State of North Carolina
All Hazard Communications Unit Program

All Hazard Communications Unit Qualification Guidebook

This is a supplemental document to the North Carolina Incident Management Program Type 2 and 3 Qualification System Guide, which was published by the All-Hazard Incident Management Team Working Group. This document is prepared and published by the North Carolina Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee, which provides oversight and governance to the All Hazard Communications Unit Program.

June 2017

SUMMARY

Purpose:

This document serves as the North Carolina (NC) qualification guide for all hazard communications unit positions in support of Type 2 or Type 3 All Hazard Incident Management Teams (AHIMT) during incidents and planned events.

This guide is intended to supplement and align with NC's All Hazard Incident Management System (AHIMS). Specifically, it supplements and is aligned with the Incident Management Program Type 2 and 3 Qualification System Guide which is prepared and published by the NC AHIMT Working Group.

This guide supplements the Type 2 and 3 Qualification System Guide by providing further guidance needed to address the technical nature of public safety communications (voice and data) encountered in all hazard incidents and planned events and to promote local, regional, and statewide interoperability through a standardized communications unit qualification program.

Goals:

1. Develop and sustain highly professional and technically proficient communication expertise across public safety disciplines; who are familiar with both legacy and current communication technologies and who can deploy as county mutual aid and state resources and promote local, regional, and statewide interoperable and redundant communications planning and usage.
2. Develop and sustain nine (9) Type III All Hazard COMUs[1] statewide, three (3) per NCEM Branch in order to support the state's nine (9) Type III AHIMTs.
3. Develop and sustain three (3) Type II All Hazard COMUs statewide, one (1) per NCEM Branch in order to support the state's three (3) Type II AHIMTs.

Objectives:

1. Establish and educate minimum training and qualification standards for COMU personnel working as part of a COMU or as a single resource assignment. Guide the development of skills and knowledge outside of the formal classroom environment.
2. Retain the foundation and principles of the performance based qualification system established and implemented by the AHIMT Working Group. Educate the difference between the COMU qualification process and other AHIMT unit position qualifications.
3. Improve the COMU qualification process at the state level in order to develop and sustain a high level of technical knowledge and experience within COMUs.

[1] *For the purposes of this document the acronym COMU will be used to illustrate the overall communications unit. It is to be understood that COMU is intended to be an abbreviation and not an acronym indicating a NIMS ICS position.*

Guidance:

No local agency is required to use these standards or qualifications to manage their own COMUs. With the publication of this edition of these guidelines, the standards in this guide are to be met by all participating agencies and organizations that choose to certify communication professionals and COMUs within the NC AHIMS.

The remainder of this page is blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section **Page**

Summary 1

Table of Contents 2

A. Introduction 3

B. COMU Personnel Typing 3

C. Description of the Qualification Process 3

STEP 1: Prerequisite Training Process 3

STEP 2: Formal Classroom Training Process 4

STEP 3: Position Task Book (PTB) Initiation and Completion Process 4

STEP 4: SWIC Review and SIEC Recognition Process 6

STEP 5: AHIMT Application and Credentialing Process (Only for COML) 6

STEP 6: Currency and/or Requalification Process 7

D. Appeals Process 8

E. COMU Instructors 8

F. Review and Update of the COMU Qualification Guide Book 8

Appendices

A. COMU Positions Explanations 9

B. COMU Qualification Binder Checklist 10

C. COMU Qualification Flow Chart 11

D. Acronyms 12

A. INTRODUCTION:

To enhance the ability to communicate among jurisdictions, agencies and disciplines, NC public safety agencies have worked cooperatively to develop inter-jurisdictional interoperability solutions. A critical component to building, sustaining, and educating interoperability solutions involves the continued refinement of a recognized process for the qualification of COMU personnel. Any questions regarding this All Hazard COMU Qualification Guide Book and the processes explained within it may be directed to the NC Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC).

