

# Nunavik Search and Rescue Roundtable

## Roundtable 2026: SAR Governance in Nunavik



Montreal, Quebec, 20-21 March 2026

Report Prepared by Peter Kikkert

## Background: The Nunavik Search and Rescue Roundtable

The [Nunavik Search and Rescue \(SAR\) Roundtable](#) – a partnership between community responders, government practitioners, and researchers – was created in response to repeated calls from Nunavimmiut for review and discussion of the region’s SAR system. Community responders also requested a platform through which they could discuss issues with their search and rescue partners and strengthen the relationships required to conduct effective SAR operations in the region.



Co-organized by Craig Lingard, Director of Kativik Civil Security and academics Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, the first Nunavik SAR Roundtable was held in Montreal, Quebec, from 11-13 December 2022. The roundtable brought together SAR responders, community leadership, representatives from Inuit organizations, and regional, provincial, and federal officials to strengthen relationships and discuss search and rescue preparedness, prevention, and response. The [roundtable](#) and follow-up discussions culminated in a report on [The State of Search and Rescue in Nunavik](#), which explores strengths, major challenges, and areas for improvement, and provides recommendations for strengthening the region’s SAR system.

The roundtable was never envisioned as a one-and-done event, however. Instead, it is an ongoing initiative that provides the time and space to discuss and improve the search and rescue system, offers training opportunities, helps to organize other SAR activities, and strengthens relationships. In November 2023, March 2025, and March 2026 for instance, roundtable members participated in Arctic SAR Exchange [2023](#), [2025](#), and [2026](#), hosted by Joint Rescue Coordination Centres Trenton and Halifax. [Nunavik SAR Roundtable 2024](#), held in April 2024 in Montreal, focused on establishing standard operating guidelines for SAR operations in the region, and participants began to co-develop ground search and rescue pre-plans and reporting forms. In March 2025, the roundtable convened again with the theme [Finding the Trail Forward](#), with a focus on strengthening search and rescue governance.

## SAR in Nunavik: The Basics

Through the National SAR Program, federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal organizations share responsibility for search and rescue, with the support and assistance of volunteer organizations and private sector partners. The National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS), which is housed in Public Safety Canada, is responsible for coordinating the National SAR Program, provides policy advice to support SAR efforts, coordinates SAR prevention activities, and manages Canada’s contribution to the International Cospas-Sarsat Programme. The Canadian Armed Forces is responsible for the effective operation of the

federal coordinated maritime and aeronautical SAR system, while the Coast Guard is responsible for the maritime SAR program, which covers incidents involving a vessel or person(s) on federal waterways, including the waters of Ungava Bay, Hudson Bay, and James Bay.<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian SAR (ground SAR - GSAR) cases, such as searches for missing hunters or boaters on inland waters, is a provincial responsibility and has been delegated to the Nunavik Police Service (NPS) – although during prolonged and/or difficult searches the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) can assume control of operations. Due to widespread dissatisfaction among Nunavimmiut with GSAR authority resting with the police, partners are now actively exploring alternative governance models.

Currently, Kativik Civil Security has no mandate to deliver search and rescue services in the region, but the department is heavily involved in providing equipment, training, and support to community responders. The Kativik Regional Government plays a pivotal role in funding SAR operations through the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program, while Makivik has also provided financial support for past search and rescue equipment purchases.

Nunavimmiut responders engage in search and rescue activities as part of Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CCGA) units, community GSAR teams, Canadian Ranger Patrols, Uumajuit wardens, and the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association (CASARA). Private sector actors, such as Air Inuit and Nunavik Rotors, often provide assistance during SAR operations, when needed and if available.<sup>2</sup>

## **SAR Governance in Nunavik: A Primer**

Governance determines how decisions are made and how organizations act. In SAR, governance systems must enable speed, clarity, and coordination. In Nunavik, current arrangements do the opposite. They create barriers to collaboration, delay mobilization, and erode trust among responders and institutions. These issues have been consistently identified at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable between 2022 and 2026, yet gaps remain.

