

Second Century



Celebrating Section Managers

One of ARRL's greatest contributions to amateur radio, and one of our greatest benefits, is the structure we bring through the organization. In the decades leading up to being hired as CEO, I always looked at ARRL from the perspective of being "just a member." I never really was involved in, or that well educated about, how ARRL's structure works. All I knew was that it worked — and worked well!

When I was first getting into amateur radio, having mentors was important to me. My father Dan and best friend Michael, N2MW, were pivotal in helping me take those small steps forward in learning and operating. One celebrity who came in and out of the scene, principally through visits to the clubs I attended during those early years, was my ARRL Section Manager.

Now, they didn't officially have that title until 1984, but the role of Section Manager has been a vital one since the early days of message relaying. Today's Section Manager's scope of responsibility is much broader! They function as a recruiter, leader, communicator, collaborator, mediator, moderator, and friend. Our 71 Section Managers form the blanket of field support that stretches out from Headquarters and across our entire membership.

One great question I hear at events is, "Why don't Section Managers report to Division Directors?" The answer is, Section Managers function very differently from Directors — as differently as state governors do, in comparison to the US president. Section Managers are very hands-on in providing day-to-day support to members and other volunteers through Headquarters' Field Services Department. Section Managers are the direct representatives of ARRL in every Section. They are the leaders of the Field Organization.


Directors and Vice Directors are principally focused on the governance, strategy, and oversight of ARRL. Unlike Section Managers, they are also considered fiduciaries under the law, meaning they must always put the organization ahead of themselves, and they have extensive financial responsibilities and corporate policy-making involvement.

During the August Section Managers call, we discussed two very important constituents within the Sections that require extensive attention from the Section Managers. The first constituent is radio clubs. First and foremost, amateur radio is a community — a very small community. ARRL has always represented active hams. Yes, there are nearly 800,000 licensees, but how many never really entered the hobby, or have since become Silent Keys? Unknown. What is known is that ARRL members are radio active, and that activity very often is driven by clubs. Section Managers must prioritize time to ensure that clubs are healthy and thriving, and to link club leaders to Headquarters when they need assistance. The word "inclusive" has become a lightning rod for misunderstanding, but it is a word that must be used: clubs must strive to be inclusive. Section Managers must ensure that newcomers and old-timers alike are welcomed and well supported by their local club.

The other constituent is our ARRL Volunteer Examiners (VEs). ARRL processes two of every three exams taken through our VE program. With nearly 30,000 accredited VEs in the field, this is an extraordinary force of communication and support for new hams coming into the hobby. Section Managers know that most VEs operate out of clubs. Licensing classes and mentoring are commonplace, but where we fall down is letting people slip away once they are licensed. How many times do I need to read messages saying that new hams don't know where to turn to get started? There is huge opportunity for Section Managers and clubs working with their VEs to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. And if they actually become radio active, perhaps they'll consider joining our membership!

Finally, let's talk about what you should expect from your Section Manager. It seems "everything" is a possible answer. It is a big job. It can be a thankless job. Certain social networking environments have become so toxic, Section Managers are having to address outrageous claims being made to their members. Section Managers should be positive and supportive. You should see them as a beacon of light and leadership within amateur radio. And from their efforts in making our community a great place, they certainly deserve the celebrity status they enjoy as they go out into the world to spend time with us.

As we wind down the ARRL Year of the Volunteers, let's take a moment to end where we started with the January 2023 cover of *QST*: celebrating our Section Manager volunteers. If you haven't already, reach out and thank your Section Manager! In addition, consider what skills you can bring to our community, and ask your Section Manager how you might volunteer in support of the Section. Be radio active. Keep working those VOTA stations when you find them. And be a connector at your club or VE sessions to help a new ham into our community!


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