



Best Practices
RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Administrative Program Guide

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Recognition Program

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Program Introduction

The Texas Fire Chiefs Recognition Program is a voluntary process where fire departments in Texas prove their compliance with Texas fire service's current Best Practices. These Best Practices were carefully developed by Texas Fire Service professionals to assist departments in the efficient and effective delivery of service and the protection of individual's rights.

The Texas Fire Chiefs Association developed the Recognition Program to assist Texas departments in meeting their professional obligations to the citizens of Texas. An appointed Committee of fire service professionals from across the state developed the Recognition Program and identified the Best Practices for Texas Fire Departments. This Committee now conducts reviews of a department's efforts and awards "Recognized" status.

Being "Recognized" means that the department meets or exceeds all of the identified Best Practices for Texas Fire Departments. These Best Practices cover all aspects of fire service operations including administration and organization, emergency medical service, training, special operations, records and information management, fire operations, fire prevention - risk reduction - community outreach, response analysis, communications, safety and health, resources management, professional standards and conduct. While being "Recognized" does not guarantee an department will not make a mistake, it does ensure that the department has carefully thought about these critical issues, has developed policy and procedures to address them and has systems in place to identify and correct problems.

There are a number of benefits to becoming a "Recognized" fire department. Fire Departments direct and control their employee's activity through supervision, training, and written policies and procedures. Since supervisors cannot always be present, the training and the policies and procedures of a department are critical to ensuring proper performance. Appropriate equipment is also necessary. The Recognition Program ensures a department has addressed the most critical of fire department issues in both policy as well as actual operation. The Recognition Program does not tell a department what their policy must be, but rather it ensures that the policy, procedure, or operation addresses all of the critical aspects of an issue.

The Recognition Program assures both City Management and the citizens of a city that their Fire Department is operating in a manner that reflects the current best practices of the Fire Service. It reduces both citizen and departmental risks. It can provide citizens with reassurance and improve community cooperation – and can also lead to improved performance of the department.

The Recognition Process

A department that has been awarded “Recognized” status has undertaken a careful internal review of all of its policies and procedures, equipment, facilities, and operations and has then requested an outside review to prove their compliance with the standards. A trained assessor from a nearby department is assigned as a resource to assist the Department in this initial internal review effort. After an independent review of their written policies and proofs of compliance, a team of assessors is sent to the department to review their operations, facilities, and to interview staff. A Final Report outlining the findings is sent to the Recognition Committee. The Committee reviews the findings and, if the department meets all the standards, votes to award “Recognized” status.

The “Recognized” status is awarded for a four year period. During the four year period the department must submit an annual report and proofs of compliance for four performance related standards. These are reviewed as they are received and compliance verified. During the last year of the four year period the department must prepare updated documentation on all of the Best Practices and another on site review is conducted. The findings are submitted to the Recognition Committee for consideration to approve “Recognized” status for the next four years.

What about CPSE Accreditation?

The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) provides the only international accreditation process for Fire Departments. The Texas Recognition Program includes a number of practices that are uniquely required by Texas law and not included in the CPSE accreditation process. Our program was designed by Texas Chiefs specifically for Texas departments and in compliance with Texas law. However, the Texas Fire Chiefs Association fully supports those members who seek CPSE accreditation in their pursuit of excellence.

Program Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout the program manual.

Advisor – Person knowledgeable in the “Best Practices” program assigned to the candidate department to assist in the compliance process.

Assessors – Are Chiefs of Fire Departments, Command level officers, or Program Managers that have been trained specifically in the on-site Review Process and have been carefully selected by the Recognition Program to conduct Final On-Site assessments of candidate departments.

Best Business Practices – Also referred to as Best Practices or standards, are a compilation of fire department practices and requirements determined by the Recognition Committee to be the most appropriate for Texas Fire Departments.

Board of Directors – The governing Board of Directors of the Texas Fire Chiefs Association.

Candidate Department – A Texas fire department that has contracted with the Texas Fire Chiefs Association to conduct an assessment of their compliance with the Texas Best Business Practices for Fire Departments.

Compliance Files – Files created for each of the Best Practices which contain the Candidate Department’s Proofs of Compliance with that standard.

Contract – An agreement between a Candidate Department and the Texas Fire Chiefs Association whereby the Texas Fire Chiefs Association provides initial and ongoing evaluation of a candidate department’s compliance with Best Practices and grants “Recognized” status.

Document Submission Form – A form designed to facilitate submission of proofs of compliance and explain the documentation and proofs submitted.

Electronic Submission Process – The method of submitting over two thirds of the required proofs of compliance via the Recognition Program website and having those proofs reviewed and accepted prior to the Final Compliance Review.

Final Compliance Review – An onsite evaluation by an Assessor (or team of Assessors) not associated with the Candidate Department. This Final Review Team will ensure compliance with Best Practices which require visual confirmation of compliance. The Team Leader prepares a report on their findings which is submitted to the Recognition Committee for their action.

Initial Meeting – Is a meeting between the Candidate Department and the Department Facilitator to start the Internal Review Process. The Assessor conducting the Initial Meeting will conduct an inspection of the department facility to identify any physical or equipment issues which would pose a problem in gaining recognized status.

