

APPALACHIAN SEARCH AND RESCUE CONFERENCE

# OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE MANUAL



**May 2016**

(This edition supersedes all previous versions of Operations Manuals)

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Revision 0

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# 1 The Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference

## 1.1 Introduction

The Operational Guidance Manual (OGM) is a revision of all previous Operations Manuals for the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference (ASRC, conference). This OGM documents the procedures that guide the ASRC when Groups (member teams or teams) respond to requests from responsible authorities (RAs). Portions of the OGM will set forth procedures; however, the nature of the requests which RAs make of the member teams, requires that these procedures remain flexible and ultimately subject to the judgment of those executing such procedures. Further sections of this OGM provide guidance for the ASRC dispatching system structure and methods by which the ASRC will offer team accreditations. This OGM replaces any and all parts of previous versions of the ASRC Operations Manual and draft portions thereof.

## 1.2 Associated Documents

The OGM builds on current versions of ASRC organizational documents including:

- Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws;
- Strategic Plan;
- Administrative Manual;
- ASRC Training Standards; and
- Federal Communications Commission Radio Licenses assigned to the organization.

## 1.3 Capabilities of the Member Teams

Each member team of the ASRC brings its own unique set of skills, members, and philosophies to the conference. The common core skill set among all the member teams is the ground-based Search and Rescue (SAR) skills that are set in the conference Training Standards (i.e. Field Team Member [FTM] and Field Team Leader [FTL]). These skills are ubiquitous throughout the conference such that every member of each member team is trained in these fundamental skills. The standardized performance expectations for this basic knowledge are found in the conference Training Manual. Each member team has adopted as part of their own training program the standards set forth in this manual.

Each member team also contributes their own set of specializations within SAR. Some of these specializations may include:

- cave rescue and recovery;
- wilderness medicine;
- canine resources;
- search management and incident command specialists;
- disaster response training and resources,
- equestrian resources;
- wilderness pre-hospital care;
- data, information, and communications system specialists;
- law-enforcement and local government liaisons; and
- search and recovery specialists.

Teams with specializations provide their own equipment and standards (which may be in addition to standards promulgated by the conference) to conduct these specialized operations.

## 1.4 Capabilities of the Conference

Membership to the conference affords each team several advantages including:

- access to a unified set of training standards adapted to the regional operating environment;
- relationships and regular dialogue with member teams, which, when leveraged during an incident, offers a seamless integration into that incident;
- immediate and remote assistance with search management;
- a culture of innovation, research, and desire to advance the state-of-the-practice of SAR;
- access to experienced and world-class experts doing cutting edge research in search and rescue;
- best-practice recommendations from teams of experienced and world-class experts within the conference, including this Section 5 of this document;
- insurance products that take advantage of bulk rates to provide operational liability and other coverage; and
- central dispatch of all member teams during searches for critical missing subjects and high profile searches at the request of RAs.

The conference is as strong as each member team. Member teams of the conference benefit from the unique nature of each team.

## 1.5 Review and Revision Procedures

This document will be reviewed bi-annually by the Conference Operations Officer (COO). The effectiveness and usability of the policies and procedures described herein will be reviewed. Current practices will be reviewed against what is described in the text and appendices of the current version of the OGM. The Conference Operations Officer (COO) is responsible for completing the review in coordination with the Operations Officers of the member teams. Changes to the text (i.e. body of the document, not including the appendices) of this OGM will be proposed at a Board of Directors (BOD) meeting for approval. Changes will be communicated using a redline version of the document. Once approved, only those changes will be applied and a new version of the document, to supersede the prior version, will be reissued to all member team Operations Officers and to the BOD.

Appendices will be reviewed at least annually. Updates to appendices of this OGM can be made by the COO. Those updates will be communicated to member team Operations Officers upon completion and in writing. Updates to the appendices, if any, will be communicated to the BOD during the second and fourth quarter BOD meetings.

