compliance, even if they had achieved initial accreditation. Additionally, significant personnel changes within some agencies negatively impacted their reaccreditation efforts as the process progressed.

Perhaps one of the most unprecedented challenges was the impact of COVID-19. Much of the success of this work originally hinged on in-person communication, training, and technical assistance. In March 2020, all in-person assistance was suspended due to the global pandemic. This forced all providers and stakeholders to identify innovative ways to continue the work. Not all agencies had the same technological resources or the infrastructure to support a new remote work environment, so much of the work had to be customized to the capabilities of each agency. One significant obstacle was the fact



that not all Mexican agency employees had access to computers, networks, and work resources or the authority to access them outside of physical workspaces. From March 2020 to June 2022, all the work conducted was done so using a variation of virtual communication platforms and remote work environments. The determination of all stakeholders involved allowed for this work to continue, or it would have otherwise completely halted.

SOLUTIONS

To address these issues and ensure project goals were successfully met, NPI, with INL approval, modified technical assistance plans to provide additional support to agencies in need.

Expand Technical Assistance & Resources

The project plan was modified to offer support to struggling agencies. When an agency achieved initial accreditation, the technical advisor team ensured the agency had the new accreditation site established in PowerDMS to start the reaccreditation phase. The technical advisor team then switched the agency to the quarterly reporting protocol.

However, if the regional manager (RM) and team leader (TL) believed an agency urgently needed closer assistance than the quarterly contact protocol allows, they established a procedure to request monthly reporting instead of quarterly. The request required a rationale explaining why monthly reporting was needed and the estimated time required before the agency returned to quarterly reporting. NPI's director of international programs and assistant director reviewed and approved any requests for reporting changes, ensuring agencies stayed on the path to reaccreditation.



CALEA Commissioners meeting in Mexico, November 2018

Additional Actions Taken by NPI

From the beginning of the grant, NPI's staff understood the importance of addressing the sustainability of CALEA accreditation in Mexico. NPI took actions to support that sustainability, both as part of the grant activities and in other ways. These actions included:

- strongly encouraging CALEA to hold a meeting of CALEA commissioners in Mexico;
 - As a result, INL sponsored a very successful meeting of commissioners in November 2018 in Mexico City. This introduced many Mexican agencies and the Mexican public to CALEA accreditation.
- intentionally hiring numerous Mexicans to increase the number of accreditation experts in Mexico when additional staff and part-time SMEs were needed;
 - As a result, two of the three NPI regional managers lived in Mexico, and one of them is a former Mexican criminal justice official. In addition, of the 14 contract TLs and TAs working on the grant at the end of the grant period, all but two are Mexican citizens living in Mexico.
- opening a project office, paid for by the grant, in Mexico City near the INL office where one regional manager works when she is not traveling to foster coordination between the project partners;
- establishing a Spanish-language website and newsletter to share information about CALEA accreditation with Mexico's people; and



- as described in more detail below, conducting a workshop in Mexico in 2019 with CEOs and other officials from successful accredited agencies that resulted in a sustainability guide titled [Communicating for Improved Adoption and Sustainability of CALEA Accreditation](#).



NPI Team and NPI Mexico Project Staff, 2022

Actions Taken by CALEA and PowerDMS

When the grant started in 2016, CALEA had contracts with approximately 10 Mexican agencies, most of which were in the self-assessment stage that precedes initial accreditation. Therefore, many of CALEA's documents were still only available in English, and none of their staff members—including the regional program manager responsible for working with Mexican agencies—were fluent in Spanish.



As a result of the substantial increase in the number of Mexican agencies involved in CALEA accreditation, both CALEA and PowerDMS made changes to accommodate. While these changes were not specifically mandated or paid for by the grant, they enhanced the sustainability of CALEA accreditation in Mexico. As a result, CALEA:

- completed translation into Spanish of its website and all documents related to accreditation, including the CALEA Standards Manuals for each of its programs;
- identified and trained Mexican public safety officials as CALEA assessors;
- hired and trained three CSMs who are fluent in Spanish;
- with the sponsorship of INL, held its first meeting of CALEA Commissioners in Mexico at a conference in Mexico City in November 2018;
- changed its by-laws to allow Mexican delegates to review the CALEA on-site reports of Mexican agencies, conduct panel hearings in Spanish for those agencies, and make accreditation recommendations to the Commissioners;
- selected and trained five Mexican officials to serve as Mexican Delegates and perform the Mexican agency reviews;
- held the first Mexican Delegate agency review panel hearing on May 4, 2019, at the Huntsville, Alabama CALEA Conference (hearings have also been held at every subsequent CALEA conference); and
- hired a former Mexican public safety official to work from his home in Mexico as CALEA's Regional Program Manager for Latin America.



NPI's Lorena Singer with CALEA Delegates



PowerDMS is the document management system used by all public safety agencies working on CALEA accreditation, and as such, is vital to the accreditation process. At the start of the grant, PowerDMS had numerous documents related to accreditation in its document management system that were only available in English. In addition, the company only had one staff member who was fluent in Spanish to handle all interactions with Mexican agency staff members. As a result of the large increase in Mexican agencies involved in CALEA accreditation, PowerDMS took the following actions without cost to the grant to enhance the sustainability of CALEA accreditation in Mexico:

- translated all documents related to CALEA accreditation in its document management system into Spanish;
- hired additional personnel who were fluent in Spanish to train new Mexican agency AMs and members of their accreditation teams;
- produced and made available online Spanish-language webinars explaining how Mexican agency personnel should use the document management system; and
- hired people fluent in Spanish to staff the PowerDMS Help Desk so that if a Mexican agency staff member ever has a problem with the document management system, someone will always be available to help them in Spanish.

Additionally, on August 29, 2022, PowerDMS launched the Spanish “PowerDMS University.” This web-based tutorial and certification program is for AMs and system users and is another important resource for Mexican agencies learning to navigate PowerDMS.

Accreditation Managers Workshop

One of the objectives included in the project’s scope of work was the directive that NPI coordinate with INL in the design, development, and enhancement of an annual Accreditation Managers Workshop (AMWS) to provide special training, updates, and other activities. The AMWS aimed to strengthen the AMs’ skills and improve their accreditation programs. INL was responsible for selecting the location, dates, lodging, and all necessary activities to fulfill this activity.

Following the conclusion of each AMWS, the Mexican accreditation coalition, CAISPMEX, assembled a meeting with the membership. [See page 39](#) for more information on CAISPMEX.



