

Planning for the ARRL's Second Century

By David Sumner, K1ZZ
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From time to time the ARRL Board of Directors tackles the formidable task of strategic planning. The mission of the ARRL — to advance Amateur Radio and advocate on its behalf — is well understood, but the resources available to us are limited and the environment in which we pursue that mission is dynamic and somewhat unpredictable.

Strategic planning is an imperfect but necessary art. It involves:

- assessing the present and future environment;
- setting long-range goals that will lead to fulfillment of the mission;
- considering and selecting among alternative means of achieving these goals;
- setting priorities; and
- establishing milestones so that progress can be measured.

In July 2006 the Board devoted the second day of its meeting to a revision of the League's Strategic Plan. The document was refined by the Executive Committee in October 2006 and adopted by mail vote of the Board later that month. The Plan begins with a list of ten-year assumptions and key external trends that may represent future opportunities or threats. Space precludes listing them all, but here are some examples:

- growing competition from other means of communication;
- continued growth of non-licensed transmitters;
- increasing land use regulations that restrict or prevent amateur operation;
- growing complexity of government relationships; and
- changes in publishing technology.

Next the Plan lists the key questions -- the "mega issues" -- that we must try to answer as we confront these opportunities and challenges, for example:

- How can ARRL increase Amateur Radio's overall image and relevance with the public?
- What is unique, different or interesting about Amateur Radio that will keep the interest of current amateurs and attract new ones?
- How can ARRL make the needed cultural, organizational and financial changes to sustain future success?

There are other aspects to the Plan, but the Board's vision is best summarized in the following five long-range goals for 2014, the League's Centennial Year:

- ARRL will be Amateur Radio's proactive advocate and representative voice in achieving key regulatory and legislative goals.
- ARRL will be the primary source of high quality Amateur Radio educational information and resources.
- ARRL will be the recognized and respected leader in Amateur Radio public service and emergency communications.
- ARRL shall attain the financial security to advance and advocate Amateur Radio.
- ARRL will have a well-trained, team based, member-responsive environment to advance its membership base.

The Board intends to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the Strategic Plan at its July 2009 meeting. As a part of the process leading up to that review, the Board would like to hear from *you*. You are invited to share *your* thoughts on the future direction and priorities of *your* national association.

The current ARRL Strategic Plan, down to the level of the long-range goals listed above, is posted at www.arrl.org/stratplan. (To view the Plan you will have to be logged into the Web site as an ARRL member.) Please look it over with the following questions in mind:

- *Assumptions and Key External Trends:* What items should be added? Modified? Deleted?
- *Mega Issues:* Again, what should be added, modified or deleted? Also, what are your thoughts about how to answer these key questions?
- *Value:* Do you agree with the statements of what the ARRL must offer, and must do, to enhance its value to Amateur Radio?
- *Long-Range Goals:* Do the five long-range goals capture your vision of how the ARRL should be positioned for its Second Century? If not, how could they be strengthened or improved?
- *Strategies:* What should the ARRL do over the next several years to pursue its long-range goals?

The Board wants to tap the wealth of experience, in virtually every field imaginable, that exists within the ARRL membership. Your job and your other activities and interests outside of Amateur Radio may give you a unique insight that will contribute to the success of our planning endeavor. Your detailed knowledge of some aspect of Amateur Radio could illuminate an opportunity that the Board itself might overlook.

In particular, we need the perspective of newer members and amateur licensees. Those of us who have enjoyed decades of involvement in Amateur Radio know that what attracted *us* is quite different from what attracted *you*. We know that our needs as ARRL members are likely to be different from yours. But -- as hard as we may try -- we cannot put ourselves in your shoes. To do a better job of serving today's and tomorrow's radio amateurs, we need to hear from *you*.

The Web site will explain how to share your input with the Board and with your fellow members. If you would like to participate but do not have Web access, drop me a note (the address is on page 14).

With your help, the next revision of the ARRL's Strategic Plan will set the stage for a successful Second Century for our national association -- and for Amateur Radio itself.

