

# Evaluation of the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SAR NIF) Contribution Program

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National Search and Rescue Secretariat

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# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
ACROYNYS AND ABBREVIATIONS	<b>5</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 EVALUATION MANDATE	<b>6</b>
1.2 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	<b>6</b>
<b>2.0 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND APPROACH</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES	<b>10</b>
2.2 SCOPE	<b>10</b>
2.3 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY	<b>11</b>
<b>3.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3.1 RELEVANCE</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1.1 CONTINUED NEED FOR PROGRAM	<b>11</b>
3.1.2 ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES	<b>12</b>
3.1.3 ALIGNMENT WITH FEDERAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	<b>12</b>
<b>3.2 PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>13</b>
3.2.1 ACHIEVEMENT OF EXPECTED OUTCOMES OR EFFECTIVENESS	<b>13</b>
3.2.2 DEMONSTRATION OF EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY	<b>19</b>
<b>ANNEX A – MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>ANNEX B – FEDERAL PARTNERS INTERVIEWED</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>ANNEX C – SAR NIF EVALUATION – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>ANNEX D – LOGIC MODEL FOR SAR NIF</b>	<b>27</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The terms and conditions for the contribution component of the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SAR NIF) were approved by the Treasury Board on August 30, 2005 and are valid until March 31, 2010. Prior to seeking approval for the continuation of the program a summative evaluation must be performed. The mandate for this independent program evaluation is therefore derived from the above requirement.

SAR NIF provides funding for new initiatives that will improve and enhance elements of the National Search and Rescue Program. The funding program provides funds to eligible recipients through two financial mechanisms – contribution agreements (for Vote 10 projects) and transfers to managing departments via the Parliamentary Estimates process (for Vote 1 & 5 projects). The scope of this evaluation considers only the Vote 10 contribution component of the SAR NIF program, which comprises approximately 50% or \$4 million of the SAR NIF's annual allocated budget of \$8.1 million.

The SAR NIF is a horizontal program managed in partnership with other federal, provincial and territorial SAR organizations. Eligible recipients of the SAR NIF contributions are provincial and territorial governments, profit and not-for-profit Canadian organizations from volunteer, academic or private sectors and individuals with responsibilities in the National SAR Program.

The evaluation has confirmed the many benefits and advantages accrued to Canadians as a result of the SAR NIF contributions. The contribution program's positive aspects include the following:

- There is overwhelming agreement amongst proponents that the program continues to address a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Canadians.
- Many of the search and rescue organizations staffed by volunteers profess that without SAR NIF they would be hard pressed to function effectively.
- The SAR NIF program remains relevant and important to the DND/CF as it contributes directly to one of the three programs identified in the Program Activity Architecture (PAA).
- There is strong agreement amongst most survey respondents and supported by documents examined that the TBS Policy on Transfer Payments is now respected.

Areas recommended for program improvement include the following:

- The NSS website should include appropriate and up-to-date information regarding the SAR NIF program, including examples of successful initiatives recently undertaken. This would be of considerable help to applicants.
- As part of the SAR NIF contribution program renewal process, the NSS should explore the possibility of creating a more efficient and equitable

method to provide funding for provincially sponsored projects designed to support volunteer groups. The NSS should also review the omnibus process and determine the effectiveness of this strategic method of providing funds.

- The renewal process should also explore ways to considerably shorten the contribution approval time span to Government of Canada / DND norms.
- The rules of engagement for the Merit Board should be re-examined with a view to take into consideration the need for improvement expressed by the members.
- The NSS should ensure that the SAR NIF information systems are robust enough to satisfy government financial requirements as well as program management and user needs. It should be able to track the authorized carry forward to the next year of unspent SAR NIF project dollars at fiscal year-end.
- Finally with the renewal of SAR NIF, the NSS should ensure that the Program Management Strategy includes an appropriate auditing and evaluation framework along with the requirement for systematic collection of performance information and the regular issuance of an annual report on SAR NIF operations. This would considerably strengthen the public perception of accountability on the part of the program.

## **ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS**

- Canadian Coast Guard (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) – CCG/DFO
- Canadian Forces (Department of National Defence) – CF/DND
- Federal Managing Departments/Agencies – MDA
- Interdepartmental Committee on Search and Rescue – ICSAR
- Lead Minister of Search and Rescue – LMSAR / Minister of National Defence – MND
- Memorandum of Understanding – MOU
- Meteorological Service of Canada (Environment Canada) – MSC/EC
- National Search and Rescue Secretariat – NSS
- Parks Canada (Agency) – PC
- Program Activity Architecture – PAA
- Provincial/Territorial governments – P/T
- Results-Based Management Accountability Framework – RMAF
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police – RCMP
- Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund – SAR NIF
- Transport Canada – TC
- Treasury Board – TB

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 EVALUATION MANDATE**

The renewed terms and conditions for the contribution component of the National Search and Rescue program, SAR NIF were approved by the Treasury Board on August 30, 2005. The Results-Based Management Accountability Framework (RMAF) requires that:

“An independent evaluation of the contribution program in support of the SAR NIF will be carried out every five years, or more frequently, if requested by the Executive Director of the National Search and Rescue Secretariat. The next independent program evaluation is scheduled for FY 2008-2009.”