## 1.6 Document Organization

The remainder of this document is organized as follows:

- a detailed explanation of the organization of the conference is presented in Section 2;
- a description of how the member teams and the conference responds to requests for service is provided in Section 3;
- guidance to member teams for best operational practices is provided in Section 4; and
- member team accreditation procedures are provided in Section 5.

Supporting appendices can be found at the back of this document.

## **2 Organization of the Conference**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The conference is structured to provide support to the member teams and facilitate regular interaction between the member teams. The organization relies on the member teams to be mature and independent organizations in their own right who are seeking the advantages afforded by membership to the conference. The conference is structured to provide equal representation from each member team to the organization and has organizational officers who guide the direction of the conference and drive it forward by producing documentation, guidance, and other products for the member teams.

### **2.2 Conference Officers and Leadership of the Member Teams**

Conference officers lead the member teams to realize the mission, vision, and core values of the conference's Strategic Plan. Conference leadership contributes to the overall direction and activities of the organization in tandem with member teams' requests and input. Conference officers are resources for the leaders of each member team to consult on a variety of issues as conference officers generally have significant experience and expertise.

### **2.3 Relationship of the Conference with Outside Organizations**

Member teams of the ASRC should strive to set the example for other search and rescue teams they interact with. They do this by achieving a high level of performance during a mission, conducting valuable routine training, interacting at a sophisticated level with responsible authorities, and maintaining professional demeanor at all times. Everything that a member does should be in an effort to advance the goal of search and rescue – to find the missing person fast.

On behalf of the member teams, the conference may occasionally reach out to other organizations which may offer a beneficial relationship to the member teams. These organizations may offer products, services, or expertise that may be of benefit to the member teams. Conference officers may be able to leverage the size of the membership body, previous successes or uniqueness of the organization to attract outside organizations to bring their goods and services to the member teams.

Conference officers may also engage other search and rescue teams to explore the possibility for that team to join the conference. These search and rescue teams may be of strategic value such as expanding the conference area of influence or incorporating a specialized resource. Any team that wishes to join the conference shall follow the procedures outlined in the Administrative Manual.

### **2.4 Relationship between the Conference and Responsible Authorities**

In several places, the ASRC Strategic Plan describes the ASRC as an organization that provides multi-agency coordination across the member teams. Our core values assert that we “work in close cooperation and coordination with responsible authorities before, during, and after missions.” The Plan also recognizes a client environment that implies the conference should emphasize its delivery of multi-agency coordination, before, during, and after missions.

Additionally, agencies across our client environment have typically adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Most obviously, searches now are conducted using the Incident Command System to organize field activities. NIMS also describes multi-agency coordination during incidents, emphasizing prioritization of resources, requesting resources from multiple agencies, and ensuring common operations upon arrival at an incident. According to NIMS, multi-agency coordination consists of

“personnel, procedures, protocols, business practices, and communications integrated into a common system.”<sup>1</sup> Consistent with NIMS, then, ASRC organization and governance, business practices, and common training standards provide the foundations of multi-agency coordination.

These principles, in turn, guide development of our OGM, establishing the doctrine underpinning the ASRC’s common core capabilities and coordination protocols. In particular, this OGM describes mechanisms for resource requests, resource coordination and accountability, and guidance to establish a framework for interoperability, especially with regard to communication capabilities.

## **2.5 Role of the Conference Operations Officer**

The COO helps set the culture and values which guide conference member team’s responses to requests for services from an RA. The COO provides a forum for operations officers of member teams to interact, discuss issues, and seek advice. The COO should encourage good discussion between the member team’s operations officers, connect teams to each other, and stay up-to-date on the capabilities offered by each member team. State and local issues facing member teams, including operational requirements, political climate, and responsible authority needs should be monitored by the COO for opportunities to assist member teams to overcome these challenges. The COO may want to monitor emerging trends in missions that member teams are facing to help identify new challenges facing member teams. The COO may also want to monitor new technology, training opportunities, and operational techniques that conference member teams may want to take advantage of.

