



**The only global provider of multi-
disciplinary SAR certification**

**2005
Strategic Plan**

Historical Perspective:

Western State Search and Rescue Coordinators, employees from the National Park Service, and other Emergency Managers, founded the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) in 1972. The focus of these founders was education in Search Management; the theory of search, search planning, and the management of search incidents.

In the 1980's, the National Association for Search and Rescue continued to expand into the management of search incidents with the adoption of the National Wildland Interagency Group's Incident Command System as the best practice of incident management. While the focus of the education efforts remained in Search Management, membership was opened to local Search and Rescue (SAR) Organizations and individual SAR Volunteers.

In the early 1990's, the SAR Managers realized that they need trained SAR responders. NASAR began to develop education course and certifications for the SAR responders. Membership began to expand to included students of these education / certification programs and more individual SAR Volunteers. NASAR began to focus some attention in developing and participating with Federal SAR agencies. In the mid 1990's, NASAR began a multi-year contract with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) developing training programs for Urban Search and Rescue.

In the late 1990's, focus of the Association shifted towards the volunteer SAR responder and diverse SAR disciplines including Search Dogs. Increased diversity began to compete for the primary focus of the organization and direction of NASAR. This competition strained both personnel and financial resources of the organization.

With the goal of refocusing NASAR's purpose and direction during 2004, the Board of Directors (BOD) and staff embarked on a strategic planning process for the Association. Dr. Stacie Morgan, Balanced Management, Inc. facilitated this process. Members of the BOD, staff and members of the Association took a comprehensive look at the organization, completed a critical analysis, and tested their conclusions with members of the public, competitors, customers, the remaining Directors and staff. The final product is contained within this report. We want to thank each and every person who invested their time, money, sweat, and stomach juices to take this organization into the next fifty years!

Driving Forces that Influence NASAR:

The Strategic Planning Team identified several driving forces that influence the organization; the forces are not listed as to the amount of influence they inject into the organization, nor by the order of importance.

- Who is the membership? NASAR has never been good at collecting information about our membership. This has caused assumptions as to the needs and wants of these members. While some of the assumptions have been accurate, there have been times these assumptions may have caused the organization to go in opposite directions.
- Fluctuating demand vs. constant need -- Not unlike our member organizations the demand for SAR services changes with the seasons, outdoor use, and location but the need to provide professional SAR services is a daily reminder, so goes NASAR. The demand for NASAR products and services fluctuates from year to year, product to product, service to service, but the need for all the products and services is always there -- by someone.
- SAR education, standards, and certification – SAR is an evolving industry causing constant change. The disciplines within the SAR industry are independent and require different amounts of support from NASAR.
- Volunteers vs. paid providers – The wants and needs of these two types of SAR providers can be quite different. At times NASAR finds itself between them, with expectations of the groups on opposite sides.
- Increased SAR demand – This force could be described more as increased expectations, causing a greater demand. These expectations could easily be seen in the recent Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast of the United States.
- The NASAR BOD focuses on tactical concerns rather than strategies – While the BOD is tasked with the governance of the organization they tend to focus on the day-to-day concerns of the SAR industry. Understand the members of the Board are volunteers and come from across the SAR industry, all being actual first responders. This causes a difficult transition from the “cliff face” to the “board room”.
- Local vs. State vs. Federal – While the jurisdictional issues are easily identified, there is a real difference in perspectives of needs and wants. One can include the differences from region to region (i.e. west vs. east).
- Civil liabilities – The SAR industry has enjoyed a relatively limited amount of civil lawsuits for various reasons. However, over the last five years we have seen the amount of lawsuits increasing. One recent case in the 4th Circuit resulted in a 19 million dollar liability to the responsible SAR agency (*Hurd vs. USA*).

- Lack of NASAR corporate / organizational memory – NASAR’s ability to remember is challenged, with new members to the organization, staff, and to the BOD. As one recent BOD member who returned to the board after a two-year absence said, “It was like I never left, they were talking about doing the same things, voting on the same resolutions, and lamenting the same issues.”

Future Scenarios:

While none of us have a crystal ball to see what the future holds, as part of the process the group was asked to look into the SAR Industry’s future and identify possible scenarios. The group identified fifteen (15) possible scenarios, some more likely than others, but finally settled on four most likely. In each of these scenarios, one can find some examples that they are already occurring.

