



From Command to Collaboration: Advancing Emergency Management Through the Incident Support Model

Facilitated by



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Introduction



Certified SBA WOSB

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB) certified firm established in 2018.

Full-Spectrum Emergency Management.

ACDC is a leading provider of consulting services across all phases of the emergency management cycle, bringing diverse, nationally recognized experience to private and public clients under our mission of staying *competent, caring, and connected.*

Seasoned Team of National Experts.

Emergency management leaders and subject matter experts with diverse, multi-sector experience, including two former State Emergency Management Directors (OR + VT). Our experienced professionals have been a part of the fabric and culture of emergency management for nearly 30 years, proudly supporting programs for some of the most challenging natural disasters and catastrophic events.

Facilitators



Erica Bornemann, MPA

VICE PRESIDENT, PLANNING + RISK REDUCTION (PARR)

- **Former Director of Emergency Management for the State of Vermont**
- Served at the Vermont State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during 27 Federally declared disasters, including seven declared disasters as Director including the pandemic.
- Extensive background in Risk Reduction, Preparedness, Climate Adaptation, and Resilience policies, programs, and related affairs.
- Served as President of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) (2021-2022).
- Current Private Sector Committee Chair for NEMA.

Liz Rowell, MPH

SENIOR CONSULTANT, PARR

- Served as the Planning Section Chief for Vermont Emergency Management
- EOC and Incident Command Structure (ICS) background through on-scene tactical operations through her many years as a Paramedic Crew Chief for Charleston County.
- Extensive experience in emergency preparedness and management, plan development, and pandemic response
- Expertise in all hazard planning activities including training and full-scale exercises.



What's at Stake?

IN DISASTER, COMMUNICATION CAN SAVE LIVES – OR COST THEM.

“EOC was largely ineffective at maintaining a common operating picture and situational awareness among the critical locations/functions of the County EOC, various DOCs, and involved cities.”

- After Action Review of the Woolsey Fire Incident



Quick Poll!



Who here is a current or former first responder?



Who has served in the military?



Who has worked in an Emergency Operations Center?



**Who has worked in an EOC using
the Incident Support Model?**



**Who has experienced a
communication breakdown during
a response?**



What are some characteristics of effective EOCs?



Where Did Incident Command Structure (ICS) Come From?



Origins of ICS

- **Brief history:**
 - Established 1970 after Southern California experienced 773 wildfires within 13 days¹.
 - This system was initially known as the Field Command Operations System.
 - Limited adoption in the early days.
 - Wasn't until the aftermath of 9/11 and President Bush's issuing of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 that the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and, ultimately ICS, became the **consistent nationwide system**.
- **ICS and ICS-like structures in EOCs, place emphasis on command/control, tactical deployment, and on-scene chain of command.**
- **Best designed for on-scene incident management, often not promoting situational awareness and information sharing.**

ICS in the EOC – Square Peg, Round Hole



How the ICS-like structure was adopted in EOCs:

- Originally, this structure was utilized within EOCs because it was most familiar to emergency management workers.
- Training began in the 1980's and 1990's on ICS, offered through both FEMA and the National Fire Academy.



Real Consequences

START DATE: November 8, 2018

LOCATION: Ventura + Los Angeles Counties, CA

CAUSE: Faulty Southern California Edison equipment

AREA BURNED: 96,949 acres (approx. 151 square miles)

STRUCTURES DESTROYED / DAMAGED: 1,643 / 364

FATALITIES: 3 Civilians

INJURIES: 2 Civilians, 3 Firefighters

EVACUATIONS: 295K+ People

ESTIMATED DAMAGES: \$6B (2018 USD)





The Incident Support Model (ISM)



Origins of ISM

- **FEMA introduced the ISM in 2017**
 - Part of the NIMS Refresher and the EOC How-to Quick Reference Guide.
- **ISM evolved from challenges experienced utilizing the ICS-like Structure.**
- **Challenges included:**

1

Role confusion
between command
and coordination.

