



HUMANITARIAN WORKFORCE
MAIN D'OUVRE HUMANITAIRE

SEARCH AND RESCUE VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION OF CANADA HUMANITARIAN WORKFORCE



FULL SCALE EXERCISE (FSX) “EFFECTIVE IMPACT 2024”

05 October 2024

AFTER-ACTION REPORT

FINAL – 14 April 2025

HWF2024-EX001

**Full Scale Exercise (FSX) “Effective Impact 2024”
05 October 2024
After Action Report
HWF2024-EX001**

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1. INTRODUCTION:

With Canada’s everchanging disaster risk profile, the ability for governments at all levels to effectively respond to emergencies is increasingly being strained under the sheer frequency and severity of disasters. Recognizing the need to better engage and support Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in emergency management, the Government of Canada created the ***Supporting a Humanitarian Workforce to Respond to COVID-19 and Other Large-Scale Emergencies*** (HWF Program).

The Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC) plays an educational and advocacy role for the Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) community. With the creation of this government program, there is a further need for a national coordinating body for operational deployments. The Emergency Management Governance for Search and Rescue (EMGOSAR), the National Search and Rescue Operations Concept (NSOC) and the development of a National Readiness System, collectively provides the foundation for this national operational coordination body known as the SARVAC Humanitarian Workforce (HWF) program.

Given the nature of the services it provides to Canadians, SARVAC HWF continuously strives to improve its preparedness and to identify and address areas of improvement to ensure it delivers these services effectively and efficiently. Exercising constitutes a key tool that supports preparedness and improvements to service delivery, and the SARVAC HWF will plan and participate in many Provincial, Territorial and National exercises (from tabletop to full-scale exercises), as the program evolves and expands.

Exercises are a cornerstone of overall preparedness and support mitigation/prevention by testing and validating plans and capabilities, as well as identifying gaps and areas for improvement. Their main purposes are:

- **Validation:** validating plans, policies, procedures, and the ability to conduct operations.
- **Relationships:** building and strengthening relationships with partners and clarifying roles and responsibilities prior to an actual incident.
- **Preparedness:** assessing readiness with an emphasis on identifying shortfalls and addressing gaps.
- **Resourcing:** refining plans, procedures, identifying resources, and capability requirements.
- **Training:** supporting formal training courses and field training for personnel in their roles and responsibilities for conducting operations.
- **Familiarization:** familiarizing SARVAC HWF personnel with elements of a response or a service that they may not yet have been exposed to.

When exercises fulfill these purposes successfully, they increase collaboration and effectiveness, promote efficiency, and help align plans to competencies and resources. In short, they become a critical tool for supporting organizational preparedness.

Full Scale Exercise (FSX) “Effective Impact 2024” was conducted to validate the 10 phases of the SARVAC HWF NSOC, to test the HWF readiness to respond to a large-scale emergency, and to enhance the relationships, interoperability and awareness of HWF Responders from Provincial and Territorial Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) Associations.

This After-Action Report (AAR) will examine exercise conduct, identify the lessons learned, incorporate exercise participant feedback, and establish an Improvement Action Plan (IAP) to better prepare the HWF program to respond to Requests for Federal Assistance (RFA) going forward.

2. EXERCISE METHODOLOGY:

In 2024 the SARVAC HWF program adopted the United States Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) as the standard for the planning and delivery of SARVAC HWF exercises.

This program, which has also been adopted by several Government of Canada Departments and Agencies, provides a common approach to exercise program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning.

The exercise and evaluation program is designed to help emergency and disaster response agencies develop, execute, and evaluate exercises that address their preparedness priorities. In designing and developing individual exercises, exercise design team members are identified to schedule planning meetings, identify and develop exercise objectives, design the scenario, create documentation, plan exercise conduct and evaluation, and coordinate logistics. Lessons learned from exercises are collected and compiled and formulate the Improvement Action Plans (IAP) that further the planning and preparedness of emergency and disaster response programs.

FSX “Effective Impact 2024” followed the 5 phases of the Exercise Planning Cycle under the HEEP:

1. Foundation.
2. Design and Development.
3. Exercise Conduct.
4. Evaluation.
5. Continuous Improvement.

The **FOUNDATION** phase commenced in January 2024 where the Exercise Design Team (EDT) was established with Champions from the SARVAC HWF Train-the-Trainer program as well as with staff from the HWF program. During this phase the EDT developed the concept of the exercise, defined the key elements, and secured approval from the SARVAC Executive and the HWF Program Director.

In the **DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT** phase the exercise began to take shape. Building on the foundation phase when the outline was defined, the design and development phase moved further to create the exercise in its entirety, up to the day before the exercise was conducted.

In the **EXERCISE CONDUCT** phase, the plans developed during the design and development phase came to life. Player actions were the focus of exercise conduct, but several other significant activities were happening just before exercise start and simultaneously with exercise play to ensure that the exercise ran as planned and met its objectives.

The exercise conduct phase included:

- Setting up the exercise area.
- Delivering pre-exercise briefings.
- Ensuring exercise control and supporting player actions by delivering injects and adjusting based on player actions.
- Implementing plans to ensure participants' safety.

- Providing exercise facilitation services.
- Providing support to VIPs, media, and observers.
- Executing the evaluation activities that happened concurrently with the exercise, including noting observations and collecting participants' feedback.
- Holding debriefs.
- Returning the exercise area to its original state.

The **EVALUATION** phase focused on the analysis of the observations made to assess whether the exercise objectives were met. It prepared relevant information on strengths and areas for fine tuning during the improvement planning phase. Planning for exercise evaluation began at the foundation stage with the development of measurable exercise objectives.

The **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** phase will build on the analysis done in the evaluation phase and will identify and implement specific actions that will address areas for improvement, gaps, and weaknesses.

The continuous improvement phase includes:

- Engaging exercise participants on the development of an improvement plan.
- Identifying improvement actions stemming from evaluation recommendations and assigning them to the appropriate authority.
- Seeking SARVAC Executive endorsement on the improvement plan.
- Implementing the measures identified in the improvement plan.
- Assessing and reporting on the effectiveness of implemented improvement actions.
- Sharing lessons learned with internal and external partners.
- Archiving lessons learned for future reference.

To complement the 5 phases of the Exercise Planning Cycle used for FSX “Effective Impact 2024”, SARVAC HWF is currently developing an Exercise Design and Planning Manual which can be used at the National, Provincial / Territorial and Team levels for exercise conduct to ensure uniformity and seamlessness across the SARVAC GSAR community in HWF exercise planning and delivery.

3. EXERCISE OVERVIEW:

3.1 Purpose and Scope:

Purpose: Through the delivery of a FSX, evaluate the preparedness and emergency response capacity of the SARVAC HWF as they responded to an RFA to support the needs of Canadians experiencing a large-scale emergency. This exercise sought to validate the SARVAC HWF readiness to respond to a large-scale emergency and to enhance the relationships, interoperability and awareness of HWF Responders from Provincial and Territorial GSAR Associations.

Scope: A one-day, Full Scale Exercise (FSX), conducted in Constance Bay, Ontario on Saturday, 05 October 2024, with volunteers from the Provincial and Territorial (P/T) GSAR Associations and support staff, to evaluate the preparedness and emergency response capacity of the SARVAC HWF as they responded to an RFA to support the needs of Canadians experiencing a large-scale emergency. This FSX exercised phases **5. MOBILIZATION, 6. DEPLOYMENT, 7. TASKING, 8. ON-SITE DEBRIEF** and **9. DEMOBILIZATION** of the HWF NSOC.

Phases **1. NOTIFICATION, 2. SURVEY, 3. ALERT** and **4. FORMATION** of the NSOC were evaluated as a “warm start” to this exercise. Phase **10. AFTER-ACTION REPORT** of the NSOC has formed the post-exercise evaluation and Improvement Action Plan (IAP).

3.2 Participating Individuals, Organizations and GSAR Associations:

Elder Peter Decontie, Sacred Fire Keeper, Kittigan, Zibi Anishnabe First Nation	Officiant
West Carleton Disaster Relief	Host Agency
Sauvetage Bénévole Outaouais – Ottawa Volunteer Search and Rescue (SBO-OVSAR)	Host Team
SARVAC Executive and Board of Directors	Observers

Ontario Provincial Police National Search and Rescue Secretariat Government Operations Center Emergency Measures Organization – Ontario City of Ottawa Department of National Defence Public Safety Canada	VIPs
SARVAC HWF Train the Trainer Champions	Exercise Design Exercise Players
Yukon Search and Rescue Northwest Territories (Yellowknife Search and Rescue) British Columbia Search and Rescue Association Search and Rescue Alberta Search and Rescue Saskatchewan Association of Volunteers Search and Rescue Manitoba Ontario Search and Rescue Volunteer Association Association Québécoise des Bénévoles en Recherche et Sauvetage New Brunswick Ground Search and Rescue Association Prince Edward Island Ground Search and Rescue Association Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association	Exercise Design Exercise Players

3.3 Exercise Objectives:

1. Exercise and evaluate the **MOBILIZATION, DEPLOYMENT, TASKING, ON-SITE DEBRIEF** and **DEMOBILIZATION** phases of the SARVAC HWF NSOC during the 1-day FSX.
2. Demonstrate the clear and effective lines of communication between the SARVAC Executive, National Incident Support Team (NIST) Director and General Staff, the Mission Incident Support Team (MIST) Coordinator and General Staff, and Mission Ready Groups (MRGs) on field tasking during the 1-day FSX.
3. Test the timely and effective deployment of equipment and resources to the incident scene to provide the logistical support required of the MRGs on field tasking during the 1-day FSX.
4. Stand-up a fully staffed and operational Base of Operations (BoO), at the MIST level of the SARVAC HWF Organization (within the first 2 hours of the exercise), to effectively liaise with the NIST, the Agency Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) and the MRGs on field taskings during the 1-day FSX.

3.4 Scenario:

A powerful hurricane struck the Ottawa region on Monday, 23 September 2024 leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. The hurricane spawned an unexpected tornado that hit a residential neighborhood, compounding the existing challenges posed by widespread power outages and infrastructure damage. The City and Province have found themselves overwhelmed and unable to manage the crisis effectively.

In response to their RFA, the Government of Canada has approved the SARVAC HWF to deploy 300 ground search and rescue volunteers for a minimum of 14 days. The primary mission is to assist with debris removal, search and rescue operations, wellness checks, and traffic control.

3.5 Exercise Format:

Exercise “Effective Impact 2024” was conducted as a FSX.

FSXs (sometimes also called "live exercises") are the most complex and resource-intensive format of exercise. They are designed to validate plans, policies and agreements, to evaluate capabilities and resources, or assess interoperability between multiple functions and/or organizations, from the command-and-control functions all the way to the on-site response.

FSXs simulate the realities of a complex response, and often include players operating under a cooperative system such as the Incident Command System (ICS). They can involve multiple functions, agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions, and validate many facets of preparedness.

FSXs are conducted in a realistic, real-time environment using a scenario with injects to drive player actions, with real-time deployment of assets and personnel and conduct of on-site operations.

Full-scale exercises share these attributes:

- FSXs are operations-based exercises that examine how multiple functions and/or agencies in several locations would come together to respond to a complex scenario requiring a coordinated response and the deployment of personnel and assets, from the management of the response to the response actions on site.
- Full-scale exercises are mostly used for validation, preparedness, resourcing, training, and building and strengthening relationships.
- Multiple agencies and/or multiple functions within an agency participate in the exercise.
- Player actions happen in real time and result in the deployment of personnel or assets.
- Full-scale exercises typically last one operational period or more, based on the exercise scope and objectives.

3.6 Exercise Timeline:

All times are Eastern Daylight Savings Time (EDST)

Time	Action
0604	Ground transportation departed from Sandman Signature Hotel for Constance Bay.
0647	Ground transportation arrived at Constance Bay.
0700	Breakfast was served.
0800	Exercise Opening Circle Ceremony was conducted.
0815	Start Ex. The Operational Period Briefing was delivered.
0830	Mission Ready Group (MRG) Alpha and MRG Bravo were tasked to set up the Base of Operations.
1030	MRG Alpha deployed to the City Yard for sandbagging operations.
1049	The Communications Repeater was established.
1100	A Traffic Control checkpoint was established.
1130	The MIST moved from the Community Center to the Base of Operations.
1145	The Traffic Control checkpoint was demobilized.
1200	MRG Alpha and Bravo returned to the Base of Operations.

1210	Pause Ex. Lunch was served.
1320	Resume Ex. ESRI Quick Capture “Just-In-Time” overview was delivered.
1347	The Operations Section Manager provided a briefing to MRG Alpha and MRG Bravo on the damage assessment operation.
1402	A power outage was simulated, and the MIST reverted to battery back-up power.
1420	MRG Alpha conducted rapid damage assessments Northwest of the Base of Operations.
1436	MRG Bravo conducted rapid damage assessments of the Community Center.
1438	MRG Bravo received an “ad-hoc” medical inject.
1440	MRG Alpha returned to the Base of Operations.
1455	MRG Bravo returned to the Base of Operations.
1455	The “Ad-hoc” medical inject concluded.
1500	Demobilization of Base of Operations Commenced.
1600	End Ex. All exercise personnel depart Constance Bay for Sandman Signature Hotel.
1650	Ground transportation arrived at the Sandman Signature Hotel.

4. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

4.1 Potential Illness Self-Assessment and Protocol:

Several HWF Responders developed the signs and symptoms of a communicable respiratory illness during travel to and while at the FSX. Consequently, over the next few days there was a resultant high rate of exposure and infection amongst those who also participated in the exercise. While this is very unfortunate and we sincerely hope that all of those who were affected made a speedy recovery, had this been an actual HWF Deployment and the accommodations were in close quarters such as tents or a small gymnasium, the rate of infection would likely have been much higher. This would no doubt result in the HWF Deployment being of reduced capacity or unavailable to support the AHJ and in a worse-case-scenario, place more strain on the already limited resources available such as hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies.

Recommendation 1: *It is recommended that the SARVAC HWF develop an Illness Self-Assessment Tool to be used by all HWF Responders identified for travel before they leave their points of origin. The results of the Assessment Tool will be the decision gate for go / no go travel.*

Furthermore, it is recommended that a protocol be developed and implemented if an HWF Responder on deployment or exercise is identified as a "close contact" and/or becomes symptomatic with a communicable illness. This protocol will trigger the actions to be taken to limit the spread and rate of infection amongst the other HWF Responders.

