

Association Volunteer

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Introduction

The NMRA Achievement Program has awards certificates in four categories:

- Model Railroad Equipment;
- Settings;
- Engineering and Operation; and
- Service to the Hobby.

In the “Service to the Hobby” category, certificates are provided for Official, Author, and Volunteer. This article will discuss the requirements for the Volunteer Certificate and present some ideas that will help you get involved with the hobby as a valued volunteer. Volunteer opportunities abound in the hobby, and your time and efforts will provide rewards to you well beyond the mere accomplishment of the certificate requirements.

First, a look at the Qualification Requirements

The Volunteer qualifications may look daunting at first blush, because of the strictly-defined concept of time units (TU). But when broken down and examined in detail, the precise wording is intended to reduce ambiguity when accounting for credit toward the certificate. Also, the careful wording of the requirements allows the AP Regional Chair to evaluate and certify that the appropriate credit is given for a particular volunteer activity.

As you progress toward completion of the Volunteer AP Certificate, you will become very familiar with the TU. The TU is the basic credit given for various volunteer activities that are commonly performed by NMRA members. Give a clinic? – get a TU or TUs as the case may be — more on this later. Sponsor an open house at a division or regional meet or national convention? Get some TUs! Serve on a committee at the divisional, regional, or national level? Get some TUs! Serve as an officer for you local division? Get some TUs! Write an article for a model railroad publication? Get some TUs!

To achieve the Volunteer Award, you must accrue 60 TUs. While there are many ways to obtain TUs to apply to the

Volunteer Award, they generally fall within three categories:

- Service on NMRA committees and office-holding positions;
- Participation in conventions, clinics and open houses; and
- Service as a judge at NMRA-sponsored modeling contests, Boy Scout Merit Badge Counselor, and other service-oriented activities within the model railroading community.

These categories and the TUs that can be earned for each will be discussed in greater detail below. The formal requirements

for the Volunteer Award and the required paper work can be found at NMRA.org. Click on the “Achievement Program” link, and then look for the “Volunteer” section. By the way, the NMRA web site is an excellent source of inspiration for volunteering opportunities!

Apples = Oranges = Eggplants

When I was documenting points for my Volunteer AP Award, I was struck by the various ways that points accrue. Some are time/duration based (like offices and committee positions); some are event-based (like





Above: Volunteering can actually be fun and quite rewarding. Presenting clinics is one of the many manifestations that an active volunteer will be involved in. John Lowrance, MMR, is providing a clinic on assembling metal vehicles.

Left: Al Hovey was working with boy scouts to build a project model railroad at the Rocky Mountain Region's Rails Along the Rio Grande Regional Convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico, this past June. The railroad was built during the convention by volunteers.

open houses and volunteer opportunities at meets), and some are one-shot opportunities that may require significant preparation on your part (like giving live clinics or working on a newsletter). The thing to keep in mind is that all these activities will gain you TUs and you should look to all categories for opportunities to provide service to the hobby. Participating in multiple categories will enhance your AP experience, and who knows, you may make a new friend along the way, too!

Committees and NMRA offices

Let's talk about the NMRA committees and office-holding positions first.

According to the requirements, accrual of TUs for committees and other office-holding positions is time-based, and you receive the TUs for service at the following rates:

- Active satisfactory service as a General Manager of a National committee: 4 TUs per month.
- Active satisfactory service as a National committee Manager: 3 TUs per month.
- Active satisfactory service as a Region committee Manager, or on a National committee: 2 TUs per month.
- Active satisfactory service as a Region committee member, a Division Officer, or committee Manager: 1 TU per month.
- Active satisfactory service as a Division committee or board member: ½ TU per month.
- Editors of an NMRA publication shall receive credit at the rate appropriate for committee Chairmen at the same level.

- Service as a Division officer or director (other than at the Regional level): 1 TU per month.

- Newsletter editors of 100% NMRA clubs having 10 or more members may earn one time unit per issue of the club newsletter, providing it is four pages or more. All newsletters must have four issues on file in the NMRA's Kalmbach Memorial Library, edited by the person applying, before the time units will be considered for credit.

