

Building Your Local ARES Group

To be successful an ARES group needs a "reason" to exist. If you live in hurricane, tornado, forest fire, or earth quake prone areas, it is easy to keep people interested. If you live in an area that has very few natural disasters it is much more difficult to maintain interest on the part of your members.

One area that always needs communicators is public service events. There are many non profit organizations, doing fund raising that clearly qualify for Amateur Radio communications assistance. These public service events can easily be used for very effective communications training and regular practice.

How do you build your organization?

1. Establish the "need" This is sometimes called "sizing up" your area. It involves working closely with your Served Agency(ies) to assess:
 - a. What services your Served Agency needs, if all things were perfect, this would be in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the agency.
 - b. What services your group can provide, also in a perfect world, this could be detailed in the (MOU) with the agency.
 - c. Plan on how you will resolve any differences between the first two items.
 - d. What manpower is needed to support required services?
 - e. Plan for how you can acquire the resources you do not have
 - f. What technical advancements do you need to address in support of required services
 - g. What long term requirements will you face for long term incidents?

2. Recruit new members.

Membership recruitment is a necessary and ongoing responsibility of any ARES group that wishes to maintain an effective group for any length of time. Due to the ever changing makeup of our society, people will find their priorities changing as time passes. The operator with boundless enthusiasm may find that after a while his wife, family, or job take more time that they had previously and he will not be able to be as active as he had been. Therefore you will need an ongoing supply of operators for the group. Recruitment is how your group will survive. Many ECs will enlist the aid of one or more of their Assistant ECs (AECs) with this activity. There are some factors you will need to consider when recruiting:

a. Eligibility

If your area does not have Identification cards (IDs) issued by your served agency, then eligibility may simply be an Amateur Radio license, and an interest in public service. If your served agency issues the IDs and performs background checks or have other requirements, then their requirements will need to be added to your requirements, based on which groups you choose to offer your services to.

b. Recruiting materials

Be sure you have a good supply of one page handouts that give a brief explanation of ARES and details the time and training commitment involved. It is far better to get a smaller number of people that are ready to train and work together, than a large number that are surprised that they actually have to do something once they become members.

c. Recruit at local clubs or ham fests.

The easiest way to meet active hams is at local Radio Club meetings and ham fests or tailgate parties and the like. If you bring a supply of your hand-outs, you can be ready.

d. Recruit at local licensing classes.

This is a wonderful source of new and interested people. Get them involved early in public service.

3. Select your assistants.

An EC should if feasible, recruit as many Assistant ECs (AECs) as his group needs to function smoothly. Remember, if you are out of town when an actual incident begins, you need leadership people in place to handle the operation in your absence. A few examples of AEC positions are:

a. AEC for administration and recruitment

b. AEC for Net Manager

c. AEC for training

Your list may be totally different, but if you select AEC's for Net Manager, and training, be sure you pick people with leadership skills, and a positive attitude.

4. Hold training sessions.

The first training session that every new ARES person needs is orientation. This will get the person started with the information that many take for granted, such as:

a. Date and time of training nets.

b. Overview of served agencies and their needs.

c. SAFETY!

d. Basic Operational procedures

e. Participation expectations. Groups without participation expectations tend to not do as well.

After the initial orientation, regular training sessions are essential for efficient operations. The attitude of "I've done that before, I know how to do that" "I don't need to train" is not productive when you are trying to produce effective team operation practices. People with that attitude will be one of your greatest challenges, as they may likely have the experience needed, but may not be willing to be a team player. No matter how good someone's skills may be, the challenge is going to be putting together a team that will work as a team, even under a lot of stress. Hold four to six major training events or participate in a number of public service events, each year to test this team effort concept. This gives everyone a chance to shine and yet will not wear them out. You can adjust that number as your area needs may dictate, and evaluate your leader's abilities to lead, and each member's ability to work together.

5. Praise good work!

Keep in mind that ALL of your people are volunteers. A warm smile and a public thanks will go further toward keeping them happy, than anything else you can do. Be sure to praise those that deserve it! Unfounded praise undermines your credibility and lessens the contribution of those that deserve the praise.

6. Hold regular meetings

The best way to keep people interested is to help them participate. The easiest way to handle that is to hold regular meetings. Be aware that you can take this premise too far and drive people away by holding more meetings than necessary. Once per month can work well if there is a portion of the meeting devoted to social interaction. One technique that has proven very successful with some groups is to hold a breakfast or lunch session at a local restaurant and go into your meeting after the meal. This provides a good socialization time and that produces people that are ready to pay attention to the business portion. You should solicit feed back from your people to determine the correct directions for your group to follow. Make sure they are an important part on the decisions you make, remember just because you are the leader, it doesn't take away from the team principal. You can't accomplish much by yourself. Be sure you have a good "reason" for the meeting. Holding meetings, just to have meetings, is severely counterproductive, and most people don't care too much about wasting time.

7. Start with number 1 again. This, of necessity, is a repetitive process. You cannot perform the above steps once and be done. A regular review of all of the steps above should keep your group prepared, enthusiastic and ready to serve your Served Agency needs.