



Second Century

A Representative Democracy

“I want to call your attention to page 76 in this month’s issue of QST. There you will find a call for nominating petitions for the purpose of electing a Director to the ARRL Board of Directors in each of five ARRL Divisions.”

ARRL is divided into 15 “Divisions,” or geographic regions. Once every 3 years, each Division elects a Director to represent the members on the Board of Directors. Five Divisions hold elections each year so that at no time does a majority of the Board change at once.

The purpose of the ARRL Board is defined in the Articles of Association as follows:

The affairs of the Corporation shall be governed by a Board consisting of fifteen Directors, each representing a territorial Division comprising a geographical area as defined in the By-Laws.

In short, the Board determines the policies for the organization which the staff is charged with carrying out. The CEO reports to the Board and is responsible for managing the staff. And while this is only one sentence in the Articles of Association, it charges the Board with a significant amount of responsibility. Board members represent not only the members within their respective Divisions, they collectively represent all the members of the ARRL when the organization speaks to the FCC, other government agencies, the United States Congress, and other Amateur Radio organizations and Societies, domestically and internationally.

Becoming a Director of ARRL is a straightforward process. If you’ve been a licensed amateur for 4 continuous years prior to nomination and have also been a member of ARRL for that same time, you are eligible to serve. All you need to do is submit a petition in the proper form including the signatures of at least 10 current members of the organization, and your name will be on the ballot. Then, if a majority of the full members in the Division who return ballots vote for you, you’ll be a member of the Board beginning in January 2019. It’s that simple.

That is, however, the easy part. If elected, you must actually go to work. And trust me, after watching the men and women of the ARRL Board of Directors over the years, I can tell you with certainty, it is a heck of a lot of volunteer work! There are two full Board meetings a year, generally held in Connecticut near ARRL HQ. Each meeting lasts 2 days, and they are usually preceded by committee meetings. Between Board meetings there are additional committee and subcommittee meetings, as well as attendance at club meetings, hamfests, and conventions. These responsibilities take up evenings and weekends throughout the year. In addition, there are hundreds or even thousands of engagements with individual members and other radio amateurs by phone and email. Many members who contact their Director want to express an opinion on a particular

subject; influence the Director’s decision on a matter important to them; or sometimes register a complaint about something they feel ARRL is doing wrong.

The ARRL is “representative democracy,” which is defined as “a type of democracy founded on the principle of elected officials representing a group of people...”. It’s the same basic structure used by most Western democracies in the world and it has worked well for ARRL for more than 100 years. Some people view ARRL as a “pure” democracy in which the people decide on policy initiatives for the organization directly. Such a structure really isn’t feasible with the large number of members ARRL has, each with his or her own viewpoint. One of the best things about Amateur Radio is the diversity of views held by ARRL members. That fact alone would make it impossible to run the organization that way.

So, assuming that ARRL should continue as a representative democracy, how does one Director represent the diverse opinions of *all* the members of the Division, let alone the opinions of *all* the members of the organization collectively? Once elected, a Director has a statutory, fiduciary duty to the corporation as well as a duty to the members of the organization. Although they sound comparatively similar, the two duties are different and could even conflict with one another. A Director must understand the opinions of the membership, but he or she must also decide what is best for the organization at all times. It is a delicate balance, and requires unique skills combined with a great deal of patience. Despite what people think, a Director does not represent the opinion of one individual radio amateur. He or she must advocate the collective opinions of all the members, for their benefit *and* for the benefit of the organization.

If this sounds like something you might want to do, then please request a petition and start the process. If you don’t believe you have the time to take on this significant responsibility, please make sure you vote. Traditionally, only about 30% of the members in any one Division participate in the election process.

As I stated, ARRL is a representative democracy. To be represented properly, you *must* participate. I encourage all members to a) become involved in the workings of your organization and b) participate in the election process. To do so will help ensure your voice is heard and Amateur Radio will benefit from your involvement.

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