This guide establishes guidelines for qualification of COMU positions in NC. This guide also addresses the roles and responsibilities of the NC SWIC, the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC), and the NCEM Branch Managers in the COMU qualification process.

B. COMU PERSONNEL TYPING:

Type IV and V: These qualifications are handled at the local level and not addressed in this guide.

Type III – SIEC Recognized: Communication professionals who successfully complete Step 4 will be recognized by the SWIC and SIEC as a COMU resource for state sponsored deployments (e.g. COMU overhead teams and COMU strike teams). However, SIEC recognized communication professions who have not received a COML credential (Step 5) must deploy under a credentialed COML when supporting a Type 3 or above AHIMT.

Type III – COML Credential: Communication professionals who successfully complete Step 5 will be recognized by the SWIC, SIEC, and the NCEM Branch Managers as a COML single resource for state sponsored deployments in support of a Type 3 or above AHIMT.

Type II: Type II credentialing requirements will be established by the AHIMT Working Group at a future date.

C. DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALIFICATION PROCESS:

The Incident Qualification System is a "performance based" qualification system. In this system, **the primary criterion for qualification is individual performance as observed by a qualified evaluator**; using approved standards. In a performance based system, qualification is based upon demonstrated performance as measured on incidents and planned events, normal job activities, exercises and/or classroom simulation activities.

A communication professional must have an opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the task of a position before accepting a position assignment. It is the responsibility of the individual and the individual's sponsoring agency to ensure that each trainee has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for position performance.

Communication professionals who desire qualification through NC's AHIMS must complete the steps as described below to become and remain credentialed/recognized in NC as a Type III or above COMU resource.

STEP 1: Prerequisite Training Process:

1. Candidates **MUST** have completed and maintain documentation for the following courses:
   - COML: **ICS-100, ICS-200, ICS-300, IS-700, IS-800.**
   - All other COMU Positions: **ICS-100, ICS-200, IS-700, IS-800.**

2. COMU positions (e.g. COML, COMT, INCM, INTD, and AUXCOMM) are separate positions and are currently not progressive in nature. While it is common, there is no current requirement to take one course prior to another. See Appendix A: COMU Positions Explanations for additional details.

3. Candidates **SHOULD HAVE** a public safety communications background with exposure to field operations or currently work in or around public safety communications where they have a vested interest in developing their public safety communications knowledge, skills, and abilities. Such experience can include but is not limited to the following:

   - Has or currently works with local or state communications, communications systems, and resource contacts
   - Has a working base knowledge or frequency / talk group resources and the regulatory and technical issues relating to voice and data communications
   - Has a working base knowledge of local topography and how it affects communications
   - Has a working base knowledge of communication systems' infrastructure and site locations
   - Is familiar with NC communications plans (e.g., Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP), ESF #2 Operational Communications Plan, Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans [TICP], and other communication resource guides

STEP 2: Formal Classroom Training Process:

1. All candidates **MUST** be sponsored in writing by their agency. The sponsoring agency must confirm their support for assisting the candidate in meeting the guidelines of the COMU Program as outlined in this document.

2. All candidates **MUST** attend and successfully complete the COMU formal training course (e.g. COML, COMT, INCM, INTD or AUXCOMM) conducted by a DHS-approved instructors.

3. All COMU formal training courses will be announced through the NC Training & Exercise Registration Management System (NC TERMS) approximately 60 to 90 days prior to the course.

4. All candidates who register for communication course on NC TERMS will be automatically wait listed in order for the SWIC and/or qualified instructors to screen candidates to ensure all prerequisites are met and the most qualified candidates are selected for the courses.

STEP 3: Position Task Book (PTB) Initiation and Completion Process:

1. PTBs are in a format that allows documentation of a trainee's ability to perform each task. Tasks pertaining to tactical decision-making and safety are flagged and require position performance on an incident or preplanned event. Remaining tasks may be evaluated through other means such as simulation, or other emergency and non-emergency work. However, these types of simulations or work should be a true representation of the required task to insure that the person will be able to perform to the required level when exposed to a real event. Successful completion of all required tasks of the position, as determined by qualified evaluators, will be the basis for qualification.

