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CRS  CS Ex

Evaluation of the Contribution Program for the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund

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Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	i
Executive Summary.....	iii
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Profile of the SAR NIF Contribution Program.....	1
1.1.1 Background	1
1.1.2 Program Description	1
1.1.3 Program Objectives	2
1.1.4 Stakeholders.....	3
1.2 Evaluation Scope	3
1.2.1 Coverage and Responsibilities.....	3
1.2.2 Resources	3
1.2.3 Issues and Questions	4
2.0 Findings and Recommendations.....	5
2.1 Continued Need	5
2.2 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities	6
2.3 Alignment with Government Priorities.....	6
2.4 Achievement of Expected Outcomes (Effectiveness).....	8
2.5 Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	17
2.6 Conclusion.....	21
Annex A—Management Action Plan	A-1
Annex B—Evaluation Methodology and Limitations	B-1



Acronyms and Abbreviations

BC	British Columbia
BCSARA	British Columbia Search and Rescue Association
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CASARA	Canadian Aviation Search and Rescue Association
CCG	Canadian Coast Guard
CFDS	<i>Canada First Defence Strategy</i>
CRS	Chief Review Services
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
DND	Department of National Defence
EC	Environment Canada
FTEs	Full-time Equivalents
FY	Fiscal Year
GC	Government of Canada
GSAR	Ground Search and Rescue
ICSAR	Interdepartmental Committee on Search and Rescue
IRMC	Investment and Resource Management Committee
LMSAR	Lead Minister of Search and Rescue
MB	Manitoba
MEOSAR	Medium Earth Orbit Search and Rescue
MDA	Managing Departmental Agency
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NIF	New Initiatives Fund
NL	Newfoundland and Labrador
NLSARA	Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association
NSP	National Search and Rescue Program
NSS	National Search and Rescue Secretariat
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
OGD	Other Government Departments
OPI	Office of Primary Interest



OSARVA	Ontario Search and Rescue Volunteer Association
PAA	Program Alignment Architecture
PCA	Parks Canada Agency
PEI	Prince Edward Island
QSR	Quadrennial Search and Rescue Review
R&D	Research and Development
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SAR	Search and Rescue
SARMAN	Search and Rescue Manitoba
SARVAC	Search and Rescue Volunteers Association of Canada
TBS	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
TC	Transport Canada
YT	Yukon Territory



Executive Summary

Chief Review Services (CRS) conducted an evaluation of the contribution program in support of the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (i.e., the SAR NIF Contribution Program). The relevance and performance of the SAR NIF¹ for fiscal years (FYs) 2008/09 to 2012/13 was reviewed as part of an assessment for funding renewal. The term of the SAR NIF's current agreement is effective until 31 March 2015.

Program Description

The SAR NIF was established to provide eligible SAR partners² with an independent source of funds to develop and advance initiatives that support the priorities of the National SAR Program (NSP). The SAR NIF provides up to \$8.1 million annually (i.e., \$40.5 million over five years) by contribution agreements or transfers of appropriation to support initiatives that advance SAR priorities. Projects are deemed eligible by an annually-appointed Merit Board and approved by the Interdepartmental Committee on Search and Rescue (ICSAR).

Relevance

The SAR NIF provides a unique opportunity for federal SAR partners to collaborate across jurisdictional and sector boundaries on initiatives that advance their mutual SAR mandates, but would not otherwise be feasible in isolation. The SAR NIF support allows provincial and territorial SAR departments, SAR volunteer and non-profit organizations to finance their SAR advancements, leverage funds from other sources and formalize partnerships that would not have been otherwise established. The SAR NIF supports a national SAR capability, which is a federal responsibility (i.e., aeronautical SAR) under international conventions and a DND role. SAR is a top operational priority for the Department, contributing to DND's strategic outcomes and the *Canada First* Defence Strategy (CFDS). In addition, the SAR NIF has supported projects that relate to stated federal and departmental priorities. As such the SAR NIF aligns with DND priorities and responsibilities.

Overall Assessment

- The SAR NIF Contribution Program is relevant and appropriate for the Department of National Defence (DND).
- Changes are needed to address the SAR NIF's issues of effectiveness and efficiency, especially to ensure that project results benefit the SAR Program and to establish terms and conditions for performance measurement and communications.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, references to the SAR NIF are to the SAR NIF Contribution Program.

² Eligible SAR partners include DND, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Environment Canada (EC), Parks Canada Agency (PCA), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Transport Canada (TC), provincial or territorial governments and recognized volunteer SAR associations.



Performance

The SAR NIF Contribution Program has funded a diversity of projects that show indications of individual improvements in SAR response and prevention, advancements in related research and development, and fostering partnerships among stakeholders. However, project results are not being validated to assess the impact of SAR NIF nor to actively promote and share best practices for the NSP. This concern has been identified in previous evaluations. Further, the SAR NIF is not fulfilling requirements for performance assessment and communication objectives in accordance with its terms and conditions. This creates concerns about the SAR NIF's effectiveness and efficiency in achieving expected results. In addition, the federal transfer mechanism currently employed within this contribution program does not support project performance reporting and knowledge translation.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Finding 1: The SAR NIF is a unique mechanism to support cross-sector initiatives related to SAR response and prevention that meet the needs of the NSP and its partners.

Key Finding 2: The SAR NIF is aligned with DND and the federal government's role, along with partners and stakeholders, to support the NSP.

Key Finding 3: The SAR NIF has funded projects that directly address stated Defence priorities, and projects that align with priority areas included in recent Throne Speeches and federal budget announcements.

Key Finding 4: The SAR NIF has funded SAR-related projects with a diversity of managing authorities, recipients, and reach. Over the five years, the funding has supported a balance of response and prevention projects.

Key Finding 5: Annual priorities and project merit criteria established for the SAR NIF are very broad. The SAR NIF priorities have remained static over the evaluation period and have not been recently validated against current needs of the NSP.

Recommendation 1: Conduct a formal validation process to ensure that priorities for the SAR NIF align with the evidence-based response and prevention needs of the NSP (i.e., formal needs assessment).

Recommendation 2: Refine the SAR NIF priorities to be more focused on the needs identified during validation. Adjust merit criteria to favour projects that address only specific, identified needs with distinct links to desired SAR NIF outcomes and reach.

Key Finding 6: Individual projects show evidence of improvements in SAR response capabilities and prevention efforts at varying levels of effect. However, the level of detail required in project reports is insufficient to reliably assess project results.

Key Finding 7: Information from funded projects is not being used to inform the SAR NIF or to validate the comprehensive impact of the Program. This issue has been raised



previously in other reports. The SAR NIF is not meeting the terms for performance measurement defined in its terms and conditions.

