

Building Department Accreditation



At first glance the City of Las Vegas, Nevada, and the Palm Beach County, Florida, School District might appear to have little in common. Las Vegas is home to more than half a million people and is a popular resort and entertainment destination set in the high desert. The Palm Beach County School District is located along Florida's eastern seaboard and is the 11th largest K-12 school district in the U.S., comprising 185 schools with a total enrollment of about 170,000 students.

Yet both of these entities, along with the City of Henderson, Nevada, and the City of Plano, Texas, have earned Building Department Accreditation from the International Accreditation Service (IAS) through its nationally recognized accreditation program.

Raising the Bar

"Those elements of concern that were identified during the accreditation process have been corrected and have resulted in a marked improvement in the overall operation of the Department," says Las Vegas Department of Building and Safety Acting Director Earl Russell. "Inspection holdovers are down. Periodic auditing of all department functions has improved and made us better for the experience."

Russell adds that accreditation has dramatically improved communication with stakeholders. "We try to involve all aspects of the community and give them a voice in the decision-making processes of the department. The designers, contractors and developers were all an integral part of the development of the modifying ordinances when we

adopted the 2006 model codes. They participated in committees and proved themselves to be an enormous asset. Added to this, we are in constant communication with IAS technical staff and they are a wonderful resource for us. IAS continues to be a valuable partner for the City of Las Vegas.”

Selso Mata, Chief Building Official for the City of Plano—a Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area home to over 240,000—agrees. “I think IAS is a valuable partner in helping us realize professional growth and raise awareness of our building community and the importance and responsibilities of building safety.”

“Accreditation helped us identify opportunities to become a high-performance organization” Mata adds. “Through the accreditation process, we can reach our potential and raise the bar on what a building inspection department can be.”

Palm Beach County School District Building Department Chief of Facilities Management Joseph Sanches agrees. “Accreditation is an excellent vehicle to demonstrate to school district administrators, contractors, designers and the public that their building department business model and procedures are in accordance with the highest national standards of code enforcement.”

The Road to Recognition

The IAS Building Department Accreditation Program is modeled on an international peer review process and uses practicing building officials and code professionals on its evaluation teams. The accreditation process begins with the completion of a comprehensive information questionnaire, followed by an on-site evaluation.

“There were many opportunities for improvement that were identified in the process,” recalls Russell. “For instance, we did not have a controlled system of auditing the Special Inspection Agencies for their work on jobs that required special inspection per *International Building Code* Chapter 17. This came to light when one of the IAS evaluators visited a site under construction. The accreditation process greatly improved our dealings with the special inspection agencies and we now require non-conformance reports to be forwarded on a daily basis so that outstanding issues are resolved in a timely manner. The auditing of our Special Inspection Program has been a great success. We continue to expand this program and

devote additional staff to ensuring that agencies are performing at a level acceptable to the jurisdiction.”

The thirteen categories of accreditation criteria used by IAS to assess building departments include basic jurisdictional information, department staff, permitting, budgeting, construction codes, plan reviews, professional credentials/licenses, inspections, certificates of occupancy, on-site evaluations, annual reports, service goals and complaints/appeals.

Throughout the accreditation process, IAS evaluators carefully assess critical elements such as customer service, code interpretation and enforcement, and fiscal strength. Teams of IAS-trained evaluators, including practicing building officials, assess the department’s expertise and its compliance with the IAS Accreditation Criteria for Building Departments/Code Enforcement Agencies. The teams also visit construction sites to appraise the performance of the jurisdiction’s inspection process.

A Rising Tide

Six departments have earned accreditation in the two years since IAS introduced its program, three more are currently in-progress and another eight are waiting final site evaluations. All told, IAS has received applications for accreditation from a total of thirty-three jurisdictions in nineteen states over the last two years.

“We are receiving an ever-increasing number of requests from ICC Chapters all over the country for presentations on the IAS Building Department Accreditation Program,” says IAS Vice President Patrick McCullen. “We are very pleased with the momentum that has been building, which has been a result of the program’s value to the jurisdictions and the high quality of IAS evaluations.” ♦

