

WS1 Handout 8: School Incident Command System (ICS) Roles and Responsibilities

Five major management functions are the foundation on which the ICS organization is developed:

Incident Command	Sets the incident objectives, strategies, and priorities and has overall responsibility for the incident
Operations	Conducts operations to reach the incident objectives. Establishes the tactics and directs all operational resources.
Planning	Supports the incident action planning process by tracking resources, collecting and analyzing information, and maintaining documentation.
Logistics	Provides resources and needed services to support the achievement of the incident objectives.
Finance & Administration	Monitors costs related to the incident. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analyses.

These functions apply whether the school ICS is handling a routine emergency, organizing for a major nonemergency event, or managing a response to a major disaster.

Incident Commander

Who is the incident commander?

The incident commander has overall responsibility for managing the incident by establishing objectives, planning strategies, and implementing tactics.

The **incident commander is the only position that is always staffed in ICS applications**. On small incidents and events, one person, the incident commander, may accomplish all management functions.

The incident commander is responsible for all ICS management functions until he or she delegates the function. In a school building, the incident commander is typically either the building principal or assistant principal. Depending on the incident, it can be any staff member that has the knowledge and experience to manage the crisis. For example, a school nurse may be incident commander when a student has a medical emergency in the building. Rank, grade, and seniority are not the factors used to select the incident commander. The incident commander is always a highly qualified individual trained to lead the incident response!

The incident commander may delegate authority for performance of certain activities to the command staff (public information, safety, liaison, mental health officers) and/or the general staff (operations, logistics, planning, and finance chiefs). The incident commander adds positions only as needed.

What is the incident commander responsible for?

- Ensuring incident safety.
- Providing information services to internal and external stakeholders.
- Establishing and maintaining liaison with other agencies participating in the incident.

Command Staff

What is the command staff?

The command staff are specific individuals to whom the incident commander delegates responsibilities during a crisis incident. These individuals report directly to the incident commander. Under the ICS model that is created by the Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA), three command staff positions are created: public information officer (PIO), safety officer, and liaison officer. NASP recommends an additional position on the ICS called the mental health officer. The responsibilities of each command staff member are described below:

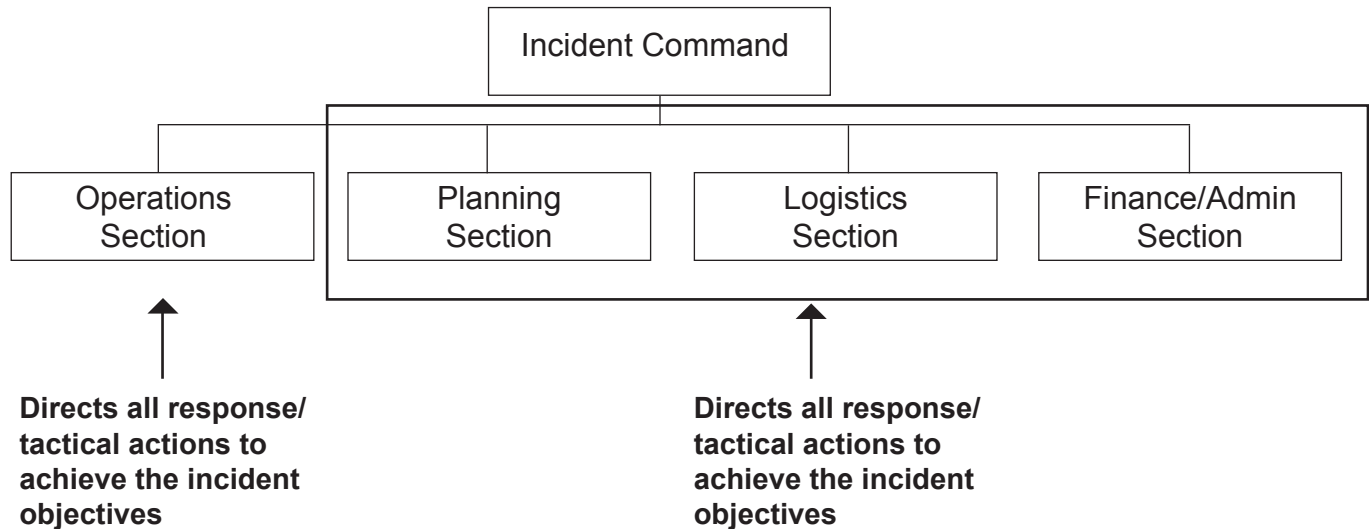
- *Public information officer.* Serves as the conduit for information to internal and external stakeholders, including the media or parents.
- *Safety officer.* Monitors safety conditions and develops measures for ensuring the safety of all response personnel.
- *Liaison officer.* Serves as the primary contact for agencies assisting at an incident.
- *Mental health officer.* Monitors mental health conditions and coordinates the mental health response of all response personnel. Mental health responsibilities may be transferred from the operations section chief to the mental health officer during long-term recovery efforts after the initial crisis response has been stabilized.

