

LiOTA: Libraries On The Air

A Complementary Program to the ARRL Plant the Seed Initiative

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The ARRL Board of Directors recently approved an initiative I proposed some months ago through my Division Director, David Norris K5UZ. This is *Plant the Seed-Sow the Future*. This initiative promotes and implements the tools to facilitate ARRL-affiliated clubs to identify and seek a formal relationship with one or more public libraries in their area of service.

The reasoning behind establishing such a “served agency” approach comes from my research on the demographic profile of library visitors and patrons (see this URL: <https://k4fmh.com/2023/03/30/a-recommended-strategy-for-planting-the-seed/>). The Gallup organization has shown that public libraries are the most common cultural crossroads in the United States’ public sphere. This is especially the case for two identified target markets for the ARRL education and outreach program: women and young people. With ARRL-affiliated clubs being encouraged to create formal relationships with area libraries, reaching these two demographics will be more efficiently accomplished due to the targeted-marketing where they frequent. (Gallup says that women and youth visit public libraries over twice the rate than movie theaters.)

In this memo, I propose a complementary program that follows on the heels of the National Parks on the Air (NPOTA) effort by the League back in 2016. NPOTA reached sunset insofar as the ARRL’s management was concerned at the end of that year. However, the entrepreneurship of Jason Johnston W3AAX led to his incorporation and trademarking of POTA: Parks on the Air shortly thereafter. It has been wildly successful, resulting as of this writing (July 1, 2023) in over 15 million QSOs, 11 thousand activators, and 400 thousand hunters. This activity is not promoted as a contest in the usual sense although logs are filed, verified, and awards achieved. It has created a formal activity space for a range of amateur radio operators who may not participate in existing contesting events.

I’ve discussed the receptivity by public library directors and staff with a number of those professionals. *To a person, everyone was very excited at the prospect of an affiliated amateur radio club or group of hams scheduling an “on the air” event at their library location.* One Director asked if she could talk to the ISS and was ebullient when I said that was very possible! This potential program activity falls squarely into the STEM emphasis now a vibrant part of the public library professional discourse.

Because of the strong positive response by library staff who are the key decision-makers in the public libraries in my surrounding counties, it is my belief that the ARRL should consider adding a complementary “on the air” activity for the *Plant the Seed Initiative* that was recently been formally approved by the Board of Directors.

The **Libraries On The Air** (*LiOTA*) program would be an activity scheduled with a local public library by ham operators at a mutually agreeable time. The public library would handle most of the public relations and promotion to the public as part of their existing program outreach. Of

course, ham operators conducting the event would engage in the usual promotion of the activation to the amateur radio community itself. This division of labor will spread the word to the regular library community *without any additional effort* on the part of the activating ham operators or club.

The mechanics of implementing LiOTA by the ARRL are two-fold. One is to use the existing LoTW system to add an additional “award” element in the database. Activators can upload their credentialed log files (*.adi) to LoTW under a new Award of LiOTA, analogous to WAS, DXCC, and so forth. I have created a file of all public libraries in the U.S. complete with unique entity number for use in each QSO (example: NM0041, Zuni Public Library, Zuni NM). I can assist ARRL IT management in accessing and using these data in LoTW should that be needed.

