How to Run an Activity that Brings in Radio Novices

For Pacificon 2026

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Dan’s Theory on Recruiting More Hams

Many, if not most people, learn best in community.

Ham radio has a steep learning curve!

There are a lot of potential Hams who will come into the hobby only when we organize more group learning activities.

Defining Terms

Radio novice: Someone new to radio, down to having literally never held an HT before.

Presentation: Primarily lecture and conversation.

Workshop: Primarily actually doing stuff.

Bringing in Novices

Enticing people to come to an activity can be the hardest part.

Here’s how to recruit participants for your learning activity.

1. Have a strong pitch.
2. Pitch a receptive audience.
3. Have a good venue.

“Radio Practical Skills” Sample Promo Text

Learn to effectively use a radio! There will be a short overview of how radios work, followed by real practice communicating on the air. This is a great intro for anyone interested in using radio for camping trips, protest, or emergency preparedness.

No experience, license, or radio is required! Bring your own FRS or GMRS radio if you have one, but we will have FRS radios available for everyone.

The Parts of a Pitch

Be explicit that no experience is required.

Tell participants that all equipment will be provided.

The pitch should be short, direct, and relevant to participants' interests.

Marketing 101: Have a USP (Unique Selling Point)

- There should be a bit of a "wow" factor in the description.

Your Target Audience

Ideally you have a curated list of interested people.

Next best is a list of people likely to be interested.

- e.g. GMRS emergency preparedness groups…

Next next best are local groups with their own curated lists.

- County libraries, community spaces, etc.

Finally, websites may work, too: NextDoor, etc.

Qualities of a Good Presentation Venue

- Accessible
- Bathrooms
- Big enough for everyone
- Seating for everyone
- Quiet inside
- Projector and screen
- Good WiFi and Internet
- (Free) Parking
- Food options nearby
- Close to transit
- Close to participants
- Available when you need it
- Free

Parks as a Workshop Venue

- Accessible
- Public bathrooms
- Phone signal and internet
- Big enough for any planned activities
- No conflicting events that day
- At least one available picnic table
- Account for weather, including wind and sun
    - Ideally some weather protection, including tree shade
- Test activities from this location first

Neutral Ground

Venues should ideally be free of baggage.

This brings in people who wouldn’t have come otherwise.

- For example, if you want to bring in more young people, don’t host all your events at a senior center.
- Similarly, some people will never come to an event at a police station.

Star Your Activity with Introductions!

Start with introductions and warm-up questions *every time*.

- See where people are coming from.
- ID mismatched expectations.
  - If someone is way too experienced for the activity, warn them they may not learn anything new.
- Intro’s build trust and help you learn why people came.

Demonstrations & Activities

Demonstrations and activities must succeed!

Participant activities should be meaningful and self-contained.

Planning ahead is crucial:

- If you're going to demo hitting a repeater, have club members listening and ready to transmit on the repeater.

Have handouts so participants don't have to remember stuff while doing stuff.

Don't focus on being realistic. Focus on being compelling.

Be Confident as a Trainer!

You can be candid if this is new for you…

- But frame it as a positive!
- Tell participants they can ask questions…
- And give feedback at the end.

Be opinionated!

- Too much nuance is distracting and unhelpful.
- Err on the side of being too “simple.”

Be Simple! Stay Focused!

People will be confused about things you didn’t think possible.

- Anticipating what will be confusing is one of the most important skills you can develop!
- Ask for questions *constantly.*
- But don’t be afraid to tell a participant if a question is off-topic.
    - Just try to stick around after to answer any remaining questions.

Provide a Path to Grow

Once participants are excited, give them ways to learn more.

- Promote ARES, RACES, and your local club’s next meeting.
- Suggest ways to study for and take their license exams.
- Get participants’ contact info!
  - This can be the beginning of your list of people interested in future beginner’s events: PACE planning, POTA / SOTA demo’s, etc.

Finish Every Activity with an Evaluation

Every time!

It’s hard to get candid feedback. But it’s crucial.

The number 1 rule: Don’t push back on feedback, even if you disagree or think it’s wrong.

Use the feedback to improve your training right away.

- This creates a repeatable, virtuous cycle.

In Conclusion

1. Write a good pitch, as getting people is the hardest part.
2. Pitch people most likely to be interested.
3. Find a good venue that’s on neutral ground.
4. For presentations, be opinionated and make it simple.
5. For workshops, ensure demos and activities succeed!
6. Start with introductions, end by receiving feedback, and ask for questions throughout.

Thanks!

Thank you, Pacificon organizers!

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Contact me if you're interested in a workshop or training.

