

Participation Hours

ISSUE: Army MARS requires individual members report 15 total hours participation per quarter, at least 9 hours on the air.

AR 25-6 sec 3-2 b states, "A minimum of 12 hours of participation in each calendar quarter (3 consecutive months), consisting of at least 6 hours on HF and/or VHF and/or UHF networks is required to maintain membership".

BACKGROUND: Army MARS increased the participation requirement in this area in the 2007/2008 period.

There is little evidence to suggest this requirement has had an impact on membership recruitment or retention.

Some state and region directors have requested a monthly participation requirement rather than quarterly.

AR 25-6 indicates a calendar quarter. Army MARS has used a "running" quarter consisting of the last three consecutive months.

RECOMMENDATION: Present following options to the full MGEB in telephone conference:

- Adjust membership requirements to 12 hours per quarter / 6 on the air.
- Adjust membership requirements to a monthly rather than quarterly period

DISCUSSION: The full MGEB convened by teleconference on 12 July 2012. The following are highlights of the discussion points:

- A monthly hourly requirement would simplify accountability but provide less flexibility for members to participate over a three month period. A monthly requirement would result in more leave of absences.
- AR 25-6 specifies a calendar quarter. ARMARS has traditionally used a running quarter of the last three consecutive months. The quarter needs to be defined and clarified in the AR.
- Requiring HF on the air hours would focus the membership on our core capability. Practicing and developing skill with HF radio is necessary for all members. A pathway to "VHF only" membership is not desired.
- VHF operations will remain an important ancillary activity.

DECISION: 11 Region Directors were present for four separate votes on this issue:

- 1) 10 Region Directors voted against changing to a monthly requirement. The proposal for a monthly hourly requirement is rejected.
- 2) 11 Region Directors voted to define a quarter as the last three consecutive months for the purposes of member hours.
- 3) 9 Region Directors affirmed the 15 hours total per quarter, of which at least 9 hours are on-the-air requirement for individual members.
- 4) 11 Region Directors voted to require at least 9 hours on the air per quarter using HF radio once a member completes the basic training course. This provision to become effective the reporting period starting, 1 JULY 2013.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

- Communicate to Membership
- Update Basic Training Course to reflect required HF radio hours.
- Update AR 25-6 to state, "A minimum of 15 total hours in the previous three consecutive months, consisting of at least 9 hours on HF networks is required to maintain membership".

Net Control Duty

ISSUE: Army MARS requires Individual Members to perform one hour of Net Control Station (NCS) duty per quarter. AR 25-6 and the other MARS services do not require each individual member to perform NCS duty.

BACKGROUND: Army MARS increased the participation requirement in this area in the 2007/2008 period. It is believed this requirement would address the problem of “ghost members”, who held membership but did not participate in a meaningful way, or keep up on their training and capabilities. The requirement did prompt many members to work harder on their skills and become more proficient in procedures. In this respect the requirement is successful where it has been enforced.

In some cases the requirement is difficult to accomplish. There may be insufficient scheduled nets and membership levels to provide NCS opportunities. This has resulted in the requirement being lightly enforced by some State leaders.

RECOMMENDATION: Present following options to the full MGEB in telephone conference:

- Retain the existing requirement for 1 hour NCS duty per quarter
- Eliminate the requirement
- Modify the requirement

DISCUSSION: The full MGEB convened by teleconference on 12 July 2012. The following are highlights of the discussion points:

The Net Control requirement is necessary to develop skills, experience and confidence in all members

- The requirement is an administrative headache for accountability.
- Add a place to claim the NCS hour on the Participation Report.
- NCS may submit COMSPOT reports to their State Director to get credit for the NCS hour.
- Affirmed willingness to terminate members based on this requirement.

DECISION: 9 Region Directors voted to retain the requirement for all individual members to serve as NCS for one hour per quarter. The NCS requirement is retained.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

- Communicate decision to Membership
- Update instructions for member participation report.
- Add the following sentence to AR 25-6 section 3-2b: “A minimum of one hour as Net Control Station on any MARS network in the previous three consecutive months is required to retain membership”.

WL2K and Data Mode

ISSUE: ARMY MARS policy currently requires individual members to have an approved data mode (waveform) capability. A list of approved data modes is provided in the Net Plan. Army MARS has been requested to reinstate a previous policy of requiring WL2K capability of all Army MARS members. AR 25-6 3-1 a (1) (d) states, "In possession of, or access to, a radio station capable of operating on MARS VHF and/or HF frequencies..." There are no references to data modes or Winlink 2000 (WL2K) capability in AR 25-6.

BACKGROUND: Army MARS required its members to have WL2K capability beginning in the 2007/2008 period. This requirement was modified to "Any Approved Data Mode" in 2011. Any of the data modes listed in the Net Plan such as RTTY, MT63, Olivia, Pactor, or M110A meet the requirement.

The current requirement is not an economic burden on members. The freely available amateur radio soundcard "multi mode" programs such as FLDigi include several modes used in Army MARS such as RTTY, MT63 and Olivia. Hardware modems utilized by WL2K also include the RTTY mode as it is used in Army MARS. M110A software is freely available.

Requiring a data mode in addition to SSB voice significantly enhances network capabilities. Most messages in MARS are transmitted using a data mode at this time. The requirement represents current practice for effective network operations.

