

FAQ for EPCSAR Applicants

Every year we receive many questions about membership. This page includes the most frequently asked questions. Use this page as a first resource to learn about what it takes to become an EPCSAR member.

- 1. How can I join the team?** Learn as much about the team as possible so that you can determine if SAR is realistically what you want to do. Then fill out the application (downloadable from www.epcsar.org) and deliver it before the application deadline. Be informative on the application. Attach additional documentation that may be pertinent.
- 2. When do you accept new members?** We induct new members annually except during years when we recertify with the Mountain Rescue Association (MRA), about every fifth year.
- 3. When is the application deadline?** This is posted on the www.epcsar.org home page. It is normally near the end of the calendar year.
- 4. How can I learn more about the team?** You can browse the www.epcsar.org website and also read this FAQ. But the best way to learn about the team is to come to team meetings and chat with members any time of the year. If you still have questions, email us at membership@epcsar.org.
- 5. When are team meetings?** Team meetings are held at Rescue Base (3950 Interpark Drive) the first and third Wednesdays of every month from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. These meetings are open to the public.
- 6. Is there anything else I need to do before applying?** We strongly recommend that you discuss with your family and employer the possibility of joining SAR, and consider the potential impact on them. Family and employer support is essential.
- 7. What happens after I submit an application?** Your application will be held until the end of the calendar year when the application processing cycle begins. At that time, a background check will be performed. Your application will then be reviewed by a committee. If selected, you will be invited to an interview at Rescue Base. A committee will then make the final selection and the selected applicants will be invited to new member training.
- 8. When is new member training?** New member training usually begins in late February and runs until early May.
- 9. Is it difficult to get on the team?** In most years the team recruits from 8 to 15 new members to maintain the desired staffing level. The entry process is competitive because the number of applicants always exceeds the number of available positions. The process is selective because only those candidates who are capable of performing SAR work are accepted.
- 10. Who will be considered for the team?** All applicants will receive consideration for membership without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or national origin. Applicants must 21 years of age or older. There is no maximum age limit.
- 11. Is there a fitness requirement?** We do expect all new members to be capable of performing in the field. In order to successfully complete the new member training, the applicant should be reasonably fit. Fitness will be tested during new member training.

12. **Are there any health requirements?** Applicants should have no chronic health issues that would preclude performing strenuous activity in demanding, remote environments under adverse conditions.
13. **Do I need to be a U.S. citizen?** No.
14. **Do I need previous experience to join?** No. There is no requirement for previous experience. However, previous experience will be considered and you are encouraged to describe your experiences on the application.
15. **What should I do while I am waiting to join the team? Is there any way to prepare for membership?** Do not go out and buy a lot of gear. Do come to team meetings. Do keep fit by hiking or whatever it is you like to do.
16. **Should I buy equipment before I am accepted on the team?** No. If you are accepted, we will discuss in training what gear is needed. You may have some of the gear already. And you will benefit from seeing what type of gear works well for veteran SAR members.
17. **Can I use personal equipment that I already own?** Yes, if it is appropriate for SAR work.
18. **What kind of person are you looking for to join the team?** First, we look for individuals who share our strong desire to serve the community. We then look for individuals who have the availability and commitment to serve, who are capable of working in demanding environments, who can follow leadership and provide leadership, who will work as a member of a team, who can perform under stress, who are self motivated, who are willing to maintain a high level of skills and fitness, and who are willing to do the non-glamorous work that keeps the team running.
19. **What kind of person do you *not* want on the team?** Individuals who do not have the time to serve, who are uncomfortable working within a team, or who are joining SAR solely for a sense of adventure or personal gain.
20. **Do new members get to fly on helicopters?** Flights on helicopters are rare. This is not a reason to join SAR.
21. **I am an experienced rock climber and this is what I want to do on the team. Is that possible?** We value specific skills that new members bring to the team. However, we need individuals who are willing to support the team in many areas, not just one.
22. **Do I need rock climbing skills to be a member?** No. It should also be noted that, although rock climbing and SAR require many similar skills, these are very different activities.
23. **I may be moving away from the area next year. Is there a minimum commitment you expect from new members?** It is our hope that new members will participate on the team for several years. This is because the team invests a tremendous amount of resources in training new members. If you know you will be relocating within a year or two, please do not apply.
24. **Is it expensive to be on the team?** There is a fee to begin the new member training to help cover training material costs. There are no annual dues to be a member, but members must acquire and maintain all personal gear, including equipment, clothing, radios, etc. The initial cost can be several hundred dollars. The costs for members with advanced capabilities are much greater. EPCSAR membership is probably far more expensive than most volunteer opportunities.