2

Absence of
centralized situational
awareness.

3

Duplication of efforts
in both resource
support and planning.

4

Inefficiency during
large or complex
incidents.



What is the ISM? Key traits...

- Strategic support over tactical command.
- **Improves situational awareness** through a dedicated section and tools to **promote information flow** and decision support.
- The Planning Section is focused on both **current and future operations**.
- EOC Manager receives packaged plans, not just raw data.
- **Enhances coordination across agencies** by focusing on support functions that unify efforts.
- **Scalable and Flexible Framework**
 - Easily adapts to incidents of varying complexity.
 - Can integrate non-traditional partners (e.g., Non-governmental Organizations (NGO), utilities, private sector).



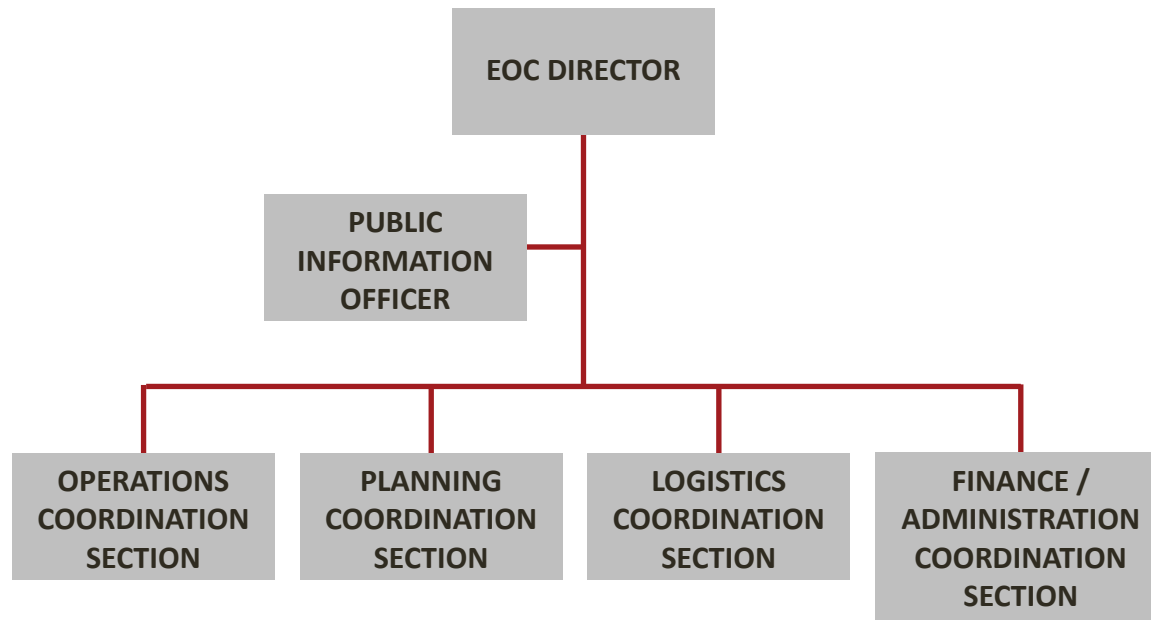
Core Comparison: ICS-like EOC vs ISM

Command vs. Control

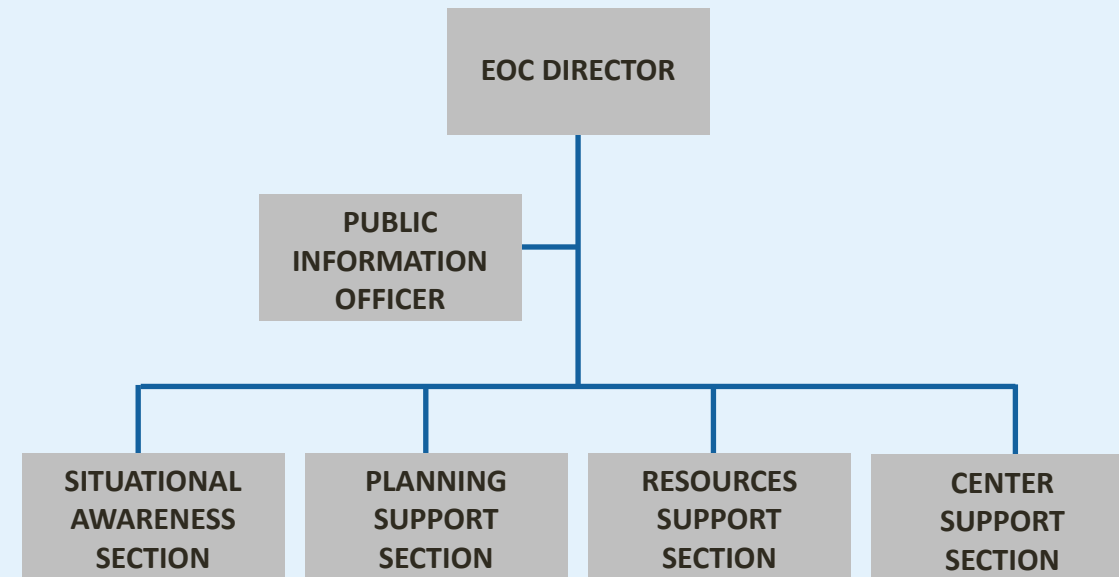


ICS is like a Bodega | ISM is like a Costco

ICS vs. ISM Organizational Chart



ICS



ISM

How ISM Enhances Communication Through the Situational Awareness Section (SAS)



