
The ARRL Convention and Hamfest Planner

**A Jungle Survival Guide
for Event Sponsors**

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Introduction

Over the years, League officials and members have been involved in literally countless conventions and hamfests. Out of this wealth of experience certain principles and guidelines emerge. Not only can they make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful event but they can also simplify the planning and execution and reduce the inevitable problems and irritations. This document summarizes a great deal of that experience and is offered primarily to help those undertaking an ARRL convention or hamfest. Much of the material is also applicable to other functions, including a club open house to a regional hamfest.

For the most part, this document will be most helpful to those committees putting on an average event: a convention or hamfest that draws from 500 to 4,000 hams, is held at a fairgrounds or large hotel, and has several seminars, programs, commercial exhibits and/or a flea market. For those conventions that draw more than 5,000 hams, experience and professional assistance is needed to deal with the more complicated logistics, and planning for such an event is beyond the scope of this document.

Putting on a convention or hamfest is a lot of work. You'll run across some sobering facts in this document. Sometimes when the light at the end of the tunnel seems like an oncoming express train, you'll want to give up. Don't. Your efforts will be worth it.

So You Want To Have A Hamfest . . .

You have decided to sponsor a hamfest! First, ask yourself honestly these very important questions:

1. Do we need a hamfest? Or, is it so close geographically and close in time to another established event that attendance will likely be adversely affected?
2. Are there enough hams within a two-hour drive of our location to support the event?
3. Is there a suitable site and is it available on a suitable date?
4. Do we have enough advance funds?

Before you answer with a rousing “YES,” here are a few sobering facts:

1. Many hamfest sponsors believe a hamfest 200 miles away is not in their area and they need one in their own home town. If there are successful hamfests within 200 miles, the chances of a locally sponsored new one becoming a great success are limited.
2. It is a proven fact that an area can have 2,000 hams, but approximately 2/3 to 3/4 of them will NOT attend the hamfest for varying reasons. Check your potential attendance very carefully.
3. Locating a suitable building or park is not too much trouble. Many cities (and hamfest sponsors) however, completely overlook the fact that most attendees do not carpool. Many times a site is selected with a building that will accommodate 5,000 and a parking lot for 500 (which many hamfest sponsors immediately turn over to outdoor swappers), leaving most attendees to fend for themselves in locating a parking place; thus they come in the door mad at the hamfest and daring you to make them have a good time! Overnight RV parking has become a popular addition to many hamfests and can make the difference between attending or staying home for some. Check your selected site for regulations.
4. Size and type of hamfest dictate amount of advance funds necessary. A few of the advance charges that are common to the one-day and two-day hamfests are site rental deposit, ticket printing, advertising and promotion charges, flyer printing, prize purchases and postage.

You've read the above and are still convinced that you're ready to follow through. The remainder of this document is devoted to helping you plan your event so as to give it the best chance of success. Good luck!

Advance Planning

Depending on the type and amount of activities for your event, start the countdown to your event at least 12 months in advance. The need for advance planning cannot be stressed too much! Here's a sample outline of a schedule:

- **July** -- Create budget. Appoint volunteers to hamfest/convention committee.
- **September** -- Notify committee members outlining their responsibilities. Begin promotional effort. Strike agreement with site management.
- **November** -- Recruit commercial exhibitors.
- **December** -- Obtain status reports from committee members. Give committee members overall progress reports.
- **January** -- Recruit food vendors.
- **March** -- Continue two-way communications with committee members.
- **April** -- Mail promotional flyer to all ARRL members in the ARRL Division. Post to the event's web site (if applicable) and be sure to update your announcement on the ARRL web site if any particulars of your event have changed since the sanctioning of the event. Promote via broadcast email if possible.
- **June** -- Mail second promotional flyer and send emails.
- **July** -- Hamfest!

DECISIONS: One-Day or Two-Day Event?

The one-day hamfest entails less expense, man-hours and chance of failure than the longer event. Programming can be held to a minimum. Swapping, eye-balling, picnicking, competing or a talk by one of the local hams on their latest project will provide a full day of fun for attendees. If your hamfest site is not near an area where non-ham members of the family can find entertainment, include activities for them in your hamfest program. The happy ham at a hamfest is the one who has a happy family!

The two-day hamfest takes a significantly greater commitment. To guarantee success you **MUST** have the undivided support of the clubs in your area, your dealers and manufacturers and a larger source of advance funds available. The longer and larger the hamfest, the greater the demands placed on your committee's time and the larger their area of responsibility. Once the Chairman begins to assign jobs, the number of man-hours required to operate the event will astound you. Some of the additional budget requirements are: security charges, electrical installation, booth installation charges, janitorial expenses, extra insurance, program booklet printing, regional and national advertising (last optional), ad-copy layout charges, traveling expenses for speakers, salaries for electrical work and maintenance.