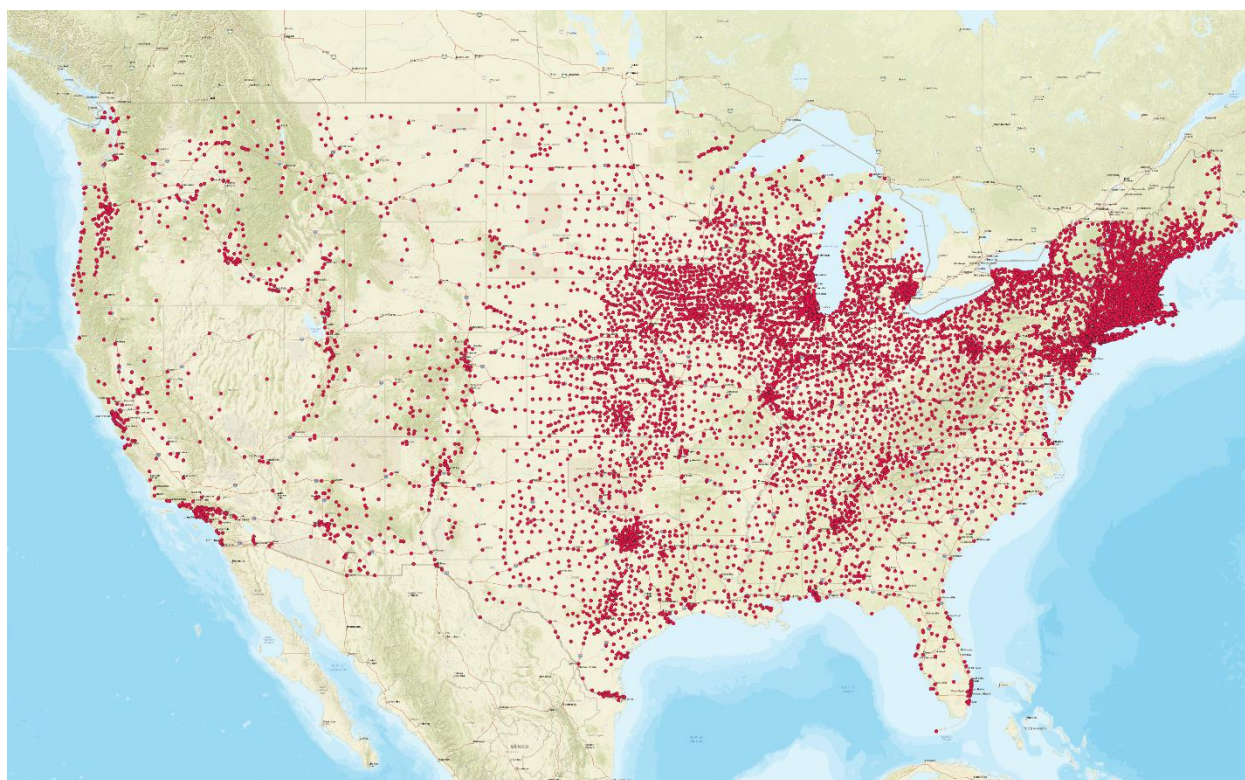


Figure 1 Public Libraries in United States

Each library in the database was georeferenced for the map in Figure 1. Only the Continental US (CONUS) is shown although there are public libraries in AK, HI, PR and island possessions in the data. There are 9,215 library sites in this database. This dataset is easily updated on a biannual basis.

As noted in my earlier blog posts at k4fmh.com (see URL above), the public library database has extensive data on each library site’s visitation traffic, programs offered with young adult and youth programs identified separately, as well as the population served. These data elements can be used to track the potential public outreach for each “on the air” activation.

I have created a logo fitting the program, especially given the demographics of public libraries in the U.S. This is shown below. This logo is suitable (in SVG vector format) for display on tee shirts, mugs, and other promotional items as part of the program. Featuring a female operator

at a microphone in a library setting emphasizes the likely target demographic in public libraries. *Getting women and youth on the air through control operators, much like GOTA stations at Field Day, is a key aspect of this public event at a library.* I'm told by library personnel that most children are accompanied by an adult female in library visits.

To conclude, the *Libraries On The Air Program* is a natural follow-on successor to the 2016 landmark NPOTA by the ARRL. It will put some additional thrust into the *Plant the Seed Initiative* by fostering an activity that all local ARRL-affiliated clubs know very well: a public event activation. Even better, public libraries already know how to get the word out to promote their programs and associated activities.

Should the Board of Directors adopt this program, the two major action elements, besides officially adopting the program, are to implement a public relations roll-out as well as a minor update to the LoTW database system including a new "award" element of a LiOTA activation. There should be a minimal cost element to both of these action items. These costs may well be offset by the marketing of promotional items for sale via the ARRL website.



Figure 2 LiOTA Logo featuring female operator at microphone © Frank K4FMH

I have copyrighted the contents of this memo to protect against other parties absorbing it into their activity space. I am willing to hand over complete rights to the concept and logo to the ARRL if it is adopted not later than July 1, 2024. Should the League not make a positive decision by that date, I will consider other avenues through which to implement the *Libraries On The Air Program*.

It is my belief that this program will leverage the currently exploding POTA-style operating activities among U.S. ham operators. That will also ramp-up the partnerships between ARRL-affiliated clubs and the two key demographics driving the future of amateur radio itself: women and youth. This is a compelling low-cost opportunity for the League to reach two demographics that are woefully under-represented in the ranks of U.S. amateur radio operators.