

RAC Director Geoff Smith VA3GS, was Speaker for BARC 12 May Meeting

Although the meeting was lightly attended, it was productive. Alex VE3PKA presented the PowerPoint on the Barrie Amateur Radio Club's idea of creating a RAC Regional Council in Southern Ontario. Geoff stated that RAC had recently expressed an interest in ways that they could improve, and that he would present our thoughts to the members of the RAC "Re-organizing Committee".

This new structure would help RAC meet goals set out in its Core Values; namely points 1 and 8:

1. *We seek to reach all Radio Amateurs* to help them improve their knowledge of Amateur Radio and their operating skills.

8. *We believe Amateur Radio in Canada is enhanced and harmonized by a strong national association aided by local and provincial clubs* and associations.

This new structure will also help RAC meet Section 2, (The objectives of the organization) Article 1.1 of its Constitution:

“To represent and act as a liaison and coordinating body for Canadian Amateur Radio Associations, Societies, Organizations and Individual Radio Amateurs”.

You can find these RAC documents at: <http://www.rac.ca/en/rac/>
(italics in the above quotes are mine – Editor).

A summary of the results of the survey recently conducted along with a detailed outline of BARC's proposal is given below:

BARC SURVEY RESULTS

The questionnaire was dispatched to an estimated 100 Amateurs. There were 16 returns or 16%. Of these, one was a “one liner” of a personal nature and was not included in the data. A further three returns did not address the questions directly, but were taken into consideration in a report to Geoff Smith, VA3GS, Regional Director Southern Ontario. Of the remaining 12 returns 7 or 58% were from non-BARC members.

The steering group structured the questions to elicit opinions on the services provided by RAC. The returns were *expected* to be fairly neutral bordering on the positive given the nature of the internal discussions. The questions then became more targeted with the expectation that the responses would probably be increasingly critical. These were intended to set the stage for positive recommendations in the final question for structural change that would create mechanisms for improved communication between RAC authorities and the Amateur community.

In keeping with the promise of anonymity none of the actual responses will be released. Edited portions of some responses were included for illustrative purposes in the letter to Mr Smith outlining the results below:

Question 1 -- The services that are provided (by RAC) to the Amateur Radio community as a whole; such as representation to the national regulator (e.g. international AR bodies, non-government agencies, etc.)

Three (3) respondents felt that RAC was doing a good job representing the community to government and international bodies, 2 did not. Overall, the assessment is that RAC is meeting this mandate.

Question 2 -- RAC services that are provided to you as an individual (e.g. TCA, bulletins, QSL bureau, etc.)

There were 5 positive responses and 2 negative ones. There were several positive comments on the improvements made to TCA. The changing role of the QSL Bureau due to electronic forwarding of cards was commented on as was the limitation of club insurance to incorporated entities. The overall assessment is that RAC is meeting its mandate and the improvements are appreciated.

Question 3 -- RAC's promotion/development of our hobby.

As expected, the question on promoting the hobby elicited a largely neutral to negative response. RAC's presence at hamfests was acknowledged but as one respondent put it RAC is perceived more to "report" on the hobby rather than try to promote/expand it". In the replies we begin to see comment on the 'non-role' of the clubs, as well as recommendations such as offering an inexpensive 6-month RAC membership including TCA to students in club-sponsored Basic licensing classes as a means of fostering a better relationship.

Question 4 -- RAC's provision of a public service (e.g. providing public safety communications to other community groups, providing organized support to community officials.)

As one BARC member expressed it, there are "public safety communications" provided to community service groups and "emergency communications" provided primarily to emergency response organizations. In the United States, ARES has traditionally been focused more towards the former with RACES (and more recently MARS) serving as the primary vehicle for the latter. In Canada the boundary is less distinct with some provincial jurisdictions sponsoring Amateur Radio based groups, some groups calling themselves "ARES" but effectively sponsored by a government agency, and other jurisdictions where RAC ARES groups are trying to adapt on their own to new municipal government structures organized according to Incident Management or Incident Command System doctrine. All 10 responses to this question reflected RAC's uncoordinated approach and/or poorly communicated aims for the Field Service in a time when change is taking place at an unprecedented rate.

Question 5 -- The promotion of, membership in, and support to Amateur Radio clubs.

Question 5 was designed to measure RAC's promotion of membership in clubs. Only one (1) of the 10 respondents spoke to the RAC club insurance programme in qualified terms and noted that educational materials were improving. The remaining comments leave the distinct impression that RAC does not as a matter of policy see the clubs as a focal point in Amateur Radio.

Question 6 -- Keeping the Amateur Radio community informed of RAC activities/decisions.