Key Finding 8: The SAR NIF inherently fosters project-level cooperation between recipients and project managing authorities. Formalizing partnerships and partnering for training and prevention outreach were the focus of many projects. However, without clearly defined expectations for partnerships across all levels of the NSP, the SAR NIF's impact on partner promotion and improvement cannot be validated.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a formal performance measurement and monitoring strategy for the SAR NIF. This should include:

- performance measures that are specific and related to the expectations of the Program's outcomes and priorities;
- revisions to the current project application and reporting templates (i.e., the Performance Measurement and Communications Plan sections of the templates) to link closely with the SAR NIF's formal strategy. Revisions to the project application template should be completed prior to approval of new project funding; and
- a comprehensive assessment of impact and value (i.e., performance) of all currently available project data prior to commencing new projects. Present assessment results to ICSAR and use the results to validate the effective use of funding to support specific strategic directions and revised priorities of the NSP.

Key Finding 9: The SAR NIF workshops were positively regarded by all participants. However, these stand-alone workshops have not been continued since 2010. Since then promotion has continued through the annual SARscene conference and ad-hoc consultations with some SAR partners.

Key Finding 10: The SAR NIF has not met its communications and outreach objectives as defined in the Program Agreement.

Recommendation 4: Address incomplete components of the SAR NIF communication strategy to fulfill obligations to promote and share knowledge about the SAR NIF with partners.

Key Finding 11: Formal solicitation of feedback is not conducted with project recipients or SAR partners. Best practices from program results have not been examined to drive efficiencies in program design and delivery. Information on successful prevention and response projects has not been well promoted or made easily accessible.

Recommendation 5: Develop and integrate a formal mechanism to solicit feedback into the SAR NIF's framework. Suggestions for improvement should be implemented to ensure that the efficiency of the SAR NIF is maximized.

Key Finding 12: Annual priorities for the SAR NIF have been static over the last five years. The Program is not being leveraged to support strategic directions for the NSP.

Key Finding 13: Transfers of appropriation do not require project reporting back to the SAR NIF. Without this reporting requirement, the SAR NIF is unable to measure, share or actively promote the performance of projects funded within the Transfer of Appropriations mechanism.



1.0 Introduction

1.1 Profile of the SAR NIF Contribution Program

1.1.1 Background

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the evaluation of the contribution program in support of the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (i.e., the SAR NIF Contribution Program), covering an evaluation period of FYs 2008/09 to 2012/13. CRS completed this evaluation according to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) policies³ and approval authority.⁴ Specifically, the evaluation team sought to assess the SAR NIF's relevance and performance towards expected outcomes (i.e., performance effectiveness, efficiency of resource utilization). A risk assessment conducted in support of the 2010 renewal concluded that the overall risk for the SAR NIF was low.

1.1.2 Program Description

In 1986, the federal government established the SAR NIF Contribution Program as an independent source of funds to develop and advance NSP initiatives and policies. Eligible SAR NIF projects must reflect the annual priorities of the NSP, which are determined by the ICSAR. These annual priorities are borne out of the following six national SAR strategic priorities:

- **Partnerships.** Develop and strengthen partnerships to facilitate and enhance SAR prevention and response activities.
- **Multi-Jurisdictional Exercises.** Participate in a program of multi-jurisdictional exercises with focus on areas of historical problems or future concern, and/or to confirm plans and procedures for SAR response activities.
- **Volunteers.** Involve and maximize as appropriate the use of volunteers.
- **Technology and Innovation.** Encourage the identification and development of best practices, innovation and/or new technologies to support SAR prevention and response activities.
- **Interoperability.** Identify types and characteristics of SAR equipment that should be compatible and/or interoperable.
- **Data and Information.** Promote the collection and free exchange of information and data applicable to SAR prevention and response.

³ TBS Policy on Evaluation (2009), see: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=15024§ion=text (Last accessed on December 31, 2014) and Policy on Transfer Payments (2012), see: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=13525§ion=text (Last accessed on December 31, 2014).

⁴ Chief Review Services (February 2013) DND/CAF Five-Year Plan for Evaluation 2013–14 to 2017–18, File 1000–10–4 (CRS).

Projects must be submitted to the National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS) through a SAR NIF partner. These partners include the six federal SAR departments (DND, DFO, EC, PCA, RCMP, and TC) or any of the provincial or territorial governments. Recognized volunteer SAR associations are permitted to apply directly to NSS, with endorsement from their provincial/territorial government body. Applicants must also demonstrate in-kind/cash contributions from a source other than the NSS of a minimum of 5 percent of the overall project cost.

A call for proposals is initiated in April of each fiscal year. Proposals are reviewed and assessed by an independent Merit Board⁵ against an established scoring protocol.⁶ A Technical Review Panel provides assessment on research and development proposals of a technical nature. The Merit List for approved projects is completed in the winter and submitted to the ICSAR for endorsement with final approval by the Lead Minister of Search and Rescue (LMSAR). Eligible projects from the Merit List are funded, based on ranking, to the extent of fund availability for that fiscal year.

The SAR NIF is composed of two components—transfers of appropriation and a contribution program. SAR NIF projects that are initiated by a federal SAR department or Managing Departmental Agency (MDA) will receive funds through a direct transfer of funds from the NSS to the MDA (i.e., a Transfer of Appropriations via the Parliamentary Estimates Process). The MDA is the primary manager of operational and capital expenditure bound by a Letter of Agreement (e.g., a Memorandum of Understanding) signed by the NSS on an annual basis. All other projects, including those initiated by provincial and territorial government applicants and SAR volunteer associations, are funded through a Contribution Agreement (CA) between the NSS and the recipient. Initiatives proposed that support a federal department/agency's mandate and jurisdictional responsibilities are eligible for funding through a CA.⁷ The CA dictates the responsibilities of the NSS and the recipient, including reporting and monitoring requirements.⁸ SAR NIF projects are typically funded for between one and three years.⁹

1.1.3 Program Objectives

The overall objective of the SAR NIF is to support the efforts of the NSP to achieve seamless SAR through improved partnerships and increased interoperability and cooperation.¹⁰ This objective is supported by the following operational objectives for the SAR NIF:

⁵ The SAR NIF Merit Board is composed of representatives from each of the six federal SAR departments and one representative from the Ground Search and Rescue Council of Canada. Reference: SAR NIF Partner's Manual, August 2007.

⁶ SAR NIF Scoring System, SAR NIF Partner's Manual, Annex E.

⁷ In accordance with the Treasury Board Policy on Transfer Payments (2012), these initiatives must have no direct benefit to the managing federal department/agency.

⁸ National Search and Rescue Secretariat, Applicants Guide 2013. <http://www.nss-snr.gc.ca/en/new-initiative-fund/proposal-guide.page?> (Last accessed on December 31, 2014).

⁹ In exceptional cases, projects may be permitted to lapse to a final fourth year of support.

¹⁰ Treasury Board program agreement, April 16, 2010.

- enhance the effectiveness of the SAR response in federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions;
- promote and support projects designed to develop and improve SAR prevention; and
- share SAR response and prevention best practices throughout the SAR community.

