Nunavut Search and Rescue Roundtable

Kitikmeot 2020: Summary Report



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Roundtable Overview

The Kitikmeot Roundtable on Search and Rescue (KRSAR) was held at the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS) in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, from 31 January – 1 February 2020. It brought together 55 members of the Ground SAR (GSAR) teams, Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) Auxiliary units, CASARA volunteers, and Canadian Ranger patrols from Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, and Kugaaruk, academics, and representatives of federal and territorial agencies to discuss best practices, lessons learned, and future requirements for search and rescue in the Kitikmeot region.

The idea for this roundtable came out of conversations that the roundtable organizers – Peter Kikkert, Angulalik Pedersen, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer – had with members of the community-based organizations involved in SAR in the Kitikmeot. Given the distances involved, the lack of federal resources in the region, and their extensive knowledge of local geography, sea and ice conditions, the environment, and potential challenges and risks, these groups are the foundation of Canada's Arctic SAR system and need to be as effective as possible. To assist with this objective, group members highlighted the need to:

1) share their knowledge with and learn from practitioners in other communities;
2) share their experiences with and develop relationships with the territorial and federal agencies involved in SAR in Nunavut.



The roundtable allowed community responders to explain how they organize, coordinate, and conduct searches, with a focus on training and skills, response procedures, leadership, equipment, and inter-organization and inter-community cooperation. Together with their partners in the Canadian Coast Guard, Emergency Management Nunavut, and the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces, participants explored how Canada's Arctic SAR System could best utilize community-based assets as force multipliers. As a culminating activity, officers from the Canadian Coast Guard held a Mass Rescue Operation Tabletop Exercise that centred on an adventure cruise ship running aground in the waters of the Kitikmeot.

The roundtable brought together practitioners with a great deal of experience conducting SAR operations in their communities. The main objective of this roundtable was to collect their knowledge and produce a list of challenges, lessons learned, best practices, and suggestions for improvement to share with all individuals, groups, and agencies involved with SAR in the Kitikmeot.



The Gjoa Haven Coast Guard Auxiliary unit's new rescue boat. Photo courtesy of Winnie Hatkaittuq.

Major SAR Challenges

Over the course of the Roundtable, participants highlighted the following challenges:

- The impacts of climate change and the loss of traditional skills (particularly amongst younger community members), coupled with the failure of some travelers to take the necessary fuel and equipment when on the land, has increased the number of SAR incidents
- Newcomers to the communities, adventurers, and tourists – both small on-the-land expeditions and cruise ships – pose new challenges and place new burdens on the Kitikmeot's SAR system
- Equipment shortages – from inReach devices, to snowmachines, to SAR boats
- Gaps in and lack of access to training (e.g. wilderness first aid)
- Inability to recruit new members, particularly young adults
- Effectively tracking community-level capabilities

- Coordination and cooperation between the community organizations involved in SAR and their territorial and federal partners
- Lack of accounting and administrative skills amongst SAR volunteers
- Fundraising problems
- Difficulties establishing relationships and attaining the support of private industry/resources
- Issues posed by disorganized and uncoordinated community searchers who do not work with community SAR organizations
- Problems created by social media (although it also creates opportunities)
- Organizational mandates from the South that limit operations in the North
- The need to establish what roles community groups would play during a Mass Rescue Operation
- The need to secure SAR tasking number and air support in a faster, more efficient manner
- Difficulties communicating effectively with the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre
- Lack of access to trauma counselling and mental health supports

Community Responders

"When we go out on searches, we know the people. They are friends even family. It can be hard."

"This is the real challenge, getting people involved. If we had more volunteers, we would have more people willing to respond. It would take the burden off. It might even encourage people to train more together if the burden was spread around a bit more. We need people who are willing to put the time in and learn how to do SAR."

"All of it is very stressful, very tiring. When you have two dozen searches a year, it takes so much out of you. It's easy to get exhausted. Sometimes you want to quit. Sometimes you are searching for people you love. Sometimes you don't find them or find them too late. It's all hard."

"My community doesn't have enough satellite phones, or a place to keep equipment, or enough equipment. I've been living in here for 20 years, have had lack of ATV, boats, snowmobiles, skidoos, equipment and volunteers for years. We need help. SAR always running out of money. Fundraising can't get enough. Me and my husband are the only ones who try to find volunteers to search for others, and it can be hard sometimes. In the old days, they didn't wait for anything, not tasking number or anything, they just went. Now we need to buy things, we need paperwork and it's too time consuming when lives are on the line. These are our families. Every minute, every second is precious when someone is in danger."