During times when the conference is acting as a multi-agency coordination (MAC) center, the COO is the primary point of contact for dispatch and coordination of conference - wide activities. The COO may at time, appoint or request a substitute for this duty as necessary. Conference dispatch procedures are described in Section 5 of this OGM.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency, *National Incident Management System* (Washington, DC: December 2008), p. 64.

## **3 Safety**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The health and safety of the personnel of each member team during travel, training, mission response, and other conference activities is a core value of the conference. Health and safety should always be the first consideration when member teams are conducting their business. The conference works to create a culture of safety and the example is set by the leadership of the conference and each member team.

### **3.2 Training**

The nature of search and rescue training inherently includes values of safety. Member teams should emphasize personal safety to each of their members as often as possible during training periods. Personal safety is practiced through the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), operating procedures, written guidance, and the experience of the individual and teammates. Creating a culture of safety can start during training periods which will carry over to mission response. Member teams should train their membership on the necessary PPE that is needed to respond to their missions and participate in their trainings.

### **3.3 Mission Response**

Member teams are encouraged to evaluate each mission and their potential response from a perspective of safety. This is typically done by senior personnel on the team (e.g. operations officer, president, chief). Evaluations may include who is responsible for incident command, the types of tasks that may be assigned to the team, the distance the incident is from the team's primary response area and proper PPE to be worn during the mission response. If the team feels that safety of its members may be compromised without due cause then they should decline the mission or the task and address the concern with the responsible authority. Accountability for each individual member of each team is a critical safety issue which the conference expects each team to address during each mission.

Each member team will maintain a dispatching system to account for each individual member who responds to a call-out or mission. Dispatching system will include, at a minimum, the following capabilities:

- Standard times during a call-out when an individual team member must contact their organization, or vice versa, to account for their location and/or status;
- Account for the location and/or status of each team member during the entire mission response including travel to and from the mission;
- Document the communication with each team member that includes the date and time that team member was contacted and a response received;
- A method which the team stays informed of any changes in mission status and can communicate the change in mission status to each member engaged in the response;
- A method by which each team member can be contacted at any time during the mission response; and
- Procedures which train members of the team on the use of the dispatch system and appointed members on the operation of the dispatch system.

Teams should not assume that the responsible authority is properly communicating safety considerations or risks when responding to a mission. Risks inherent to a mission include the travel requirements to and from the mission, the environmental setting of the mission, climatic factors, subject type, the reason for searching, and the team's own capabilities. Member teams should turn down a request for resources when the risk to the safety and well-being of their team members is exceeded by that team's tolerance for risk.

## 4 Response to Request for Service

### 4.1 Introduction

Responsible authorities (RAs) who are charged with locating the missing person and effecting the rescue will turn to SAR organizations such as the member teams of the conference for assistance. SAR teams offer knowledge, skills, and abilities which supplement the capabilities of the RA. SAR teams may have agreements such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes methods of contact and expectations when an RA contacts that team. In effect, SAR teams act as consultants for the RA. SAR teams normally have strict policies against self-deployment and will act only after an RA directly requests their service. Member teams of the conference do not respond to requests for services from the general public, a request must come from a government organization. The remainder of this section describes the various methods by which services of member teams may be requested by an RA.

### 4.2 Direct Request of Member Teams

Each member team must develop their own relationship with the RAs in their operational area. Operational areas of the member teams are defined by that team. The ASRC does not assign operational areas. Note that operational areas can and will overlap. When a responsible authority contacts a member team, that team may choose to respond based on any number of risk factors that leadership of the team weighs, some of which may be outlined in Section 3.