1.1.4 Stakeholders

The SAR NIF is managed by the NSS, an autonomous organization within DND and accountable to the LMSAR. Funding for the NSS is derived from the budget of the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff. Other stakeholders include the ICSAR and eligible recipients of the SAR NIF. Eligible recipients include:

- the six federal SAR departments;
- provincial and territorial SAR departments;
- SAR volunteer¹¹ organizations; and
- academic or private sector groups and individuals with responsibilities in the NSP.

1.2 Evaluation Scope

1.2.1 Coverage and Responsibilities

The SAR NIF is included in the DND Program Alignment Architecture (PAA), section 2.2, Defence Services and Contributions to Government, in sub-sub activity 2.2.3, National Search and Rescue Program.¹² In accordance with the current Program Agreement, the NSS Executive Director or NSS Director of Policy and Programs is responsible for SAR NIF.

1.2.2 Resources

The total approved spending for the SAR NIF is \$8.1 million per year with a maximum of \$40.5 million¹³ over five years. A summary of the annual funding is presented in Table 1 as follows.

¹¹ Volunteers include recognized provincial or territorial SAR volunteer organizations, SAR Volunteers Association of Canada (SARVAC), Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the Canadian Aviation Search and Rescue Association (CASARA).

¹² DND Program Alignment Architecture, July 2013.

¹³ Subhas Roy Consultants Inc. Evaluation of the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SAR NIF) Contribution Program, 2009.

FY	Approved Funding (\$M)
2008/09	8.1
2009/10	8.1
2010/11	8.1
2011/12	8.1
2012/13	8.1
Total	40.5

Table 1. Expenditure Authority of the SAR NIF Contribution Program. This table provides a summary of the approved funding, in millions of dollars, for the SAR NIF Contribution Program between FYs 2008/09 to 2012/13 and the five-year total.

1.2.3 Issues and Questions

To assess the relevance and performance of the SAR NIF Contribution Program, the evaluation team considered the following core evaluation issues:

Relevance: The extent to which the SAR NIF is still relevant to the needs and priorities of the federal government and its partners and is aligned with federal roles and responsibilities.

- **Continued Need.** Does the SAR NIF continue to address a demonstrable need and is it responsive to the needs of Canadians?
- **Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities.** Does the SAR NIF align with current federal roles and responsibilities?
- **Alignment with Government Priorities.** Is the SAR NIF aligned with federal government priorities and DND/Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Strategic Outcomes?

Performance (Effectiveness; Efficiency and Economy): The extent to which the SAR NIF Program was successful in achieving its expected outcomes and has demonstrated efficiency and economy.

- **Achievement of Expected Outcomes.** The following questions were used to assess the performance of the SAR NIF:
 - To what extent do SAR NIF projects result in improved SAR response and prevention?
 - To what extent do SAR NIF projects promote and improve partnerships among all levels of the NSP?
- **Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy.** Were the most efficient and economical means employed to achieve the intended outcomes for the SAR NIF?

2.0 Findings and Recommendations

Evaluation findings and recommendations are outlined in Sections 2.1 through 2.5.

2.1 Continued Need

To examine the extent to which the SAR NIF Contribution Program continues to address a demonstrated need, the following indicators were assessed:

- evidence of a specific gap addressed by SAR NIF; and
- assessment of the feasibility of new initiatives for SAR in the absence of SAR NIF.

The findings are based on evidence from document reviews.

Key Finding 1: The SAR NIF is a unique mechanism to support cross-sector initiatives related to SAR response and prevention that meet the needs of the NSP and its partners.

The national SAR system receives 15,000 calls¹⁴ annually. This demonstrates a continued need for a coordinated SAR response and continued investment in prevention focused on mitigating the contributors to SAR incidents. The SAR NIF was established to provide resources for capability development in response and prevention¹⁵ and partnership-building across all levels¹⁶ of the NSP.

The SAR NIF is a mechanism that can support multi-jurisdictional and cross-sector (governmental, volunteer, academic) collaboration on national SAR projects. Federal SAR partners rely on SAR NIF contributions (e.g., transfer of appropriations) to develop projects that mutually advance their SAR mandates but would not be feasible for either partner to develop alone. This is especially important when promoting interoperability projects, such as research and development, or when adopting common procedures, processes and principles across SAR partners.

For other recipient organizations (e.g., volunteer groups), the SAR NIF provides financial access and opportunities to leverage funds from other sources (e.g., in-kind support, monetary support from provinces/territories, private sector). Without the SAR NIF, many of the advancements and formalized partnerships that have been funded would not have been possible, specifically for volunteer and non-profit organizations in the Canadian SAR community. SAR NIF promotes the partnership and efforts of individual SAR organizations, which contribute to our national capabilities.

¹⁴ Quadrennial Search and Rescue Review, December 2013, page 5.

¹⁵ Response and prevention development includes Research and Development (R&D), training, asset purchases and safety education.

¹⁶ Levels of the NSP include federal, provincial, territorial and municipal jurisdictions.

2.2 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities

To examine the extent to which the SAR NIF Contribution Program aligns with federal roles and responsibilities, the following indicators were assessed:

- alignment of the SAR NIF mandate with federal roles and responsibilities (i.e., signatory legislation and international treaties/agreements); and
- alignment of the SAR NIF mandate with CAF/DND roles and responsibilities (i.e. *National Defence Act*).

The findings in this section are based on evidence from document reviews.

Key Finding 2: The SAR NIF is aligned with DND and the federal government's role, along with partners and stakeholders, to support the NSP.

Although SAR is not directly included in the *National Defence Act* (1985), DND/CAF have responsibilities to the NSP through Cabinet-directed activities of the LMSAR, the NSS, and the ICSAR. The Government of Canada (GC) has federal responsibilities pertaining to SAR by its signatory status in international conventions¹⁷ for SAR and through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with domestic and international partners related to SAR operational and administrative responsibilities and coordination. To meet these responsibilities, a capable SAR response and coordinated NSP with strong partnerships and cooperation is required. SAR NIF projects support this by promoting partnerships and cooperation and by funding capability enhancements through R&D and training projects across all levels of the NSP.

SAR NIF projects and partnerships go beyond the federal role and responsibilities to support other levels of government and local organizations, which further strengthen the NSP.

2.3 Alignment with Government Priorities

To examine the extent to which the SAR NIF aligns with federal government priorities and DND/CAF strategic outcomes, the following indicators were assessed:

- alignment of the SAR NIF mandate with stated Defence strategic outcomes and objectives; and
- alignment of the SAR NIF mandate with stated federal government priorities.

The findings in this section are based on evidence from document reviews.

¹⁷ Conventions include: Convention on International Civil Aviation (1944), International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) (1974), and International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (effective in Canada in 1985).

Key Finding 3: The SAR NIF has funded projects that directly address stated Defence priorities, and projects that align with priority areas included in recent Throne Speeches and federal budget announcements.

