

ICS-200: Applying ICS to Healthcare Organizations

Lesson 3: Functional Areas and Positions

Lesson Overview

The **Functional Areas & Positions** lesson introduces you to ICS and organizational components, command staff, expanding incidents, and general staff.

Lesson 3 Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the functional areas and positions within an ICS organizational structure.
- Describe how ICS is used to manage expanding incidents.

Incident Commander

The Incident Commander performs **all** major ICS Command and General Staff responsibilities unless these functions are activated.

The Command Staff positions include Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. General Staff positions include Sections Chiefs associated with the Operations, Logistics, Planning, and Finance/Administration Sections.

Upon arriving at an incident, the highest ranking and/or the most qualified person will either assume command, maintain command as is, or reassign command to a third party. This does not mean that the highest ranking person (e.g. the Director or CEO) needs to assume the role of Incident Commander. In ICS, the Director or CEO can assume the role of Agency Executive, Incident Commander, or neither. ICS roles are assumed by those individuals most qualified for the position. The Incident Commander reports incident progress to the Agency Executive, who continues to run the day-to-day administrative affairs of the organization.

The Incident Commander:

- Has overall incident management responsibility delegated by the Agency Executive.
- Develops the objectives that guide incident response and recovery efforts.
- Approves the Incident Action Plan and all requests pertaining to the ordering and releasing of incident resources.

Command Staff

The Command Staff is only activated in response to the needs of the incident. Command Staff includes the following positions:

- Public Information Officer.
- Liaison Officer.
- Safety Officer.

Command Staff carry out staff functions needed to support the Incident Commander. These functions include interagency liaison, incident safety, and public information. The following Command Staff positions are established to assign responsibility for key activities not specifically identified in the General Staff functional elements.

Public Information Officer (PIO)

The PIO is responsible for interfacing with the public and media and/or with other agencies and organizations with incident-related information requirements. The PIO develops accurate and complete information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest for both internal and external consumption. The PIO may also perform a key public information-monitoring role.

Only one incident PIO should be designated. Assistants may be assigned from other agencies or departments involved. The Incident Commander must approve the release of all incident-related information.

Safety Officer (SO)

The SO monitors incident operations and advises the Incident Commander on all matters relating to operational safety, including the health and safety of emergency responder personnel. The ultimate responsibility for the safe conduct of incident management operations rests with the Incident Commander or Unified Command and supervisors at all levels of incident management. The SO is, in turn, responsible to the Incident Commander for the set of systems and procedures necessary to ensure ongoing assessment of hazardous environments, coordination of multiagency safety efforts, and implementation of measures to promote emergency responder safety, as well as the general safety of incident operations. The SO has emergency authority to stop and/or prevent unsafe acts during incident operations. In a Unified Command structure, a single SO should be designated, in spite of the fact that multiple jurisdictions and/or functional agencies/organizations may be involved. The SO must also ensure the coordination of safety management functions and issues across jurisdictions, across functional agencies, and with private-sector and nongovernmental organizations.

Liaison Officer (LNO)

The LNO is the point of contact for representatives of other non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, and/or private entities. In either a Single or Unified Command structure, representatives from assisting or cooperating agencies and organizations coordinate through the LNO. Agency and/or organizational representatives assigned to an incident must have the authority to speak for their parent agencies and/or organizations on all matters, following appropriate consultations with their organization's leadership. Assistants and personnel from

other agencies or organizations (public or private) involved in incident management activities may be assigned to the LNO to facilitate coordination.

Deputies

Deputies may be assigned at the Incident Command, Section, or Branch levels. The only ICS requirement regarding the use of a Deputy is that the Deputy must be fully qualified and equally capable to assume the position.

The two primary functions of a Deputy include:

- Performing specific tasks as requested by the Incident Commander, Section Chief, or Branch Director.
- Performing ICS functions in a relief capacity (e.g., to take over the next operational period). In this case, the Deputy would assume the primary role.

Like Command and General Staff positions, Deputies should only be assigned when needed. Remember that the ICS organizational structure should expand relative to incident needs.

Cooperating and Assisting Agencies

For large incidents, other organizations or agencies can assist with the incident response efforts in different capacities.

Assisting Agencies are agencies or organizations that provide personnel, services, or other resources to the organization with **direct responsibility for the incident management**.

Cooperating Agencies are organizations that **supply assistance other than direct operational or support functions and resources** to the incident management effort.

For example, hospitals and healthcare systems from areas outside of a region impacted by an incident may send medical personnel and supplies to help treat incident victims. They are serving as cooperating agencies. They are offering assistance, but are not responsible for incident response.

Agency Representative

An Agency Representative is an individual who speaks on behalf of an assisting or cooperating agency or organization to other entities involved with the same incident. Agency Representatives work through the Liaison Officer of the other agency's ICS structure. For example, a healthcare organization's Agency Representative would make contact with the Liaison Officer of the local government's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to communicate information and requests to the local government, as well as make decisions on matters affecting the healthcare organization's participation in the incident.

