

An Outstanding Operation

The Miami Parking Authority celebrates its designation as an Accredited Parking Organization and describes the steps it took to get there.

**By Alejandra Argudin,
LEED AP, CAPP**



THE MIAMI PARKING AUTHORITY (MPA) is proud to offer outstanding service to residents of and visitors to our large city and even prouder to have recently been recognized as one of the first five Accredited Parking Organizations (APO) by the International Parking Institute. Getting there wasn't all that easy, but every step was valuable, and we're looking forward to an even brighter future as an APO.

Created in 1955 by a Special Act of the Florida State Legislature and incorporated into the City of Miami's Charter in 1968, the Miami Parking Authority manages and develops affordable and convenient on- and off-street parking facilities in the City of Miami. MPA is managed by parking industry professionals and financed by parking revenues. Funds not used by operations are returned to the City of Miami, and all ticket citation revenues are directly payable to Miami-Dade County. MPA provides accessible parking for millions of vehicles annually.



As a semi-autonomous agency of the City of Miami, MPA's main mission is to make the parking experience convenient, affordable, and safe for people in the city. MPA contributes to an efficient transportation system that serves the needs of the public and promotes economic development within Miami. The agency looks to meet the city's parking needs while being responsive to its customers by continuously improving performance and striving for excellence.

MPA is well-aware of the phenomenal growth our city is experiencing. For that reason, we are always open to opportunity, expansion, and innovation as we stay true to our commitment to excellent customer service, fiscal transparency, public accountability, and effective governance. That's where our success lies.

When Rachel Yoka, vice president of program development at the International Parking Institute, told us about the launch of the Accredited Parking Organization designation for parking organizations, we felt it was an excellent opportunity to expose our success and immediately became interested in pursuing it. Given our track record of excellence in all areas of operations, we decided we wanted to be one of the first to go through with the process of becoming an APO. After reviewing the criteria established by IPI's APO Committee, we felt confident that we would receive accreditation, as well as meet the prerequisites to attain the gold standard.

Initial Feelings

We are fortunate to have a CEO who supports any and all endeavors that contribute to the betterment and



will continue working with leading-edge technology for the convenience of our customers.

The Process

Initially, the APO accreditation process seemed overwhelming as we worked to gather and present the evidence that would demonstrate our accomplishments. But once the different departments became directly involved and took charge of their sections, we were able to produce the requested documentation.

As we organized the documentation, we realized officially for the first time that we were able to meet the requirements of the program. It was a proud moment for us to see that not only did we meet the standards by which all organizations were being measured, but that we also exceeded those standards more often than not.

We assigned a staff member to review the different sections as the departments completed them to make sure all the necessary information was provided in an organized and timely manner. The assignment took approximately a month and a half to complete. We were fortunate to have the support of our staff across the board for completion of this project.

Lessons Learned

As an organization, we had just finished formalizing our strategic plan when we started working on APO. As it turns out, our plan had actually contemplated some of the same standards that we didn't meet. We also came across others that we had implemented in the past but that are no longer in place. At that point, it became evident to us that we needed to revisit those standards in order to reinforce our qualifications.

After the experience of the APO process, we also learned that we should revive certain items that are meaningful to our customers and to our business. We can easily reestablish certain elements that had been in place in the past, especially for the benefit of our customers. These elements have since been added to our strategic plan so they are implemented by the time we are up for recertification.

Going through the process reassured us that we are a thriving agency. I was excited and proud to see that we continue to be leaders in this industry, not only as it relates to our parking operations, but also in terms of how we run the agency as a whole. Every department functions with a sense of pride that was evident as dedicated staff members became engaged and looked forward to participating in the process to prove that they contribute in equal part to the success of the organization.