Activities for the two-day hamfest usually include: programs, organizational meetings, food functions, exhibits, contests, etc. You will be expected to have a Headquarters hotel with a rate lower than any place else on earth! Of the activities listed, exhibits will be the most difficult to come by and food functions will be the most hazardous to your financial success.

DECISIONS: Selecting a Committee

Pick solid individuals with histories of hard work and success in volunteer roles. If you pick a friend for a committee role, be sure your friendship is strong enough to withstand the rigors of convention stress and strain.

Chairman. The buck stops here. The chairman must keep abreast of all hamfest planning, doing his best to spot all potential problems and taking action before such problems become serious. This requires supervision of the committee members; a plan and schedule must be agreed upon by each member and the chairman must ensure that the plan is being executed correctly and on time.

Specific tasks include:

- “Hiring” all key committee members.
- Ensuring adequate communication within the committee through meetings, phone calls, on-the-air nets, letters, newsletters and e-mails.
- “Selling” the hamfest to potential exhibitors.
- Arranging for liability insurance.
- Obtaining ARRL hamfest status.
- Creating a sound financial plan for the event.

Associate Chairman. Assists chairman with site arrangements, rental of fairgrounds for maintenance, trash dumpsters, electrical distribution, and other aspects of the site selection and related contingencies.

Publicity Chairman. The most critical job on the convention committee, publicity efforts make or break the event. Get the word to active hams by direct mail, broadcast e-mails, web sites and advertising in ham magazines, *QST*, and regional convention flyers.

Exhibit Hall Chairman. Plans exhibit layout and works with commercial exhibitors.

Ticket Chairman. Advance and at-the-door ticket sales. Arranges for printing of tickets. Maintains sales records for hamfest.

Parking Chairman. Coordinates parking scheme, makes signs and schedules parking lot staffing.

Flea Market Chairman. Plans flea market arrangement. Guides flea marketers to their spaces.

Security Chairman. Provides security for the grounds and especially the exhibit hall.

Food Chairman. Coordinates food and drink concessions.

Information Chairman. Talk-in station. Gathers information on local hotels, hospitals, restaurants, gas stations, shopping facilities, beaches, tourist attractions and alternate entertainments for nonham spouses. Runs public address system.

Program Chairman. Plans hamfest programs including forums, seminars, films.

Alternate Activities Chairman. Ensures a fun weekend for nonhams.

Exams Chairman. Coordinates volunteer exam session. Contacts ARRL VEC office well in advance to ensure that everything comes together on hamfest or convention day.

FINANCES

Of primary importance is well-planned and administered financing of the convention. Too many affairs go on the rocks, financially, because of faulty cost estimates. On the other hand, attending hams are quick to sense a situation where the convention is being run as a “money-maker” for the sponsoring club or group, all of which results in bad feelings. Do not try to “clean up” at the expense of the attending amateurs.

The following list will serve as a guide to the items that must be considered in budgeting your costs:

- Banquet (rent of hall, cost of food and any entertainment)
- Tickets (printing costs)
- Free tickets and/or gratuities to speakers or guests
- Lodging and transportation expenses of speakers, if necessary
- Cost of sending out notices and other advertising literature to the ARRL Division
- Cost of printed programs
- Cost of badges
- Allowance for complimentary banquet tickets to speakers or guests
- Signs, banners and decorations
- Prize costs
- Costs of excursions or hire of buses
- Telephone and postage
- Photocopy facility

In figuring these costs, it is first necessary to get some idea of the expected attendance. Most groups holding a convention for the first time tend to overestimate attendance—a sure way to get into the red, financially! Be cautious in your estimates and bear in mind circumstances that cut down attendance. Simultaneous affairs in nearby ARRL Divisions have little effect, unless they’re within 300 miles. Bad weather, on the other hand, may cut attendance in half.

One of the very best guides to attendance is the record of previous conventions or hamfests; these attendance figures should always be secured and studied.

With some idea of an attendance figure, you can go ahead with the budget in earnest. Lay out your program in as much detail as possible and then, with your attendance figure as a guide, compute the cost of each feature. When you have finished, add about 20% to the total to cover emergencies and to ensure a slight margin of profit.

Ticket Prices

The total, divided by the expected attendance, gives you the cost per ticket. This usually comes out in some odd figure, such as \$4.84 or \$7.37; the ticket price should then be made the next higher “even” figure, \$5.00 or \$7.50. Too high a cost may cut your attendance; one way around it is to make expensive items (the banquet) optional extras. The wise committee will keep the basic charge as low as possible.