Operations related to SAR are a top priority¹⁸ for DND/CAF. SAR and its associated programs such as the SAR NIF, contribute to the Defence strategic outcome related to Ensuring Sustainable Operational Excellence both at Home and Abroad for the Defence of Canada and the Protection of Canadians.¹⁹ The DND PAA includes subsection 3.2.4.0, Search and Rescue,²⁰ and SAR is also included in departmental priorities in the CFDS under Defending Canada—Delivering Excellence at Home.²¹

In addition to the priority of ensuring the safety and security of Canadians, reports on departmental performance include the following priorities:

- assisting partner agencies in emergency response practices;
- consolidating partnerships with universities and community organizations;
- supporting research and development in the public safety community (e.g., collaborating with domestic and international partners on geospatial and meteorological-related programs); and
- collaborating successfully with a wide range of partners.

SAR NIF projects support these priorities by providing direct funding to the stakeholders and partners who develop these capabilities and enhancements to the NSP.

In addition, the SAR NIF has contributed to projects related to developing new technology as well as expanding capabilities in the Arctic and northern regions, both of which are stated priorities within recent Throne Speeches.²² Support for distribution of a maritime virtual trainer by a small Canadian enterprise for use in SAR training was included in recent federal budgets,²³ as was a newly announced tax credit for SAR volunteers.²⁴ These references demonstrate the GC's commitment to a federal priority placed on SAR and its contribution programs such as SAR NIF.

¹⁸ Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Air Force Vectors, 2014.

¹⁹ Priority 1, Defence Priorities 2013–2017.

²⁰ PAA 2010.

²¹ CFDS, page 7.

²² Speech from the Throne, 2013.

²³ Federal budget and Economic Action Plan, 2012.

²⁴ Federal budget and Economic Action Plan, 2014.

2.4 Achievement of Expected Outcomes (Effectiveness)

To assess the effectiveness of SAR NIF in achieving expected outcomes, the following areas were assessed:

- funded projects align with identified priorities and represent a diversity of categories, applicant organizations and geographical reach;
- impacts of funded projects (response, prevention, R&D);
- diversity of partnerships across all levels of NSP;
- examples of promotion and improvements to partnerships; and
- communication with SAR partners across all levels of NSP.

The findings in this section are based on a review of program data, literature reviews and interviews with program staff.

Alignment with Identified Priorities and Project Diversity

Key Finding 4: The SAR NIF has funded SAR-related projects with a diversity of managing authorities, recipients, and reach. Over the five years, the funding has supported a balance of response and prevention projects.

Between 2008/09 and 2012/13, the NSS has funded 69 SAR NIF projects worth approximately \$37.8 million (Table 2). Funded projects were received by a diversity of applications including all six federal SAR departments (n=41), one territorial and nine provincial governments (n=24) and four volunteer associations²⁵ (national and provincial/territorial; n=4). Volunteer associations were specified as the direct recipients of at least 6 of the 24 provincially/territorially-managed projects. Many of the federally-managed projects indicated the involvement of national or federal non-government organizations.²⁶ Of the total SAR NIF funds spent over the five years, \$8.08 million was used to fund federally-managed R&D projects;²⁷ \$14.6 million was used for prevention projects; and \$15.1 million funded response-related projects.

From the descriptions of the projects and activities, it appears that the reach of the projects was also well balanced: 30 of the projects (43 percent) indicated a national reach;²⁸ 35 projects were provincial or territorial in reach; the remaining 4 projects

²⁵ Project applications were accepted directly from volunteer associations starting in 2010 only.

²⁶ E.g., Canadian Safe Boating Council, SARVAC, Ground SAR (GSAR) Council of Canada, Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, Canadian Marine Pilots' Association.

²⁷ R&D projects included non-SAR departments National Research Council and Industry Canada (Communications Research Centre of Canada).

²⁸ Projects with national reach include those with outputs that are intended to be nationally accessible at minimum (e.g., satellite data, theoretical models, web-accessible materials) or that contribute to a federal-level capability (e.g., Canadian Coast Guard [CCG] training, sensors for RCAF-SAR assets).

involved multiple municipalities (e.g., Northern Ontario) or trans-provincial/territorial boundaries (e.g., northern Canada, Atlantic Canada).

Managing Authority	No. of Projects	Prevention (\$M)	Response (\$M)	R&D (\$M)	Total (\$M)
DFO	12	0.925	3.25	-	4.18
DND	6	-	2.27	\$3.94	6.22
EC	8	3.77	-	\$2.54	6.31
PCA	3	0.02	0.88	\$0.94	1.00
RCMP	5	5.50	-	-	5.05
TC	7	2.27	0.63	\$1.49	4.40
5-Year Total—Federal	41	12.05	7.05	8.08	27.6
British Columbia (BC)	7	0.69	1.38	-	2.07
Manitoba (MB)	4	-	0.77	-	0.77
New Brunswick	1	-	0.51	-	0.51
Newfoundland	2	-	0.79	-	0.79
Nova Scotia	3	-	1.88	-	1.88
Ontario	1	-	0.51	-	0.51
Prince Edward Island (PEI)	3	-	0.39	-	0.39
Quebec	1	-	0.45	-	0.45
Saskatchewan	1	-	0.24	-	0.24
Yukon (YT)	2	0.66	0.49	-	1.15
5-Year Total—Provincial/Territorial	24	1.35	7.19	-	8.54
Volunteer Association	4	1.21	0.71	-	1.91
5-Year Total	69	14.60	14.95	8.08	37.63*

Table 2. Distribution of SAR NIF Project Funding Awarded Between 2008 and 2013 by Managing Authority and Category (i.e., Prevention, Response, R&D). This table presents a summary of the number of SAR NIF projects and type of project with corresponding dollar values, in millions of dollars, for 2008 to 2013.

***Note:** At the time of the evaluation, all funding awarded had not yet been expended for those projects that continue beyond 2013.

Key Finding 5: Annual priorities and project merit criteria established for the SAR NIF are very broad. The SAR NIF priorities have remained static over the evaluation period and have not been recently validated against current needs of the NSP.

From a review of a sample of project files, the activities described in project files appear to align with annual priorities, as is required of all funding-eligible projects. Annual priorities for SAR NIF are broad and permit a wide breadth of projects to be considered eligible based on alignment with the merit criteria.²⁹ Conversely, the vagueness of the focus of annual priorities and merit criteria details makes validating alignment difficult.

²⁹ Based on the SAR NIF Scoring System, SAR NIF Partner's Manual, August 2007, Annex E.

Although project files reviewed indicated some degree of application to a SAR context, the primacy of a SAR focus in funded projects was not always clear. In the case of some funded federal projects, the distinction was not clear between project areas that focused on activities mandated as departmental responsibilities versus new or improved areas specific to SAR response or prevention.

Annual SAR NIF priorities have remained largely unchanged in both number and ranking over the evaluation period and interviews suggest that these priorities have not been assessed during that time. NSS staff also indicated that no formal activities have been conducted to validate priorities against current evidence-based gaps or needs in SAR response and prevention.³⁰ Given the elapsed time, SAR NIF priorities should be formally and empirically validated against response and prevention needs of the NSP.