"[Y]ou would never send a firefighter out to fight a fire with bad equipment or without any protective gear, yet we are asked to do this when doing searches on the land? Is this not also dangerous work?"

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SAR Best Practices and Lessons Learned

- Each community requires multiple well trained and experienced SAR coordinators and unit leaders – they make the entire system work.
- Clear plans and procedures that lay out contact information, the different responsibilities of community SAR responders, and the steps to be taken before, during, and after a search. Everyone should know what they have to do to prepare for a search and complete their tasks immediately (e.g. buying food, checking the weather, preparing a kamotik, getting information from the missing person's family).
- During a search, GSAR teams should be separated into pairs. Each pair should consist of an experienced searcher/elder and a new recruit to facilitate the transmission of knowledge and skills. Each pair should have an inReach device or GPS that is hooked up to the community command post. In each pair, one searcher should be responsible for keeping track of the time and for regularly checking in with the SAR command post, while the other remains completely focused on looking for tracks or other signs of the missing person. Base camps should be established on the land during extended searches to save the searchers from having to travel to the community for resupply.
- Discussing challenges and solutions after a search can lead to significant improvements – turning lessons observed into lessons learned can have a major impact.
- Hamlet offices and the RCMP can offer significant assistance before, during, and after a search, but often they are not involved in community SAR efforts.
- There should be a focus on preventative SAR and providing community members with survival training at an early age.
- Recent expansion of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, including the training and equipment that this process has provided, has had a positive impact and should be expanded to Taloyoak and Kugaaruk as soon as possible.



A sign that the Kugluktuk GSAR team put up at the community's gas station – which is usually the last place people go before they head out on the land.

"We've heard your concerns about the GSAR training. For too long the training has been 'southern based' – better for below the tree line. Learning how to build a lean-to using branch isn't going to help you very much. We agree. So we've been working to 'Nunavutize' the GSAR training. We've gathered input from community GSAR teams, from elders, from a wide array of knowledge holders, and have put a course together that will address many of the past issues – designed for Nunavut by Nunavummiut, that incorporates traditional knowledge. That said, you know, this is a work in progress. We've just started rolling the training out. Just had the first session in Iqaluit, but it's coming to Kugluktuk and Cambridge Bay in the next few weeks. You don't like something, tell us. You think something is missing, tell us. We have experts in every community and we have a lot to learn. We will build this thing together."

– Mike Kendall, Emergency Management Nunavut.

- After every search there should be a sharing circle, led by elders, to allow for debriefing and critical incident stress management.
- Community meetings should be convened after every search to: (a) explain the search to the whole community, (b) share lessons learned, and (c) educate community members.
- The new "Nunavutized" GSAR training offered by Nunavut Emergency Management is a great initiative, and NEM should incorporate community responder feedback into the program.
- SAR works most effectively when the JRCC/CAF/Coast Guard view community groups as force multipliers – they should practice how to best employ these local assets during searches.
- The members, skills, and equipment of community SAR organizations should be listed in community emergency plans



Canadian Rangers preparing for a patrol.

Community Responders

"Is there a common database that stores the information from every previous search, including where they occurred, who they involved, and how the searches went? … Who goes through these reports to identify past problems and possible solutions? Would it be possible to share this information with community SAR group? This information could be very helpful, but it is not provided to the communities."

"The Taloyoak Ranger Patrol has taken part in many SAR operations around the community, with Kugaaruk, and Gjoa Haven. Rangers called up when there are not enough volunteers or search goes long. They should be involved in SAR discussions…The Rangers can make a big difference and search and rescue. We are organized and trained. We know how to work together. It should be made easier to use us."

"Because people in these groups often know one another and there is usually a lot of crossover between them with all the hats people wear, there might be an idea that they can work together no problem. But in an emergency, when groups have different ways of communicating, different ways of doing things, different mandates from the South, we can quickly run into trouble. We need to practice cooperating. We need to practice working together. And it's not just SAR – think about how helpful this would be during other emergencies that we might face in the community."

