



# Seeing the True Value of Volunteer\$

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*Ready to Serve and Sustain Our Community*

A common plight of all volunteers is being taken for granted. This is revealed in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways. Amateur radio operators (hams) have a long history of volunteering. This is especially true during disasters. When severe storms, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural calamities devastate communities, hams are noted for being there when “all else fails” filling the communication gaps.

Volunteers are unpaid. Thus, their true value goes unseen. I recognized this as a critical problem because when the generosity and good will of volunteers goes unrecognized. Volunteers can get demoralized and discouraged. Some won't eagerly volunteer again.

It doesn't take much to appeal to their good graces. In many rural and urban settings, I have “rewarded” volunteers with recognition via paper certificates, having their photos show up in newsletters and illustrating lessons. They gain immense self-satisfaction from their sense of “doing good” and “helping others.” But it hurts when they are not valued for their service.

Volunteers saves event organizers money. Volunteers get no wages or salaries, no benefits, no insurance, no retirement. The volunteers cost organizers next to nothing. It saves the project budget. Organizers appreciate this very much. They may say all the right words, but in terms of the budget, the value of the volunteers = 0.

## ***Plight of the Volunteer***

*When volunteers attend emergency exercises and meetings with government agencies, there is a glaring overlooked difference. Most of the government participants are paid to attend. The volunteer are not paid. If they take time off with no pay or their shop for the day to participate.*

*They get no compensation for lost wages or business income. If hams don't attend, it is taken as an indication that hams “are not interested.”*

*The fact that ham volunteers are not compensated shows they are not truly “valued.”*



*Ham volunteers in a simulated emergency exercise in Hiangalgunge, Sundarban area, India*

I overcame this issue when I organized training sessions in urban Los Angeles for a large American non-profit organization. They were generous enough to provide \$1,000 for the project. We were cooperating with a local non-profit affiliated with the California state government. This group has some funds available for the project. When I put together the community volunteer part of the project proposal, I showed the value of the volunteers as \$10,000. When both groups received my papers, they were

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shocked! Both groups thought I was sending them a bill! I was only showing them dollar value of the volunteers to the project. I pointed out to the US national organization that when they put up \$1,000 for the project, the value of the volunteers time, resources (tools, radios, etc.), transportation costs, food, etc. would have cost \$10,000 if these volunteers were paid and compensated. I want the event organizers and the attendees to know the true cost / value of the volunteers. Think about it. What would be the response of an organizer if you tell them “for every \$1 you spend for the project, I can make it worth \$10.” In other words, the volunteers increased the National non-profit’s value to the project by 10 X.

When event organizers don’t know the monetary value of your volunteers, it is hard to really **value** them. You must make every effort to document what it would cost for the organizers to hire competent workers for their event. This is time to pull out the magnifying glass and to count every item, every penny, and every minute of everything. For example, 10 hams show up to provide radio services for an event. Start with the cost per hour if radio operators were hired and paid by the hour. Then factor in the cost of the radios, batteries, and all other operator equipment. Then include hourly pay for all the organizing meetings and time on duty. Count the water and meals, too, if the event organizers don’t supply this. Put the dollar amounts to the transportation cost for the volunteers to get to and from the event. Did you make name badges for your volunteers? Detail the cost in time/labor, and materials IF not paid for by the event. Any out of pocket expenses you incur should be added to the list. You may be shocked as to how much money you and your volunteers put forth in terms of cash, materials, equipment, time / labor, etc. Don’t let these costs go unacknowledged. These costs add value to what you and your volunteers do for the larger organization and public. Consider the costs and expenses you and the other volunteers incur to be ready to support a given event. These are costs the event organizers never pay. It is your duty to inform them of the true monetary value of your participation.

In many cases, event organizers have volunteers sign legal waivers of liability. In other words, they won’t be responsible for your injuries when serving with them as a volunteer. This is just another example of how volunteers are not valued. They are asking you to come work with others who are paid and compensated. Hams may be doing work others cannot do, but the hams aren’t be paid or insured. Hams volunteer to do communications work also bring their equipment at no cost to the event organizers. If ham equipment is worn out, damaged, lost, stolen in the course of volunteering, no one compensates them. In essence, many hams pay for the “privilege” of serving or volunteering. 🌱



*Glendora Emergency Response Communications volunteers installing their own 2-way radio and GPS tracking equipment at a West Covina, CA public service event .*

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<b><i>An Example of the Value of</i></b>		
<p>This is a hypothetical example of what an evening community event might cost. The hams provide radio communications for an annual parade event that lasts about 5 hours.</p> <p>This is the equipment and expenses for a ham volunteer to participate. Preparation time before the event and break-down/clean up time is not included.</p> <p>The cost per hour for each operator would increase if adding their time to set-up and take-down equipment is added. Consider that city or government employees would be paid to do that work, too.</p>	Item	Estimated Volunteer Cost
	Radio (HT)	\$50-\$219
	Headset	\$3.50-\$25
	High gain whip antenna	\$35-\$65
	Extra Batteries	\$20
	Flash light	\$15
	Safety vest	\$20
	Amateur radio license	\$19
	Radio Operator / hr	\$57.95-\$86.05
	Subtotal Value / volunteer	\$220-\$469
	<b><i>Other Charges</i></b>	
	Transportation	\$15.60
	Parking	\$5.00
	Water	\$2.50
	Food	\$20.00
	Subtotal Value / volunteer	\$43.10
	Estimated Total	\$264-\$512
<p>This example shows that for a single ham to provide radio services at a local event. Depending on the specific equipment, the value of each volunteer ham radio operator could be \$264 - \$512 for 5 hours of service. If 20 ham volunteers are needed for the event, the ham group is providing anywhere from \$5,271 to \$10,243 of services to the event organizer.</p> <p>The ham contribution could be higher if other equipment is furnished by the hams: tents, tables, chairs, batteries, generator / solar panels, mobile or base station radios, antennas, masts / towers, coax cable, etc. If paid employees were used instead of volunteer hams, the organizer costs would be even higher when adding in payroll taxes, life and medical insurance, retirement, and other employee related costs.</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Do Not Sell Yourself Short: Tell People What It Costs You to Give Your Radio Communications Skill to the Community.</i></b></p>		
<p>In the US the law is clear: amateur radio operators may not be paid for their services. However, this does not change the fact that IF an event organizer had to pay employees to do the service of the volunteer hams, the costs would NOT be cheap. 🍷</p>		