

So you're the ARES Emergency Coordinator for your county - Now What?

Now that you are the emergency coordinator (EC), what do you do or what should you be doing? No doubt you have seen the long list of duties and responsibilities an EC is supposed to be doing. How in world does one person do all of that and how do you start building or maintaining an active ARES team? And I do mean active, not just names on a roster but volunteers ready, trained, and able to respond to your county's communications emergency.

How does ONE person do all that? Answer: ONE person can not! It takes a team effort. However, you, as the EC are the team's coach, quarterback and cheerleader all in one nice bundle.

The first thing a new EC must do is locate and/or recruit your replacement. What? Leaving already? NO! But any good plan has at least one back up. You need to find someone who would be willing to step into the role as EC if needed. Let's say you're out of town on vacation, you're ill, your boss will not let you leave work, or you and your family are victims of the disaster and you need to take care of your family first. Any of those situations can and do happen. Your backup does not have to be someone who is being groomed to someday take over as EC when the time is right for you to step aside, but they can be.

Next, read, learn and understand the section's and your county's ARES Emergency Communication plan. Take special note that any good plan is always evolving and being revised. Don't make any changes to your county's plan right off. Build your team, get their input and *then* make any needed changes to the county plan. More importantly, your overall understanding of the plan(s) is important. ARES volunteers in your county will be looking to **you** to know what's going on and what they should be doing. Being able to put a written plan(s) in their hands and being confident in the plan will make any event go much smoother.

Now let's do a "by the numbers" review each of the duties of the EC. **Look for my comments and suggestions in italic below each of the listed duties and responsibilities.*

Emergency Coordinator

ARRL Field Organization

The ARRL Emergency Coordinator (EC) is a key team player in ARES on the local emergency scene. Working with the Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC), the Regional Emergency Coordinator (REC), the District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) and Official Emergency Stations (OES), the EC prepares for, and engages in management of communications needs in disasters. EC duties include: **The word LOCAL is the most important word in the above paragraph. All emergencies or disasters are LOCAL. The EC is the primary manager of ARES volunteers in a communication emergency.*

1. Promote and enhance the activities of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) for the benefit of the public as a voluntary, non-commercial communications service.
**Notice that this is number one on the list. It's your biggest duty. Promote, enhance/grow/build, then recruit and recruit, then recruit some more. Never miss an opportunity to meet, greet and recruit volunteers and leaders to your team.*

2. Manage and coordinate the training, organization and emergency participation of interested amateurs working in support of the communities, agencies or functions designated by the Section Emergency Coordinator/Section Manager. **This is a bit of a catch all paragraph, and it also should remind you flexibility is a big part of any successful ARES team. You should also keep "Manageable Span of Control" (remember your ICS/NIMS training) in mind as your team grows -- you will need to assign a leader, or in most cases several leaders (A-EC), to oversee many operational functions such as training, exercises and logistics to name a few. This may also include the training of new amateur radio licensees to help grow your ARES team.*
3. Establish viable working relationships with federal, state, county, city governmental and private agencies in the ARES jurisdictional area which need the services of ARES in emergencies. Determine what agencies are active in your area, evaluate each of their needs, and which ones you are capable of meeting, and then prioritize these agencies and needs. Discuss your planning with your SEC and then with your counterparts in each of the agencies. Ensure they are all aware of your ARES group's capabilities, and perhaps more importantly, your limitations. **The EC is a key part of the overall plan and partnership with the each served agency. However, your best leaders (A-EC) can help you with this matter. Here in Oklahoma, under the management of the county EC, an A-EC leads a small team (Rapid Response Team - RRT) focusing on the day-to-day interaction and communication with a specific served agency. One RRT per each served agency. The size of each RRT is one A-EC and three to seven ARES emergency communications volunteers – the size of the RRT follows NIMS best practice "Manageable Span of Control". You the EC can not do it all, or in a communications emergency, be everywhere.*
4. Develop detailed local operational plans with "served" agency officials in your jurisdiction that set forth precisely what each of your expectations are during a disaster operation. Work jointly to establish protocols for mutual trust and respect. All matters involving recruitment and utilization of ARES volunteers are directed by you, in response to the needs assessed by the agency officials. Technical issues involving message format, security of message transmission, Disaster Welfare Inquiry policies, and others, should be reviewed and expounded upon in your detailed local operations plans. **This should all be covered in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and in your county's ARES communication plan. A key point to remember is that ARES volunteers work under the management and direction of ARES leadership. When ARES is there to assist with communications -- that is what we do. ARES volunteer do not become part of a served agency's volunteer pool. ARES is a self-standing Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with national partnerships and MOUs in place with many national disaster response providers. See this link for more information on MOUs with current national served agency partners: <http://www.arrl.org/served-agencies-and-partners>*
5. Establish local communications networks run on a regular basis and periodically test those networks by conducting realistic drills. **A weekly local ARES net is a good place to start. This can be simplex, or via local repeater -- you and your leadership team decide. I suggest that you make this NET part of your county's ARES communication*

plan. This net can be an “On Air” meeting place any time your ARES team is either on stand-by or is active during a communications emergency.