4.2 SARVAC HWF Program Management, Readiness, Overhead & Mission Deployment:

All GSAR volunteers who attended the FSX were selected and approved by their Territorial or Provincial GSAR Association based on their background, training and experience in GSAR operations, and with the expectations that they would bring back the experiences and lessons learned at the exercise to their Team and P/T Association to help further the knowledge and awareness of the SARVAC HWF program.

From the feedback received, it was evident that not all exercise participants were familiar with the structure of the SARVAC HWF National Search and Rescue Operations Concept (NSOC) or the Emergency Management Governance for Search and Rescue (EMGOSAR) and experienced some challenges in fulfilling the exercise roles that were assigned to them.

Recommendation 2: *It is recommended that the SARVAC HWF Project Team continue with short-term planning for training, exercising and on-line information sharing to further the knowledge and skills of SARVAC Volunteers who may be called upon to fulfill Command and General Staff roles in the Mission Incident Support Team (MIST) when the SARVAC HWF is deployed under an RFA.*

Furthermore, long-term strategic planning for the SARVAC HWF Program should also continue to ensure that direction and guidance is provided to P/T GSAR Associations to ensure that HWF training and exercising (funded by the Project) builds on capability, capacity, and skills training and

maintenance to ensure that HWF deployment capabilities are available when the program is called upon in the service of Canada and Canadians.

4.3 Exercise Briefings, Operational Briefings & Time Constraints:

The Deployment Phase of the NSOC and the supporting Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) identify that an “Orientation Briefing” is to occur when HWF Responders arrive at the Base of Operations and before any operational taskings are undertaken. In the case of the FSX, due to the time constraints on the Friday evening before the Saturday exercise, only 30 minutes were available to the MIST Response Coordinator (RC) to provide a briefing to the HWF Responders.

Orientation Briefings contain important information that is key to the success and safety of an operation or exercise. In addition to critical matters such as leadership assignments, roles, responsibilities, and tasking information, they often include “just-in-time” training for tools and skills that will be used during the conduct of the operation or exercise.

As sufficient time was not available on Friday evening, much of the Orientation Briefing was pushed to Saturday and after the exercise was started. “Just-in-time” training on the download and use of the ZELLO push-to-talk application on smartphones and the ESRI Quick Capture application for rapid damage assessments of effected structures was hampered by time pressures and consequently several end user issues were experienced, and valuable exercise time was consumed to trouble shoot problems.

While it is recognized that volunteer time and availability is valuable, very limited and to be respected, and that the planning and delivery of exercises and training is often bound by the constraints of funding availability, the importance of allowing the necessary time for the preparation and delivery of training and exercising is key to a successful outcome. Likewise, exercises and training should be planned and tailored to ensure that maximum value can be achieved within the allotment of funds and time available.

Recommendation 3: *It is recommended that consideration be given to modifying Phase 6 – DEPLOYMENT of the NSOC (and the associated SOPs) so that orientation briefings and/or “just-in-time” training can be delivered virtually (where possible), and ahead of time before the Mobilization and Deployment phases of an exercise or deployment commence.*

4.4 Operational Planning “In Situ”:

While planning for the FSX was comprehensive and began 9 months in advance of the exercise, some key exercise components were not fully resolved until shortly before the exercise was conducted.

They included:

- The confirmation of community residents whose properties would be the subject of rapid damage assessments.
- The confirmation of the locations for the conduct of some exercise objectives (sandbagging station and traffic control location).
- The identification of local GSAR volunteers who would complete the full complement of HWF Responders in the Mission Ready Groups (MRG) for the exercise.

The last-minute resolution of these matters meant that the Incident Action Plan (IAP) could not be completed, documented, and communicated in advance, and final planning therefore was conducted “on the fly” and during exercise conduct.

While a verbal IAP is acceptable in the Incident Command System doctrine, given that this was the first FSX for the SARVAC HWF program and that many exercise participants were new to their assigned roles, the early resolution of these outstanding matters and the documentation and dissemination of the IAP in advance would have alleviated some confusion and clarified roles and responsibilities for the Command and General Staff in the MIST thus supporting efficient exercise flow.

4.5 Electronic and Hard-Copy Log Keeping:

As identified in the *Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation RFA – HWF Deployment After-Action Report*, centralized logging (electronic and/or hard copy) of operational communications, activities and actions taken continues to be a work in progress for the SARVAC HWF program.

Log keeping during an HWF deployment or exercise is crucial for several reasons:

Real-Time Coordination. Accurate and timely logging helps coordinate efforts between the MIST and MRGs conducting field operations. This ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, tasks are prioritized appropriately, and responses are synchronized, reducing the risk of duplication or gaps in assistance.

Situational Awareness. Live logs provide a continuous update on the evolving situation. This allows decision-makers to understand current conditions, track progress, and adjust strategies as needed. It helps in adapting to changes on the ground and responding to emerging needs more effectively.

Resource Management. By keeping a live log of resources deployed, consumed, and needed, teams can manage logistics better. This includes tracking supplies, personnel, and equipment, which is essential for maintaining effective operations and ensuring that critical resources are available where they are most needed.

Communications. Log keeping facilitates communication amongst the NIST, MIST and MRG’s on field deployment by providing a shared, up-to-date record of activities and decisions. This helps in maintaining transparency and ensuring that everyone involved has access to the same information.

Documentation and Accountability. Accurate logging serves as a record for accountability, helping to document what actions were taken, by whom, and when. This is important for evaluating the effectiveness of the response or exercise, learning from the experience, and providing a basis for any future inquiries or reports.

Evaluation and Improvement. After the mission or exercise, live logs can be reviewed to assess what worked well and what could be improved. This helps in refining protocols, training, and response strategies for future missions, ultimately enhancing overall response capabilities.

In summary, log keeping is essential for efficient management, coordination, and communication during an HWF response or exercise, and it plays a key role in ensuring that the operation is effective and well-documented.

Recommendation 4: *It is recommended that SARVAC HWF continue its work to identify, adopt, and implement a standard log keeping capability as soon as possible.*

4.6 SARVAC HWF Deployment Support Equipment:

The deployment support equipment that has been amassed by the SARVAC HWF to date is comprehensive and will offer safety, comfort and sustainability while on smaller-scale deployments. The FSX did identify several equipment shortfall areas that should be addressed. While some equipment issues involve documentation and procedural matters which are easily corrected, and some are of very low dollar value, others will require more analysis before corrective measures can be taken.

The amount of equipment cached by SARVAC HWF is suitable for a deployment complement of approximately 100 HWF Responders if they are expected to be mostly self-sufficient for a short period of time. If a larger capacity response, or a response of a longer duration is requested, the SARVAC HWF may not be able to satisfy the request due to the limited amount of support equipment on-hand and when “just-in-time” procurement may not be possible due to the lead time required for manufacturing of equipment that is not “off the shelf” (i.e. ZUMRO Inflatable Tents).

As the capacity, capabilities, and volunteer GSAR complement available to the SARVAC HWF program expands, so should the inventory of necessary equipment required to support the Humanitarian Workforce in the field. The ability to deploy and the success of an HWF operation hinges on this equipment being immediately available during emergency situations.

Recommendation 5: *It is recommended that the procedural and low-dollar-value deployment support equipment issues be corrected as soon as is practicable.*

It is also recommended that SARVAC HWF conduct a GAP Analysis to determine the areas in deployment equipment shortfalls that will require corrective action before an HWF deployment will be 100% self-sufficient and to make the necessary recommendations for corrective actions.

5. WAY FORWARD:

The following way forward is recommended:

1. That the SARVAC HWF Program Director review the final draft of the AAR and the key findings and recommendations, offer commentary, and any direction for amendments to the document.
2. That the final draft version of the AAR be reviewed by the HWF Project Team then forwarded to the SARVAC Executive for feedback.
3. That any comments from the SARVAC Executive be incorporated into the AAR, and that the final document be translated into both Official Languages and then shared with the SARVAC Board of Directors.
4. That the final version of the AAR be shared with Provincial and Territorial GSAR Associations and SARVAC partner agencies.
5. That SARVAC HWF host a virtual meeting with the FSX participants to present the AAR for discussion and feedback.
6. That the FSX “Effective Impact 2024” AAR be posted on the SARVAC National website.
7. That the Improvement Action Plan (IAP) be adopted for improving the planning and execution of future SARVAC HWF deployments and exercises.

6. CONCLUSION:

Full-Scale Exercise “Effective Impact 2024” provided invaluable insights into the effectiveness of the current plans, resources, and response protocols outlined in the National Search and Rescue Operations Concept. The exercise demonstrated a high level of coordination and commitment among the SARVAC leadership, the Exercise Director, Design Team, Control and Evaluation, Simulation and the Exercise Players. The Exercise confirmed that the Operational Concept for HWF works and that many key procedures are capable of being executed under pressure. This exercise highlighted the importance of refining the coordination between Provincial and Territorial GSAR Associations with respect to education, training and exercising around the SARVAC HWF program.

Moving forward, the lessons learned will be incorporated into ongoing training programs and planning processes to address identified gaps. A follow-up improvement action plan will be developed to ensure corrective actions are taken, and to further strengthen our collective ability to effectively respond to an actual event under the HWF umbrella. Continued collaboration, preparedness, and learning from these exercises will remain essential to enhancing our overall response capabilities.

This exercise has provided a solid foundation for improving our preparedness and will contribute significantly to our long-term goal of ensuring a more resilient and effective response to Requests for Federal Assistance in support of Canada and Canadians in their time of need.

The SARVAC HWF Program Director and Staff would like to offer sincere thanks and gratitude to all those who assisted in the planning and conduct of FSX “Effective Impact 2024”. West Carleton Disaster Relief, Sauvetage Bénévole Outaouais – Ottawa Volunteer Search and Rescue (SBO-OVSAR), the SARVAC Executive and Board of Directors, and the SARVAC HWF Train the Trainer Champions for their unwavering support through all phases of exercise design and delivery.

7. IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN:

TITLE	ISSUE	CORRECTIVE ACTION	ELEMENT	OPI	COMPLETION DATE
Illness Self-Assessment and Protocol	Several HWF Responders developed the signs and symptoms of a communicable respiratory illness during travel to and while at the FSX. Consequently, over the next few days there was a resultant high rate of exposure and infection amongst those who participated in the exercise.	It is recommended that SARVAC HWF develop an Illness Self-Assessment Tool to be used by all HWF Responders identified for travel before they leave their points of origin. It is recommended that a protocol be developed and implemented if an HWF Responder on deployment, training or an exercise is identified as a “close contact” and/or becomes symptomatic.	Policy SOP	deBreyne French Conway Peet	30 April 2025
Program Management, Readiness, Overhead & Mission Deployment	It was evident that not all exercise participants were familiar with the structure of the SARVAC HWF NSOC or EMGOSAR and experienced some challenges in fulfilling the exercise roles that were assigned to them.	It is recommended that SARVAC HWF continue with short-term planning for training, exercising, workshops, and online information sharing to further the knowledge and skills of SARVAC volunteers who may be called upon to fulfill Command and General Staff Roles in the MIST. Long-term, strategic planning for the HWF	Policy Training Exercising	French Conway St-Onge Peet	In-play and ongoing

		program should continue to ensure that direction and guidance is provided to the P/T GSAR Associations to ensure that HWF training and exercising builds on capability, capacity, and skills training and maintenance to ensure that deployment capabilities are available.			
Exercise Briefings, Operational Briefings, and Time Constraints	<p>The Deployment Phase of the NSOC and the SOPs identify that the Orientation Briefing is to occur when HWF Responders arrive at the BoO and before any operational taskings are undertaken.</p> <p>Due to time constraints, only 30 minutes was available to the MIST RC to brief HWF Responders.</p> <p>Briefings and “just in time” training were hampered, and valuable exercise time was consumed to trouble shoot problems.</p>	It is recommended that consideration be given to amending Phase 6 – DEPLOYMENT of the NSOC (and SOPs) so that orientation briefings and/or “just in time” training can be delivered virtually (where possible), and ahead of time before the Mobilization and Deployment Phases of an exercise or deployment commence.	Policy SOP	deBreyne French Conway	Action item with changes in V5 of SOPs in January 2026

Operational Planning “In Situ”	<p>While planning for the FSX began 9 months in advance of the exercise, some key exercise components were not fully resolved until shortly before the exercise was conducted.</p> <p>The last-minute resolution of these matters meant that the Incident Action Plan could not be completed, documented and communicated in advance, and final planning was therefore conducted “on the fly” and during exercise conduct. This resulted in some confusion and hampered exercise flow.</p>	It is recommended that in future exercise planning, all outstanding components be resolved prior to exercise conduct so that the IAP can be completed, documented, and communicated in advance of the exercise to eliminate any confusion.	Best Practice	SARVAC HWF	Ongoing
Electronic and Hard-Copy Log Keeping	As identified in the <i>Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation RFA – HWF Deployment AAR</i> , centralized logging of operational communications, activities and actions continues to be a work in progress for the SARVAC HWF program.	<p>It is recommended that SARVAC HWF continue its work to identify, adopt and implement a standard log keeping capability as soon as possible.</p> <p>That personalized logbooks be kept by all HWF Responders and that copies of any notes taken be turned over to the MIST Planning Manager before demobilization.</p>	Policy SOP	deBreyne Devanney French Conway	01 April 2025

SARVAC HWF Deployment Support Equipment	<p>The FSX did identify several equipment shortfall areas that should be addressed.</p> <p>The amount of equipment cached by SARVAC HWF is suitable for a deployment complement of approximately 100 HWF Responders if they are expected to be self-sufficient for a short period of time.</p> <p>As the capacity, capabilities, and volunteer GSAR complement available to the SARVAC HWF program expands, so should the inventory of necessary equipment required to support the Humanitarian Workforce in the field.</p>	<p>It is recommended that minor equipment shortfalls (documentation, procedural, low dollar value) be evaluated and corrected as soon as possible.</p> <p>It is also recommended that SARVAC HWF conduct a GAP Analysis to determine the areas in deployment equipment shortfalls that will require corrective action before an HWF deployment will be 100% self-sufficient and to make the necessary recommendations for corrective actions.</p>	Budgetary Logistics	French Conway Yetman Peet	31 March 2026
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APPENDIX 1 – EXERCISE DESIGN / CONTROL FEEDBACK:

The “Code of Conduct” was not received before mobilization commenced. Electronic signing was problematic with a mobile device, but the application worked well when opened on a computer.

Guidance documents were received after mobilization and therefore could not be used to assist in the packing of personal belongings.

Directions for the Operations Manager, MRG Supervisors and Strike Team Leaders were not clear with respect to the tracking of HWF Responders during the mobilization and demobilization phases of the exercise. The “chain of command” was not clearly defined.

The demobilization on-line “check-in” through www.monday.com was problematic and would not work when using a mobile device.