**Dedicated Situational Awareness Unit
=
Streamlined Information In + Out**

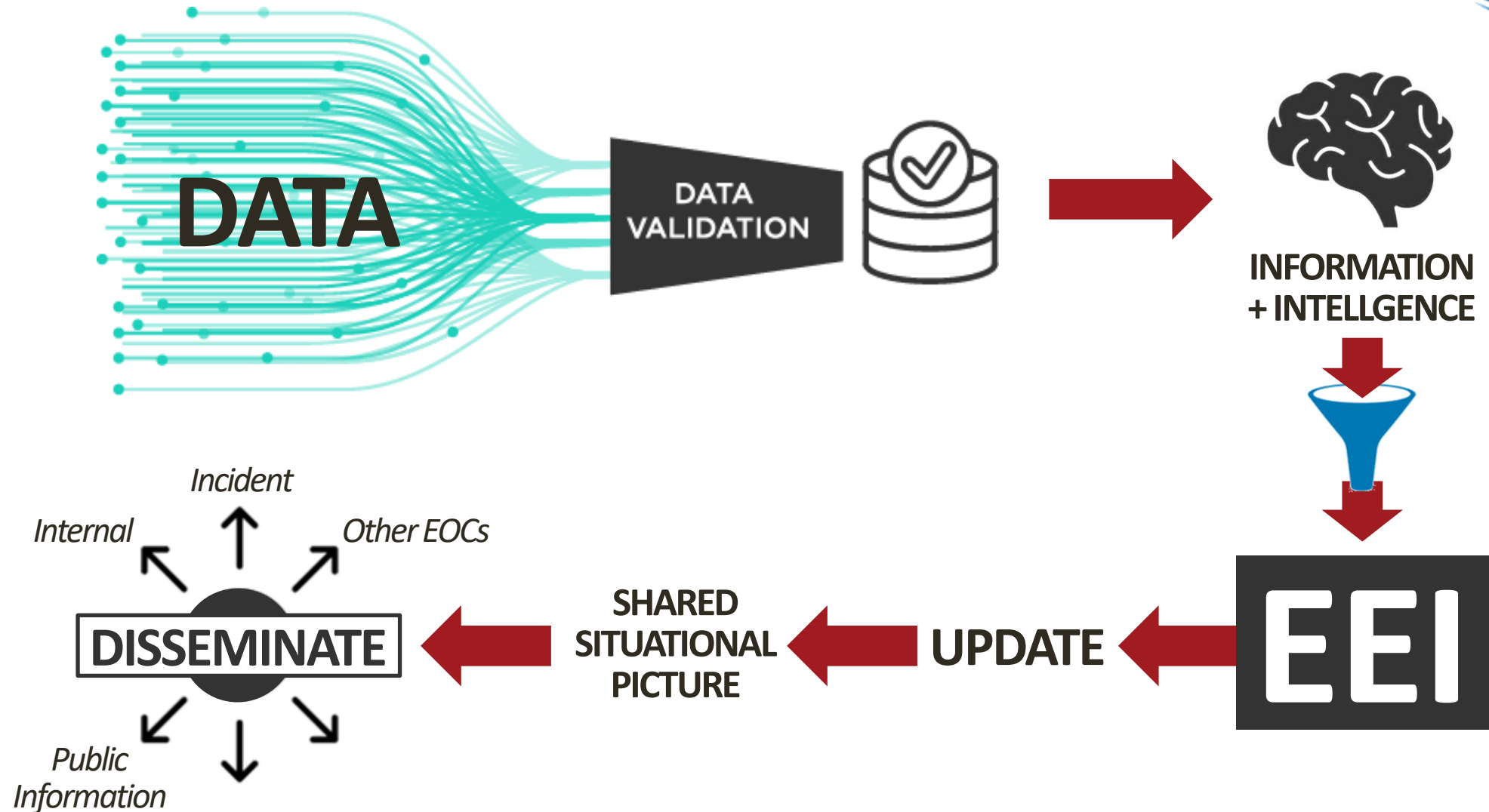
- **Core Responsibilities:**

- Maintaining Common Operations Picture.
- Information Collection and Dissemination.
- Support to Decision Makers
- Collaboration and Integration

- **How is that different from the Planning Section in ICS-like EOCs?**



ISM and Real-Time Feedback Loops





Collaboration Through Structure

- **Consolidates Resource Support and Logistics.**
 - ESFs can focus on providing resources and support to the incident rather than having to support the EOC itself.
 - EOC functionality is maintained through a dedicated Center Support Section.
 - Absence of independent Logistics section leads to faster resource allocation and more unified tracking.
- **Maximizes Communications through a dedicated Situational Awareness Section (SAS) and Planning Section.**
 - ESF leads, or partner organizations, provide real-time input directly to SAS through specific Elements of Essential Information (EEI) and raw data that can be further analyzed for accuracy.
 - The Planning Section can focus on future and demobilization planning, lead the development of the IAP, and facilitate the Planning Cycle.
- **Partners who provide real-time information in the SAS:**
 - National Weather Service
 - Power Providers
 - Phone Providers



ISM In Action: Vermont COVID-19 Response



SUCCESS STORY:

