



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Find out what to expect from the Registered Public-Safety Leader Program, a deep-dive into management and service.

By Curtis Nekovar

Like the infamous “get new hair club” commercials where the spokesperson would say he was not only the president but also a member, I am an RPL graduate and a program facilitator for many years now. As a student, I recall the road being long and exhaustive at times, and as a facilitator, I hear the same from the students. But we all put our noses to the grindstone to make it through, and we all find it our proudest career accomplishment.

Whether you enter the Registered Public-Safety Leader (RPL) program on your own initiative or it is a mandated prerequisite for advancing into a supervisory position, you should understand its expectations, which are different from other training programs. First, this is a year-long journey. Attending an 8-hour, multi-day, or week(s)-long training can throw a wrench into our workload back in the emergency communications center (ECC); now imagine sessions for a year. As we in the public safety communications industry are keenly aware, “things” happen that are entirely unforeseen and can cause havoc in one’s life or agency. Who would have thought we would bear witness to a pandemic in our lifetime? Facing the unforeseen while keeping your eyes focused on the RPL road is vital. Falling behind, even just a week or two in assignments, can be challenging. The critical

key is to keep your facilitators aware of any obstacles you face and your plan to overcome them. Setting aside the proper amount of time will vary from person to person. Plan to commit five to 10 hours each week at a minimum for the coursework and the RPL service project.

APCO International’s RPL Program is designed for individuals interested in developing a solid foundation of management and supervisory skills necessary for successful ECC operations. RPL consists of six different courses over the 12-month program:

- Course One: Managing organizations and change. We discuss how leadership can exist at all levels in an organization and explore the different concepts of leadership.
- Course Two: Communicating with clarity. In course two, we provide an overview of

communication as it applies to management and share how to communicate with confidence and clarity.

- Course Three: Developing the talent pool. We discuss ensuring you have the resources to recruit, train and retain qualified employees, all while enhancing team performance.
- Course Four: Building connections and consensus. In this course, we explore how to leave a lasting positive impression on those you know and discuss interpersonal skills specific to negotiation and conflict resolution.
- Course Five: Teamwork and collaboration. We explore practical skills to build and manage teams.
- Course Six: APCO international leadership and history, and how to make a difference within our association and



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industry. We discuss APCOs governing documents, learn about the history of the association and foster effective communication with government officials and leaders.

Each of the six RPL courses has weekly sessions with corresponding assignments due each week. During that week, you will have readings and multimedia assignments with associated written postings to complete. In addition, there may be other assignments in the week, such as authoring papers based on the topics explored and discussed that week. While everyone works at different paces, time management is of utmost importance given the unforeseen circumstances we all experience. Waiting until the final hour can be highly stressful and often reflected in the completed work. Conforming with your classmates and facilitator is challenging if you are late in your postings, as they may have already moved on to the following week.

Interaction with classmates builds communication skills, trust and networking. Of course, online learning environment conversations differ from those held in physical classrooms. The conversations must largely be carried out in electronic posts. For example, you are asked to review your classmates' postings and then post comments to at least two others. As stated in the RPL student expectations, "This is how we interact and learn in online courses." Posts must add value and be substantive, for example using open-ended questions to drive the conversation and ensure good dialog in the online classroom.

In one of the later courses, you will work in groups to tackle an industry-related issue. Your group will prepare and deliver a presentation as if meeting with an audience. This assignment brings another layer of flexibility and commitment as you will work with other classmates who may be in different time zones. Finding those regular meeting dates and times and dodging the inevitable obstacles as the day approaches can be incredibly challenging. In this project, many participants genuinely enjoy the opportunity to talk with their classmates instead of corresponding through written postings and assignments. These presentations take place in course five via a video meeting.

On top of all that comes with the one-year academic commitment, you will also work on a project that you select during the first few weeks of course one. Throughout



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the program, you will provide updates on your project, and during the final course, you submit your completed project for review by APCO Institute personnel. Like falling behind in assignments, pushing the service project to the proverbial back burner can cause significant difficulties to finishing on time. As with weekly assignment obstacles, communicating with your facilitators and the APCO Institute personnel is vital.

RPL service projects need to impact our industry positively and contain substantial efforts for all 12 months. The application to RPL is online, and you can identify what you will present as a yearlong project. Give thought to the project, the plan and when/how it will occur. Then craft three to four reasonable goals for each quarter. You are creating the yearlong map of goals and objectives to follow while in the RPL program.

