

CFIA – becoming a Washington Accord signatory

<http://aapia.cfia.or.cr/>

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The process to become a Washington Accord signatory has been an ongoing effort of more than 20 years for CFIA and each step further to reach our goal was worth it due to the many satisfactions lived and team achievements.

Through this article, we would like to share this process with other organizations that might get inspired by our effort.

The Colegio Federado de Ingenieros y de Arquitectos de Costa Rica – CFIA, is the professional engineering and architecture organization in Costa Rica created by law in 1903. Through this law, the state conferred to CFIA the functions of regulating, controlling, and developing professional practice of these two professions.



Colegio Federado de Ingenieros y de Arquitectos - CFIA

During these 117 years, CFIA's has worked and contributed to society by fulfilling its mission: "To ensure excellence and decorum of our members, for the development of an efficient, responsible and interdisciplinary professional practice of engineering and architecture; contributing to the security and sustainable progress of the country".

As background information, it is important to mention that in Costa Rica only 15 universities have Engineering programs. There is a total of 93 Engineering careers from different specialties. Of these, 5 public and 3 private universities group most of the programs.

The Engineering training programs last 5 years to obtain the academic degree of "licentiate".

Being the organization responsible for granting the license to practice engineering and architecture in the country, every year CFIA gives around 1,200 licenses to new professionals. These new members must undertake and satisfactorily pass an induction course that include ethical, legal, and procedural foundations for professional practice.

About the process to become a Washington Accord Signatory

Going back to February 1993, the "First Pan American Seminar and First National Congress on Institutional Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Education" was organized under the auspices of UPADI (Pan American Federation of Engineering Societies). This marks the commencement of CFIA's participation in the analysis of the accreditation processes.

With the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the collaboration project called "Accreditation of Engineering Education Programs in Latin America" was carried out from 1994 to 1997. The project's main aim was to help in the creation of a reference framework

for the accreditation of engineering education programs in Latin America, stimulating the creation of accreditation systems.

In July 1997, CFIA's Assembly members approved the creation of a Permanent Joint Commission, in charge of the project for the creation of an accreditation agency for the careers of Engineering and Architecture.

As a result of the efforts of this Joint Commission on Accreditation (CPA), in 1999 the first engineering program was accredited as "substantially equivalent" under the criteria and procedures of the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB). From this process onwards, evaluation visits to the programs were carried out by two evaluation teams: a CEAB team and a CPA-CFIA "parallel team" or "shadow team".

More than 20 joint evaluation visits were carried out under this modality, both in public and private universities. A total of 12 Engineering programs were accredited.

In 2003, the CFIA General Board of Directors agreed on the creation of the Professional Training department (DFP), as the organizational body in charge of being the formal link with the academic sector and responsible for the execution of the agreements emanating from the CPA. This department began working in 2004.

Moreover, in November 2005, AAPIA was established as the accreditation agency for Architecture and Engineering programs, where the CPA would represent CFIA and the employer sector would be invited to participate in the accreditation council.

Indeed, a very important Memorandum of Understanding between CFIA and Engineers Canada was signed in 2008. In the MoU CEAB agreed to provide CFIA with the technical assistance required to outline and implement its own accreditation system and it agreed to assist the future Costa Rican accreditation system to achieve membership in the Washington Accord.

This invaluable support let AAPIA CFIA to participate in the general meeting of the International Engineering Alliance held in Istanbul, Turkey in June 2015. It was during this meeting that CFIA was unanimously accepted and given the provisional member status within the Washington Accord. The application was supported by both Engineers Canada and Engineers Ireland who from that moment on officially served as our mentors in the process to lead CFIA to reach its goal, full signatory status.

At the IEAM 2016 held in Malaysia, the provisional status of CFIA was formally recognized within the Washington Accord. A period of 5 years was established so that AAPIA could make the necessary adjustments based on the IEA good practices and apply to become a full signatory. The mentoring organizations collaborated significantly during this process, with visits and advice.

During the IEAM 2018, with the endorsement of the mentoring organizations, the application to be evaluated by a Washington Accord team was presented.

A review team comprised by evaluators from Turkey, Hong Kong and New Zealand visited our accreditation agency in 2019 to evaluate the performance of AAPIA in four accreditation visits.

Finally, the review team presented its report to the Washington Accord signatories recommending CFIA and its accreditation agency to be upgraded to full signatory member. This recommendation was unanimously accepted on June 22, 2020 at the IEAM 2020.

Definitely this is a very important milestone for our accreditation agency and the academy as the programs accredited by AAPIA will be recognized by the signatories of the Washington Accord.

CFIA intends with its accreditation agency, AAPIA, to guarantee to the national and international community that the study programs of the different engineering and architecture careers meet the criteria established to provide the relevant international recognized training.

Our commitment is to continue contributing to the development and recognition of good practice in engineering education to the best benefit of improving the quality of life of our society.