

Finding the Trail Forward: Establishing a Governance Framework for Search and Rescue in Nunavik

Governance is about how we make decisions and organize to get things done. In search and rescue, effective governance that supports fast responses can save lives. The goal of Nunavik SAR Roundtable 2025 is to reach consensus on a governance framework for Nunavik SAR that will improve response times and operational effectiveness, foster inter-community and inter-agency collaboration, and ensure that the local and Inuit Knowledge of Nunavimmiut is fully integrated into the SAR system.

The Frontline: Community SAR Teams

Community responders represent the cornerstone of the search and rescue system in Nunavik. They match their dedication with intimate knowledge of the land, local environmental conditions, and their fellow community members. Community responders should be members of a recognized ‘organized team’ which can be an Auxiliary unit, a Ranger patrol, Uumajuit wardens, or any SAR unit recognized by the community. The stipend for community responders will continue to be paid out of the Hunter Support Program.

Roles

- Serving as searchers/responders in the field or as members of the incident management team
- Access, stabilize, and evacuate distressed or injured individuals to ensure their timely transfer to appropriate care or place of safety
- Provide such other assistance to municipal, regional, provincial, and federal agencies as required, able to, and authorized

Requirements

- Complete required training
- Maintain competencies and equipment
- Respond to search missions prepared and ready
- Work in harmony, unison, respect with team members
- Follow the direction of the community SAR coordinator, a regional coordinator, and/or JRCC coordinator

Governance and organizational issues identified at past roundtables:

- NPS unqualified to be agency of jurisdiction for GSAR
- Confusion on roles, responsibilities, mandates, particularly for GSAR
- Limited collaboration between SAR partners and communities
- Communication and information flow issues
- Dislike of current level system (1-3) used for SAR operations
- Too much responsibility and authority given to mayors
- The land-ice interface
- Underreporting of SAR cases
- Need to fully integrate Inuit Knowledge into SAR system

Agencies of Jurisdiction

Air/Marine SAR: Canadian Armed Forces (JRCC/RCAF)

Marine: Coast Guard

Humanitarian (ground/inland waters): Nunavik Police Service*

*This framework envisions Kativik Civil Security assuming responsibility for Humanitarian SAR.

Local SAR Management: Community Search and Rescue Coordinators

Located in each community, search and rescue coordinators will be the foundation of the SAR system in Nunavut. These individuals will be responsible for preparing for and coordinating all ground and marine SAR operations at the local level. They must provide the leadership and organization required to investigate a case develop a plan, determine the resources required, deploy those resources, and evaluate results. Critically, the coordinators will serve as SAR detectives. A search and rescue operation requires information – as much as possible, as accurate as possible, as quickly as possible to help you and your partners make good decisions.

The leadership provided by the coordinator will ensure a SAR operation runs smoothly and that the right things are done, at the right time, with the right resources. At certain points in the year, the SAR coordinator will also assist with SAR prevention and marine safety activities.

Each community will have one SAR coordinator. This coordinator will be recognized as an employee of Kativik Civil Security and will receive a part-time salary. The SAR coordinator responsibilities could also be built into the duties of an existing role, such as the fire chief or public safety officer, if that is the community's preference.

Roles

- Facilitate training opportunities for their teams
- Supervise the maintenance of key equipment
- Maintain an up-to-date inventory of SAR equipment in the community
- Keep an up-to-date list of members of SAR team(s), including their contact information, training, and skills
- Organize a group chat or some other form of group communication to provide alerts, notifications, updates, and other SAR-related information
- Establish an incident management team
- Identify a command post location and prepare it for use
- Receive alerts
- Notify responders
- Strive for mobilization of 30-45 minutes
- Lead investigation, management, and planning efforts
- Organize and task SAR teams
- Organize the purchase of supplies and fuel for SAR teams
- Collaborate with partners as required
- Complete required documentation

- Facilitate debriefs
- Work with partners to determine search suspension
- Participate in SAR prevention and marine safety initiatives
- Chair the community SAR council

Requirements

- Must complete the Nunavik SAR Coordinator Course
- Must complete other KRG training, as required
- Must submit required documentation to Kativik Civil Security
- Commit to being on call to receive SAR alerts

Local Support: Community Search and Rescue Council

Every community will have a search and rescue council that will provide local support to the SAR coordinator and responders. The six-person council will consist of a municipal council representative, Landholding rep., Anguvigaq rep., MSAR rep., GSAR rep., and will be chaired by the SAR coordinator. They will meet regularly to discuss the status of the community's SAR resources and determine critical requirements and areas for improvement. Further, they will coordinate and approve stipends for SAR volunteers, which will be paid for by the Hunter Support Program.