The use of the ZELLO application was problematic. The instructions for download were clear but not for the use of the application. There were issues in deleting channels that were not in use and the severe battery drain on mobile devices resulted in many HWF Responders deleting the application during the exercise to extend battery life.

It was observed that the Mission Incident Support Team (MIST) were often not in their assigned areas which created difficulty when trying to supply exercise injects to drive exercise play.

The Peer Mental Wellness support team was not identified until the Exercise On-Site Debrief. Mental Wellness support should be always identified at the beginning of the exercise and the team should be readily available.

Only 1 person per Strike Team should have been identified to conduct communications. This would have alleviated some of battery drain concerns and would have limited some of the ZELLO channel clutter.

It appears that ZELLO is not compatible with the damage assessment application and resulted in the application often shutting down.

MIST and MRG positions and duties were not clearly defined and many HWF Responders were not sure of what their duties and responsibilities were. More information and training is required and the “chain of command” for an HWF deployment must be clearly defined.

Too many acronyms were being used and many HWF Responders were confused because of not being familiar with their meanings.

Hammers (mallets for larger tents) should be included as part of the tent kits as well as tent pegs and not spikes. Barrier / caution tape as well as glow sticks should also be included to mark tent pegs and guy wires which can pose a safety hazard.

Sandwich boards were present but not used to mark important locations. This caused some confusion.

Mission Ready Packs should contain a waterproof list of contents on the inside of the bag and “like” or similar items should be packaged in smaller dry sacks so that contents of the pack do not have to be opened on the ground when looking for a particular item. This will help to protect the contents of the bag.

Smaller, personal vehicles were used to transport HWF Responders from the Base of Operations to remote sites for operational taskings while there was a school bus laying idle in the parking lot.

Different size gloves should be made available to HWF Responders. One size does not fit all.

Cell phone charging cords in the Mission Ready Packs were not universal and did not fit all models of phones being carried by HWF Responders.

Operations Manager, MRG Supervisors and Strike Team Leaders should be afforded time at the commencement of an operation or exercise to organize themselves to provide better operational oversight and leadership to the HWF Responders.

Colours of ICS vests worn by Command and General Staff did not match the colours worn on armbands which led to some confusion.

The protocol to be used when a “NO DUFF” is called for a first-aid scenario should be more clearly defined as well as the expected level of training afforded by HWF Responder personnel.

Quick Capture application initially proved to be difficult to download to personal mobile devices and compatibility between this application and ZELLO created issues. It is suspected that lack of familiarity may have been the issue and once troubleshooted, it proved to be a very useful and efficient tool.

A small step ladder should be included with the MRG Deployment Equipment to assist in tasks such as placing lighting in ZUMRO tents.

There appeared to be no cellular coverage for TELUS mobile phones at the exercise location which proved to be problematic.

There was no backup plan for documenting information if the Quick Capture application did not work. A training video for Quick Capture sent ahead of the exercise would have been valuable.

Name tags should be provided for MRG backpacks.

Solar chargers in MRG backpacks were dead and should have been charged prior to deployment.
In future exercises, HWF Responders should be encouraged to “talk through” their actions to assist the Exercise Evaluators in documenting key activities and findings.
HWF Responders need to always maintain their situational awareness. There was a “close call” when the mirror on a passing vehicle almost hooked a MRG backpack being worn by a Responder.
A hard copy list of key exercise participants, their roles and contact telephone numbers should be provided to all exercise participants for information.
At times it appeared that MRG Strike Teams were not being tracked while in the field and instances occurred when the exact location of all Strike Teams was not known.
No protections were afforded if wildlife was encountered while on field operations (roaming dogs, bears, etc.)
Different briefing areas should be provided for MRGs and Strike Teams. Cross-chatter sometimes caused confusion.
Lines of communications were not clear. MIST General Staff were in the field directing Strike Team activities.
Strike Teams were conducting tasks that were not assigned to them by MRG Supervisors (B1 was on the roof setting up a repeater but were not assigned the task by the Supervisor).
No formal notice that a first-aid post had been established. The information was casually passed by “word of mouth”.
No control of equipment being issued (what was signed out to who?) The Milwaukee Tool Kit is a good example of this.
There was no rollcall after lunch. Several people were not present, missed the brief, and were confused about the afternoon exercise plan.
Pencils in addition to pens should be provided in case the response takes place in a sub-zero environment.
Event signage could have been larger and clearer. Sandwich boards were available but not used.
Poor cellular telephone coverage hampered the use of the damage assessment tool.
MRG Responder knapsacks should be high visibility and not dark blue in colour.

There should be a sign-in / sign-out sheet provided at the base of operations.
Equipment such as the heaters should be pre-assembled before shipped to a distribution center. It would be difficult to assemble in darkness or in poor weather conditions.
The tear-down of the base of operations was disorganized. It was accomplished by exuberant enthusiasm but with no discipline.
Each HWF Responder should be provided with a hard copy “business card” during the On-Site Debrief with clear instructions on how to seek peer mental wellness support or professional support after an HWF deployment, if required.
Team Leaders were not familiar with the ESRI application before the exercise and there were password and login issues. This information should have been shared before the exercise and not during the busy operational briefings.
There should have been more top-down oversight; especially with matters pertaining to safety. It appears that safety was quite lax at times.
Generators take gasoline while heaters take diesel or propane. This should have been clearly identified. With only one fuel source provided, it was assumed that gasoline was suitable for all equipment.
Consider having a smaller, advance party to set up the Base of Operations who have clear knowledge on how the equipment is to be assembled. This will help ensure “quality control”, limit confusion, and prevent Responders from standing around with nothing to do.
Equipment assembly instructions (tents, heaters, etc.) should be kept in plastic bags to prevent them from becoming wet and unreadable in inclement weather.

APPENDIX 2 – EXERCISE PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

Only questions where feedback was received are included in this appendix. As well, only relevant feedback is included.

3B. Please provide details of the problem (if any) that you experienced with our information emails?

Some e-mails were sent to me while I was in transit or in Ottawa. I did not have my laptop, and I don't get e-mails at my personal e-mail address on my phone.

Difficulty getting onto ZELLO.

QR codes were way too small to capture on the phone.

The information on travel was great however more training on the roles and responsibilities needed to be more detailed.

My role as Safety Officer was not very clear to me in advance. (i.e. wander around, identify safety issues, discuss issues with players, STOP / PAUSE the exercise, if necessary, etc.).

The content was good however it would be beneficial to have one source for all email messages. Pertinent content was coming from different email addresses which made it difficult to review.

Sequencing of emails were sometimes out of order, e.g. password email for ARCGIS came out in the evening and then username for it came out the morning after. The Responder Specific Information Package lacked the specific info for MRG supervisor and leader's name.

Some of the emails and details would have been best to receive a little bit further in advance - for a deployment naturally they will be delayed but for an exercise it would have been beneficial to have them more in advance.

It was not clear which emails players vs support people for the exercise should receive. This is likely an artificiality of the exercise. In a real deployment everyone would be "players" and should get all the emails.

Did not receive exercise plan or information other than the general broadcast and the survey. seems like there was an issue with emails since I didn't receive ARCGIS invites either.

There were a lot of emails. Perhaps a preamble to the email explaining the distribution list the email went to and the purpose of the email.

4B. Please provide any suggestions that you may have for the addition / deletion or changes to the questions asked?

They were not detailed enough to accurately select the best candidates for a given mission.

6. Please provide details for additions, changes or removal of travel information.

Information was excellent, Patrick was good to work with. I was able to use Aeroplan points to upgrade with no issues.

Other than flights/travel being booked the location of the hotel was shared very late via email.

I appreciate that in an actual event the timeliness of communications would have worked. In this situation I was already inbound before I received all of my pre-exercise information.

Travel information originally went to spam. Lodging information did not arrive till 4 days before exercise, which had me concerned / wondering if I needed to book my own lodgings.

8B. Please provide details of any registration difficulties that you may have experienced.

I did not receive the original information package and needed to register a second time last the day before the exercise. As a result, I was not assigned to a team for the exercise.

There could have been SARVAC signage in the hotel lobby point participants to the room/hall where registration was happening.

Travel information was great, flights, hotel shuttles was great. It was a little confusing when arrived at the hotel as the registration desk was not in the main area.

10B. Please provide any recommendations for improvement to the meals and snacks provided.

Hotel was OK. Community Center knocked it out of the park!

Hand sanitizer on tables. Buffet serving tools touched by 100 people including the sick ones. All of SARSACV acquired COVID on this exercise.

Wish there were more opportunities to hydrate throughout, not just at mealtimes.

Great variety! Just one small note about the meals - I had responded with dietary restriction to the questionnaire ahead of time, but when I went through for lunch, there were no vegetarian sandwiches left (just in terms of accommodating restrictions on the ground).

11B. Please provide any recommendations for additional, removal or changes to the equipment provided.

Since the backpack kits are just one big compartment, it would be helpful if smaller items or items of similar nature were grouped in zipper bags inside the backpack. This would serve the double purpose of helping to keep equipment dry in inclement weather.

There were many issues with the equipment which will be provided separately. I would not be comfortable going into a crisis zone based on the equipment provided. The First Aid equipment was particularly insufficient.

My solar charger was not working. I know this was also the case for several others. I'd recommend a way of labeling the bags for easy identification. I'd also like to recommend more internal bags for ease of sorting the gear.

Accommodation facilities for winter season.

Very good material. But gloves too warm and burly for the summer.

Equipment was generally good, but packs should have been issued at start of the day. Packs may not last more than one incident.

Mallets for putting in stakes would be a good addition to the tents and base of operations. Also tent pegs instead of spikes would be preferable as the spike tops were not large enough to keep the loop from slipping off. In my opinion the tents provided are too small to be suitable for two people who have spent the day together and may like some emotional down time.

It was inconvenient having to return our vests at the site as I put personal items in the vest, and had to fill up my pants pockets or look for a bag for return back to hotel.

The first aid kit provided to the FA MSG was missing injury reports, pens, large BP cuffs, tourniquet, permanent markers, Bag-Valve-Mask assembly, SAM splint, spine board or litter, extra batteries, rubbing alcohol or alcohol swabs, life-saving medications (Benadryl & epinephrine), sunscreen, and moleskin padding. It could have used band aids of various sizes, more tape (or vet wrap), more trash bags, and more sets of scissors.

The ArcGIS app did not work for me, nor did the Quick capture App due to login issues. Also, my team was asked to assemble one of the space heaters and I was provided and asked to wear large heavy-duty gloves that were useless for working with small tools, nuts and bolts. These were for handling debris. Mechanics gloves need to also be included in the kits for this purpose.

The goggles provided in the ready packs do not go over prescription glasses. The gloves provided were also too thick for fine motor skill type work. A reference list of what equipment is provided in the ready packs would be great to have so that members can know what additional equipment to bring or personalize.

I was part of the First Aid Medical Support Group (MSG) stationed at the tent. For the tent setup, an additional four pegs (making a total of eight) would have been useful to keep the tarp and tent floor more secure and flat, reducing the risk of tripping hazards. It would also be helpful to include a roll of flagging tape in the tent bag to mark the ropes, as well as a tent patch kit for any repairs. Regarding the large First Aid kit we were supplied: the dish was broken, and several items were expired, including those in the glucose monitoring kit and the hand sanitizer. We would recommend adding the following items to the kit: Israeli bandages with clotting agents, chest seals, SAM splints (the ones in the kit were too small and flimsy), face masks, sunscreen, disposal bags, a large syringe (for pressurized water), extra blood pressure cuffs (for both large adults and children), and a razor for the AED (which was missing from the kit). Additionally, nasal airways (NPAs) would be beneficial. One notable issue was the absence of EpiPens in the kits. This became problematic when our only task was treating a bee sting. The organization should decide if we will carry EpiPens or cheaper alternatives like vials of epinephrine with syringes. Several items in the kit (and in the packs generally) contained batteries, but there should be a system to ensure all batteries are removed at the end of deployments to prevent corrosion. If, during multi-day deployments, we aim to establish a more semi-permanent First Aid station (rather than just deploying to accidents), it would be more efficient to include the following in addition to the regular First Aid kits: boxes of gloves in various sizes, bottles of water for washing cuts and dehydration, glucose gels, a box of ice packs, and several boxes of band-aids. These would be kept separate from the core First Aid kits. For paperwork, it would be helpful to have multiple copies of SOAP notes to facilitate patient transfer to paramedics and monitor progress over time. A minor injury form should also be included to record instances where we provide small items, like band-aids. An inventory of kit items would make it easier to track usage and restock, and it would be helpful to include pens and sharpies for filling out this paperwork. The kits in the volunteer packs seemed sufficient for individual use, but the designated MSG First Aider should have access to a more comprehensive kit, including items like a tourniquet and properly sized SAM splints. Lastly, if we ever anticipate needing to move a patient, it would be essential to have a litter and packing materials, such as tarps, sleeping bags, or blankets.

More work needs to be done to both better understand and train responders on some of the IT elements of the deployment equipment (Zello, ArcGIS).

Two cots in the provided pup tents were extremely tight and probably not work for two strangers.

Would recommend larger tents if the plan is to put two searchers in each tent, as there was barely enough room for two cots in the existing tents, and no room for personal gear for two. I would supply cots versus sleeping mats for searchers for better comfort. Sleeping bags should be three season, not the lightweight summer bags used during the exercise.

Zello just on a phone was not suitable for communication in a loud environment. I could not hear any of the transmissions the first time. Each time I had to stop what I was doing, pull out my phone, and listen to the recorded messages with the phone next to my ear. A Bluetooth speaker-mic would solve this problem.

Lights to attach to responders. Reflective material is great for safety but only visible when lights shone on them. Adding small lights to front and back of vest would increase responder safety and visibility to others.

12B. Please provide details of the health or safety issue that you observed or experienced including the time and severity.

Sleeping tent stakes were not bright enough to be seen in the grass and posed a tripping hazard.

Putting up aerials without helmets; there was danger on the roof; traffic is always a potential danger; getting everyone seat-belted every time probably didn't happen; putting up unfamiliar tents in a crowd in a hurry could result in eye poking etc.; spikes need hammers; stoves were assembled in a confined space with too many people; no clearly designated area for gas/oil/lubricants; tripping hazards at large tent entrances; scope of practice questions/issues around drugs etc.

Medics were not provided gear prior to the exercise beginning, adequate PPE, had not been issued until later requested. Fortunately, only one very minor injury sustained, but too soon into the exercise.