Recommendations

1. Conduct a formal validation process to ensure that priorities for the SAR NIF align with the evidence-based response and prevention needs of the NSP (i.e., formal needs assessment).
2. Refine the SAR NIF priorities to be more focused on the needs identified during validation. Adjust merit criteria to favour projects that address only specific, identified needs with distinct links to desired SAR NIF outcomes and reach.

OPI: NSS

Impacts of Funded Projects

Key Finding 6: Individual projects show evidence of improvements in SAR response capabilities and prevention efforts at varying levels of effect. However, the level of detail required in project reports is insufficient to reliably assess project results.

Based on the information available for review in project files, individual projects show evidence of improvements in SAR-related response and prevention capabilities. These improvements vary from enhancements in local capability to advances in systemic SAR capabilities of a national scale. Examples of capability improvements cited from specific project reports include:

- telecommunications upgrades for specific SAR unit volunteers;
- rescue skills training with local volunteers;
- locally-focused SAR prevention/safety workshops;
- validation of meteorological modeling;
- satellite upgrades and testing; and
- multi-audience education material on safety and prevention-related precautions.

³⁰ The OAG highlighted that SAR NIF is not linked to a strategic foundation, borne from the lack of a federal SAR prevention strategy. Reference: OAG Report, Spring 2013.

The information included in project reports is largely limited to milestone accounting and reconciling project activities and deliverables. Details of the impact of project activities (e.g., participant feedback, training results, behaviour change) was not often included or of sufficient detail to assess the full effect of the completed project. This is hindered by incomplete Performance Measurement and Communications Plan sections in project applications, which should frame how the project results are to be assessed. Program staff should confirm completion of these sections in a project application before launching a SAR NIF project. Project milestones reports and final summary submissions should directly address each performance and communication criteria stated in the project's corresponding application.

Key Finding 7: Information from funded projects is not being used to inform the SAR NIF or to validate the comprehensive impact of the Program. This issue has been raised previously in other reports. The SAR NIF is not meeting the terms for performance measurement defined in its terms and conditions.

Information on funded project results are not compiled, monitored or comprehensively reviewed. This finding was echoed in previous evaluations³¹ and by the Auditor General.³² Interviews with NSS staff indicated a misconception that the terms of a contribution program preclude the collection of performance information from funding recipients. However, the data from project reports already submitted to NSS has not been exploited. At the time of this evaluation, NSS staff had just completed data entry of a Microsoft Access® database³³ for SAR NIF with information from project files and reports. No reports or analysis of completed projects have yet been conducted with this database and the plan for its ongoing use has not been formalized. Software issues that impede its utility have been noted.³⁴ The SAR NIF database should be part of a comprehensive performance monitoring strategy, whose absence has also been noted in previous evaluations. Beyond the existence of this database, there is no evidence for this evaluation that demonstrates that progress has been made in addressing the gaps in performance monitoring or measurement for SAR NIF.

Promotion and Improvement of Partnerships

Key Finding 8: The SAR NIF inherently fosters project-level cooperation between recipients and project managing authorities. Formalizing partnerships and partnering for training and prevention outreach were the focus of many projects. However, without clearly defined expectations for partnerships across all levels of the NSP, the Program's impact on partner promotion and improvement cannot be validated.

³¹ Five-Year Evaluation of the SAR NIF Contribution Program (2005 and 2010).

³² OAG Report, Spring 2013, Chapter 7.

³³ The Microsoft Access database was implemented in place of the NIF Information System (NIFIS) cited in previous management action response. Staff indicated the database was a simpler and more achievable tool to bring online than the NIFIS originally planned for SAR NIF.

³⁴ NSS staff indicated that financial reports generated by the database do not reconcile with financial data shown in the system, which undermines the validity of the generated reports.

Most existing SAR NIF projects have a federal or provincial/territorial organization managing each funded project. As previously noted, SAR volunteer associations and non-government organizations are often recipients of many federally and provincially-territorially managed projects. By design, the SAR NIF intrinsically fosters project-level cooperation between those SAR partners. From the sample of project files reviewed, funded projects have involved the cooperation of at least 38 different partnerships, which span the diversity of levels of the NSP. These partnerships include seven federal departments, five provinces or territories and seven volunteer associations. The distribution of partner relationships is presented in Table 3. Each funded project is also required to include at least 5 percent financial support (including in-kind) from other organizations, which also fosters project-level cooperation.



Managing Authority	Partners	Project
RCMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canadian Safe Boating Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video-based cold water education
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kent Harrison Search and Rescue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications upgrading
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEI GSAR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map series development
YT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yukon Avalanche Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avalanche forecasting and education
BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snowmobile Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avalanche education for mountain snowmobiling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Columbia Search and Rescue Association (BCSARA) RCMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAR volunteer development
MB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manitoba Office of the Fire Commissioner SAR Manitoba (SARMAN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing MB's volunteer association
DND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Research Centre (Industry Canada) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MEOSAR Phase 2
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OSARVA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GSAR volunteer development
TC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TC (Office of Boating Safety) Life Saving Society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal floatation device education and loaner program
DFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kativik Regional Government Nunavik SAR volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marine SAR education
PCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saguenay – Saint Laurent Marine Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diving-related oceanographic conditions measurement and reporting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RCMP PEI GSAR Association Tourism PEI CCG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rip current education video
EC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Laboratory for Marine and Coastal Meteorology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental forecasting predictions system (Arctic, Labrador)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ontario Provincial Police Canadian Power & Sail Squadrons CCG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online mariners' meteorological guide
PEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEI Office of Public Safety PEI GSAR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic planning for GSAR capabilities

Table 3. A Sample of SAR NIF Partners and Projects Between 2008 and 2013. This table provides a sample of the SAR NIF partners and projects completed between 2008 and 2013.

Fostering partnerships between new and existing SAR partners are primary components of some of the funded projects. Although documents indicated that most partnerships are informal (i.e., no evidence of specific terms or formal agreements), the SAR NIF has funded eight projects whose objective is specifically to develop or update a formal agreement (e.g., Terms of Reference, MOU) between partners. From the sample of project files reviewed, other examples of project-level partnering between at least two independent organizations include:

- resource sharing (e.g., facilities, equipment, expertise, human resources);
- skills training delivery;
- delivery of safety education workshops;
- knowledge sharing (e.g., conferences, awareness fairs) and consultations (e.g., strategic planning, surveying);
- promotional events; and
- development and distribution of outreach materials (e.g., media articles, radio promotion, newsletters).

The assessment of SAR NIF partnerships was limited to anecdotal examples gleaned from project files. No evidence was found that the expectations for the promotion and improvement of SAR partnerships funded by the SAR NIF have been defined. Therefore, the results for partnership efforts cannot be objectively assessed beyond those anecdotal examples provided. The expectations for partnership promotion and improvement should also be considered when developing the SAR NIF performance measurement and monitoring strategy recommended in this evaluation. Focused and measurable criteria should be defined for SAR partnerships that directly reflect a focused strategic direction from the NSP. The SAR NIF's previous Results-based Accountability Framework may provide some initial structure.