2. Candidates who attend and successfully complete a COMU formal training course, not including THSP, may request a PTB be initiated by the SWIC for them for that specific position. The SWIC maintains the electronic copies of the most recent COMU PTB versions.
3. Once the candidate completes STEPS 1 and 2, the candidate is then recognized as a COMU trainee. All COMU PTBs are initiated by the SIEC Executive Director (The SWIC), or a designated SWIC representative, and assigned a SIEC tracking number.
4. The trainee **MUST** complete the COMU PTB as prescribed below **WITHIN FIVE (5)** years from the date that the PTB was initiated.
   - A completed PTB **MUST** contain a minimum of four (4) evaluator records.
     - All tasks for COML PTBs **MUST** be directly supervised and initialed off by a Credentialed Type 3 or above COML or Logistics Chief during an incident, planned event or exercise.
     - All remaining COMU PTBs **MUST** be directly supervised and initialed off by a Credentialed Type 3 or above COML or by a communication professional which the SIEC recognizes in the position being evaluated (e.g. COMT, INCM, INTD).
     - As each task and sub-task is evaluated the proper event code, evaluator record number, date evaluated, and evaluator initials **MUST** be notated in the PTB next to the task or sub-task.
   - A completed **COML PTB MUST** contain evaluation records demonstrating performance at a minimum of four (4) different incidents, events, or exercises.
     - Two (2) **MUST** be incidents of more than one (1) operational periods each.
     - The two (2) remaining events may be planned events, full scale/functional exercises, or additional incidents regardless of the number of operational periods.
     - Each incident, planned event, or exercise used for evaluating and documenting COML experience **MUST** be at a level of complexity which requires a written Incident Action Plan. Incident Action Plans and other supporting documents **MUST** identify the trainee as performing in the COML position. This supporting documentation **MUST** be submitted as part of the trainee's COML Qualification Binder. See Appendix B: COMU Qualification Binder Checklist.
   - All remaining **COMU PTBs** (e.g. COMT, INCM, RADO) **MUST** contain four (4) evaluation records demonstrating performance.
     - Two (2) **MUST** be incidents **OR** planned event of more than one (1) operational periods each.
     - The two (2) remaining evaluations may be full scale/functional exercises, additional incidents regardless of the number of operational periods, or a single task evaluation not tied to an event/incident.
5. If a trainee is listed as performing as a COML in an IAP, but also performs COMT tasks while acting at the COML, the trainee may be evaluated and initialed off for both the COML tasks and COMT tasks which were completed during the same incident, event, or exercise.

6. **The final evaluator's verification of COMU PTBs MUST be completed by a credentialed Type 3 or above COML.**
7. Once a PTB has received the final evaluator's verification, the trainee will submit their COMU Qualification Binder with the competed PTB and all supporting documents to the SWIC as outlined in STEP 4. **The PTB's "Agency Certification" signature information WILL be filled out and signed by a NC: Division of Emergency Management Representative. For COML PTBs it will be the applicable NCEM Branch Manager. For all other COMU PTBs it will be the SWIC.**
8. It is the trainee's responsibility to make sure all documentation and signatures are present and correct.

STEP 4: SWIC Review and SIEC Recognition Process:
(RETURN TO COMU PERSONNEL TYPING)

