

SARVAC History

A meeting was held in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in October 1996 that brought together police, emergency measures officials, and volunteer search and rescue representatives from each province and territory in Canada to discuss the creation of a national ground search and rescue volunteer association.

Out of this meeting, the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC) was formed to provide a national voice for ground search and rescue volunteers to address issues of common concern, and to develop programs and deliver initiatives that benefit and support all ground search and rescue volunteers in Canada.

In the two years following the 1996 meeting, with funding from the New Initiatives Fund (administered by the National Search and Rescue Secretariat), SARVAC brought together policing agencies, emergency measures officials, and its newly formed Board of Directors to continue discussions about ground search and rescue in Canada and, in particular, the role and needs of search and rescue volunteers.

These meetings offered an opportunity for search and rescue stakeholders from across Canada to exchange ideas and discuss matters of common interest. These meetings ultimately resulted in a positive step forward for ground search and rescue in Canada, which has seen the formation of numerous volunteer search and rescue teams, as well as provincial/territorial volunteer associations, in the years following.

SARVAC Objectives

- Establish education programs aimed at improving the standards of performance for ground search and rescue.
- Promote, develop, and coordinate educational programs to better equip the general public to cope, both mentally and physically, with the natural environment and with problems from natural and man-made disasters and emergency situations.
- Conduct meetings and symposia in order to provide a public forum for promoting ground search and rescue capabilities in Canada.
- Represent public opinion on ground search and rescue issues through liaison with Federal, Provincial/Territorial and Local agencies and Members of Parliament. Maintain liaison with search and rescue equipment manufacturers in order to promote the development and refinement of emergency response equipment.
- Promote the formation of local search and rescue organizations by providing support in the form of guidance and material on organizing and developing local units, educational materials, and consulting services.
- Promote standardization of search and rescue procedures and communications by preparing and distributing sample plans, programs and procedures.
- Promote knowledge of search and rescue issues and programs and promote communication between organizations by the publication of newsletters, journals, and other publications.

- Upon request of Federal, Provincial/Territorial, or Local agencies or Members of Parliament, provide consultation and expert testimony on emergency response related subjects.

Going Forward

In the fall of 2007, SARVAC struck a steering committee to apply for a grant under the National Search and Rescue Secretariats New Initiatives Fund to further develop and update the organizational framework of SARVAC, to provide a sustainable and formally recognized governance structure and to increase SARVAC's role in the delivery of prevention and response activities to promote national standardization, consistency, education and outreach.

SARVAC, up until July 2008 when it received its NIF funding, did not have the capacity to conduct this activity, as it was and still is primarily a volunteer driven organization. Now with paid staff, there is the capacity to implement the changes required to be a vibrant partner in SAR prevention and response.

SARVAC is positioned well to be a key entity in the National SAR Program. As the national volunteer association for GSAR, SARVAC is a valued source of information and vital liaison between the national, provincial and local level. With the support of its provincial associations, and the endorsement of the provincial/territorial authorities responsible for SAR, SARVAC will develop the capacity to communicate and deliver better information, tools and techniques to improve SAR in Canada.

New Initiatives Fund project focus

A lack of standardization between jurisdictions in terms of training, procedures, certification, and resources dedicated to SAR presents challenges to interoperability and mutual aid. SARVAC intends to improve this situation through the exchange of pertinent and timely information resulting from assessment and collection of baseline information and statistics, evaluations and fostering interoperability and outreach.

Interoperability

SARVAC's exercise development initiative will improve readiness of the entire SAR system from local to national levels. The exercise development strategy will prepare volunteers and other responders for working together during an actual incident and to achieve a seamless integration of program elements; and, will help develop the techniques, teamwork and trust necessary for a seamless approach to SAR.

Specific Objectives for Response Program:

Provide a toolkit for exercise development.

Provide training and support to SARVAC membership to enhance their capacity for response.

Public Education and Awareness

SARVAC members can be great communicators of safety information for the general public. Programs like Adventure Smart (BC-PEP) use volunteers on a regular basis to communicate public education and awareness messages. SARVAC would like to build on the success of Adventure Smart, by creating a national Program and using the Adventure Smart methodology to promote safety and awareness regarding search and rescue across Canada.

Specific Objectives for Prevention Program:

- Train 250 SARVAC members based on Adventure Smart.
- Initiate delivery of the three core Adventure Smart programs at a community level.
- Provide materials and support to instructors in the delivery of the prevention program.
- Identify new best practices for consideration and expansion into the Adventures mart program.
- Identify relationships which encourage financial participation of provincial/territorial and federal jurisdictions in prevention strategy.
- Identify new strategies to engage the public.
- Identify potential relationships with corporate sponsors and partners.

Overall Deliverables:

At the end of this three year initiative SARVAC will have achieved and delivered the following:

- An updated Governance Structure;
- An updated Strategic Framework for communications, response and prevention;
- Hired two full time employees to manage and maintain the SARVAC organization and to develop and implement the strategic framework;
- Delivered training in exercise design for SARVAC members across Canada;
- Undertaken and trained over 250 SARVAC members in a national prevention program based upon Adventures Smart;
- A 5 year Business Plan for SARVAC Activities. The business plan will include a communications and sustainability plan;
- Further, SARVAC will have the organizational capacity to act as a conduit for compiling, analyzing and sharing information, tools and best practices on behalf of its members.