1. When a team was on roof setting up antenna there didn't appear to be anyone providing fall protection lookout. 2. All four of us from Saskatchewan came home with COVID and likely many other attendees did as well. Persons with symptoms need to do better to protect the team. Had this been an actual multi-day activation effectiveness could be severely jeopardized.

Safety Officer Perspective - I observed no critical safety issues during the exercise but I did observe many major and minor issues. Some of the major ones I needed to make corrective interventions. See areas of improvement for more discussion on this.

Seemed to be a COVID spreader event unfortunately ... aware of board members and responders that were participating despite flu symptoms and spoke to a number that had potential exposure to Covid in the last 72 hours. I wonder if we have a better way of managing this risk.

There was no plan/map of the Base of Operation setup. There was no briefing of what was being put where. Gas cans were plonked beside generators right beside tents. SARVAC needs a "bivouac" or Base of Operations setup SOP (accommodations tents etc, operations tents, parking, fuel storage, fire points, meeting/rally point ... basic stuff I learned in the army).

Responders were so focused on the apps; they were not paying attention to their surroundings. I witnessed one of my team members almost get hit, by the side view mirror of a passing car. Worst case scenario - he could have been dragged. He did NOT get hit but the focus of all the members was so much on their phones, that they forgot to watch their surroundings. More training / practice on the apps PRIOR to deployment would help.

12D. If the health or safety issue observed was not corrected in a timely manner, why do you think this was the case?

It was mentioned by several people and no flagging tape was used. Would recommend changing the tent stakes or dipping the top in a coloured paint or wrapping with orange tape. Something for a bright colour contrast for safety.

1. The roof issue was a reasonable risk to manage. 2. Nothing can turn back the COVID clock.

The bug is insidious and true to the type A personality ... there was a deep personal commitment and will to 'git er done' despite the COVID risk in retrospect I think that the final review overall dive into this and think about how we would respond in a real event where (me for example) would be even more driven to contribute It is an issue I struggle with myself.

13B. Please provide any recommendations for changes to the Mental Wellness component of the Debrief Phase.

Visually identify wellness team members during the operation.

A three-sentence reference at the Friday evening briefing would have been useful. "This is a very gentle exercise. However, for some of you there is always the possibility that it could trigger past events etc. If so ..." Michelle's brief comments at the end of the afternoon were right on."

The debrief hit all the critical points and made everyone aware that one-on-one assistance was also available which was well done.

Possibly a Crisis Management Briefing (CMB) would have been slightly better.

To prepare members for deployment, if deploying in waves, each subsequent wave should be briefed by members from the previous wave in terms of what they might encounter for mental health, e.g. what they can expect to see on the ground, types of interactions with the public.

The briefing should be given by someone in a leadership position instead.

Far too generic and impersonal. Nothing in the session would prompt me to...

Recommend better tailoring to the actual situation. Debrief from an exercise will usually be different from a real event. I.e. we did not see blood, death and despair but we were in the community and could have seen poverty, abusive behaviour or drug abuse. We didn't but is a different brief. Just a suggestion.

The briefing Michelle provided was excellent and delivered extremely well ... (better than I expected to hear!) ... While there was a low critical event risk, I might have looked to a quick discussion on what folks might experience in the event they were triggered and encourage provincial or regional debriefs as a way of easing these pressure points a bit kind of like what you are doing nationally, just a little more in person where possible.

I suggest the mental wellness contact links and information be included in all information transmittals, so it is easily found and accessed.

Not all events or people require CISM support. Having awareness of the program is great but put the focus on prevention, resiliency training instead.

14B. Please provide any recommendations for changes to the Travel Expense Form.

A digital copy to fill in - somewhat like this survey.

looks like in trying to keep it on a single printed page, the spreadsheet is crowded and fonts too small. Spread it out and it will be easier to read and ensure volunteers have completed it correctly (signed and dated for example).

It's very manual / lots of work for office. My team uses <https://floatfinancial.com> which saves us loads of time on expense reporting.

Mileage even for local responders, drove for 2hrs on exercise day, 2 hrs on logistics support day as well.

15B. Please provide details for additions, changes or removal of details to improve the Travel Expense Claim Form.

An acknowledgement email that it was received would have been beneficial. I still don't know if my claim was received.

I didn't look at the travel expense form. (I'm local, so my time is more valuable than what I might get back from SARVAC, plus it wasn't clear--I didn't ask--if we locals could claim mileage for instance).

Not clear whether local participants should submit mileage claim. I did not submit.

28. What were the 3 tops strengths of this exercise?

I got to see how the pre-planning took place and how it shaped the actual exercise.

Collaboration.

Provided Context for the HWF

The professionalism and expertise of the overhead team.

Diverse experience among participants, great training location, good equipment provided.

Friendship, knowledge, leadership.

Informational emails leading up to exercise day; meals/ accommodation; schedule.
Opportunity to test the program in simulated real-life scenario.
National presence in the field is important for representatives from the P/T orgs to observe and understand that cooperative learning has great power.
Excellent orientation to the SARVAC NSOC and stages of a deployment.
Realistic Scenario: Scenario that closely mimic potential real-life emergencies relevant to the community.
I was really impressed by the quality of the tents and cots and feel confident that they would provide a good level of comfort for both work and rest.
Observing capacity across the country - the intention is to bring forward people from every provincial organization and that was completed very successfully, great to see different provincial reps working seamlessly together.
The exercise demonstrated that participants from all parts of the country with varying degrees of knowledge and experience can form a cohesive and effective workforce.
It allowed participants to build long term relationships with volunteers from other jurisdictions.
A great opportunity to meet and work with other P/T GSAR associations. Strike teams in future HWF exercises should consciously mix members from different P/T organizations and include other partners, e.g. Red Cross, etc....Time for a pre and post exercise social for members to get to network with one another would be great.
Strong support from SBO-OVSAR.
Exercise planning - logistics, accommodations, food supporting the exercise was excellent.
Gave new HWF participants a basic working knowledge of what might be expected of them.
All Exercises - The VIP session was quite effective with several positive discussions emerging, with some (of the best of them) being referred to the HWF SARVAC Lead and Team.
29. What are the top 3 areas for improvement?
Communications. The exercise was way too dependent on cellular service and technology. Zello was new to many of us and proved to have a lot of issues. In a real emergency, and in many parts of the country cell service may not be available. I understand SARVAC has contingency plans for this, it would have been nice to exercise that capability as well.

Pre education on apps.
Send out a tutorial on the software with the deployment instructions. The proper way to use Zello and to set up the Quick Capture apps weren't apparent for everyone, and some people struggled.
Leadership.
Knowledge, too long for meetings, too much for one day.
Check lists (go bags have a sign off check list of what was in the bag when taken and one for what is in the bag returned. Check lists on containers, the blow-up tents, what should be in the bag when opened and when putting away).
Communications could be smoother. ground level chain of command could be clearer. Vests seemed a little fragile. I don't know how long they're going to last in real-world conditions.
The demobilization was not organized. It went well, but no structure.
Clarify scope of practice and medical control issues for advanced first aiders (including dispensing of OTC medication for treating minor problems like headaches or stomach upsets if required to prevent unnecessary reductions in personnel availability and capacity).
Have the exercise over 2 days, allowing more time for communication to flow within the MIST from the RC down through to the Responder. It was more giving the entire response team directions than letting it flow through the chain of command. Caused a bag of mass confusion.
To avoid causing confusion (e.g. mixing MRG members) follow the ICS chain of command. For example, MRG supervisors should not be tasking the entire MRG directly but should be tasking the MRG team leaders who then direct the work of their strike team members. Make the different command roles in the field easier to identify/distinguish by having different coloured vests for MRG supervisor vs Team Lead, etc... Coloured name tags are not as easy to distinguish.
Defining roles within the different positions needs to be better accomplished - not all understood the specific roles even if they had the training to do said role, different provinces approach the roles perhaps differently so those under/above might have had varying levels of expectations, few individuals sought guidance or clarification of the roles throughout the day meaning if there was a misinterpretation it continued throughout the exercise in some scenarios.
Didn't know it was mostly a media exercise. Thought we'd be doing more SAR tasks.
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for activities that GSAR members operating under the Authority of HWF need to be promulgated. For example, what first aid scope of practice can be employed. As medicine is a provincial responsibility, first responders deployed to a different part of the country will have different scope of practice that they can work to. This needs to be clearly documented so they understand what is acceptable and what is not.

Roles were too rigid, as a MRG FA attendant I was not able to help with the set-up, but I was also not allowed to access a FA kit or actually respond to a FA need on my team while still setting up. I felt like dead weight (I was not even allowed to hand out small items like bolts) - suggest allowing such roles to be flexible (can do regular work while in one phase, then once deployed you can be a FA/supervisor, or allow FA attendants to be contributing members of the team with the expectation that they will prioritize FA 100% over other tasks when a need arises).

Briefings need to be better. More concise, and stick to what matters. Receiving proper ICS 204s.

Perhaps share some sort of "how a national SAR exercise is planned and executed in Canada" overview document.

Have consumables like gloves and safety glasses separate from team packs.

Section chiefs and deputy chief roles be more defined.

For future exercises, eliminate the VIP portion and just focus on making the exercise more realistic.... take some time to make it look more like a disaster actually hit. Have the location of the exercise closer to the hotel where responders are staying; we lost 2 hours of exercise play to travel time from hotel to location. Include more injects that involve actors playing roles (despondent relatives, victims, etc.). Every team should have an opportunity to respond to an inject so all teams get the same experience.

Time - the exercise needed more time allocated either for training or operational guidance for the TTT ahead of the SFX or perhaps the briefings to not start that evening and continue through to nearly 9pm the following day. Those traveling far distances with time change were visibly exhausted - it would have been beneficial to have some sort of session only for the TTT and provincial reps not including all SBO as they severely outnumbered others and their experience levels and idea on the exercise was also different. If those traveling were already taking one day off, I suggest we request an additional day off and have the time to be together for more than 36 hours, two full days isn't insurmountable with a travel day on either end for future planning.

Have more time for socializing/fun activity to meet other members and build morale.

In the debrief I would have liked Paul to be clear on his role and leadership, and the HWF Team and SARVAC office to have been clear (less modest?) on their roles with SARVAC HWF.

30B. Please provide any recommendations for changes or general feedback not covered above.

This was my first 'real' experience with SARVAC, I found it to be very educational. I think the exercise was very beneficial to the organizers, perhaps less so to those in the trenches, as we mostly stood around for the day. Still, I believe the purpose of the exercise was well achieved. I have some concerns that in a real deployment (or another exercise) the weather may be less than the ideal conditions we experienced. Some thought to where and how players and personnel would carry/stow their various kit (raingear, boots, parkas etc.) would be required in that scenario.

You folks did an exceptional job. I know there were things that didn't go according to your plan, but that's the nature of an exercise, to see the holes in the plan. Please be proud of the success of this exercise and the culmination of all your hard work to put it together. It's a huge undertaking.

1. As a strike team leader, on 2 occasions someone higher in the ICS structure (Ops Manager and MIST Director) tasked two of my team members without my knowledge. It took quite some time to locate them as the MSG Sup was also not advised. In an actual disaster response, this is a major safety concern. 2. On three occasions, we were sent (Ops Manager>MSG Sup>Me) to logistics to pick up equipment/supplies and logistics sent us elsewhere (where there were no supplies). It seemed they were just trying to get rid of us so they didn't have to deal with the requests instead of arranging the require equipment/supplies that were requested. 3. I asked for the IAP for the "incident" and was repeatedly told it was not available. This is one of several instances when ICS principles were outright ignored.

We had a large number of local team members; it may have been a good idea for them to have had the training on the HWF before the event.

GREAT WORKS FOLKS! I know some of the challenges and constraints that you were working under so hats off to you all. One thing that might help in future events would be a list of acronyms and translations into GSAR terms and some general statement that there are sound reasons why we can't use the terms with which we're familiar) PS: SBO-OVSAR belongs to both OSARVA and AQBRs; the survey would benefit from "Not Applicable" responses and once you've indicated a choice it seems you can't avoid responding one way or another; questions 21 and 24 don't "work" for some participants; while I understand the need to operate in English, more French would have made the few francophones feel more welcomed; I appreciate the gesture of having aboriginal involvement but a very brief history of the aboriginal peoples in the region, the translation of a prayer and smudging might be more meaningful

GSAR groups from areas adjacent to Ottawa could have been invited to increase spread of knowledge of HWF.

Consider procuring magnetic vehicle decals to clearly identify SARVAC/HWF-associated vehicles, especially if rentals are being used.

Awesome job! I think this should be trialed in a more remote area such as NWT or Nunavut or remote areas.

Do more of these! Logistics! You/we need to go through every action for setting up camp, running it and dismantling it to ensure the proper tools and instructions/expertise are applied. Example is having a hammer for the tent/tarp pegs. Small things which slow down the entire group. Secondly, if possible, give the Mission Ready Groups the comms and mission plans the night before so that the leads can survey their teams for expertise/experience within their team, allowing the TL's to plan.

Work that can be done for the future included preparing documentation for responders that outline the roles and responsibilities of all organizations that will likely be responding to a major disaster.... this includes the municipality, the province/territory, and all NGOs who may be responding. The purpose and objective of what SARVAC is being tasked to do should be made very clear upfront, and we do not want to take on a role that other NGOs may also be doing and may be better capable to handle. I also note that it can take 4-5 days after the RFA is received by the GOC to deploy; if MOUs exist between Provinces and NGOs the process of bilaterally requesting assistance outside of the RFA process may get boots on the ground faster than through the RFA process. A thorough review of how SARVAC responds to an RFA request should be undertaken to identify areas where efficiencies could be found. Hold another exercise in the Fall of 2025 that incorporates recommendations and actions from this exercise and suggest making the next one a response to an RFA for assistance from Alberta to assist with wildfires.