1. Trainee **MUST** apply for SIEC Recognition by submitting a COMU Qualification Binder to the SWIC. This **MUST** include prerequisite training certificates, formal training certificates, the completed PTB, and supporting documents such as Incident Action Plans, Incident Communications Plans, and/or After Action Reports that relate to the evaluations in the PTB. See Appendix C: COMU Qualification Binder Checklist.
2. The SWIC will review all newly submitted COMU Qualification Binders, prior to SIEC review, to ensure they are complete and meet the requirements as explained in this guide. Quarterly deadlines for submitting new COMU Qualification Binders for the SWIC's review are December 1st, March 1st, June 1st, and September 1st.
3. If a COMU Qualification Binder is not complete, the SWIC will (1) request additional documentation from the applicant or (2) return it to the applicant with an explanation of what is missing.
4. If a COMU Qualification Binder is complete, the SWIC will then add it to the SIEC's agenda for an evaluation and decision. Within the SIEC, a five (5) member COMU peer-review sub-committee performs the document review for all COMU Qualification Binders.
5. The applicant and final verifying evaluator will receive notification from the SWIC regarding the SIEC evaluation and decision.
   - If approved for SIEC recognition, the applicant will be recognized and given a certificate signed by the SIEC co-chairs and the SWIC. The SWIC will retain a copy of the COMU Qualification Binder.
   - If not approved for SIEC recognition, an explanation will be provided to the applicant and final verifying evaluator by the SWIC regarding what additional experience or training is needed. The applicant also has an option to appeal the SIEC's decision. See the appeal process in Section D for further details.

STEP 5: AHIMT Application and Credentialing Process (Only for COML):
(RETURN TO COMU PERSONNEL TYPING)

1. Prior to submitting an AHIMT application for COML credentialing, the applicant **SHOULD HAVE** experience working regional or multijurisdictional Type 3 or above incidents, events,

or exercises and **SHOULD HAVE** a working relationship with the fully credentialed AHIMT personnel within one's NCEM Branch.

2. Applicant requests an AHIMT application from the SWIC.
3. Applicant completes the AHIMT application, adds any additional documented experience to his/her COML Qualification Binder, and obtains "Agency Approval" from the applicants' designated agency head. The applicants' designated agency head will sign as the "Verifying Official" on the AHIMT application **to indicate that the applicant is allowed to participate in AHIMT dispatches and to ensure the applicant is covered by worker's compensation.** If the applicant's designated agency does not cover worker's compensation for AHIMT dispatches, then the applicant must coordinate alternate means of coverage through NC Emergency Management. Applicant submits all of the above to the SWIC.
4. The SWIC will review and forward the applicant's completed application and binder to the respective NCEM Branch Manager for review and endorsement decision.
5. The NCEM Branch Manager will review the binder and decide to approve or disapprove the applicant's application for AHIMT COML credentialing. NCEM Branch managers are authorized to determine if the applicant meets the overall requirements for NC AHIMT Type 3 or above positions.
6. The applicant will receive notification from the SWIC on approval or disapproval.
   - If approved, the SWIC will generate a request for credentialing in NC TERMS, issue a SERT badge, and enter the newly credentialed COML into the NCEM resource database as being available for regional/state sponsored Incident management Team (IMT) or Single Resources List (SRL) deployments.
   - If not approved, an explanation will be provided to the applicant and final verifying evaluator by the SWIC/NCEM Branch Manager regarding what additional experience is needed. The applicant also has an option to appeal the NCEM Branch Manager's decision. See the appeal process in Section D for further details.

STEP 6: Currency / Requalification Process:

1. The maximum time allowed for maintaining currency is 5 years. A mandatory criterion for re-recognition or credentialing will occur once every 5 years to keep the individual's qualifications and skills up to date and to maintain active participation in the North Carolina COMU program. Currency for a COMU position can be maintained by meeting any of the following requirements:
   - By successful performance in the position qualified for within 5 years. The requalification period is for 5 years from the date of qualifying incident, event, or full scale/functional Incident Action Plan.
   - By successful performance in a higher COMU position.
2. Each individual must reapply by submitting a new Incident Action Plans, Incident Communications Plan, and/or After Action Reports that documents their participation. COMLs must also submit a new AHIMT application form. Requalification paperwork is to be submitted to the SWIC. Failure to re-apply within 90 days following the expiration of qualification will require completion of a new PTB.

