

Updating the ARRL Public Service Honor Roll

*Submitted to the Supervisor, ARRL Field Organization Team
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Executive Overview

The first of the five principles comprising the “fundamental purpose” of the amateur radio service, as defined in the United States Code of Federal Regulations, Title 47, Chapter I, §97.1, is “Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications.” The ARRL Public Service Honor Roll (PSHR), documenting some of that service, has existed in approximately its current form for decades, but the meaning and significance of the point totals is lost on persons not involved in amateur radio.

This document recommends that the ARRL transform the PSHR into a data collection engine with the capability to present information which is relevant to persons outside the amateur radio community. The proposed changes would enable, for example, creation of statistical reports which enumerate for elected and appointed officials the significant time and financial resources which amateur radio volunteers contribute to public service within their communities. As a public relations tool, the PSHR might be used to help retain (and even expand) amateur radio spectrum, facilitate cooperation with local agencies, defeat aggressive anti-antenna zoning ordinances, generally promote the image of the amateur radio community, and perhaps even aid in the recruitment of new amateur radio licensees.

Background

At a county ARES Team Leader meeting on 13 August 2013, and at a statewide ARES leadership conference on 24 August 2013, I promoted the PSHR to meeting attendees. It was my personal observation that even amateurs licensed 30 years or more were either not aware, or just vaguely aware (as I had been some four months earlier), of the PSHR. In addition, there appears to be widespread confusion as to what constitutes PSHR points, and the consequence of this is that many public service endeavors are being significantly under-reported by the amateur radio community.

On 26 December 2013, an email was sent from Steve Ewald, WV1X, Supervisor, Field Organization Team at ARRL headquarters to ARRL Field Organization Appointees and ARRL Section Officials soliciting ideas “to update or revise the Public Service Honor Roll criteria” (PSHR) which is published on their website.

In looking through selected back issues of *QST*, the Field Organization Reports section has shrunk significantly over time (July 1981, pages 79-81, 65 column inches; February 1993, page 93, 30 column inches; April 2002, page 78, 16.5 column inches; January 2014, page 98, 9.5 column inches) despite the growing numbers of amateur radio licensees in the U.S. In most *QST* issues, there are more column inches devoted to the list of silent keys than there are to field organization reports. Are amateurs today performing less public service, or are their activities just are not being reported and recorded efficiently?

Emergency managers who take the FEMA IS-1.a (Emergency Manager: An Orientation to the Position) class are being taught (reference: <http://emilms.fema.gov/is1a/EMOPsummary.htm>) to adhere to Presidential Policy Directive 8 (PPD-8) which describes our nation's approach to national preparedness. The value of PSHR reports can be better explained to elected and appointed public officials if we re-format it into a style and language that they speak (i.e. hours of service).

General Recommendations

- #1 Eliminate “points” and track all public service in units of hours served, miles traveled, and direct monetary expenses.

PSHR “points” are not a form of currency that amateur radio leaders can take to elected or appointed public officials and use to reinforce the value of the volunteer services rendered to the community. Hours of service, on the other hand, can be converted by those officials to monetary value, and even be used to document community “matches” when submitting applications for grants from federal and private sources.

- #2 Track all public service activities by all amateurs, not just those meeting the minimum for publication in *QST*.

In our county, for example, there are approximately 90 ARES members. Only a couple of these meet or exceed the current threshold for inclusion in the PSHR column, so well over half of the total volunteer hours are unaccounted for each month and that data is lost.

- #3 Align PSHR categories and sub-categories pertaining to emergency communications with the National Preparedness Goal.

Presidential Policy Directive 8 (PPD-8) describes our Nation's approach to national preparedness, and breaks down the national capabilities into the five “Mission Areas” of Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery (reference: <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=7423>). With the exception of public service events which are not part of a national preparedness effort, all ARES, MARS, NTS, RACES, SKYWARN, and similar activities can be bucketed into the latter three of these mission areas, and subsequently rolled up into reports which should be meaningful to officials in local jurisdictions and nationally.

- #4 Encourage all radio amateurs to report their public service hours.

Although it is not likely feasible to report all public service hours in *QST*, this volunteer data is not currently being captured on a nationwide scale as it should.

- #5 Establish a method to easily enter PSHR data on, or upload reports to, the ARRL website.

This will standardize the process, facilitate data collection by the Field Organization Team, and contribute to the ability to create management reports.

- #6 Establish a method to summarize PSHR data at various levels (local jurisdiction, District, and Section).

Use this data as an indicator of the health of ARRL sanctioned groups.

Specific Recommendations – Revised PSHR Categories

This section illustrates how PSHR activities can be re-arranged into groups and categories pertaining to emergency communications which align with the National Preparedness Goal.

- A. Mitigation – Activities in preparation for those necessary to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.
1. Public service nets.
 2. Emergency services training and exercises.
 3. Infrastructure support.
 4. Emergency communications leadership.

- B. Response – Activities necessary to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs after an incident has occurred.
 - 1. Communications provided at an incident site.
 - 2. Supplemental response communications.
- C. Recovery – Activities necessary to assist communities affected by an incident to recover effectively.
 - 1. Communications provided within a disaster area.
 - 2. Supplemental recovery communications.
- D. Community – Public service events outside of emergency/disaster preparation and response situations.
 - 1. Planning of scheduled short-term public service events.
 - 2. Participation in scheduled short-term public service events.

In all categories, the radio amateur would record the total time spent each month and round up to whole hours only at the end of the month, with no maximum hours. It is recommended that miles traveled (plane, train, vehicle, boat, bicycle, etc.) and direct monetary expenses also be tracked.

