

ARRL ARES Plan

July 2025

The Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®) has held to the same precepts virtually since its inception in 1935, encouraging participation by licensed Amateur Radio operators with a sincere interest in Emergency and Public Service Communications. With the advent of additional training requirements imposed upon agencies and organizations assisting them, and the development of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System (ICS), ARRL was challenged to align the standards of ARES with current needs of our served partner agencies.

ARRL consulted with experienced resources from a broad cross-section of radio amateurs in the U.S. to examine the needs of our served agencies. A vision and mission statement were developed for ARES — one that is versatile, tells why ARES exists, and provides an overview of what ARES does and how it does it.

These updates to the ARES program are being developed to allow the implementation of a policy of Good Practices or Generally Accepted Practices and Continuous Improvement. With these concepts in place, we envision a more flexible ARES program that can adapt to meet new and emerging communication needs as identified by partners and program participants. This document supersedes any previous versions of the ARES Plan.

ARES® Vision Statement

To be the premier amateur radio emergency communications service to the United States and its territories.

ARES® Mission Statement

ARES Strives to be an effective partner in emergency/disaster response, providing the citizens and public service/safety partners with communications expertise, situational awareness and capabilities of professional communicators.

Our Expertise and Capability

Expertise

Amateur Radio operators (“hams”) possess unique skills. While a ham’s license allows the operation of radio equipment on a wide range of frequencies with varying propagation conditions, hams also are capable of setting up field stations and portable antennas and using non-conventional means of getting a message through when other systems are overloaded or have failed.

These skill sets are created and improved by the local ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) group through thorough training — both formal and informal, and often in conjunction with local agencies where the team can meet agency personnel with whom they can expect to be operating during a true emergency. This advance effort is a strong contributor to developing mutual trust and understanding among the key individuals managing any emergency operation and should be exercised at every opportunity.

Skills and Capabilities

ARES groups have actively engaged in the following steps so that they have the ability to perform certain actions and meet their objectives. Further, a goal of the ARES program is to ensure that program participants continue to improve and develop additional capabilities for serving the public directly or in support of the needs of partners.

- Net operations and traffic passing provide experience in on-the-air operating, including net procedures and routines that are easily learned and adopted. Experience resulting from regular net participation ensures that established procedures and routines for net participation become rote practices for participants. The skills involved in copying transmissions subject to severe noise levels or interference come only through the actual experience of operating under severe conditions.
- Effective exercises offer scenarios to practice for hazards and threats. Having an established written policy relating to the most likely emergency scenarios allows ARES participants to understand the procedures for activating for a given situation. Severe weather events may be quite different from a wildfire, for example, requiring contact with different agencies and different skill sets from ARES participants. A well-written emergency communications plan greatly simplifies activation procedures and ensures that smaller items are not inadvertently overlooked.
- Emergency and disaster response provides experience with actual pressures and changing requirements found in such environments. Having the opportunity to participate in emergency or disaster response offers the ARES member valuable lessons and experiences. Therefore, it is important for those involved in the response to participate in the After-Action Reports (AAR)

and debriefing process, so that all participants can learn from those who have operated in emergency conditions. Careful attention to details and retention of notes is an important part of completing this important educational task.

Various available field resources for communicating, such as VHF, UHF, HF, repeaters, accepted simplex frequencies, and local/regional HF networks.

Multi-Discipline Capabilities and Cooperation

ARES members and groups are encouraged to work with other like-minded individuals or groups to support their community in times of crisis. This includes planning and training as well as developing relationships and building a network of resources able to assist in times of need. This may include Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) or other Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) in your area. ARRL is a National VOAD member and the resources and relationship building opportunities are very important. We encourage ARES groups to be involved at the local level with any local VOAD that may be active.

ARES Groups are also encouraged to work with other people or groups interested in Emergency Communications. GMRS operators have increased in numbers and capabilities and could provide a valuable resource during times of crisis or in support of public services events. GMRS repeaters are common around the country and may fill gaps in areas where a ham repeater may not have adequate coverage. Some communities also have CB groups who may be a resource in supporting EmComm. There is also a growing trend in community groups and neighborhood groups that may include FRS radios and operators. Seek out any opportunity to work with any of these groups to provide assets when needed.

ARES® and Its Relationship with Message Traffic

The Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®) is chartered with providing emergency communications support. This support can take many forms, but it does by its very concept include the transmission of third-party messages for our partner organizations and the communities we serve.