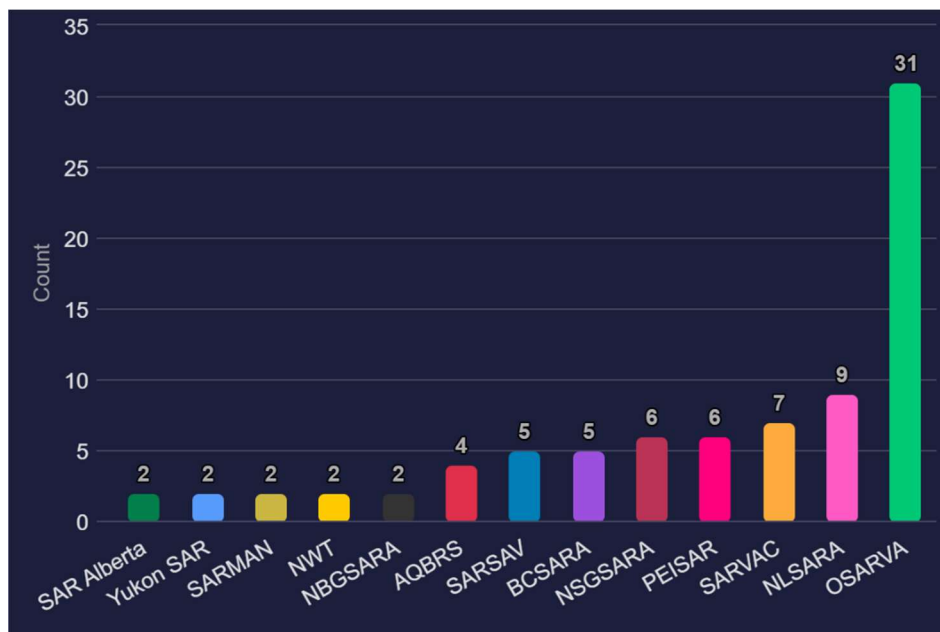
It would be helpful to implement a system for reporting when pack contents need to be replaced or when something is damaged. This would make re-inventorying the backpacks much more efficient. An online portal where we could log in and watch brief 5-minute instructional videos would also be beneficial. Topics could include using Zello, building a sandbag wall, operating the generator, setting up tents, and other key tasks. This way, before deployment, we could watch the relevant videos and refresh our knowledge.

A presentation prior to Saturdays should have been provided, to go over the NSOC and phases one through ten, so participants were better prepared for what to expect., especially for those of us that weren't at the Friday night presentation. Chatting with folks on Saturday implied that few people were seeing the overarching picture of what was going on. Should also include a N/A option for alot of these survey questions, since a good proportion of attendees were local, so didn't fly in, stay at the hotel, or file an expense claim.

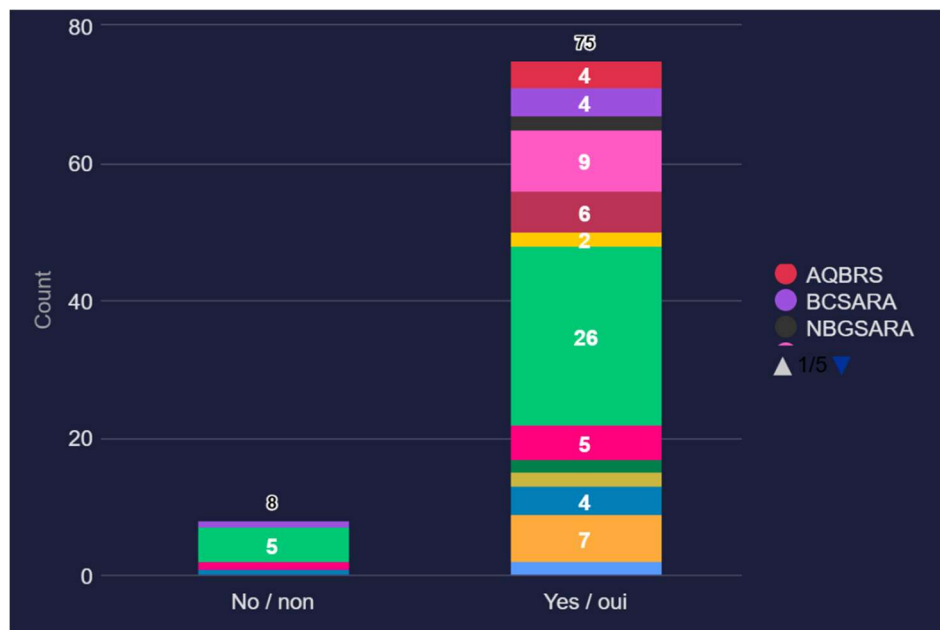
Great exercise and experience overall. The equipment is fantastic - perhaps some training on how to use it (laminated sheets with quick set up / instructions). It would be great to have teams rotate though the taskings, so they can experience it all. Understandably, it's a ton more work but would be a huge benefit.

APPENDIX 3 – RESPONDER SURVEY GRAPHS:

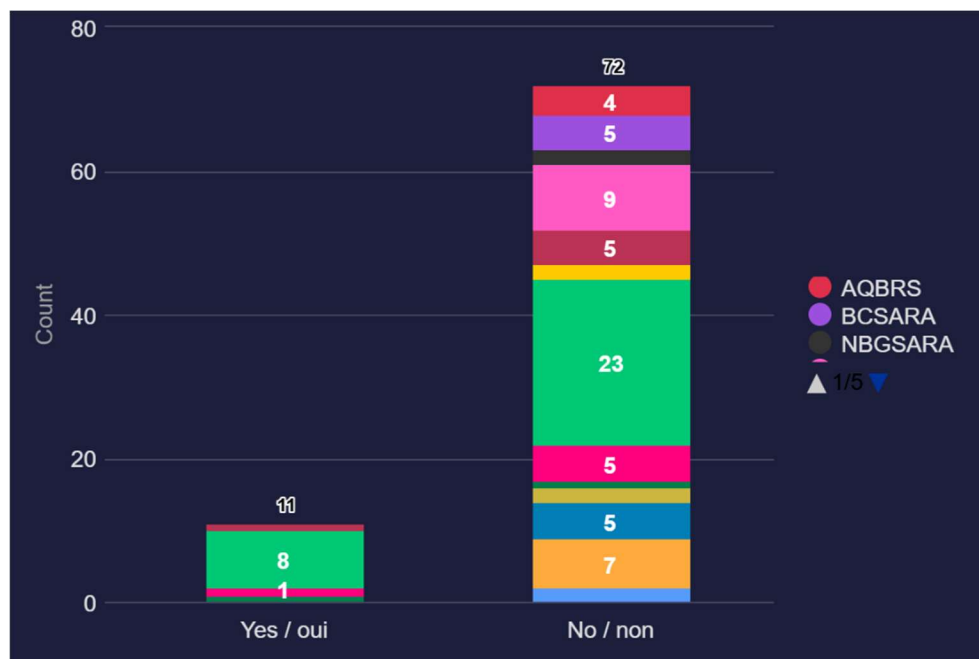
A total of 83 Exercise Participants responded to the pos-exercise survey.



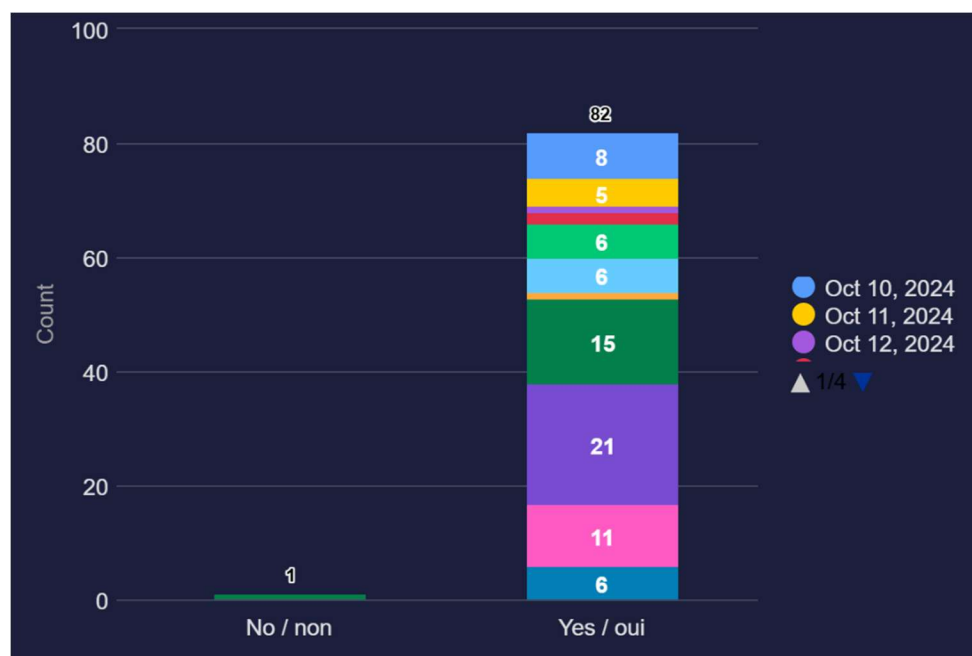
Survey Respondents by Association.



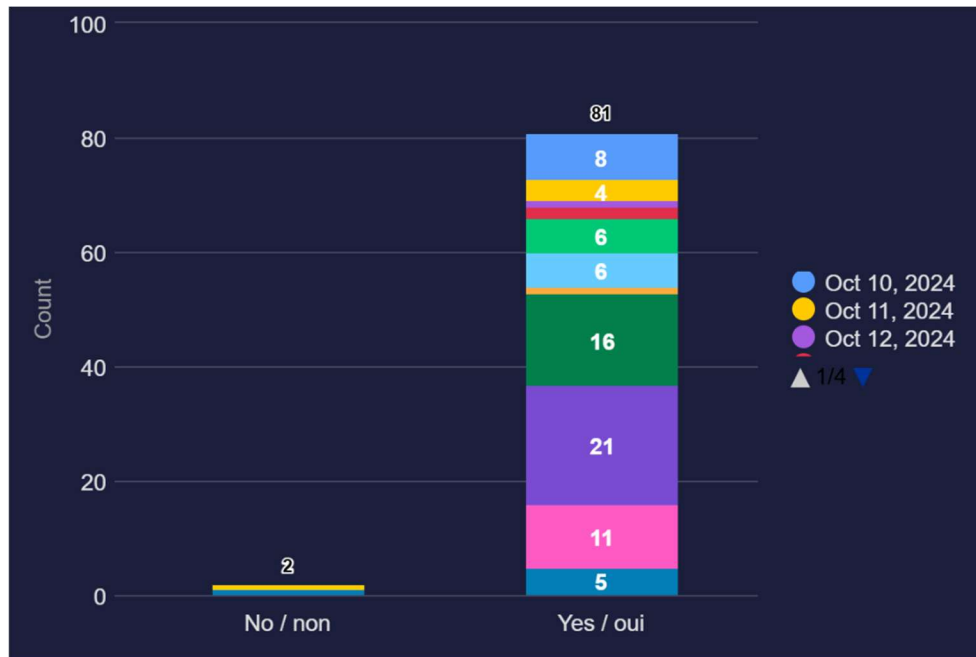
Did the information emails provide the necessary information?



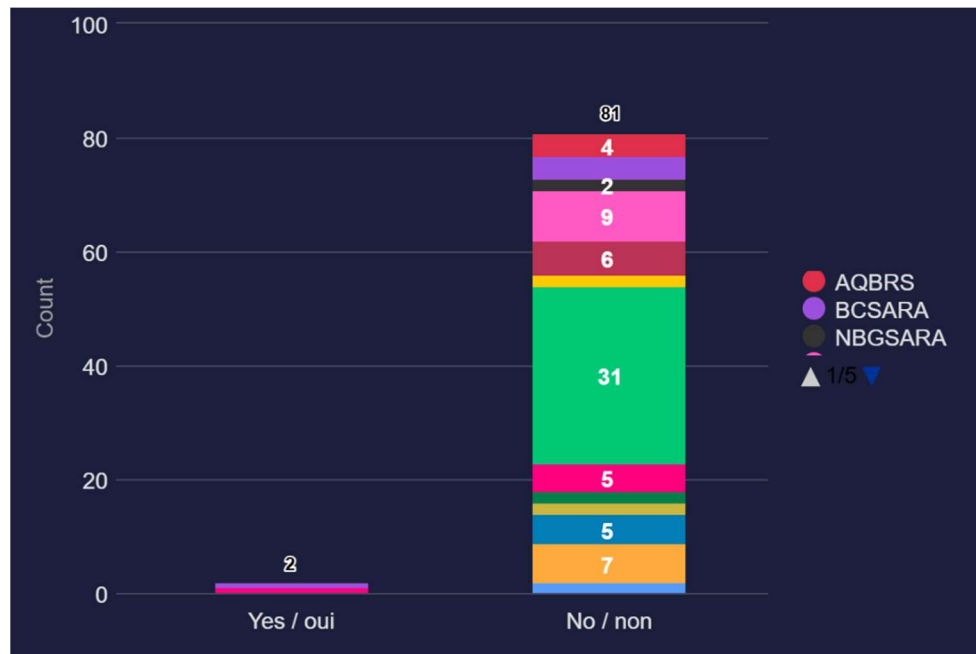
Did you experience any issues with receiving the information emails?



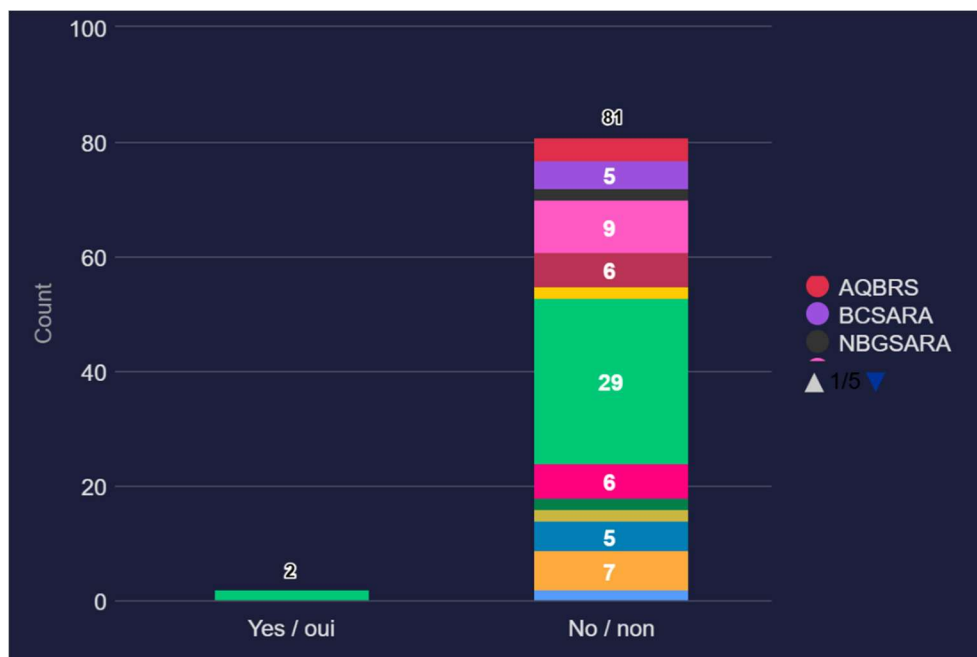
Where the questions asked on the information e-mails appropriate?