This question was designed to measure if the respondents were satisfied with RAC's ability to keep them informed of RAC activities and decision-making. Nine (9) out of 10 respondents were unsatisfied and the majority of comments were less than positive. Of note, the responses highlighted the communication disconnect between RAC and more than 90% of the Canadian Amateur community who are not RAC members (the principal means of communication being TCA which is directed to members only).

Question 7 -- Your ability to voice your recommendations and concerns to RAC officials.

This question was intended to measure the effectiveness of upward communication. Eight (8) out of 9 responses were negative, some of them quite brutal. Whatever the impression *within* the RAC management system, the responses make clear that there is a significant body of hams who feel isolated if not ignored.

Question 8 -- Recommendations for administrative or structural change that would address your comments at topics 6 and/or 7.

Question 8 was intended to elicit proposals for structural change that would bridge the perceived communications gap. The questionnaire designers expected the responses to 6 and 7 to be critical in nature but the response to Question 8 was scathing. It is the clearest statement of all that RAC is NOT viewed as representative of the respondents, and there is such an enormous gap that an alternative provincial body was proposed as a credible alternative. Nevertheless, for those whose preference is a modernized and properly functioning RAC, within the responses to Question 8 was a viable model for a Southern Ontario regional council structure. It was used as the basis for the presentation to Director Geoff Smith at tonight's meeting.

BARC Executive
12 May, 2009

RECONNECTING - CREATING A RAC SOUTHERN ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

A SOUTHERN ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

It has been said elsewhere that organizations can be managed from the top-down or the bottom-up. Clearly a bottom-up approach is at its foundation inclusive. By our very nature hams congregate in groups to discuss Amateur Radio, promote the art, and provide a public service. The hobby is at its best when a club exists to serve as the local focal point not only for operating events but as a forum for informed discussion. Involving the clubs at the base level in a hierarchical consultation process is seen as an essential component of any regional consultation process.

The RAC Southern Ontario region is vast in size and population density, and probably includes a significant percentage of Canada's Amateur Radio population.¹ The region also encompasses a number of dispersed urban centres with distinct regional economies and agricultural areas with their own distinct characteristics. Span of control theory suggests that some form of sub-region body is needed to facilitate the flow of information and to coordinate the collation of inputs. One respondent proposed basing the sub-groups on the EMO Sectors. The 14 sectors² are founded on political boundaries which has its advantages. On the other hand, the sectors³ also divide some otherwise natural and even traditional geographic Amateur Radio groupings. Perhaps more importantly, span of control theory suggests that any more than seven sub-groups would lead to a management breakdown.

The role of the elected Section Managers is less comprehensive in Canada than in the ARRL, nevertheless this office serves at the head of the Field Service within the South Ontario Region. As such this office is an essential part of any consultation process whose purpose is to provide the Regional Director with consensus advice on matters affecting RAC policy or procedure.

The proposal therefore is to form a Southern Ontario Regional Council composed of up to seven sub-region representatives and the Section Manager, whose role is to advise the Region Director. With the exception of the Section Manger, each representative would be appointed by the sub-region council, and each sub-region council would be composed of representatives elected/appointed by the member clubs. Terms of office, etc. would define specific duties and responsibilities, and provide for such things as a staggered rotation so that continuity is maintained. Inherent in this structure is the ability to strike ad hoc working groups and/or sub committees for the purpose of addressing specific issues that arise from time to time, and drafting proposed solutions for presentation at the RAC Director level.

A working group responsible to the Regional Director could prepare the initial draft of the Terms of Reference.

CONCLUSION

The April 2008 BARC meeting attended by Southern Ontario Regional Director Geoff Smith initiated wide-ranging BARC and ARES group discussions on ways to improve membership involvement with the RAC decision making process. Bill 118 served as a catalyst. Subsequent communications with the

¹ A query of the RAC callsign database using only the letter "L" in the postal code box produced a list of 8014 entries.

² The ARES Ontario districts are based on the same EMO Sector boundaries.

³ See <http://www.emoares.org/sectors.html>

Regional Director and RAC officials once more pointed out a difference in views on the scope of the perceived communication gap between RAC management and the Canadian Amateur Radio community. A survey was conducted in an attempt to quantify the scope of the gap, the results of which proved both emotional and disturbingly negative in tone. While the survey suggests that RAC is meeting its responsibilities to the national regulator and international Amateur Radio bodies, the survey clearly demonstrated that a overwhelming majority of respondents feel that RAC fails its responsibility to communicate effectively with the Amateur Radio community at large, and leaves its members excluded from the decision making process.

This report, to be delivered to Mr Smith prior to his visit to the May 12th BARC meeting, proposes a new consultation methodology. It recommends the formation of no more than seven sub-region councils composed of representatives elected or appointed by Amateur Radio clubs, which are representative of the whole community at the local level. Each sub-council would in turn appoint a representative who, along with the elected Section Manager, would form an Advisory Council to the Regional Director. The councils would be empowered to create ad hoc working groups to address issues on a case-by-case basis. Terms of reference for the councils would include directives that would provide for a structured turnover of representatives to ensure continuity of purpose and action.