Picking a Hotel

Previous experience is often the best guide in picking a hotel or other convention site to be sure that the food quality, service and facilities will be satisfactory. The hotel chosen will quote various prices on banquet menus, once you give them an idea of attendance. Prices will vary widely according to location, but a banquet figure higher than the cost of a meal in a moderately-priced restaurant will result in low attendance and/or dissatisfaction. Most hotels demand a minimum guarantee on dinners and you should make allowance for this in your calculations. Additional dinners are not usually a problem, provided adequate notice is given. Be sure somebody does give notice if you find your attendance greater than expected; there is nothing more disconcerting to a convention committee than to find there are not enough places to go around.

Booth Space Sales

Income can be derived from the sale of booth space to manufacturers of radio equipment for amateur use for display of their product line. Other groups are also interested in display and sale of their goods at amateur conventions. Booth size is usually 8' x 10' or multiples thereof. Flea market and tailgating space is an additional source of income. The use of lecture halls is ordinarily extended free by the hotel management when a banquet arrangement is made with them. Make sure this is the case, however, since some establishments assess extra charges. In any event, tell them what you will need and make sure that the rooms are reserved for your use and that you are aware of any additional charges.

Chamber of Commerce, Convention Bureau

In connection with printing programs, mailing notices to amateurs in surrounding territory, and arranging for transportation to points of interest, be sure to consult the local Chamber of Commerce or Convention Bureau. It is frequently possible to save substantial amounts on these items through such personal contact; some Chambers assume most of the program and publicity printing costs for conventions and even furnish clerical help. It is a good idea to have your tentative program drawn up before going to see them, however, as no one likes to commit himself on an unknown proposition. Another possibility is the use of nonprofit mailing privileges for qualified organizations.

Keep It Simple

Don't succumb to the lure of elaborate programs or badges; they run up costs amazingly but do not contribute to the success of the convention. The experienced convention committee keeps them simple and inexpensive. In most cities you'll be able to find badge firms locally; consult the classified section of the telephone directory under "Badges" or "Advertising Specialties," contact ARRL HQ for a list of official ARRL badge engravers.

Don't put off badge negotiations until the last minute; you should start work on badges at least six weeks before the convention date.

Advertising

Many conventions defray cost of printing the program by soliciting advertising. It is not recommended that solicitation be made from national radio manufacturers for such advertising; their budgets are laid out months in advance and asking them is generally a waste of time. Local and regional dealers, however, are good prospects. And, don't limit yourself to approaching only radio dealers. Contact the hotel in which the affair will be held, and nearby garages, parking lots and restaurants.

PRIZES

The hamfest committee should not depend on all prizes being donated by dealers or manufacturers. For the most part it is much better to include prize purchases as part of the hamfest budget and take advantage of the generous discounts most dealers and manufacturers offer for prize purchases. It is far better to allow for purchases and reduce the budget if donations are received. Donations are always a generous gesture and should be well acknowledged.

In some states awarding prizes on the basis of the drawing of a lucky ticket—lotteries—is illegal. Convention committees should check the local law. In any event, federal law prohibits the use of the mail for the circulation of any matter containing an offering of a prize to be awarded upon the basis of lottery or chance.

Exhibits

Exhibits are costly to the manufacturer and dealer. Shipping, travel expenses for those manning the exhibit, loss of man-hours at work for those on the road, not to mention the exhibit charges themselves, add up quickly. Many companies have opted to participate only in events that are two days in length and have a historically “proven” attendance in excess of 3,000. The exception to this requirement is usually your local dealer or manufacturer as they will recognize the possibility of having an exclusive on sales or product exposure. Caution: Every convention and hamfest in the country has a noticeably smaller attendance on the second day. Be very sure your second day attendance is not limited to your exhibitors and committee members. Plan some activities for the second day that will make the attendees want to return.

MEETING EXHIBITORS' NEEDS

Additional pointers on commercial exhibitors' needs:

1. Adequate set-up time must be allowed for exhibitors. Quite often, dealers drive all night to attend a show—and manufacturers may have to fly across the entire country. This makes it very difficult to set up a show at 9:00 AM and open at 12 noon as is often requested. Give exhibitors 10 to 12 hours for set up. The 3 to 4 hours usually provided are simply not enough!
2. Most exhibitors would prefer not to have the commercial exhibits open on Friday night. Only with an attendance of 10,000 plus would it be necessary to open exhibits on Friday night. If a hamfest draws only 2,500 to 3,000 in attendance, exhibitors see the same people Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This is not quality sales time.
3. An exhibitors' lounge must be provided where battle-weary exhibitors can go to rest their feet for a few minutes. The lounge should be close to the exhibit hall. Exhibitors cannot expect employees to stand on their feet all day without a place to take a short break.
4. Sandwiches and beverages should be easy for exhibitors to obtain. If these items could be purchased in the exhibitors' lounge, it would be an ideal situation. If not, perhaps a separate line at the concession stand for “exhibitors only” could be established. It is necessary to get back to the booth quickly, and quite often one can spend 15 to 20 minutes standing on a concrete floor in a refreshment line.
5. A few conventions do not have easy access for the dealers to load their trucks after the shows. Several dealers need to have access to a loading area at the same time. Only one forklift or elevator for a show held on the second floor is not adequate.