SAR Improvements and Future Requirements

Roundtable participants made the following suggestions for improvements to the Kitikmeot SAR system:

- Develop plan and procedures for community SAR, complete with contact information, and the skills, training, equipment, and competencies possessed by community responders – these should be distributed to territorial and federal agencies
- Regular training, meetings, and exercises to facilitate cooperation and coordination between community groups and their federal and territorial partners
- Create memorandums of understanding between community groups and the RCMP for use of snowmachines and other equipment
- Municipal, territorial, and federal governments should provide time off with pay to allow their employees to pursue SAR training opportunities
- Incentives for participation in community SAR organizations
- Community groups should have access to lessons learned from previous searches

- Increased funding to support preventative SAR efforts and educational materials, and a mandatory survival course as part of school curriculum
- NEM should consider making playing cards with tips on how to survive on the land
- Equipment and training suggestions: caribou skin clothing, dry suits, Wilderness First Aid, offering a new course on "community side of a search" (administration, organization), standardized radios between groups, more inReach devices for GSAR teams, permanent markers on the land to act as wayfinders, SAR cabins between communities, and detailed SAR maps
- Each community should have a dedicated SAR building where they can store supplies, equipment, and fuel; hold meetings; and which can serve as a command post during SAR missions.
- Each GSAR team should have access to two snowmobiles and two ATVs to be used only during searches, training, and exercises; or to an equipment fund that people could spend on their own equipment and machines
- Expand the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Indigenous Community Boat Volunteer Pilot Program to Taloyoak and Kugaaruk.
- Establish a paid SAR coordinator position in each community
- Push cell service further out with repeater towers as a preventative SAR measure
- Deploy more federal SAR assets to the Kitikmeot on a permanent or seasonal basis (station Canadian Armed Forces aircraft to Cambridge Bay; build a Coast Guard Station in region)
- Hold the Kitikmeot Roundtable on SAR every two years – it is essential for relationship-building, information sharing, and the improvement of the Kitikmeot SAR system



InReach devices are "a SAR game changer. They are the Connor McDavid of searches."

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Community Responders

"During a search we often have to run back and forth between different places gathering food and supplies, getting fuel, coordinating volunteers, and getting ready. This can take a lot of time, which we do not have during a search. It can also mean we forget important things. Having a building with storage and an office for a command centre or even just a seacan in which to store our supplies would be very helpful. That way we could all just meet at the building, get our supplies, and take-off. Maybe we could even store military rations in the building, which we can take right away during a search. All of this would save time."

"Education and prevention are vital. This should be a big part of what we do…With climate change, bad ice, machines are getting damaged and more people are getting hurt and getting lost. Even with the most experienced people things happen. If people know how to survive they can, they just need the knowledge and education."

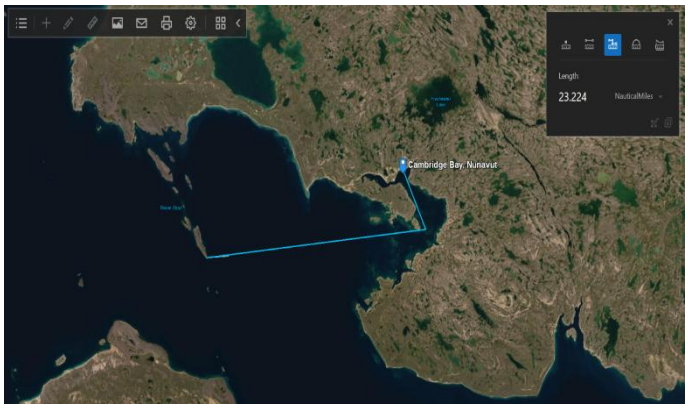
"SAR is an essential service at the community-level, we need it for health and community safety. There are multiple community groups involved in SAR – it is tough to coordinate between all of them. We should have a paid coordinator in each community, who is the full-time point of contact for all things SAR. This person could organize the searchers, train community members, ensure there is cooperation and coordination between the different groups. check equipment, ensure that a community is always ready for SAR. This person could keep track of who has what training in the community. They could arrange the fundraising. This could be a full or part-time job, but it should be paid work. I think it would be a great investment in our communities."