- Increased urbanization equals decreasing outdoors skills -- We see this scenario in both victims of SAR’s and the SAR responders. Each provides its own challenges. Starting with SAR responders, this has caused SAR organizations to have to rethink training requirements. While responders used to come to SAR with numerous basic outdoors skills, these same skills now need to be included in basic training programs costing more training time and dollars. As our society moves from agriculture to a service economy, the opportunity for people to obtain “inherit” skills has declined, resulting in people not recognizing “risks” or to exploit these “risks”, in turn resulting in a greater, more complex demand for SAR.
- Technology – Takes the “S” out of SAR – We observed a future where people will be able to be located at all times. So searching for someone was no longer the issue, but the issue now becomes the rescue. With the increasing use of cell phones, GPS, and PLB’s, we see people going places they did not go before with the limited skill sets. They rely on the 911 systems if they should need help. We see in parts of the nation the number of SAR incidents have shifted from searches to rescues, as the “victim” may not know where they are, but local SAR responders are able locate them via GPS Coordinates or verbal descriptions given to the responders.
- SAR becoming a paid public service agency – SAR is currently the only first responder industry that is made up of 95% volunteers. As demands on these first responders’ commitments in time and training increases, the expectations of the public and civil liabilities are realized and the industry becomes a paid public service like law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service. We see areas where local volunteer SAR teams have disbanded, due to more law enforcement and fire service involvement. After the recent Hurricane Katrina, a discussion of using the military as the primary federal SAR responders has begun.

- SAR becoming a Private Sector Enterprise – The opposite of the above scenario is that SAR will become a Private Sector Enterprise. Arguably in some regions of the nation, SAR responders are part of a private organization already, but the group was talking about for profit. This view pointed to private EMS companies, the recent search in Aruba for a missing teenage girl, the contracting of the private sector to provide sub-rescue coordination center services for satellite beacons.

Critical Issues:

The Strategic Planning team was able to identify numerous critical issues faced by the organization. After some analyzes it was discovered all these various issues could be placed into one of the following four (4) areas:

- Identity – You ask a room full of people what or who is NASAR you will get a room full of different answers. This occurs if you ask staff, members, Directors, customers, or other SAR professionals. Without an identity, NASAR is destined to drift in the winds of perceptions of those that manage, belong, or observe her.
- Professionalism / Preparedness – There is a perception in the SAR Community that NASAR has a lack of preparedness to run a national corporation and that the training and certification process has a lack of prerequisites for training levels. NASAR needs to professionalize its actions, instructor status, appearance and materials and expand on accreditation efforts.
- Value – What is the value of NASAR’s services and products? Why should I be a member of NASAR? What is in it for me? Why should I become SARTECH certified? Why does membership or certification or education cost so much? These are all questions as to the value of NASAR.
- Financial – From the beginning, the financial stability of the organization has been critical and some thirty-three years later it is still is. The organization has failed to capitalize upon its products and services to make ends meet. The organization continues to look for “easy money” or “fund raise” instead of using this time to develop and implement a financially stable business model.

Building Blocks of a SAR Professional:

During a discussion of the building blocks, the Strategic Planning Team discovered the need to come to a common definition as to how standards, education, certification, and credentials relate. To this end, the Team developed the following relationships:

Standards are the foundation of any profession. Building upon this foundation and expanding one's knowledge through education will mark that profession. To validate that knowledge, certification, one must test skills, abilities and knowledge. Finally, the combination of one's education and certification, based upon standards allows for professional credentials.

Customer Base:

It was important for the Team to identify and rank the organization's customer base. The ranking of the customer base was completed via consensus and each team member used his or her own bias and perspectives to assist with the ranking. Then a competitive analysis was completed based upon buying criteria which lead to the final order of ranking:

- Members
- Organization Teams
- New Students / Candidates
- Returning Students / Candidates
- Licensing Agencies
- Vendors and Manufactures
- Individuals that are not members, may or may not be SAR responders
- Federal SAR Coordinators
- Local and State SAR Coordinators
- Instructors
- NASAR Certification Coordinators / Evaluators

NASAR Products & Services:

An analysis of NASAR's products and services was completed. The results showed that NASAR is a service-based organization; a majority of its outputs were services other than tangible items (products). This business diversity that can be good can also be a challenge to manage.

- Products
 - SARTECH Certification
 - Books and materials
 - Magazines
 - Equipment
 - Clothing
- Services
 - Courses
 - Advocacy and insight
 - Position Statements
 - Conference and Symposia
 - Web Site

- Resource Databases
- Special Projects
- Forums
- Research and Development
- Networking access
- Professional Status
- Membership Insurance benefit
- Membership Discounts

Perceived Core Competencies:

The Planning Team was asked to take a serious look at the organization and determine our core competencies. During the time it took to complete the whole planning process, the team realized something very important. Listed below are the Core Competencies we all thought we had, but one could argue we have a lot of room to improve. Thus we changed this category from Core Competencies to Perceived Core Competencies.

