



## Planning and Operating a Special Events Station

There is an often overlooked tactic in adding some spice to QSL chasing and amateur contacts that exist in the world of amateur radio.

The Special Events Station often sparks interest among QSL chasers and those who are interested in making contact with stations that spout an interesting purpose. It is associated with a significant public event and is only operated for a brief time.

And the typical impediment to doing this is often, 'I don't know how to do it!'. Well, read on. When you finish this article, you'll know exactly what to do.

First, any licensed amateur can apply for a Special Events call regardless of his license class. It is best for someone that has a general class license or higher to request the call because the general class bands are the best place to operate Special Events Stations.

Next, an event should be significant. Don't try to do a special event that is 'Johnny's birthday'. That will not get much attention.

Instead, take on an event that gets some attention. One that our radio club recently undertook was the annual 'Bataan Memorial Death March Marathon' that honors the victims and surviving veterans of the horrible Bataan Death March that took place in the Philippines during World War II. That one got some notice.

Once you've chosen an event that is likely going to get attention, it comes down to planning. The first thing is deciding what call sign to operate under.

It is all right to use a club call for the special event. However, a standard ham call isn't as attention getting as a one by one call sign issued through the vanity call program. You can get a one by one call sign for a limited number of days. The easiest way is to go to <http://www.1x1callsigns.org> and apply. There is no charge for this.

You can search up and look for other special events by clicking on the 'Search 1x1 Calls' link on the left side of the page. Set your start date for today and the end date for several months from now. I did that just now and found an enormous number of Special Events Stations including such interesting events that honor the Navajo Code Talkers, IOTA (Island On The Air) Weekend, International Lighthouse/Lightship Weekend, and the list goes on and on. Once your call is registered, your event will appear there, too. Reading these listings will help you when you write your listing.

Select 'Request 1x1 Call' and you will find a form in front of you. Fill in all the required information. When you select a 1x1 call, try to choose something that has a meaning. An example of that is that our radio club used 'K5B' because the B stood for Bataan, the 5 is in the call area where the event took place and where many of the victims and survivors of the march were from. The K was chosen because it was a popular amateur prefix.

You can choose N, K, or W as a prefix. You may choose any single digit numeral (0-9) to follow it. Then the suffix letter can be any alphabetic character (A through Z) except X.

Be sure to select a VEC (Volunteer Examiner Coordinator) to process your event. I usually choose ARRL because it is what I have traditionally chosen. But there are other VECs that you can select in that drop down box.

Don't overlook the field that provides a description of your event. The better described, the more likely you are to get noticed and worked on the day of the event. Be sure to include the URL to your Website that gives information about your event.

Once you've finished providing the information, submit your request. It sometimes takes as much as a week before you receive confirmation that you have reserved the Special Events call for your event. So be patient.

Some years back while living in Maryland, I helped run a Special Events Station for the annual science fair at the local community college. I chose the call sign N2S (In To Science). Unfortunately, N2S was already assigned to another Special Events Station for the weekend of the science fair. Since we lived in call area three, I choose N3S as an alternative.

Most radio clubs have a member who is good with QSL art. Our club was no exception. Our artist took a photo of runners from a previous year's marathon and the logo of the event. He made us a card that everyone in our club ooh'd and ah'd over when we projected it at the club meeting. So we adopted it as the QSL card for the event.

Here's where many people make the mistake of printing their Special Event QSL cards before the event. While you need an image of the card to put on a Web page publicizing the event, you don't know exactly how many cards you will need until after the event is over and you have time to receive QSL requests. It is not yet time to print the cards. That time will come well after the event is over. We'll cover how to go about getting cards at a reasonable price later in this article.

There are numerous ways to publicize your event. Some of them are:

1. Create a Web page with the Special Event information on it.
2. Ask QST to include it in their listing of Special Events Stations.
3. Email other country's Amateur Radio Publications and ask that your Special Event be included in their journals (RSGB, WIA, RAC, etc.).
4. Send it over amateur radio mailing lists.
5. QRZ (<http://www.qrz.com>) has a forum entitled, 'Contests, DXpeditions and Special Events'. This is a wonderful place to publicize your event.