Most exhibitors travel many miles each year to present a professional approach to Amateur Radio conventions. This is very expensive and physically taxing to all manufacturers and dealers. These few simple courtesies will help to attract additional exhibitors to most hamfests.

FLEA MARKET

Probably the most popular part of any ham radio convention or hamfest is the flea market. Here, sellers set up tables, elaborate booths, or simple tailgates to peddle just about everything under the sun: vintage radios, tubes, used 2-meter rigs, muffin fans, radio components, caps, badges, jackets, Novice rigs, and so on. Sellers are generally admitted for a slightly higher admission fee in exchange for a flea market space and possibly a table. Buyers descend on sellers to buy, trade and ragchew.

Sellers are usually admitted before the doors open to the public to offer them a chance to set up their tables. Your Flea Market Coordinator arranges the layout of the flea market area and directs sellers to their spaces.

Some sellers may engage in sales of illegal items such as pirated software, video decoders, fuzz busters, and so forth. Print warnings in your hamfest literature, and post signs prominently to the effect that such sales will not be tolerated, and sellers suspected of illegal sales will be subject to prosecution by local authorities.

Handicap access: Make sure that your show is fully accessible to physically handicapped persons. Employ wheelchair ramps wherever possible.

Programs

First things first, pick some topics that would be of most interest to hams attending your show—they'll be good drawing cards. Remember that you'll need to recruit a local expert to present each seminar. Here are some suggested topics to choose from:

- ARRL Forum
- FCC Forum
- Instructor's Forum
- Antenna Talk
- Packet Radio—Introduction
- Packet Radio—Discussion Forum
- Traffic Handlers Confab
- ARES/RACES Program
- Digital Forum
- EmComm Forum
- AMSAT or Satellite
- Amateur Television Demonstration
- DXpedition Presentation
- Contest Station Design
- VHF/UHF Conference
- RFI Forum
- VE Forum
- Club Presidents' Leadership Roundtable
- ARRL Section Leadership Get Together
- Public Relations Forum
- New Ham Hospitality Forum
- ARRL Volunteers Opportunities Forum
- Youth Forum

MEETING SPEAKERS' NEEDS

With the list of the features to be scheduled, the committee can proceed with definite plans for arrangement of the program. The various speakers chosen will undoubtedly attend to their speeches themselves but there should be a clear understanding with each, beforehand, as to the length of time he is to have on the program, and the equipment that he will require (blackboard, projector, pointer). This must be done out of courtesy to the speaker as your guest; it is disturbing to any speaker to go before an audience with no clear understanding of how much time is expected of him, and, of course, it is embarrassing to following speakers if, because of lack of such a time understanding, a previous speaker cuts deeply into their own time. **IMPORTANT:** A member of the committee should be appointed to see that the speaker is met, properly introduced to the audience, and that the equipment is available for his use.

In the end, you will have a program that will show when each event is to take place. When the affair is held, this schedule should be adhered to rigidly. The point cannot be stressed too heavily, for upon it depends a great deal of the success of the event. A sloppy program, where nothing starts on time and where features are allowed to run over into the time of succeeding program items, is unsatisfactory from all standpoints. Keep your schedule, no matter what steps may occasionally be necessary to do it.

BANQUETS

A banquet's success depends largely on the toastmaster; his choice deserves careful consideration. He should be "good on his feet," one who can be witty without being vulgar, and one who relates well to the audience. A particular type to avoid is the one who makes long-winded speeches; nothing is more boring than a toastmaster who tries to be the chief speaker of the evening. If the toastmaster is a nonham, explain Amateur Radio to him—especially call signs if he is to introduce guest hams.

By all means, DON'T permit the chairman to talk about how hard you (the convention group) have worked. No one is interested. If the convention's a success, it is unnecessary, and no amount of explanation helps if the arrangements are inadequate.

Don't have too many or too-long speeches at the banquet. Let the banquet emphasize fellowship and provide relief from the educational part of the convention. If you have honored guests it is proper to seat them at the speakers' table and to ask them to say a few words. The trend today, however, is away from long speaking programs at the banquet and it is best to avoid them. A tactful toastmaster can word his general introduction to the speaking program in such a way as to indicate that it is not the intent to have "speeches" so much as brief comments and greetings. Often, brief "contests"—oldest and youngest ham, most years in ham radio, most miles traveled to hamfest, and so on—liven up a banquet.