“The terms and conditions will apply and payments will be made for eligible expenditures incurred from 01 April 2005 to 31 March 2010, at which time a summative evaluation will be performed prior to seeking approval for the continuation of the program.” The mandate for this independent program evaluation is therefore derived from the above requirement.

### **1.2 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

In 1986, the Federal Cabinet recognized the National SAR Program as a distinct horizontal program of the government and confirmed the Minister of National Defence as the Lead Minister for Search and Rescue with overall policy responsibility for SAR and authority, responsibility and accountability for the coordination of the National SAR Program. The National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS) supports the Lead Minister for Search and Rescue/Minister of National Defence (LMSAR/MND) in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

The Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SAR NIF) provides funding for new initiatives in the SAR area. The funding program delivers funds to eligible recipients through two distinct funding mechanisms – a contribution agreement for Vote 10 recipients, and transfers to managing federal departments/agencies through the Parliamentary Estimates process for Vote 1 and 5 projects. Eligible recipients of the SAR NIF contributions are provincial and territorial governments, profit and not-for-profit Canadian organizations from volunteer, academic or private sectors and individuals with responsibilities in the National SAR Program.

The SAR NIF is managed in partnership with other federal, provincial and territorial SAR organizations. This includes the following federal SAR delivery departments:

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the program description in this section has been obtained from the Treasury Board approved Terms and Conditions of the Contribution Program in Support of the SAR New Initiatives Fund.

- Canadian Forces (Department of National Defence)
- Canadian Coast Guard (Department of Fisheries and Oceans)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Transport Canada
- Meteorological Service of Canada (Environment Canada)
- Parks Canada (Agency).

Representatives from these organizations comprise the Interdepartmental Committee on Search and Rescue (ICSAR).

The SAR NIF receives an annual allotment of up to a maximum of \$8.1 million to support the National SAR Program priorities by providing funds for new initiatives aimed at improving the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the SAR program in Canada.

The maximum amount payable under this fund is \$40,500,000 over five years, subject to review. The funding breakdown for the period is shown in Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1**

	<b>FY 2005-06</b>	<b>FY 2006-07</b>	<b>FY 2007-08</b>	<b>FY 2008-09</b>	<b>FY 2009-10</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
SAR NIF	\$8,100,000	\$8,100,000	\$8,100,000	\$8,100,000	\$8,100,000	\$40,500,000

As may be seen from the figures shown in the following Table 2 below,<sup>2</sup> the Vote 10 contribution component of the SAR NIF program subject to this evaluation averages around 50% or around \$4 million of the \$8.1 million SAR NIF yearly allocation. Components of the program delivered through Vote 1 and Vote 5 are transferred through the Parliamentary Estimates process to, and managed by, the federal SAR delivery departments mentioned below. Approximately \$4M in Vote 5 funding is transferred to other federal government departments and agencies annually for approved Search and Rescue related projects. As per the RMAF, the Vote 1 and Vote 5 program components are therefore not subject to this independent evaluation which is limited to those contribution funds in Vote 10 managed directly by the NSS.

<sup>2</sup> Figures provided and validated by NSS Comptroller.

**TABLE 2**

Fiscal Year	SAR NIF Forecast Expenditures	SAR NIF Actual Expenditures
2005/06 V5 -See Table Note 1 -	N/A	N/A
2005/06 V10	\$ 2,902,781	\$ 3,516,261
2006/07 V5	\$ 7,048,814	\$ 7,048,814
2006/07 V10	\$ 2,027,379	\$1,932,379
2007/08 V5	\$ 4,419,318	\$ 4,419,317
2007/08 V10	\$ 5,332,075	\$ 3,288,701
2008/09 V5	\$ 3,035,708	\$ 3,035,709
2008/09 V10	\$ 5,332,075	\$ 3,717,806
2009/10 V5	\$ 3,701,769	\$ 3,701,769
2009/10 V10	\$ 6,691,327	\$ 6,691,327
<b>Totals</b>	\$ 40,491,245	\$ 37,352,082
<b>SAR NIF Funds Available</b> -See Table Note 2 -		<b>\$ 40,500,000</b>
<b>SAR NIF Authorized Funds Lapsed</b>		<b>\$ 3,147,918</b>
<b>Notes</b>		
1. No allocations via Supplementary Estimates and/or ARLU in 2005/2006.		
2. As per the SAR NIF Terms and Conditions, the NSS has the authority to spend a maximum of \$40,500,000 over a 5 year period.		

Within the non-federal jurisdiction, the National Search and Rescue Secretariat works directly with provincial and territorial SAR authorities and police services to develop and standardize the quantity and quality of SAR service available to the provinces and territories.

Potential applicants must contact one of the federal, provincial or territorial SAR partners to initiate interest in the program and develop proposals that address program and partner priorities. SAR NIF provides annual funding for new projects (or initiatives), that will improve the National Search and Rescue Program. The SAR NIF continues to use the priorities of the National SAR Program to determine funding priorities. Over the past four years, the NSS has used variations of these priorities<sup>3</sup>. The current priorities of the National Search and Rescue Program are:

- National SAR Program Information Management and Data Exploitation - Define and develop mechanisms for monitoring, sharing and measuring the National SAR Program.
- Interoperability - Promote standardization and compatibility of systems, equipment and personnel to achieve greater integration and program effectiveness.

<sup>3</sup> Details for the Call for Proposals (2010-2011) are shown in the NSS web-site modified on 2009-04-20.