D. APPEALS PROCESS:

(RETERN TO STEP 4) (RETURN TO STEP 5)

Appeals relative to denial of eligibility for either SIEC recognition or COML credential may be made by utilizing the following procedures:

1. Appeals for SIEC Recognition:
   - Appeals shall be in writing by the individual who applied for qualification. Appeals must contain, at a minimum, a description of the reason/circumstances leading to the appeal, supporting documentation, and the desired outcome. The appeal must be addressed to the SIEC co-chairs and submitted to the SWIC no later than 60 days after notification of initial review and denial. The SIEC shall render the final decision in writing to the applicant within 30 days of the receipt of the appeal.
2. Appeals for COML credentialing:
   - Appeals shall be in writing by the individual who applied for certification. Appeals must contain, at a minimum, a description of the reason/circumstances leading to the appeal, supporting documentation, and the desired outcome. The appeal must be addressed to the appropriate NCEM Branch manager and submitted to the SWIC no later than 60 days after notification of initial review and denial. The appropriate NCEM Branch Manager shall render his/her decision in writing to the applicate within 30 days of the receipt of the appeal. The decision of the NCEM Branch Manager shall be final.

E. COMU INSTRUCTORS:

A candidate wishing to become a COMU DHS-Approved instructor **MUST** be a credentialed Type III COML or SIEC recognized in the specific COMU position (COMT, RADO, INCEM), which they wish to instruct.

1. The candidate **MUST** have instructor qualifications and teaching experience identified as adequate by the SWIC / SIEC. The candidate **MUST** be endorsed by the SWIC / SIEC to attend an All-Hazard COMU train the trainer course. The candidate **MUST** successfully complete an All-Hazard COMU train the trainer course for the specific position which they will instruct.

Upon being added to the DHS COMU Instructor list, the new instructor will be eligible to teach the DHS All-Hazards COMU course. To serve as a DHS-Approved COMU Instructor, each instructor agrees that he/she will use only approved DHS-All-Hazards COMU materials (One may add local information to enhance the course content). Additionally, instructors will teach the DHS All-Hazards COMU course only with other DHS-Approved Instructors or DHS All-Hazards COMU-trained adjunct instructors. DHS requires two DHS--Approved instructors per class, or a 1:15 instructor to student ratio.

F. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE COMU QUALIFICATION GUIDEBOOK:

This guide will be reviewed and updated as necessary every two years by the SIEC to ensure its alignment with the Incident Management Program Type 2 and 3 Qualification System Guide and the NC AHIMT working group. Suggested revisions can be emailed to the North Carolina SWIC.

APPENDIX A: COMU POSITIONS EXPLANATIONS:

RETURN TO STEP 1

Communications Unit Leader (COML) – Under the NIMS ICS structure, a COML is the focal point within the Communications Unit. They have the essential core competencies required for performing COML duties in an all-hazards incident. A type 3 COML has the ability to operate in a local or state-level All-Hazard Incident Management Team. Additionally, they have the required skills needed to coordinate and maintain on-scene emergency operational communications during a multi-jurisdictional response or planned event.

A COML manages the operational communications aspects and functions during an incident or event, and develops a NIMS/ICS Form 205 Incident Radio Communications Plan to support ongoing and forecasted incident operations, and supervises the COMU. As needed, the COML will work with communication stakeholders and response assets to coordinate and synchronize communications with other dispatch centers and the incident communications plan. COMLs must be subject matter experts (SMEs) in communication planning in order to achieve and maintain operational communications, interoperability, and redundancy.

Communications Technician (COMT) – The COMT is the technical expert within the Communications Unit. The COMT is responsible for assisting the COML in assessing the technical communication situation, determining communication technical requirements, and implementing a technically effective incident communications plan. It is essential that COMTs are SME regarding communication technical concepts and technologies that are utilized in North Carolina. These concepts and technologies include, but are not limited to, interoperable communication solutions, LMR communications, satellite, telephone, data, and computer technologies that are used in incident response and planned events. COMTs are also responsible for deploying advanced equipment and keeping it operational throughout the incident or event.

Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM) – Supervises the operational aspects of the Incident Communications Center (ICC). During an incident, the ICC is designed to absorb incident traffic in order to separate that traffic from the day-to-day activities of the dispatch center. The ICC is typically located at the Incident Command Post (ICP) in a fixed site, tent, trailer, mobile COMU.

Radio Operator (RADO) - Staffs a radio and/or phone at the ICC and is responsible for documenting incoming radio and telephone messages. **Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT), Incident Dispatchers or Tactical Dispatchers** can be used as RADOs.

Technical Specialist (THSP) – Allows for the incorporation of personnel who may not be formally certified in any specific NIMS/ICS position. THSPs may include Local Agency Radio Technicians (as opposed to the COMT), Telephone Specialists, Gateway Specialists, Data/IT Specialists, and or Cache Radio Specialists.

> **Auxiliary Emergency Communications (AUXCOMM)** volunteers would be considered a technical specialist. Volunteer communicators and groups have been providing redundant and contingency communications to public safety agencies for nearly 100 years. Event planners, public safety officials, and emergency managers at all levels of government utilize their services. Contingency communications provided by auxiliary communicators have been critical when other primary forms of communications have failed or have been temporary disrupted. Today, North Carolina has and continues to incorporate auxiliary communicators into the state's strategic, operational, and tactical communications plans. THSP- AUXCOMM volunteers provide additional communications capability and interoperability to the COMU.

APPENDIX B: COMU QUALIFICATION BINDER CHECKLIST:

RETURN TO STEP 3, RETURN TO STEP 4

□ Cover Sheet with COMU Position, Name, and Contact Information

□ Section A (Prerequisites):

- □ Photo of Applicant
- □ ICS-100.a Certificate of Completion
- □ ICS-200.a Certificate of Completion
- □ ICS-300 Certificate of Completion (COML Only)
- □ IS-700.a Certificate of Completion
- □ IS 800.b Certificate of Completion

□ Section B (Formal Training):

- □ Original Home Agency Written Endorsement (See Section C, STEP 2)
- □ COMU Formal Training: DHS Certificate of Completion

□ Section C (Position Task Book):

- □ Completed Position Task Book with Four or More Evaluator Signatures and the Final Evaluator Verification Signature.
- □ PTB Agency Approval (Leave Blank: Will be completed by a NCEM representative)

□ Section D (Supporting Documentation):

- □ Incident #1 for COML, Event or Incident #1 for COMT or below
- □ Incident #2 for COML, Event or Incident #2 for COMT or below
- □ Event / Exercise / Incident
- □ Event / Exercise / Incident
- □ Additional Events / Exercises / Incidents as applicable