Recommendation

3. Develop and implement a formal performance measurement and monitoring strategy for the SAR NIF. This should include:

- performance measures that are specific and related to the expectations of the Program's outcomes and priorities;
- revisions to the current project application and reporting templates (i.e., the Performance Measurement and Communications Plan sections of the templates) to link closely with the SAR NIF's formal strategy. Revisions to the project applications template should be completed prior to approval of new project funding; and
- a comprehensive assessment of impact and value (i.e., performance) of all currently available project data prior to commencing new projects. Present assessment results to ICSAR and use the results to validate the effective use of funding to support specific strategic directions and revised priorities of the NSP.

OPI: NSS

Communication with Partners

Key Finding 9: The SAR NIF workshops were positively regarded by all participants. However, these stand-alone workshops have not been continued since 2010. Since then promotion has continued through the annual SARscene conference and ad-hoc consultations with some SAR partners.

To allow SAR partners to exchange best practices and experiences related to SAR activities,³⁵ workshops have been delivered annually to SAR partners. From 2008 to 2010, this included an annual SAR NIF workshop, which focused specifically on

- project application guidance;
- discussions on partner challenges related to projects; and
- promotion of successful projects.³⁶

Workshops have been well attended by a diversity of provincial and territorial partners, but significantly less attended by federal SAR departments or volunteer associations. The representation of SAR partners in attendance at workshops is presented in Table 4 as follows.

³⁵ Treasury Board program agreement, April 16, 2010.

³⁶ Additional SAR NIF workshops were held in a condensed format during annual SARscene conferences in Winnipeg (2011), Toronto (2012), and Chilliwack (2013). Formal participation numbers and feedback were not available for review.

Partner	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Federal	1 (PCA)	1 (RCMP)	-	2
Provincial/ Territorial*	16	21	10	43
Volunteer Association	1 (NLSARA)	2 (NL + SARVAC)	2 (NL + OSARVA)	4

Table 4. Representation from Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Volunteer Association SAR Partners at Annual SAR NIF Workshops. This table provides a count and summary of the number of participants at the annual SAR NIF workshops between FY 2008/08 and 2010/11.

***Note:** No representatives from YT attended in 2008/09; Ontario was represented in 2008/09 only; Northwest Territories and Newfoundland and Labrador were represented in 2009/10 only.

From participant surveys, 100 percent of respondents indicated that the workshop was a positive experience and met their expectations. The majority of survey respondents indicated that the workshops created valuable networking opportunities. Examples of successful projects or sharing best practices and common challenges were cited repeatedly as highly useful components, as well as receiving guidance on the project submission process.

Stand-alone workshops were not continued after 2010. NSS staff indicated challenges in obtaining travel approval as the primary reason for not holding workshops. Three days of consultations were conducted in 2013 but were limited to BCSARA, SAR Alberta, Alberta Office of the Fire Commissioner, MB Office of the Fire Commissioner, and SARMAN. However, promotion of the SAR NIF has been carried out at the annual SARscene conference hosted by NSS. The SAR NIF promotion at these conferences has included a modified workshop, material available at a promotional booth and presentations by funding recipients.

Key Finding 10: The SAR NIF has not met its communications and outreach objectives as defined in the Program Agreement.

Promotion activities for the SAR NIF have not met the terms of the Program Agreement. Final summary reports have not been published to the NSS website. The SARscene magazine, the mechanism cited to advertise best practices and project results, has not been produced since 2010.

In 2013, a second call for proposals was required to expend annual funding designated for the SAR NIF. NSS staff suggested federal budget cuts. Resulting resource constraints led to fewer proposals from federal partners during the initial call for proposals in 2013, although circumstances were not formally explored by NSS. To extend the availability of SAR NIF funds, a second call was offered. Program staff also indicated that fewer new participants had attended annual workshops (i.e., same participants year after year).

To better promote available SAR NIF funding, and response and prevention best practices garnered from successful projects, the gaps in the SAR NIF communication strategy must be addressed. Results of completed projects, as well as overall performance and impact of the SAR NIF, should be made widely accessible using available web and print mechanisms. Dedicated information technology resources should be renewed as required to support web currency. Outreach activities should be incorporated into communications initiatives to ensure that new applicants are encouraged to participate in the SAR NIF.

Recommendation

4. Address incomplete components of the SAR NIF communication strategy to fulfill obligations to promote and share knowledge about the SAR NIF with partners.

OPI: NSS

2.5 Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy

To assess the efficiency and economy of the SAR NIF, the evaluation team considered the following criteria:

- best practices and evidence of efforts to improve the Program (soliciting feedback/consultation, actions based on results);
- operational costs and funding resource allocation; and
- cost of the Program.

The findings in this section are based on reviews of program data, analysis of financial information and interviews with program staff.

Best Practices and Efforts for Program Improvements

Key Finding 11: Formal solicitation of feedback is not conducted with project recipients or SAR partners. Best practices from program results have not been examined to drive efficiencies in program design and delivery. Information on successful prevention and response projects has not been well promoted or made easily accessible.

Over the five years of the evaluation period, opportunities to gain efficiencies in the SAR NIF have not been exploited. Feedback from funding recipients of completed projects has not been formally sought to identify suggested program improvements based on their experiences with the contribution program. Systematic review of the program design or delivery is not conducted regularly beyond program renewal activities. Consultations with SAR partners regarding the SAR NIF are conducted ad-hoc in the absence of workshops, and those consultations have not included partners at all levels of the NSP. Consultations to date have not focused on garnering feedback from partners about improvements to the SAR NIF Contribution Program.

Statistical analyses of the portfolio of funded projects has not been comprehensively compiled or analyzed to identify gaps in funding areas, partner representation, or project diversity. The evaluation team has already identified that the results of project summaries are not being used to derive best practices in prevention and response of funded projects. The insufficient promotion of project successes and access to project summary reports for knowledge sharing, as noted previously in this report, suggest an increased risk that knowledge is being duplicated and inefficiently used.

The NSP SAR SharePoint system offers a communication mechanism that has not been fully utilized. The SharePoint portal is currently operational and can be made available to all SAR partners. This tool could be optimized to deliver program information, provide project application guidance, publish project summaries, and share knowledge and best practices related to SAR response and prevention activities. The initial effort to bring the SharePoint system to currency may require additional interim resources, which should be taken into consideration.

Recommendation

5. Develop and integrate a formal mechanism to solicit feedback into the SAR NIF's framework. Suggestions for improvement should be implemented to ensure that the efficiency of the SAR NIF is maximized.

OPI: NSS

Key Finding 12: Annual priorities for the SAR NIF have been static over the last five years. The Program is not being leveraged to support strategic directions for the NSP.

The evaluation team noted that projects funded by the SAR NIF appear to align with the annual priorities established by ICSAR. However, the annual priorities for the SAR NIF have remained consistent over the five-year evaluation period. All five priorities have been eligible for funding and those priority areas are broad. This enables a diversity of project eligibility but significantly risks diluting the effective impact of projects when applied to such a wide breadth of topics. The stagnancy of the SAR NIF priorities suggests that the SAR NIF is not being used to focus on specific NSP issues.