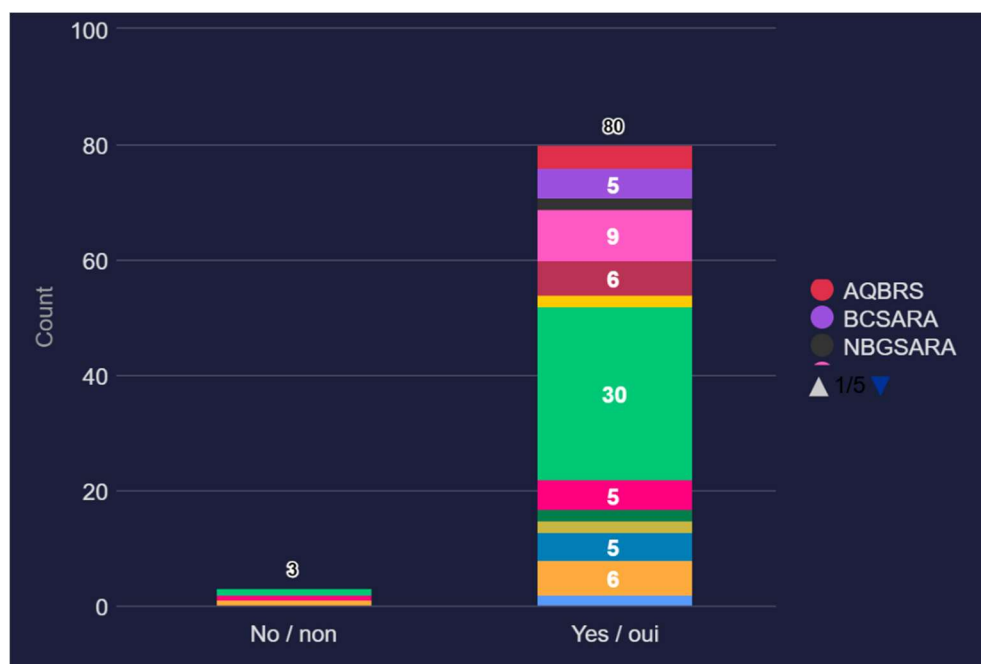
Did you receive sufficient information to travel to the exercise?



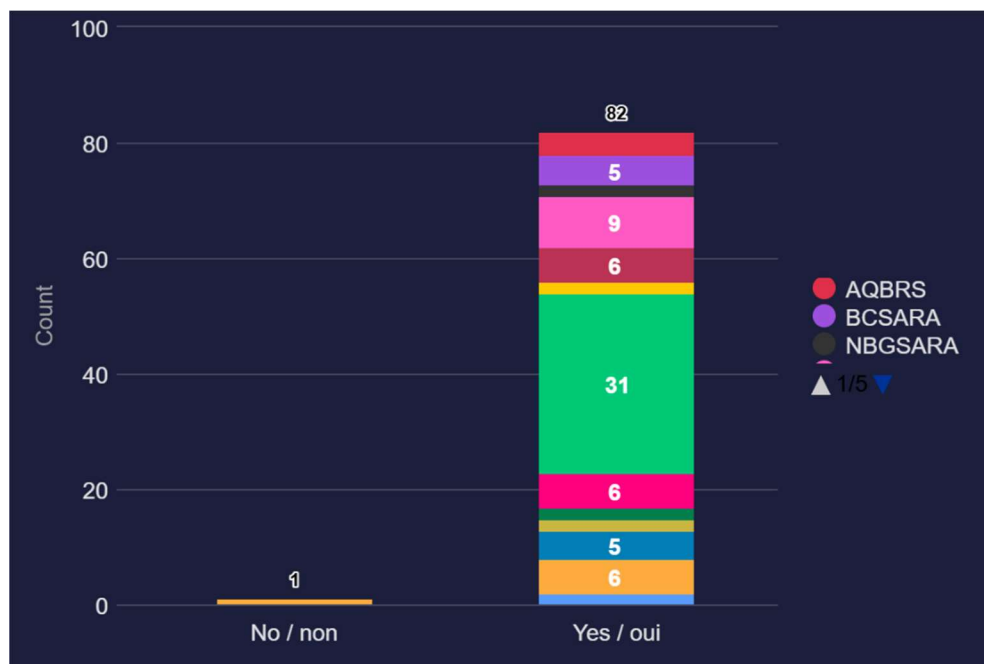
Did you experience any difficulties or trip interruptions during travel?



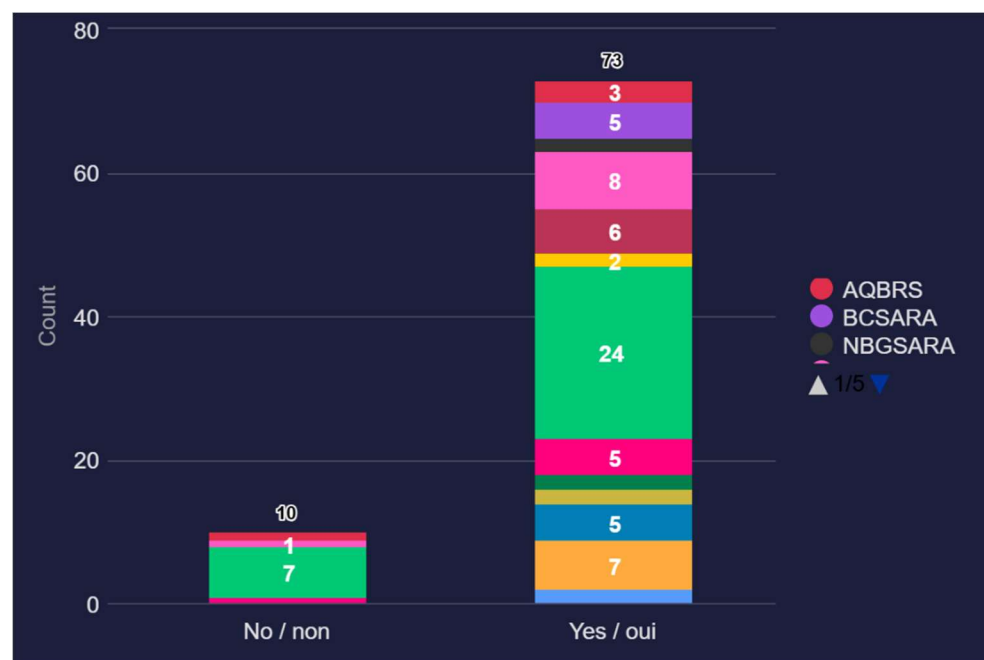
Did you experience and difficulty registering for the exercise?



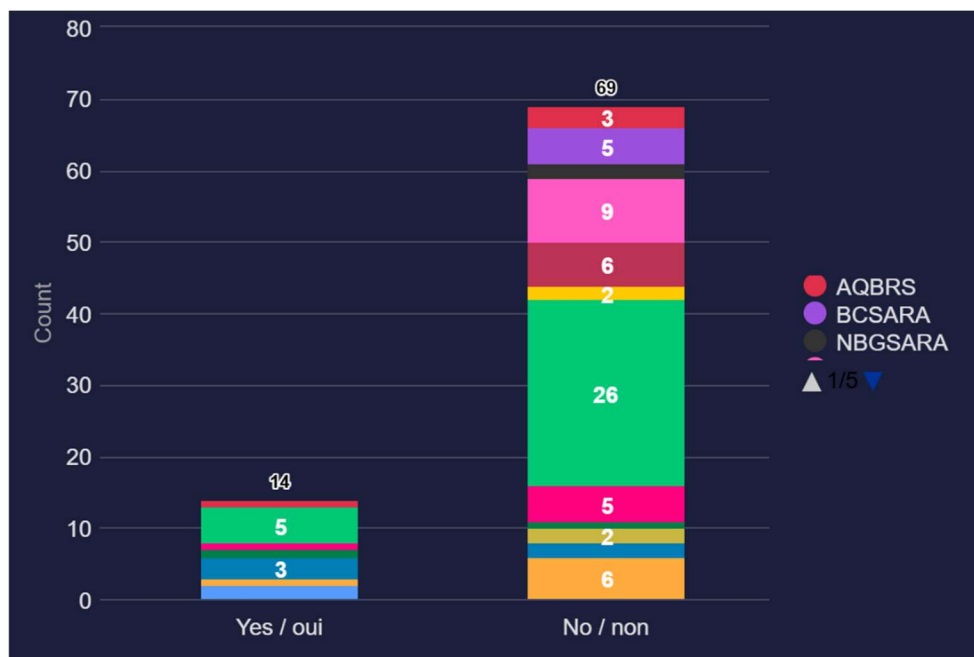
Were the accommodations provided suitable and as expected?



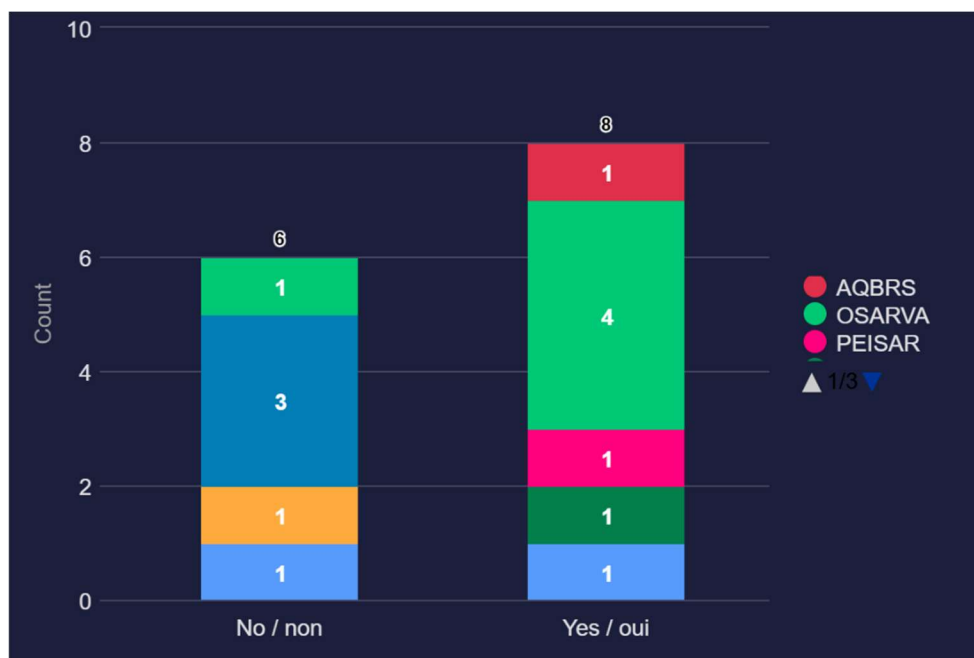
Were the meals and snacks provided suitable and as expected?



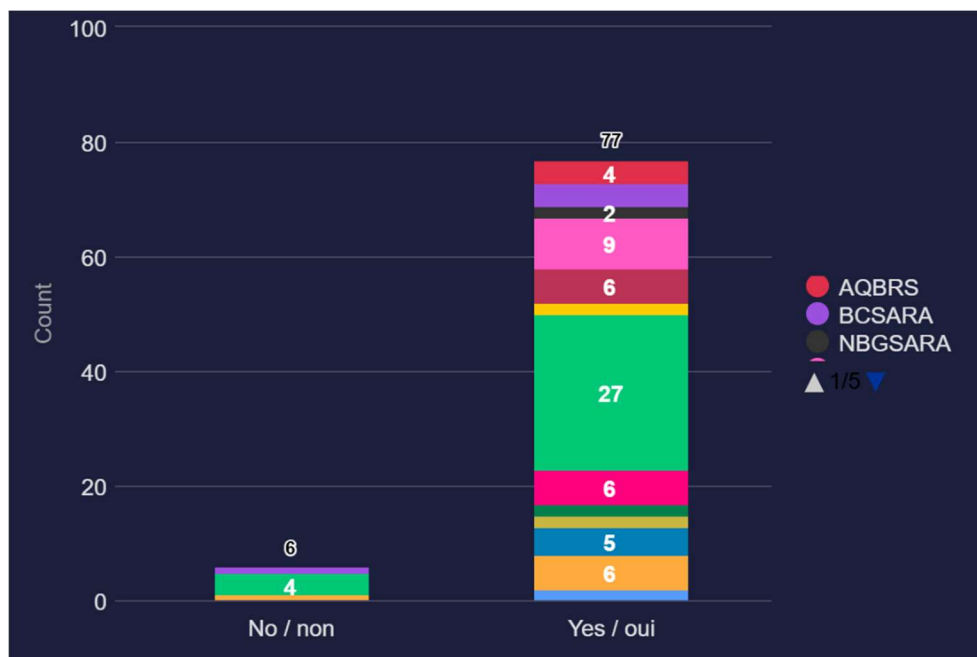
Was the equipment provided suitable to support your role in the exercise?



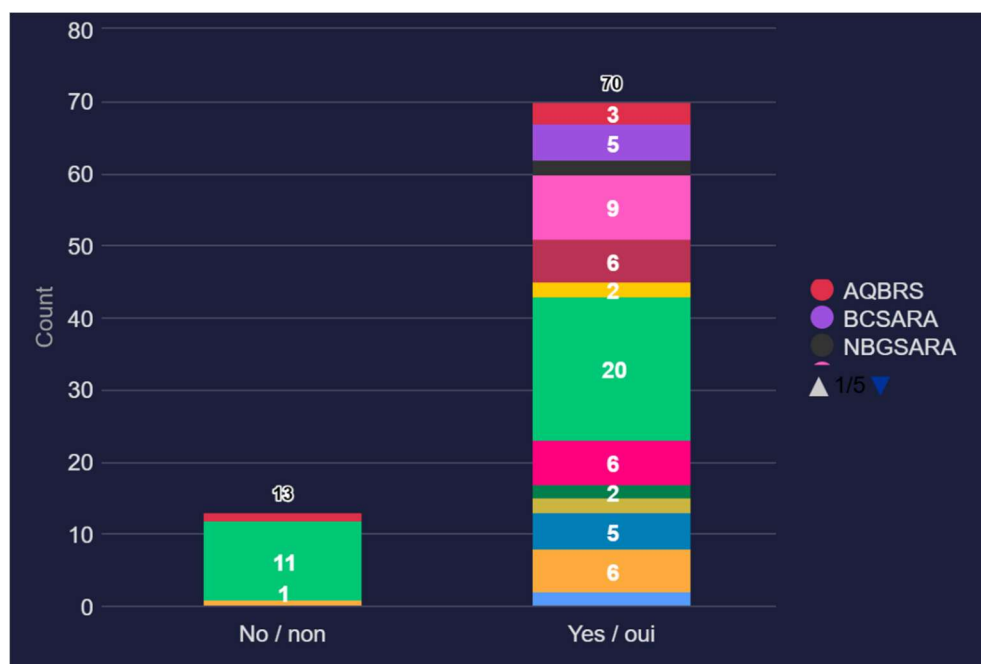
Did you observe or experience any issues with respect to health or safety?