Upon responding to a request, the member team shall notify the ASRC of its intent to respond using the procedures described in **Appendix A**. Doing so initiates insurance coverage provided by the conference and provides the conference leadership with situational awareness of the state of conference teams. Each member team shall respond to a request per their own operating guidelines but at a minimum have a dispatch system in place for their membership prior to sending members in the field. Accountability of each member is part of conducting a safe response to a mission. Dispatch systems may be of that team's own design but meet the requirements provided in Section 3.3.

### 4.3 Direct Request of Conference

An RA may choose to request the services of a subset or all of the member teams of the ASRC. In that case, the conference acts as a MAC center for that RA. If an RA contacts the conference directly and requests the services of two or less member teams, then the conference will refer the RA directly to those teams for response by providing contact information to the RA or contacting those teams directly, or both. If an RA directly requests the entire ASRC or at least three teams, then the ASRC will initiate conference dispatching systems. Requests from the RA will first be routed to the COO or his designee (Conference Alert Officer [CAO]), who at that time may directly contact the RA for further information. The COO/CAO will choose a member team whose operational area is closest to the mission to act as the point of contact for the conference at the mission incident command post. That member team will name the person who conference dispatch should communicate with. The COO will open conference dispatch using the procedures described in **Appendix A**.

Circumstances of the request may be unusual or beyond the capabilities of the conference. As such, the COO/CAO may contact the Chair or another officer of the conference to discuss potential options to respond to the RA. The COO/CAO will act to satisfy the RAs request to the extent possible. The COO/CAO, in consultation with another officer of the conference may turn down the request. However, the COO/CAO will always refer the RA to the closest ASRC member team for further consideration.

#### 4.4 Member Teams Initiating a Conference-wide Request

A member team may receive a request from the RA to engage additional ASRC member teams in a mission. The member team should evaluate if the RA understands the risks of engaging additional conference member teams, namely extended transportation times for personnel. Only then should the member team should contact the conference to initiate the coordination of additional teams from the conference. The member team will act at the point of contact for the conference for the duration of that mission. Contacting the Conference may be done so through (in order): (i) contacting the COO, (ii) contacting any of the other conference officers, and (iii) opening conference dispatch. If neither the COO nor any of the other conference officers are available, then the member team should open dispatch directly using the procedures described in **Appendix A**. Note that it is preferable for a conference officer to first be notified so that the risks are understood at the leadership level prior to engaging additional member teams and opening dispatch.

#### 4.5 Response by Personnel from Member Teams

Personnel from member teams of the ASRC always respond as personnel of their team. Personnel shall not register with the mission under the ASRC because the conference is not an operational entity. Teams who permit personnel to hold membership in more than one SAR team shall have in-place policies and procedures, including dispatching procedures, to guide personnel as to which team they are representing at that time.

#### 4.6 Response by At-large Members

At-large members who respond to missions, shall respond to a mission as personnel of their sponsoring member team. At-large members should notify their “home” team of their intent to respond prior to doing so. At-large members shall fall under the dispatching procedures of their sponsoring member team unless that team approves in writing (i.e. email) use of the responding team’s dispatch. At large members shall follow the policies and procedures for conduct and operations that their sponsoring team has in-place for mission response.

#### 4.7 Response by Remote Support Personnel

An RA may request remote support for a mission to assist in planning, data analysis, mapping, and other services. Remote support is an important service that a member team has access to through the conference and can offer to an RA when engaged in a mission. Remote support through the conference shall not be initiated without a request from the RA. When requested, the RA must be made aware that personnel from other teams who may not be present at the mission will be providing remote support services. If remote support services are provided fully by member teams who have already been requested by the RA, then additional permission is not necessary. An additional request from the RA is required only when personnel who would provide remote support services are members of a team that has not yet been requested by the RA. Requests for remote support can be made by any member team engaged in a mission through the COO/CAO, ASRC dispatch (if open), or by directly contacting personnel listed on the roster in **Appendix B**.