There are times when a particular guest is present from whom something more ambitious than a brief greeting may be desired. In such cases, the banquet program would center upon this one address, of course. Never have more than one such address, however, and try to have as few others speak as possible, even if they speak only briefly.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES

It is almost certain that a great many unlicensed spouses will attend conventions these days with their ham spouses; often, there are sizable numbers of children as well. Accordingly, there should be a fairly complete program for them: tours, beauty demonstrations, craft displays, luncheons, a nursery, game room, scavenger hunt, cartoons, movies, and a hospitality room, for instance. The committee members' spouses will have lots of ideas and will usually undertake to set up non-ham programs. One caution: A growing percentage of ham spouses are licensed themselves, and may wish to take in at least a part of the amateur program.

ATTENDANCE OF HEADQUARTERS REPRESENTATIVES

Wherever possible, ARRL HQ will honor an invitation from the ARRL-affiliated convention sponsor for a speaker from the staff. Given the ever-increasing cost of travel, however, this will not always be possible. All requests for having an ARRL staffer attend your event should come through ARRL's Convention Program Manager who will then contact your Division Director for approval. All requests should also suggest the speaker or topic most widely desired by the sponsors, with an alternate or two. Give HQ as much notice as possible, at least a few months: Staff attempt to combine convention travel with visits to affiliated clubs to get most efficient use of each travel dollar.

OTHER NOTES ON PROGRAMS

The general type of program is nearly always based on previous conventions/hamfests in the ARRL Division and, generally speaking, it is wise to be guided by such precedent if it has been found successful. Only thoroughly experienced committees should attempt a radically new type of convention program and then only after consultation with the ARRL Director.

Whether the program will be primarily technical or social depends on experience; some regions consistently run to a good sprinkling of technical sessions, while others concentrate on the social aspects, particularly if the event is held outdoors at a camp or a park. A reasonable number of technical addresses is a good idea if the standard is kept high. If you cannot obtain good speakers for technical sessions, it is better not to have any. Under such circumstances, one or more technical "round-table" discussions on "live" subjects can be substituted; the best-informed amateur available for the subjects chosen should be invited to act as moderator.

The welcoming address is usually made by the chairman of the committee or the president of the sponsoring club. Keep it brief. A representative of a mayor's office or local chamber of commerce is sometimes secured for a brief welcoming address, particularly at more "formal" conventions; often the mayor will be available. Unless he/she is unusually well-informed, a secretary will welcome suggestions for pertinent references to Amateur Radio for the address. Amateur emergency work or public service activity is suggested, particularly if amateurs have participated in some recent local event.

ARRL Officials' meetings to discuss Field Organization issues, DX conclaves, emergency communication meetings, and MARS operations meetings should always be included. The SM of the local Section, if available, is the one to ask to take charge of the Field Organization meeting. Emergency Coordinators are logical choices to be chairmen of emergency meetings. Officials of MARS are similarly the ones to "head up" meetings of these groups and will always be glad to do so. Asking them has the additional advantage of ensuring that your convention will be well publicized among their groups. Nets, repeater councils and local chapters of the QCWA are other groups who willingly hold meetings.

A "safety session" is highly recommended. Representatives of the local power or light company are practically always available to speak on electrical safety precautions and to

demonstrate artificial respiration and CPR; the local chapter of the American Red Cross may also be consulted with respect to artificial respiration demonstrations. Local personalities are often available for amateur/media discussions.

National Weather Service personnel can be invited to speak on weather and emergency communications.

ARRL FORUM

ARRL conventions and hamfests with formal speaking programs should make provisions to have some time devoted entirely to ARRL affairs—the traditional “ARRL Forum” at which members have an opportunity to register their views. The Division Director is the logical moderator at such a meeting to report on the affairs of the Division. Similarly, a representative from the Headquarters staff might well be scheduled for an appearance here. Such meetings can be worthwhile if well handled but are a waste of time if allowed to degenerate into long-winded wrangles among a few. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that the chairman selected for any such meeting should be a person capable of keeping it well in hand. The Director is frequently an excellent choice. The ARRL program should be scheduled at a time that will provide the largest audience. Avoid scheduling other programs during the ARRL Forum slot. Also avoid popular luncheon times.

ENTERTAINMENT

Any entertainment offered as a part of the convention should be in good taste and in keeping with the standards of Amateur Radio.

Visits to local points of interest are in order if there is something with real interest such as an unusual type of industry or famous landmark (often available for a picnic lunch). Visits to local broadcast stations are very popular as well.

A “dutch supper” replacing a formal banquet at some low-priced restaurant or inn is often an excellent way to take care of the evening of the first day of a two-day affair; it can be followed by informal activity winding up, perhaps, with a Wouff Hong initiation at midnight.

