

## **Chapter Seven: On Serving "Served" Agencies**

Meeting the communications needs of served agencies is a challenging, and often daunting proposition in today's complex disaster/emergency relief arena. With the proliferation of emergency relief organizations, increasingly sophisticated needs, all competing for that scarce resource -- the volunteer -- coupled with the emergence of other non-ARES amateur providers, it's enough to make an ARES member's head spin. As more of the population moves to disaster-prone areas, and less government funding is available, more pressure is consequently placed on agencies to appropriately use the volunteer sector for support of their missions in disaster mitigation.

The League's formal relationships with served agencies are vitally important and valuable to radio amateurs. They provide us with the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the relief of suffering among our fellow human beings. Another substantial benefit not to be overlooked is that the relationships lend legitimacy and credibility for Amateur Radio's public service capability, and that is important when it comes time to defend our frequencies and privileges before the FCC and Congress. So, ARRL's relationships with the emergency/disaster relief world need to be nurtured.

### **7.1 What to Do?**

First, it is imperative that a detailed local operational plan be developed with agency managers in the jurisdiction that set forth precisely what each organization's expectations are during a disaster operation. ARES and agency officials must work jointly to establish protocols for mutual trust and respect. Make sure they know who the principle ARES official is in the jurisdiction. All matters involving recruitment and utilization of ARES volunteers are directed by him/her, in response to the needs assessed by the agency involved.

Make sure ARES counterparts in these agencies are aware of ARES policies, capabilities and perhaps most importantly, resource limitations. Let them know that ARES may have other obligations to fulfill with other agencies, too. Technical issues involving message format, security of message transmission, disaster welfare inquiry policies and others should be reviewed and expounded upon in the detailed local operations plans.

### **7.2 Pulled Every Which Way But Loose**

Another challenge ARES faces is the number of agencies that demand communications support during a disaster. A local ARES unit only has so much to go around, and it can't possibly meet every agency's needs.

While the League maintains several formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with disaster and emergency response agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Weather Service, Salvation Army, National Communications System and Associated Public-Safety Communications Officials - International. These documents merely set forth a framework for possible cooperation at the local level.

While they are designed to encourage mutual recognition, cooperation and coordination, they should not be interpreted as to commit, obligate or mandate in any way that an ARES unit *must* serve a particular agency, or meet *all* of its needs, in a jurisdiction. MOUs are "door openers," to help you get your foot in the door. It's up to you to decide whether or not to pursue a local operational plan with an agency, a decision that will be based on a number of factors including the local needs of the agency and the resources you have available to support those needs, given that you may have other prioritized commitments as well.

To address this, sit down with your fellow ARES members, EC and SEC, and determine what agencies are active in your area, evaluate each of their needs, and which ones you are capable of meeting. Then prioritize these agencies and their needs. After you're all in agreement, sit down with your counterparts in each of the agencies and execute local, detailed operational plans and agreements in light of your priority list based on the above.

Given the above, however, you should also be working for growth in your ARES program, making it a stronger, more valuable resource and hence able to meet more of the agencies' local needs. 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. That's good for all of us.

### **7.3 Another Kind of Competition**

With a strong ARES program, and a capability of substantially meeting most of the local served agencies' needs, you might avoid another problem that is cropping up in some parts of the country -- competition with emerging amateur groups providing similar communications services outside of ARES. Some of these groups may feel that their local ARES doesn't do the job, or personality conflicts and egos get in the way, so they set up shop for themselves, working directly with agency officials, and usurping ARES' traditional role. Some agencies have been receptive to their assistance.

There continues to be "RACES versus ARES" polarization in some areas. And some agencies, including at least one with statewide jurisdiction, are forming their own auxiliary communications groups, and recruiting their own hams, some away from ARES.

There's not much you can do about this, except to work to find your ARES program's niche and provide the best services you can as outlined above. Strive for growth and enhancement of ARES members' abilities, and make sure you present a "professional" face to potential "served" agencies and your opportunities will grow. Make your program better than the next guy's, and agencies will be more attracted to you.

If possible, setting egos and personalities aside, seek out these other groups and take the initiative to try to establish a rapport, and the fact that "we're all in this *together*," for the good of the public and Amateur Radio. With good communication, mutual respect and understanding between you and the other groups, at the least, you should be able to coordinate your program's missions with theirs (i.e., divide up the pie, or who will do what for which agency) to foster an efficient and effective Amateur Radio response overall. At best, you may find other groups willing to fold their tents and join your camp! Try it.

<http://www.arrl.org/chapter-7-on-serving-served-agencies>