Roles

- Support local fundraising efforts
- Assist with completion of expense forms, damage reports, and other required paperwork
- Assist with local SAR prevention and marine safety initiatives
- Approve and administer stipends to community responders
- Support SAR coordinator as required during SAR operations
- Work with partners to determine search suspension

Key Definitions

Definitions are important in emergency response. A governance framework for Nunavik will have to adopt common definitions for search, rescue, and recovery. Here are some suggestions:

Search – overdue, lost subject

A search is to look for a lost person(s), vessel, or aircraft – a known entity in an unknown location, considered at risk (e.g. safety is threatened by conditions related to the environment, the weather, or to age or health factors of concern).

Rescue – known subject, known location

A rescue operation is an operation organized to assist and deliver to a place of safety a person(s) whose location is known or has been determined after a search, but due to equipment failure, injury or other circumstances is at risk and to delay the rescue may result in loss of life or unnecessary suffering.

Recovery

An operation that, although it may involve the participation of a search and rescue team, is carried out under the direction of another lead agency for the purposes of recovering the body of a person(s) who is deceased.

Requirements

- Devote time to regular meetings and other efforts as required
- Be prepared to support SAR operations, as required

Regional Coordination: Kativik Civil Security RRCC

In this framework, Kativik Civil Security will take over as the agency of jurisdiction for Ground Search and Rescue from the Nunavik Police Service. KCS will provide regional SAR coordination for ground and marine SAR cases, formulate a coherent regional SAR plan, and lead the development optimized local and regional resources. On the response side, KCS will serve as a regional rescue coordination centre (RRCC).

Roles

- Create and update regional SAR plans
- Collect and analyze SAR case information
- Undertake SAR prevention initiatives
- Research and development into new and emerging technologies
- Provide critical equipment and training opportunities
- Provide tasking number to community SAR coordinators for GSAR Operations
- Provide advice and support to community SAR coordinators
- Support documentation requirements
- Assess and act on requests for air support
- Help to secure assistance from and coordinate with regional and federal partners (e.g. NPS, JRCCs, private sector)
- Reimburse operational costs for Ground Search and Rescue (fuel, food, etc)
- Facilitate inter-community collaboration during searches
- Perform risk assessment and management for SAR operations
- Lead debriefing activities
- Provide Critical Incident Stress Management supports to responders
- Provide insurance to responders not already covered by another policy (e.g. CCGA)

Requirements

- KCS personnel responsible for SAR coordination must complete the Nunavik SAR Coordinator course, required internal training, and, if possible, the assistant search mission coordinator course offered at the Coast Guard College
- Be able to work closely and harmoniously with all possible partners

The Voice of the Volunteers: Nunavik Search and Rescue Association

A made-in-Nunavik SAR association will serve as a regional voice for marine, ground, and aerial SAR responders. This association would represent the interests of all teams and responders in the territory. It would be heavily involved in fundraising, advocacy, setting standards, and developing training materials.

provides a legal structure that stays in place even as the active members change over the years. An incorporated non-profit can enter into contracts and have its own bank accounts.

Roles

- Strengthen the SAR culture in Nunavik
- Represent the interests of Nunavik's SAR responders on different governing bodies (e.g. SARVAC)
- Solicit, administer, and distribute funding and donations
- Monitor and improve the working relationships between community responders and their government and private sector partners
- Provide personal equipment to community responders
- Develop and support training programs
- Develop standard operating guidelines
- Work with KCS to ensure interoperability and collaboration between community SAR teams so that they deploy between communities to provide support during prolonged searches
- Support responder health and safety
- Provide and support SAR prevention, education, and awareness programs

Requirements

- Volunteers willing to devote time and energy to association
- Need to register with the Registraire des entreprises
- Registered association requires a governing board of directors with at least three directors, elected by members
- Create and follow bylaws or "règlements généraux" which contain the general rules of how the organization should operate
- Must have an annual general meeting where the members, among other items, elect board members and receive financial statements
- Must file tax returns, an annual declaration form with the enterprise registrar, as well as pay an annual registration fee

Operational Framework