Similarly, a good way to start off the second day of a convention is to schedule group breakfasts at coffee shops of various hotels or in restaurants. QCWA breakfasts are quite popular. A local convention official should be assigned to each group to appear early and make certain that arrangements are in order. No formal program or seating is necessary; those who show up will form tables of their own. Expenses are “dutch,” of course. One or more of the following groups can be scheduled: traffic, DX, emergency, MARS, mobile, repeaters, nets, QCWA, FOC, OOTC, etc.

Do not schedule too many activities. Most hams like to visit with friends, see all the stuff on exhibit and in the swap area, meet with members of their DX-club, traffic net or FM association. THEN if time permits they may attend a program. One-day hamfests rarely have time for programs nor are they missed. The two-day hamfest should have a few on the most popular subjects . . . plus several organizational meetings. For the most part

these programs can be provided to the committee at minimal cost, if any at all. Usually the local expert in any of the more popular fields of Amateur Radio will have a better attended program than some stranger to the area. The out-of-town speaker will have a greater need for assistance in travel expenses than the local; speaking fees are not the norm in Amateur Radio circles although some renowned speakers do charge fees. If the event is an ARRL convention you will have received information regarding ARRL speakers available at no charge to you.

WOUFF HONG

Any ARRL-approved State, Division or National Convention is eligible to put on the traditional initiation into the Royal Order of the Wouff Hong, and many do so. This event can be one of the highlights of a new ham's experiences. If interested, communicate with ARRL Headquarters for the ritual's details. The Wouff Hong initiation ceremony is performed before the audience by a cast of five characters (who have active speaking parts) and a "novice." The characters are known as The Old Man, Hi-Potential, QRM, QRN, and Xtal and the various roles require a lot of rehearsal to perfect. The Old Man and Xtal are the principal roles and their proper handling requires some study and work. Costumes are required but need not be expensive. When put on, the performance takes about 25 minutes. It is usually done at midnight. Only licensed amateurs who are members of the ARRL may attend the performance and be initiated as members of the R.O.W.H.

In addition to the ritual, League Headquarters also supplies very attractive R.O.W.H. certificates to be made out for each person attending the initiation. Some convention committees make a separate charge of a dollar or so to help defray additional cost of costumes, rental of hall or other quarters for the initiation if some special location is selected, installation of special lighting effects, and so on.

The R.O.W.H. initiation is an impressive ceremony at any amateur convention but should not be put on unless the parts have been thoroughly rehearsed so that a top-notch performance results. One effective method is to record all voices on tape ahead of time and then (after adequate rehearsal) simply pantomime the ceremony itself.

INVITE DXCC CARD CHECKERS

Want something to draw more people to your convention? Inviting someone who can check cards for the DXCC award can attract people to your event! ARRL HQ's DXCC desk offers the following membership service to you: a list of approved card checkers so you can determine if one lives nearby for you to invite. Or you can contact the DXCC desk direct at (860) 594-0234 or dxcc@arrl.org. Card checkers will need a table to work at, and a chair. You can advertise this card-checking service on your convention Web site to get the DXers to come to your event!

FOOD

Many hamfests would have been financial successes if the committees had not overestimated the number of people for a luncheon or dinner, or over purchased supplies for a committee-operated food stand. If you cannot schedule "order from the menu" events, guarantee ONLY those meals for which you have received advance payment. The profit of a committee-operated food stand on-site can be inviting. Nonetheless, it is sometimes the wiser choice to let a professional operate the stand in exchange for a percentage of sales to the committee and let the vendor take all the chances on advance supply orders. The professional also removes all the insurance burden from the committee by providing their own insurance to cover food operation.

Promotion

Advertising your event is the most important function in hamfest planning. Proper advertising is the secret to making your hamfest a success. All your work for a great event will be wasted if you do not sell your product. Advertising expenses are usually one-fourth of your entire budgeted amount for the hamfest, whether it's a small or large event.

TYPES OF ADVERTISING

The type of advertising you do will depend on the type of hamfest and the area you plan to cover. Your advertising funds will be wasted if the notices are not placed in the correct spots. Forgo national advertising (except the free write-ups offered by the magazines) until such time as your show has grown national in scope. Club newsletters, regional publications, local newspapers, and on-the-air announcements are all good spots; nothing replaces the direct-mail approach, however, if you can afford it and can get an up-to-date mailing list. If you cannot afford to mail to all the hams in the appropriate area, mail to those that are on the air most frequently and ask them to assist you in talking up your hamfest. Broadcast e-mails and announcements on web sites are also a great way to promote your event.

Be sure your club members mention the hamfest in all their conversations. Do everything in your power to be sure EVERYONE in the immediate area KNOWS all about your hamfest. They will be an excellent source of publicity if they have all the facts.

ANNOUNCEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

When you make up an ad or announcement, be sure you include these fundamentals: name of hamfest, location (include a map if not on well-traveled highway), date, hours, charges for attendance and swap or food functions, mailing address, telephone, e-mail and event URL for further information, and a talk-in frequency. After you have mentioned all of the above, other activities can be mentioned. Do not go into a great deal of description as it takes space—do not crowd your announcement—mention the basics and a few teasers to get their attention. CAUTION: Never mention any activity that has not been formalized. Some unforeseen hang-up could prevent your having the activity and those in attendance have a habit of HAUNTING you with the activities that did NOT occur, regardless of a good job done on the rest of the show. It pays to start early.

MAILING LABELS

ARRL HQ provides free mailing labels to ARRL-approved events, and charges a nominal fee to unsanctioned affairs. Lists can be provided for all licensees, just ARRL members or ARRL-affiliated clubs. For a mailing label request form, write ARRL, 225 Main Street, Newington, CT 06111 or download a form at www.arrl.org. Label requests require a two-week turnaround period from the date that HQ receives your request to the date by which you will need the information.

Promotional materials should be sent to principal clubs in the area (list obtainable from ARRL HQ, after completion of the above mentioned form), to MARS heads, QCWA

groups and so forth. These steps should ensure reaching all potential attendees.

QST COVERAGE

Your ARRL convention will be listed in the “Coming ARRL Conventions” box one month prior to the complete convention announcement. For a convention the first weekend in June, for instance, aim for the May issue of *QST*, the copy deadline for which is March 1. A late September event would be publicized in the September issue, deadline July 1. There is no charge for either the box listing or the write up. If additional *QST* coverage is desired, however, advertising in the “Ham-Ads” section or display advertising is available at reduced rates. Contact the ARRL Advertising Manager or e-mail ads@arrl.org for information.

QST will list your event, whether ARRL approved or not, in its monthly Hamfest Calendar, free of charge. There are certain guidelines, however.

Hamfests and conventions will be listed only once. If the event will occur on the 10th of the month or before, it will be listed in the previous month’s *QST*. If it will occur after the 10th, it will be listed in that month’s *QST*. The deadline for receipt at ARRL HQ of hamfest information is the 1st of the second month preceding publication date.

In other words, if your event will occur on August 7, the information must be at HQ by May 1 (preferably sooner) to make the deadline for the July issue. If your event will occur on August 12, it should get to HQ by June 1st for the August issue.

A NOTE ABOUT PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Tailor promotional materials toward your intended audience. Consider publishing two separate flyers: one geared toward the major audience, hams, and the second toward the general electronics-oriented public.

ARRL and Your Convention

Before any convention can be advertised or otherwise labeled an “ARRL Convention” or “ARRL Hamfest,” certain requirements must be met. These have been specified by the League’s Board of Directors and appear in the Rules and Regulations attached to the League’s Articles of Association. They describe the circumstances under which such a convention may be held and prescribe the procedure which must be followed. The pertinent Rules and Regulations are:

(Revised January 16, 2010)

1. American Radio Relay League Hamfests and Conventions are meetings of persons interested in Amateur Radio which are authorized and conducted in accordance with the rules that follow. ARRL Conventions may be sanctioned at the Section, State, and Division levels, and in some cases as Operating-Specialty conventions; there will be not more than one Convention at each level in a given area per year. “Operating-specialty” is defined as an operating or technical activity that is of interest to a subset of the ARRL membership.

2. Neither the name of the American Radio Relay League, nor the initial letters thereof, nor its emblem, shall be used in connection with any meeting or convention, or in the advertising thereof, unless it has been approved in the manner set forth below.

3. Parties desiring to conduct an ARRL-sanctioned Convention shall submit an application (setting forth the place and date of the proposed convention, the area to be served, the clubs, associations or groups who propose to sponsor it, and the names and addresses of the officers chosen to conduct it) to ARRL’s Convention Program Manager. The Convention Program Manager will then seek the approval of the Director of the division in which the convention is to be held. When the Director is satisfied that the approval of such convention will be in the best interests of the League, he or she will notify the Convention Program Manager who will then submit the application to the Executive Committee for its formal approval. State conventions held in states that are partly in two ARRL divisions must be approved by both Directors. Upon such final approval the Convention Program Manager will notify the chairman of the convention group.

The program of every such convention shall be subject to the approval of the Director of the division in which the convention is to be held. ARRL-sanctioned conventions will make provisions for an ARRL forum or meeting and for an ARRL display booth or table and shall make every effort to use the ARRL diamond prominently displayed on the front of all advertising and program materials. On its part, the League will make every effort to provide a speaker from among the Headquarters staff or from among the officers of the League at no cost to the convention treasury; to provide editorial support in *QST* for the event; to accept paid advertising at rates lower than for commercial purposes; and to contribute awards or prizes.