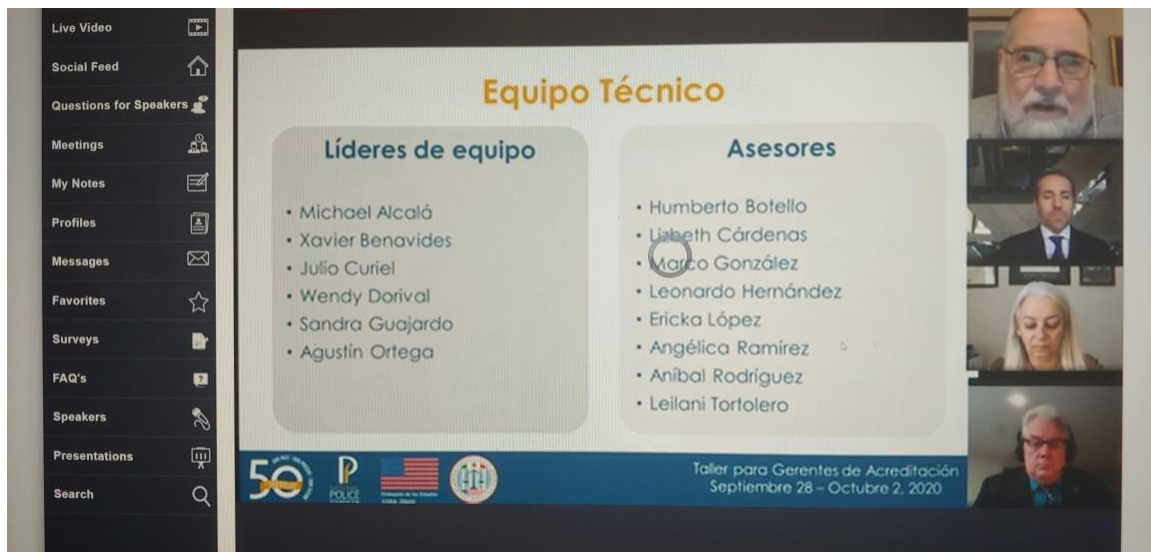
While the AMWS was initially developed as an in-person event, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and the subsequent lockdowns prevented both travel and in-person gatherings. As a result, the AMWS scheduled for 2020 and 2021 were redesigned as virtual events.



Inaugural Annual Accreditation Managers Workshop, March 2019

2019

The first formal AMWS was held in March 2019 in Merida, Yucatan. According to information provided by INL, other trainings took place prior to this, but they were not identified as formal AMWSs.



(Virtual) Annual Accreditation Managers Workshop, September 2020

2020

In late September 2020, NPI project staff provided substantial support for a very successful, week-long virtual AMWS sponsored by INL. Originally scheduled as an in-person meeting to be held in April in Monterrey, the AMWS convened AMs from Mexican agencies for numerous presentations, panel discussions, and breakout groups. These were all designed to educate and improve the overall management of the individual agency's accreditation process.

2021

The AMWS was held August 23-27, 2021. The five-day virtual conference opened with pre-recorded remarks from NPI's president and CALEA's executive director. The event also included standard virtual presentations from multiple US and Mexican experts, more than a dozen pre-recorded "sound bites" interspersed with regular presentations, three simultaneous panel discussions, and more than a dozen breakout sessions. The attendance totals varied daily, but on the second day of the workshop, the number of online participants totaled 180.



Annual Accreditation Managers Workshop, June 2022

2022

From June 22-24, 2022, project staff, technical advisors, and INL personnel conducted a three-day workshop in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. As with previous events, there were a variety of presentations, panel discussions, and breakout groups. It was estimated that 200 people attended in person, while approximately 200 more connected virtually.



Taller para Gerentes de Acreditación
Annual Accreditation Managers Workshop, January 2024

2024

The last workshop was held January 25-26, 2024, in Mexico City. This workshop also served as an opportunity to close out and celebrate the project's successes. This event continued to improve upon the quality of information provided to the attendees. It was estimated that 200 people attended in person. During this event, NPI's technical advisors and the CAISPMEX Board of Directors were instrumental in planning and operations, setting the stage for future workshops organized by CAISPMEX and Mexican agencies' members.

Joint Actions

Initially, when a new agency signed a CALEA contract, the agency automatically received five licenses for accessing PowerDMS. These were covered by the CALEA enrollment fee. In August 2019, NPI negotiated and received four additional PowerDMS licenses for each agency: three for NPI technical team members and one for the INL Monitoring and Evaluation Team (one license per agency). This allowed technical assistance team members access to assist the new Mexican agencies without using any of the agency's five licenses.



Sustainability Guide

The long-term sustainability of CALEA accreditation in Mexico has been a primary goal of this project. To provide agency executives and personnel with resources to achieve and sustain accreditation, the project team developed a 23-page sustainability guide, [*Communicating for Improved Adoption and Sustainability of CALEA Accreditation – A Guide for Agencies in the CALEA Accreditation Process*](#). The sustainability guide contains recommendations about the content and timing of communications from an agency to internal and external stakeholders during various phases of the accreditation process.

NPI and CALEA believe that by following the recommendations, an agency can ensure the sustainability of CALEA accreditation by better educating internal and external stakeholders about the positive changes brought about by accreditation. Until March 2020, the intent was to give copies of the sustainability guide to the agency CEO, AM, and media spokesperson(s) during a personal briefing where the recommendations in the guide and timing of communications would be reviewed. A pilot briefing was planned for a new agency in March/April 2020; however, that visit was canceled because of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, a protocol for presenting the sustainability guide in a virtual environment was developed in place of in-person briefings.

The sustainability guide briefing included a PowerPoint presentation focusing on the importance of communication during the CALEA accreditation process and highlighted how agencies should use the guide. Three copies were shipped to each agency to arrive just before or soon after the briefing. The guide begins by providing background information on the purpose and value of accreditation for the agency to use when communicating with agency staff, political leaders, and communities who may be unfamiliar with the process. The guide then provides agencies with language (messaging) and resources that can be used to communicate with stakeholders at each step in the accreditation process.

Engaging Key Stakeholders

The overall goal is to ensure that future public safety leaders maintain the commitment to professional development and policing. Mayors, governors, and other elected officials must understand the challenges of attaining CALEA accreditation, what it means to be accredited, and how it reflects positively on their leadership. Ensuring all stakeholders have this awareness has proven helpful in gaining support for getting the resources required to achieve initial accreditation, remain in compliance, and achieve reaccreditation.



INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

A key group that must understand the requirements and benefits of accreditation—including the importance of the standards, policies, and procedures it requires—are **the agency's officers, supervisors, and administrative personnel**. Too often, accreditation produces new policies and procedures, but agency personnel are unaware of why these changes have occurred and how they relate to accreditation. Promoting understanding of the purpose and anticipated benefits will result in increased internal support.

Ex. 1: Message to Community Members and Organizations

"We have made the decision to undertake a significant challenge—reaching international policing accreditation of our agency to ensure we are providing you with public safety services that are professional, of the highest quality, and grounded in integrity and the trust we will earn from each of you."

