



Building departments agree: Accreditation promotes top-notch service

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by [International Accreditation Service](#)

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The International Accreditation Service (IAS), a member of the International Code Council's family of solutions, introduced the Building Department Accreditation program in 2005. In the past 15 years, many building departments in communities of all sizes across the nation have earned accreditation from IAS. These building departments have achieved a level of performance that have enabled them to deliver exceptional service to their communities. Moreover, the jurisdictions that have been accredited — and re-accredited — in those early days are realizing the greatest value of the program.

For example, the city of Rochester Hills, Mich., was one of the first building departments to earn accreditation. Scott Cope, director of the city's building department, said accreditation helped the department continue to deliver quality service during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the challenges of working from home and the new virtual reality. "The procedures and systems we had set up during the original accreditation process proved invaluable in helping us deal with the new challenges of the pandemic," he said. "We were able to develop and implement an online permitting and virtual inspection process within days. This provided access for our customers while our offices were closed and allowed construction to continue without skipping a beat. The lessons learned and best practices implemented all those years ago continue to pay dividends in helping us meet the needs of our community and our own defined goals for service."

Selso Mata, director of building inspections in Plano, Texas, agrees. IAS accreditation helped his jurisdiction identify and implement opportunities that drive a high-performance organization and encourage professional growth while raising awareness of building codes and safe building practices. Because of accreditation, he said, "Our job tasks and procedures became much more consistent. We're more aware of how our day-to-day activities can be affected by changes in our community. We're better able to flex with changing demands or fluctuating economic conditions."

The Clark County Department of Building & Fire Prevention received its original building department accreditation in 2009. "The department pursued IAS accreditation to evaluate its ability to deliver top-notch professional services in accordance with national/international standards," said Sam Palmer, P.E., CBO, Clark County's assistant director.

Accreditation basics

The IAS Building Department Accreditation program is modeled on an international peer-review process. IAS building department evaluation teams are made up of practicing building officials, as well as code and accreditation professionals. Following the receipt of the building department's application and fees, the accreditation process begins with the jurisdiction uploading documentation to reflect conformance with [Accreditation Criteria AC251](#). The jurisdiction is provided a list of typical documentation that reflects conformance with AC251 and instructions on how to upload that documentation into an electronic file. IAS then conducts a preliminary pre-assessment documentation review of the uploaded documentation. The department is provided with a detailed list of findings and with an opportunity to submit any identified missing documentation before IAS conducts a full evaluation.

“Accreditation allows us to benchmark the services we provide as well as our policies and our procedures with other high performing agencies around the globe; evaluate what we are doing well and those areas for possible improvement; with the ultimate goal of providing the safest and best professional services to our customers,” said Palmer.

Achieving accreditation requires that an organization establish long-term quality management systems and service goals focused on continual improvement. IAS uses criteria in 13 accreditation categories to assess building departments. These include basic jurisdictional information, department staff, permitting, budget, construction codes, plan reviews, professional credentials/licenses, inspections, certificates of occupancy, on-site audits, annual reports, service goals and complaints/appeals.



Michael Bouse

Throughout the accreditation process, IAS evaluators also assess critical elements of the building department, such as customer service, technical competence, code interpretation and enforcement, and fiscal strength. Teams of IAS-trained evaluators assess the building department's expertise and its compliance with the IAS Accreditation Criteria for Building Departments/Code Enforcement Agencies ([AC251](#)).

"In these uncertain economic times, IAS has taken measures to reduce the costs to local building departments striving to achieve building department accreditation," said IAS Building Department Accreditation Program Manager Mike Bouse. "Cost reduction measures include a reduction of assessor rates. Additionally, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all IAS building department accreditation assessments are currently being conducted remotely with no reimbursable travel-related expenses incurred. These cost reduction measures have been well received and building departments that have had remote assessments have found the process to be efficient and easy to navigate."

Long-term performance



Scott Cope

The Rochester Hills Building Department used the accreditation evaluation process to develop performance measures for plan reviews, as well as to track plan review errors and analyze rejection/approval rates. Cope continues to use performance measures to track service goals and report the results to the mayor. Cope continues to put established and continually improving processes and procedures to work. "For the first time, I can use the reports that compare our service goals versus actual performance to justify staff increases," he said. "We're able to show the amount of work the current staff is able to complete in a given time frame."

From the performance report, Cope said the mayor and city council have the information to decide whether the service goals are satisfactory, and if not, what needs improvement. “I can show exactly where we’re at and where we want to be,” Cope said. “In fact, for the first time, I was able to get the go-ahead to add a staff member with no objections from anyone on the city council. That is big. In the past, it’s been very difficult to hire someone because we haven’t had the metrics to really prove the need. It’s been a relatively smooth transition to bring someone on board.”

Raising awareness

A building department receives a certificate of accreditation once it has met all IAS criteria. But it doesn’t end there. Building departments must undergo reviews 18 months after initial accreditation and each subsequent reassessment to maintain accreditation and are required to complete a full review by IAS every three years.



Sam Palmer

“The IAS accreditation program helps us push our desire for continuous process improvement by requiring constant evaluation and adjustment of our own best practices,” said Palmer. “The building profession is always changing, and it is critical that our department stays up to date with the current trends and methods of construction and protection. Las Vegas is truly the ‘Entertainment Capital of the World’ with more than 45 million visitors a year. As such, our owners, developers and contractors are continually bringing new ideas, products and construction technologies into their projects (as well as pushing the envelope on project completion times). Our department must function at a high level of professionalism to meet the needs of our city. Our goal is to construct and maintain a safe built environment.”



Selso Mata

“And re-accreditation is much easier the second time,” Mata said, after the Plano Building Department of Inspections earned its accreditation in 2014. “The renewal process is a really good time to make sure that we’ve documented personnel changes, shifts in code applications and policies.”

Mata said re-accreditation is also a good time to evaluate best practices from other communities and build awareness of all the things the department does well. “Oftentimes, a community’s building department flies under the radar,” he said. “Now, with a renewed focus across the industry on building safety and the credibility of accreditation, our community is better able to understand our role in safe building practices.”

About the Author

The International Accreditation Service (IAS) is a nonprofit, public-benefit corporation that has been providing accreditation services since 1975. IAS accredits a wide range of companies and organizations, including governmental entities, commercial businesses and professional associations. IAS accreditation programs are based on recognized national and international standards that ensure domestic and/or global acceptance of its accreditations. IAS is a subsidiary of the International Code Council (ICC), a leader in building safety, and professional association that develops the International Codes.