Some Further Thoughts on Creating a Regional Council

Applied to RAC as a whole, we are talking about a significant cultural change, which is always a hurdle in any organization.

The key to the whole puzzle is RAC's Constitution Article 1.1 (Objectives of the organization - <http://www.rac.ca/en/rac/>): "To represent and act as a liaison and coordinating body for Canadian Amateur radio Associations, Societies, Organizations and Individual Radio Amateurs." The corollary is that there must be an effective, formal, consultation process in order to carry out that mission. All the other Article 1 objectives hang on it.

The BARC presentation is founded on the premise that the current top-down consultation process represented by the existing management model (principally the ad hoc appointment of Assistant Directors -- the Field Service has been put "at arm's length") is not effective. The onus has been left almost entirely to the "Canadian Amateur radio Associations, Societies, Organizations and Individual Radio Amateurs" to initiate the consultation process via a proposal or complaint. When RAC does seek input it is (my opinion) through an announcement of some sort, though media that generally only RAC members would normally see, seeking only individual input. As we know from BARC's own survey process that input is generally very minimal, primarily because individuals generally do not feel themselves qualified to comment or do not wish to become embroiled in controversy of any sort.

This in turn is feeding the wide-spread *perception* (source: BARC survey) that RAC is an isolated entity divorced from the "community" and it is this *perception* and how to remove it that is RAC's real challenge. As we discussed within the steering group, instituting a bottom-up consultation process is the essential first step to changing the paradigm.

Some Questions about the Creation of a RAC Regional Council:

1) What is the threshold for club participation in one of your proposed regions in order for its "opinions" to count?

The threshold is that the club exists. It is an 'association', 'society' or 'organization' and therefore has a right to be heard as defined by RAC's Constitution Article 1.1. It is only for that entity to declare itself an organized body and to hold an open meeting(s) of record, to be considered in my mind legitimate and therefore eligible to participate in the consultation process without additional caveat.

2) Would the input from all the participating clubs be sent on to the RAC Director?

There are two answers to this, both legitimate. The first is that under Article 1.1 all "Associations, Societies, Organizations and Individual Radio Amateurs" have the right to consult with RAC and obviously the appropriate point of contact is the RAC Regional Director. Under "natural law" this in my mind includes independently consulting with the Director and/or appealing a decision taken by RAC or any other body/individual.

If the RAC Regional Director were to implement the initiative proposed by BARC, whereby individuals choose to associate in an organized body and that body nominates a representative to a sub-region council, the accepted democratic process is that the decision of the sub-council would go forward to the Regional Council, and it is that Council's advice that the Director would respond to. This is the paradigm shift, the upward consultation process whereby a consensus position is formed and presented to the Regional Director for action. In the event (probably rare) that an individual or club/association should disagree with the consensus position, then the appeal process kicks in and the onus falls on the Director **a)** to assure him/herself that due process has in fact been followed and **b)** take the appeal forward to the Board (if it is policy) or management (if it is process related), provided of course that in the Director's mind there is merit to the appeal.

The third aspect is how does the Regional Director know that an individual has put something forward to the club/association, or that a sub-committee has discussed a topic, and the decision was not to go forward with it. This is a very legitimate concern as the Director could be aware of an important factor that the club/sub-committee may not know about and the Director may wish to put the topic back on the table at the appropriate level, with the new information. The answer to the question is 'Minutes of Meetings', a copy of which goes to the Director precisely to close the information loop.

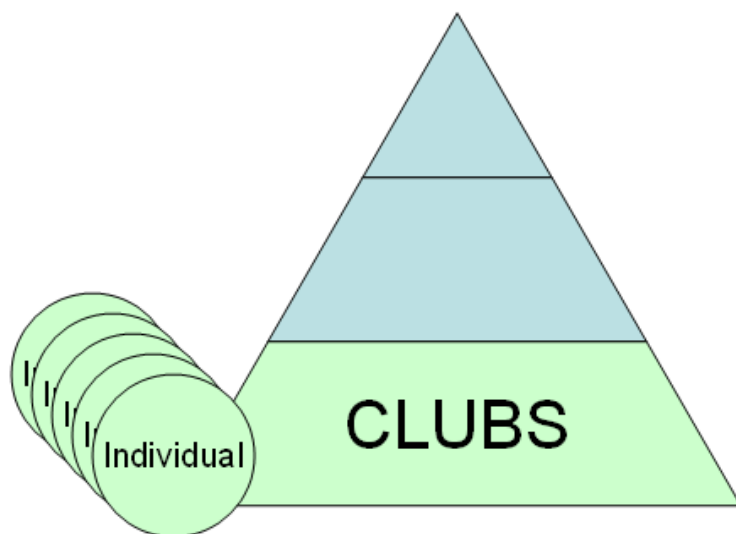
There is also within this "loop" the engine that keeps the wheel turning: a properly functioning secretariat ("an administrative unit responsible for maintaining records and other secretarial duties; especially for international organizations"). A principle function of a secretariat is to ensure that the proactive flow of information, documents, etc. is taking place in a timely fashion so that decision makers at all levels have before them the relevant factors to make an informed decision. The need to defer a decision because critical information is not available should be a rare occurrence, and then because of some new factor that has the potential of leading to a fundamentally flawed decision.