Vermont State EOC & the COVID Response

Mission and Resource Support Section

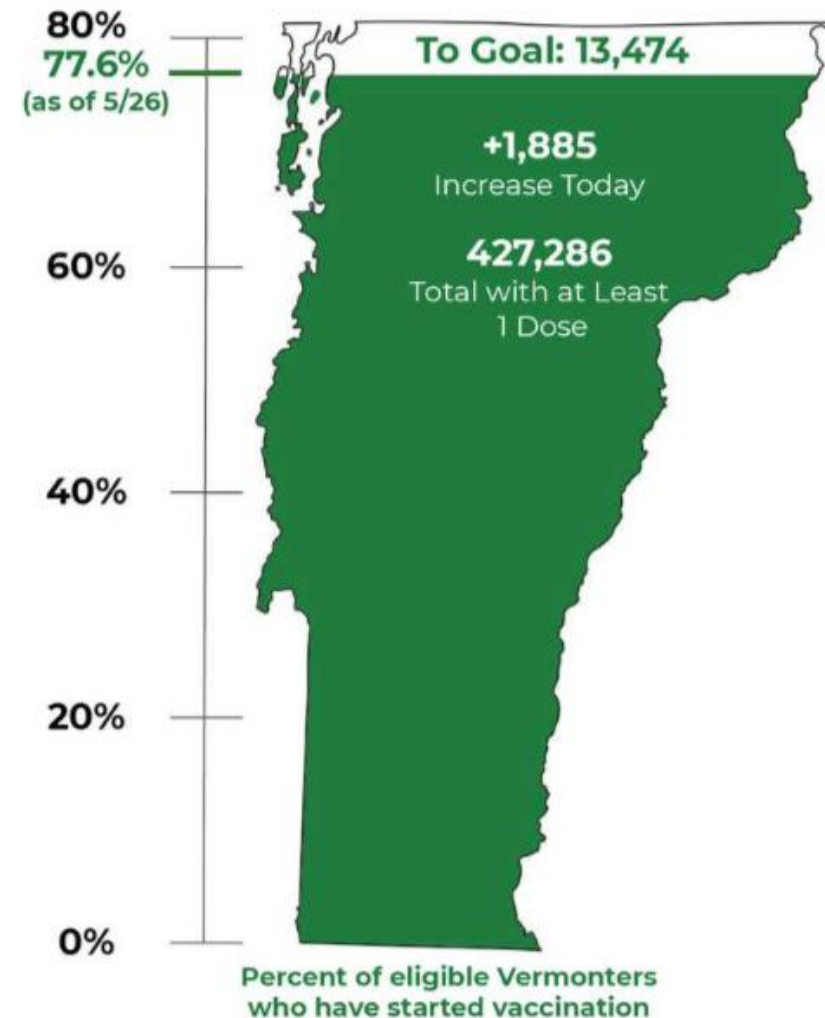
- Centralized resource tracking, mission requests, fulfillment, and coordination with logistics and finance.

