

**The Foundation for
Recreational Boating Safety and Education**

Discover BoatingTM Hands-On Learning
On-Water Boating Safety Training
FY 2011 1102.13

Final Executive Summary Report
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Background

The Discover Boating™ Hands on Learning Center grant was originally presented as the first of a three year plan to increase boating safety through the delivery of essential on water boat operation and safety skills by and through marine dealers. The ultimate goal was to get dealers to deliver the training to their customers and the boating community as a core business practice. Two training venues were identified that would maximize throughput: events would be conducted at boat shows and at boat dealerships. Both provided ready access to the right audience and securing the required boats, facilities and equipment would not be a problem.

The Foundation's objectives were to develop a practical skills training program and conduct hands on boater training at three NMMA in water boat shows and at local boat dealerships several weeks after each show. The strategy was to demonstrate the value and potential benefits generated by the training activity in order to establish a business case for direct dealer involvement. The entire concept was built around the belief that, structured correctly, training and education would not only advance boating safety but also prove to be an effective marketing tool that improves business results. Once the viability of the concept was proven, the task would then be to show dealers how to use it in their local markets. Training responsibilities could then be transitioned to dealers who would continue to conduct training at boat shows and other appropriate venues. Ultimately, dealers would incorporate training into their core business activities with additional efforts from NMMA. It is the dealer centric nature of the approach that gives it substantial outreach and maximum impact potential.

Initial funding would be provided through educational grants and then become self-sustaining over a three year period through industry stakeholder funding. The intention was to develop an ongoing industry resource that helps promote and grow boating while significantly advancing boating safety in support of the Recreational Boating Safety Strategic Plan.

The strategy necessitated the creation of a recreational boater training program that was flexible enough to use in formats where time constraints were a consideration such as boat shows or a dealer "open house" but that could still function as a standalone, complete course as needed. In addition, the content was designed to address specific areas that were linked to accidents and casualties such as Navigation Rules awareness and compliance, e.g. The plan included provisions for instructor development and certification as well as funding for the planned recreational boater training at in water boat shows and local dealership events.

The funding level ultimately awarded was sufficient to retain the primary elements of the original proposal described above but required material adjustments to program objectives to facilitate the conduct of a smaller scale “pilot” program.

Overall Summary

The results from the Discover Boating Hands on Learning Events validate the continued use of boater education and training at Boat Shows. Expansion of funding support for the proposed activities in the short term will result in a substantial increase in the number of boaters who have completed practical skills training. It will provide strong outreach messaging to industry observers regarding the critical nature and benefits of increased boating safety advocacy and facilitate the transition of boat show training responsibilities and costs to dealers and industry stakeholders as originally envisioned. It will substantially contribute to the creation of a safety culture within the recreational boating community.

The experience with the training events at local dealerships however revealed that a change in strategy is necessary. The Foundation and its partners remain confident that the goal of getting dealers to incorporate the training and education of customers as part of the boat purchase and delivery process is still attainable. That confidence is bolstered by reaction of dealers who hosted the post boat show training events but, since the events were organized and conducted entirely by the grant execution team, it was fairly easy for the dealers to be satisfied. The Foundation created a separate proposal for funding of a “Marine Dealer Grassroots Advocacy Pilot Program” that details specific changes and actions that will be used to achieve the goal of direct dealer engagement. Separation from the Boat Show Events proposal will clearly delineate objectives, strategies and actions and insure a focused effort to achieve success.

While a change in the approach to the dealer side of the program delivery is required the, core elements of the dealer venue training have been more than adequately validated. As with the boat show events, participants were very enthusiastic about their learning experience and appreciative of the opportunity to improve boating skills. The positive experience also provided motivation for additional training - a full 75% said they would like to participate in additional courses.

Synopsis of Results

Discover Boating events were conducted at boat shows in Miami, Tampa and Norwalk with an additional event planned for Chicago in June. A total of 375 individuals were trained in 122 individual underway learning sessions at the first 3 boat shows which was 75% of event capacity. An additional 50 individuals completed "Powerboating Made Easy" through six stand alone dealer training events for an average of 8 participants per event. Another event is planned for Chicago in August with one of the industry's leading dealers. Four instructor training clinics were conducted resulting in certification of 17 additional qualified instructors and one additional instructor trainer.

Key Findings

- **Discover Boating Hands on Learning Events**

Boat shows proved to be an exceptional venue for boater training as 375 individuals participated in 122 clinic sessions at 3 boat shows. Discover Boating's integrated marketing efforts and effective use of social media combined with convenient access delivered throughput that was 75% of capacity. A positive learning experience increases interest in experiential education programs as 74% of participants in boat show events reported an interest in additional hands on training.