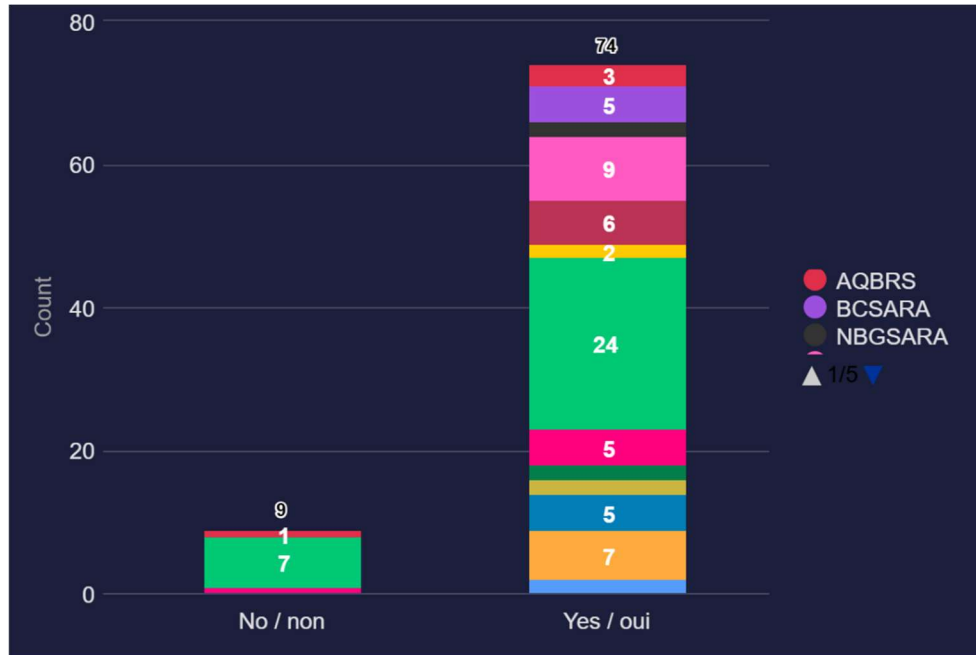
Were the health or safety issues observed or experienced corrected in a timely manner?



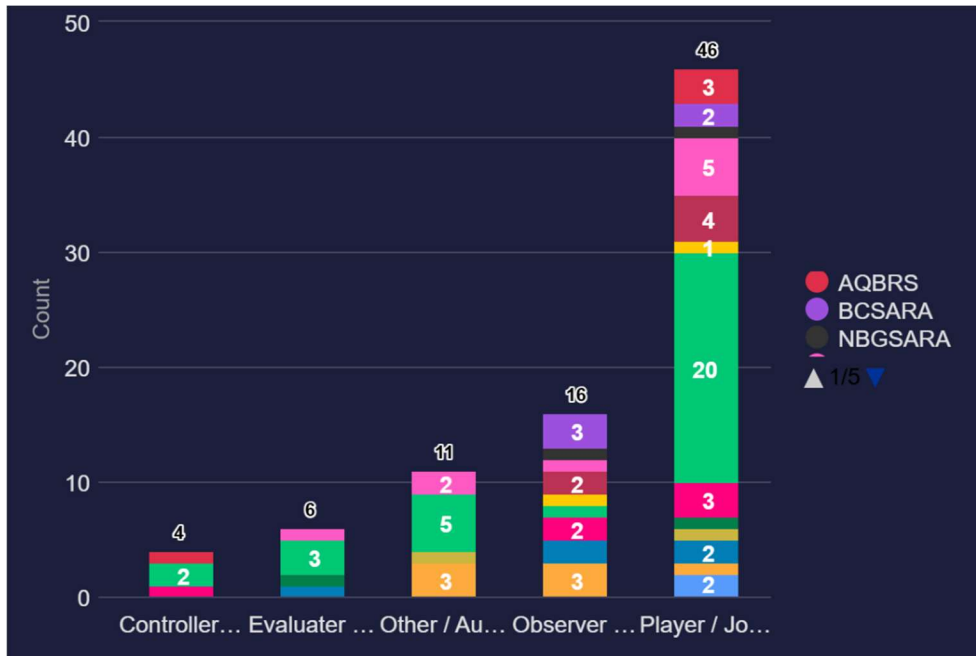
Was the Mental Wellness information provided during the On-Site Debrief suitable?



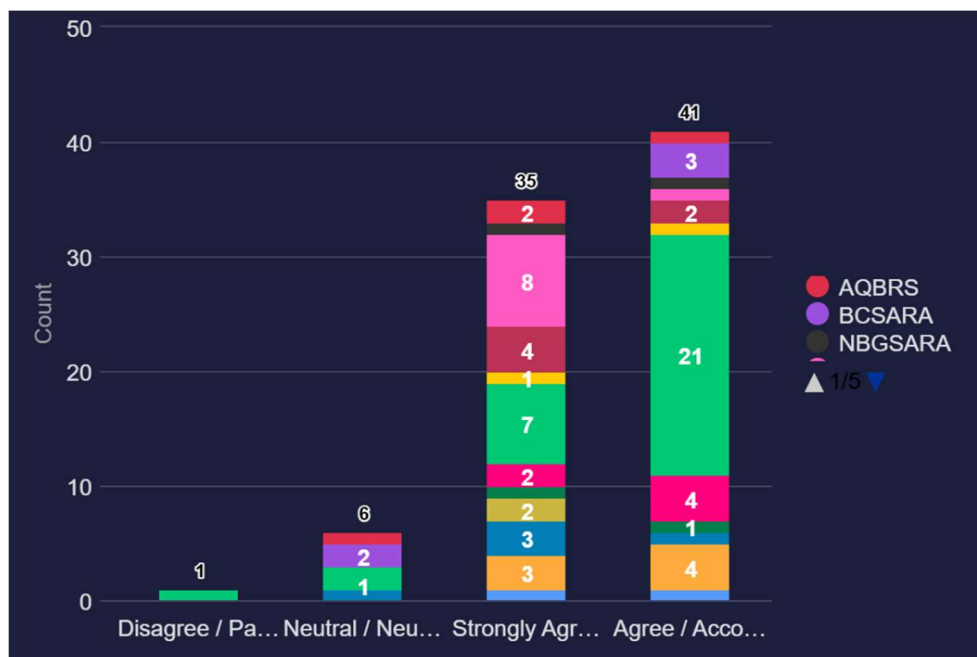
Did you receive a Travel Expense Claim Form?



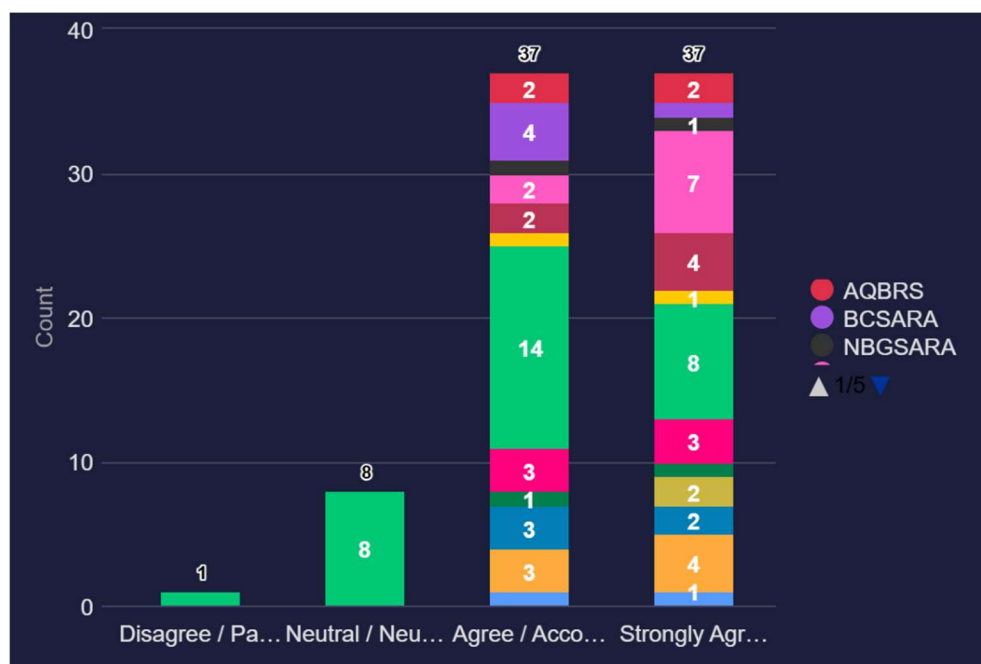
Was the Travel Expense Claim Form submission process clear and concise?



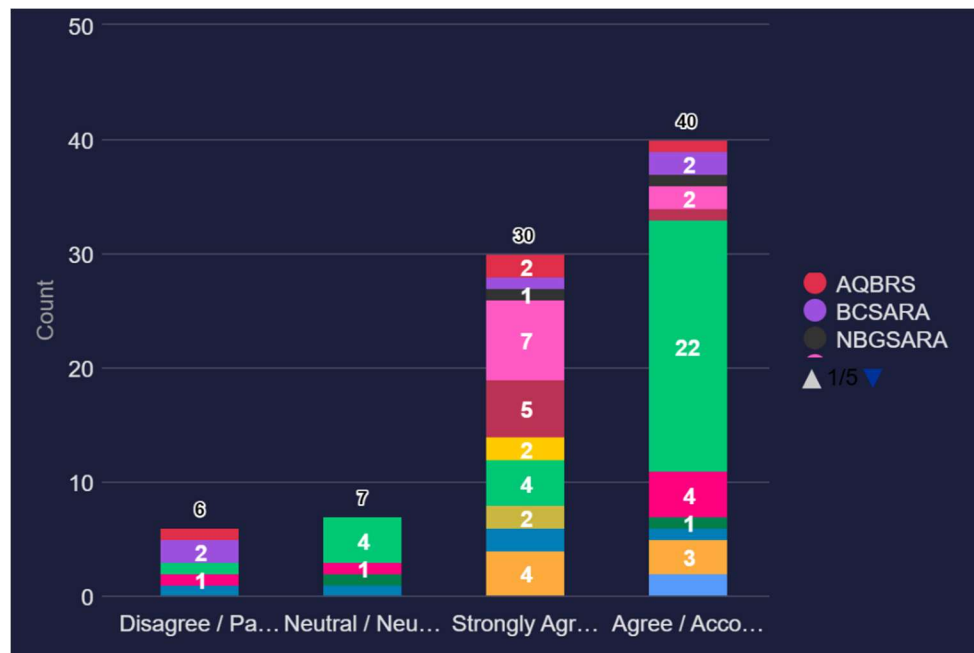
My role in FSX “Effective Impact 2024” was:



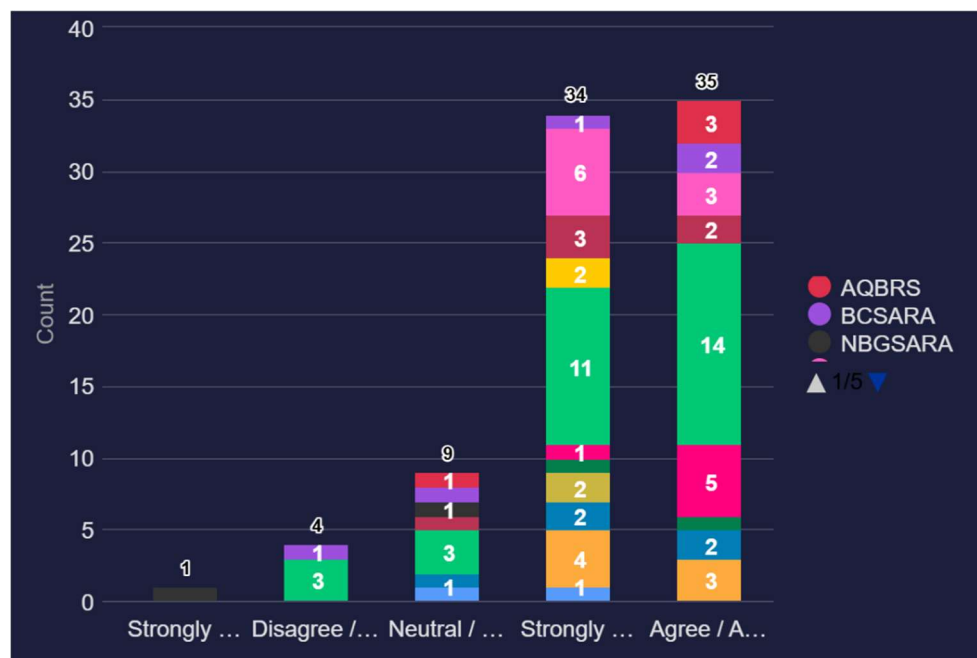
The exercise was well structured and organized.



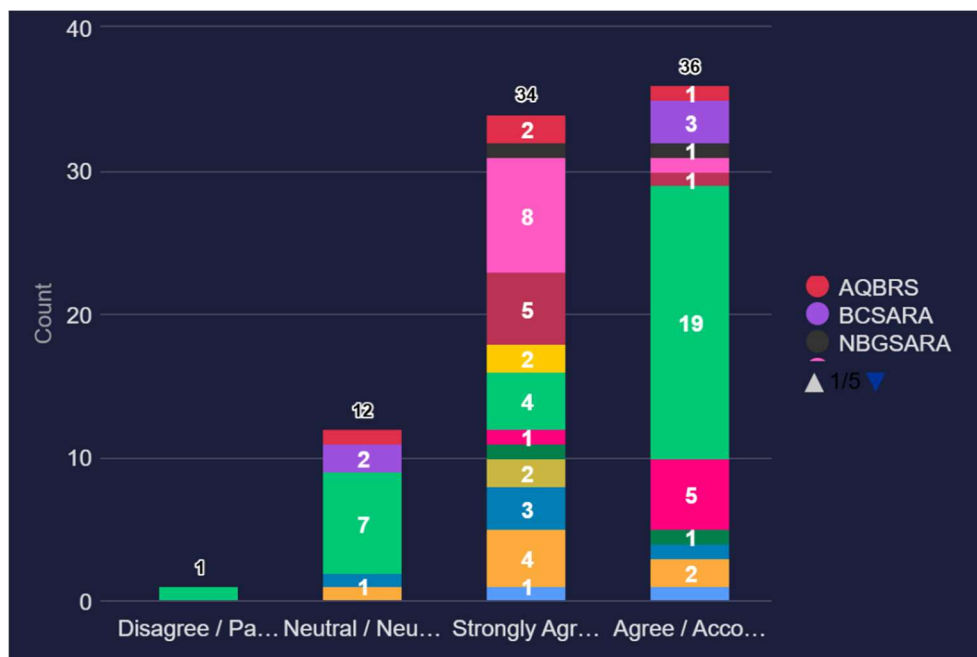
The exercise scenario was realistic.