I've always thought it a bit odd that the requirements started off with service opportunities at the national level, as I suspect that the vast majority of points are accrued at the division level (by virtue of the many more opportunities to serve at the Division level). At any rate, accruing TUs in this category is relatively straight forward – serve on a committee, document it, and gain points. There are some nuances to consider, such as, "What if I am on two committees for the same convention?" or "Well, I served for one and a half month, what would I do?" My advice is to document everything thoroughly, submit your application with more points than the 60 required, and be prepared to make your case if a question arises.

The qualification forms explicitly states that other club officers, even of those clubs having 100 percent NMRA membership, do not earn volunteer credits, so only count the Division, Region, or National offices and committees when you complete your Statement of Qualifications form.

Let's talk a bit about what is meant by "committee." The SOQ discusses this in some detail, and suggests just about any office or function that isn't covered under Association Official is regarded as a committee position. Most other officers in a Division (or Region) are considered Committee Chairmen.

For example, if your Division has a person who runs the contest at the monthly meeting, they can be considered the "Contest Committee Manager", your local AP representative is a member of the "Region AP Committee", and so on. Conventions and meets have myriad opportunities to serve on committees, and the Division or Region Committed Chairman would love your help!

Here's a bonus hidden in the SOQ: Individuals who work just the day of the event (for example at the convention registration desk) receive credit for one month's work as committee members. So, show up

to work the meet (collect the money at the gate, or help with signage, or coordinate the A/V equipment) and you get a TU point (or two)!

Conventions, Clinics, and Open Houses

Now the fun begins! Participation in conventions and meets is a great way to earn TUs, and, for me, was probably the most enjoyable and rewarding part of the entire AP process. According to the requirements:

- Individuals (and their crews) who open their home or club layout for layout tours in conjunction with NMRA conventions or other NMRA sponsored events earn credit as follows for each day that the layout is open for viewing:

- National Event 3 Time Units/day (12 TUs maximum per event);

- Regional Event 3 Time Units/day (6 TUs maximum per event); or

- Divisional Event 3 Time Units/day (3 TUs maximum per event).

This credit for open houses is in addition to any credit that a member may receive for being on the committee that works to set up the event.

So, if your layout is on the layout tours portion of a meet (or if you participate as a helper to the layout host), then be sure to log that event in your Statement of Qualifications. These activities are event-based (as opposed to duration-based in the case of officers and committee members).

If you are a member of a modular club (and who isn't?), then you can earn TUs by participating in NMRA-sponsored events. (Sorry, as much as we love the Great American Train Shows, you don't get TUs for running at a GATS).

- Individuals who participate in modular layouts in conjunction with NMRA Divisions, or at NMRA sponsored events, earn credit as follows for each day the layout is open for viewing at the event.

- National Event 3 Time Units/day (12 TUs maximum per event)

- Regional Event 3 Time Units/day (6 TUs maximum per event)

- Divisional Event 3 Time Units/day (3 TUs maximum per event)

This credit for modular layout participation is in addition to any credit that a member may receive for being on the committee that works to set up the event.

The SOQ notes that there is generally a maximum of 48 time units credited for any one National convention, 24 time

units credited for any one Regional convention, and 6 time units credited for any one Division event. So you can't earn all your volunteer time units at a single meet and expect it to fly with the review committee.

Presenting live clinics are a great way to accrue TUs and give you the chance to



Above: Bob Hamm, MMR, has been a regular volunteer in the NMRA National Convention contest room for several years. His dedication, service and efforts have made the national conventions more enjoyable for all.

share your special model railroading expertise with others. And you can apply all those tips you learned at Toastmasters! Here's a tip if you are nervous about speaking in front of a group of people — Imagine that they are naked! That ought to put you at ease... or maybe make you a bit nauseous!

Here is what the SOQ has to say about clinics:

- A live clinic that is presented more than once earns Association Volunteer credits for each additional (the first presentation is credited toward Author) presentation at the following schedule:

- National Clinic - 3 Time Units
- Regional or Division clinic - 2 Time Units

What's the deal about "more than once?" Well, basically, the first time you give a clinic, it counts toward your Author AP Award. We'll discuss that a bit more later.