Further, agency personnel should be encouraged to take pride in the changes being made and the resulting improvements in the agency. Officers and supervisors are important spokespersons for the agency and can share the value of accreditation with others, including community and business leaders. Crucially, the person designated as the AM must have the full support of the CEO to give continuity and support to the accreditation process.

Ex. 2: Message to Elected Officials/Politicos

"Pursuing international accreditation demonstrates that we are willing to do something bold and new to improve policing in our (city or state) and in Mexico. This is a gift to our community that no one should ever take back."

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

People in the community—including **business owners, non-government organizations, community leaders, and others**—must understand that the ultimate purpose of accreditation is to ensure agencies provide public safety services that are professional, ethical, and of the highest quality. Community members should know that the agency has taken bold steps toward accountability and the ideals of democratic policing.

By ensuring community members are fully aware of the purpose and benefits of accreditation, the hope is that they will support the agency in acquiring any resources



needed to maintain accreditation in the future. This works particularly well if the citizens are aware of what changes accreditation has brought about, which is why the sustainability guide provides draft messaging and a timeline for releasing statements designed to keep all stakeholders (internal and external) informed at each stage of the process.

Messaging Goals

Ensuring that organizations derived from civil society are involved in and aware of this accreditation process also allows for accreditation to be integrated into the development of public plans and policies that are intended to last beyond the next political administration change. The suggested messaging is designed to accomplish several objectives: to inform and make the case to political leaders about this important decision to pursue accreditation, to highlight the need to remain committed to the process, and to emphasize the need to support it through the allocation of funding and resources.

Ex. 3: Message to Agency Personnel

"We are committed to accreditation because we know that you want and deserve to be respected for your work and trusted by the community. CALEA accreditation is not something designed to be visible through new uniforms, names, or colors. Instead, CALEA will influence what we accomplish and what we provide to our staff and our community. We will transform, through policy and procedure changes, into a high-performing, trusted, and respected organization. I am counting on each of you to help us achieve this goal and to share our commitment and our success with the community we serve."

The messaging should emphasize that accreditation is a commitment to improving services to the city/state and focus on how the government will be distinguished nationally and internationally for pursuing this process.

For agency staff, it is important to communicate that the agency CEO is wholly committed to this process, that pursuing accreditation demonstrates trust and confidence in their abilities, and that it moves the agency toward more professional policing. For the community, the purpose is to prepare them for a long process designed



to provide improved services, build stronger relationships, and encourage greater trust and confidence in the agency.

Key Themes in Messaging

After preparing the internal and external stakeholders for accreditation, the primary focus of the messaging is to continue to remind stakeholders of the importance of CALEA accreditation and the hard work required to maintain and sustain it. Some new mayors, governors, and federal administrators only seem interested in making changes—whether they are needed or not. Therefore, the accredited agency must lay the groundwork before and during the transition to a new administration.

Messages to political leaders, agency staff, and community members must include that CALEA accreditation has nothing to do with politics or the political party in power. Those messages should begin about six or nine months before the administration is about to change. Recommended steps include:

- Provide updates on agency policy and practice changes, agency engagement, and participation in CALEA meetings and trainings.
- Set expectations about impacts and the reaccreditation process.
- Frequently focus on an area of change to demonstrate how accreditation has improved services.

The detailed guidance offered throughout the sustainability guide is intended to support enhanced understanding and adoption of the accreditation process through both internal and external outreach and communication. It is important that all stakeholders—including officers, staff, community members, and elected and appointed officials—who may have a role in developing policies or have oversight or other authority over the agency are aware of the requirements, changes, and outcomes associated with accreditation. This will ensure the agency has the support necessary to sustain it.



CAISPMEX 2019 Board Meeting

Establish a Coalition

The Coalición de Acreditación para Instituciones de Seguridad Pública de México (CAISPMEX) was created in 2019 to provide a venue for agencies to network and for accredited agencies to share best practices, lessons learned, and model policies, among other activities and strategies. This coalition not only serves to assist agencies in sustaining their accreditation but also encourages new agencies to seek accreditation.

The coalition is overseen by a board of directors, the most recent members of which were elected in 2023. An advisory board consisting of three members—one each from NPI, INL, and CALEA—advises the board as needed.



The accomplishments of the coalition include:

- development of a set of bylaws establishing a fair election process for board members and delineating the rights and responsibilities of the board and the membership;
- establishment of a process for agency membership through the payment of annual dues;
- development of a website that provides access to webinars and publications for its paying members: www.caispex.com; and
- registration with the Mexico Tax Administration Service to issue invoices/receipts to meet the government's tax reporting requirements.

CAISPMEX utilizes social media such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram to communicate regularly with stakeholders, share CALEA-related information, publicize relevant coalition activities, and highlight the agencies' successes. CAISPMEX also hosts a webinar series that provides training on the use of the CALEA Information Management and Reporting System (CIMRS) platform, PowerDMS, and other information relevant to the accreditation process.

Host Webinars

The project team endeavored to create webinars that were useful for all the Mexican agencies, regardless of where they were within the accreditation process. They began by providing basic but necessary information, such as how to interpret and achieve compliance with required standards. Next, they consulted with the onsite TAs to identify any specific areas of concern they were noticing with Mexican sites. Finally, they reached out to the Mexican sites themselves to solicit requests for webinar topics.

After processing the collected feedback, they recruited SMEs, including advisors, CALEA staff, or other accreditation practitioners, to present on the requested topics. The NPI team also organized webinars in which the participant agencies' peers served as panelists, sharing their experiences and promising practices. These webinars seemed to be the most impactful, as the presenters and audience related to each other well. Below is the list of presentations in reverse chronological order; a complete description of each presentation can be found in [Appendix 7](#).

- **November 16, 2023: The Accreditation Manager: Challenges and Strategies for the Future** (*El Gerente de Acreditación: preocupaciones y estrategias para el futuro*).