This document provides a high-level perspective on ARES, which may be incorporated into any ARES operation, whether it is providing service in a disaster or at a community public service event. Training in both net operating and message formatting can be found in several well-regarded publications, including The Amateur Radio Public Service Handbook, first edition; The ARRL Operating Manual, eleventh edition; and The ARES Field Resource Manual. Additionally, The National Traffic System's NTS Methods and Practices (http://www.arrl.org/files/file/NTS_MPG2014.pdf); and The NTS Manual (http://www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/NTS_Manual2015.pdf) are references for net and traffic handling procedures.

It is incumbent upon every Emergency Coordinator (EC) to develop a Standard Operating Procedure or Guide for his or her organization that includes clear liaison procedures for working with served partner agencies and regional traffic nets for fast and efficient handling of both tactical and strategic messages. The organization should utilize the Winlink system where appropriate. It should not limit itself to any specific messaging format or system but, instead, develop the operating skills and capacity

to accommodate a wide variety of formats to meet ever-changing needs due to propagation, agency requirements, or technology.

Some things to keep in mind:

- ARES, as it is working with its partners, will need to handle messages and send those messages using partner-preferred forms (such as the IS 213) in lieu of or in addition to NTS Radiograms.
- ARES will need to accept responsibility and be held accountable for timely delivery and tracking of messages which were sent on behalf of partners.
- ARES participants — as their skills (qualifications) improve via training and performing tasks — need to be familiar with, and use, multiple digital communication protocols for messaging.
- ARES groups should invite NTS personnel to work with them as they assist with messaging for their Partners. However, the protocols used by ARES and its partners will necessarily take priority over other alternative systems.

The leadership of the local ARES group should have a clear knowledge of local and regional traffic nets — especially Local, Section, and Region Nets of NTS. Knowing the schedules of these nets may allow rapid access to trained and ready outlets for urgent traffic. Further, knowledge of the organizational structure for these nets, especially the names, call signs, and contact information of the Net Managers, is extremely valuable in the event that a net needs to be activated outside of its normal schedule. Liaison, participation, and traffic handling with these nets are all vitally important to having an effective relationship and the ability to pass important traffic when it needs to happen.

The EC should examine the potential types of emergencies that may affect his or her communities and formulate a basic “Quick-Start” plan for each scenario. This plan should include each served partner agency, expected operating frequencies, how each will be utilized, what liaisons will be required, and how stations will be prioritized and assigned. The Quick-Start document can serve as a standard policy for consistent procedures when an activation occurs.

Qualifications for Membership in ARES

All participants shall have a valid Amateur Radio license issued by the Federal Communications Commission. All participants must have a serious interest in providing volunteer radio communications support in an emergency. All participants shall have an interest in self-improvement and maintaining standards for excellent community service. All participants need to have full membership in ARRL for leadership and certifications Advanced and above.

Many of the partner agencies that ARES serves have mandated and structured training programs where all participants receive the same training so that, upon completion of the training, when activated or assigned to serve an agency in the field all such participants are presumed to be qualified to assume any position to which they were assigned.

Changes have been made to ARES to resolve and clarify for our partners the training required of ARES participants. Beginning with ARES 2.0, a national standard for qualification in ARES has been instituted to

address the needs of our partners. Training will be required for all ARES participants. Training will be measurable and recognized across a broad spectrum of the country by served partners.

Multiple levels of training will allow ARES participants to enter the program and advance to higher levels of qualification and service as desired.

- **Basic** — This is an entry level for those who choose a non-leadership role as well as those new to Amateur Radio or emergency communications. This introductory training is conducted by the local ARES group to meet their needs and those of their served agency or partners. This training includes FEMA IS-100, IS-200, IS-700 and IS-800 and the ARRL ARES Basic EmComm course. Members should also have completed the ARES Position Task Book (PTB) for level 1. This introduces ARES participants to the fundamentals of emergency communications and provides instruction on how participants are to conduct themselves while serving in the field or otherwise activated.

- **Intermediate** — To qualify for this level, participants shall have completed the following courses and tasks:

- ARRL's Basic and Intermediate Courses
- FEMA IS-100, IS-200, IS-700, IS-800
- ARRL's ARES Position Task Book (PTB) for level 2

Participants are also encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities available through partners to enhance their knowledge and skill set.

A full ARRL membership is required for this level.

Note: Members who have taken the IS courses more than 5 years ago should take refresher courses as these have been updated over the years.

- **Advanced** — This level of training prepares ARES participants to take on more advanced EmComm tasks and possible deployments. It would also be required to advance into leadership positions such as EC, AEC, ADEC, DEC, ASEC, and SEC, and other designated positions in the ARES program. Participants are required to complete:
 - ARRL Advanced EmComm Course
 - FEMA Professional Development Series IS-230, IS-240, IS-241, IS-242, IS-244
 - IS-288 (The Role of Voluntary Organizations in Emergency Management)
 - ARES Position Task Book (PTB) for level 3.
 - Participants are also encouraged to complete the FEMA courses IS-300 and IS-400 should they be available locally.