- Public Education and Awareness - Use broad awareness and targeted outreach to minimize the number and severity of potential SAR incidents.
- The SAR Volunteer Community - Develop sustainability and capacity of volunteers in SAR.
- Managing Technology - Encourage technology development which reduces SAR response time and increases survivability.

In order to apply for funding, SAR NIF applicants must determine the appropriate SAR NIF Partner to submit their SAR NIF applications (based upon jurisdiction and area of SAR responsibility).

Proposals received by the managing federal departments and agencies are reviewed, ranked by order of priority and submitted to the NSS/DND for consideration by the SAR NIF Merit Board. Only those SAR NIF Applications that the managing federal departments and agencies endorse are submitted to the NSS.

Provincial/territorial government proposals can only be submitted by the recognized SAR authority within the provincial/territorial jurisdiction. The authority submits an omnibus proposal after surveying or collecting proposals from SAR organizations within their jurisdiction. The method for development of the omnibus proposal is determined by the provincial/territorial authority.

The NSS/DND reviews and submits to the SAR NIF Merit Board SAR NIF applications received from all SAR NIF Partners. The SAR NIF Merit Board reviews the proposals and meets to discuss the merits of the proposals. Once the SAR NIF Merit Board meeting has concluded, individual members score the projects independently and submit the scores to the NSS for tabulation. The resulting SAR NIF Merit List is created by ranking the scored SAR NIF applications from highest to lowest. The SAR NIF Merit List is then submitted to ICSAR for endorsement and transmitted onward to the LMSAR/MND for final approval.

Once projects are approved by LMSAR/MND, the NSS determines how many projects from the SAR NIF Merit List can be funded based upon the amount of uncommitted funds available in the upcoming fiscal year (April 1). The uncommitted funds are those funds not designated for on-going, approved projects from previous fiscal years. Once the funding line has been determined, the NSS prepares the financial documents (including contribution agreements) which must be signed before any funds are released to eligible recipients.

## **2.0 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND APPROACH**

### **2.1 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES**

Aligned with the Treasury Board approved RMAF, the objectives of this evaluation include assessing the relevance, success and cost-effectiveness of the SAR NIF contribution program, as well as the adequacy of the NSS and departmental design and management of the program and monitoring activities. These objectives are also consistent with the core issues to be addressed by departments in an evaluation as per the recently issued TB Directive on the Evaluation Function.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.2 SCOPE**

The delineation of the specificity of the scope is important. As mentioned in the previous section, the scope of the evaluation is limited to the Vote 10 SAR NIF contribution funds managed directly by the National Search and Rescue Secretariat. The renewed terms and conditions for the contribution component of SAR NIF were approved on August 30, 2005. The revised SAR NIF contribution terms and conditions are applicable for the period from April 1, 2005 to March 31, 2010. Therefore, the period of coverage subject to the evaluation is accordingly from the start of the period noted to the date of the end of the evaluation fieldwork phase, May 2009.

The SAR NIF contribution program evaluation included the review of the following program aspects and / or activities as per the evaluation framework:

- Setting program objectives and guidelines;
- the development and approval of MOUs and contribution agreements;
- the establishment and communication of agreed funding categories;
- proposal assessment activity;
- the project approval and funding process;
- project monitoring activity;
- the processing of project claims and payments;
- the measurement and communication of project effectiveness; and,
- the adequacy of the project evaluation selection process and evaluation conduct.

The SAR NIF contribution program evaluation also addressed the following Expenditure Review Committee issues:

– Public Interest, Role of Government, Federalism, Partnership, Value-For-Money, Efficiency, and Affordability.

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<sup>4</sup> The new TB Evaluation Directive takes effect as of April 1, 2009.

## **2.3 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

The program evaluation was conducted through a review of documents, selected interviews and the use of survey questionnaires. Documents reviewed included among others, MOUs between the National Search and Rescue Secretariat and other Federal SAR Partner departments and agencies, contribution agreements with provinces and with recipients, the SAR NIF Partners' Manual, Applicant's Guide, and Treasury Board terms and conditions. Also looked at were the contribution project files, the NSS and SAR NIF Website, administrative data, performance measurement results as available, previous program and project evaluation and audit reports that were available and data obtained through selected interviews and surveys. Interviews were conducted with key staff within the National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS), and with the current and recent past federal Merit Board members in a focus group session and as well with the provincial Merit Board representative – see Annex B. The survey questionnaire for SAR NIF stakeholders is included in Annex C. Based on the survey questionnaire results, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with selected recipient stakeholders.

## **3.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evaluation report findings with corresponding recommendations are grouped according to the subject headings for the evaluation objectives and core issues to be addressed, as mentioned previously in Section 2.1. The Recommendations have been made only for areas deemed requiring improvement. They are set out in italics for ease of reference and are numbered 1 through 6, starting in Section 3.2 below.

### **3.1 RELEVANCE**

#### **3.1.1 CONTINUED NEED FOR PROGRAM**

An assessment was made of the extent to which the program continues to address a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Canadians. There is overwhelming agreement amongst proponents that there is a strong continued need for the SAR NIF program. This is borne out through the responses to the survey questionnaire and follow-up interviews with contribution recipients, Merit Board members and provincial partners that the objectives of the SAR NIF program are being mostly met. More specifically, there is also general agreement that the program is responsive to the needs of Canadians and that the first two objectives of the SAR NIF program as stated below are being met:

- 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.

