



Accreditation Open Forum

July 23, 2024 – “Project Managing Your Agency’s Accreditation”

Questions and Answers

- Have you seen any organization complete the process in less than three years?
 - Yes, several organizations have successfully completed the accreditation process in less than three years. For example, utility agencies often manage to complete the process within one to one-and-a-half years due to fewer applicable chapters. For traditional public works agencies, two years is a more typical timeframe. Despite these variations, APWA allows all applicant agencies up to three years to complete the process, providing ample time for agencies to ensure all criteria are met.
- How often is the *Public Works Management Practices Manual* updated?
 - Every four years. The 11th edition, which is the most current, debuted in August 2023. The 12th edition will be released in late summer/early fall 2027.
- Is it possible to get the manual in PDF form?
 - Unfortunately, the manual is not available in PDF form. However, APWA offers the Self-Assessment Software, which serves as a digital representation of the manual. This software allows agencies to conduct self-assessments and manage their accreditation documentation more effectively. It includes interactive features that facilitate tracking progress and even assigning practices to whole divisions or specific individuals.
- Is there a list of policies and procedures that we should have? I purchased the manual and I didn't see any list of policies and procedures in it.
 - The *Public Works Management Practices Manual* is organized into chapters, each containing recommendations for items that an agency should implement, such as policies, procedures, plans, and inventories. The aim of accreditation is to ensure your agency has items for each applicable practice. APWA does not critique the content of the policies or procedures but verifies their existence and use. Policies may differ based on location; for example, street sweeping schedules will vary between Washington and Florida. If you would like to see examples of what was supplied for a specific practice, the model practice library is an excellent resource.
- Could we get a link to the model practices library?
 - If you are with an accredited or applicant agency, please contact us at accreditation@apwa.org for a digital link to the model practices. This resource provides valuable examples and templates that can assist your agency.
- How do you assess what level of approval is needed for a given process or policy - departmental, senior management, or council?
 - Your organization likely has a framework for who can and cannot adopt policies and craft procedures. If you are not sure what those guidelines are, your chief administrative officer, city attorney, or city clerk may know the answer. For accreditation, that is covered in the policy your agency supplies in Chapter 1, practice 4. If your agency outlines that only a director may sign off on a policy, that is approval the evaluation team will be looking for.
- How do you prepare your staff for the evaluation site visit?
 - Evaluators will review the documentation you provide to confirm your agency’s adherence to practice, and if needed, will ask for clarification or additional

information. To prepare your staff for the evaluation site visit, ensure they are familiar with the accreditation process and understand the expectations. Conduct short mock evaluation sessions to practice responding to potential questions/requests. It's also helpful to hold periodic training sessions regarding the Self-Assessment Software and its use. Try to remind all staff that the evaluation process is not like an audit or regulatory examination. The evaluators are public works professionals from accredited agencies—they are your peers.

- What questions are asked in the evaluation process?
 - During the evaluation process, questions typically focus on verifying compliance with specific practices and the documentation your agency has provided, so they will vary. But here are some common types of questions:
 - "How does your agency comply with this practice?"
 - "When was the last time your agency reviewed this policy? I do not see a date on the document."
 - "Can I see additional documentation for this practice?"
- Is uploaded documentation enough or should we also have information in the directives/compliance boxes in the software?
 - The requirements for documentation can vary depending on the specific practice being evaluated. For some practices, uploading a single document, such as one example of a map showing scale, will be sufficient and the explanation can be brief, i.e. "Yes, our maps include a scale (see uploaded example)." However, other practices may require additional information or context provided in the directives/compliance boxes in the Self-Assessment Software. This additional information can clarify how a practice is applied within your agency or explain any unique circumstances that might affect compliance.
- Why would you want to combine two agencies (or more) and complete accreditation together?
 - Combining multiple agencies to complete accreditation can offer several advantages, especially for organizations with overlapping public works functions. By working together, agencies can share resources, such as accreditation software, and coordinate their evaluation dates, leading to synchronized expiration dates and reduced costs. This collaborative approach can also foster inter-agency communication and promote the sharing of best practices. However, the decision to combine efforts should be considered based on each agency's goals and operational structure. Some agencies prefer to maintain separate accreditation processes and that is understandable, particularly for larger agencies that may be more decentralized.
- Are there any resources that would help us share with our staff the importance of accreditation?
 - Yes, several resources are available to help communicate the value of accreditation to staff. APWA offers these open forums (and handouts like these produced from the forums), and workshops (both virtual and in-person) that include panel discussions with individuals from accredited agencies who can speak on the importance of becoming accredited. We also have an informational flyer that can be shared with internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, hosting internal meetings to discuss the accreditation process and its positive impacts can foster staff engagement and collaboration across your department and even your organization.

- What are the benefits of accreditation?
 - While we feel each agency will benefit in various ways, some of the benefits accredited agencies have shared with us include:
 - ✓ Improved Organizational Efficiency: Accreditation encourages agencies to evaluate and streamline their processes, leading to more efficient operations.
 - ✓ Continuous Improvement: The accreditation process promotes a culture of continuous improvement by identifying areas for growth and development.
 - ✓ Enhanced Public Confidence: Being accredited demonstrates a commitment to excellence and adherence to industry standards, which can increase public trust and confidence in the agency's capabilities.
 - ✓ Standardized of Documents: Accreditation provides a framework for standardizing practices across the agency, ensuring consistency.
 - ✓ Professional Development: Accreditation offers opportunities for staff to enhance their skills and knowledge through training and professional development programs.
 - ✓ Succession Planning: Accreditation often includes guidelines for succession planning, helping to ensure that the agency has a strategic approach to developing and retaining future leaders.
 - ✓ Potential for Lower Insurance Premiums: While not guaranteed, achieving accreditation may lead to reduced insurance premiums by demonstrating a commitment to best practices and risk management.

Lastly, here are the results from today's poll:

“Where is your agency in the accreditation process?”

- “Just started exploring” 36 respondents
- “Purchased the manual and software” 16 respondents
- “Started self-assessment/improvement” 17 respondents
- “Ready to apply!” 2 respondents
- “Already accredited, here to learn and interact” 8 respondents