- **June 14, 2023: Development and Permanency of the Institutional Culture** (*Desarrollo y Permanencia de la Cultura Institucional*).
- **April 26, 2023: Strengthening Institutions Through Policies and Procedures, Employee Professional Development, and Internal Controls** (*Fortalecimiento de las instituciones a través de políticas y procedimientos, desarrollo profesional de los empleados y controles internos*).
- **February 22, 2023: The CALEA Evaluations Model** (*El Modelo de Evaluación CALEA*).
- **December 13, 2022: Roundtable Discussion with Members of CALEA's Review Committee G, Regional Program Manager, and National Policing Institute** (*Mesa Redonda con miembros del Comité de Revisión G de CALEA, el Gerente Regional de CALEA y National Policing Institute*).
- **October 24, 2022: The CALEA Accreditation Program and Community Involvement Programs** (*Vinculación del Programa de Acreditación con CALEA en la Atención a Programas de Proximidad en la Comunidad*).
- **September 1, 2022: The CALEA Accreditation Program and Crime Prevention, and Community Involvement Programs** (*Vinculación del Programa de Acreditación con CALEA en la atención a la Prevención del Delito y Programas con la Comunidad*).
- **June 2, 2022: The Importance of Background Investigations in the Integrity of Law Enforcement Agencies** (*Importancia de las Investigaciones de Antecedentes y la Integridad de la Agencias de Aplicación de la Ley*).
- **February 24, 2022: Indicators of Positive Changes Resulting from the Accreditation Process** (*Indicadores de Cambios Positivos Derivados del Proceso de Acreditación*).
- **December 14, 2021: Healthy Employee, Healthy Agency** (*Un Empleado Saludable, Una Organización Saludable*).
- **October 27, 2021: Staff Inspections** (*Inspecciones de Personal*).
- **June 10, 2021: Proofs of Compliance** (*Pruebas de Cumplimiento*).
- **April 8, 2021: Strategies for a Successful Reaccreditation** (*Estrategias para una Reacreditación Exitosa*).
- **November 6, 2020: Difficult Standards for Public Safety Training Academies** (*Estándares Difíciles para Academias de Entrenamiento de Seguridad Pública*).
- **November 3, 2020: Difficult Standards for Communications Centers** (*Estándares Difíciles para Centros de Comunicación*).
- **October 30, 2020: Difficult Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies** (*Estándares Difíciles para Agencias de Aplicación de la Ley*).
- **August 25, 2020: Managing Multiple Accreditations** (*Administrando Acreditaciones Múltiples*).



- **June 25, 2020: Challenges Faced by Communication Centers to Comply with CALEA Standards** (*Retos Enfrentados por Centros de Comunicaciones en el Cumplimiento con los Estándares de CALEA*).
- **April 24, 2020: Police Integrity** (*Integridad Policial*).
- **December 10-11, 2020: CALEA Accreditation Topics** (*Temas de la acreditación CALEA*).
- **June 5, 2020: Best Practices in Recruitment, Selection, and Hiring of Officers and Personnel in Public Safety Agencies** (*Las Mejores Prácticas en Reclutamiento, Selección, y Contratación de Oficiales y Personal en Agencias de Seguridad Pública*).

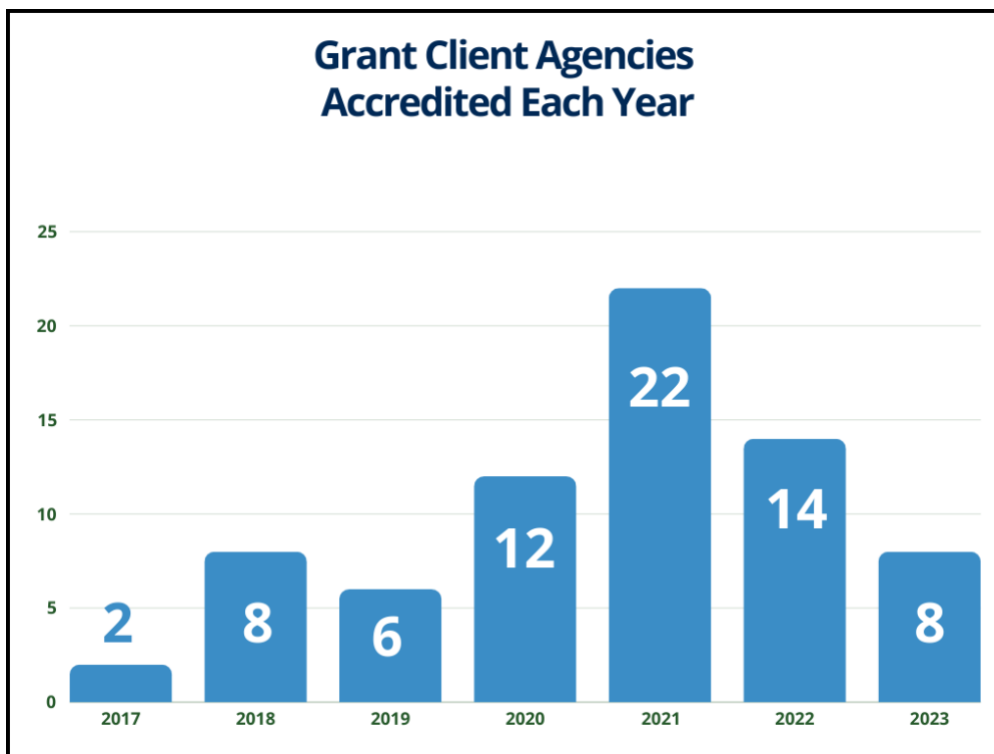


V. IMPACT OF ACCREDITATION PROCESS

By helping more than 80 public safety agencies in Mexico measure themselves against the accepted international “gold standard” of CALEA accreditation and achieve said accreditation, the project team improved the quality and consistency of law enforcement operations in the agencies assisted.

This effort to bolster the rule of law in the source region for drugs sold in the US has the potential to improve public safety in US cities as well by reducing drug supply.

Figure 4. Grant Client Agencies Accredited Each Year





MEASURING IMPACT

NPI conducted multifaceted focus groups and interviews with agency personnel to identify and document lessons learned and best practices. Additionally, project partners from NPI, CALEA, and INL were interviewed and/or surveyed to ensure the feedback reflected input from all project stakeholders. This process allowed participating agencies and program staff to reflect on the challenges, celebrate their successes, and provide recommendations for agencies seeking CALEA accreditation in the future.

Technical Advisor Questionnaire

The Technical Advisor Questionnaire (TAQ) was completed by project team TAs or TLs between August and December 2022, informed by communication with agency AMs. Individual agency profiles, which include information similar to what is captured within the TAQ, are included in [Appendix 5](#). Based on the analysis of these documents, overall trends are summarized in this section.

The TAQ captured the following information:

- names of agency, TAs/TLs, regional manager, type of agency, and state in which the agency is located;
- information about the agency's participation (contract date, accreditation status);
- how many programs and policies the agency created and/or implemented;
- obstacles the agency faced and how they were resolved;
- significant achievements by the agency during the process; and
- lessons learned.