Comments received indicate that more could be done to promote the third objective through an enhanced communications strategy. This is discussed in further detail in a subsequent section 3.2.1 (b) as is the related recommendation.

### **3.1.2 ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

An assessment was made of the linkages between program objectives and (i) federal government priorities and (ii) departmental strategic outcomes.

The SAR NIF program remains relevant and important to the DND/CF as it contributes directly to one of the three programs identified in the Program Activity Architecture (PAA): "Contribute to Canadian government, society and international community in accordance with Canadian interests and values." In particular, the SAR NIF program enables the DND/CF to "support Government of Canada (GOC) Programs."

### **3.1.3 ALIGNMENT WITH FEDERAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

An assessment was made of the role and responsibilities for the federal government in delivering the program.

It has been well established over the years that Search and Rescue (SAR) is a critical service to Canada and Canadians given the country's size, climate, topography and population. As noted by the Office of the Auditor General<sup>5</sup>, Canada fulfils its air and marine search and rescue obligations under international conventions.

Federal SAR incidents constitute marine, air and humanitarian. For ground SAR incidents the provinces and territories have the main responsibility.

The federal role was re-affirmed by Cabinet. The SAR NIF was set up by direction of Cabinet decision 6-0078-86RD (01), 10 April 1986, under the authority of the Minister of National Defence and by Treasury Board Decision 805407-1 of 11 June 1987.

Pursuant to a Treasury Board decision of 06 June 1996, the LMSAR/MDN had the authority to approve contributions, and associated terms and conditions, to non-federal entities. In 1998, the LMSAR/MND approved a contribution program to provide broader use of the SAR NIF.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1992 Report of the Auditor General of Canada — Chapter 8 - Search and Rescue.

<sup>6</sup> NSS Web-site: SAR NIF Program Authorities.

## **3.2 PERFORMANCE**

### **3.2.1 ACHIEVEMENT OF EXPECTED OUTCOMES OR EFFECTIVENESS**

An assessment was made of progress toward expected outcomes (including immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes) with reference to performance targets and program reach, program design, including the linkage and contribution of outputs to outcomes. Reference should be made here to the Logic Model for the SAR NIF Program, reproduced in Annex D to this Report and to the Performance Measurement Strategy (referred to as the RMAF in the SAR NIF Terms and Conditions).<sup>7</sup> For each of the program activities listed in the sub-sections below are shown the nature of the outputs and extent of the outcomes. The evaluation assessment in each case is based on an examination of the revised 2005 SAR NIF Terms and Conditions, of MOUs, contribution agreements, ICSAR and Merit Board proceedings and minutes, and project files and as well the weight of opinions obtained through surveys and interviews conducted.

#### **a) Set Plans and Priorities**

The purpose of the re-design of the SAR NIF program was to address the deficiencies noted in the 2005 audit and evaluation reports.

Examination of the 2005 SAR NIF Terms and Conditions, of MOUs, contribution agreements, and project files indicates the following:

- The expected output included Program re-design to address the deficiencies. This resulted in the development of revised terms and conditions and program objectives and guidelines. This in turn resulted in the following outcomes:
  - There is strong agreement amongst most survey respondents and supported by documents examined that the TBS Policy on Transfer Payments is now respected and that there is appropriate authority for the NIF contribution payments by Federal Partners.
  - SAR NIF program requirements & set objectives support the National SAR Program's Strategic Directions and Program Plan. It should be noted that the National SAR Program itself is beyond the scope of this evaluation which focuses on the contribution component of SAR NIF.

#### **b) Establish Program Design & Operating Mechanisms**

- The expected output was the development of a communications plan. The strategic directions and priorities for the National SAR Program included renewing the NSS website to improve the availability and accessibility of

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<sup>7</sup> See the RMAF for SAR NIF. Logic Model is in Exhibit 1; and Performance Measurement Strategy sets out performance indicators in Exhibit 3.

search and rescue information.<sup>8</sup> The 2005 Evaluation Report had also recommended that:

- “NSS website provide more detailed SAR best practices (collected from the Partners) based on NIF project results, and the contact details of the local experts”; and
  - “NSS endeavour to better publicize NIF successes to Canadians through articles in the mainstream media and in conjunction with other federal promotional material.”
  - “NSS initiate additional forums throughout the year that bring together Partners and NIF project proponents to discuss and share experiences and information on past, current and future NIF projects in an open manner.”
- The actual outcome was that much of the SAR NIF content of the NSS website had not been updated during the period of mid 2006 to March 2009. Many respondents to the survey indicated that many of the on-line tools previously available were removed from the NSS website. Survey respondents indicated a need for the NSS to provide more information and tools on the NSS website, including examples of successful SAR NIF applications. Current examples of successful projects were unavailable to potential SAR NIF contribution applicants. We are also not aware of whether there has been publication of NIF success stories to any great extent in the mainstream media.
  - A SAR NIF strategic communication plan has been developed. Some of the main objectives of the plan are to increase awareness of the SAR NIF; provide success stories to internal audiences and to rebrand the SAR NIF. Planned activities and deliverables are:
    - To develop a Video (long term planning)
    - To design and develop a NIF Information Kit folder;
    - To develop a new distribution process and compile a distribution list for dissemination of NIF news, information etc.;
    - To design and develop various NIF promotional items (magnets, pen, pamphlet, floating key chain, mini-flashlight, poster);
    - To design a display booth and pop-up banners;
    - A SAR NIF one pager has also been developed and was distributed at Sarscene 2008 in Newfoundland
  - A second output was the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with managing departments and agencies. The 2005 Evaluation Report had also recommended that:

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<sup>8</sup> DND Reports on Plans and Priorities – 2008-2009 Strategic Outcomes.