Remote support personnel from member teams not requested by the RA for the mission shall notify their team of their intent to provide remote support services. Teams who have personnel trained in remote support and intend to provide these services shall have policies in place to ensure their team is aware of their personnel’s participation.

## 5 Operational Guidance for Member Teams

### 5.1 Introduction

The conference provides training standards and operational guidelines that each team subscribes to by maintaining their conference membership. Member teams of the conference are unified by their desire to maintain professional-level services to the RA. This section provides operational guidance for member teams by providing a minimum set of policies which member teams should establish. The conference is available to provide guidance to any member team as they establish these policies and procedures.

### 5.2 Member Team Operations Manuals

Each member team should establish a manual which provides their personnel written guidance for operations. Such operational manuals should establish the minimum operating parameters for their personnel should adhere to during missions and/or training opportunities. Member team operation manuals should be reviewed and updated bi-annually to reflect current operating procedures. Operations manuals should provide guidance for each service area that the member team provides to the RA as well as the policies and procedures described in the sections below. The following is a list of recommended, but not required, topics for each member team operations manual.

- Response to requests from RAs
  - Dispatch procedures
  - Urgency assessment
  - Risk management considerations
- Search management procedures
  - Responsibility
  - Qualifications for search manager
  - Use of remote support
- Field Tasks
  - Safety
  - Field team composition
  - Field promotion guidelines
- Communications
  - Radios
  - Codes with reference to the ICS communications guidelines
- Medical Care
  - First Aid
  - State and local requirements
  - Rendering care to a teammate
  - Rendering care to the search subject
  - Documentation
- Subject Evacuation
  - Nontechnical evacuations
  - Semi- and Technical Rescue
  - Safety
- Minimum Equipment
  - Team
  - Personnel
  
- Mission Types other than Wilderness Search

- Accidents, Injuries or Illness of a Member

The conference is not an operational entity and the member teams are responsible for creating the documentation for the topics listed above.

### 5.3 Medical Care Guidelines

#### 5.3.1 Background

Personnel of member teams learn first aid, CPR, and AED skills primarily to provide medical care to fellow teammates and secondarily to provide medical care to a subject, if required. Member teams shall have policies which allow for providing medical care to the extent which law permits and to the level of training, but not beyond.

#### 5.3.2 Level of Care

To avoid criminal or civil liability, individuals in ASRC Teams shall provide care to members and patients in accordance with team policies, applicable state legislative and regulatory law, and common law principles. Generally such care will fit into one or more of the following categories:

- No first aid or medical care
- First aid level care
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Basic Life Support (BLS) level care
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Advanced Life Support (ALS) level care
- Wilderness Medical Care outside the state EMS system

Member Teams may provide care at whatever level they wish, and may change this at any time. However, member Teams should inform the other member teams of the level of care they provide, and should share their patient care policies and protocols with other teams, through the Conference Medical Officer (if available), who shall place such information in the ASRC Archive or other record and ensure it is updated at least bi-annually.

#### 5.3.3 Committees

The ASRC has two committees dealing with medical issues. The *Medical Advisory Committee* consists solely of team member-physicians. The *Medical Committee* has a broader membership, including all members of the Medical Advisory Committee, all member Group Medical Officers for member Groups that have such an officer, and any other interested members of ASRC member Groups. Details of these structure and duties of these committees may be found in the ASRC Administration Manual.

The committees may put forth:

- updates to certification standards, used by member teams;
- updates to best practices when those updates are permitted by the certifications used by member teams;
- updates when laws, rules, and regulations change within each state covered by the conference;
- recommendations to the member teams for best practices to train and learn the skills and techniques required by the certifications used by the member teams; and
- responses to requests made by the COO or BOD.

The committees may produce deliverables in the form of memorandums or white papers for delivery to the BOD for acceptance. Committees may establish peer review policies for any deliverable they produce. Deliverables shall be marked “Draft – for internal review only” until approved by the BOD, when the markings can be removed. Information and recommendations contained in deliverables are for the benefit of the member teams to use to the extent they desire, but are not enforceable by the conference.