"The federal government just gave the Coast Guard Auxiliary units in the Kitikmeot brand new SAR boats and equipment, at a cost well over $200,000 a piece. That's great program. I'm a member of the Auxiliary and it has had a huge impact. But, what about GSAR? If the reason for the new boats is that communities don't always have safe equipment, that more outside boats are coming in, that more marine SARs will happen, couldn't the same be said about GSAR? What about those Norwegian tourists between Cam Bay and Gjoa? Volunteer GSAR rescued them. What if they had died out there on the ice – that would not be a good result for Canada. We have to stop treating the ice differently than the water. What I'm saying is that if the Coast Guard can buy new boats for the Auxiliary, can't the feds provide funding for GSAR equipment, so we don't use our own?"

Mass Rescue Tabletop Exercise: Key Observations and Recommendations

The Roundtable's culminating activity involved a tabletop exercise exploring community-level responses to a Mass Rescue Operation (MRO). The exercise simulated a cruise ship running aground off Unahitak Island near Cambridge Bay, although participants from other communities were asked to apply the scenario to their own local contexts.





The following represent the key observations, themes, and recommendations from the TTX:

- The tabletop captured the willingness of community members to risk their lives to help strangers who might be in trouble. If a disaster unfolded close to their communities, they would go and see how they could help.
- The exercise highlighted the sophistication of community-level understandings of and plans for MROs and reinforced the value of community-level perspectives in planning, preparing for, and executing an MRO.
- The local information that community-based groups could provide on geography and environmental conditions would be absolutely vital during an MRO and could save lives (e.g. during the TTX, Cambridge Bay participants provided information on the geography of Unahitak Island, environmental conditions, the safest evacuation route, and where passengers could be offloaded).
- Community groups would have essential and diverse roles to play in an MRO. Participants listed a series of potential responses for Coast Guard Auxiliary units, community GSAR teams, and/or Ranger patrols, including:
  - put eyes on the situation;
  - provide updates to the JRCC;
  - on-scene coordinator;
  - provide intel on where passengers could be evacuated to on the land;
  - shepherd lifeboats or zodiacs to safe havens or the community;
  - help in offloading and tracking passengers;

  - search for missing passengers;
  - establish a camp to provide warmth and shelter;
  - give first aid;
  - provide predator control;
  - reassure evacuees that the situation is under control;
  - assist in setting up accommodations for evacuees in their communities;
  - be the points of contact between evacuees and the community, etc.

- The actions that community-based groups could take during a MRO should be further developed and practiced by community members in partnership with federal and territorial agencies.
- Community emergency plans should be kept as up to date as possible and be built to reflect the specific local contexts of each community – a generalized or standardized plan will not work in a real emergency.
- Cruise/tour operators should consider sharing their emergency plans and procedures with the communities they plan to visit or travel near – particularly with members of community-based SAR organizations they might have to work with in the future.
- These companies should consider donating rescue equipment to the community groups whose assistance they might require at some point,
- While willing to follow the direction of the JRCC, the CAF, or Nunavut Emergency Management, community first responders stressed that they also expected these agencies to listen to the information and suggestions they passed along, and act upon their recommendations and approaches.
- Communication and coordination would be vital in an MRO (at the community-level, between responders and the JRCC, responders and the ship's crew, between the different groups acting at the scene, etc.) – lines of communication and coordination must be firmly established and put to the test through exercises.
- During an MRO it would be essential to provide a steady stream of information to the broader community to reassure community members and enlist their support in evacuation efforts.
- Roundtable participants wished to be briefed on the plans, preparations, and tools federal and territorial agencies have in place to deal with an MRO.
- As the regional hub for the Kitikmeot, Cambridge Bay is well equipped with both the human and physical infrastructure required to deal with a disaster involving hundreds of people – the community's size, capacity in terms of transport, shelter, food, medical care, etc. and its highly effective community-based GSAR team and Coast Guard Auxiliary Unit are all key assets.
- Participants noted that, while the other Kitikmeot communities also have effective community-based groups that could respond to an MRO, even a short stay by evacuees would place a severe strain on their existing physical infrastructure.