- SAR Education / Certification
- Expertise in Wilderness Ground SAR
- Voice of and advocate for the SAR Responder
- A sense of fraternity and support mechanism for the SAR Responder
- Provide a forum for the distribution, promotion, discussion and resolution of issues and offerings within the SAR Community.
- SAR Industry Leadership

Competitive Analysis:

We looked at our competitors in relation to NASAR's products and services. Our single biggest competitor is OUR OWN MEMBERS! They compete with us on almost every level. But after accepting this fact and looking at our other competitors within and without the SAR industry, only one of NASAR's products and services stood apart giving NASAR a clear cut competitive advantage:

NASAR is the only global provider of multi-disciplinary SAR certifications.

The strategy for NASAR lies within our Certification program!

From this work the Strategic Planning team was able to develop the new vision and mission for NASAR to take us into the future. With this vision and mission we were able to identify four (4) goals. Based upon these goals, we were able to list objectives for each goal. It will be up to the current Board of Directors and future Boards to develop the tactics to meet the objectives and reach the goals. We would like to challenge you the reader to become involved in helping identify tactics and getting involved in helping your organization reach this vision!

Vision

NASAR is your global source for search and rescue credentials.

Mission

NASAR develops and provides professional credentialing products and services for your search and rescue community.

Goals

To increase the professionalism of our organization, products and services.

To develop a sustainable pool of SAR professionals.

To make our certification products and services more available to our customers.

To garner wider endorsement of our certification products and services.

Objectives

It should be noted that the dates attached to the objects are ending dates. Note the start date for each objective as many of these objectives will be worked on concurrently.

Goal 1 - To increase the professionalism of our organization, products and services.

Objectives:

- 1) Develop processes to increase Organization accountability by March 30, 2006
 - Review the business processes and organizational structure.
- 2) Develop, write and publish all corporate processes and procedures by May 31, 2006
- 3) Develop a financial business plan by May 31, 2006
- 4) Review/revise membership categories to better define how members fit into the organization and contribute to the SAR profession by August 31, 2006
 - Establish special interest sections (IAFC)
 - Define member category criteria
- 5) Increase the professionalism of our products by January 31, 2007
 - Develop quality control processes to evaluate the reliability and consistency of educational and certification products
- 6) Obtain an independent “accreditation” for NASAR (like ISO 9000) by December 31, 2010

Goal 2 - To develop a sustainable pool of SAR professionals.

Objectives:

- 1) Work with organizations to assist them in developing SAR programs for youth by March 31, 2006
- 2) Provide recruiting and retention tools and materials for the local SAR team manager by January 31, 2008
 - Develop a comprehensive toolbox for local SAR managers to use in managing their SAR team.
- 3) The voice of SAR to legislators – lobby for professional recognition and funding at the local, state and federal levels by January 31, 2008

Goal 3 - To make our certification products and services more available to our customers.

Objectives:

- 1) Identify and evaluate the various certification/education delivery business models by December 31, 2005
 - Identify ways of increasing the availability of our courses/certifications by streamlining the process of access to the customer
- 2) Put the “R” back in NASAR by December 31, 2006
 - Establish partnerships with technical rescue entities by December 31, 2006
 - Identify market gaps and develop or leverage technical rescue courses/certification to fill the need in that market gap
- 3) Develop certification and education product lines for technical rescue by September 30, 2007
- 4) Redesign our traditional certification delivery process by March 30, 2006
- 5) Redesign the evaluator and coordinator certification process by March 30, 2006
- 6) Redesign our traditional education delivery process by July 31, 2006
- 7) Redesign our licensing program delivery process by July 31, 2006
- 8) Restructure the instructor certification process by July 31, 2006
- 9) Redesign web presence to offer streamlined process for our customers to obtain our products by September 30, 2007
 - Increase the usability of the website to serve multiple user groups for multiple purposes

Goal 4 - To garner wider endorsement of our certification products and services.

Objectives

- 1) Create brand recognition for NASAR by September 30, 2006
 - We want NASAR to be to SAR what “Coke” is to soda
- 2) Develop a “good neighbor” marketing plan by July 31, 2006
 - Engage the general public in the prevention of search and rescue incidents
 - Update the Hug a Tree program by January 31, 2006
 - Distribute the Hug a Tree program by May 31, 2006
- 3) Increase NASAR’s participation with organizations with preventative SAR programs by January 31, 2007
 - Partner, or improve partnerships with organizations such as NPS such that our products are distributed, provided, endorsed or otherwise used for the general public
- 4) Obtain accreditation for NASAR education programs by outside organizations by May 31, 2007
 - Validate eligible NASAR curriculum through a post-secondary educational accreditation process
- 5) Create formal relationships with Governmental, Regulatory and Response Agencies/Organizations by May 31, 2010
 - Via declaration between NASAR and NSARC that recognizes NASAR as the leader of inland non-federal SAR responders.