When publicizing your event, be sure to include the information about how to request your Special Events QSL card and what frequencies and dates/times you will be operating (the best frequencies to use for special events stations are general class frequencies. If you go to the advanced or extra bands, there will be quite a number of people who won't be able to call you because of their frequency limitations). Include your Web page with the information about your event. Typically, you should request they send you their QSL card for the contact and an SASE (Self Addressed Stamped Envelope). The SASE will save you the cost of postage for this event (remember that sending one hundred cards would otherwise cost forty-four dollars in postage or twenty-eight dollars if you mailed them as postcards). Save yourself that expense. QSL chasers can spare an extra stamp to save you the cost of mailing your card to them. I suggest that you also request they write your 1x1 call sign in the lower left hand corner of the outer envelope (it makes it much easier for you to distinguish between these requests and other club or station mail). Don't forget to give them your mailing address so they know where to send it. Be sure to put 'U.S.A.' at the end of your address for the DX stations that might contact you. Tell them that it may take six to eight weeks for them to receive their Special Events QSL card. If you have any special requirements, you should tell them now. It is a good idea to put a deadline by which you must receive the QSL request. But be sure to give them a good four to six weeks after the event.

DX stations are a little more difficult. Either you can request they send you a IRC (International Reply Coupon) for enough postage to mail the card to them. Or you can request they just send you their QSL card and you can send yours back to them via the ARRL Outgoing QSL bureau.

On the day(s) of the event, have plenty of operators available and let everyone take turns. Keep a good log of all contacts. Using a logging program is often the best way. You will be able to sort the log alphabetically by call sign and then print it out for use when you fill out the cards. This will make the QSL process much easier.

Proper identification of a 1x1 Special Events Station requires that you give the 1x1 call every ten minutes and at the end of your transmissions. In addition, you must give the trustee's call sign (your call or your club's call if that's what you used to register the 1x1) once per hour.

Be sure your operators have some knowledge of the event and can answer questions when asked by the stations calling them. When you are in a pileup, keep the contacts brief and be polite as you move to the next station. When you are in a slump and want to attract some attention to other stations, take some time to tell the calling

stations about the event. When possible, have someone else keep the log for the operator.

Now that your event is over, collect the log and hold onto it. You will need it when you prepare the cards.

Over the next month, your QSL requests will come in. Don't open them as you could create a nightmare for yourself in keeping each SASE with its corresponding QSL. I suggest you get a plastic bin from a store like Walmart to keep the unopened outer envelopes in. When the requests stop coming [or when you reach the QSL deadline], count the number of requests. Once you have an accurate count of how many QSLs you will need, it is time to have your QSLs made.

Whatever the number of requests you get, add an extra ten to fifteen per cent in additional cards to your printing order. There will be stragglers that come in much later and you will need to keep a few on hand to fill those requests. You'll probably want to keep a couple for the club historian or album.

QSL requests are often mailed to you in an outer envelope. When you open the envelope, you should find the other station's QSL card sent to you plus an SASE. An SASE is an envelope with the other station's mailing address and a postage stamp on it. To send your QSL card to them, you just fill out your own QSL card with the information from your station log and then seal the card in the SASE. Then just drop it in the mail.

Most QSL companies will only do five hundred to a thousand cards as a minimum order. And QSL companies are not cheap. That's great for a personal or club station that will operate for many years. Since your event is only going to be for a few days at most, you won't need nearly that many. Unless you get close to five hundred or a thousand contacts [that actually request your card], you don't want to spend that much. Our QSL request to actual contact ratio was about twenty-five per cent.

Find a local printing company. I was able to find one that made our cards by printing four to a page of cardstock. They printed our color artwork on the front and the black and white QSL report on the back in a way that allows the page to be cut into four 3.5" by 5.5" cards (standard QSL size). Be sure to have them print a QSL report form on the back sides of the cards. Be sure to let them know that the absolute maximum size cannot be exceeded (it makes it hard to stuff them into the SASEs and they don't easily fit in QSL card binders that collectors may use if they are any larger than that). He charged us a small amount to do the cutting and then forty-five cents per page printed on card stock. We ordered one hundred and twenty-eight cards. Divide that number by four, multiply it by forty-five cents, and add the two or three dollars to it for the cutting and you will find that you can get QSLs cards made at a very good rate. We only spent between sixteen and seventeen dollars to do it. You can make it very cost effective if you take the time to find the best deal. After the first year, you can go back to that same printer to do your cards for the next year. And he will already know how to do it for you.

Now that the cards have been printed, it is time to schedule your 'QSL Party' at the club house. This can be a lot of fun in getting club members together for a common project. Tell them that this is a chance for them to learn about proper QSLing. It will get several people interested and they will come to help you.

Take your plastic bin to wherever you are going to meet. Pour out your bin of QSL requests (the outer envelopes) into a pile on the table. Place the stack of Special Events cards on the table in a different place. Put your Special Events log where everyone can reach it. Place your now empty plastic bin on the floor next to the table. You'll also need a trash can to place the outer envelopes in as you open them.