25. **How much training time is required for new members?** About 80 hours. The new member training program typically runs from late February through early May. This period is chosen so that new members will be ready to participate in the field when the mission load increases during the summer. New member training sessions are typically held Monday and Wednesday evenings, and Sunday mornings during this period. There may be some variations to this schedule. Participants are expected to attend every training session and also practice some skills at home.
26. **How much training time is required for regular members?** There are 2 evening and 2 weekend trainings each month. These are normally scheduled the first and third Wednesday from 19:00 to 21:00 and the following Sunday from 08:00 to 12:00. There is normally a reduced training schedule in December. This schedule may change depending on training needs. All members are expected to make as much training as possible. Training is an essential part of search and rescue and it is a critical element for safety.
27. **Are there tests for new members?** Yes. Participants in the new member training program are tested during the program and at the end of the program. Physical skills, knowledge, and fitness are tested.
28. **What is the failure rate in new member training?** Because we carefully screen candidates before they are accepted for new member training, and because our instructors are dedicated to the new member's success, the failure rate is low.
29. **How can I be successful in new member training?** The key to successfully completing the program is to attend all sessions, practice certain skills outside of training, ask questions, and become fully engaged in the training.
30. **How much time is required for missions?** The amount of time this requires is difficult to quantify. Missions usually last a minimum of three hours, oftentimes around 6 hours, and occasionally overnight or multi-day. The team responds to about 120 missions or more each year.
31. **Besides missions and training, is there any other time requirement?** Yes. It takes a lot of work to keep the team running and members are required to provide ongoing support in addition to training and missions. This support is performed by participating on a committee. Some of the committees are vehicle, building, training, equipment, preventative search and rescue (PSAR), and others. Committee work is usually flexible in scheduling.
32. **Besides missions, training, and committee work, is there any other time requirement?** Maintaining one's personal gear and maintaining a personal readiness for the next mission is not a small task. It requires time and good organization skills.
33. **I may have some schedule conflicts this year with new member training. Am I required to take every class?** Every prospective new member is required to take all of the new member training classes. If a class is missed, instructors will generally make an effort to provide a make-up opportunity, but this is not always possible. If you know you have schedule conflicts, discuss this during an interview to determine if it can be managed, or if you should apply at a later time.
34. **I was a member of a rescue team before moving to Colorado Springs. Can I become a member of EPCSAR without going through the new member selection and training?** That

depends. If you are an experienced member of a Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) team and you provide letters of recommendation from team officers, then we may fast track you on to the team. However, we may still ask or require you to participate in our new member training so that you can become familiar with our team, its standards and practices, and its members.

35. **What medical experience do you require to apply for membership?** We do not require previous medical experience to apply. We will provide opportunities for you to learn the basic medical skills required of our team members.
36. **I do not like blood and gore. Am I required to perform medical tasks on the team?** Basically, yes. Every member has the potential to be first on scene with a patient, or they may need to aid a teammate. Therefore, every member is required to achieve and maintain First Responder and CPR certifications. Higher levels of medical training are desirable but are not required. Providing medical care is an essential part of SAR work and it is not a suitable activity for everyone. Applicants are encouraged to discuss this with current members and during an interview.
37. **How can I get the First Responder and CPR training?** These basic levels are normally provided by qualified instructors in-house. First Responder training is 40 hours of classroom and skills training. You must recertify every 3 years. CPR (for health care providers) is 4 hours of training and you must recertify every 2 years. Every new member is expected to reach these levels in their first year of membership, and then maintain these levels throughout their SAR career.
38. **You must see a lot of trauma. How do you deal with that?** EPCSAR responds to medical and trauma cases, and sometimes death, including suicide. Members do encounter stressful incidents on missions. We are proactive on this issue, providing education, crisis intervention services, and critical incident debriefings as necessary. But fortunately, most missions have happy endings.
39. **Once I am accepted into the new member training, does that mean I am a member of the team?** No. An individual must first pass the new member training and be accepted by the Board of Directors to be classified a "New Member." The success rate is usually about 85%. After the successful completion of the first year as a new member, and again with approval of the Board, the new member becomes a regular member of the team.
40. **I do a lot of other community work. Will that be OK?** Yes. However, consider the demanding schedule that is required by SAR, especially in the first one to two years. Discuss this during an interview.
41. **Why is the new member training so long?** New member training has several goals. One goal is to get every member to a minimum level of performance so, upon graduation, the member can contribute to field operations safely. A second goal is to assure every member is performing in a consistent manner. This is an essential element of our approach to safety. A third goal is for the new member and the team members to become familiar with each other so that they can work together. The length of new member training is the minimum time necessary to reach these goals. It actually requires about two years or more for a member to become proficient in all the necessary skills.