Discussions with the NSS indicate that a formal review of annual priorities has not taken place over the last few years. With the suspension of ICSAR meetings, annual priorities for the SAR NIF have been approved secretarially and in the absence of significant discussion. Activities to assess the validity of current SAR priorities have not taken place. These activities would include environmental scans of current research and SAR practices, gaps analysis of the NSP, and extensive consultation with SAR partners related to priority areas. Prior to the very recent Quadrennial SAR Review (QSR), the last formal consultation on strategic planning for NSP had not taken place since October 2009. The absence of a national SAR policy and approved strategic framework further compromise this work. Until further work is done to validate and focus the strategic priorities of the

current NSP framework, it is unlikely that efficient leveraging of the SAR NIF will be fully realized.

Operational Costs and Funding Resource Allocation

Costs associated with operating SAR NIF have been on average \$274,590.77 annually. Table 5, as follows, shows that the average annual cost of operations (salaries; Operations and Maintenance [O&M]) is equivalent to approximately 3 percent of the average value spent on contributions annually. Operational costs are low for the SAR NIF. These costs have increased over the evaluation period due to an increase in the number of Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) associated with the SAR NIF.

Operational Costs (\$ Millions)	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Salary and Wage Envelope	\$0.20	\$0.26	\$0.24	\$0.18	\$0.22
O&M	Not applicable	\$0.16	\$0.03	\$0.04	\$0.04
Total Operations	\$0.21	\$0.42	\$0.27	\$0.22	\$0.25
FTEs	3.16	4.30	3.45	3.59	3.14

Table 5. Operational Costs and FTEs for the SAR NIF Contribution Program. This table provides the operational costs, in millions of dollars, and FTE counts associated with the Program for FYs 2008/09 to 2012/13.

Funding resources have been divided approximately equally between contributions (Vote 10) and transfers of appropriation (Vote 1 and Vote 5) to federal departments. On average, transfers to DND represent approximately 31 percent of annual departmental transfers. Total annual contribution funding has fluctuated slightly per year. For the years where the full \$8.1 million was not expended, consultations with NSS staff indicate that the remaining funds were not sufficient to fully fund the next-ranked project on the Merit List. In 2008–09, \$1.2 million was not used by project recipients and carried forward to the next fiscal year. Given these variances, \$39.6 million of the total of the \$40.5 million has been spent over the five-year period.

Funding Allocation (\$ Millions)	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Appropriation Transfers to DND	1.08	0.52	1.00	1.26	0.59
Appropriation Transfers to OGD	2.05	3.14	3.04	1.04	1.30
Total Appropriation Transfers	3.13	3.67	4.04	2.63	1.89
Total Contributions	3.72	5.68	4.03	5.70	5.65
Total Funding	6.85	9.35*	8.07	8.33	7.53

Table 6. Distribution of Expended SAR NIF Funding Allocation³⁷ Across Transfers of Appropriation and Contributions. This table presents the funding allocations, in millions of dollars, expended for the SAR NIF Contribution Program by fiscal year. (Data provided by NSS from expenditure estimates.)

***Note:** Expenditures exceeded \$8.1 million in 2009/10 due to a budget carry-forward of funds that were unused by recipients in previous fiscal years.³⁸

The five-year distribution of the SAR NIF funding allocation shown in Table 6 indicates that up to half of the SAR NIF funds were transferred to federal department budgets for SAR-related projects. This proportion is significant given that the purpose of a federal contribution program is typically to support non-federal development.³⁹

Key Finding 13: Transfers of appropriation do not require project reporting back to the SAR NIF. Without this reporting requirement, the SAR NIF is unable to measure, share or actively promote the performance of projects funded within the Transfer of Appropriations mechanism.

The dispersal mechanism used for the SAR NIF is uncommon. Although funding given to other departments is awarded to support projects that are deemed to support the NSP interests, departmental transfers are not bound by the same reporting terms as the contribution portion of the SAR NIF.⁴⁰ The promotion of projects and sharing of best practices is a central objective of the SAR NIF. Without equivalent requirements to report results from projects funded by transfers of appropriation, knowledge garnered from those projects may not be as widely accessible. Given that almost half of the SAR NIF funds have been transferred to federal departments without formal project results or feedback to the SAR NIF, this represents a significant loss of knowledge transfer and sharing related to SAR NIF initiatives. Therefore, the evaluation team recommends

³⁷ Includes only a proportion of awarded project funding that has been expended within the five-year evaluation cycle (i.e., allocated funds for projects ongoing beyond 2013 are not captured).

³⁸ Consultation with NSS comptroller.

³⁹ Non-federal includes business/industry; community non-profit (volunteer) sectors; education and research institutions; other levels of government (municipal, provincial/territorial); and specific target populations (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Aboriginal organizations). From Red Tape to Clear Results: The Report of the Independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Grant and Contribution Programs (December 2006), TBS.

⁴⁰ As appropriations are transferred directly into the Vote budgets of the receiving department, subsequent financial tracking or performance reporting back to the transferring department are not required.

examining if this transfer mechanism is the most appropriate way to provide funding such that the performance monitoring and sharing objectives of the SAR NIF can be met.

Cost of the SAR NIF Contribution Program

The actual annual average cost of the SAR NIF Contribution Program is approximately \$8.19 million considering both operational costs and project funding, as shown in Table 7. Over the five year period between 2008–09 and 2012–13, the cumulative total cost of the SAR NIF is \$40.5 million. All funded projects are required to demonstrate cost sharing of at least 5 percent. Project cost-sharing over the evaluation period is valued at approximately \$2.0 million.

Cost of Program (\$ Millions)	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Operations Costs	0.21	0.42	0.27	0.22	0.25
Funding Costs	6.85	9.35*	8.07	7.99	7.32
Total Program Costs	7.05	9.77	8.34	8.22	7.57

Table 7. Overall Costs of the SAR NIF Contribution Program. This table provides a summary of the overall costs, in millions of dollars, associated with the Program for FYs 2008/09 to 2012/13.

***Note:** Expenditures exceeded \$8.1 million in 2009/10 due to a budget carry-forward of funds that were unused by recipients in previous fiscal years.⁴¹

2.6 Conclusion

The results of this evaluation indicate that the SAR NIF Contribution Program is a relevant investment for DND/CAF. It is a unique mechanism for supporting SAR initiatives and partnerships across all levels of the NSP. The Program contributes to the federal and department roles and responsibilities and priorities related to SAR and the NSP. However, areas of concern have been identified for the performance of the SAR NIF. While individual projects show improvements in response, prevention and partnership-building, results are not used to inform directions for the SAR NIF or the NSP. Communications activities have been reduced over the evaluation period and best practices are not being formally shared or promoted. The SAR NIF has also not fulfilled the requirements of its terms and conditions.

⁴¹ Consultation with NSS comptroller.