The disconnect between formal systems and operational reality is clear. The Nunavik Police Service (NPS) is the agency of jurisdiction for ground SAR and responsible for supporting air and marine responses. According to official procedures, all SAR cases should be reported to the police – but only a fraction are. In 2024, for instance, the NPS recorded nine SAR cases, yet communities responded to more than 142 incidents. In the three previous years, the NPS recorded fewer than 5% of all cases.

Community responders are the backbone of SAR in Nunavik. Their knowledge of the land and their community members, and their willingness to respond immediately, makes them indispensable. However,

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Canadian Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Manual, for maritime SAR purposes, the Coast Guard is responsible for all oceanic, coastal (coastal waters include any tributary's estuary), and secondary waters (as defined in the Canada Shipping Act, 2001), but not inland waters (as defined in section 2 of the Customs Act), except for the Canadian inland waters of the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence River system, and Lake Melville.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Nunavik's search and rescue system, see Kikkert and Lackenbauer, [\*The State of Search and Rescue in Nunavik\*](#).

current governance structures neither support nor empower them to operate effectively within a coordinated system.

The governance issues that impede collaboration are deeply embedded in the SAR system. Distrust of police and external agencies, shaped by past experiences and limited engagement, discourages cooperation. Weak relationships, inconsistent communication, language barriers, and a limited understanding of partner capabilities further reduce the ability of community responders and their partners to work together during incidents. Limited joint training and a lack of interoperable systems – Nunavik continues to have 14 communities doing SAR 14 different ways – impede collaboration between responders from different communities and reduce operational effectiveness.

In the current governance framework, mandates do not match capabilities. The Nunavik Police Service holds responsibility for SAR but lacks trained search and rescue incident management capacity, on-the-land operational capability, and dedicated funding. External partners such as the Sûreté du Québec often have limited regional familiarity and inconsistent involvement, while the Canadian Rangers lack a formal ground SAR mandate, complicating their activation. At the community-level, elected officials without SAR expertise are frequently required to make operational decisions.

While there has been meaningful progress in marine SAR through close collaboration between Kativik Civil Security and the Canadian Coast Guard, jurisdictional issues still need to be addressed, and relationships must be sustained and formalized moving forward.

In [2024](#), the Nunavik SAR Roundtable tried to bring greater consistency to community SAR operations through the co-development of standard operating guidelines. While some progress was made, Nunavimmiut responders argued that the creation of guidelines for Nunavik SAR should not continue until the jurisdictional issues that negatively impacted SAR operations in the region were properly addressed. As one responder effectively concluded: to develop comprehensive guidelines before these jurisdictional issues had been resolved would be like “build[ing] on melting permafrost. ... We will develop guidelines that don’t make sense because the system doesn’t make sense. We will learn them, and start using them, but they won’t work well, and everything still needs to change.”<sup>3</sup> Participants suggested that the roundtable’s next meeting should focus on co-developing concrete solutions to these governance issues.

[Nunavik SAR Roundtable 2025](#) focused on establishing a trail forward for search and rescue governance in the region. The participants reached a consensus to work towards a framework for SAR in Nunavik that rests on five interconnected pillars:

- Community SAR Teams: responders remain the operational backbone of SAR.
- Community SAR Coordinators: lead local investigation, planning, and mobilization – a paid position.
- Local SAR Councils: provide oversight and administrative support.

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<sup>3</sup> See Kikkert and Smith, [Nunavik Search and Rescue Roundtable 2024: Standard Operating Guidelines](#), pg. 8.

- Nunavik Rescue Coordination Centre/Kativik Civil Security: provides regional authority, coordination, planning, resource allocation, and 24/7 operational support.
- The Nunavik SAR Volunteer Association strengthens volunteer voice, sustainability, and culture.

Roundtable participants argued that this framework would improve response times, strengthen inter-community and inter-agency cooperation, and ensure that Inuit Knowledge and local experience are central to SAR operations.