- “NSS review all existing NIF administrative and management guidelines and MOUs and ensure that they are clearly worded and the roles and responsibilities of the NSS and the partner are clearly defined.”
- The actual outcome was that 12 MOUs have been signed in this period, once when the program was renewed in 2005. Six MOUs relate to VOTE 5 and six relate to VOTE 10. Aside from meeting the above-noted concerns, the agreements were vetted by the DND Legal Services to ensure among other concerns that all of the agreements were in compliance with the Treasury Board requirements.
- As mentioned in Section 1.2, eligible recipients of the SAR NIF contributions are provincial and territorial governments, profit and not-for-profit Canadian organizations from volunteer, academic or private sectors and individuals with responsibilities in the National SAR Program. The related output was the development of Contribution agreements between the NSS/DND and the provincial/territorial and other recipients involved and have resulted in the following outcomes:
  - All contribution agreements have been vetted by the DND Legal Services to ensure among other concerns that all of the agreements are in compliance with the Treasury Board requirements.
  - Merit Board members and funding recipients have noted that there is a lengthy approval process for contribution agreements. Timing is of key importance to the delivery of funds. This is discussed further in Subsection 3.2.1 (c) below.
  - Contribution agreements with the provinces/territories require a single “omnibus” proposal from each province/territory. This means that the omnibus proposal may be considered ineligible if certain components of the application do not meet the eligibility requirements of the SAR NIF. Some Merit Board members have noted that this is an “all or nothing approach.”
  - Inclusion of an “indemnity clause” in the contribution agreement has resulted in non-participation from several provincial/territorial governments. The new Policy on Transfer Payments provides more flexibility for Program Managers, including the exclusion of the indemnity clause from contribution agreements.
  - The number of provincially sponsored contribution agreements approved under SAR NIF and the amounts approved have tended to be relatively small compared to that of projects sponsored by the federal partners. Some provinces/territories question whether the SAR NIF is providing a balanced response to SAR needs across Canada.

*Recommendation 1:*

*The NSS Executive Director should ensure that the NSS website includes appropriate and up-to-date information regarding the SAR NIF program, including examples of successful initiatives recently undertaken.*

*Recommendation 2:*

*The NSS Executive Director should as part of the SAR NIF contribution program renewal process explore the possibility of creating a more efficient and equitable way to provide funding for provincially sponsored projects designed to support volunteer groups. The NSS should also review the omnibus process and determine the effectiveness of this strategic method of providing funds.*

**c) Review of Proposals & Approval of SAR NIF Projects**

- The expected outputs were enhanced processes for proposal review and project approval. The 2005 Evaluation Report had also recommended that:
  - “NSS initiate discussions among all NIF Partners (including direct dialogue with small recipient organizations) to determine how best to remedy the issues of administrative support and guidance, and ensure that small groups in particular are not prevented from applying for NIF funding due to perceived and actual administrative requirements.”
  - “NSS ensure that a mechanism is in place to always provide, either prior to or during the Merit Board meeting, third-party reviews and expertise for any highly technical or scientific proposals that are received by the Merit Board. For example, separate Merit Board meetings could be held to review R&D proposals and non-R&D proposals so that third party experts are invited to the Merit Board session during which their expertise is required.”
  - “NSS immediately review the timeframes and approval processes that are in place to determine how best to reduce the NIF project approval period, from start to finish, and to be capable of announcing new approved proposals before the end of March.”

However, the following outcomes were noted:

- The evaluation survey results are quite consistent in that most recipients had nothing but praise for the assistance and explanations provided by the SAR NIF program staff during the application process.
- Merit Board members confirmed that the situation has much improved whereby for the review of R&D proposals, an initial review and advice is provided by third party experts to the Merit Board. It should be noted that a majority of the R&D projects supported by the SAR NIF are outside the scope of this report as they are funded via the transfer payment process (Vote 5).

- There is an expectation that the selection and approval process would be undertaken with due diligence and in a timely fashion. However, the selection and approval process still tends to drag out to some 15 months, which is much too long, resulting in project management problems down the road.
- Lengthy approval process also results in project objectives being one year out of synchronization with National SAR Program priorities according to some Merit Board members.
- The proposal selection and project approval process needs to consider the prioritization of objectives – there are too many federal and provincial objectives at play to consider.
- Some Merit Board members indicated the need to clarify the “the rules of engagement” for the Merit Board process to formalize the proceedings. This would clarify their roles and responsibilities as Merit Board members. There is no evidence in meeting minutes that they are approved by the Merit Board members in attendance.

