



PUBLIC NOTICE

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DA 21-9

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU SEEKS INPUT ON EXPANDING THE NUMBER OF AMATEUR OPERATOR LICENSE VOLUNTEER EXAMINER COORDINATORS

WT Docket No. 21-2

Comments Due: February 4, 2021

Reply Comments Due: February 19, 2021

By this Public Notice, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (Bureau) seeks input on whether the existing fourteen volunteer examiner coordinators (VECs) are sufficient to coordinate the efforts of volunteer examiners in preparing and administering examinations for amateur radio operator licenses or whether the Bureau should open a window to consider authorizing a limited number of additional VECs (but likely no more than five). Specifically, the Bureau seeks to determine whether the existing 14 VECs provide adequate support to volunteer examiners or whether additional VECs are needed.

The Amateur Radio Service is available to all qualified persons of any age who are interested in radio technique solely with a personal aim and without pecuniary interest.¹ To operate an Amateur Radio Service station, an operator must have a license; the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) issues three classes of operator licenses, each authorizing a different level of privilege.² The class for which each licensee is qualified is determined during an examination of the level of skill and knowledge in operating a station that the licensee demonstrates to volunteer examiners, who conduct this testing on behalf of Commission-certified VECs.³

In its *1983 Report and Order*, the Commission amended its rules to allow volunteers to prepare and administer examinations in the Amateur Radio Service.⁴ At the same time, the Commission established the use of VECs to coordinate the efforts of volunteer examiners.⁵ VECs introduced consistency into the volunteer examiner program by centralizing accreditation of volunteer examiners, coordinating the dates and times for scheduling examinations, and managing the various administrative

¹ 47 CFR §§ 97.1, 97.3(a)(4).

² 47 CFR § 97.9. We note that three additional license classes have been grandfathered under Commission rules. See *1998 Biennial Regulatory Review, Amendment of Part 97 of the Commission's Amateur Service Rules*, WT Docket No. 98-143, Report and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 315, 323-24, paras. 14-15 (2000).

³ 47 CFR §§ 97.501, 97.519.

⁴ See *Use of Volunteers to Prepare and Administer Operator Examinations in the Amateur Radio Service*, PR Docket No. 83-27, Report and Order, 95 F.C.C. 2d 14 (1983) (*1983 Report and Order*).

⁵ *Id.*

tasks arising from examinations. Any authorized VEC can operate in any of the 13 VEC regions,⁶ but they are required to provide services in at least one region.⁷ While VECs are required to serve at least a single region, some VECs offer examinations remotely across the country,⁸ as permitted by the Commission's *2014 Report and Order*.⁹

The Commission has long maintained 14 VECs and now seeks to consider whether they continue to serve the evolving needs of the amateur community or whether there are unmet needs that warrant considering expanding the number of VECs. Are the existing 14 VECs sufficient to coordinate the efforts of volunteer examiners in preparing and administering examinations for amateur radio operator licenses, or are additional VECs needed to support the amateur community? What needs are currently being met, and which needs, if any, are currently unmet? If the Commission were to allow additional VECs, how many additional VECs are needed to satisfy the existing amateur service operator license examination needs? We note, however, that the Commission is unlikely to add more than five additional VECs. Given VECs use a collaborative process to create the question pool and operating protocols for how volunteer examiners administer exams, would additional VECs enhance or hinder this collaborative process? Finally, we seek comment on how increasing the number of VECs will address the unmet needs, if any, of the amateur community, as well as on what obstacles or complications could be created by increasing the number of VECs?

Filing Requirements. Parties may file comments, identified by WT Docket No. 21-2, by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Filers: Comments may be filed electronically using the internet by accessing the ECFS: <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/>.
- Paper Filers: Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing.

Filings can be sent by commercial courier or by the U.S. Postal Service. All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.

- Commercial deliveries (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.
- U.S. Postal Service First-Class, Express, and Priority mail must be addressed to 45 L Street, NE, Washington, DC 20554.
- **Effective March 19, 2020, and until further notice, the Commission no longer accepts any hand or messenger delivered filings. This is a temporary measure taken to help protect the health and safety of individuals, and to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. See FCC Announces Closure of FCC Headquarters Open Window and Change in Hand-Delivery Policy, Public Notice, DA 20-304 (March 19, 2020). <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-closes-headquarters-open-window-and-changes-hand-delivery-policy>.**
- **During the time the Commission's building is closed to the general public and until further notice, if more than one docket or rulemaking number appears in the**

⁶ We note that there is an additional "unofficial" fourteenth region for areas outside the United States.

⁷ See 47 CFR § 97.521(b).

⁸ See American Radio Relay League, *ARRL VEC Conducts Remote Exam Session with Applicants in Antarctica*, (July 23, 2014), <http://www.arrl.org/news/arrl-vec-conducts-remote-exam-session-with-applicants-in-antarctica>; Anchorage Amateur Radio Club, *Remote Testing*, (Dec. 8, 2020), <https://kl7aa.org/vec/remote-testing/>; W5YI-VEC, *Amateur Exam Teams*, https://www.w5yi.org/exam_locations_ama.php (last visited Dec. 16, 2020).

⁹ See *Amendment of the Amateur Service Rules Governing Qualifying Examination Systems and Other Matters*, WT Docket No. 12-283, Report and Order, 29 FCC Rcd 6311, 6320, para. 28 (2014) (*2014 Report and Order*).

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Additional Information. For further information regarding this Public Notice, please contact Justin McCuen, Attorney Advisor, Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau at Justin.McCuen@fcc.gov or (202) 418-0916.

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