Initial On-site Compliance Review – An onsite evaluation conducted by the Department Facilitator to ensure the department’s files are ready for visual confirmation during the Final Review process. This informal review is designed to assist Candidate Departments achieve Recognized status with the least cost and difficulty.

Internal Review Process – The process where a Candidate Department reviews its policies, procedures, and operations to ensure it meets the Best Practices. Proofs of Compliance are collected and placed in Compliance Files. Many of the Proofs may be submitted electronically to a Program Coordinator for acceptance.

Pre Site Visit Survey – The form submitted prior to the Initial On-site Compliance Visit. This form serves as a review/summary of the department’s policies and practices.

Program Director – The individual assigned to a candidate department with overall management oversight of the program. The Executive Director of the Texas Fire Chiefs Association serves as the Program Director.

Program Manager - The person designated by the Candidate Department’s Fire Chief to administer and oversee the Recognition program. This may be a sworn or non-sworn member of the department or may even be a community volunteer. In some departments the Program Manager may be the Fire Chief.

Proofs of Compliance – Any written or visual evidence which proves the department is complying with the Best Practice. This can be written documentation, copies of reports, logs, and internal memorandums, interviews with department employees, visual observation of activities, operations, facilities, equipment, or any other evidence which tends to prove the department is in compliance with Best Practices.

TFCA Recognition Committee – A Committee of Texas Fire Chiefs and other professionals appointed by the TFCA Board who make the decisions regarding the Program process, modifications and additions to Best Practices, and vote to award “Recognized” status to candidate departments which have proven compliance with standards.

Standards – A common term used to refer to the Best Business Practices.

Validate Participant Status – A department that has failed to meet the requirements for “Recognized” status but has successfully addressed and met the “Core Standards” as indicated in the manual and checklist, may opt to be designated as a “Validated Participant”. This allows the department to remain in the process and continue to work towards “Recognized Status”.

Application Process

Preparation

The Chief of a Department which is pursuing Recognition and the designated Program Manager (see below) are required to attend or view electronically a Recognition Program familiarization program offered periodically. This program is intended to ensure the Chief is fully aware of the program requirements.

Initially the Chief should designate a Program Manager (PM). The Program Manager can be any sworn or non-sworn member of the department. The more familiar the Program Manager is with departmental operations, the easier the task will be. There are several factors to consider when choosing a PM. The Chief should appoint an individual who:

- Has an interest in doing the job
- Is computer literate
- Is organized and efficient
- Is capable of writing clearly and concisely
- Is capable of formulating drafts of department policy statements
- Is capable of dealing effectively with all levels of department management

In some cases, such as very small departments, the Fire Chief may be the Program Manager.

This training is provided at annual conferences and in regional training programs around the state. A listing of upcoming training programs as well as the Best Practices is maintained on the Program website at <http://bestpracticetexas.org>. Departments may also contact the TFCA to schedule an electronic viewing.

The department should thoroughly review the Best Practices Program to ensure they will be able to meet all the requirements. Copies of the most current Best Practices are provided to all Texas Departments at no charge on the Recognition Program Website in the Download section at <http://bestpracticetexas.org>. Departments do not “register” on the website until accepted into the electronic submission process.

Compliance Process

The method for attaining Recognized status will entail using an Electronic Submission Process. The **Electronic Submission Process** allows departments to submit over two-thirds of their proofs of compliance electronically and the Program Director will track them as they are submitted. Acknowledgement of the proofs does not indicate acceptance of the submission. Further information or detail may be necessary. Naturally some proofs will need to be verified onsite by the Assessors. Departments can begin work on files and proofs at any time and submit them electronically after accepted into the program.

Application

Departments that have completed attended the Familiarization program may make formal application. The department should download a Texas Recognition Program Application from the Recognition Program website. The completed application should then be sent to the Texas Fire Chiefs Association at the address listed on the bottom of the application. After application is made and a department has been accepted into the program the department will be billed for their first year’s fees. The initial meeting for the Candidate will be scheduled. These annual costs will subsequently be billed each year.

Advisor

Each fire department, after registering as a “Best Practices Candidate”, will be assigned an advisor. Advisors can be members of the TFCA Best Practices Committee or a Program Manager from a Fire Department that has achieved “Recognized” level of Best Practices. Program Managers from “Recognized” departments are encouraged to participate as an Advisor to share their experience and knowledge of the process.

The registering department can request a specific Advisor who they are geographically close to or have a professional relationship with that would aid in the success in the department achieving “Recognized” status. It is the role of the Advisor to assist candidate departments in understanding the “Best Practices” process, answering general questions about the standards and to seek clarifications or definitive answers on standards from the Best Practices Committee. How much or how little the candidate department utilizes the experience and knowledge the Advisor has in the Best Practices program is at the discretion of the candidate department.

It is not the role of the Advisor to prepare responses to standards, develop policies or procedures for the candidate department, lobby for approval of “Recognized” status for the department or give definitive approval of any submissions by the candidate department.

During the site visit by the assigned Assessment Team the Advisor may be in attendance but should not be an active participant in explaining or defending the Registered Department policies, procedures or documentation.

Submission of Application to the Committee

The Texas Fire Chiefs Association will review the applications received and will submit the applications to the TFCA Recognition Committee periodically. If the department has already completed its Internal Review Process and has all files ready for inspection, the Recognition Committee will approve the application and direct the Program Director to send a Final Compliance Review team to the department.