Judges and Merit Badge Counselors

One of the most popular areas at any meet or convention is the contest room, and there are opportunities to gain TUs if you participate in judging model contests.

Official judges at NMRA-sponsored model contests (including non-rail) shall

be given time units for such service at the contest only (not monthly), as a one-time service credit per contest as follows:

- National Contest Judge 3 Time Units

- Regional Contest Judge 2 Time Units

- Division Contest Judge 1 Time Unit

This credit is in addition to any credit that you may receive for being on the committee that works to set up the contest event.

NMRA members who serve as Boy Scout Merit Badge Counselors can claim TUs for this activity also:

- Boy Scout Railroading Merit Badge Counselors who are NMRA members can earn:

- 1 Time Unit per month, and
- 1 Time Unit per Scout that qualifies for the merit badge.

This credit is retroactive with no time limit for those who have served as counselors in the past provided that they were also NMRA members during the time of service.

The Railroading Merit Badge is a fun achievement for any scout, and serving as a Counselor is a rewarding experience. Try working with a group of active scouts if you want a real challenge! (Hint – it's a lot like herding cats!)

The Author – Volunteer Conundrum

A situation can arise where an activity can fall into multiple Achievement Award categories. For example, giving a clinic can be applied toward the Author Certificate or toward the Volunteer Certificate. The guiding principle here is that a single activity cannot be counted toward multiple awards, but multiple occurrences of the same activity can count toward single awards. Live clinics can be recognized for credit for both the Author and Volunteer Awards, depending on circumstances.

In the case of a live clinic that is presented more than once, the first occurrence is counted toward the Author award, and subsequent occurrences count toward the Volunteer Award (at a rate of 2 TUs for clinics given at the division and regional levels and 3 TUs if given at the National level). If the participant already has the Author Award, then the both the first and subsequent presentations of a live clinic can be counted as Volunteer TU credits.

The Dreaded Paperwork

For some reason, completing the forms prevents many members from making progress toward completion of an AP Award. How many times have we heard, "I've met the requirements, I just need to fill out the forms!"? The Volunteer Award is no exception – you must complete a record and validation form (available at NMRA.org), which itemizes your volunteer activities and provides the tally of your TUs. The form allows you to list your volunteer activities, and the TUs you are claiming. The form has a signature block for each item, and you should get a responsible person (somebody in charge of the event) to sign off to verify your service. Don't be shy about this! Chances are they were in your shoes when they were going for the Volunteer Award, and they will be happy to sign your form.

Here's a tip – Keep track of your service as you do it! Real time tracking is much easier than going back and collecting signatures for past volunteer activities. That being said, do take credit for any service that you performed in the past while a NMRA member.

If You Want to Get Something Done, Ask a Busy Person to Do It

So, you've read this far and still aren't convinced that the Volunteer Award is within your grasp? Do the requirements sound too daunting, and those 60 TUs look like too much work?

Heed the wisdom of an old Hindu saying: Drop by drop, an ocean is formed. Grab the forms, get started, and before you know it, you will have met the requirements!

Accruing 60 TUs may be accomplished by the application of a simple philosophy: Get involved! The NMRA community is awash in volunteer opportunities, and you will find plenty of ways to gain those precious TUs. The best place to start is by becoming involved in your local NMRA Division. As a former Division Superintendent, I can tell you from first-hand experience that people are always needed to put on clinics or serve on meet committees. Seek out that handful of members who always step up to volunteer (you know the ones) and ask if you can help them. Watch their faces light up as they welcome you to the fold!

The Volunteer Award (along with the Official and Author Awards) provides a unique opportunity to give something back to the hobby that we all love – our time and talents. Time is precious these days, and

because of that, a person who gives time to the hobby is appreciated more so for his/her efforts. While it's nice to earn an award for outstanding craftsmanship (such as Scenery or some of the other AP categories), it can

be just as rewarding (or more!) to help fellow modelers. It's the balance of all aspects of the hobby that keeps us energized and enthusiastic about how we spend our leisure time. 📷