Of the 74 agencies with available TAQ information, 39% were training academies, 32% were law enforcement agencies, and 28% were communications centers. The most common **programs created or implemented** as a result of the accreditation process were:

- early intervention (78.4%)
- performance assessment (40.5%)
- training (37.8%)
- employee support (33.8%)
- written directive system (31.1%)
- risk management (29.7%)
- grievance process (21.6%)
- disciplinary system (17.6%)



The most frequent **obstacles** identified were:

- staff resistance (64.9%)
- political circumstances (43.2%)
- changes in organizational leadership or buy-in from leadership (29.7%)
- issues with AMs (e.g., insufficient communication with the agency, turnover in position) (25.7%)
- COVID-19 pandemic (23.0%)
- budgetary/fiscal issues (21.6%)
- confusion about CALEA standards (21.6%)

Of those agencies that indicated staff resistance or confusion about CALEA standards, common strategies for minimizing their impact were **supportive leadership, consistent communication, and education about the CALEA process.**

The most common benefits of or achievements related to the CALEA process were:

- updated processes, standards, and directives (70.3%)
- increased collaboration within the agency and with other agencies (58.1%)
- continuous improvement (24.3%)
- increased agency pride (16.2%)
- improved community relations (16.2%)



Focus Groups

As referenced earlier in this report, the focus group discussions began in 2019. Enough agencies were enrolled in the accreditation process for the team to start capturing feedback from program participants so that they could apply lessons learned or modifications in real time. Below is a list of the focus groups held throughout the project and the purpose and outcomes of each.

JUNE 2019 – MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E) TASK PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOCUS GROUP

Purpose: A planning meeting and focus group to assess and validate M&E questions and survey methods and develop an action plan for survey implementation and analysis.

Outcome: The focus group discussions resulted in the development of a survey. The survey was expected to be administered in person to newly enrolled agencies, with a follow-up survey after the agency was accredited. This effort was interrupted by the pandemic in 2020.

Participants: Project staff, representatives of accredited agencies and those in process, and Mexican and US agencies familiar with conducting surveys in Mexico took part.

JULY 2019 – MOST CHALLENGING STANDARDS AND AREAS OF SUPPORT FOCUS GROUP

Purpose: Review multiple areas and standards that are challenging for Mexican agencies, such as shifts and patrol allocation, personnel selection and promotion, personnel performance appraisals, and specialized response models. NPI and INL project staff proposed to hold a special focus group to identify these areas and map out the types of support and assistance that staff can proactively begin to provide to agencies still in or about to begin the accreditation process.

Outcome: The results of this focus group were presented in a webinar.

Participants: Mexican agency staff and executives, NPI project staff, and INL.

AUGUST 2019 – INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS) AND NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS)

Purpose: One area where Mexican agencies struggle with CALEA standards is the Incident Command System (ICS) incident response model, a standardized response to large-scale and critical incidents developed by the Department of Homeland Security in the US as a lessons-learned approach. The ICS model, which is part of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), is well



understood in the US and is required through standards and federal funding, but no similar process exists in Mexico. However, the ICS approach is required by CALEA standards and should be tremendously useful to Mexican agencies if adapted to the Mexican context.

Outcome: A group of US and Mexican SMEs convened to examine the relevant ICS standards and the ways in which Mexican agencies have addressed the standards. The goal was to then develop a primer and set of recommendations for Mexican law enforcement agencies on ICS.

Participants: Group of US and Mexican SMEs.

AUGUST 2019 – COMMUNICATING ACCREDITATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Purpose: Key feedback received from Mexican SMEs has identified a significant concern with the extent to which the benefits and expectations of accreditation are communicated within the agency's ranks and done in a way that promotes professionalism. Another major concern is the extent to which the benefits of accreditation are identified and shared with the community.

Outcomes: This challenge was addressed by developing an Accreditation Communications Toolkit for agencies that provides them with messaging, templates, and timelines for communicating internally and externally about the changes accreditation should bring about in an agency.

The [sustainability guide](#) was the product of this focus group.

Participants: Mexican agency staff and SMEs, project staff, INL staff, and US SMEs.

SEPTEMBER 2019 – BEST PRACTICES COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE CONFERENCE

Purpose: To encourage and support new agencies and develop in-country sustainability, NPI project staff held a one-day community of practice made up of the early success agencies. Agencies were asked to identify, describe, and be prepared to share best practices that other agencies can use in the future, which were also highlighted with INL as success stories.

Participants: INL, NPI, and CALEA staff, approximately 30 representatives from accredited agencies in Mexico, leaders from agencies well on their way to accreditation and advanced accreditation, officers of the Mexico Accreditation Coalition, and others.



Additional focus groups were held in 2021, 2022, and 2023:

FOCUS GROUP 2021 – INDICATORS OF SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE CHANGES RESULTING FROM THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS (*INDICADORES DE CAMBIOS POSITIVOS DERIVADOS DEL PROCESO DE ACREDITACIÓN*).

Discussions in this focus group resulted in the development of different sets of indicators for agencies to use in evaluating the positive effects and benefits of participation in the accreditation process. The indicators are organized according to program (LE – law enforcement, TA – training academies, and COMM – communications centers) and by degree of difficulty (basic, intermediate, and advanced).

To validate these indicators, the project team launched a pilot group for their implementation. Three states with accredited agencies in each of the CALEA programs were chosen to implement the indicators, with one agency from each serving as the control (baseline). Their answers were reported to INL's M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation Unit) for validation and analysis.

A select number of focus group participants developed a user guide for the implementation of the indicators to all agencies involved in accreditation. In April 2023, training on the use and reporting of the indicators was provided to all project agencies. The final indicators and user guide were published in May 2023 and can be found in [Appendix 8](#). INL continues to gather this information.

FOCUS GROUP 2022 – SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ACCREDITATION PROGRAM: THE CEO'S POINT OF VIEW (*SUSTENTABILIDAD DEL PROGRAMA DE ACREDITACIÓN: LA VISIÓN DEL TITULAR*).

CEOs from 11 Mexican agencies were interviewed regarding their experiences, opinions, and advice to other CEOs. This activity resulted in the production of a video titled *Sustainability of the Accreditation Program: the CEO Vision*. The video was distributed to agency CEOs and AMs in May 2023.

FOCUS GROUP 2023 – CALEA ACCREDITATION IN MEXICO: LESSONS LEARNED (*ACREDITACIÓN CALEA EN MÉXICO: LECCIONES APRENDIDAS*).

This focus group captured a discussion with representatives from the project partners: NPI, INL, and CALEA. Participants were asked to evaluate the challenges faced by agencies participating in the INL-funded Mexico accreditation project that did not complete the process, withdrew voluntarily, or were removed for other reasons.

The focus group discussions were held in three groups, allowing each discussion to focus on specific areas of experience and involvement. The groups were organized as follows:



- **Group 1** included representatives from INL (1), NPI (4), CALEA (3), and one external SME involved in the implementation of the project.
- **Group 2** included individuals who directly assisted agencies participating in the grant. The group included representatives from INL (one), NPI (nine staff members and eight technical advisors), and CALEA (one).
- **Group 3** included six NPI TAs who worked directly with participating agencies by providing them with technical assistance. This session was conducted in Spanish to facilitate an open discussion and encourage more participation from the TAs who had limited ability to speak English. (Four NPI staff observed this discussion.)