Situational Awareness Section

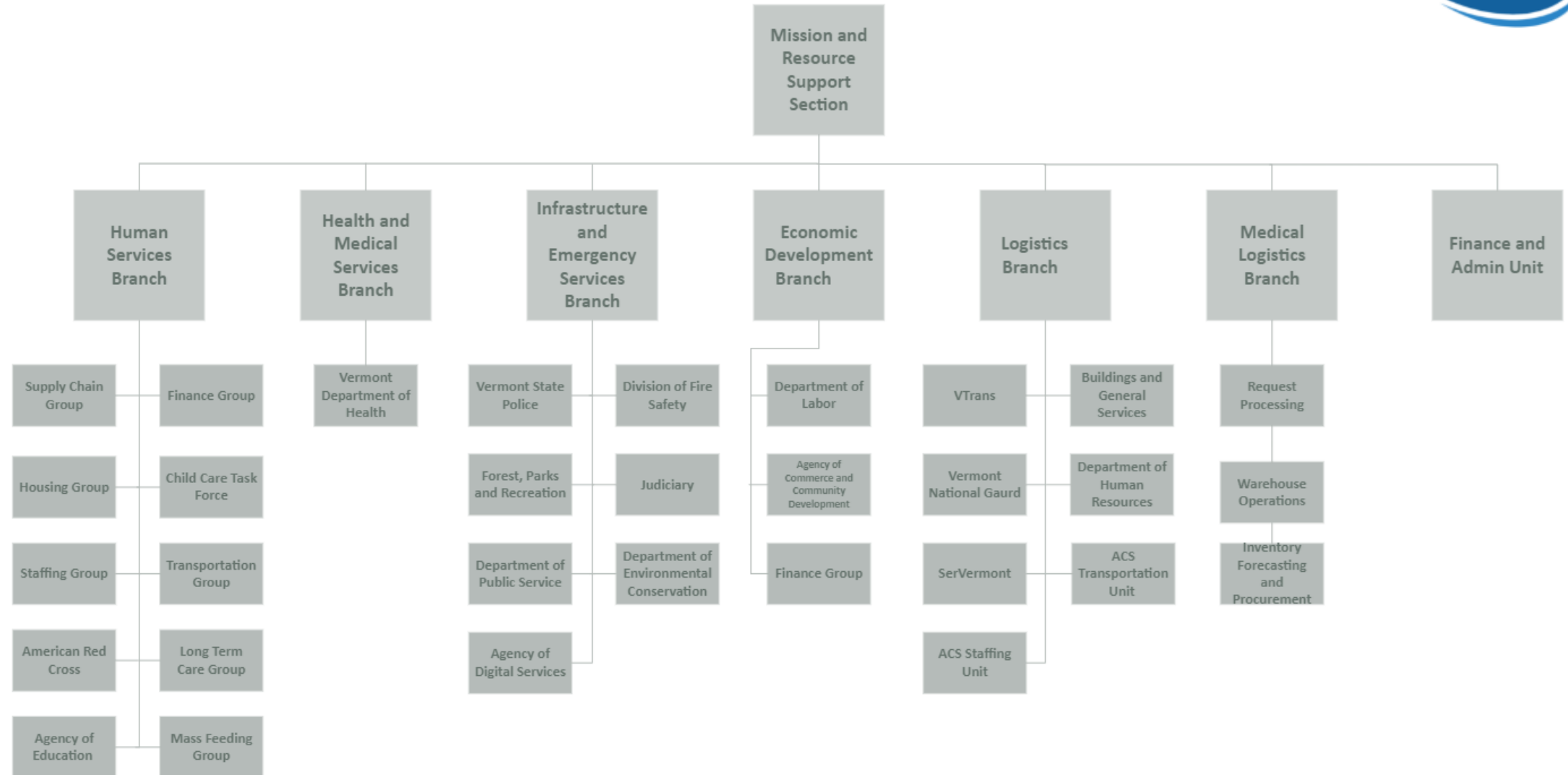
- Dedicated team focused on real-time data collection and reporting.

Flexible Branch & Group Creation

- Easily added branches for key missions like vaccination, testing, and vulnerable populations.



VT Mission and Resource Section





Activity



A stalled weather system has caused heavy rainfall for the last 48 hours. Rivers are nearing flood stages, and low-lying areas are experiencing flash flooding.

Your EOC is activating...



Discussion 1: Situational Awareness Support

Multiple towns are reporting rising water levels. The EOC is receiving conflicting reports from field responders and social media is showing images of impassable roads.



Discussion 2: Planning Support

The EOC Manager requests a 30-minute briefing and wants to know if shelters will be needed and where to open them.



Discussion 3: Resource Support

The EOC is receiving multiple requests from local municipalities for assistance. These requests are coming in from multiple channels.



Making the Case: ISM Builds Trust, Clarity, and Speed



Why it Works

1

Clear Role: Support, Not Command

Positions the EOC to support on-scene operations, not control them, reducing confusion over authority and allowing field responders to focus on tactical response.

2

Efficient Information Management

Dedicated units (e.g., Situational Awareness, Planning Support) ensure validated, synthesized information reaches decision-makers quickly, preventing overload and enabling timely action.

3

Faster, Smarter Resource Support

Separates coordination from control, allowing for rapid prioritization and deployment of resources across jurisdictions without unnecessary bottlenecks.

4

Stronger Multi-Agency Collaboration

ISM encourages horizontal coordination and real-time collaboration across partners and sectors, improving trust, transparency, and a unified response.



“So... Now What?”

REFLECTION:

- **Could your EOC benefit from this model?**
 - Not all EOCs are the same, so choosing the right model for your organization is MOST important.
- **Where can you start?**
 - National Qualification System Implementation
 - Stakeholder buy-in
- **What needs to change in your organization to support ISM?**
 - CEMP or EOP rewrite
 - Change to your physical EOC and EOC Guidelines



Questions?



Resources & Contact Info



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