- Private industry should be considered an important force multiplier in the Kitikmeot.
- The fuel and oil spills that could result from this kind of incident were a major concern for community participants – there is extremely limited or no resources to deal with an oil or fuel spill at the community-level in the Kitikmeot.
- Participants highlighted the importance that a TTX can play in preparing and planning for an MRO or SAR operation – it allowed the different groups involved to navigate the complexity of an MRO while seated around the same table.
- Through this TTX, federal and territorial learned a great deal about community capabilities and approaches to disasters, while community members learned about some of the resources at the disposal of federal agencies (eg. the MAJAID Kit).
- The TTX also offered a chance to build the relationships that would be required in a real MRO.
- Participants hoped that the Coast Guard, other federal agencies, or academics would offer additional exercises at the community level, eventually moving towards functional and full-scale exercises.

"We know the local weather. We know the conditions. We know the water and ice, the rocks. We know how the ice works. We know the best routes to take, the fastest, the safest routes to take. We know things that you can't get from a GPS or a weather report. We know how the tides work. If you are coming in by zodiac or lifeboat, we can help you avoid dangers. We may not be happy that you've brought this trouble, but we will try our best to help you out of it. You have to listen."

- Community Participant, Mass Rescue Tabletop Exercise



Kitikmeotsar.ca

Roundtable participants suggested the following functions for kitikmeotsar.ca:

- Collect, present, and explain best practices, lessons learned, challenges, suggestions, and SAR stories on an ongoing basis
- Track all community groups, federal, and territorial agencies involved in SAR in the Kitikmeot and their capabilities, provide contact information
- Display an interactive map showing where SAR cases happen in the Kitikmeot
- Preventative SAR/education services
- House SAR plans and procedures for each community
- Collect stories of past SAR operations

Roundtable Wrap-Up

Whitney Lackenbauer, in offering a few summary remarks, pointed out that Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework identifies the "increase whole-of-society emergency management capabilities in Arctic and Northern communities" as a priority. At the core of this whole-of-society approach in the North must be community-level perspectives, skills, and responses. Lackenbauer concluded by suggesting that the idea "we're from Ottawa, we're here to help" – which has been the government's historic approach to emergencies in the North – does not fit in a whole-of-society approach to emergency management, threatens to undermine community-level understandings and responses, and is unsuited to local realities. Instead, Lackenbauer noted, this approach might be replaced by a mindset of "Hi, we're Ottawa, we know you have things in hand – how can we help without disrupting what you are already doing and getting in your way."

As the Roundtable drew to a close, several community participants explained to the organizers the importance of SAR to the Kitikmeot and to the rest of Nunavut. They noted how essential it is for Nunavummiut to go out on the land to be healthy and whole. People must be able to hunt and fish to feed their families. They must feel confident that they can travel safely between communities, over the ice, land, and water, to visit family and friends. This kind of travel is central to Inuit culture. "For all of this to be possible, you need SAR," one participant emphasized. "You need people who know how to go out on searches. You need people who are willing to go out on searches. Because with all the changes going on, even the best-prepared people could have an accident and could need help." The many programs designed to get people on the land and to support hunters are essential, he explained. "But we also need programs to help SAR, to build our SAR teams. We need this space [the roundtable] to talk about it and get better at." The health of Nunavummiut is tied to the land, and community SAR responders provide essential support to maintain this connection.

SAR in the Kitikmeot is often a very hard task. It is our hope that the knowledge collected at this Roundtable, the experiences shared, the best practices discussed, and the suggestions for improvement, help to make this difficult but essential responsibility easier to bear for community-based organizations.

Please note that this is a summary report. For fuller descriptions of all of the roundtable discussions, see *Kitikmeot Roundtable on SAR: General Report and Findings* and *Kitikmeot Roundtable on SAR: Mass Rescue Tabletop Exercise Report* available at nunavutsar.ca.

Community Responders

George Angohiatok, Cambridge Bay GSAR: "I have a lot of experience doing searches. I've been involved in GSAR for decades. I got my education on the land from my father, grandfather, and other elders. I was 12 years old when I went out by myself for the first time. I was 14 years old when I went on my first search. Everyone needs to know how to read a trail, how to identify what type of machine is used. This will let them know who has been lost. Everyone needs to pay attention. Needs to learn how friends act on the land. Need to know their skill level, if they are able to make it home on their own. When people go out, we have to pay attention to what they are wearing, what they are bringing with them. This is everyone's responsibility. This kind of information is important during a search. One time in the 1980s, I found a guy who had a snow knife, but who didn't know how to use the snow knife to build a snow house. After this, I convinced the hamlet to offer a day long survival course for the community. We need to educate people. We need to keep on training them. We need to educate the community – this will deal with the problem before it becomes a problem. And we need to learn how people act on the land."