The response to the 2011 Discover Boating learning program clearly demonstrates the need, popularity and appeal of hands on training among recreational boaters. Many individuals participated in multiple training sessions and most event sessions were completely booked via the online registration website prior to the boat show opening day. The success of the program and popularity among the boating public also got the attention of key industry leaders and dealers..... Boater Training and education is now a key component of the Industry Growth Strategy.

Added Benefit of Discover Boating Learning Events

- It is a cost effective & efficient delivery venue
 - Dealers and boat show producers participate in the cost of training delivery - they provide the boats, equipment and the facilities
 - Provides the ability to leverage existing marketing and promotion resulting in higher percentage of funds spent on training delivery rather than trying to drive attendance
- Boat show events foster a safety culture

- Central focus on training and safety at Discover Boating boat show events sends strong message to boaters and the industry and substantially augments the overall outreach efforts of national safety advocates
- Quality experiential events are enthusiastically received and endorsed by participants
- They provide a synergistic platform for incorporation of additional safety messaging
- Shows provide a “captive audience” who are open to receive the boating safety message
- Events provide additional outreach messaging opportunity beyond the curriculum
 - For example, PFD use is a standard part of the pre-boarding safety briefing for all participants
 - Instructors always wear PFDs while underway
 - All participants are provided inflatable PFDs and required to wear them while underway
- The events attract a broadly diverse target audience with various experience levels to insure message is heard and received by the right audiences
 - Specific audiences may be targeted by adjusting the learning content and messaging
 - 61% currently own a boat
 - 40% described themselves as beginners/new to boating
 - 63% had no prior formal training at all
 - 80% had no prior formal hands on, skills specific training
- Females accounted for 38% of participants
- Age distribution
 - 18 - 24 = 4%
 - 25 - 35 = 10%
 - 36 to 54 = 57%
 - 55+ = 29%

- **Training Events at dealerships**

The objective was to show dealers the benefits that are associated with training boaters in general and their customers in particular and to build a business case for direct dealer involvement in skills training delivery. This approach provided the opportunity to evaluate dealer capacity to deliver training and to determine what modifications and or program enhancements might be required to achieve the program goal.

Experience revealed that while almost all dealers provide vessel familiarization training to boat buyers, the focus is generally more on how to use and care for the boat features and equipment rather than operational skills. Many dealers don't have qualified training resources on staff and or cannot dedicate the time and resources required to organize and conduct training programs. Some dealers use local

USCG licensed captains to train their customers but rarely is there a specific training objective communicated or standardized training methods established. Content is usually left up to the individual captain to determine and more often than not those responsible for conducting the training have had no formal instructor training themselves.

There are however some notable exceptions. Many of the industry's top dealers routinely provide training for their customers and many have well organized programs conducted by professional instructors. The challenge is to get those who have customer training programs to expand availability to the general boating community and to make a convincing business case to those who do not to get onboard. This program facilitated the development of a training blueprint for dealers. The task now is to demonstrate the benefits to more dealers and then show them how to use it in their markets.

The PME events were designed as 4-hour standalone training events that incorporate all elements of the boat show clinics along with a few notable additions (see program binder for details). A total 50 individuals participated in six events. Four were held at local boat dealerships several weeks after the boat show. Two were conducted as special, exclusive events during the boat show to compare the differences in results.

The events are taught as 60 minute "clinics" and are comprised of 5 individual learning events. Content is derived from separate modules of the Powerboating Made Easy training program (see accompanying program binder for details).

- **Train qualified instructors to conduct the programs**

Four separate Instructor Training and Certification Clinics were conducted. Twenty candidates participated in the 4 day events resulting in the certification of 17 qualified instructors and the promotion of an additional Instructor Trainer. The expected outcome is that a standardized training program will be made available thru Dealers, Marinas, schools, independent trainers and other entities that have or use "qualified" instructors.

It's important to note that in many if not most cases, dealers do not possess the required training resources to take on the educational responsibilities envisioned in this plan. The Foundation would necessarily coordinate a collaborative effort among multiple established boater training entities to insure that adequate educational resources were available to dealers when/as needed, nationally to conduct training. The particulars of this tactical strategy is detailed in the Foundation's year two proposal entitled "Marine Dealer Grassroots Advocacy Pilot Program"

- **Develop practical, hands on skills training program in a format suitable for use in a variety of event venues**

The vision is for NMMA to establish a national “hands on” training standard for the industry that is embraced by dealers as part of a recommended boat delivery process and with existing customers as a boating safety tool that delivers business benefits at the same time. Training content and curriculum development is based exclusively on hands on skills training not simply the knowledge.