The secretariat should be *seen as entirely neutral*, should be aware of the pros and cons of any given issue, and should ensure that these factors are included as supporting material to the formal agenda -- all of which must be distributed with enough lead time so that

participants can do their pre-meeting homework. The secretariat should independently brief the chair on the agenda so that the chair can be assured that all views and factors are considered appropriately before a decision is taken. Indeed, in my experience the measure of a secretary is the confidence the membership have in him/her that their input will receive an unbiased and full hearing, within a context that respects personal confidentialities if necessary. In my professional life I participated in several such secretariats (NATO, CANUS, nationally) and observed that great professional pride taken in ensuring that the consultation process worked effectively and efficiently. I would expect just such an organization to exist between the clubs and councils of the structure outlined in the BARC proposal.

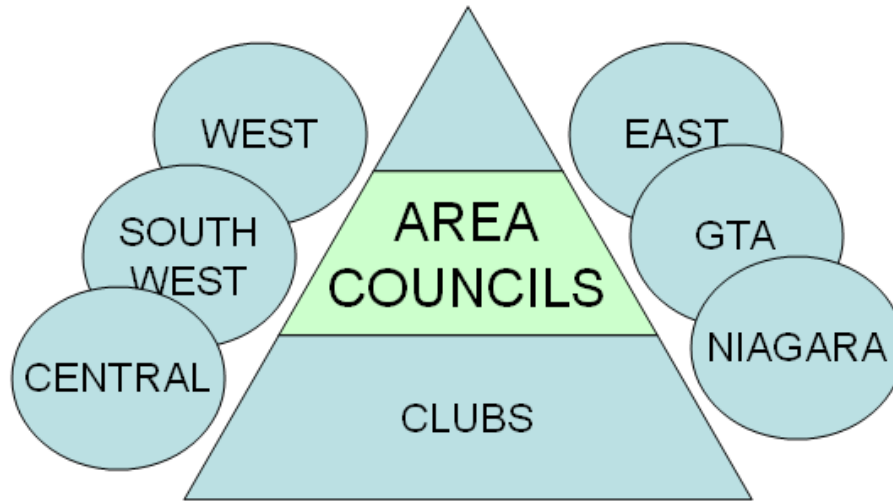
It is this process that will materially destroy the *perception* that RAC currently faces.

ADVISORY STRUCTURE: LOCAL



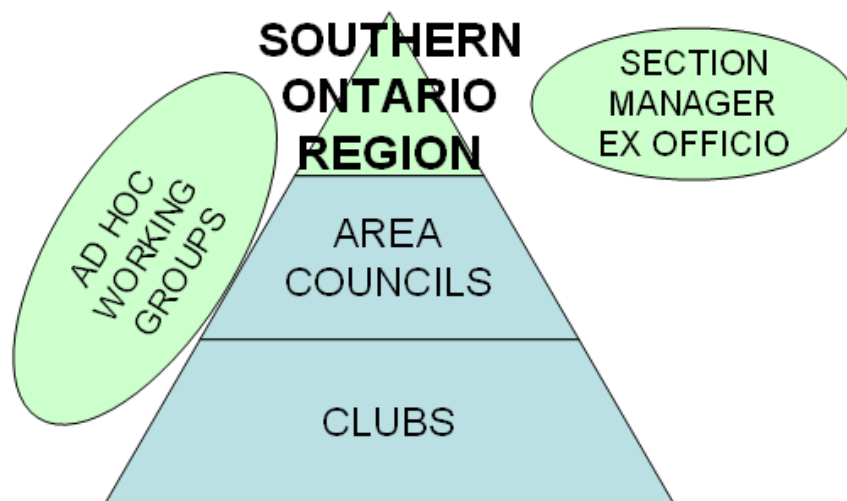
Barrie Amateur Radio Club

ADVISORY STRUCTURE: AREA



Barrie Amateur Radio Club

ADVISORY STRUCTURE: REGIONAL COUNCIL



Barrie Amateur Radio Club