During the focus group discussions, individuals from agencies that had successfully achieved accreditation and were demonstrating sustainability were identified. These individuals were then interviewed in-depth to obtain a list of topics and questions derived from the focus group discussions. These interviews were conducted virtually and individually, providing a confidential venue to the people interviewed. They were assured their responses would not be connected to their agencies or themselves to encourage candidness and honest feedback.

The input and feedback provided during the interviews validated the findings gleaned from the focus groups and provided meaningful additional comments. The participants expressed that the interviews were beneficial, provoking critical thinking and prompting them to self-diagnose their agencies and purpose. An important byproduct of the interview process was that it renewed their awareness of the value of accreditation and reinforced their commitment to the process.

PROMISING PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons Learned

Through analysis of the focus group discussions, survey responses, and individual interview notes, the NPI team determined that the challenges faced by Mexican agencies could be captured under the umbrella of five overarching issues:

1. Lack of commitment
2. Political context
3. Financial difficulties
4. Cultural influences
5. Organizational capacity



In some instances, these challenges caused agencies to delay receiving accreditation, lose compliance with the accreditation process, or not receive accreditation at all. However, in many cases, the agencies overcame the obstacles and ultimately received accreditation. Each of these challenges, along with recommendations for overcoming the issue, are addressed in detail below.

LACK OF COMMITMENT

Many participants said that lack of commitment was the greatest challenge to achieving accreditation. The feedback collected revealed, for example, that some agency executives only began the process to achieve personal recognition of the achievement—instead of out of a genuine desire to professionalize the agency. This resulted in the failure to complete the accreditation process. Participants noted that those agencies that did not comply with certain requirements or complete the accreditation process offered excuses such as financial, legal, and cultural challenges. While some are valid challenges, the TLs and TAs agreed that the lack of commitment was the root driving force behind these excuses.

Participants also noted that insufficient understanding of the accreditation process itself (policy development, timeframe for implementation, documentation) and the steep learning curve associated with it resulted in an inability to complete the requirements for some agencies. Not fully comprehending the benefits of accreditation hindered commitment as well.

Additionally, multiple participants observed that a lack of commitment to accreditation increased following a change in political or departmental administration. This was particularly true when accreditation was previously achieved. The new leaders often failed to see accreditation or reaccreditation as something beneficial to their careers and thus decided not to dedicate resources to the commitment.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

As noted, a change in political leadership and administration often negatively impacts an agency's accreditation process. When a political administration changed, the new executive implemented new philosophies and policies. Participants explained that new leaders want to create their own legacy and differentiate themselves from the previous leaders. As a result, new leadership sometimes opposed continuing the accreditation process.



With a new administration, it is common and expected in Mexico to have a change in an agency's CEO. The new CEO will make changes to the executive and management staff, sometimes without knowledge of the agency's projects, including the accreditation process. When this occurred, the continuity of the accreditation process was delayed or suspended until the new CEO decided if the project would continue. Even if the new administration ultimately approved the accreditation process, the time lapse negatively impacted the agency's progress and momentum.

Some agencies also faced legal obstacles to achieving accreditation. Political leaders far removed from the accreditation process can create policies detrimental to an agency working to become or remain accredited. For example, participants mentioned some accreditation requirements that agencies could not comply with due to federal, state, or local laws and policies.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

The CALEA accreditation process requires significant financial resources. The grant covered the CALEA enrollment fee, the assessment fee, and the first two continuation fees. The first continuation fee is paid 30 days after the agency receives accreditation, while the second continuation fee is paid on the first anniversary of being accredited. Therefore, the agency was responsible for the continuation fees starting on the second anniversary of being accredited.

Some agencies struggled to pay the accreditation continuation fees or gain the required funding to acquire the necessary equipment to comply with standards. When an agency could not secure the needed funds, it struggled to maintain accreditation. The financial concerns agencies face can overlap with political challenges when current political administrations are unwilling to allocate funding for accreditation.

Participants noted that some agencies struggled to adequately budget for the funds needed to maintain accreditation. One participant explained that some Mexican laws make requesting or using funds for the accreditation process difficult. At the same time, another noted that requesting funds is a long and laborious process. Agencies that did not include the accreditation funds within their annual budget could not purchase, maintain, or support the necessary equipment and technology for accreditation.

Participants also shared that some agencies were hesitant to join the program because they were fearful of audits. Specifically, the fear was that the CALEA audit would be far-reaching and not tied only to accreditation-related policies.



CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Multiple participants discussed how individualism is a significant cultural challenge. As a result of this desire to stand out as an individual, agencies struggled to work effectively with each other—they rarely shared their best practices, and there was a lack of means and opportunities for collaboration. Participants shared how agencies seemed uninterested in creating a community of practice or working together. Even within an agency, staff were reluctant to share and collaborate among themselves, often creating duplication of services.

A lack of standardization of processes between agencies also presented difficulty for those working toward accreditation. There were no model policies to share amongst agencies. Only a handful in the entire country were accredited, and due to the common desire for individualism, it was difficult to convince agencies to coordinate in developing them.

Engaging the community (including leaders, businesses, and local organizations) in the accreditation process also proved to be a challenge, as cited by multiple agencies. Some said they did not have access to public communications or social media, which made it difficult to reach out to the community and share the benefits of accreditation or form meaningful and lasting relationships with the community.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Frequently, the process was hampered because management agreed to enroll but did not fully understand the accreditation process and its value. Some CEOs saw the process as a prize and participated because they thought the grant would serve as a means to obtain resources and assistance from the US Embassy INL program. Therefore, they were unprepared to devote the time and resources needed to fulfill their commitment to the process. Interviewees addressed the importance of executive buy-in for achieving and maintaining accreditation. If the agency leadership was not convinced of the advantages of accreditation, the process did not work because it was seen as a burden rather than a benefit.

Participants also shared multiple challenges regarding the AM positions assigned by the agency CEO to spearhead the accreditation process within each agency. Some agencies changed the AM during the accreditation process, which caused delays in their timeline of achieving accreditation. Other agencies struggled due to a disconnect between the AM and the accreditation team. That dysfunction resulted in difficulties in meeting accreditation requirements.



One agency hired an outside consultant company to implement the accreditation process. This proved to be a challenge because they experienced a contract dispute and the company they hired simply left and took all the information with them. Without their data, the agency had to restart the accreditation process from the beginning.

This experience is a cautionary tale about what can happen when agencies use outside contractors to comply with accreditation requirements rather than using in-house talent.

