

New Plan Aligns ARES with the Needs of Served Agencies

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The new ARES Plan adopted by the ARRL Board of Directors at its Annual Meeting in January represents an effort to provide ARES with a clearly defined mission, goals, and objectives; specific training requirements, and a system for consistent reporting and record-keeping. The Board's Public Service Enhancement Working Group (PSEWG) spent more than 3 years crafting the ARES Plan which, ARRL officials believe, provides a much-needed update of the program's role in public service and emergency preparedness in the 21st century. Concerns focused on bringing ARES into alignment with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS), and creating more consistent and standardized ARES training requirements. Given dramatic changes and upgrades in national, regional, and local emergency and disaster response organizations, ARRL faced a major challenge, said ARRL Great Lakes Division Director Dale Williams, WA8EFK, who chaired the PSEWG.

“If we didn't address these issues, such as training standards and organizational management, ARES faced the very real possibility that it would no longer be viewed as a valid and valuable partner in emergency and disaster relief situations,” Williams said.

With input from ARES members and a peer review team, and the assistance of emergency response officials with some partner organizations, the PSEWG came up with a plan that provides guidelines to ensure that ARES remains a service of organized, trained, qualified, and credentialed Amateur Radio volunteers who can provide public service partners with radio communication expertise, capability, and capacity, Williams added.

Training requirements in the final ARES Plan consist of the free FEMA Professional Development Series of independent study (IS) courses, as well as the ARRL's EC-001 and EC-016 emergency communication courses. The ARRL Board approved a proposal to make the ARRL EC courses free for ARES members.

The plan highlights some additional training programs that ARES participants are encouraged to consider taking, but that are not required, such as AUXCOMM and training courses like ICS-300 and ICS-400.

The ARES Plan outlines a three-tiered membership structure based on increased responsibility levels and accompanying training requirements. The optional tiered system serves to define three distinct ways to participate in the ARES program, leaving it up to participants to determine their level of involvement.

The ARES Plan points out that public service events such as parades and marathons are within the realm of ARES activity and are an integral part of effective training.

The Plan notes that training requirements are ultimately the responsibility of the Section Manager, with each SM approving training for local ARES teams, as local conditions and needs dictate.

The ARES Plan also highlights the relationship between ARES and the National Traffic System (NTS).

Williams noted that, within the ARES structure, the Emergency Coordinator (EC) will continue to lead the ARES team locally during an incident, while the District and Section Emergency Coordinators will continue to serve as resources and support for the EC. The ARES Plan stresses that ARES participants are not first responders, and it encourages ARES leaders to develop and grow their group's partnerships with state emergency management agencies and officials. Williams said the adoption of the ARES Plan is not the end of this process.

“ARES cannot remain stagnant only to be updated once every few generations,” he said. “The ARES Plan, and the ARES program, must be able to evolve.” Williams added that the ARRL Headquarters emergency preparedness staff will review the program annually to ensure its continued relevance. Read [more](#).