Roundtable participants were very supportive of the framework, given its focus on local and regional leadership. They noted, however, the following key points:

- Further consideration had to be given to the roles and responsibilities of each pillar.
- The roles of and relationship between the Nunavik Police Service, the Sûreté du Québec, and Kativik Civil Security would have to be worked out. Could/should jurisdiction for ground search and rescue be transferred to Kativik Civil Security? Should police continue to exercise jurisdiction, but operational responsibility be given to Kativik Civil Security? These questions had to be answered.
- A Nunavik SAR Coordinator Training Program had to be developed rooted in the realities of search and rescue in Nunavik.
- Assistant Community SAR Coordinators should be built into the system, given the burden of being the person running a multi-day operation.
- While local support for the SAR Coordinators was essential, the responsibilities of the Local SAR Councils had to be clearly established. What would this group do? Who would sit on these councils? How would they support SAR operations? Would they be sustainable?
- While all agreed that a Nunavik SAR Volunteer Association should be created, and signed a resolution to this effect, concern was expressed about how to mobilize and sustain this kind of volunteer organization.

In short, while supportive of developing a new governance framework along the lines presented at Roundtable 2025, all participants suggested that careful preparatory work would have to be undertaken to make it a reality.

Since the 2025 roundtable, Kativik Civil Security and its partners have moved beyond simply identifying a trail forward for SAR governance in Nunavik – they are now actively breaking it. In the fall of 2025, they established the Nunavik SAR Committee which fosters regular, productive discussions between Civil Security, the Sûreté du Québec, the NPS, and Quebec’s Ministère de la Sécurité publique to work through the governance issues affecting ground search and rescue in Nunavik. Through this committee, Kativik Civil Security and its partners have helped build a shared understanding of these issues, their operational impacts, and how they could be addressed through the framework endorsed at the roundtable. The committee is examining how mandates, roles, and responsibilities can be redefined and better aligned to strengthen coordination and support more effective search and rescue operations across Nunavik.

In collaboration with the NPS, Kativik Civil Security has also established a Regional SAR Coordinator position. While funded by the NPS, the position will operate within Kativik Civil Security to strengthen

regional coordination and operational effectiveness for ground, marine, and air SAR incidents. The Regional SAR Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating and supporting search and rescue operations across Nunavik, including liaising with partner agencies, conducting risk assessments, and helping ensure the safety and effectiveness of SAR teams during both emergency and non-emergency operations.

## **The 2026 Nunavik SAR Roundtable: Setting the Scene**

In the invitation for Roundtable 2026, Kativik Civil Security Director Craig Lingard observed that “since the 2022 roundtable, we have moved from unanimous agreed confusion to a unanimous consensus on the Nunavik SAR governance model.” He also recognized that sustaining this momentum would require moving beyond broad agreement to address the detailed operational and governance questions still facing the framework. To support this work, a small group of experienced responders from across Nunavik was invited to participate in a focused meeting in Montreal at the end of March 2026. Participants were selected based on their SAR leadership, contributions to previous roundtables, and understanding of the unique governance systems already operating within Nunavik that must be considered in developing an effective and sustainable SAR framework.

### **Invited Participants:**

Zebedee Annahatak	Kangirsuk SAR (unable to attend due to emergency situation)
Michael Cameron	Salluit SAR
Johnny Kasudluak	Inukjuaq SAR
George Kauki	Kuujuuaq SAR
Peter Kikkert	St. Francis Xavier University
Justin Lingard	Kuujuuaq SAR
Craig Lingard	Direction, Kativik Civil Security
Billy Dan May	Tasiujaq SAR
Billy Palliser	Puvirnituq SAR

Financial support for the 2026 roundtables was provided by Kativik Civil Security and through Public Safety Canada Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SARNIF), under Project 24040, *Closing the Gaps: Addressing Critical Challenges in Arctic Ground Search and Rescue*.

## **Roundtable Discussion and Outcomes**

Participants were asked to work through each component of the governance framework that had been outlined at the 2025 roundtable: Community SAR Teams, Community SAR Coordinators, Local SAR Councils, a Regional SAR Coordination Centre, and the Nunavik Search and Rescue Association. They were tasked with clarifying the roles, responsibilities, authorities, and expectations associated with each pillar and determining how the different components would function together as an integrated system.