When we first became involved in the process, we didn't know what to expect. But we did know we had the motivation to tackle the project and give it our all. I would not have done anything differently. My advice to any organization going through the process in the near

Meet the APOs

Accredited Parking Organizations have met a comprehensive standard of excellence. The first five APOs were introduced at the 2015 IPI Conference & Expo in Las Vegas:

- Miami Parking Authority.
- Cornell University Commuter and Parking Services, Ithaca, N.Y.
- University of Washington Transportation Services, Seattle, Wash.
- City of Houston Parking Services Department, Houston, Texas.
- Missoula Parking Commission, Missoula, Mont.



success of our organization. Additionally, we have a very committed board whose five members allow us the flexibility to explore new technologies, grow as an organization, explore opportunities outside our city, and take calculated risks for the benefit of our community. Our board not only sets policies that deliver results but also offers support to help us move forward with new challenges. Going through the accreditation process solidified that we are on the right track as an organization while bringing to our attention several areas where we can make improvements.

There was no doubt among staff that our organization meets the criteria established by the committee for accreditation. While studying the different aspects represented in the APO designation, we came to the realization that we run a very well-rounded organization that exemplifies a culture of integrity and accountability, and we wanted to share our experience with others in the industry. MPA's spirit of creativity, strong appetite for innovation, and talented leadership have all played an important role in positioning it as a parking industry leader in technology adoption and fiscal responsibility. We are constantly exploring and implementing technological solutions to meet and exceed the parking needs of our patrons. The MPA board and management team

Accrediting Your Organization

The International Parking Institute (IPI) launched the APO as a new designation for parking organizations that have achieved a comprehensive standard of excellence. APO recognizes best practices in responsible parking management and operations, customer service, professional development, safety, and security.

To become an APO, an organization must demonstrate its commitment to ongoing evaluation and improvement of program outcomes through the implementation of industry best practices. Applicant organizations work with an IPI-approved and trained third-party reviewer to organize and present evidence of accomplishment of more than 250 criteria in 13 categories related to industry best practices. The APO was developed to be applicable to institutional, municipal, medical, university, airport, private, and other parking programs.

Categories are:

- Governance and organization.
- Planning and monitoring.
- Financial budgeting and management process.
- Customer service.
- Personnel education and development.
- Access and revenue control.
- Asset maintenance.
- Regulations, compliance, adjudication, and collections.
- Safety, security, and risk management.
- Environmental sustainability.
- Marketing and communications.
- Data security.
- Third-party contractors and service-level agreements.

Facilities interested in becoming APOs can download information, including the complete 35-page APO Manual for Applicants at parking.org/apo.

future is to not be discouraged by the size of the APO matrix. Although it is very lengthy, it all comes together with dedication, organization, and level of detail. I also think it was very beneficial to have all the staff involved in the process. Giving our staff a chance to participate in the completion of the project made them aware of their importance to the organization.

MPA is proud to be one of the first five parking organizations to earn the APO designation and be recognized for responsible parking management and operations and outstanding practices in customer service, professional development, safety, and security. We believe the APO recognition serves as a good benchmark to indicate where we are as an organization in this industry. It was helpful in identifying the areas where we are doing well



and those we need to improve.

It is very easy to lose focus on the future when you get caught up in the present. In our case, the fact that we had just worked on our strategic plan was very helpful because we were able to incorporate items that we might have overlooked if they had not been part of the APO requirements. In the end, we are very proud to be recognized with this designation by such a reputable organization. The recognition exemplifies our ongoing commitment to integrity and accountability as we provide high-quality parking operations and management.

The designation helps benchmark the organization and allows us to set goals and establish where we would like to be. While it does take time and effort, earning the recognition of the largest association in the industry is well worth the work. It is a wonderful opportunity that allows an organization to stand out among its peers while opening a dialog among different organizations to determine what can be done better for the benefit of customers, employees, and the organization as a whole.

I predict that the quality of the program will be further enhanced as feedback is received from the various organizations going through the process. IPI has set a standard for what an organization should have in place to be successful. We need to continue challenging ourselves as an industry so that we can continue to grow as an organization, educate our customers as to who we are and what our purpose is, and successfully partner with the business community. Parking continues to be the first experience someone has when arriving at a destination and the last experience they will have before they leave. We need to continue our work to make it a pleasant one!

ALEJANDRA ARGUDIN, LEED AP, CAPP, is chief operations officer with the Miami Parking Authority. She can be reached at aargudin@miamiparking.com.