42. **Who teaches the new member training?** Senior members of the team. They teach skills and procedures that are consistent among all members and are generally in use by MRA teams across the nation.
43. **What do you teach in new member training?** There is a long list. A partial list includes ropes, knots, navigation, rescue systems, area familiarization, search theory, search technique, team protocols and policies. Safety is emphasized throughout the training. Classes are a combination of lecture, lab, and field work. Basically, if you graduate from the training, you should be able to function in the field during basic missions under supervision.
44. **I am not sure if I really am suited for SAR. Can I start the new member training to try it out?** No. We encourage you to learn as much about SAR as possible before you apply. A great way to do this is to attend Wednesday meetings, which are open to the public. Get to know some of the members and discuss with them your desires and concerns.
45. **I want to join SAR but my spouse is not sure I should.** All potential applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss this with their family before applying. You may bring the family to a team meeting. It is important that you make an informed decision before committing.
46. **I am not sure if my employer will support me with SAR activity.** All potential applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss this with their employer. During SAR missions, there is potential for a member to miss work unexpectedly, although this can often be managed and minimized. During missions, it is important that every member be focused on the mission, and not worrying about work or family.
47. **I am training a search dog. Do you need dogs for the team?** Certified search dogs are an important asset on the team. Dog handlers are regular members of the team. They participate in the full new member training program, and they participate in other aspects of the team in addition to training a dog.
48. **Is EPCSAR part of the Sheriff's Office?** EPCSAR is an independent, non-profit Colorado corporation with 501(c)3 status.
49. **What is the relationship between EPCSAR and the Sheriff's Office?** By Colorado Statute, county sheriffs are responsible for search and rescue in their county. For over thirty years, the Sheriffs of El Paso County have designated EPCSAR as the County's search and rescue group. And for operational purposes, EPCSAR is part of EPSO's Emergency Services Division.
50. **Why do I need a background check?** Because we are providing a service to the El Paso County Sheriff as volunteers. We are also serving the public in a trusted capacity.
51. **Does EPCSAR respond outside of El Paso County?** Yes. Most EPCSAR missions occur within El Paso County, but we do provide services to other counties and states when needed. This is usually coordinated through another SAR team or a coordinating agency.
52. **How big is the team?** Here are some numbers that may help answer that question:
- a. EPCSAR maintains a roster of approximately 65 volunteer members.
 - b. The team responded to 130 calls in 2008 requiring 6,338 man-hours. The number of calls typically increases every year.
 - c. The team owns "Rescue Base", which is the 9000 square foot facility located at 3950 Interpark Drive.

- d. The team currently owns and operates two first-response rescue trucks, two Terra Tucker snow cats, one utility vehicle, one personnel transport vehicle, one command & communications vehicle, one 6x6 and one 4x4 off-road vehicles.
53. **Is SAR work dangerous? How much risk is there?** There are inherent risks in SAR and risk cannot be completely eliminated. Risk is managed through training, consistent procedures, and professional attitudes. Safety is our highest priority in every activity and we have a very good safety record.
54. **Do I need special insurance for SAR work?** There are no requirements for individuals to maintain special insurance. In the course of performing their duties, SAR members are covered by Worker's Compensation insurance. You can discuss any personal insurance needs with your insurance agent and lawyer.
55. **What do you get out of SAR?** Every individual will give you a different answer, but generally, our members get a tremendous amount of satisfaction knowing they played a role in saving a life, providing closure to a grieving family, assisting someone in need of help, or providing information that prepared a group to recreate safely. Many new members will tell you after their first year that the experience is far greater than they ever expected. SAR is the kind of activity where the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

Do you still have questions about membership? Email us at membership@epcsar.org.