Sgt. Roger Hitkolok, Canadian Rangers, Kugluktuk GSAR, Coast Guard Auxiliary: "Me and Jack [Himak] started up a GSAR team in Kugluktuk and we have been working at it ever since. It's a lot of work, but the community needs it. I usually start a search at a person's house, so that I can learn their tracks and be able to recognize them on the land. It's really important to know the tracks. People should pay attention to the tracks left by their family and friends. I've been on searches where the people didn't bring anything with them on the land. Not even a tent. People who go out prepared can still lose their way in a storm. People can lose their heads during bad weather or when they get lost. People go into shock. People will leave their machines, which they should never do. We have to teach people how to stay calm on the land. What to do if they run into trouble."

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Roundtable and TTX Participants (by community, alphabetical order)

Cambridge Bay

- Murphy Angnayoak - GSAR
- George Angohiatok - GSAR
- Sgt. Jas Dilbar - RCMP
- Jimmy Haniliak - GSAR and CCGA
- Bobby Klengenberg - GSAR
- Randy Klengenberg - GSAR
- Rosabelle Klengenberg - GSAR
- Jim MacEachern - Assistant Senior Administrative Officer and SAR command centre lead
- Beverly Maksagak - GSAR Coordinator
- Ivor Maksagak - GSAR
- Angulalik Pedersen - 2IC CCGA and GSAR
- Calvin Pedersen - GSAR
- Candice Pedersen - CASARA

Taloyoak

- Abel Aqqaq - Canadian Ranger
- John Ikilik - Canadian Ranger
- David Nanook - Canadian Ranger
- Mary Ugyuk Sutherland - Canadian Ranger
- Bruce Takolik - GSAR and Canadian Ranger
- Sgt. Sam Tuluirialik - Canadian Ranger
- David Totalik - Canadian Ranger
- Steven Ukuqtunnuaq - GSAR and Canadian Ranger
- Lena Ukuqtunnuaq - GSAR
- Johnny Ukuqtunnuaq - GSAR and Canadian Ranger

Kugaaruk

- Breanne Inaksajak - GSAR
- Sam Inaksajak - GSAR
- Ronald Inutuinaq - GSAR
- Bernadette Iqqugaqtuq - GSAR
- Nick Sikkuark - GSAR

- Chris Tungilik - GSAR

Kugluktuk

- Aidan Case - Junior Canadian Ranger
- Jack Himiak - CCGA and GSAR
- Sgt. Roger Hitkolok - Canadian Ranger, CCGA, GSAR
- Glen Leyte - Canadian Ranger
- MCpl Baba Pedersen - Canadian Ranger, CCGA, GSAR

Gjoa Haven

- Winnie Hatkaittuq - CCGA
- Paul Ikuallaq - Unit Leader CCGA, GSAR Coordinator, Canadian Ranger
- Sarah Kamimmalik - CCGA
- Kenneth Puqiqnak - CCGA
- Leonard Teelktak - 2IC CCGA

Nunavut Emergency Management

- Mike Kendall - Manager Emergency Response and Recovery

Joint Task Force North

- Capt Daniel Wilkinson - J9-Ops, Joint Task Force (North)

Department of National Defence

- Ehren J. Edwards - Policy Officer, Directorate of Strategic Coordination and Outreach, Department of National Defence / Government of Canada

Royal Canadian Air Force

- Maj Wesley Cromwell - Staff Officer Search and Rescue Readiness, 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters

Canadian Coast Guard

- Chris Bianco - Mass Rescue Operations Officer, Arctic Region

- Jay Collins - Deputy Superintendent SAR, Arctic Region
- Darlene Langdon - Arctic Administrative Assistant, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary
- Alana Swales - Canadian Coast Guard, Arctic Region

Transport Canada

- Miguel Parent - Senior Policy Advisor

Academic

- Natalie Carter, Ph.D.
- Bailey Chisholm
- Ryan Dean
- Peter Kikkert, Ph.D.
- HLCol P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Ph.D.
- Bianca Romiagnoli
- Chloe Walker

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Funding and Support for the Roundtable

MEOPAR
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