Assistants

In a large or complex incident, Command Staff members may need one or more Assistants to help manage their workloads. Each Command Staff member is responsible for organizing his or her Assistants for maximum efficiency. Assistants are subordinates of principle Command Staff positions.

As the title indicates, Assistants should have a level of technical capability, qualifications, and responsibility subordinate to the primary positions.

Assistants may also be assigned to Unit Leaders.

Expanding Incidents

An incident may start small and then expand. As the incident grows in scope and the number of resources needed increases, there may be a need to activate Teams, Divisions, Groups, Branches, or Sections to maintain an appropriate span of control.

The ability to delegate the supervision of resources not only frees up the Incident Commander to perform critical decisionmaking and evaluation duties, but also clearly defines the lines of communication to everyone involved in the incident.

Next, we'll review the major organizational elements that may be activated during an expanding incident.

Operations Section

The Operations Section:

- Directs and coordinates all incident tactical operations.
- Is typically one of the first organizations to be assigned to the incident.
- Expands from the bottom up.
- Has the most incident resources.
- Controls staging areas for personnel, equipment, and vehicles.

Operations Section Chief

The Operations Section Chief:

- Is responsible to the Incident Commander for the direct management of all incident-related operational activities.
- Establishes tactical objectives for each operational period.
- Has direct involvement in the preparation of the Incident Action Plan.

The Operations Section Chief may have one or more Deputies assigned.

Operations Section: Staging Areas

Staging Areas are set up at the incident where resources can wait for a tactical assignment. Staging areas can be designated for personnel, equipment and/or vehicles. In healthcare organizations, the term Labor Pool is essentially a staging area for personnel.

Incident resources can have one of three types of status conditions: Assigned, Available, or Out-of-Service. Resources in a Staging Area are available and ready for assignment. Resources in an Out-of-Service status (e.g. resting, eating) are NOT located at the Staging Area.

Staging Areas: Chain of Command

After a Staging Area has been designated and named, a Staging Area Manager will be assigned. The Staging Area Manager will report to the Operations Section Chief or to the Incident Commander if the Operations Section Chief has not been designated.

Divisions and Groups

Divisions are established to divide an incident into physical or geographical areas of operation.

Groups are established to divide the incident into functional areas of operation.

Groups may be assigned across geographical areas when a functional activity crosses divisional lines.

For example, a Damage Assessment Task Force, reporting to the Infrastructure Group Leader, could work across divisions established to manage two distinct areas of the hospital that had been damaged - the west side of the building (West Division) and the north side (North Division).

In any organization in which combined Divisions and Groups are used, it is important that the supervisors establish and maintain close communications and coordination. Each will have equal authority; neither supervisor will be subordinate to the other.

Branches

Branches have functional or geographical responsibility for major parts of incident operations. Branches can be used to combine functional Groups and geographic Divisions, or when the number of resources, Groups, or Divisions exceeds the recommended span of control (one supervisor to three to seven subordinates) for the Operations Section Chief. Branches are identified by Roman numerals or functional name, and are managed by a Branch Director.

Planning Section

The Planning Section has responsibility for:

- Maintaining resource status.
- Maintaining and displaying situation status.
- Preparing the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- Developing alternative strategies.
- Providing documentation services.
- Preparing the Demobilization Plan.
- Providing a primary location for Technical Specialists assigned to an incident.

One of the most important functions of the Planning Section is to look beyond the current and next operational period and anticipate potential problems or events.

Information and Intelligence

The Planning Section is typically responsible for gathering and disseminating information and intelligence critical to the incident. Based on the incident needs, the Information and Intelligence function may be activated as a fifth General Staff section, as an element within the Operations or Planning Sections, or as part of the Command Staff.

The analysis and sharing of information and intelligence are important elements of ICS.

In this context, intelligence includes not only national security or other types of classified information but also other operational information, such as risk assessments, medical intelligence (i.e., surveillance), weather information, geospatial data, structural designs, toxic contaminant levels, and utilities and public works data, that may come from a variety of different sources.

Traditionally, information and intelligence functions are located in the Planning Section.

However, in exceptional situations, the Incident Commander may need to assign the information and intelligence functions to other parts of the ICS organization. In any case, information and intelligence must be appropriately analyzed and shared with personnel, designated by the Incident Commander, who have proper clearance and a "need-to-know" to ensure that they support decisionmaking.

The information and intelligence function may be organized in one of the following ways:

- **Within the Command Staff.** This option may be most appropriate in incidents with little need for tactical or classified intelligence and in which incident-related intelligence is provided by supporting Agency Representatives, through real-time reach-back capabilities.

- **As a Unit Within the Planning Section.** This option may be most appropriate in an incident with some need for tactical intelligence and when no law enforcement entity is a member of the Unified Command.
- **As a Branch Within the Operations Section.** This option may be most appropriate in incidents with a high need for tactical intelligence (particularly classified intelligence) and when law enforcement is a member of the Unified Command.
- **As a Separate General Staff Section.** This option may be most appropriate when an incident is heavily influenced by intelligence factors or when there is a need to manage and/or analyze a large volume of classified or highly sensitive intelligence or information. This option is particularly relevant to a terrorism incident, for which intelligence plays a crucial role throughout the incident life cycle.