During these discussions, participants proposed several changes to the original framework. Rather than creating Local SAR Councils staffed largely by volunteers, they argued that Northern Village administrations should assume the administrative and support functions originally envisioned for those councils. Participants emphasized that expecting volunteers to carry such substantial organizational and administrative responsibilities was neither realistic nor sustainable. Instead, they recommended that search and rescue be recognized and supported as a core municipal service, comparable to fire protection. Participants also identified the need for an additional pillar within the governance framework: the Nunavik SAR Roundtable itself. Beyond serving as a forum for discussion, the Roundtable was recognized as a critical mechanism for relationship-building, collaborative decision-making, innovation, and consensus-building across the Nunavik SAR system.

Together, roundtable participants crafted the scaffolding for each pillar of the governance framework:

## **1. Community SAR Teams**

Community SAR teams form the operational foundation of the Nunavik SAR system. These teams already conduct the majority of SAR responses throughout the region and possess the skills, local knowledge, and environmental awareness essential to effective operations. Teams may include volunteers from local ground SAR groups, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary units, Canadian Ranger patrols, Uumajuit wardens, or other recognized local responders. Communities should retain flexibility in how they organize teams to reflect local realities, preferences, and capacities.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- Maintain operational readiness through training and exercises
- Respond rapidly to SAR incidents within and around their communities
- Locate, access, stabilize, and transport SAR subjects
- Support incident management when required
- Share local knowledge critical to search planning and risk assessment
- Support SAR prevention, boating safety, and public education activities

## **2. Community SAR Coordinators and Assistant Coordinators**

Each community should have a designated SAR Coordinator and Assistant SAR Coordinator, which will be paid positions supported through Kativik Civil Security or integrated into an existing municipal position. These individuals represent the leadership core of the local SAR system. They provide continuity, organization, and accountability while serving as the primary link between communities and regional or external partners. These individuals will be responsible for preparing community SAR responders/teams and coordinating all ground and marine SAR operations at the local level. 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. Their activities will be supported through the creation of a Nunavik SAR Coordinator Training Program.

## Roles and Responsibilities

- Maintain equipment inventories and responder lists, including 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
- Ensure that adequate number of responders are ready to respond
- Help to organize training and exercises
- Receive and investigate SAR alerts
- Serve as SAR detectives, gathering and analyzing critical information – a SAR operation is fueled by information, as much as possible, as accurate as possible, as quickly as possible.
- Lead local planning and operational decision-making
- Mobilize and tasking SAR teams and equipment
- Ensure the safety of responders
- Liaise with local organizations, Kativik Civil Security, external agencies, and community members
- Manage communications and documentation
- Support post-incident debriefing and Critical Incident Stress Management for their teams
- Assistant Coordinators provide redundancy and continuity, ensuring operational leadership remains available during prolonged incidents, absences, or simultaneous operations

### **3. Northern Village Administrative Support**

Northern Village administrations should provide consistent administrative support to SAR coordinators and teams, recognizing search and rescue as a core municipal service, comparable to fire protection. Under this model, Northern Village administrations would provide the institutional and administrative backbone necessary to sustain effective local SAR capacity. This could include supporting logistics, purchasing, reporting and record-keeping, and reimbursement processes. By placing these responsibilities within existing municipal structures, SAR coordinators and responders would be better positioned to focus on preparedness, training, operational planning, and response activities.

## Roles and Responsibilities

- Support logistics, purchasing, and reimbursements
- Work with coordinators to organize/schedule team members
- Assist with record-keeping and documentation
- Help manage facilities, storage, and equipment
- Assist coordinators with financial and administrative tasks
- Assist coordinators with community engagement and public relations during operations
- Integrate SAR into broader municipal emergency planning

#### **4. Kativik Civil Security and the Nunavik Rescue Coordination Centre**

Operational responsibility for Ground SAR should shift from the Nunavik Police Service to Kativik Civil Security (KCS), which would function as the regional SAR coordination hub through the Nunavik Rescue Coordination Centre. Personnel at KCS would provide planning, tasking, operational support, and access to external resources, while ensuring that community-led responses are supported rather than constrained. This change would align responsibility with capability and create a coherent regional system. Progress toward this goal has already begun through the establishment of the Regional SAR Coordinator position mentioned in the governance primer above. The roundtable participants emphasized that KCS is expected to support and strengthen community-led operations and not take control of local efforts. Regional coordination must remain responsive, collaborative, and grounded in local realities.

##### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- Collect and analyze SAR case information
- Conduct regional risk assessment and situational analysis
- Standardize reporting and procedures
- Provide training opportunities to community SAR responders
- Undertake SAR prevention initiatives
- Research and development into new and emerging equipment and technology
- Provide support to local SAR teams and regional operational coordination
- Assist community coordinators during incidents, particularly with planning and logistics
- Support documentation requirements
- Facilitate tasking and access to regional resources, including air support
- Coordinate with JRCCs, the Canadian Armed Forces, Coast Guard, police, and private sector partners
- Facilitate inter-community collaboration during searches
- Support after action reviews and lessons learned processes
- Ensure responders have access to required Critical Incident Stress Management supports

#### **5. Nunavik SAR Volunteer Association**

A Nunavik SAR Volunteer Association should be established as an incorporated non-profit to represent community search and rescue responders, support training and standards, strengthen collaboration, and secure funding. This organization would provide a stable, long-term structure to sustain and advance SAR capacity across the region. Most importantly, it would serve as the voice of the volunteers.

##### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- Strengthen SAR culture in Nunavik
- Advocate for Nunavik SAR responders
- Support fundraising and grant applications
- Develop training materials and standards

- Promote interoperability between communities
- Support responder recruitment and retention
- Assist with equipment acquisition
- Promote responder wellness and safety
- Strengthen public awareness and SAR prevention initiatives

\*Participants noted that many of the proposed functions of a Nunavik SAR Association could also be fulfilled through the Nunavik SAR Roundtable, without the administrative burden associated with establishing and maintaining a non-profit organization. At the same time, participants recognized that a formal association would provide important advantages, including the ability to fundraise and administer grants and donations.

## **6. Nunavik SAR Roundtable**

The Nunavik SAR Roundtable should continue to function as a central forum for relationship-building, collaborative decision-making, and innovation. Grounded in the principles of tukitaaqatigiinni (working together toward a common understanding) and qanurtuuniq (resourcefulness and problem-solving), the roundtable provides a trusted space to strengthen partnerships, resolve challenges, and adapt the system over time. It facilitates the sharing of knowledge and development of consensus on SAR priorities, governance issues, operational challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. The roundtable also creates opportunities for community responders to engage directly with government and institutional partners to seek clarity on policies, procedures, authorities, and operational expectations, helping improve coordination and ground-level effectiveness across the region.