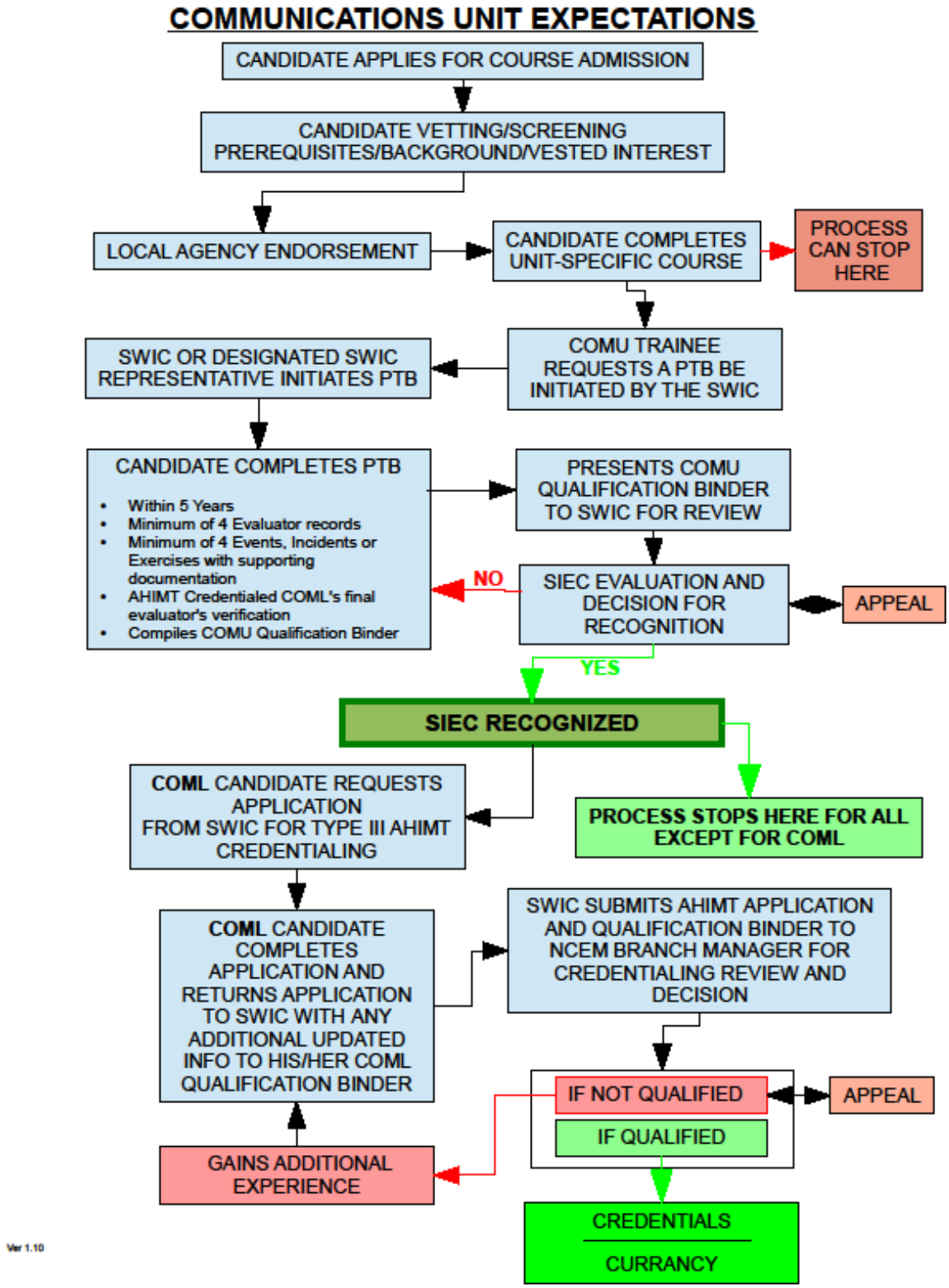
□ SWIC Review and SIEC Review

□ SWIC Review/Comments _____
□ SIEC Peer-Review Review/Comments _____
□ SIEC Decision: Date: _____ □ Recognized □ Not Recognized
Comments: _____

□ AHIMT Application (COML Credentialing)

□ AHIMT Credentialing Application
□ Official Training Record (TERMS Transcript, College Transcript, etc.)
□ NCEM Branch Manage Decision: Date: _____ □ Approved □ Not Approved
Comments: _____

APPENDIX C: COMU QUALIFICATION FLOW CHART:



RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDIX D: ACRONYMS

AHIMS	All Hazard Incident Management System
AHIMT	All Hazard Incident Management Team
COML	Communications Unit Leader
COMT	Communications Unit Technician
COMU	Communications Unit
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
ICS	Incident Command System
INCM	Incident Communications Center Manager
NC	North Carolina
NCEM	North Carolina Emergency Management
NIMS	National Incident Management System
OEC	Office of Emergency Communications
PTB	Position Task Book
RADO	Radio Operator
SCIP	Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan
SIEC	Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee
SWIC	Statewide Interoperability Coordinator
THSP	Technical Specialist
TICP	Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan