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Motivating Amateur Radio Clubs to Open New Initiatives (MARCONI)

Program 11: Enhancing Participation of Women in Local Amateur Radio Clubs

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Operational Guidelines

BACKGROUND While exact figures are elusive because most national licensing bodies, including the FCC, do not record gender, studies based on name analysis in ARRL, and YLRL membership suggest that women represent approximately 15 percent of licensed amateurs in the United States. This translates to more than 100,000 licensed women operators. The abbreviation YL, meaning "Young Lady," is used for Q-signals and during OnAir operations to refer to a woman operator, paralleling OM ("Old

Man”) for men.¹ XYL is the term for unlicensed women, usually wives of male amateur radio operators

Although early accounts of ham radio history often center on male inventors and experimenters, women were active participants from the beginning: using Morse code, building transmitters, operating receivers, and training new radio operators in amateur, educational, and commercial radio work. Early numbers were small and while the percentage of women continues to grow, it continues to significantly lag behind the percentage of men engaged in the hobby.

Informal YL networks began to develop at a time when few amateur radio clubs welcomed women. In 1939, these networks coalesced into the Young Ladies’ Radio League (YLRL), founded by twelve U.S. operators to “encourage and assist women interested in amateur radio.”² YLRL’s newsletter, *YL Harmonics*, began to circulate nationwide and later internationally, carrying operating notes, contest logs, and mentorship columns. By the early 1940s, YLRL had established an international correspondence network connecting operators across North America, Europe, and the Pacific.³

World War II transformed the role of women in many ways including technical communication. Many YLRL members joined or organized under the banner of Women in Radio and Electric Service (WIRES), a loosely coordinated network of women trained for communications and electronics work. Members taught Morse code, repaired

¹ <https://ylrl.net/history/>

² <https://ylrl.net/history/>

³ <https://ylrl.net/history/>

transmitters, and operated emergency communication posts for the War Department and the Office of Civilian Defense.⁴

STATEMENT OF PROGRAM PURPOSE: In the decades that have followed, the number of women engaging in amateur radio has continued to increase. Indeed, the global network of YL groups around the world continues to strengthen, and the number of young women and women pursuing STEM fields is approaching 50% in many areas. While 100,000+ YLs nationwide is significant, the number of YLs in local areas may be quite small and the absence of local community and support may discourage women from entering, thriving, and contributing to the hobby. While YLRL remains an important source of connection and support, more can be done on the local level through local ham clubs. Realizing that enhancing the role of women in local amateur radio clubs substantively benefits both women hams, and the local club, is what this chapter attempts to address in three sections:

1. Engaging the next Generation of Hams: Outreach to Young women
2. Outreach to YLs: Support for Licensed Women in Ham Radio
3. Outreach to Unlicensed Women/XYLs

1. Engaging the next Generation of Hams: Outreach to Young Women

There are several initiatives already in place for outreach to young women. The current initiatives are described below along with helpful links to get you started.

⁴ <https://ylrl.net/a-call-to-action/#:~:text=The%20YLs%20were%20living%20up,served%20with%20the%20Signal%20Corps.>

a. Scouting:

Scouting is a logical place to connect with young people in around amateur radio. Scouting America (formerly the Boy Scouts) and amateur radio go back more than a century.⁵ Both Scouting America and Girl Scouts collaborate with ARRL on badges/patches where scouts learn fundamentals of radio communication and wireless technology, connect to people and explore related careers.

Scouts learn about Amateur Radio and do hands-on activities. They can also learn about broadcast radio, emergency and public service communications, and explore ways wireless technologies are used in everyday life and in the workplace.

This is an effective way for ham clubs to promote ham radio to the next generation of young women.

i. Girl Scouts

Radio and Wireless Technology Patch Program

Developed by the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) in collaboration with the Girl Scouts, this patch introduces Girl Scouts to radio principles, encouraging troop activities and on-air demonstrations. The ARRL website has a detailed resource which includes links to the [curriculum](#).

The curriculum includes detailed instructions making it a relatively simple project for a club to undertake in collaboration with your local Girl Scouts

⁵ <https://radioscouting.website/>

council. After reviewing the materials, you can reach out to [local clubs in your area](#) to initiate or support their Radio Patch program.

ii. Scouting America (formerly the Boy Scouts)

The Boy Scouts have admitted young women for several years and rebranded themselves as Scouting America in 2024. Scouting America has more than 1 million members, approximately 200,000 of whom are young women⁶ making Scouting America another great resource to cultivate new hams including young women.

There are several ways that local amateur radio clubs can interact with Scouting America:

Radio Merit Badge

The wireless merit badge was introduced in 1918.⁷ Scouting America has a detailed curriculum as well as an informative booklet on ham radio on its [website](#). Clubs can organize special classes or workshops to cover all requirements for the radio merit badge. These can be stand-alone events or can be combined with other ham radio activities like Field Day. Additionally, club members can become registered Merit Badge counselors and guide scouts on their journey to earn the coveted radio merit badge.

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2024/05/07/boy-scouts-rebrand-as-scouting-america-to-boost-inclusivity/>

⁷ <https://www.arrl.org/radio-scouting>

Jamboree on the Air “JOTA”

JOTA is an annual event that fosters Scout-to-Scout communication across borders. Unlike contests, the purpose is to foster conversations while experiencing ham radio communication. JOTA is the largest Scouting event in the world.⁸ Ham clubs can set up JOTA stations at Scout events like camporees, or Scouts can visit the local club to participate in JOTA. More information on JOTA can be found on [ARRL's website](https://www.arrl.org/radio-scouting) and [Scouting America's website](https://www.scouting.org/radio-scouting).

K2BSA Amateur Radio Association

The K2BSA Amateur Radio Association is a nonprofit organization that promotes Radio Scouting at www.k2bsa.net. More information is on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/k2bsa), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/k2bsa) and the [Radio Scouting Yahoo group](https://www.yahoo.com/group/radio-scouting).

Local Council Station Loans

As part of the sponsorship agreement with ICOM America, an amateur radio equipment company, up to ten complete Amateur Radio stations will be available for long-term or short-term event loans to local councils.

Clubs who are not yet connected to Scouting America should check with your local [Scout council](https://www.scouting.org/councils) to discuss how your club can get involved.

b. ARISS (Amateur Radio on the International Space Station)

⁸ <https://www.arrl.org/radio-scouting>

[ARRISS](#) enables students to speak directly with crew members of the International Space Station, inspiring them to pursue STEM fields and engaging them with radio technology. You can apply to participate through the [ARRISS website](#) (note: deadlines to apply are approximately one year before scheduled date).

Many ARISS school sessions can pair students with female astronauts and women ground-station operators giving students examples of women using ham radio in high-profile public events. If you wish to apply, you may partner your local club with a local school or educational organization.

The ARISS proposal requires that students spend several months learning about space and the space program in advance of this contact so it will take a good deal of commitment on the part of the local school or organization as well as the local ham club. That said, the time is well spent as a way to demonstrate the power of radio and STEM fields to young women.

c. ARRL Education & Technology Program

ARRL's *Teachers Institute on Wireless Technology* trains educators to incorporate amateur radio and electronics into STEM curricula. Their resources are on [ARRL's website](#) and could also be used by ham radio operators offering to guest lecture. Club members can reach out to their local schools to offer guest lecture services to the STEM faculty.

d. Social Media

There is an increasing number of young women posting on TikTok about their Ham Radio adventure. The hashtag #hamradio is used to categorize these videos, which cover topics from the technical aspects to the social side of amateur radio. In addition, X, Discord, Facebook and Instagram have active ham radio posters. You can locate content by searching by hashtags #hamradio, #amateurradio. If your club is not on social media, you can consider announcing events or promoting ham radio activity by using social media to engage younger people with an emphasis on outreach to young women.

e. Club Events

Opening the club to young women on Field Day to demonstrate ham radio is an excellent way to introduce the next generation to the hobby. Hosting a club community event like CQ Santa (Calling Santa) introduces young children – boys and girls to ham radio and connects the club to the local community. For the Calling Santa event held by the Meriden Amateur Radio Club - W1NRG, local children speak to a radio club member dressed as Santa and talk to the North Pole using the Club's repeater at the club's radio station. Another hidden radio club member portraying an Elf or Mrs. Claus living at the North Pole, responds on the repeater and answers the child's questions about Santa, toys, etc. Each child then gets a signed "QSO" certificate from Santa and special treats.

You can combine the event with other holiday activities, crafts, radio demonstrations and hands-on activities (learning Morse Code is always popular). The ham club benefits from engaging with the local community while promoting ham radio to children. There is always a strong showing from young women in the community for this event.

This type of event is distinct from the national "[Santa Net](#)," which is a nightly check-in on the 3.916 MHz frequency between Thanksgiving and Christmas, organized by the 3916 Nets group. If your club is not able to host a local event, it is worth promoting the Santa Net within your community.

2. Outreach to YLs: Support for licensed women in ham radio:

As noted above, national statistics aside, the number of YLs in your local area may be small and the absence of local community and support may discourage women from *engaging* and contributing to the hobby. The relatively small numbers, in turn, has the effect of discouraging interest from unlicensed women.

As mentioned, the Young Ladies" Radio League (YLRL) exists to encourage and assist young women and women throughout the world to enter into the Amateur Radio Service. This organization supports young women and women in a number of ways:⁹

- *YL Harmonics* (a bi-monthly publication for members)
- YL nets (including a list of YL nets around the world)
- YL contests
- YL Conventions
- scholarships for licensed women studying in technical fields
- presentations at Ham Fests around the world

⁹ <https://ylrl.net/about-us/>

As a starting point, does your club promote YLRL? It helps for clubs to include YLRL activities in lists of upcoming [contests](#), [conventions](#), and [nets](#) promoted to your membership. Consider creating a club liaison to YLRL who can provide updates from YLRL in your newsletters or other communications to members. [Harmonics](#), the YL newsletter, is a great source of information about YLRL activities. Consider inviting a speaker from YLRL to discuss the organization and its activities.

Does your club have active YLs? If not, why not? Ask YLs who may be inactive if there are things the club could do to encourage more YL participation. Make it a point to participate in the major YLRL contests as a club or offer special YL events at the club.

3. Outreach to Unlicensed Women

Many women come to the hobby because of their OM or family member. It is one thing to be recruited by your OM but a different experience entirely to be in a room with a vibrant community of women who love ham radio. Some XYLS attend Ham Fests as guests. YLRL's presence at Ham Fests serves to encourage XYLS who may have an interest in becoming licensed. Before considering outreach to unlicensed women, it is recommended that you first assess what your club does to support your current YLs.

YLRL members offer YL only amateur radio classes which may feel more inviting for women. The [YLRL website](#) lists a number of ways they can support women:

You can direct interested women to [YLRL's website](#).

Other ways to reach unlicensed women:

- Consider offering social events at your club and invite XYLs so women become part of the local amateur radio community.
- Have a presence in community events (races, festivals, etc.) where club members volunteer (often through Community Emergency Response Teams).
- Offer licensing classes in your local club and advertise broadly in your community.
- Do outreach to local veteran's groups.
- Offer to do a session at local women's clubs on ham radio and disaster preparedness.

We believe that clubs are key to expanding the number of women and young women engaging in ham radio. In turn, increasing the number of engaged ham radio operators will strengthen local clubs. If your club is not currently involved in such outreach, consider making that a priority for the upcoming year.

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