



Second Century

What Is ARRL?

How well do you know ARRL and its structure? Decades before I became CEO, I was a member. I've always supported ARRL because, in large part, I always believed it had my back. I still very much believe that today. As a member, I never took the time to understand the organization of ARRL and its inner workings. ARRL was simply always there for me, and other than those special times I spent seeing or working with my Section Manager, I never knew about the Board, the President, or much of anything. That was pretty much true right up until I went to apply for the CEO position.

Let me ask you: Who is the President of ARRL? Who was his predecessor? And before that? Who was your Director in 1990? How about your Section Manager? Maybe you pulled it out for 1990, but how about 1960 or 1930? The point I am driving at is that people, many people, come and go over the history of an organization as old as ours. What's still the same? ARRL. It is still here. It is still pursuing its mission to promote and protect our hobby. The beauty and genius of ARRL's structure and its ability to endure for more than a century is that it ensures members can find, select, and elect capable people as the years go by to oversee the operations, finances, and Field Services of ARRL.

How about this one: Who *owns* ARRL? The answer may surprise you, and will certainly differ from opinion pieces posted to social media. The answer is: No one. ARRL is not a ham radio club. ARRL does not have shareholders. The members of the association do not own ARRL. It is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for the public good. It is not a governmental body you are required to pay taxes to. It is a corporation that must abide by local, state, and federal laws where applicable in pursuit of its mission. Some people do not seem to like this, but that's the way it is.

So what does the Board do? The ARRL Board, which includes 30 member-elected Directors and Vice Directors and seven Board-elected Officers, is responsible for the oversight of the organization. The Board must ensure that ARRL is working to meet the needs of amateur radio broadly but also to provide certain programs and services that directly benefit members. The Board is also responsible for carefully overseeing the legal and financial obligations of the organization to keep it in good standing with the appropriate authorities and to ensure that ARRL is financially viable.

What the Board is not? It is not a representative democracy. We're not even sure how a page was

created on the ARRL website, or what caused an editorial column some years ago, to refer to it as one. Again, this is one of those topics where proponents wrap themselves in the argument that ARRL is some kind of governmental body run by the members, and get wound up if they're not supported in this misbelief. ARRL is not a governmental body based on democracy. It is an organization, a corporation, overseen by a corporate board, where the members find, select, and elect members to a 15-person Board of Directors who are responsible — as a single unit — to oversee ARRL. The Board, not individual Directors, is responsible for ARRL.

What about Section Managers, who are also member-elected? They do not, as some people believe, report to their Division Director. There are even Section Managers who have been told this, and know this, but refuse to accept it. Section Managers report to the Director of Emergency Communications & Field Services (ECFS) — a member of the Headquarters staff. They are part of the Field Services program, which is overseen by a Board standing committee called EC-FSC. The Section Managers work with members in their Section to fulfill certain volunteer positions that support areas such as emergency communications, technical support, Affiliated Clubs, traffic handling, and governmental affairs, to name a few. Section Managers are not Board members. They do not make decisions on behalf of ARRL regarding operations or finances. They focus on promoting and protecting amateur radio within their Section by carrying the field initiatives established by ARRL Headquarters into practice at the local level.

Let's finish on one of my favorite topics: transparency. This term has been weaponized to hurt ARRL's reputation, and yet it is a double-edged sword. For those who would speak out against ARRL, there are both members and staff who would like to see ARRL

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