As soon as the department is ready for a Final Review and is approved to undergo the Full Review Process, the Program Director will have a Contract mailed to the department. The contract should be completed and signed by both the organization CEO (City Manager) and Fire Chief. As soon as the Contract is completed and returned and the first year program fees have been paid in full, the Program Director will contact the department and provide submission instructions, and arrange for scheduling an initial meeting.

Expect Department Change

The Program Manager (PM) is a key change agent. The Chief should also be aware that Recognition is a task in which the entire department participates.

Chiefs cannot simply assign this task to someone in the organization and forget about it. Because the Chief makes final policy decisions, and presumably knows more about the department than most, their active participation is essential.

Chiefs are encouraged to hold regular briefings on Recognition status. The PM will also serve as an information liaison. The Chief may also want to schedule time at regular staff meetings for the PM to bring staff up to date on progress and address problem areas. Some departments may find it useful to assign department staff to conduct policy reviews in certain areas to assist the PM.

The PM should make every effort to visit and/or network with other Recognized or Accredited departments. The information gathered will prove to be invaluable.

The Best Practices developed by the Recognition Committee should serve as a blueprint for department policy. They are not, however, the only resource the department should explore. Texas Fire Departments have an excellent reputation regarding the sharing of information, especially in the area of policy development. Fire Departments that have a long-term commitment to Recognition efforts can serve as a tremendous resource to those departments just starting the process. New PM's seeking advice should never hesitate to contact other departments involved in the recognition process or the Recognition staff.

Proofs of Compliance

Best Practices

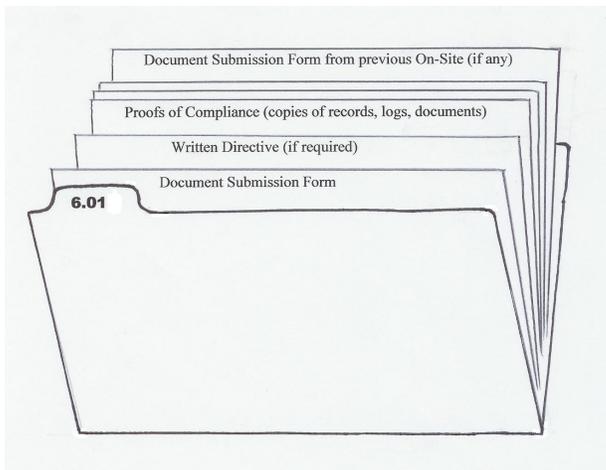
The Best Practices are compiled in a separate document for ease of review and study. The Best Practices, also informally called standards, are reviewed annually and updated as necessary. New or revised Best Practices must be complied with as indicated in Chapter 6 of this manual.

File Development

As indicated earlier, the department will develop a file folder for each standard and will maintain Proof of Compliance with each standard in the respective file (or three ring binders if the department prefers). A Paperless File Process is also allowed if the department meets the requirements listed at the end of this chapter. Copies of files (paper or electronic) are maintained by the department as long as the department remains in the program. Paper files are typically manila or similar type files labeled with the Best Practices number.

Whether paper or electronic, the documents inside the file should be maintained in the following order:

1. Document Submission Form (DSF) for the standard
2. Copy of Written Directive (Departmental Policy/Procedure if required)
3. Documentation showing Proofs of Compliance (in same order as listed on DSF)
4. DSFs from prior reviews.



Numbering System

The standards are numbered according to their placement within the chapter and section to which they apply. For example, in the standard number 1.02, the 1 refers to the chapter, Administration and Organization, and the .02 corresponds to the chronological order of the standard within this chapter.

Components of the Best Practices Statement

Best Practice Statement - The Best Practice is identified by its specific number, such as 1.02. The Best Practices statement then presents the requirements of the standard. The Best Practice may contain a number of separate requirements. Each of the separate requirements must be addressed in the department's directive (policy statement) or operations and proof of compliance is needed for each requirement.

Conditional Standards

Some standards are conditional or "if" standards. For instance, if the fire department does not have an airport in their response district, then the department is not required to develop a detailed policy regarding responses to airport emergencies. The department must, however, create a file folder and a Document Submission Form under the appropriate standard number, indicating that the department does not have a need for that specific function. This can include a letter from the Chief detailing why there is no need for type of service.

Critical Department Functions performed for the Department by Other Entities Must Still Meet Standards

If Communications or other functions such as Haz-Mat, Technical Rescue, etc. are performed by departments other than the Candidate Department, the Department performing those functions must meet the Best Practices for those functions. Because these functions provide critical services to both the officers of the Candidate Department and the citizens of the city, these standards must still be met. The Candidate Department must provide the appropriate evidence of written procedures such as when to call for these assets, what actions the host department may take until the Team arrives, and what level of support the host department personnel may provide

once the Team arrives. Written agreements should be provided that describe the role(s) of both the Technical Team and the host department and that the Specialty Team is compliant with all applicable rules and regulations.

Waiver from Standard Compliance

Waivers of Standards are not granted by the Committee. The Best Practices were designed to be minimum requirements for departments in Texas. All standards MUST have a response from the candidate department that sufficiently describes how the candidate department meets that standard. Departments should carefully review the standards manual and resolve any questions before making application.