It Seems to Us: Another Step in Strategic Planning

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In the September 2008 issue of QST this page was devoted to a discussion of strategic planning. In preparation for the ARRL's Second Century beginning in 2014, at its July 2008 meeting the Board of Directors launched a yearlong project to review and revise our association's Strategic Plan and invited members to participate.

First of all, thanks to everyone who provided input at this stage of the strategic planning process. While the quantity of comments received has not been overwhelming, the quality is impressive. The agenda for the January 2009 Board meeting included a discussion of the membership input, the intent being to give the newly elected Executive Committee some guidance as it prepares material to be used as the starting point for Board consideration in July.

Categorizing the comments received revealed some interesting patterns. The most popular category was promotion of Amateur Radio: to whom, by what media, and on which themes. "AARP," young people (both directly and through their parents and educational administrators), and technology-oriented adults were mentioned several times as target groups. Several members mentioned advertising as a medium. Others identified a need for material designed specifically for personal presentations to educators, explaining the educational and career benefits of Amateur Radio involvement.

The hands-on aspect of Amateur Radio technology was seen as an underutilized strength by several members. We may not be able to mess around with the insides of microprocessors, but there are many opportunities for gaining experience with telecommunications technology that are unique to Amateur Radio. We have a tradition of sharing our innovations with one another that is attractive to the current generation of amateur technologists and electronics experimenters. We're not doing everything we could to bring the opportunities that are inherent in Amateur Radio to the attention of those kindred spirits.

The second most popular category for comment was emergency, disaster and public service communications. Wide-ranging views were expressed, particularly on training and certification issues, our relationships with the agencies we serve, and our use of digital technology. Amateur Radio's role in disaster response has evolved considerably since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina and this no doubt will continue, but there is a need for

the ARRL to enunciate a clear vision of where this evolutionary process ought to take us so we can be sure that we are headed in the right direction.

Membership issues were the next most frequently mentioned. A recurring theme was to give members more choice in how they receive information from the ARRL, including alternatives to receiving *QST* by mail. We are already investing in how this might be achieved: A major action taken by the Board in January was to approve funding for the third and final phase of a new ARRL Web site that we hope to bring on line at the end of the year. The new site will offer new possibilities for building and serving communities of interest and will make it easier for members to find in-depth information on the specific topics that interest them.

Comments about the governance of the League generally advocated improving communication between the ARRL and its members, greater transparency in decision-making, and more opportunities for grassroots involvement before ARRL positions and proposals are adopted. The planning process itself drew some criticism, both with regard to the existing Strategic Plan and the exclusion of non-members from the process. While members of an organization naturally have a greater voice in its affairs, we are certainly interested in what we need to do to be seen as more relevant by non-members and how we can bring former members back into the fold. Several apparently independent comments were received about the ARRL's Mission Statement, urging that it be reviewed and given greater visibility; this will definitely be included in the Board's work plan for July.

Several members commented to the effect that the ARRL should be more open to cooperation with and support of other Amateur Radio organizations. This topic seems to be ripe for consideration. The growing diversity of interests within Amateur Radio is both a strength and a weakness. As the national association that seeks to advocate on behalf of Amateur Radio as a whole, we cannot hope for a volunteer Board or a professional staff that possesses expertise in every facet of this expanding universe. We must find more ways to tap the expertise that exists within our membership and to interface with other organizations that share our goals.

A number of members raised the specific problem of antenna restrictions, particularly with regard to residences that are subject to private regulations (CC&Rs and homeowners' associations). This issue is at the top of the list of legislative objectives for the 111th Congress that was adopted by the Board in January. Not all members see legislation as the only solution; technology offers a growing number of ways for those who must live under such restrictions to pursue Amateur Radio.

Board members considered all of this input, added some thoughts of their own, and turned it over to the Executive Committee to take the next step at its March meeting.

If you are a member who hasn't yet taken the opportunity to provide input or if you would like to supplement your earlier comments, it's not too late! Visit www.arrl.org/stratplan for background resources and instructions. We look forward to continuing the dialogue.