What are potential command staff qualifications?

Incident Commander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority to commit school resources • Past experience as incident responder • Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take command ▪ Balance response initiatives with safety concerns ▪ Motivate responders ▪ Communicate clear directions ▪ Size up the situation and make rapid decisions ▪ Assess the effectiveness of tactics and strategies ▪ Be flexible and modify plans as necessary
Public Information Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media relations training and experience • Authority as designated spokesperson • Ability to maintain composure in challenging situations under fire
Safety Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker safety and hazardous material (hazmat) training and experience • Ability to assess risk and develop safety measures
Liaison Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to represent the concerns and needs of all parties involved in a response
Mental Health Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed or certified as a mental health provider • Ability to assess response personnel's potential inability to perform his or her duties due to mental-health-related issues.

General Staff

In an expanding incident, the Incident Command first establishes the Operations Section. The remaining sections are established as needed to support the operation.



Operations Section

Who is the operations section chief?

The Operations Section chief is the person with the greatest technical and tactical expertise in dealing with the problem at hand. In a unified command, there is only one Operations Section chief, who is selected by the responding agencies.

What are the major activities of the operations section chief?

- Develops and implements strategy and tactics to carry out the incident objectives.
- Organizes, assigns, and supervises the response resources.
- Manages staging areas and special organizations.
- Organizes mental health and medical support for crisis victims.

Planning Section

What are the major activities of the Planning Section chief?

- Collecting, evaluating, and displaying incident intelligence and information.
- Preparing and documenting Incident Action Plans.
- Tracking resources assigned to the incident.
- Maintaining incident documentation.
- Developing plans for demobilization.

The Incident Commander will determine if there is a need for a Planning Section, and if so, will designate a Planning Section chief. It is up to the Planning Section chief to activate any additional staffing needed. If no Planning Section is established, the incident commander will perform all planning functions.

Logistics Section

What are the major activities of the Logistics Section chief?

- Ordering, obtaining, maintaining, and accounting for essential personnel, equipment, and supplies.
- Providing communication planning and resources.
- Setting up food services.
- Setting up and maintaining incident facilities.
- Providing support transportation.
- Providing medical services to incident personnel (not injured students).

The Incident Commander will determine if there is a need for a Logistics Section at the incident, and if so, will designate an individual to fill the position of the Logistics Section chief. The Logistic Section chief helps make sure that there are adequate resources (personnel, supplies, and equipment) for meeting the incident objectives. The Logistics and Finance Sections have to work closely together to contract for and purchase goods and services needed at the incident.

Finance Section

The Finance/Administration Section is set up for any incident that requires incident-specific financial management.

What are the major activities of the Finance/Administration Section chief?

- Contract negotiation and monitoring.
- Timekeeping.
- Cost analysis.
- Compensation for injury or damage to property.
- Critical position if the crisis incident qualifies as a federal or state emergency.

Note: On some incidents, the finance and administration function is not done at the incident scene; rather, this function is handled by the school district. The Incident Commander will determine if there is a need for a Finance/Administration Section at the incident, and if so, will designate an individual to fill the position of the Finance/Administration Section chief.

What are potential general staff qualifications?

Operations Section Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past experience as incident responder • Completion of ICS training • Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Size up the situation and make rapid decisions ▪ Communicate clear directions ▪ Balance response initiatives with safety concerns ▪ Lead and motivate responders ▪ Assess the effectiveness of tactics and strategies ▪ Be flexible and modify plans as necessary
Planning Section Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of ICS training • Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organize and analyze information ▪ Write clear, accurate documents ▪ Interpret diagrams and maps ▪ Develop and present briefings ▪ Use computer-based applications including databases and spreadsheets ▪ Direct others in a crisis

Logistics Section Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of ICS training• Knowledge of school logistics (food services, sheltering, transportation, emergency caches, etc.)• Ability to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Organize and prioritize resource requests▪ Anticipate and plan for resource needs▪ Maintain records and documentation▪ Track resource requests▪ Solve resource problems creatively▪ Communicate effectively orally and in writing▪ Direct others in a crisis
Finance/ Administration Section Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of ICS training• Knowledge of workers' compensation, insurance claims, and contracting requirements• Ability to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Keep accurate accounting records▪ Purchase or contract for needed resources▪ Process insurance and workers' compensation claims▪ Communicate effectively orally and in writing▪ Direct others in a crisis

FEMA's Online Training Courses in the National Incident Management System and Incident Command System

Relevant topics

Introduction to ICS for Schools
Introduction to ICS for Higher Education
ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents
NIMS: An Introduction
NIMS Multiagency Coordination System
NIMS Public Information Systems
National Response Framework: An Introduction

For more information on these courses: <http://training.fema.gov/IS/>

Note. Adapted from *IS-100.SCa Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools* by Federal Emergency Management Agency Emergency Management Institute, n.d., Retrieved from <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is100SCalst.asp>. Adapted with permission, Public Domain.