Proofs of Compliance

Proofs of Compliance are those methods used by the Candidate Department to prove they comply with the Best Practices and their own policies. Proofs can be written documentation, copies of logs, sign-off sheets, photographs, visual inspections or interviews with department staff. Most of the standards can have documentation submitted electronically, but some will require visual inspection during the onsite Final Review. The electronic submission process is outlined later in this chapter.

The Document Submission Form (DSF)

The Document Submission Form is designed to provide basic information about the documents being submitted and minimize the amount of data necessary. A Document Submission Form for each standard has been prepared and may be downloaded from the website. The data fields on the DSF are mostly self-explanatory. The open field entitled “Proof of Compliance Submitted” is designed as a free flow narrative for the department to identify each document submitted, where the document is from, and identify the portions of the standard that it addresses. This allows a department to attach only a single page of a multi-page policy and state in the narrative of the DSF that “Item 1” is “Page 3 from the Training Standards Policy (General Order 2.1) and addresses the reporting requirements for training.” At least one full page of any policy or order should be submitted to show the submission is actually part of a larger document.

Multiple entries describing different documents proving different parts of a standard can be placed on the one DSF. Other formatted proofs such as “pdf.” files or photographs, can be explained on the DSF and submitted as a separate document or attachment. Additional information which the department wishes the reviewer to be aware of can also be included.

Preparation for Electronic Submission

The DSF is the first attachment for each proof submitted. For each standard, a DSF must be prepared. The DSF is then saved on the department computer using the City name and Standard number as the title – such as Test City 6.01, and a copy printed for the hard copy file folder if used.

Minimization of Documentation

While each part of a Best Practices standard must be proven individually and completely, the minimum number and amount of documents should be submitted which accomplishes that purpose. If submitting a part of a document such as a policy, the department should submit a copy of at least one complete page and not cut and paste only the two sentences which apply. This allows the reviewers to see that it is part of a larger policy and the context for the statements. An explanation of the document is provided on the DSF. If a standard requires proof of training, a sample of two or three certificates or a departmental sign in sheet showing training may be submitted as acceptable proof. The department should be aware that the Final Review team may request to see proof of entire department training on any issue (all members) when onsite.

Highlighting

Microsoft Word allows for yellow highlighting to be used on any text. Departments are expected to highlight the specific sections (sentences, paragraphs, pages) of a document which specifically proves compliance. If an entire document is needed to prove compliance, highlighting is unnecessary.

Electronic Submission Requirements

Departments submit proofs electronically by first ensuring their documents showing compliance (such as a General Order or Policy) are in electronic format and have the appropriate areas highlighted. The Program Manager then opens the appropriate DSF form, completes the form, and saves it on their computer system.

Each requirement of a standard must be clearly met and a different document showing proof of compliance may be necessary for each. All attachments should be clearly explained on the DSF form.

PDF files or photographs submitted as proofs can be submitted as an additional attachment when submitting the file electronically. They should still be explained on the original DSF however.

The department should meet these requirements:

1. Department must use the electronic file system provided in the download of “Complete Program Files and DSF’s” from the Program Website. (Downloads/Getting Started)
2. Department must have ability for routine backup of files on the department computer system. Backup may be manual or automatic but regular copies must be made to ensure no loss of data. The Program staff cannot provide copies of data already submitted and approved if data is lost.
3. Complete files must be available for all standards at the onsite review. The Department must understand Program deadlines will not be extended or adjusted due to data loss.

4. Department must have ability to copy their complete electronic file system (Chapters 1-12) to USB thumb drives. The copy media must be large enough so that all files and all supporting documentation will fit on one media device.
5. Department must be able to provide complete copies of all files during Final On-Site Review.
6. A printer must be easily accessible for printing the contents of any file if needed by an assessor.

7. All files must be created in same manner as required by current Program Manual, with file names clearly identified within each standard file. Such as for file folder # 1.01, you would expect to see the following contents of the file clearly labeled:
 1. DSF.doc
 2. Policy.doc
 3. OrgChart2010.xls
 4. PhotoOrgChart.jpg

Final Review On-site:

1. Assessors will bring a laptop if possible. Assessors will be provided a checklist of the on-site standards requiring review.
2. The Team Leader will assign which files are to be reviewed by each assessor. The File review may be done on computer by opening and reviewing the documents.
3. Assessors will note those Accepted on their Assessor Checklist.
4. Any files needing additional work will be discussed with the Program Manager and a copy of the file may be printed if necessary for explanation. After any changes, additions, or modifications are made and approved in paper form, the new documents will be added to the electronic file folder by the Program Manager.
5. Upon completion of all file reviews, the assessors will ensure they have correctly noted their Acceptance of files on their checklist and will sign and date the checklist.
6. A copy of the signed checklists will be provided to the Program Manager, and the original submitted with the final report.
7. A final electronic copy of the complete file system (All files for Chapters 1-12 including any supporting documentation and changes made during the onsite) will be produced in

electronic format and provided to the Team Leader before leaving. That copy will also be forwarded with the final report.

8. The department should maintain an archive copy of the final complete file system. This file copy will be extremely valuable during subsequent Re-Recognition processes.

