GENERAL

arcsight flex connector guide

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Introduction

In today's threat laden cyber landscape, security teams rely on robust, flexible, and scalable solutions to detect, investigate, and remediate incidents. ArcSight Flex, a lightweight and modular component of the broader ArcSight SIEM ecosystem, has emerged as a popular choice for organizations seeking real time log collection and correlation without the overhead of a full blown appliance. However, the true power of ArcSight Flex lies in its connectors—dedicated modules that translate diverse log sources into a unified format that the SIEM can consume. This comprehensive **arcsight flex connector guide**walks you through every step of selecting, installing, configuring, and troubleshooting connectors, ensuring that your security analytics engine receives clean, actionable data from all corners of your infrastructure.

Understanding ArcSight Flex and the Role of Connectors

What is ArcSight Flex?

ArcSight Flex is a lightweight, agent based log collector designed to sit on servers, endpoints, and network devices. Unlike traditional SIEM appliances, Flex is distributed and can be deployed in a variety of environments—on-premises, virtual machines, containers, or even cloud instances. Its core responsibilities include ingesting raw logs, normalizing them into ArcSight's Common Event Format (CEF), and forwarding them to the ArcSight Logger or ArcSight ESM for further analysis. Because Flex is modular, it can be customized to support a wide range of data sources, making it an ideal foundation for building a modern, scalable security stack.

Why Connectors Matter in ArcSight Flex

At the heart of Flex's flexibility are its connectors. A connector is a software component that knows how to interpret a specific log format—be it Windows Event Log, Linux syslog, Cisco ASA, Splunk, or even custom application logs. Connectors perform three essential functions:

- Parsing: They read raw data and break it into structured fields.
- Mapping: They translate proprietary fields into ArcSight's standardized CEF attributes.
- Enrichment: They add contextual information such as hostnames, IP geolocation, or threat intelligence tags.

Without the right connector, logs remain raw, unstructured, and largely unusable. By selecting and configuring the appropriate connectors, you unlock the full analytical power of ArcSight Flex.

Preparing for the ArcSight Flex Connector Setup

Prerequisites and System Requirements

Before you dive into connector installation, ensure that your environment meets the following baseline requirements:

- Operating system: Windows Server 2012/2016/2019, RHEL/CentOS 7/8, or Ubuntu 16.04/18.04/20.04.
- Java Runtime Environment (JRE) 8 or higher (for connectors that rely on Java libraries).
- Network connectivity: Flex must reach the ArcSight Logger or ESM on the configured port (default 5140 for TCP/UDP).
- Disk space: Allocate at least 500 /MB for the connector binaries and 1 /GB for log buffers.

- Administrative privileges: Installation and configuration typically require root (Linux) or SYSTEM (Windows) rights.

Choosing the Right Connector

ArcSight Flex offers a catalog of pre-built connectors for popular log sources. When selecting a connector, consider the following criteria:

- Log source compatibility: Verify that the connector supports the exact log format version you're using.
- Update frequency: Some connectors receive regular updates to adapt to new log schema changes.
- Performance impact: Evaluate CPU and memory usage, especially for high volume sources like firewalls or IDS/IPS devices.
- Community or vendor support: Look for connectors with active forums or official support channels.

Once you've identified the necessary connectors, download them from the ArcSight Flex connector repository or the vendor's website.

Step by Step ArcSight Flex Connector Guide

Detailed Steps

1. Download the Connector PackageNavigate to the official ArcSight Flex connector download portal and select the package that matches your operating system. Verify the checksum to ensure the integrity of the download.
2. Install the ConnectorOn Windows, run the installer as Administrator; on Linux, use tar -xzvf connector.tar.gz and then ./install.sh. The installation script will copy the connector binaries to the Flex installation directory (typically /opt/arcsight/flex).
3. Configure Connector SettingsOpen the connector's configuration file (often named connector.conf) and adjust parameters such as log source address, port, authentication credentials, and field mapping rules. For example:

   source_ip=192.168.1.100
   source_port=514
   protocol=udp
   mapping=cef_map.xml
4. Set Permissions and OwnershipEnsure that the Flex service user (e.g., flexuser) has read/write access to the connector files and log directories. On Linux, use chown flexuser:flexuser -R /opt/arcsight/flex.
5. Start or Restart FlexUse systemctl restart arcsight-flex on Linux or the Services console on Windows to apply the new connector configuration.
6. Verify ConnectivityCheck the Flex logs (/var/log/arcsight/flex.log) for entries indicating successful connection to the log source and the ArcSight Logger. Look for messages like "Connector firewall initialized successfully."
7. Validate Data FlowLog into ArcSight Logger and confirm that events from the new connector appear in the event stream. Use the query builder to filter by source=firewall and inspect the event structure.

Configuring the Connector

Connector configuration can be performed through three primary methods: text files, web UI, and command line utilities. The text file approach offers the most granular control. Below is a typical configuration snippet for a Windows Event Log connector:

```
connector_name=windows_event
source_ip=10.0.0.5
source_port=514
protocol=udp
```

mapping=windows_cef.xml
enrich=true
enrich_fields=ip_geolocation,threat_intel

Key points to remember:

- Mapping files (e.g., windows_cef.xml) define how raw event fields translate into CEF attributes like EventID, Severity, and EventType.
- Enrichment flags enable optional modules that add IP geolocation data or threat intelligence tags.
- Protocol selection should match the log source's output format; many devices use UDP, while others may require TCP or TLS.

Mapping Fields and Log Formats

Accurate field mapping is critical for effective correlation. ArcSight Flex uses XML mapping files that follow the CEF schema. For example, a Cisco ASA log line might look like:

%ASA-6-302013: Built outbound TCP connection 0.0.0.0:0->192.168.1.10:443

The connector's mapping file will parse this line and produce a CEF event such as:

cef:Version=0|deviceVersion=9.8|deviceProduct=Cisco ASA|deviceEventClassID=302013|severity=6|src=0.0.0.0|dst=192.168.1.10|spt=0|dpt=443

When creating custom mappings, keep the following best practices in mind:

- Use descriptive field names that align with the ArcSight ESM taxonomy.
- Maintain versioning in your mapping files to track changes over time.
- Validate the mapping against a sample log set before deploying to production.

Security Settings and Permissions

Security is paramount when deploying connectors. Follow these guidelines to harden your Flex installation:

- Transport Layer Security (TLS): Enable TLS for log transmission when available. Configure certificates and key stores in the connector's settings.
- Authentication: Use SNMPv3 or SSH keys for device authentication, rather than plain text passwords.
- Least Privilege: Run Flex under a dedicated user account with only the permissions required to read logs and write to the local buffer.
- Audit Logging: Enable audit trails for connector operations to detect unauthorized changes.

Testing and Validation

After installation and configuration, perform a comprehensive test suite:

1. Unit Tests: Validate individual log lines against the mapping file using the connector-test utility.
2. Integration Tests: Simulate a high volume log stream and monitor Flex's CPU/memory usage.
3. Functional Tests: Verify that events reach ArcSight Logger and that the ESM can correlate them with other data sources.
4. Regression Tests: Periodically re run tests after connector updates or OS patches.

Troubleshooting Common Issues

- Connector Not Starting: Check the Flex log for error messages such as "Failed to load mapping file." Ensure

the file path is correct and permissions are set.

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