

PACE Communication Plans

by the Lefty Radio League

Intro – What is PACE?

PACE is a framework for planning redundant communications, so that you always have a way to communicate with your people. It stands for:

Primary: Your main, go-to communication method. The one you use every day.

Alternate: A backup that's nearly as capable as your primary, but uses different infrastructure.

Contingency: A more limited option for when both primary and alternate fail.

Emergency: The last resort. May be slow and inconvenient — but it works when nothing else does.

Key PACE Principles

Independence: Each method must use different infrastructure. If cell towers go down, your alternate can't be cell-based, too.

Training: Your whole group must know how to use all four methods. A plan you can't execute is a wish.

Practice: And do so regularly. The worst time to learn is during an emergency.

Triggers: Define when to shift from one tier to the next. Don't wait too long!

Real-World PACE Examples

Soldiers in the US Army

P: Encrypted tactical radio

A: Satellite communications

C: Field telephone with wire

E: Visual signals (flares, smoke) or runners

FEMA Operators

P: Landline telephone network

A: Cell networks and mobile command centers

C: Amateur (Ham) radio through ARES/RACES

E: Physical messengers, vehicle-based couriers

A Family of Preppers

P: A group text thread (Signal or iMessage)

A: GMRS radios with pre-programmed channels

C: Ham radios or Meshtastic devices

E: A set meeting place

Wilderness Search and Rescue Teams

P: UHF/VHF tactical radios on team frequency

A: Cell phone when in coverage areas

C: Satellite messenger (i.e. Garmin inReach)

E: Whistle signals or returning to base camp

Sample PACE Plan for Activists

Here's a practical PACE plan designed for activist groups coordinating mutual aid, protests, or community defense. Adjust based on your group's resources and threat model.

P: Signal – Encrypted and popular

Works on WiFi or cellular data

Vulnerability: Depends on the power being up and cell towers or internet

A: GMRS Radios – Pre-programmed with your group's designated channel and backup

Works without any infrastructure

Vulnerability: Unencrypted

C: Meshtastic / Meshcore – Supports encryption

No license required; works off-grid; creates its own mesh network

Vulnerability: Everyone must own a device and be able to use it

E: Physical Meetup Point – Pre-designated location everyone knows

Can leave written notes in a weatherproof container

Vulnerability: Requires physical travel; slow

Tips for Building Your PACE Plan

Know Your Threat Model

What are you planning for? A protest where cell service gets overloaded? A disaster that takes out power for days? Bad actors intercepting your comms? Your answers shape which methods belong in each tier.

Ensure True Independence

Each tier should rely on different infrastructure. If your primary and alternate both need cell towers, you really only have three tiers. Good independence looks like:

- Cell-based → Radio-based → Mesh/Satellite → Physical/Human
- Internet-dependent → Local infrastructure → Fully off-grid → No electronics

Keep It Simple

The best plan is one people will actually follow. If your contingency method requires a 20-step setup process, it will fail under stress. Choose methods your group can realistically learn and execute.

Document and Distribute

Write your PACE plan down. Put it on a laminated card. Make sure everyone has a copy. Include:

- ✓ Which methods to use in which order
- ✓ Specific channels, frequencies, or addresses
- ✓ Triggers for when to shift to the next tier
- ✓ Emergency meeting location and check-in times

Practice Regularly

Schedule regular drills where you practice using your backup methods:

- "No-cell Sunday": Coordinate your group using only GMRS radios for a day.
- Comms blackout drill: Simulate Signal going down; switch to your alternate and time how long it takes to reach everyone.
- Equipment check: Verify batteries are charged, frequencies are correct, and everyone remembers how to use each device.

When to Shift Tiers

Define clear triggers so your group knows when to switch methods. Examples:

P → A: No response on Signal after 15 minutes during an active event; cell service is degraded or absent.

A → C: GMRS is compromised, jammed, or monitored by hostile actors; need encrypted communications.

C → E: Electronic methods have failed; prolonged power outage; devices lost, confiscated, or destroyed.

PACE Plan Checklist

- Each tier uses different infrastructure (cell, radio, mesh, physical)
- Everyone in the group knows all four methods
- Everyone has the necessary equipment for at least P and A
- Frequencies/channels/addresses are documented and shared
- Triggers for tier shifts are clearly defined
- Emergency meetup location is known to all
- Plan has been tested in the last 90 days
- Batteries and equipment have been checked recently

Final Thoughts

A PACE plan is only as good as your commitment to practicing it. The methods you choose matter less than your group's ability to actually use them under pressure. Start simple, drill regularly, and refine as you learn what works for your community.