Regardless of how it is organized, the information and intelligence function is also responsible for developing, conducting, and managing information-related security plans and operations as directed by the Incident Action Plan.

These can include information security and operational security activities, as well as the complex task of ensuring that sensitive information of all types (e.g., classified information, sensitive law enforcement information, proprietary and personal information, or export-controlled information) is handled in a way that not only safeguards the information but also ensures that it gets to those who need access to it so that they can effectively and safely conduct their missions.

The information and intelligence function also has the responsibility for coordinating information- and operational-security matters with public awareness activities that fall under the responsibility of the Public Information Officer, particularly where such public awareness activities may affect information or operations security.

Planning Section Key Personnel

The Planning Section will have a Planning Section Chief. The Planning Section Chief may have a Deputy.

Technical Specialists are advisors with special skills required at the incident. Traditional ICS principles have Technical Specialists initially reporting to the Planning Section, and working within that Section, or reassigned to another part of the organization. Technical Specialists can be in any discipline required (e.g., epidemiology, infection control, chemical-biological-nuclear agents, etc.).

Planning Section Units

The major responsibilities of Planning Units are:

- **Resources Unit:** Responsible for all check-in activity and for maintaining the status on all personnel and equipment resources assigned to the incident.

- **Situation Unit:** Collects and processes information on the current situation, prepares situation displays and situation summaries, develops maps and projections.
- **Documentation Unit:** Prepares the Incident Action Plan, maintains all incident-related documentation, and provides duplication services.
- **Demobilization Unit:** On large, complex incidents, the Demobilization Unit will assist in ensuring that an orderly, safe, and cost-effective movement of personnel is made when they are no longer required at the incident.

Logistics Section

Early recognition of the need for a Logistics Section can increase effectiveness and efficiency of incident operations. The Logistics Section is responsible for all support requirements, including:

- Communications.
- Medical support to incident personnel.
- Food for incident personnel.
- Supplies, facilities, and ground support.

It is important to remember that Logistics Unit functions are geared to **supporting personnel and resources directly assigned to the incident**. One area of confusion is the Facilities Unit. The purpose of this Unit is to provide facilities in support of the incident, such as space for the Incident Command Post or a location for a vehicle Staging Area, portable toilets, tentage for outdoor areas, and so on. The Facilities Unit is not responsible for day-to-day facility maintenance.

Logistics Section: Service Branch

The Service Branch may be made up of the following units:

- The **Communications Unit** is responsible for developing plans for the effective use of incident communications equipment and facilities, installing and testing of communications equipment, distribution of communications equipment to incident personnel, and the maintenance and repair of communications equipment.
- The **Medical Unit** in an ICS applied to healthcare organizations would be responsible for providing medical screening, evaluation and follow-up of employees who are assigned to an incident.
- The **Food Unit** is responsible for supplying the food needs for the entire incident, including all remote locations (e.g., Staging Areas), as well as providing food for personnel unable to leave tactical field assignments.

Logistics Section: Support Branch

The Support Branch within the Logistics Section may include the following units:

- The **Supply Unit** is responsible for ordering personnel, equipment, and supplies; receiving and storing all supplies for the incident; maintaining an inventory of supplies; and servicing nonexpendable supplies and equipment.
- The **Facilities Unit** is responsible for the layout and activation of incident facilities (e.g., Staging Areas and the Incident Command Post (ICP)). The Facilities Unit Leader provides sleeping and sanitation facilities for incident personnel, if needed.
- The **Ground Support Unit** is responsible for supporting out-of-service resources; transporting personnel, supplies, food, and equipment; fueling, service, maintenance, and repair of vehicles and other ground support equipment.

Finance/Administration Section

The Finance/Administration Section:

- Is established when incident management activities require finance and other administrative support services.
- Handles claims related to property damage, injuries, or fatalities at the incident.

Not all incidents will require a separate Finance/Administration Section. If only one specific function is needed (e.g., cost analysis), a Technical Specialist assigned to the Planning Section could provide these services.

Finance/Administration Units

Finance/Administration Units include the following:

- The **Time Unit** is responsible for equipment and personnel time recording.
- The **Procurement Unit** is responsible for administering all financial matters pertaining to vendor contracts, leases, and fiscal agreements.
- The **Compensation/Claims Unit** is responsible for financial concerns resulting from property damage, injuries, or fatalities at the incident.
- The **Cost Unit** is responsible for tracking costs, analyzing cost data, making cost estimates, and recommending cost-saving measures.

Lesson Review

You have completed the **Functional Areas and Positions** lesson. You should now be able to:

- Describe the functions of organizational positions within the Incident Command System (ICS).
- Describe how ICS is used to manage expanding incidents.

The next lesson will discuss how leadership and management are integral to ICS.