Notably, interviewees identified that it is crucial for the AM's role to be clearly stated and understood by all personnel within the agency. AMs themselves must understand the intricacies of the accreditation process to serve in their positions effectively. Additionally, remaining engaged and committed to the process, even when facing adversity, was identified as one of the most essential characteristics of a successful AM. Finally, interviewees mentioned that sometimes AMs have other responsibilities outside of the accreditation process, which is not ideal or recommended.

Promising Practices

The NPI team assessed the findings from the focus groups, interviews, and survey responses and developed promising practices to mitigate the challenges identified. These promising practices, which are outlined below, streamlined and improved the process for Mexican agencies engaged in the CALEA accreditation process. These key initiatives should be utilized for program expansion in Mexico or program implementation in other countries where no previous institutional knowledge of the CALEA accreditation process exists.

DELIVER A COMPREHENSIVE ACCREDITATION BRIEFING TO PROSPECTIVE AGENCIES

Although CALEA, INL, and NPI communicated details about the accreditation process to prospective agencies from day one, feedback from program participants indicated there was room for improvement.

It was concluded that the initial presentation given to prospective agencies should include more in-depth information about what the commitment entails. Also, it should specifically clarify what accreditation is and **what it is not**. Importantly, agencies must understand that the CALEA accreditation process and accreditation itself do not include



financial support directly to the agency. Agencies must also understand that the accreditation process is continuous—i.e., not a single event with the end goal of obtaining a certificate.

The accreditation process should be considered a tool to manage the agency's operations and monitor processes for continuous improvement, and ultimately, it should become part of the institutional culture.

Agencies should also be more fully briefed on the tangible and intangible benefits of accreditation that justify spending time, money, and resources on the process. The professionalization of policing, the standardization of policies, and the enhanced accountability resulting from these processes positively impact internal and external stakeholders. These benefits must be clearly communicated to agency personnel and the communities they serve so that everyone understands why money and effort should be invested in the accreditation process and how it will benefit them as end users.

The challenges an agency will face during the accreditation process vary depending on several factors, as discussed in the [Lessons Learned](#) section of this report. Organizational culture, competency, and political context are a few of the most relevant factors. Agencies should be aware of these challenges and their potential effects. Additionally, some challenges are common to all agencies seeking accreditation, particularly those related to the financial commitment the process entails.

In most cases, it will be necessary for agencies to invest significantly in equipment, personnel, and training to comply with CALEA accreditation requirements—and maintain their accreditation once it is obtained. Accreditation certification itself incurs financial obligations for the agency, such as required continuation fees. To ensure agencies are aware of the financial responsibilities of the accreditation process, it would be beneficial to have buy-in from each agency's finance director. If they are informed of the financial requirements and the benefits of committing to the process, it will be easier for the agency to budget and prepare for the required expenses.

Finally, these briefings must be held in person whenever possible. The culture in Mexico is such that virtual meetings are not the norm. When virtual presentations were held (by necessity during COVID-19), it was difficult to keep the attention of the CEO. The CEO and



other executives would be easily distracted by activities happening in the office and would not pay adequate attention to the information presented. Though it is a moot point since COVID restricted many activities, participating agencies would have benefitted from more in-person engagements. That should be considered during future iterations of this program.

IMPROVE APPLICANT SCREENING

Properly assessing prospective agencies' commitment, capability, and competence to succeed is paramount; therefore, it is essential to improve how agencies are screened before funds and efforts are committed to them. The application process should be revised to extract more in-depth information on how an agency operates and determine if the agency is a suitable candidate. For example, information should be requested that demonstrates the agency's previous experience with projects similar in nature to accreditation—i.e., required the agency to commit significant resources, time, and personnel to achieve stated project goals.

A more complex and thorough application would filter out agencies that might not be fully committed to the process and ensure project resources are allocated in the most effective manner.

IMPLEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS

It is important to hold participating agencies accountable throughout the process. The NPI technical team implemented a clear, periodic evaluation process, requiring agencies to report their progress toward compliance with the CALEA standards. During the project, technical advisors recorded the progress agencies made and identified delays or issues as they occurred.

As issues were identified, agencies were notified, and a corrective action plan was recommended. If the issues remained unaddressed, they were noted and communicated once again to the agency. If the agency ignored issues or delays, CALEA considered removing them from the accreditation process.

During the CALEA accreditation assessment process, if non-compliance issues were identified, the agencies were allowed to address and remedy these issues. Occasionally, during the commission review, the agency could receive conditional accreditation for



unresolved non-compliance issues and be given a time frame to provide evidence of compliance. If the agency did not meet the requirement of the conditions within the established time frame, CALEA considered removing them from the accreditation process. Additionally, accredited agencies are required to report to CALEA any situations that may affect compliance with the standards during the period while the agency is accredited. If CALEA learns of any situation involving the wrongdoing, corruption, or criminal involvement of the agency's employees regardless of sworn status, the CALEA Commission, after careful evaluation, could suspend or revoke the accreditation status of the agency.

During the focus group discussions, it was recommended that the procedure for removing an agency from the accreditation process be clear, concise, and explained to all agencies seeking or involved in the accreditation process. Agencies should first be given a probation status notice that indicates they will be removed from the accreditation process should they continue not to address the issues identified. Support should be provided through a performance improvement plan to those agencies that are aware of the issues and willing to solve them. The way agencies engage with issues and delays demonstrates their commitment to succeeding in obtaining accreditation.

SOLIDIFY A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

As discussed in the [Lessons Learned](#) section, many challenges to the successful accreditation of agencies arise from specific cultural influences.

In the case of Mexican public safety organizations, a culture of individualism and exceptionalism prevails. To enact cultural change in this area, it is essential to create and foster the notion of a community of practice.

A central tenet of a community of practice is trust. Increasing trust among agencies participating in the accreditation process allows for improved inter-agency communication. With clear communication lines established, it is easier for agencies to share, collectively learn, and support each other in the accreditation process.

In Mexico, CAISPMEX is an organization that already supports this effort. CAISPMEX's role in solidifying a community of practice among Mexican public safety organizations obtaining or maintaining accreditation should be supported and further leveraged. Now



that this cooperative agreement has concluded, CAISPMEX's role is critical to strengthening and maintaining networking between agencies and providing sustainability efforts.

To facilitate the establishment of a community of practice in other countries, as part of the onboarding process, agencies should be grouped according to their region and accreditation program—i.e., communication centers, training academies, and police agencies. Regular engagements should then be built in among these cohorts, allowing them to share their experiences and assist each other when facing challenges. These events can range from informal virtual roundtables and peer-to-peer engagements to formal in-person site visits, training, and conferences. This can foster the cultural change required to establish a community of practice that lives beyond the confined political realities of each agency.