#### 5.4 Membership

Member teams should have membership policies for the recruitment and maintenance of personnel. Member teams should provide for regular background check for each member and procedures for confidential review of the background checks and acceptance or rejection of a member based on the results of the background check. Member teams should have an on-boarding process for new members to orient them to SAR operations, certification requirements, and general SAR culture. Member teams may consider the need for multiple levels of membership including: (i) provisional, probationary, or candidate member, (ii) operational or active members, (iii) support, associate, or not operational members, (iv) lifetime or founder, and (v) inactive, dismissed, terminated or removed.

Member teams should have a process to terminate the membership of personnel for cause and exit procedures for all personnel regardless of reason for leaving. The conference BOD should be notified once a member has been dismissed but need not be notified if a member leaves voluntarily.

#### 5.5 Radio Communications

Member teams may operate under the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) radio licenses granted to the conference. Member teams are expected to govern their personnel appropriately to ensure there are no violations of the radio licenses. Member teams will indemnify the conference against violations of the radio licenses by their personnel. Member teams are encouraged to apply for their own licenses to operate under. Violations, and any resulting fees and fines, by an individual will be the responsibility of that individual’s member team.

Consistent with National Incident Management System requirements, member teams should have policies for the use of plain language on radio systems. Exceptions may be made with respect to names of personnel which may be replaced by assigning a number or some other reference that can be easily understood and subject status. The following codes are established for the status of the search mission subject once located:

- **Status 1** – the subject is responsive and able to evacuate under his or her own energy and without assistance;
- **Status 2** – the subject requires medical care beyond minor first aid and assistance to be evacuated; and
- **Status 3** – the subject is deceased.

Status codes should always be used over radios. Once a subject has been located and when possible, searchers should switch to mobile phone use to communicate with the incident command post.

#### 5.6 Responsibility for Search Mission Management

Each member team shall have a policy that the outcome and management of a mission is always the responsibility of the RA. Neither the conference nor any member team, at-large member, or personnel of a member team will assume responsibility for the direction or outcome of a search mission. Member teams may have policies to advise RAs on search strategy and assist with the management of a search, but member

teams shall always defer to the RA for decisions regarding the direction of the search and deployment of personnel.