The Review Process

Department Initial Meeting

Because some of the Best Practices require specific facility and equipment standards to be met, a thorough review of the Best Practices requirements should be conducted to ensure the department is aware of their needs in these areas. Facility and equipment issues can be costly and departments should know well in advance if any Best Practices requirements will require additional budgeting efforts. Your assigned advisor can conduct an initial visit/review to ensure the department is aware of the documentation process, conduct a facility inspection, and to assist the department in locating and developing directives if necessary.

Internal Review Process

Once a department has been accepted into the program, they begin reviewing and developing policy and collecting documentation as proof of compliance. (There is no reason a department cannot begin development of policies and procedures that meet the Best Practices prior to their official application or acceptance into the program. Submission or review can then be completed quickly once a department is accepted into the program and the overall review process shortened significantly.)

Departments accepted into the program are expected to complete their internal review and have their Final Review visit within two years from their date of acceptance.

File Requirements

The Texas Fire Departments Best Business Practices are available online to registered departments of the program. Candidate Departments must develop and submit an electronic file for each standard and will maintain Proof of Compliance for each standard in the respective file. The details of the file construction and maintenance process are covered in Chapter 4 of this Manual.

A department may request that a particular standard, originally designed to be submitted electronically, be viewed on site instead if the documentation is voluminous or part of the proof cannot be submitted electronically. File copies of all submissions must be maintained by the department even if reviewed and accepted electronically.

The self-assessment will typically begin as an exercise in comparison. The Program Manager (PM) starts comparing current department policy to the Recognition standards. Many managers will quickly come to the conclusion that the department is closer to compliance than anticipated. Fire Departments typically adapt to the ebb and flow of legislative changes and most departments quickly adopt policy that is consistent with the law. As the PM compares what must be covered for the Recognition purposes, he/she will probably find that some fine-tuning is necessary.

Compile Supportive Documentation

There are several ways to prove compliance on most standards. The Document Submission Form (DSF) allows a department to use any number of methods of proofs of compliance including written directives, other documentation, and even interviews and observation. Departments use the Document Submission Form (DSF) to explain what is being submitted as Proof of Compliance. If a standard requires a Written Directive, the department's directive must cover all aspects or requirements of the standard. Other proofs of compliance with the directive (items that prove the department is complying with their own directive) must be included to show full compliance with the Best Practice. The Evaluator's Review section of the DSF can provide the Program Manager with an understanding of what needs to be submitted for the proof to be accepted. A discussion of the Document Submission Form is provided in Chapter 4.

Written Directives — Usually a policy or general order of the department issued by the Chief, generally codified in the department's Operating Manual. It can also be local ordinances, state laws, civil service rules, city personnel rules or other written material that requires employee compliance.

Written Documentation — Examples of written documents include, but are not limited to lesson plans, memos, logbooks, emails, state law sections, or judicial

policies and law. Department policy is usually considered a written directive and will most often be the first item the Manager has available to prove compliance.

Other Documentation — May include photographs, log sheets, department forms, training rosters, certificates or any number of other items.

Interviews — Interviews may be conducted by the Final Review team. The Manager may want to list individuals on the DSF who are most knowledgeable about the department action in a specific area. For example, the director of personnel for the jurisdiction may be listed as a potential interview to prove compliance with certain personnel standards. The lead dispatcher may be listed as the best source of information on dispatch responsibilities. Listing the names of individuals does not insure that the assessment team will interview the person. However, if the

team does choose to interview the suggested person, the Manager has already supplied them with the name (and proper spelling) of the person to be interviewed. This makes the assessor's job easier and that makes the assessment go faster.

Observation — This type of proof is the easiest for the assessor and probably the least utilized. There are several standards where simply observing the action or a piece of equipment is proof that the department is in compliance with the standard. PM's should be aware that assessors are not required to settle for a single proof of compliance unless it is overwhelming in nature. The wise Manager will list multiple proofs. The more ways a Manager can show the department is truly doing what they say they are doing, the better. The assessors will be looking to find compliance with the first few items they look at in the folder. Having additional proofs will never hurt, but not having enough is a shortcoming.

Train Department Personnel in Policy Changes

If policy changes are necessary, it is imperative that all members of the department receive a copy and be trained in those changes. This receipt of a copy of a directive or training should always be documented and maintained by the department. The Manager may want to have other department personnel present the changes (including the Chief or other high ranking officer) or may simply coordinate with shift commanders. The important point is that department personnel know about newly adopted policy as soon as possible. Any new policy should include a training component for those it affects. Depending on the type of policy change, training may be formal classroom training, an internal webcast, or written correspondence as long as there is documentation that the individuals received the training. The PM should remember that the assessment team may desire to interview department rank and file on the particular issue addressed.

Electronic Submission of Proofs of Compliance

Over two thirds of the standards allow electronic submission of proofs of compliance by the Candidate Department.

A “V” notation indicates the file will be reviewed by the On-Site Team. Please note that any and all files may be verified onsite. A department may request an electronic submission standard be reviewed onsite due to the amount of proof required to show compliance. If electronic submission is allowed, the following process is used.

A Document Submission Form (DSF) is used as the first item in all files. If Electronic Submission is used the DSF is submitted as the first attachment of each standard submission.