The request by WL2K management to narrow the requirement to specifically a WL2K capability would enhance member's preparedness to assist those civil agencies that utilize WL2K. The requirement would essentially be a mandate for members to subscribe to the sole source product of a private, not for profit corporation (ARSF Inc).

RECOMMENDATION: Present following options to the full MGEB in telephone conference:

- Require individual members to have an approved data mode capability
- Eliminate the requirement:
- Require individual members to have WL2K capability

DISCUSSION: The MGEB convened by teleconference on 12 July 2012. The following are highlights of the discussion points:

- A data mode is necessary for effective network operations.
- There are varying propagation conditions that require different types of waveforms.
- WL2K capability should optional for members.
- A grace period for new members should be provided.

DECISION: 11 Region Directors were present for two separate votes on this issue:

- 1) 11 Region Directors voted to require members to have an approved data mode capability on completion of Basic Training Course.
- 2) 11 Region Directors voted not to require members to have Winlink2000 capability.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

- Communicate decision to membership
- Update AR 25-6 3-1 a (1)(d) to state: "In possession of, or access to, a radio station capable of operating between 2 and 30 MHz using SSB voice and an approved data / teletype mode. A listing of approved data / teletype modes is available in the Army MARS NetPlan."

Topic: Membership Requirements

NIMS course requirement

ISSUE: Army MARS requires members to complete NIMS courses, ICS 100, 200, 700 and 800.

There are no references to requiring NIMS courses in AR 25-6.

BACKGROUND: Army MARS added this requirement in the 2007/2008 period.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) courses are available through the FEMA training web site. Since 2005, these simple courses are required of all emergency management and public safety personnel in the United States, whose agency wish to receive federal grant money (HSPD-5). For this reason, these courses have become a defacto standard for the lowest common training through all emergency management and public safety workers nationwide.

The course may convey important information that would be helpful for the MARS volunteers understanding of the Incident Command System, and the National Response Framework. Since the courses are not instructor lead, it is possible that some individuals taking the courses may get much less from them than intended and still pass the assessment.

Retaining the requirement for the courses brings Army MARS credibility in the civilian emergency management and public safety sectors.

The requirement has been cited as an impediment for retaining or attracting new members, particularly those who do not identify with the Defense Support of Civil Authorities mission.

RECOMMENDATION: Present following options to the MGEB in telephone conference.

- Retain requirement for NIMS courses
- Eliminate requirement for NIMS courses

DISCUSSION: The MGEB convened by teleconference on 12 July 2012. The following are highlights of the discussion points:

- Army MARS overarching mission requires all members have a baseline familiarization with management systems used by civil authorities.
- Loss of well qualified members because of unwillingness to complete required NIMS training.
- Supporting National Guard under Title 32 NIMS familiarization is important.
- Only Emergency Coordinators, State/Region Directors, and certain staff need the courses.
- A course focused on the military management and staff systems should also be required.

DECISION: 11 Region Directors were present for the vote. 9 Region Directors voted to retain NIMS course requirements for all individual members in Army MARS.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

- Communicate to membership
- Update AR 25-6 to require NIMS courses 100, 200, 700 and 800.
- Investigate equivalent military training.

HF Radio Requirement

ISSUE: Army MARS currently requires individual members to have HF Radio capability. There are many members with VHF only capability. AR 25-6 3-1 a (1) (d) states, "In possession of, *or access to*, a radio station capable of operating on MARS VHF *and/or* HF frequencies..."

The lack of foundation for the policy frustrates State and Region Directors enforcement efforts. Clarification is required for the membership.

BACKGROUND: Army MARS policy has required members to have 2-30 MHz HF Radio capability. HF radio is a key component of MARS long-haul communications. Requiring a capability for HF radio operations of individual members ensures the volunteer corps is universally able to perform as required. MARS HF communications provide a unique capability to the national communications infrastructure.

Members claiming only VHF participation are a related issue. AR 25-6 allows for members to claim credit for HF or VHF/UHF on the air hours.

VHF and Land Mobile Radio (LMR) operations are useful for short range operations. In many cases, it may be used for the "last mile" connection. In some areas, MARS VHF/LMR has developed into elaborate repeater networks providing state-wide or adjacent state connectivity. LMR is relatively simple to set up, use and is reliable. MARS VHF capabilities are in parallel with many other well established LMR capabilities at all levels of the government. LMR is well established in the national communications infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION: Present following options to the full MGEb in telephone conference:

- Require HF capability 2-30 MHz
- Require HF or VHF capability.

DISCUSSION: The full MGEb convened by teleconference on 12 July 2012. The following are highlights of the discussion points:

There are AMARS members who joined MARS expecting to participate only by VHF handheld radio.

- Continued development of skill and abilities in HF radio operation through regular participation is necessary for all individual members.
- Value of VHF operations, particularly in intra-state communications and last mile connectivity
- Actual possession of HF station equipment or access to a station. Value of club stations.

DECISION: 11 Region Directors were present for the vote:

The issue regarding participation credit was deferred to the decision regarding participation hours where it was decided that 9 hours of on the air participation using HF radio is required of individual members.

9 Region Directors voted to require individual members have access to a HF radio station and 2 Region Directors voted to require members to have actual possession of a HF radio station.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

- Communicate to membership
- Update AR 25-6 3-1 a (1)(d) to state: "In possession of, or access to, a radio station capable of operating between 2 and 30 MHz using SSB voice and an approved data / teletype mode. A listing of approved data / teletype modes is available in the Army MARS NetPlan".