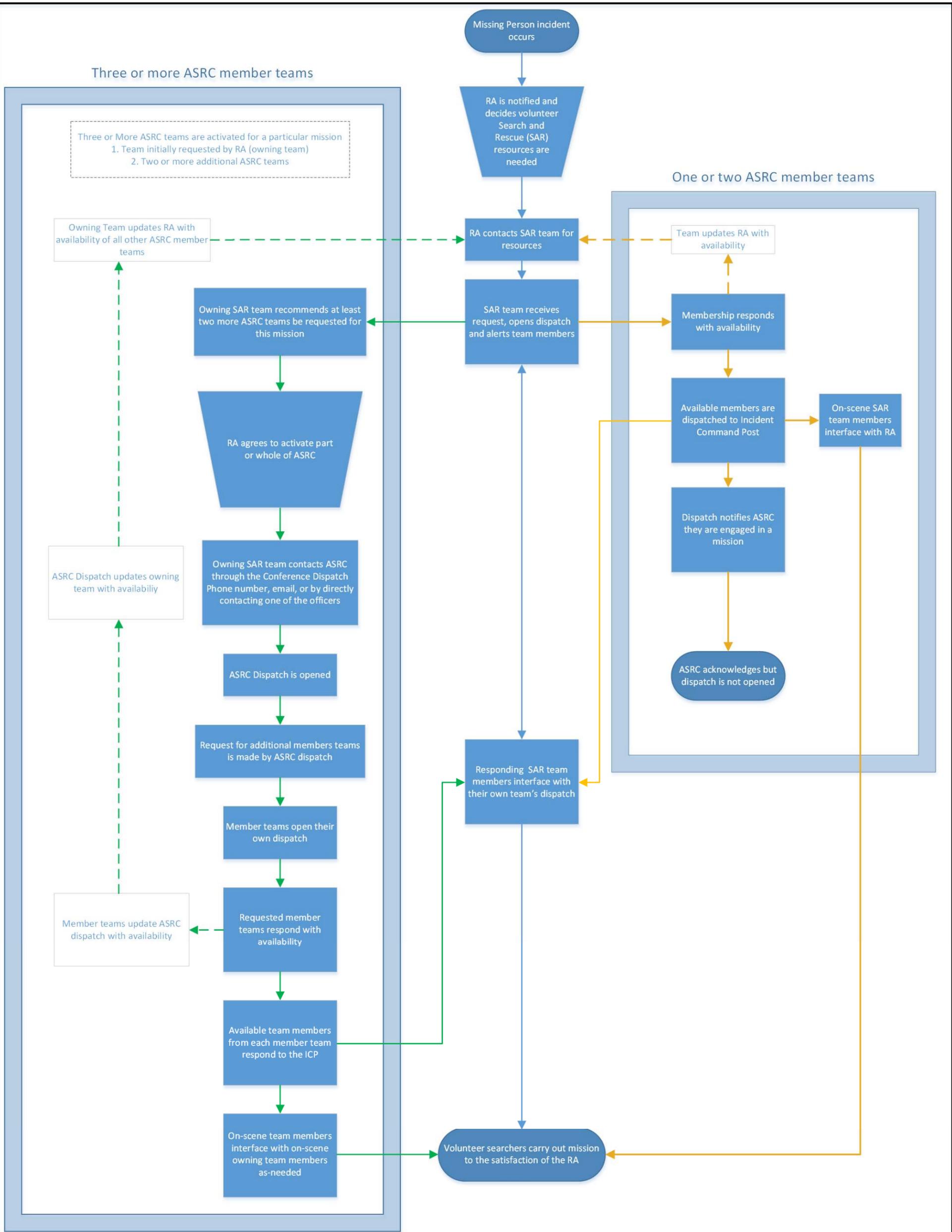
Conference accredited search managers are highly skilled and qualified individuals. They represent a resource for member teams and RAs to draw upon during a mission. Their accreditation is recognition of their hard work and extensive experience. When engaged in a mission, conference accredited search managers operate as personnel of their member team and shall not register with the mission under the ASRC because the conference is not an operational entity. Member teams with personnel, or member teams who sponsor at-large members who have earned conference accreditation shall have policies in place to accommodate a request for assistance of these individuals by an RA.

### **5.7 Conference Position/White Papers**

The conference will occasionally produce white papers or position papers that provide further guidance and support to member teams. Papers may be a summary of available technology, best practices for SAR-related skills and services or other topics that might advance the state-of-the-practice of SAR. Papers produced by the conference and any opinions or suggestions provided therein are non-enforceable recommendations by the conference to member teams.

The conference supports the development of these papers by identifying authors who have expresses interest and/or competency in the subject. The author or team of authors shall establish peer review policies for any paper produced prior to submittal to the BOD. Conference papers will be submitted to the BOD for review marked “Draft – for internal review only” until approved by the BOD, when the markings can be removed. Once removed conference white papers and position papers will be made publically available through the conference website. When appropriate, the BOD should encourage the submittal of papers for publication by academic journals or by other commercial publications. Doing so establishes the member teams and conference as leaders and innovators in SAR and related fields.

# Appendix A



**ASRC Dispatch Contact Information**

**PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION**  
 Operations Officer: Michael Hansen 443.812.1430  
 ops@asrc.net

**SECONDARY CONTACT INFORMATION**  
 Chair: Don Scelza 724.316.5298  
 chair@asrc.net



# Appendix B