Dedicating your attention to a project you are passionate about and serving the public safety industry will enhance your analytical thinking and time management skills. Examples of successful RPL projects include:

- Obtaining APCO training program certification or CALEA accreditation.
- Advocating for reclassification of telecommunicators on a state or national level.
- Creating training programs that were provided to multiple centers.
- Starting up new teams, such as a telecommunicator emergency response taskforce, a critical incident stress management or peer-to-peer program.

Let's talk about the facilitators of this program. Facilitators are graduates of the RPL program who volunteer their time to take you through your journey. They all work or have worked in the industry. They are tasked with reviewing postings by the entire class and offering comments. The relationship with facilitators goes beyond

that of teacher-student; besides sharing their wisdom, they also have the unique opportunity to learn from the participants. One of the great benefits of RPL certification is the opportunity to give back to the industry by facilitating an RPL course. Not only do you get to shape the future of our industry, but you will also earn recertification points for each week of instruction.

Once you have graduated, remember to add that prestigious RPL distinction to your signature. Graduates between May 1 of the previous year and before April 30 of the current year will be recognized at APCO's annual conference in August. Once you celebrate, the timer on another program requirement begins, and it will be time to recertify it in four short years. During the four years, you will show dedication to our industry and accumulate the 40 points needed for recertification. These points can come from professional development activities such as attending APCO's annual conference or through continuing education opportunities such as webinars. Professional participation is another way to earn points, such as serving on an APCO committee or workgroup. Another generator of points is participating as an RPL facilitator. No matter your choice for accumulating points, like everything during the RPL program, pushing it to the back burner can cause significant difficulties for recertifying on time. Remember to maintain your APCO membership for recertification and log your CDE hours earned in myapcointl.org and Training Central for each year, in the year they occur.

Please do not get scared off by all that is expected when you apply. You will also establish bonds with your classmates and your facilitators and enjoy these unique networking connections long past the end of the program.

RPL enhances your management skills and genuinely helps your professional career. It provides excellent flexibility with any schedule because all coursework is online. Good time management will become a necessary skill to be successful. To be eligible to apply, you must be an APCO International member in good standing with a demonstrated record of service to our association or industry. You must be willing and able to commit to completing the program in its entirety, and dedicated to ongoing professional development to better

public safety communications. Now that you know about RPL and desire to continue your professional development and advance in a great career, take the time to craft a good project and complete the RPL application at apointl.org/rpl-application-form.

We look forward to seeing you in class soon! ●

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fire and EMS peer on a Midwest debriefing team. He retired in 2018 after 36 years in public safety, having served as a line telecommunicator, agency director, auxiliary police officer and firefighter/emergency medical technician.

CDE EXAM #65179

1. The APCO RPL program is a _____ program.
 - a. 40-hour
 - b. Yearlong
 - c. 8-hour
 - d. 6-month
2. RPLs are required to earn _____ during the four-year certification cycle to maintain their certification.
 - a. 40 hours
 - b. 80 hours
 - c. 40 points
 - d. Merit badges
3. Besides the actual course work, during the year participants will work on their _____, which will be submitted during the final course.
 - a. Letter of intent
 - b. Service project
 - c. Writing skills
 - d. Memoirs
4. Many participants truly enjoy the opportunity to talk instead of corresponding through written postings with their fellow classmates during the _____ portion of the program.
 - a. Break
 - b. Groups
 - c. RPL graduate breakfast
 - d. Final
5. During weekly assignments, participants are asked to review postings of their fellow classmates and post comments to at least _____ others.
 - a. Five
 - b. One
 - c. Two
 - d. Four
6. Recertification points can come from professional development activities such as:
 - a. Continuing education such as webinars
 - b. Serving on an APCO committee
 - c. Attending APCO's annual conference
 - d. Participating as an RPL facilitator
 - e. All of the above
7. Facilitators are all _____ of the RPL program:
 - a. Graduates
 - b. Veterans
 - c. Paid participants
 - d. Volunteers
 - e. Both A and D
8. Each of the six RPL courses is divided into:
 - a. Weekly sessions
 - b. Daily sessions
 - c. Hourly sessions
 - d. Completely open course
9. Keeping your _____ and APCO Institute personnel aware of any assignment or program obstacles is key.
 - a. Immediate supervisor
 - b. Facilitator
 - c. Family
 - d. Classmates
10. "This is how we interact and learn in online courses" is stated in the:
 - a. RPL course brochure
 - b. RPL contract
 - c. RPL application
 - d. RPL student expectations

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