

Online reporting and standardized training are key components of the new ARES Strategic Plan.



# Positioning **ARES** for Serving in **Today's World**

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There is a growing trend toward increasing the professionalism of the numerous national organizations that respond to disasters and emergencies, and that trend has only accelerated in the past few years given the devastating storms, wildfires, and other disasters that this country has experienced. The Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®), which has played an important role in providing communication services during these times, and which is committed to being part of this trend, is taking some major steps to upgrade its strategic plan.

Knowing that the ARES organizational structure needed to be brought into alignment with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS), and that there was a need to create more consistency and standardization in the organization's training requirements, ARRL established a Public Service Enhancement Working Group (PSEWG) in 2015 to undertake this task.

## Focus on Expertise, Capability, and Capacity

The working group, with input from the ARES membership and a peer review team, as well as the assistance of emergency response officials from some of our partner organizations, has been crafting a proposed new strategic plan. That proposed plan includes guidelines to ensure

that ARES remains an organization of *organized, trained, qualified, and credentialed* Amateur Radio operators who can provide public service partners with radio communications *expertise, capability, and capacity*, says Great Lakes Division Director Dale Williams, WA8EFK, who is the PSEWG chairman.

In aligning the ARES organizational structure with the NIMS and ICS systems, Williams notes that, under the proposed plan, the Emergency Coordinator (EC) will continue to lead the ARES team locally during an incident, while the District EC and Section Emergency Coordinator will continue to serve as resources and support for the EC.

## A Modern Reporting System

One of the key components of the proposed guidelines is a new volunteer management software system, called *ARES® Connect*, which is now being rolled out to ARES groups and which will be fully in place for all ARES members by the end of this year. The *ARES Connect* program has already gone through beta-testing by several ARRL Sections with large, active ARES teams, and the feedback from that testing did result in some changes and enhancements to the system.

As an online volunteer management and activity-reporting system, a key feature of the new *ARES Connect* program is that it is easy to use, thereby making it easier for Emergency Coordinators (ECs) and other

managers to report the activities of their group. With better and more efficient reporting, it will become easier for the ARES organization nationally to have a better understanding of what is going on at the local level. It also should allow for better communication among all levels of ARES.

This modernization of the organization's reporting system also allows for better coordination between ARES and the other national emergency and disaster response organizations that it works with.

## Administrative Permissions in ARES Connect

The *ARES Connect* system allows ECs, DECAs, and SECAs to create events that ARES participants may sign up for and log hours of participation. All ARES participants will have their own accounts on the system and be able to report their volunteer hours. ECs (at all levels) serve as administrators in the system.

Emergency Coordinators will use this system to create events at a local level, approve hours, appoint members to their group, communicate directly with the group via built-in email tools, and generate reports. District Emergency Coordinators will have the ability to do all that Emergency Coordinators can do, but for all groups within their district.

Section Emergency Coordinators and Section Managers will be able to do all that ECs and DECAs can do. In addition, they will serve as the pro-

gram administrators for their Section, which gives them the authority to appoint local administrators, that is, the ECs and DECs.

It is important to note that while the new *ARES Connect* system will allow information to be logged online by ARES members and managed online through the ARRL Field Organization, it will not change how ARES operates when serving a partner entity; it is simply a system that will make managing volunteers and incidents/events easier.

Williams adds that through the remainder of 2018, participants can continue to use the traditional ARES report forms, but these will be phased out in January 2019, so it is important that ARES leaders still submit their activity reports and EC/SEC monthly reports. ARRL will look at adding additional features to *ARES Connect* once full implementation of the system is achieved.

## A New Strategic Plan for ARES

The *ARES Connect* system is one element of the proposed new ARES Strategic Plan, which was submitted by the Public Service Enhancement Working Group to ARRL's Programs & Services Committee. The Committee has given its approval to the proposed strategic plan and has recommended its approval by the full ARRL Board of Directors.

The ARRL Board of Directors, at its July 2018 meeting, voted to establish a 3-month general comment period that will close on October 31, 2018. The Board expects that the PSEWG will submit a final version of the proposed strategic plan for consideration for final adoption at the Board's January 2019 meeting.

Among the other significant elements of the proposed ARES Strategic Plan are a new Mission Statement and a Vision Statement for the organization.



The proposed updates to ARES will allow for the implementation of a policy of continuous improvement and best practices among ARES members. [Photo courtesy of Michael Smith, N5TGL]

The proposed strategic plan also identifies the expertise, capabilities, and capacity of the ARES organization, as related to its role in emergency communications.

## Enhancing Expertise Through Training

Another key element of the ARES Strategic Plan is the standardization of the training requirements for participation in ARES. It is critical that ARES participants strive to enhance the expertise that they already possess, Williams says, noting that upgrades to ARES training and resources will ensure the service continues to be a valuable partner with its served agencies into the future.

He also notes that training requirements have been inconsistent and varied across ARES groups. It is vitally important to shape the organization's training requirements into a consistent and achievable format.

The ARES Strategic Plan proposes creating levels of training requirements that would dovetail with the levels of responsibility within the organization, meaning that the more management responsibility an ARES participant takes on, the more training that individual would be required to complete.

Proposed training requirements would include ARRL Emergency Communications courses and the now stan-

dard FEMA NIMS/ICS courses IS-100, 200, 700, and 800. Other specialty courses may be required in certain cases, such as SKYWARN and other agency-specific training.

## Aligning ARES with the Needs of Served Agencies

With the advent of more uniformly functioning public safety organizations across the nation, more requirements imposed upon agencies and organizations assisting them, and the development of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS), ARRL was challenged to align the standards of ARES with current needs of our served partner agencies.

Without implementing such changes, ARES runs the risk of losing its status as a full participant and a valued partner in emergency and disaster relief situations.

These proposed updates to ARES, Williams notes, will allow for the implementation of a policy of Best Practices and Continuous Improvement. With these concepts in place, ARES will become a more flexible program that can adapt to meet new and emerging communication needs.

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