

# Task Zero: Organizing Volunteers To Accomplish Urgent Goals

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V1.0

April 19, 2018

<b>TASK 0</b>	<b>Quickly organizing amateur radio volunteers to accomplish multiple difficult and urgent tasks</b>
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DISCLAIMER: These are the best solutions and information that I was able to come up with – *if you've got a better solution, let me know!!* docvacuumtubes@gmail.com

Our 50-person Full Scale Exercise at the 2018 Amateur Radio Emergency Symposium (Gainesville, FL) had a very difficult leadership challenge right at the beginning of the exercise: how to organize 20+ stranger-volunteers into multiple smaller teams to accomplish multiple urgent & time-limited goals?

*We created this challenge intentionally.*

In a real emergency setting, leadership will potentially have to work with a large number of previously unknown volunteers. Strengths, weaknesses, personality characteristics, leadership ability, technical knowledge, social skills --- unknown in many of them! Incident Command doctrine is that a leader cannot effectively lead more than seven individuals (“span of control”), and we intentionally put 20+ persons on each of two Communications Unit, and tasked the Comm Unit Leaders with 5 or more tasks each (see table, “Background Information” at the end of this article) – implicitly requiring that they subdivide their group to get the jobs done efficiently.

As you might expect, an element of chaos resulted. Amateur radio operators tend to be technically-oriented individuals who develop their radio systems and skills somewhat by themselves, in the privacy of their own houses. Only rarely do they work in large groups, typically when putting up a Field Day station, or a tower for a club station. Those efforts may be.....exciting or frustrating. Although hams come from many walks of life, they may not have much experience leading larger groups.

Adding a **time constraint**, and constructing the groups of strangers, only intensified the difficulties! We “numbered off” the crowd of 50 participants at the Emergency Symposium specifically to split up tables of participants gathered together with their friends – dividing them up as much as possible.

There was a fair degree of confusion as a result. The two large teams spent considerable time

attempting to organize their efforts before leaving the meeting hall to travel to their assigned “deployment” locations. Abundant resources were available to them to borrow from the meeting hall – if they realized quickly enough what equipment and resources they needed --- but in the confusion, many skilled volunteers ended up deploying without important tools, antenna wire, and radios that would turn out to be crucial to performing their tasks.

There are probably multiple solutions to this problem, and different leaders or different ARES groups might discover multiple solutions if they carry out similar Full Scale Exercises. However, let me here propose at least one solution for consideration. (Send your much better solutions to [docvacuumtubes@gmail.com](mailto:docvacuumtubes@gmail.com) )

### **#1 You have to discover who has the skills for each task**

I believe this might be the most crucial task. *Who knows a solution to each of the assigned tasks?* If you break into smaller Subunits but the wrong skills are in each task group, the result won't be pretty. One solution to this is for the Communications Unit Leader to carefully read aloud all the assigned tasks, slowly enough that everyone in the group understands all of them. Before reading them, ask each member to take note of the ones for which they have some knowledge or experience. With five tasks, physically designate a gathering space for each task and after reading them, ask volunteers to literally *move to the space assigned to the task they're best skilled for* – self-segregating themselves into Subunits of people with specific skills.

It will be immediately apparent if there are distribution disparities --- if Task #1 has 10 volunteers and Task #3 has only 1, there is a problem! The leader can then ask if there are other people with skills for Task #3 and encourage a redistribution.

### **#2 You must determine leaders for each task**

At this point, give each each Subunit a few minutes to internally introduce themselves to each other and each explain how they think the task can be accomplished and what role they themselves might play. Ask each Subunit to choose their own Leader and be ready for the Subunit Leader to give a 30 second explanation of how they will go about their task.

Communications Unit Leader  
|  
Task #1 Subunit Group Leader  
|  
Task #2 Subunit Group Leader  
|  
Task #3 Subunit Group Leader  
|  
....

### **#3 Create Leadership Structure**

Next, each Subunit's Leader gives their 30 second explanation of their rough plan for accomplishing their task, so the Communications Unit Leader has a grasp of each Subunit's plans --- and can then ask for any additional input from anyone else in the Unit before breaking up to deploy. Having heard the basic plan of each Subunit, others on other Subunit groups may wish to volunteer equipment or resources to assist other submits.

### **#4 Gather Resources & Assets**

Prior to deploying, now fortified with a tentative plan for accomplishing their tasks, Subunit leaders and their team members can pick up all tools and resources they believe they will need for their tasks.

(In our exercise, one determined & enterprising team later realized once “deployed” that they needed TOOLS from the available “Community ToolBox” and sent a courier back to retrieve those tools! Another procured a vehicle with a necessary radio asset....but too late in the game.)

### **#5 Maintain Oversight**

Once the entire Communications Unit is deployed and Subunits are at work on their assigned tasks, the Communications Unit Leader needs to stay in communication with all of the Subunit Leaders to ensure that tasks are proceeding smoothly. They can move around through the working Subunits, or have the Subunit Leaders periodically find them or assemble to get progress reports. If a team gets stuck, the Communications Unit leader can search out additional resources or technical knowledge to get them back on track.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the 2018 Emergency Symposium hosted by Alachua ARES and the Santa Fe Amateur Radio Society, a short full scale exercise was held in which volunteer teams were challenged to complete a number of tasks in (simulated) support of local Emergency Management. The setting of the Exercise was a confusing and poorly-understood emergency in which local broadcast as well as public service communications had been severely damaged. These tasks as listed in the Table below and touch on a wide variety of radio skills and assets. Two Communications Units were formed, and each team had half of the tasks assigned.

*Katrina, Puerto Rico and other disasters have shown that no one can wisely claim that they will always have communications. And if ham radio is going to claim “when all else fails, there's ham radio!” – then we better have a solution to a simple request from our local EM / EOC: “Send this message by ham radio to the State EOC....all our systems are not working right now.”*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Usefulness</b>
1	Establish and maintain a Command Net	Allows tactical communication between teams.
2	Monitor frequencies for reports from fire / police / utilities / hospitals	Scanning or other techniques to “pick up” volunteers and others desiring radio connections to local emergency efforts. <i>Also – always hunt for amateurs who are on some other frequency and haven't found your operation yet.</i>
3	Create broadcasting ability at bottom end of 160 m band, or top end of AM Broadcast band, for the EOC	Allows public safety officials to have a means of reaching the general population in the absence of working broadcasting stations.
4	Digital email to State EOC	Notification and connection to state emergency authorities who need situational awareness and may be able to give you the wider picture also.
5	Create a repeater for Interoperability Channel NC1	An example of assisting to create repeater facilities where requested for interoperability between different emergency services.
6	Survey/test all known amateur communication assets	Develop situational awareness of available assets which can be leveraged to serve the community.
7	Establish contact with any ARES or other amateur emergency net	Establish connections.
8	Creating broadcasting ability over local NWS (“weather radio”) frequencies for the EOC	Allows public safety officials to have a means of reaching the general population in the absence of working broadcasting stations.
9	Utilize Message Pick Up stations to create digital connections in the absence of Internet functionality	Allows digital email connections between WINLINK-enabled communicators even without regional, national, or even international Internet functionality.
10	Maintain Activity Log and Communications Log for all actions	Keep a record of actions for both practical and legal purposes.