If a standard has multiple parts or requirements, the Candidate Department must show compliance with each part of the standard. The Proofs of Compliance may be listed as Item 1, 2, 3, etc. on the DSF with an explanation of what the item is and what part of the standard the item proves. A sample of a completed DSF and complete file is located on the download section of the website. The Evaluators Review section of the DSF provides the Program Manager with an understanding of what need to be submitted for acceptance.

Proofs of Compliance for some standards will be clear and obvious. However, if the department has any question concerning the documentation or the level of proof required, they should review the “Discussion” section of the standard for clarification. The Program Director may also be contacted for clarification of what might be required. Participation in the User’s Group can also assist Program Managers in the understanding what is required for proof of compliance.

Department documentation which is submitted electronically for acceptance as proof of compliance is maintained on a private host server and is backed up biweekly.

If the documentation submitted is believed to be insufficient in proving compliance, the Program Director shall contact the Program Manager to discuss the issue. The Program Director may suggest other documentation or other adjustments that would prove compliance. If the department requests, the Program Director will request review of the issue and submitted proofs of compliance by the Recognition Committee for a decision.

The Final Review team will randomly select a number of electronic files for onsite review to ensure proper documentation and review.

Extensions

If a department fails to complete the internal review within a two year period, they may request an extension. The extension request will be reviewed by the Program Director and submitted to the Recognition Committee for consideration. Failure to request an extension before the end of the two year period or failure of the Committee to grant an approval of the extension will result in the department being removed from the program. The department may reapply at any time.

Pre-Site Visit Survey

When the department feels that it has met all the standards, it should complete and submit the “Pre-Site Visit Survey”. This will allow a review of documentation and policies required for “Best Practices” and give both the department and the assessors and good overall summary of the department’s status. The completion of this survey is required prior to an initial on-site compliance review being scheduled.

Initial On-site Compliance Review

When the department has submitted and received acceptance of all standards recommended for electronic submission including the Pre-Site Visit Survey, and believes it has all onsite review requirements completed, they should submit to schedule their Initial On-site Compliance Review. The Initial On site Compliance Review is usually conducted by a local assessor (also called the Department Facilitator) and will be coordinated through the Program Director. The assessor will travel to the department and conduct an initial review of the entire onsite requirements. This process assists departments by making sure their onsite files and the required proof of compliance is complete before the Final Review. The cost of travel or the Initial On-site Compliance Review is the responsibility of the Candidate Department. The Department

Facilitator will complete Travel Vouchers and will be paid by the TFCA. The TFCA will invoice the Candidate Department afterward.

The Department Facilitator will review the department's files to ensure DSFs and proofs of compliance are prepared for the on-site Final Review. While he/she will not review in detail or formally accept the standard, he will ensure the file is ready for review. Since this assessor is typically located close to the department, this Initial On-site Compliance Review may take only a couple of hours.

Upon successful completion of the Initial On-site Compliance Review, the department may request the Final Review. The department should complete any necessary changes or additions to their files identified in the Initial On-site Compliance Review prior to requesting their Final Review.

Final Compliance Review

The Final Compliance Review is requested by a department when documentation for all standards has been completed and when the Initial On-site Compliance Review has been conducted. Any modifications recommended by the Department Facilitator in the Initial On-site Compliance Review should be completed prior to requesting the Final Review. The Final Review is requested through the Program Director.

The Program Director will select a minimum of 2 Assessors from another area in Texas that has no personal connection with the Candidate Department. One Assessor will serve as the Team Leader. The Final Review Team will travel to the department and conduct the Final Review by visually confirming the compliance with the remaining Best Practices where documentation has not been previously submitted. The Team may be required to reconfirm compliance with standards where documentation has previously been submitted.

The Team Leader will be the contact person for the team. The Team Leader shall moderate all discussions regarding compliance issues. The PM will be expected to be available to discuss issues anytime the team is working.

If the department has electronically submitted all standards allowed, the Final Review will normally require two assessors for two days. The team will usually arrive the night before or by noon on the first day, meet department personnel and begin their tour and review of the department. The team will usually conclude their review in the early afternoon on the second day. An exit interview is held with department leadership, and the team then travels back to their respective departments that afternoon or evening.

Members of the team may want to attend shift change, ride along with fire crews, and/or interview members of the department not scheduled for interview. This means the entire department needs to be prepared for these possibilities. The team is instructed to weigh all responses to queries. The Program Manager should arrange to attend shift briefings prior to the assessment and brief the department members on the upcoming Final Review and what to expect.

Program Managers should be aware that the onsite team may not be restricted in their access to department facilities or personnel nor are they required to use only the means recommended by the department to determine compliance.

The expense of the Final Review Team, including overnight accommodations, is the responsibility of the candidate department. Assessors will complete Travel Vouchers and will be paid by the TFCA. The TFCA will invoice the Candidate Department afterward.

The team will conduct an exit interview prior to departure. The Chief of the department will determine who should attend this exit interview. At this meeting, the department will be advised of the final recommendation the team will give the Committee. The Team may recommend “Recognized”, “Validated Participant” or “Not Recognized”.

Time Extension/ Appeals

If the department failed to meet standards for “Recognized” or “Validated Participant”, the Program Director may grant up to a ninety (90) day extension. If there are disputed compliance issues, the department has the option of presenting their case to the Program Director. The Director will present the issue(s) to the Best Practices Committee for clarification/resolution. If the Candidate Department is not satisfied with the decision of the Best Practices Committee, it may petition the Program Director for the candidate department to present its case directly to the Recognition Committee.