*Recommendation 3:*

*The NSS Executive Director should as part of the SAR NIF contribution program renewal process explore ways to considerably shorten the contribution approval process to Government of Canada / DND norms.*

*Recommendation 4:*

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that the rules of engagement for the Merit Board should be re-examined with a view to take into consideration the need for improvement expressed by the members.*

**d) Project Management and Monitoring**

- Among the expected outputs was the presence of information systems to provide financial management and reporting capability so that projects can be appropriately monitored. This is consistent with the National SAR Program Strategic Directions and Priorities that include improving SAR Program information management and data exploitation to guide planning decisions and develop prevention and awareness campaigns.<sup>9</sup>
  - The actual outcome is that although there have been several attempts made to provide this capability (NIF Information System, as well as an internally developed database) respondents indicated that the system still lacks functionality and there are recognized gaps. Merit Board members also indicated that there is no up-to-date searchable data base of successful projects to guide potential SAR NIF applicants.
- Another expected output was that there would be tight scrutiny of projects.

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<sup>9</sup> Previously cited: DND Reports on Plans and Priorities – 2008-2009 Strategic Outcomes.

- In terms of outcomes, this is borne out in the survey responses from recipients who indicate due diligence is being exercised by SAR NIF staff of project financial and operational milestones and as evidenced also in the examination of selected SAR NIF project files.
- Examination of files and survey responses indicates due diligence is also being exercised by SAR NIF staff in the processing of project claims and payments.

*Recommendation 5:*

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that priority steps be taken to ensure that the SAR NIF information systems are robust enough to satisfy government financial requirements as well as program management and user needs. It should be able to track the authorized carry forward to the next year of unspent SAR NIF project dollars at fiscal year-end.*

**e) Program Accountability**

- There were expected outputs designed to ensure program accountability. Most of these activities were budgeted for, but not undertaken for whatever reason, resulting in no output, and no way to bring about the favourable and desired program outcomes. The missing outputs include:
  - SAR NIF recipient audits (Over the past four years, the NSS has completed one audit of a SAR NIF project and is in the process of completing two additional audits. An additional report has been produced by Transport Canada in regards to their role in the delivery of the SAR NIF) ;
  - To the NSS/DND knowledge one audit has been initiated by a provincial/territorial recipient;
  - SAR NIF project evaluations (none were undertaken);
  - Collection and interpretation yearly of performance measurement information;
  - Annual reports on SAR NIF operations.
- However, the (5year) Review of the SAR NIF program has been initiated, with this summative program evaluation as a component of the review. The following outcomes are expected as a result:
  - SAR NIF program renewed, with a focus on results as an immediate outcome.
  - Revamping of plans and expectations as required, as a medium term outcome.
  - Review and revision of the Performance Measurement Strategy.

*Recommendation 6:*

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that the renewed SAR NIF's Program Management Strategy includes an appropriate auditing and evaluation framework along with the requirement for systematic collection of performance information and the regular issuance of an annual report on SAR NIF operations.*

**3.2.2 DEMONSTRATION OF EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY**

An assessment was made of resource utilization in relation to the production of outputs and progress toward expected outcomes.

- An expected output would be the delivery of the SAR NIF as designed.
  - There is an expectation that the SAR NIF program would be delivered with economy and efficiency. Efficiency of delivery implies that one can compare the delivery to known benchmarks for delivery of similar programs. Given that there are no readily available benchmarks, such a comparison would be difficult.
  - What is known is that file examination of projects indicates due diligence is being exercised by project administrators. In fact some budget items in projects examined indicate under-spending. We are told that volunteers, who are involved in SAR NIF projects, tend to be frugal by nature.
  - Table 3 below shows the forecast spending amounts for SAR NIF. The forecast Operating and Maintenance (O&M) budgets show no increase during the period; in fact the forecast figures show a decrease. This is indicative of a program that is managed through careful spending in terms of both O&M and as well salary dollars.

**TABLE 3**

<b>Financial Resources (\$ 000's) by Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Forecast Spending 2007-2008</b>	<b>Planned Spending 2008-2009</b>	<b>Planned Spending 2009-2010</b>
Vote 1 - Salary and Personnel	200	200	200
Vote 1 - Operating and Maintenance	207	173	175
<b>Sub-total Vote 1</b>	<b>\$407</b>	<b>\$373</b>	<b>\$375</b>

## ANNEX A – MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

### Recommendation 1:

*The NSS Executive Director should ensure that the NSS website includes appropriate and up-to-date information regarding the SAR NIF program, including examples of successful initiatives recently undertaken.*

### Management Action

We concur.

The current SAR NIF program information provided on the NSS website is up to date. The information to be updated is the examples of successful initiatives, the final summary report of initiatives from 2006-2007 to 2009-2010 and the NIF toolkit.

We are currently reviewing all NIF content posted on the NSS Website. A compilation of all the final summary reports from 06-07 to 09-10 is being done.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs. **Target Completion Date:** March 2010

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### Recommendation 2:

*The NSS Executive Director should as part of the SAR NIF contribution program renewal process explore the possibility of creating a more efficient and equitable way to provide funding for provincially sponsored projects designed to support volunteer groups. The NSS should also review the omnibus process and determine the effectiveness of this strategic method of providing funds.*

### Management Action

We concur.

The NSS is currently addressing this issue in the renewal of the SAR NIF Terms and Conditions that is underway.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs **Target Completion Date:** March 2010

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**Recommendation 3:**

*The NSS Executive Director should as part of the SAR NIF contribution program renewal process explore ways to considerably shorten the contribution approval process to Government of Canada / DND norms.*

**Management Action**

We concur.