The Foundation worked with the Recreational Power Boating Association to create “Powerboating Made Easy” (PME), an on water, skills based program consisting of 6 separate learning modules: Pre-Departure Preparation and Safety; Dockside Familiarization and Departure Planning; Underway Vessel Familiarization - Open Water; Close Quarters Boat Control; Underway Boat Handling & Safety; and Anchoring. It is designed to provide essential skills training every boater needs and is intended as a companion to online or classroom based training programs available through multiple organizations such as the USCG Auxiliary and the US Power Squadron. Completion of a NASBLA approved boating safety course is recommended prior to taking the skills development course. Content details are provided in Section 1 of the Program Binder that accompanies this narrative.

Opportunities for improvement

- **Greater dealer support of Discover Boating events will improve effectiveness, throughput and efficiency**

The original strategy to maximize participation in the events consisted of two key elements; leverage the NMMA marketing, advertising and PR activities already planned for boat shows to create awareness of and promote the events; and to get dealers to invite their customers and prospects – i.e., drive participation.

Dealers were generally cooperative when it came to providing boats for the boat show events and boats and facilities for the follow up events; however, they did very little if anything to actively drive participation of their customer and prospect base. We went to great lengths to keep the boat show events “sales neutral” so that dealers could comfortably invite their customers to take part in the learning events and use that as great reason to attend the show (even if they’re not currently shopping for a boat). It was very clear that the dealers didn’t understand what the program objectives were or how to use them to their advantage.

- **A more concerted communication effort with dealers prior to and outside of boat shows will facilitate a better understanding of the objectives of and benefits that can be derived from active engagement with the safety effort and hasten full engagement**

Because of the nature of their businesses, dealers have ready access to the recreational boating community and as such can facilitate efforts to create greater awareness, influence boating behavior and help create a safety culture. That's why marine dealers and several industry stakeholders are specifically identified as "Implementing Partners" to support and execute many of the strategies of the Recreational Boating Safety Strategic Plan. While this fundamental goal has eluded national boating safety organizations, there is an opportunity to significantly advance the effort by continuing to demonstrate and communicate the quantitative and qualitative value of the Discover Boating Hands on Learning Center program to key dealers.....especially the "early adopters"

- **Improved communication and outreach with industry stakeholders will facilitate their support, get them more heavily integrated into the boating safety chain and engender funding**

The Hands on Learning Center concept is based on notion that training and education can be used as an effective marketing tool. Of course it is understood that it also reduces boating accidents and casualties. The challenge is to communicate the idea that, with the right approach, boater skills training can support boating safety *and* the business of boating. It is generally the consensus of the Foundation grant partners that dealer engagement in a much wider range of safety related activities requires that the dealers and other stakeholders understand the business benefits of a dealer centric training approach. They will then be most receptive of how to adapt it to their existing business practices.

Discover boating Hands on Learning Center & Support of the RBS Strategic Plan

Objective 1 - Safety Education Certificates and Successful Course Completion

Program expands capacity to deliver hands on training by developing certified instructors to deliver hands-on training to participants at boat shows, dealer events and stand alone training classes. Future instructors will be recruited through a collaborative effort with the Marine Industries Trade Associations, Sea Tow Foundation and local dealer referrals. Also, minimum training standards will be established that encourage dealers to insure their customers receive skills training as a normal business practice. Certifications provided to participants who complete the training program will help quantify the number of persons trained.

Objective 2 - Boating Safety Outreach

Marine dealers are a foundation organization for many boaters. This program engages marine dealer network support at boat shows to advocate boating safety and strives to engage dealers more directly in boater education and training. Use of the Discover Boating brand increases awareness and augments messaging

Objective 3 - Advanced and/or On-Water, Skills –Based Boating Education

Program provides hands-on training to students through five training modules from basic skills to advanced boat handling. All courses have on-water component. Interested dealers will be encouraged to get qualified staff

trained to conduct hands on learning programs and or local resources will be developed in concert with other organizations that dealers can use as/when needed.

Objective 4 - Life Jacket Wear

All event participants and instructors are required to wear life jackets while underway and all promotional materials include only photos of persons with life jackets.

Objective 5 - Operator Compliance - Navigation Rules

Program provides a unit of instruction specifically on navigation rules and the practical application thereof for novice and experienced boaters. Key areas covered include meeting, crossing, overtaking, sound signals, navigation lights and safe speed and lookout requirements

Objective 8 - Operator Compliance - USCG Required Safety Equipment

Program provides instruction on boating safety equipment including carriage requirement, usage, care and benefits of such equipment. Each participant receives a checklist as a program hand out that includes vessel and passenger pre and post departure safety elements.