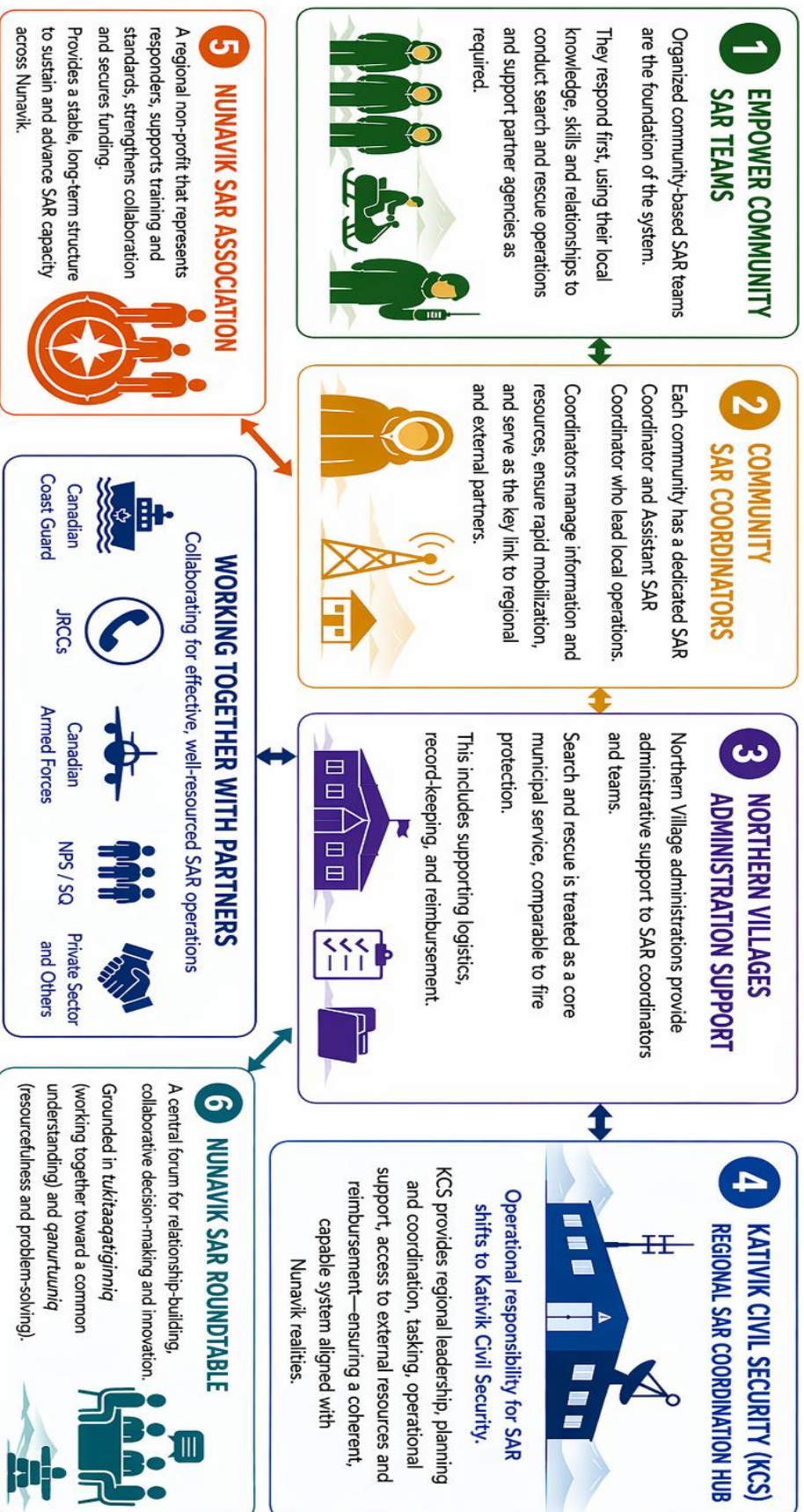
The roundtable will continue to provide responders with the space to share their stories, lived experiences, lessons, and best practices. This approach allows responders to share their expertise while learning from one another and building a sustained community of practice.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- Strengthens relationships between SAR partners
- Identifies operational challenges and solutions
- Supports collaborative governance development
- Encourages information sharing and lessons learned
- Promotes innovation and regional coordination
- Provides training opportunities
- Supports participation by Nunavimmiut in other SAR-related activities
- Ensures Nunavimmiut voices remain central to SAR development

# NUNAVIK SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

*Community-led. Regionally supported. Working together to save lives.*



## TOGETHER THIS FRAMEWORK DELIVERS:



Effective SAR in Nunavik depends on those who know the land, the people and the risks best. Governance must enable them—not hinder them—to act.



## Conclusion

After a great deal of discussion, we emerged from this meeting of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable with agreement on a governance framework for search and rescue in the region. Effective SAR in Nunavik depends on those who know the land, the people, and the risks best. Governance must be designed to enable them to act quickly, confidently, and in coordination with others. A shift to a community-led, regionally supported model, which will be anchored by Kativik Civil Security, empowered local coordinators, supportive NVs, a Nunavik SAR Association, and the roundtable, offers a practical and achievable path forward.

## About the Author

Dr. Peter Kikkert is an Associate Professor of Public Policy and Governance at St. Francis Xavier University. He is the academic lead for the Nunavut-Nunavik SAR Project and co-creator of the Nunavik and Nunavut SAR Roundtables and the Arctic SAR Exchange. He is a Team Leader and Training Officer with the Strait Area Ground Search and Rescue (SAGSAR) Association in Nova Scotia.

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