Show them how to look up the call in the logbook, to take the information from the log [and not from the other station's QSL card], and sign it with their first name followed by a comma and then their call sign. I generally suggest that they also put the other station's call sign in the address field of the card, too.

Once they know how to fill out the cards, instruct each person to take an envelope from the stack and a blank Special Events card. Have them open the envelope to find an SASE and a QSL card from the station requesting your Special Events card. They should discard the outer envelope that has now been opened.

After seeing the call sign of the requesting station, they should look it up in the log. With the information from the log, fill out the QSL card. Mark the log's QSL columns for 'Sent' and 'Received' since you received a card from them and are now sending them one. Put their Special Events card in their SASE and seal it. If you have a rubber stamp with your club's return address, use it to stamp your return address on the SASE. If you have a rubber stamp with the name of the event, stamp that on the envelope as well. Place the SASE in the plastic bin and the other station's card in a separate stack on the table. You can use the cards they sent you to make an album to archive the event in your club history.

Have each of your party members repeat the process of the last two paragraphs again and again until all of the requests have been filled.

One person should be designated to take the plastic bin to the local Post Office and mail the SASEs. I suggest using a Post Office that will postmark the SASEs from the city where the event took place (Las Cruces, New

Mexico for the Bataan Memorial Death March). But that is your choice. I could have mailed them at a rural post office near my office much more easily. But that wouldn't have been as accurate (a different post mark) and might be confusing when the SASE makes its way back to the sender. It's not a big deal, but I suggest doing it.

One person should be designated to take the remaining copies of your Special Events QSL cards and answer any stragglers requesting QSLs for the event. They will likely come in later one at a time.

Your QSL card should be different for each year. It should always be specific to that year's event (21st Annual Bataan Memorial Death March, date and year, etc.). Next year, the date and year may be different and it will be the 22nd Annual Bataan Memorial Death March. And you should use a different picture or design. Get a reputation for providing a nice QSL card. That may keep them coming back each year.

This article is based upon my experience running two Special Events Stations (N3S and K5B).

73, and happy operating.  
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<http://forums.qrz.com/index.php?threads/planning-and-operating-a-special-events-station.249795/>

## **About 1x1 Special Event Call Signs**

The Special Event Call Sign System meets the needs of amateur operators for temporary operation of their stations during events that are of special significance to the amateur service community. A Special Event Call Sign is an amateur station call sign with a one-by-one call sign format that may be reserved for assignment to stations operating in conjunction with these short-term events.

The FCC has authorized the use of one-by-one format amateur radio station call signs for use during events of significance to the amateur community. Here is what the FCC has to say about One-by-One special event call signs. A special event call sign aids amateur radio operators in calling attention "on-air" to their participation in the event as well as helping to bring notice to the event. Examples of the use of one-by-one call signs by amateur stations include a wide variety of celebrations such as conventions, festivals, dedications and anniversaries ...even local events qualify.

A one-by-one call sign consists of a single prefix letter (K, N, or W), the region number (0 to 9), and a single suffix letter (A to Z, except the letter X). There are 750 such call signs. Amateurs of any license class may reserve a 1x1 call sign for up to 15 days. Once you reserve the call sign, you simply substitute the self-selected 1x1 call sign for your FCC-assigned call sign. Be sure to read the 1x1 call sign Frequently Asked Questions.

A One-by-One Database has been established so that you can determine which 1x1 call signs are available during specific dates. Coordinators have also been selected by the FCC to approve and post 1x1 call sign reservations to the database.

<http://www.1x1callsigns.org/>

## **Proposed dates for first special event for D.A.R.K.**

July 20 or July 27 weekends

Billed as the 40th anniversary of the completion of construction of Truman Dam (1979).

### **Proposed Venues**

With USACE support: Near Truman Dam (parking lots below/above, Truman Dam Visitor Center or a park near the dam)

Drake Harbor (downstream from Dam and highly visible for public interaction; great for encouraging third party contacts to spread the word about ham radio!)

Without USACE support: Sam's farm (high point in Benton County)

Other areas north of the Dam

Member recommendations/ideas

### **Proposed bands**

6m

10m

15m

20m

40m (evenings)

75/80m

### **Advertisement**

BC ARES/D.A.R.K. website/fb page/group

Partners websites/fb pages

Larry's List

Local papers/radio stations/tv stations

Various nets

### **Who to invite to operate**

D.A.R.K. members

WAARCI members

S.P.A.R.K. members

Other hams who wish to participate

## **Sponsors**

Lunch sponsors

EMA sponsor-use of the Em Comm trailer

T Shirts sponsor

## **After the Event**

QSL Cards/Event Certificates

Recordkeeping

Cleanup

Thank the sponsors/participants

Report the results to the previously used outlets