To clarify the recommendation, there are no specific Government of Canada / DND norms regarding the length of a contribution approval process.

We are concerned about the length of the approval process. This will be addressed in the renewal of the SAR NIF T&Cs.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs **Target Completion Date:** March 2010

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**Recommendation 4:**

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that the rules of engagement for the Merit Board should be re-examined with a view to take into consideration the need for improvement expressed by the members.*

**Management Action**

We concur.

The NSS will ensure that the rules of engagement for the Merit Board members are clearly identified in the renewed SAR NIF T&Cs.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs **Target Completion Date:** June 2010

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**Recommendation 5:**

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that priority steps be taken to ensure that the SAR NIF information systems are robust enough to satisfy government financial requirements as well as program management and user needs. It should be able to track the authorized carry forward to the next year of unspent SAR NIF project dollars at fiscal year-end.*

**Management Action**

We concur.

The NSS has undertaken steps to re-evaluate the NIFIS database. The NIFIS (New Initiatives Fund Information System) is a database that was created to respond to a recommendation made in the 2005 evaluation but was never implemented. The NIFIS will allow the NSS to reconcile the financial data with the FMAS, the official DND financial system and to be used as a program management system. The NIFIS is a database accessible through the Web, which will offer direct access to our SAR partners.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs **Target Completion Date:** December 2011

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### **Recommendation 6:**

*The NSS Executive Director should direct that the renewed SAR NIF's Program Management Strategy includes an appropriate auditing and evaluation framework along with the requirement for systematic collection of performance information and the regular issuance of an annual report on SAR NIF operations.*

### **Management Action**

We concur.

The NSS is currently reviewing the Audit and Evaluation framework to reflect the DND/CRS audit criterias.

**OPI:** NSS Executive Director / Director, Policy and Programs **Target Completion Date:** March 2010

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### **Federal Partners Interviewed as part of SAR NIF Evaluation**

Focus Group Session – April 2, 2009 – includes current and former members.

1. Major Gordon Ireland – Canadian Forces, Directorate of Air Requirements, Department of National Defence.
2. Janice Brasier – Canadian Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Coordinator Search and Rescue Projects.
3. Andy George – Program Evaluation Advisor, Meteorological Service of Canada, Environment Canada – participated by telephone.
4. Paul Olshefsky – Parks Canada Agency – participated by telephone.
5. Johnathon MacArthur – National Search and Rescue Program, RCMP.
6. Michel Villeneuve – RCMP (former member).
7. Robert Lajoie – RCMP (former member).
8. Fabien Lefebvre – Senior Advisor, Strategic Initiatives, Safety and Security Group, Transport Canada.
9. Harry Blackmore – President, Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada  
- Mr. Blackmore is a member of the SAR NIF Merit Board but was interviewed separately by the evaluator.

Other attendees included Josée Marengère, Manager, SAR NIF, Anne-Marie Choquette, Senior Officer, SAR NIF, Jae-Sang Park, Analyst and Subhas Roy, Evaluator.