6. Establish an emergency traffic plan, with Welfare traffic inclusive, utilizing the National Traffic System as one active component for traffic handling. Establish an operational liaison with local and section nets, particularly for handling Welfare traffic in an emergency situation. **As EC it is important to have your county’s ARES communication plan (your roadmap) all worked out before any emergency. If your county’s ARES leaders are knowledgeable about the ARES communication plan, then you will find that communications and message traffic will flow smoothly. This also applies to your core ARES emergency communicators -- make sure they have working knowledge of your county’s ARES communication plan.*
7. In times of disaster, evaluate the communications needs of the jurisdiction and respond quickly to those needs. The EC will assume authority and responsibility for emergency response and performance by ARES personnel under his jurisdiction. **Okay, as EC you’re in charge, but remember you do not have to and really can not do it all. My suggestion is that during a communication emergency, each of your RRT leaders should check in with each served agency and evaluate communication needs. Then your leaders report their findings to you the EC. More often than not, once you have all the information (from the leaders of each RRT), you will find that not all of your county’s served agencies have urgent communications needs. This first evaluation of the communications needs will allow you and your leaders to make decisions and shift resources where needed.*
8. Work with other non-ARES amateur provider-groups to establish mutual respect and understanding, and a coordination mechanism for the good of the public and Amateur Radio. The goal is to foster an efficient and effective Amateur Radio response overall. **The first time I read that one I had to pause and think. Then it hit me - Play well with others. If your leaders and core volunteers are trained and ready to go, you will notice that other non-ARES amateur radio groups will be looking for you to lead the way. Any planning and MOUs you can have in place before any communication emergency will make working with any group a smoother process.*
9. Work for growth in your ARES program, making it a stronger, more valuable resource and hence able to meet more of the agencies' local needs. There are thousands of new Technicians coming into the amateur service that would make ideal additions to your ARES roster. A stronger ARES means a better ability to serve your communities in times of need and a greater sense of pride for Amateur Radio by both amateurs and the public. **It bears mentioning again... Never miss an opportunity to meet, greet and recruit volunteers and leaders to your team. Growing your team is VERY important and recruiting really never stops.*
10. Report regularly to the SEC, as required. ****EVERY MONTH** on the first day of the month,. ECs send your report to your DEC. DECs send your report to the SEC (in Oklahoma DEC’s report to the RegionalEC, who in turn reports to the SEC). Here in Oklahoma to make it easy to report, we can do it online via the www.ARESOK.org website.*

11. Emergency Coordinators are encouraged to earn certification in Level 1 of the ARRL "Intro to EmComm, EC-001" Course (**See ARRL for details**) **I feel for a leader this is a MUST, and I would go so far as to change the word "encouraged" to "required". I understand ARES leaders are volunteers. The way I see it, leaders should not ask their teams to participate in training they themselves have not passed. ARES leaders should also take the "EmComm for Managers" (EC-016) course online from the ARRL.*
12. All ARES officers are also expected to complete **ICS-700.A, ICS-100.B, ICS-200.B, and ICS-800.B** FEMA training. All ARES members must complete this training within one year from the time of application. **Just like recruiting, training and being ready... it all never stops. About the time you think you and your team are all trained up, there's another course to take or more training to do. If you know that going in, it will never be a surprise to you.*
13. Recruitment of new hams and ARRL members is an integral part of the job of every League appointee. Appointees should take advantage of every opportunity to recruit a new ham or member to foster growth of Field Organization programs, and our abilities to serve the public. ** Yep, recruiting is here, too. Not only for ARES but for the ARRL. It only makes sense because ARES is an ARRL-supported program. So, in case you passed over a section or two earlier in this article, I'll mention it again: Never miss an opportunity to meet, greet and recruit volunteers and leaders to your team. Always invite all new volunteers to become a member of the ARRL – The national association for Amateur Radio .*

Requirements: Full ARRL membership; FCC Technician class amateur radio license or higher. **These are the minimum requirements to become your county's EC. Having a EmComm or leadership background is very helpful, but not required.*

Okay, I know that's a lot to take in and I hope that my added comments and thoughts on the listed duties and responsibilities were helpful in your new role as ARES Emergency Coordinator for your county. My goal here is to be helpful and to stop that loud scream of "WHAT DID I GET MYSELF IN FOR" (which is usually accompanied with that hard slap to your own forehead) right after you tell your SEC that you would be happy to serve as your county's EC. And replace that reaction with, "I get it! Teamwork, recruiting, planning, clear communication and training will make our ARES team function smoothly and grow."

Do not be afraid to ask questions of your DEC, REC, SEC, the ARRL Section Manager or a neighboring EC. The more you learn and the more you grow your team, the more successful ARES will be in your part of the world.

73s and Good Luck,

Mark Conklin, N7XYO
Oklahoma Section Emergency Coordinator
Amateur Radio Emergency Service