Validated Participant Status

This status is conferred only upon the department’s request. A department that has failed to meet the requirements for “Recognized” status but has successfully addressed and met the “Core Standards” as indicated in the manual and checklist, may opt to be designated as a “Validated Participant”. This allows the department to remain in the process and continue to work towards “Recognized Status”. The department will be required to pay the annual fees and submit annual reports. The department must show continued movement towards “Recognized” status and must complete the review process to achieve “Recognized” status for the remainder of its 4 year period. If at the end of the 4 year recognition period, the department has not attained “Recognized” status, it loses its “Validated Participant” status. It may re-apply to the program after a 6 month period.

Final Review Report

The Team Leader assigned to the Final Review Team will prepare a report of the Final Review and submit it to the Program Director within 10 business days of the Final Review visit.

Committee Review and Award

Upon receipt of the final report from the reviewing Team Leader, the Program Director will electronically forward the report to the Recognition Committee. A copy of the report will also be forwarded to the Candidate Department.

If there are no significant concerns regarding the department's compliance, the Committee Chairperson may request an electronic vote as allowed in the Committee Bylaws. This electronic vote to award "Recognized", or "Validated Participant" status allows more expeditious response. The Chairperson may request additional information from the Candidate Department or may delay the vote until the next scheduled business meeting of the Committee.

Reapplication for Recognized Status after Failure to Complete Initial or Review Process or After Revocation

Departments which fail to complete the initial review process within the 24 months allowed, who have failed to achieve "Recognized" or "Validated Participant" status, or who have lost their "Recognized" status due to any other action of the Recognition Committee are allowed to reapply after six months from the date of the action. The Committee will again act upon the application without prejudice as in any other application action.

Interpretation of Best Practices

The Program Director is charged with the interpretation of Best Practices and the determination of sufficient proof of compliance. From time to time, different interpretations may be raised by Candidate Departments. The final authority on the interpretation of standards and proofs of compliance is the Best Practices Committee. If a department requests, the Program Director will request an interpretation of a standard or proof of compliance from the Best Practices Committee.

NOW WHAT?

You have done it — **congratulations!** Now enjoy the benefits.

Recognition Term

Recognized status is awarded for a four (4) year term. Requirements for maintaining Recognized status is provided in Chapter 7.

Official Recognition

The department will be identified and introduced as a "Recognized" department at the Texas Fire Chiefs Association Annual Conference. The department will also be listed on the Texas Fire Chiefs Association website as a Recognized department.

Certificate Presentation

The department will receive a framed Certificate of Recognition. Additional certificates are available should a department have more than one facility.

Local awards can be made within the department's city at either a City Council meeting or dinner if requested. Local awards would be presented by a member of the Recognition Committee or the Program Director depending upon scheduling. Expenses for the individual making the presentation are the responsibility of the candidate department.

Recognized Department Logo

Recognition staff will provide the Program Manager with camera-ready copies of the official "Recognized Department" seal. This logo may be displayed on department letterhead, web pages or any other official manner.

Maintaining Recognized Status

Annual Report and Review of Selected Standards

Recognized status is awarded for a four year period. During this period the department must continue to comply with the Best Practices.

Departments must maintain either paper or electronic files on all standards while participating in the program. These files need to be maintained throughout the four year period in order to facilitate re-recognition.

Not every standard needs new Proofs of Compliance submitted each year. Departments are required to submit an Annual Report and Proofs of Compliance for four of the standards which require specific action on the part of the department. The Annual Report Form is available for download and asks about any changes in department policy or operation. If policy changes were made impacting critical standards, copies of those policy changes should also be submitted with the Annual Report.

The Department Director (or Fire Chief) must also sign the report indicating that the Department continues to meet or exceed all Recognition Standards, or if it does not, what the Department is doing to come back into compliance.

Should a department fail to submit these proofs in a timely manner; the Program Director will query the department. Failure to promptly submit the required proofs, annual fees, or other issues which provide proof that a department is not complying with Best Practices will result in the Program Director notifying the members of the Recognition Committee. Action of the Committee may revoke Recognized status.

Renewing Recognized Status

During the last twelve months of the four year cycle, if the department wishes to renew their Recognized status, the department is required to provide documentation and Proofs of

Compliance for all standards as they did during initial Recognition. The re-recognition process is designed to be a Full Review process for all departments.

Since all re-recognition departments have been through the process at least once already, they should be familiar with the file requirements and proofs of compliance. Having the old files with their DSFs and proofs will facilitate the re-recognition process.

The Department must apply for Re-Recognition using the Application form found on the Program Website and a new Contract will be executed for the next four year period. The Program Director is the primary contact for the department during this Recognition Renewal process. A Final Review Team visit and Committee Review will be conducted in the same manner as in the initial process.

Department Re-Recognition Process

Departments should first begin with a review of each file. The following steps should be taken to ensure a complete review and compliance with the Best Practices.

