

Second Century



Making a Big Decision — Together

I once heard someone say that the membership is at the “top of the pyramid” at ARRL. That struck me, because we do not function that way. ARRL is a membership organization that is structured and run as a company for the benefit of its members. As a member, you choose to support ARRL by paying to be a member; you may choose to provide additional financial support to one or more areas of advocacy that are of interest to you; you vote for your Section Manager, Vice Director, and Director. Yet these are individual actions, taken as a portion of the overall membership. When is your voice, as a membership, heard all at once? I can’t find any evidence that, during modern times, the membership ever did anything with a single voice!

Well, here I am asking for you — our membership — to consider an important question and give me your point of view. We need to make a big decision, and if we are cavalier about it, we know that there are those who will head for the door, unhappy that their opinion was never considered! As CEO, I am asking for *your* input. So, here’s the big question:

How does ARRL handle an increase in dues?

When I came to ARRL as CEO in 2020, it took me about 2 weeks of going through financials and budgets to see two things: significant work has been done over the years to cut costs, and we have a revenue problem. No organization can operate year after year running a deficit. As each year goes by, and costs for everything increase, maintaining the same annual dues doesn’t work. Sooner or later, the financials fall into the red.

Fortunately, in the past 20 years, some very talented people have been committed to raising money and managing the investments that give ARRL the ability to fill that deficit with the earnings on our endowments. Even with market dips, careful management of our investments keeps ARRL strong and running for our members — for the moment. With each successive year, the deficit continues to grow until it overtakes the earnings and the investments begin to erode. There are those who would have us dive into and spend our investments until they are gone, with the hope that some wealthy benefactors will take over paying ARRL’s operating costs. If you’ve spent any time running a business, you’ll be familiar with this well-known phrase: Hope is not a strategy.

One area that has been a challenge for us to manage is the cost of printing and mailing our periodicals — in particular, *QST*. You’ll remember last May, due to paper shortages, we had to go to paper brokers to find something close to *QST*’s usual paper, just to get the magazine printed and mailed to you on time. Given the performance of other magazines in the amateur radio industry over the years, we were not going to miss mailing even one issue of *QST*. The costs of paper, ink, printing, and distribution have all gone up. These are not costs we can ignore or (again) *hope* get better with time — especially in light of current trends in inflation.

I have spent the past year discussing these financial issues with members, and some themes have consistently emerged: Members agree that \$49 is a bargain for all that ARRL does to promote and protect amateur radio (especially when compared to a fast food meal for four, or a tank of gas!). There are many members who enjoy the benefit of reading all ARRL publications, current and past, digitally through the website or app, and if the printed versions of ARRL magazines became an added cost (as *QEX* and *NCJ* are today — imagine adding *On the Air* and *QST* to that model), members would gladly pay for ARRL to continue printing these magazines for those interested in receiving them.

There are other questions that need to be answered regarding Life Members and generous Maxim Society and Diamond Club donors, and frankly we haven’t gotten that deep into the analysis or discussion yet. There is still much work that our Administration & Finance Committee needs to do.

And then there’s you. Here’s your chance to educate me on your thoughts. We will have an online survey available on www.arrl.org for the entire month of May. If you haven’t done so lately, please go to the website and make sure your account is up to date, including your password (the new website login requires stronger passwords than the old one did).

Take a moment to click on the survey link and answer the few questions there that will ask for your thoughts on how membership is bundled, how you would respond to options such as digital-only or digital-with-printed-magazines, and your honest feelings about costs. Here’s where we, as a membership, hold hands and answer big questions together to help guide the future of ARRL. Keep radio active, get on the air and work VOTA, and see you at some of the conventions this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Minster". To the right of the signature, the call sign "NA2AA" is printed in a bold, sans-serif font.

David A. Minster, NA2AA
Chief Executive Officer