A full ARRL membership is required for this level also.

The ARRL ARES Leadership course is the final course requirement to be an ARRL Leader in the EC, DEC, ADEC, SEC or ASEC role. This course requires the approval of the Section Manager for enrollment and completion. A full ARRL membership is required for this level also.

- **Specialized training** — Members that wish to participate in ARES Mutual Aid Team (ARESMAT) operations or provide onsite support during large scale disasters may be asked to train to a

higher level as they may need to be self-supporting “on location” during initial stages of a disaster response.

Completion of all training programs must be verified by the participant’s Emergency Coordinator (EC), DEC, SEC or designee before the participant advances to the higher level. Those individuals holding leadership positions as the new program is introduced will be allowed one (1) year or such further time period as authorized by the SM to complete the necessary training to meet qualifications for Level 3 and above. Training requirements for ECs, DEC, and their assistants will be verified by their SEC or the SEC’s designated individual.

All ARES Personnel are strongly encouraged to participate in continuing their education through various local, state, tribal and federal programs such as CISA’s Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM) offerings. As needed, local ARES organizations may choose to add special training courses to fulfill local requirements and obligations.

Qualifying, Certifying, Credentialing and Personnel Presentation

Adapted from FEMA NIMS 2017 Guidelines

Qualifying, certifying, credentialing and personnel presentation are essential steps, led by an Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) — in our specific case, ARES® — that helps ensure that personnel deploying or receiving assignments in the field have the knowledge, experience, training, capability, and presentation to perform the duties of their assigned roles. These steps help to ensure that ARES personnel across the nation are prepared to perform their incident responsibilities based on criteria that are standard nationwide. ARES participants serving other partner agencies will likely be required to work within the criteria established by those other AHJs.

Qualification is the process through which personnel meet the minimum established criteria — training, experience, physical and medical fitness, and capability — to fill specific positions. Within ARES, specific qualification standards are established for three different levels of ARES participation.

Certification/Recertification is the recognition that ARES partnership requires third-party certification in the form of a valid Amateur Radio license granted by the Federal Communications Commission, stating that an individual has met and continues to meet established criteria and is qualified for a specific position. Other certification may be required as determined by the AHJ.

Credentialing occurs when ARES, an AHJ, or third party provides documentation — typically an identification card or badge — that identifies personnel and authenticates and verifies their qualification for a position. While credentialing includes issuing credentials such as identification cards, it is separate from an incident-specific badging process, which includes identity verification, qualification, and deployment or authorization to a field location. An "ARES ID Card" will identify an individual as a member of ARES but will not necessarily grant permission to enter a disaster area. In this context only a "Credential", usually in the form of an incident- specific badge issued by the AHJ, will grant such permission.

Personnel Presentation to the public and served agencies needs to follow these guidelines. A professional appearance appropriate to the situation assigned could vary from an office setting to an outdoor setting requiring varied attire. ARES Logo attire should be worn as appropriate. On-site operations may include an approved safety vest or over the uniform shirt. In all cases the ARES Incident officer should issue a statement of the appropriate dress code for the event. Professional Appearance is crucial

ARES Staff Positions

An ARES group, which is the local operational component of the ARES program, is guided under the direction of the Emergency Coordinator (EC). It is the EC who is most familiar with the needs of his or her community, familiar with the local hazards and threats, topography, weather expectations, natural resources, and available community resources. It is the EC who maintains contact with the public safety leaders, as well as partners and their leadership.

All ARRL Field appointments are made by the respective Section Manager.

The following job descriptions detail how these ARES positions work together for an effective organization.

All ARES Job descriptions are outlined in the Director Workbook at: <https://www.arrl.org/director-workbook> and consist of the following appointments:

Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC)
Assistant Emergency Coordinator (ASEC)
District Emergency Coordinator (DEC)
Assistant District Emergency Coordinator (ADEC)
Emergency Coordinator (EC)
Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC)

Summary

Formerly inconsistent ARES training requirements are now organized into a consistent and achievable format. This is a first step towards our long-term goal of being recognized by our served partner agencies as the “gold standard” of volunteer communications support based upon ARES members’ unique Expertise and Capabilities.

This program introduces many changes that were asked for by our partner agencies. Notably, all have been included in the Plan. From the mission statement itself, new ARES Guidelines were created and appear in this document. This Plan will continue to evolve. Changes in technology, along with evolving local, state, federal, and tribal needs will require updates and revisions to accommodate our served partner agencies.

ARRL Headquarters staff will conduct an annual review of this Plan to ensure its continued relevance. This document supersedes any previous versions of the ARES Plan.