Mapping of Old to New PHSR Categories

The six legacy PHSR categories can be mapped into ten new categories as shown below. Automatic points for holding a position or overseeing automated systems are eliminated in favor of reporting actual hours.

The goals of the new arrangement are to ensure that (1) all public service hours can be placed into one of the new categories, and (2) all categories are clear to elected and appointed public officials.

Updated content for the PHSR web page on the ARRL website can easily be extracted from this chart. A threshold of, say 15 to 20 hours, might be established for publication of callsigns and hours in *QST*.

Categories		Public Service Group & Category	Description	Reporting
Old	New			
		<i>Mitigation</i>	Activities in preparation for those necessary to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.	
1 & 2	A.1	Public service nets	Public service nets are on-the-air activities which meet on a regular basis and include emergency preparation, such as training and formal message handling, as part of their regular format. ARES, MARS, NTS, RACES, SKYWARN, and nets which directly support public agencies and National VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) are examples of public service nets.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month actively participating in public service nets, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. If you serve as a net control station, also include your administrative time completing net reports after the nets you run.

Categories		Public Service Group & Category	Description	Reporting
Old	New			
4	A.2	Emergency services training and exercises	It is essential that the amateur radio community prepare for emergency and disaster operations. Amateur radio communications seminars and workshops, FEMA and other classes required for emergency worker certification, simulated emergency tests, communications exercises with local served agencies, and ARES and RACES group meetings are examples of activities to record in this category.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month participating in emergency services training, meetings, and exercises, and then round up to whole hours for reporting.
6	A.3	Infrastructure support	Repeaters, computers, and automated digital systems are effective ways to serve the public and to communicate news and information to the community of radio amateurs that are involved in emergency communications preparedness and public service operations. Operation of an amateur radio repeater, a packet radio Digipeater or BBS (Bulletin Board System) which handles NTS formatted messages, a RMS (Radio Mail Server) with HF/VHF/UHF interface(s), or an Internet web server or email list server oriented toward Amateur Radio public service are of examples of infrastructure support to record in this category.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month providing, administering, and maintaining infrastructure support equipment oriented toward Amateur Radio public service, and then round up to whole hours for reporting.
3 & 4	A.4	Emergency communications leadership	Serving in an ARRL Field Organization elected or appointed volunteer position, or as a leader in one's local ARES, MARS, NTS, or RACES group, involves a high level of commitment to public service. Coordinating with served agencies, recruiting and training members, planning and conducting meetings and exercises, keeping the organization operational, and performing group administration duties (like processing and maintaining ARES/RACES member records) are examples of public service leadership activities to record in this category.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month on emergency communications leadership activities, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. If you serve as the leader of your local field organization, report the current total number of active members in your organization.

Categories		Public Service Group & Category	Description	Reporting
Old	New			
		Response	Activities necessary to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs after an incident has occurred.	
5	B.1	Communications provided at an incident site	This category recognizes amateur radio operators who are directly involved in emergency communications within an affected jurisdiction during the response phase of the emergency incident or disaster. This includes the operator who is on the scene or out in the field, in a shelter, at the emergency operations center, at a hospital, or other served agency's headquarters or their temporary command center.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month providing emergency response communications at an incident site, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. Also record and report the number of tactical messages and formal NTS-formatted Emergency and Priority messages you handle.
5	B.2	Supplemental response communications	This category recognizes amateur radio operators who are in unaffected locations and who provide support communications to/from the affected area during the response phase of the emergency incident or disaster, such as net control, net liaison, and handling of NTS messages.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month providing supplemental response communications to an incident site, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. Also record and report the number of tactical messages and formal NTS-formatted Emergency and Priority messages you handle.
		Recovery	Activities necessary to assist communities affected by an incident to recover effectively.	
5	C.1	Communications provided within a disaster area	This category recognizes amateur radio operators who are directly involved in emergency communications within an affected jurisdiction during the recovery efforts which commence after the emergency incident or disaster.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month providing recovery communications within a disaster area, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. Also record and report the number of formal NTS-formatted Priority and Routine messages you handle.

Categories		Public Service Group & Category	Description	Reporting
Old	New			
5	C.2	Supplemental recovery communications	This category recognizes amateur radio operators who are in unaffected locations and who provide support communications to/from the affected area during the recovery efforts which commence after the emergency incident or disaster, including the handling of NTS messages.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month providing supplemental recovery communications to a disaster area, and then round up to whole hours for reporting. Also record and report the number of formal NTS-formatted Priority and Routine messages you handle.
		Community	Public service events outside of emergency/disaster preparation and response situations.	
4	D.1	Planning of scheduled short-term public service events	This category recognizes the value of planning public safety communications for community events such as marathons and relays, parades, emergency preparedness fairs, walk-a-thons, and bike-a-thons. Off-the-air meetings, on-air announcements and digital messaging, phone calls, email, and coordination time needed to plan event support are examples of activities to record in this category.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month planning public safety communications for community events, and then round up to whole hours for reporting.
4	D.2	Participation in scheduled short-term public service events	This category recognizes the value of participating in public safety communications at community events such as marathons and relays, parades, emergency preparedness fairs, walk-a-thons, and bike-a-thons.	Keep track of the actual time you spend during the month participating in public safety communications at community events, and then round up to whole hours for reporting.

Conclusion

Continuation of the PSHR is important to the amateur radio community. However, the mechanics of the reporting format and methodology desperately need to be updated. We need to collect and retain more data on public service activities. That quantitative information will validate our touting of the value of amateur radio public service activities to community and national leaders as well as to the average citizen.