Annex A—Management Action Plan

Validation of Priorities

CRS Recommendations

1. Conduct a formal validation process to ensure that priorities for the SAR NIF align with the evidence-based response and prevention needs of the NSP (i.e., formal needs assessment).
2. Refine the SAR NIF priorities to be more focused on the needs identified during validation. Adjust merit criteria to favour projects that address only specific, identified needs with distinct links to desired SAR NIF outcomes and reach.

Management Action

The NSS concurs with these recommendations.

A validation was done through the 2013 QSR, which yielded four key recommendations. As a result, the 2015–2016 SAR NIF Priorities, which are part of the current call for proposals, were realigned. These revised priorities will address the needs of the NSP as outlined in the QSR report and the 2013 Spring Report of the Auditor General of Canada, Chapter 7. These priorities are further refined through specific goals that will form the basis of the merit criteria for the board.

The SAR NIF priorities will continue to be reviewed on a yearly basis to determine whether these priorities, or a subset, continue to be relevant.

OPI: NSS

Target Date: Already in implementation and will affect FY 2015/16 proposals.

Implementation of Performance Measurement Strategy

CRS Recommendation

3. Develop and implement a formal performance measurement and monitoring strategy for the SAR NIF. This should include:
 - performance measures that are specific and related to the expectations of the Program's outcomes and priorities;
 - revisions to the current project application and reporting templates (i.e., the Performance Measurement and Communications Plan sections) to link closely with the Program's formal strategy. Revisions to the project applications template should be completed prior to approval of new project funding; and
 - a comprehensive assessment of impact and value (i.e., performance) of all currently available project data prior to commencing new projects. Present the assessment results to ICSAR and use the results to validate the effective use of funding to support specific strategic directions and revised priorities of the NSP.



Management Action

The NSS concurs with the recommendation.

- The NSS will develop and implement a performance measurement strategy and framework that will be used to assess and report on SAR NIF results and outcomes. The development will begin in 2015/16 with implementation in 2016/17.
- SAR NIF project application templates and evaluation documents will be revised to reflect the performance measurement strategy.
- An assessment of impact and value will be done on all SAR NIF projects within the last five years. The results will be presented to ICSAR in 2016/17 at the latest, following upgrades to the SAR NIF database.

The NSS has identified the development of a performance measurement strategy and the updating of the SAR NIF database as pressures in the 2015/16 Business Plan. While we will leverage GC expertise to the maximum extent, it is estimated that there will be a small Vote 1 funding requirement that will yield positive return on investment for future years. The case will be made at the Investment and Resource Management Committee.

OPI: NSS

Target Date: March 31, 2017

Feedback from Recipients

CRS Recommendation

4. Address incomplete components of the SAR NIF communication strategy to fulfill obligations to promote and share knowledge about the SAR NIF with partners.

Management Action

The NSS concurs with the recommendation and will review and validate the current communication strategy.

The NSS has compiled all project summary reports and will decide on the best way to make them available to its SAR partners and stakeholders. For example, through the NSS website or through access to the SAR NIF database once upgraded.

The NSS will showcase a sample of successful SAR NIF projects and consult with partners and stakeholders by providing workshops and consultation sessions at SARscene each year. The NSS will also propose regional workshops for our partners and stakeholders, as required, and subject to available resources. SAR NIF promotional products will be developed and widely distributed throughout the SAR community through our partners and stakeholders.

The NSS has identified additional workshops as a pressure in the 2015/16 Business Plan. It is estimated that there will be a small Vote 1 funding requirement associated with this activity that will yield a positive return on investment. The case will be made at IRMC.

OPI: NSS

Target Date: March 2017

Feedback from Recipients

CRS Recommendation

5. Develop and integrate a formal mechanism to solicit feedback into the SAR NIF's framework. Suggestions for improvement should be implemented to ensure that the efficiency of the SAR NIF is maximized.

Management Action

The NSS concurs with the recommendation.

The NSS will develop tools and mechanisms for collecting and disseminating feedback from our partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries. The information will be collected on an annual basis in the fall to allow time to make necessary adjustments to the Program and its processes prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. Furthermore, the NSS will include a feedback component in all of its SAR NIF workshops.

This recommendation can be addressed using existing resources.

OPI: NSS

Target Date: March 2016

Annex B—Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

1.0 Methodology

1.1. Overview of Data Collection Methods

The evaluation of the SAR NIF Contribution Program employed multiple lines of evidence to assess the Program's relevance and performance. The methodology used a consistent approach when collecting and analyzing the data to help ensure the reliability of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used and included reviews of program documents and financial information, key informant interviews and a review of project files. Qualitative information was used to establish the profile and context for the Program and to interpret the significance of the assessed numerical data. A comparison of both methods was used to validate the overall analysis and to develop the evaluation findings and recommendations.

1.1.1. Program Documents and Financial Information Review

A review of program documents was conducted in the initial phase of the evaluation to establish an understanding of the background and context of the SAR NIF. These documents included:

- program terms and conditions;
- Treasury Board submissions;
- workshop and SARscene documentation;
- website contents;
- project application guidance documents and partner manuals;
- terms and conditions for projects and Merit Boards;
- strategic direction and planning documents; and
- previous assessment reports.

Financial information provided by the NSS comptroller and departmental financial systems was reviewed to assess trends in resource allocation and fund expenditures.

1.1.2. Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with NSS staff responsible for SAR NIF administration and management, NSP policy and strategic advice, as well as departmental financial administration staff. These consultations were used to discuss any issues identified with program administration, management and strategic direction. Interviews also provided context and elaboration of trends observed in the program and financial data.

1.1.3. Review of Project Files

Current and closed project files were reviewed to assess individual project results. A sample of 18 paper project files were reviewed, which represented a mix of project

categories, recipients, funding years, and project lengths. The electronic database (i.e., Microsoft Access) that was newly populated with project information was also accessed for this evaluation study. Project files were used to determine details of the project plans, recipients and partnering organizations, the nature and frequency of reporting, and the results reported in available project summaries.

2.0 Limitations

The following table shows the limitations related to the data sources used to assess the Program and the mitigation strategies applied to them.

Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
Attributing the SAR NIF's activities and outputs to expected outcomes was difficult due to a lack of data.	Focus was placed on collecting anecdotal examples of improvements in response capabilities, prevention activities and partnerships advancements. Evidence of reported partnerships and collaborative activities (e.g., workshops, conferences) were also assessed. Deductions were made from these findings to assess the achievement of program objectives.
The possibility that the interviewees would provide biased information.	A comparison was made between interview data from all groups and other information sources (e.g., documents and files).
The hierarchy of objectives, outcomes and stated results in the Program Agreement is unclear and not well aligned with the program structure currently in practice.	The evaluation team focused on stated expected results (i.e., outputs) supplemented by key components of the stated objectives (i.e., outcomes) that were not otherwise included in the expected results.

Table B-1. Evaluation Limitations and Mitigation Strategies. This table lists the limitations of the Evaluation and each corresponding mitigation strategy.