1. Review the most current Best Practices Manual and compare the standard and proof of compliance requirements with those already in the file. Be aware that a number of standards have changed, new standards have been added, and minimum requirements for acceptance may have been modified since the last time the department was reviewed.
2. Complete a new (most recent version) Document Submission Form (DSF) and collect any new proofs of compliance needed. Make sure the proofs required for showing compliance are present and are within the 12 months prior to the anticipated on-site.
3. If desired, the department may submit the following files for review prior to the Final Review:
 - a. Any new standard not previously reviewed,
 - b. Any standard where the department has changed their directive since the last review.
4. Departments are encouraged to conduct a Mock Assessment with other area Program Managers prior to the Final Review.
5. Program managers should note that many files may already contain proofs that will be required for this and subsequent reviews. For instance a Charter provision designating the creation of the department may already be present in the file. However, where training or periodic activity is required, the department must show that these activities have occurred within the previous 12 month period. (New employees trained in required policies or provided copies, etc.)

Departments wishing to renew their Recognized Status must schedule their Final Review at least 30 days prior to the expiration date of their Recognized status. All proofs of compliance for this review must be dated within the last 12 months of their prior Recognition period.

New or Revised Standards

Managing the fire service is an ever changing process. As such, it is anticipated that modifications and additions will be made to the Best Practices over time. The Recognition Committee is charged with the responsibility of keeping the standards up to date and consistent with best practices. The Committee may consider at their periodic meetings, any change, modification, or additions to the standards. Any Texas Fire Chief, Assessor, Program Director, or Recognized department may suggest or recommend modifications or additions.

When additions or modifications to the standards are made, the Committee will decide an effective date for the addition or modification. The Committee will also determine if the currently Recognized departments must meet the new or modified standard. If currently Recognized departments are required to meet the new or modified standard, the Committee will establish a time frame for compliance and the departments notified. Otherwise, departments already in Recognized status must comply with the revision or modification at their next Recognition Renewal.

Fees and Expenses

TFCA Participation Required

To participate in the program, the department Chief must be a member of the Texas Fire Chiefs Association. Membership also provides numerous other benefits including legal updates, legislative representation on fire service issues, training, and access to Chiefs around the state to assist in solving problems.

Recognition Program Annual Fees

Recognition program annual fees depend on the size of department as listed below:

Fire Fighters	Fee Amount
1-10	\$ 350.00
11-25	\$ 500.00
26-50	\$1,200.00
51-100	\$1,600.00
101-200	\$2,000.00
201 or more	\$2,400.00

After application is made and a department has been accepted into the program the department will be billed for their first year's fees. The initial meeting for the Candidate will be scheduled. These annual costs will subsequently be billed each year.

The department is also responsible for the expenses of the Assessor's visits (only one required but others can be requested by the department) and the Final Review team. (This expense is incurred every four years.) Assessors are generally located close by and seldom result in any expense. Final Review teams are from another area of the state but overnight travel expenses are not expected to exceed \$1,000.

Travel expenses for the Facilitator and Final Review Team are controlled by the Program Travel Expense Policy and will be reimbursed immediately upon final approval of the expense report.

The Candidate Department will subsequently be billed with a single itemized invoice after the Final Review.



Best Practices Recognition Committee

Membership

The Recognition Committee is composed of members appointed by the TFCA Board of Directors. New Board Members are appointed at the first TFCA Board Meeting each year and begin their term of office immediately upon appointment.

Organization

Officers of the Committee include a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Recording duties are performed by the TFCA staff or Program Director attending the meeting. The Chair and Vice-Chair are appointed each year by the Board.

Meetings

The Committee will meet as needed to consider the business of the Committee. The Committee may take action electronically if approved by the Chairperson. Electronic voting on all issues is permitted by Committee Bylaws.

Voting

A quorum exists when at least half of the members of the Committee are present. Decisions are made based on a simple majority of those present and voting.

When issues are submitted to the Committee members for electronic vote, a time limit shall be established by the Chairperson, and a majority of those voting within the time limit shall decide the issue. A minimum of five Committee members voting within the time period is required for a quorum and decision.

Committee members who have a personal relationship with the Candidate Department or the Candidate Department Fire Chief will abstain from voting on Recognition for that department. If a tie vote occurs, the decision is postponed until all committee members can vote. If a member cannot vote for any reason, the tie is broken by the President of the Texas Fire Chief's Association.

Travel Policy

Appendix

A

Recognition Committee Members, Program Directors, Facilitators and Final Review Team members will adhere to the following travel policies.

Travel

Travel to and from a department or event under this program will be at the lowest possible expense. If travelers use personal vehicle they will be reimbursed at state rate for total mileage. Airfare and car rental must be approved in advance by the Program Director.

Lodging

Every effort should be made to select lodging at the state rate. Anticipated lodging rates at more than state rate must have prior approval of a Program Director. Receipts for lodging must be submitted. The program will not reimburse exceptional expenses such as in room movies.

Meals

No more than \$45 per day is authorized for meals. If a meal log is completed receipts are not required. The program will not pay for alcoholic beverages. The actual meal expense including tip, not to exceed the daily total should be reported on the log.

Other Expenses

Other necessary and required expenses may be reimbursed with prior approval of the Program Director.

Travel Expense Invoice

Upon completion of travel, a Travel Expense Invoice should be prepared and submitted to the TFCA Office along with all required receipts with-in five business days of return from travel. TFCA staff will then pay the assessor and bill the Candidate Department for the travel amounts.