4. Parties desiring to conduct an ARRL-sanctioned hamfest shall submit an application (setting forth the place and date of the proposed hamfest, the area to be served, the clubs, associations or groups who propose to sponsor it, and the names and addresses of the officers chosen to conduct it) to ARRL’s Convention Program Manager. The Convention Program Manager will then seek approval of the Director of the division in

which the hamfest is to be held. When the Director is satisfied that the approval of such hamfest is in the best interests of the League, he or she will notify the Convention Program Manager and the chairman of the hamfest.

ARRL hamfests will make space available for an ARRL display, and those ARRL hamfests which include formal speaking programs will schedule time for an ARRL meeting if so requested by the Director or another elected League official. There is no limit to the number of ARRL hamfests which may be held, but care should be taken to avoid conflict with other hamfests serving the same general area. Headquarters will provide editorial support in *QST* for the event, will provide for advertising in *QST* at rates below commercial rates, and will on request provide awards or prizes.

5. Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions, the Board of Directors may authorize or direct upon such terms as it may prescribe, the holding, as a National Convention, of a meeting of persons interested in Amateur Radio from throughout the operating territory of the League. The President will assign a member of the Board to work with the staff to evaluate National Convention applications and negotiate ARRL participation. The program of every such convention shall be subject to the approval of the Executive Committee.

From the above it will be noted that the first move is to contact the ARRL's Convention Program Manager. She will then seek the approval of the Director of the division in which the event is proposed to be and then will ultimately seek approval of the League's Executive Committee (required for ARRL conventions, but not for ARRL hamfests) once the Director has indicated his approval. The sponsoring group will be notified by ARRL's Convention Program Manager when all approvals are final. Also, when approvals are final, the event will appear online in ARRL's Hamfest and Convention database.

If you are planning a convention or hamfest, therefore, complete the online form at www.arrl.org. You should complete and submit this form **at least six months** in advance of the contemplated event date.

EVENT DATE

The date of your convention/hamfest will depend to some extent on geographical location or accommodation availability, but is more often established by the precedent or the custom of some Divisions in preferring a certain season of the year. It is well to consult the Division Director and Headquarters before choosing a firm date so that conflicts with events in other Divisions may be avoided. HQ records dates of ham gatherings up to two years in advance.

ARRL DIRECTOR INVITATION

Be sure your division Director is extended a personal invitation by the sponsoring club's president or secretary, or the chairman of the committee. A complimentary ticket (without the prize stub) is a courtesy but not a necessary gesture; the invitation itself is the important thing. A similar invitation should be extended to other League Officials in the area (League Officers, Vice Directors and Section Managers).

ARRL HANDOUTS

Exhibit materials to support an ARRL booth at a hamfest can be ordered by the hamfest coordinator, ARRL Director, Section Manger, or any designee thereof. A selection of items are available at low- or no-cost, including hanging and standing banners, tabletop displays, table throws, inexpensive giveaways -- pens, stickers, magnets and WAS/frequency charts, as well as several handouts and brochures for a variety of Amateur Radio interest areas and uses. To order exhibit and display materials go to www.arrl.org/brochures or call 1-888-277-5289.

ARRL-affiliated conventions and hamfests will receive gift certificates as door prizes.

ARRL FIELD ORGANIZATION BADGES

Members of the ARRL Field Organization are eligible to wear official ARRL Call Sign Badges. You may wish to recruit a special "Participating Badge Engraver" to have a booth at or near the ARRL booth for the purpose of engraving badges for attending Field volunteers. Often, Section Managers and Division Directors are on hand to approve badge applications on the spot, thus allowing for immediate badge delivery. For more information on the ARRL Call Sign Badge Program, and a list of official Participating Badge Engravers, please contact ARRL HQ.

VOLUNTEER EXAMS

The ARRL encourages you to sponsor a Volunteer Examination session as part of your hamfest or convention program. If exams are conducted under the ARRL/VEC, you are entitled to receive an extra gift certificate as a prize.

ARRL BOOTH

The present regulations established by the League's Board of Directors for conventions and hamfests stipulate that the committee must provide and staff a table or booth where League memberships will be solicited and accepted. While elected ARRL Officials and HQ personnel may be willing to help in the manning of the booth, they must also be available for talks and for individual membership contact. Therefore, someone should be assigned by the committee to be on duty whenever the exhibit area is open.

The convention/hamfest may accept League memberships only at the full rate: US—regular \$39, \$49 Canada or \$62 elsewhere. Rates, 21 and under: Oldest licensed radio amateur in household with proof of age is \$20. Membership is on a yearly basis only.