## ANNEX C

### SAR NIF SUMMATIVE EVALUATION – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

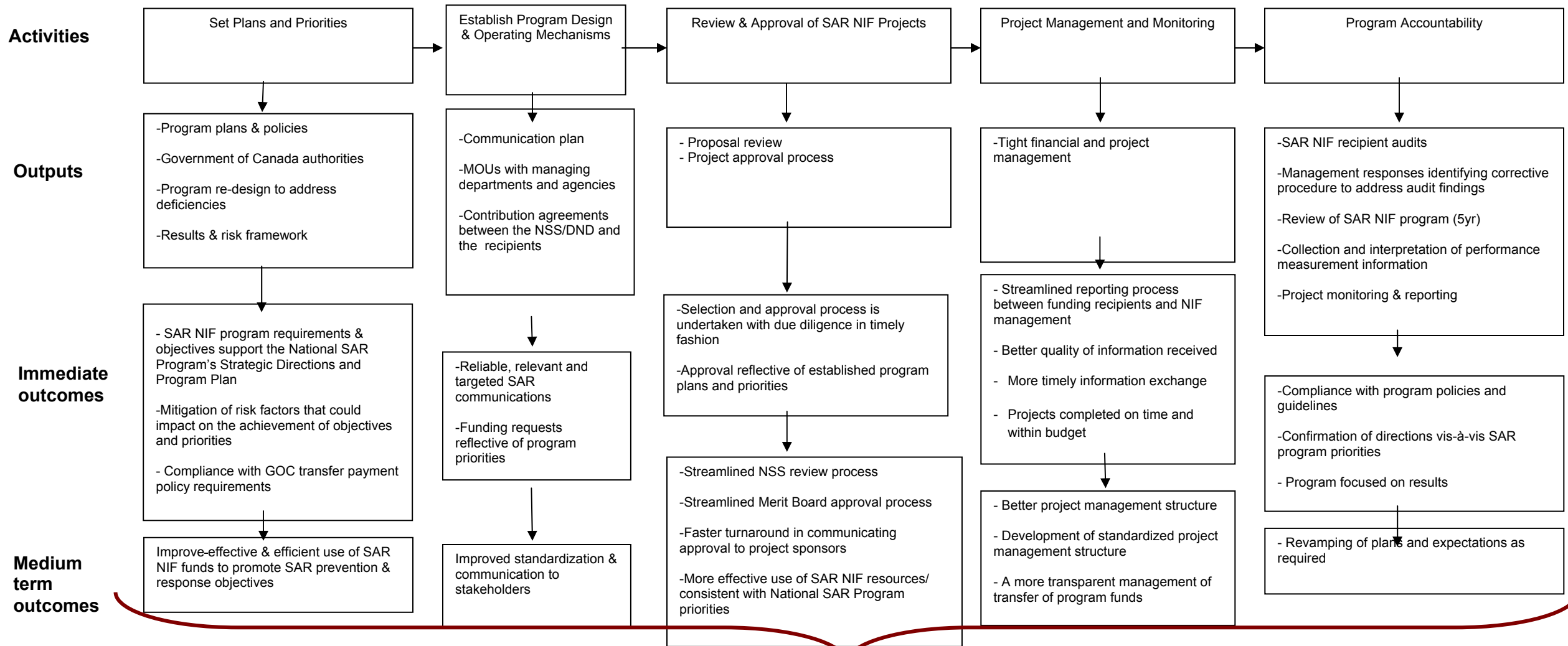
QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
<b>PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES</b>	
1. Is the NSS meeting the objectives of the SAR NIF through its funding activities?	
2. Are the SAR NIF files being managed in accordance to the SAR NIF Terms and Conditions?	
3. Is the SAR NIF being managed as per the Policy on Transfer Payments (June 2000) and the Financial Administration Act (FAA)?	
<b>MOUS AND CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS</b>	
1. Has the SAR NIF Memorandum of Understanding been developed in compliance with the policies of Treasury Board?	
2. Is the SAR NIF Contribution Agreement been developed in compliance with the policies of Treasury Board?	
3. Is the approval process for MOUs and Contribution Agreements efficient?	
<b>ESTABLISHMENT AND COMMUNICATION OF AGREED FUNDING CATEGORIES</b>	
1. The SAR NIF funding priorities reflect the priorities of the NSP;	
2. The SAR NIF Call for Proposals effectively communicates the funding priorities of the Program;	
<b>PROPOSAL APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY</b>	
1. Is assistance available to organizations of limited capacity in completing the SAR NIF application?	
2. Does the SAR NIF Application Process demonstrate fairness, equity and transparency in the decision making process?	
3. Is the SAR NIF Merit Board adequately supported in its review and scoring activities?	

4. Is the SAR NIF Merit Board scoring system reflective of the SAR NIF Terms and Conditions?	
<b>PROJECT APPROVAL</b>	
1. Are SAR NIF project actual approvals in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of the Program?	
2. Are SAR NIF applicants being notified of the decisions in a clear and transparent manner?	
<b>FUNDING PROCESS</b>	
1. Are the SAR NIF financial agreements managed in an efficient and timely manner?	
2. Does the SAR NIF funding process adhere to the SAR NIF terms and conditions?	
<b>PROJECT MONITORING ACTIVITY</b>	
1. Has the NSS implemented processes and procedures to ensure due diligence and accountability in the monitoring of SAR NIF projects?	
2. Has the NSS implemented a project monitoring process that reduces risk in the administration of the SAR NIF?	
<b>PROCESSING OF PROJECT CLAIMS AND PAYMENTS</b>	
1. Has the NSS developed and implemented processes and procedures to ensure public accountability, risk management and due diligence in the processing of project claims?	
2. Are SAR NIF recipients submitting project claims for payments in accordance with the SAR NIF requirements?	
3. Are SAR NIF project payments being made in an efficient manner?	
<b>MEASUREMENT AND COMMUNICATION OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS</b>	
1. Has the NSS developed and implement an effective and efficient communication plan for the dissemination of results from SAR NIF projects?	
2. The NSS Call for Proposals is communicated effectively and efficiently to potential applicants?	
<b>ADEQUACY OF THE PROJECT AUDIT SELECTION PROCESS AND AUDIT</b>	

<b>CONDUCT</b>	
1. Has the NSS developed and implemented an effective and efficient method of selecting SAR NIF projects for audits?	
2. Has the SAR NIF met its requirements for auditing to ensure due diligence and public accountability?	
<b>RELEVANCE</b>	
1. Is SAR NIF providing a balanced response to SAR needs across Canada?	
2. How adequate is SAR NIF funding to address the priorities of the National SAR Program in a fair and equitable manner?	
3. Is the SAR NIF contribution program consistent with Departmental and government-wide priorities? Does it address an identified need?	
<b>SUCCESS AND INHIBITING FACTORS</b>	
1. Is the SAR NIF contribution program reaching and informing its intended audiences?	
2. To what extent has the program progressed towards its intended immediate outcomes and funding agreement criterion? Are there any barriers to success?	
3. To what extent has the program progressed towards the achievement of the intermediate outcomes? Are there any barriers to success?	
4. To what extent has the program contributed to its stated ultimate outcomes?	
5. Are there any unintended impacts of the SAR NIF contribution program?	
<b>COST-EFFECTIVENESS</b>	
1. Are there alternative, more cost- effective ways of achieving the stated outcomes?	
2. What changes could be made to improve the performance and likelihood of success for SAR NIF?	
3. How effective are the governance structure and channels of communication for management and delivery?	

Logic Model for SAR NIF program

Enabling Activities



Seamless SAR through improved partnership and increased interoperability and cooperation