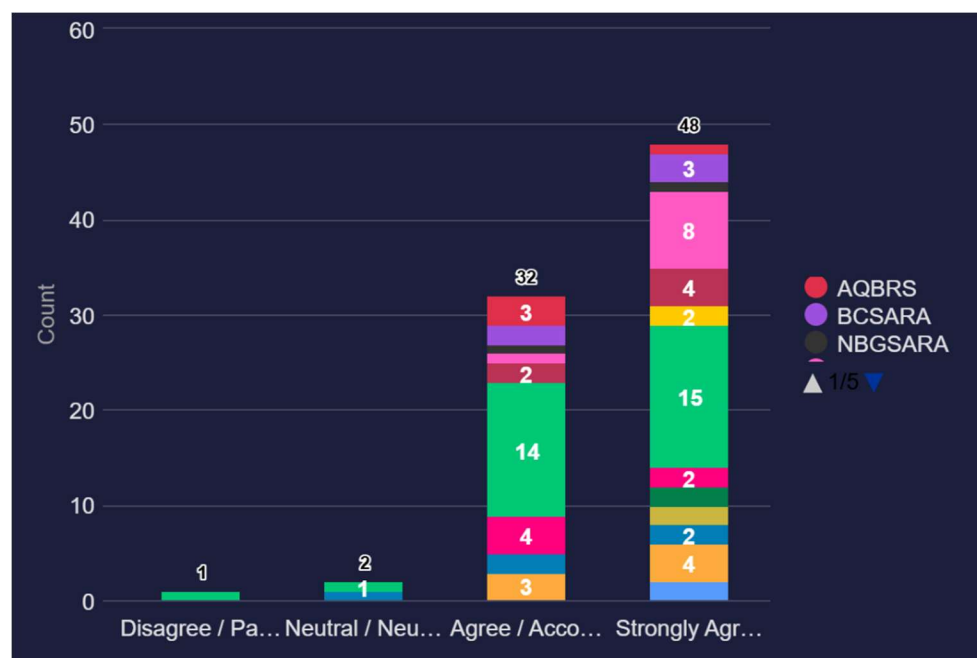
The documentation used in exercise planning and delivery was appropriate.



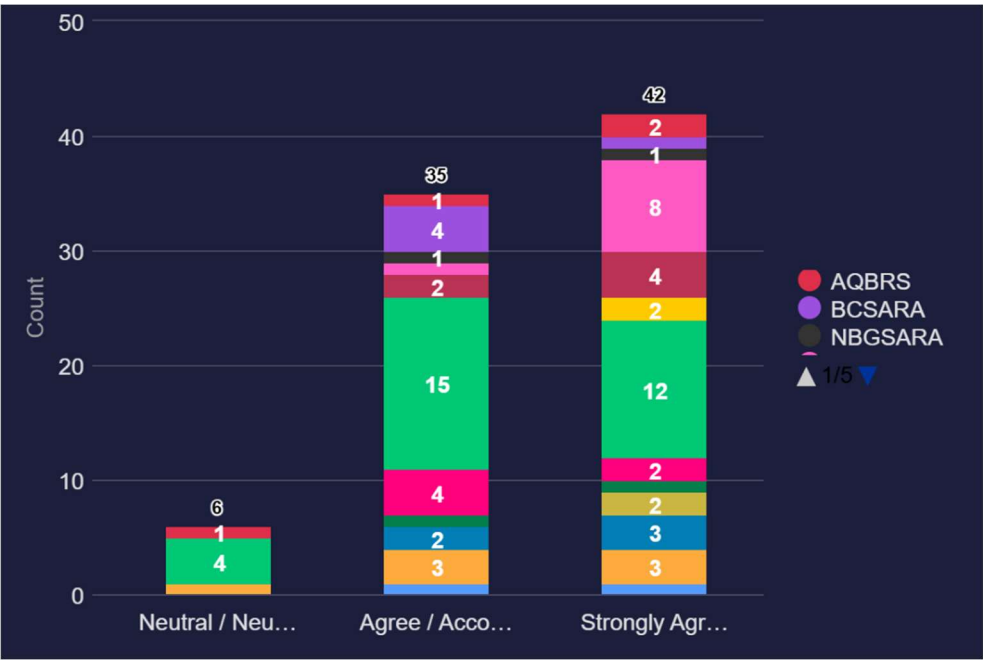
The exercise planning meetings were useful and prepared me for the exercise.



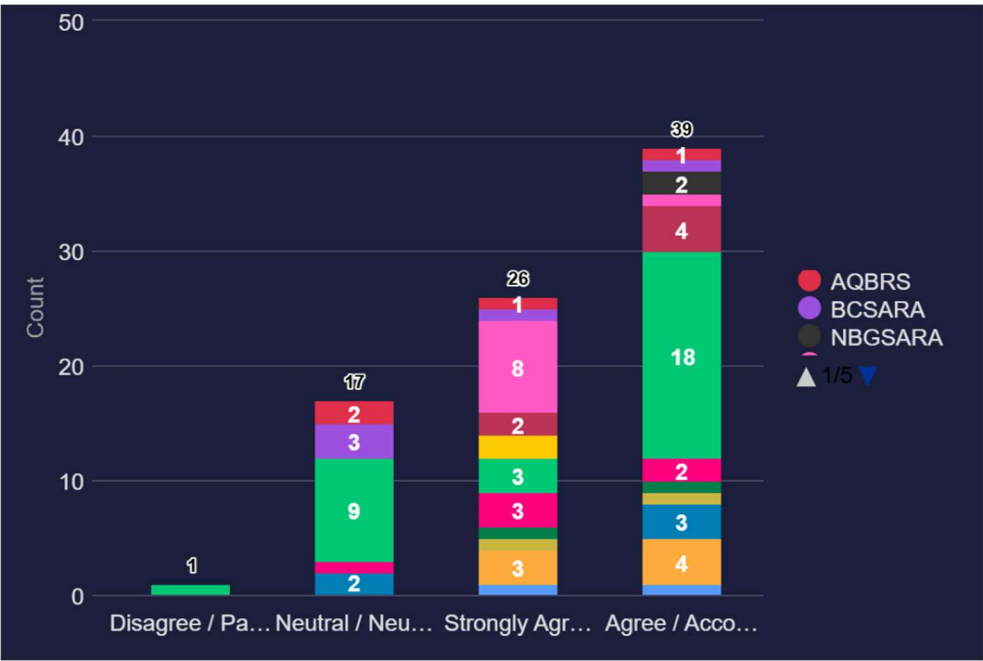
The exercise allowed us to execute our National Search and Rescue Operations Concept.



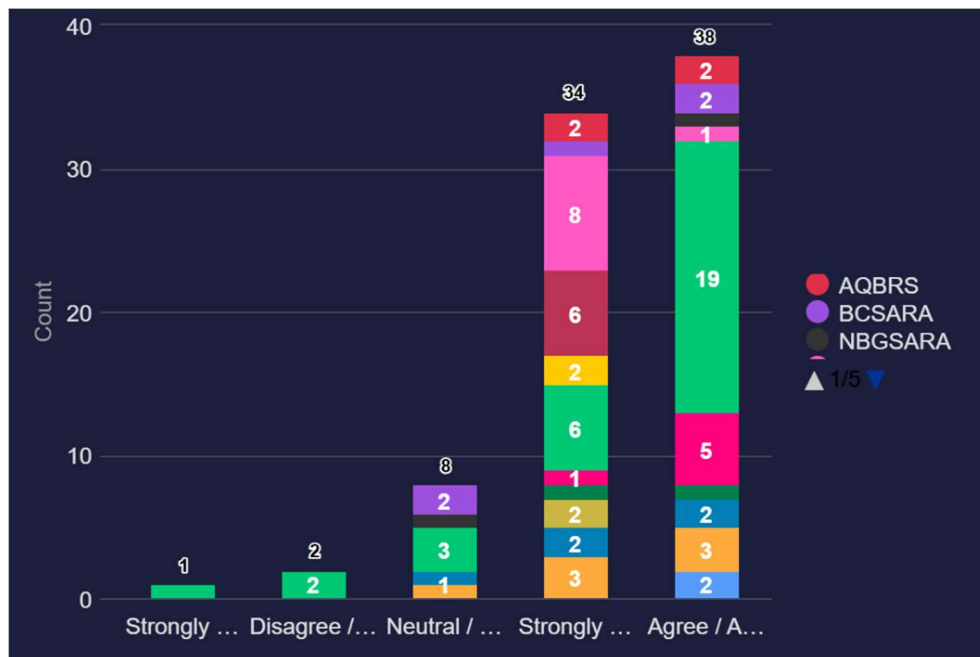
Participation in this exercise was appropriate for someone with my GSAR knowledge, training and experience.



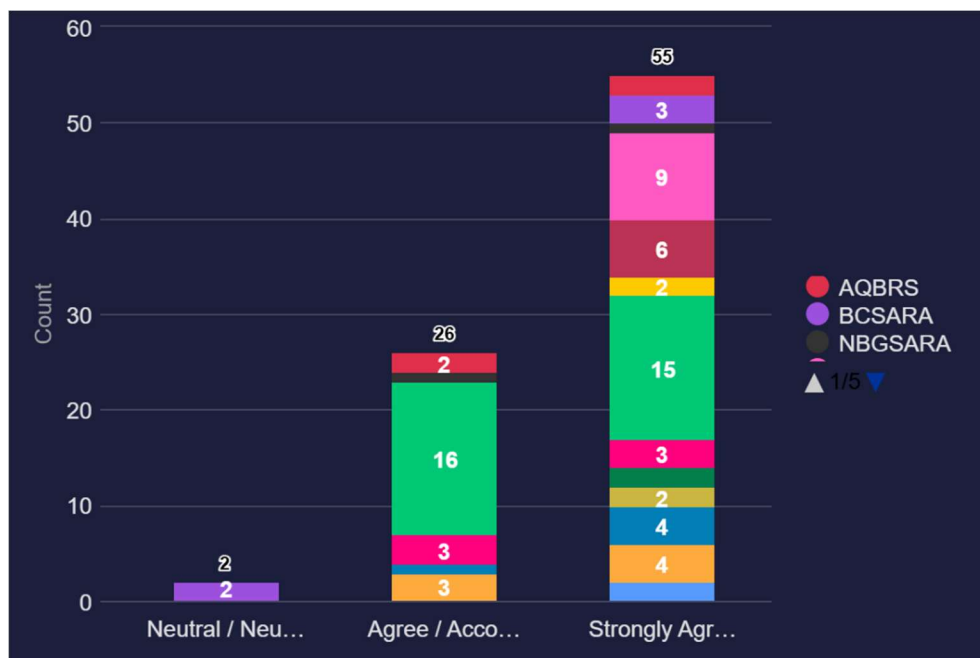
The exercise improved my understanding of my role during the activation of the SARVAC HWF.



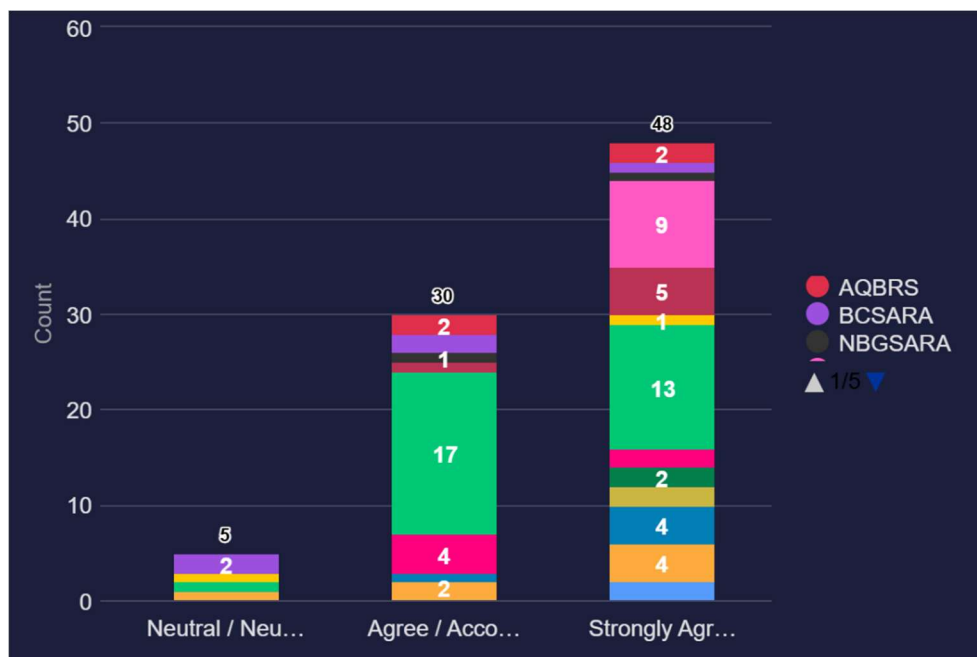
The exercise helped me identify some of my strength and weaknesses in my understanding of the SARVAC HWF.



I feel better prepared to deploy as an HWF Responder under the SARVAC HWF.



I would be happy to participate in another SARVAC HWF National Exercise.



I would like to participate in more SARVAC HWF exercising and training at the P/T level.

APPENDIX 4 – GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

AAR	After Action Report
EMGOSAR	Emergency Management Governance for Ground Search and Rescue
EndEx	The exercise has ended
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FSX	Full Scale Exercise
GSAR	Ground Search and Rescue
HSEEP	Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program
HWF	Humanitarian Workforce
IAP	Incident Action Plan / Improvement Action Plan
ICS	Incident Command System
MIST	Mission Incident Support Team
MRG	Mission Ready Group
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NIST	National Incident Support Team
NSOC	National Search and Rescue Operations Concept
PauseEx	The exercise has been paused
P/T	Provincial or Territorial
RC	Response Coordinator
ResumeEx	The exercise has resumed
RFA	Request for Federal Assistance
SARVAC	Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
StartEx	The exercise has started