A strong community of practice also helps new leaders (e.g., those onboarding after an administration change) realize that accreditation and the community of practice it includes are beyond politics and something worth maintaining. Establishing a community of practice takes time. The process can benefit from a nonprofit and politically neutral organization to lead the effort and coordinate the exchange of ideas.

EXPAND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Though the agency CEO and personnel are the key program stakeholders, there are additional stakeholders who should be involved in the accreditation process. The public, local businesses, and legislators can play important roles in ensuring the sustainability of the accreditation process. The extent of their involvement should depend on their role and function.

As discussed in depth in the Sustainability Guide section of this report, the community should be made aware of the accreditation process. Community members are uniquely positioned to demand that agencies address problematic issues, which helps keep agencies accountable. The community can also be leveraged to support the development of the community of practice by demanding that the agencies that serve them participate in conferences and other engagements to learn from each other.

Local businesses and business associations are another important and powerful segment of society that can exert additional pressure on agencies struggling to commit to becoming accredited or maintaining accreditation. Local businesses have a vested interest in professionalizing policing, emergency communication, and police training services. When public safety conditions improve, demand for goods and services



increases, and they enjoy the benefits. Businesses can also support funding needs—through their own donations or through their political connections.

Publicly elected officials, such as governors, mayors, legislators, and council people, are stakeholders whose involvement can also greatly benefit agencies pursuing accreditation. Political officials who buy into the importance of accreditation can positively impact an agency's ability to overcome challenges. For example, they can facilitate solutions to the financial challenges associated with the accreditation process as they are directly involved with the administration of funds. As representatives of the people, these officials can also pressure other key players in local and state political organizations. Having them involved will also increase the chances of the program being sustained beyond the initial accreditation.

CONTINUOUSLY ASSESS THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION

As discussed in the [Lessons Learned](#) section of this report, frequent administration changes posed a major challenge for agencies looking to obtain or renew CALEA accreditation. Often, a new administration would automatically disregard the progress achieved by a previous administration. The team determined that although this is a cultural norm in Mexico, proactively addressing it during the project's planning phase—and periodically throughout the accreditation process—can mitigate the impact.

First, when working with an agency, note any upcoming changes in administration. Then, factor this into the project process and schedule conversations with administrative entities before, during, and after administration changes. In Mexico specifically, representatives from both CALEA and CAISPMEX should involve new CEOs and their transition teams in the process as soon as possible. This fosters ownership and the notion that the accreditation process and CALEA standards transcend the political goals of a particular administration.

CALEA and CAISPMEX representatives should continue meeting with the new leaders once the new administration is finalized to ensure they fully understand the benefits of accreditation. These conversations should be focused on the public safety benefits of obtaining CALEA accreditation and how achieving accreditation means that their agencies comply with internationally recognized standards of excellence that elevate public safety institutions beyond political agendas.

INSTITUTIONALIZE BEST PRACTICES

The successful accreditation of dozens of Mexican agencies offers valuable insights for future organizations striving to do the same. In reviewing their performances, the focus



group participants identified a number of best practices. These practices (detailed below) should be shared with all project sites and integrated into their accreditation process. Institutionalizing these practices will result in a greater chance of success for additional agencies interested in achieving and maintaining accreditation.

Communication is critical to a successful accreditation program. The [sustainability guide](#) identifies best practices in effective communication. A complete list of recommendations can be found in [Appendix 9](#).

- ***Make the Accreditation Process Public.*** Making the accreditation process public signifies to the community that the agency that serves them is invested in improving its practices and complying with international standards. This transparency also helps hold agencies accountable for how resources are allocated throughout the process, which enhances community trust in law enforcement.
- ***Assign Appropriate Personnel as Accreditation Managers.*** AMs should have authority within the organization and be specifically assigned to manage the accreditation process. Ensuring that the person leading the accreditation efforts has the proper authority to effectively organize assets, assign tasks, and request resources within an organization has proven essential for success. Lower-ranking personnel faced leadership challenges that impeded the accreditation process. Additionally, AMs and their teams should be assigned exclusively to managing the accreditation process. Having dedicated personnel continuously tracking compliance with CALEA standards results in solid achievements, increased accountability, and strong sustainability potential.
- ***Provide Public Updates on Policy and Procedure Changes.*** Agencies should inform all personnel, as well as the general public, of any new standard operating procedures, general orders, and/or changes in existing regulations due to the accreditation process. This ensures that both staff and community members are involved in the accreditation process and aware of the positive changes that occur throughout. Providing the community and personnel access to all administrative regulations is an effective way to publicly track progress and hold agencies accountable to internal and external stakeholders.
- ***Leverage Digital Platforms to Educate Stakeholders.*** Agencies should use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) as tools to educate community members on the accreditation process. Through social media, the public can remain apprised of the agency's progress in implementing internationally recognized best practices to better serve their communities. When adopting



social media use, educate personnel on agency-wide policies and procedures to ensure cohesive messaging.



CONCLUSION

The expansion of CALEA accreditation is fundamentally changing and improving the criminal justice system in Mexico. CALEA accreditation brings a system of proven tools to help agency leaders plan and manage resources, encourages organizational growth and experience, and ensures that agency personnel receive needed equipment and training. This, in turn, leads to sound operational decisions. CALEA accreditation also creates organizational transparency through information sharing and promotes open dialogue to foster community awareness.

CALEA accreditation not only improves institutions but also, just as importantly, how personnel at those institutions go about their work and interact with their communities. For accreditation to be most effective, agency CEOs must ensure that when changes take place, they are recognized by everyone in the agency and communicated to the community. For accreditation to be sustained, the CEO must ensure that everyone involved—elected officials, staff, and community—understands the value and importance, as well as the continuing commitment made on behalf of the government.

As a result of this cooperative agreement, more than 80 public safety agencies in Mexico have enrolled in the CALEA accreditation process over the past seven years. This has resulted in enhanced accountability, standardized policies and procedures, and improved quality and consistency of operations within agencies across Mexico.

External results, such as lower crime rates and greater public trust, may not be immediately realized, as it takes time for internal changes to make an impact on the external community. As these changes are implemented and more widely adopted, it will become evident to the community that public safety agencies are operating at a more professional level.

Utilizing the recommendations and examples within the [sustainability guide](#) (e.g., the tailored messaging to the public) will amplify awareness of said changes and perhaps quicken the impact on the greater community.

By helping Mexican public safety agencies measure themselves against the accepted international “gold standard” of CALEA accreditation and achieve said accreditation, project partners have improved the quality and consistency of law enforcement operations in the region. This effort to improve the rule of law in the source region for



drugs sold in the US has the potential to improve public safety in US cities as well. Both nations will likely experience the benefits of this project for years to come.



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APPENDICES

1. [Agency Accreditation Status as of January 31, 2024](#)
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