



**National Safe Boating Council
Boating Safety Media Tool Box Grant (3315FAN1502.08)
U.S. Coast Guard FFY 2016 Non-Profit Grant
Final Report**



Executive Summary

BoatBeat is a national online resource, available at www.BoatBeat.org, that provides accurate recreational boating information, state and federal resources, and numerous other media assets in one location. It is a collaborative effort with oversight and management from the National Safe Boating Council (NSBC), and with support from the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and the U.S. Coast Guard.

The NSBC developed the NSBC “Media Toolbox” grant with coordination efforts with the NASBLA, identified as a grant partner on this initiative. NASBLA, as a supplement to the grant, created an Education Committee charge, *EDU_M&O 2016-4*, to help garner state agency and partner support (*Strategy 2.3, Strategy 2.4, Strategy 2.5*).

Specifically, this charge notes that it will “work with NSBC to develop and implement the **Media Toolbox** and host webinars for state Public Education Officers.” Preparation for the beta test of the webinar training sessions were made. NASBLA set up the webinar and the committee was invited to critique it. This went very well; accolades to Ed Lyngar and Joleane King for hosting it and to Ron Sarver and Pam Dillon who set it up.

In the NSBC’s grant proposal to the U.S. Coast Guard, we identified the importance of reaching out to and coordinating directly with state Public Education Officers. This was a critical component in addressing the overall goal of this grant. The NSBC continued coordination and collaboration with NASBLA as a grant partner with the Education Committee charge conducting one work group conference call to orient the work group on the project and to solicit ideas.

Another partner of the Media Toolbox grant participating was Stop Propeller Injuries Now (S.P.I.N.). Included in the discussion was the desire for additional resources based on the BAD Reports, highlighting key boating safety issues in each BAD report (i.e. – life jacket wear; BUI; boat fire; etc.) that played a critical role in helping to organize the Media Toolbox deliverable.

Abstract

Part 1. Develop and implement the Boating Safety Media Toolbox.

The Boating Safety Media Toolbox, available at www.BoatBeat.org, was designed to be multi-purpose: there is no “one-size-fits-all” when it comes to media messaging. Depending on where



a specific group is located geographically, or what their audience and target market is, it's prudent to offer multiple options for the Toolbox.

The Toolbox developed information on the following Boating Safety Topics:

Life Jackets	Personal Watercraft
CO Poisoning	EPIRBS/PLBs
Propeller Strike/Cut-Off Switch Technology	Boat Accident Reporting
Boating Under the Influence (BUI)	Boat Operator's Responsibility of Self and Passengers
Accident Reporting	Navigation Rules
Boating Safety Education	

Information will be added to the Toolbox when relevant topics present themselves.

Content Marketing: The NSBC developed 43 fact sheets for the website, and posted the fact sheets with an ADA-compliant PDF to the site, as approved by the Coast Guard. NSBC contractor Paul Werth Associates also developed additional content for the website, including five BoatBeat Alerts, revised copy for the Accident Response Tips page; added Events & Training opportunities; created a new page and content for Collaborate with BoatBeat; and updated the page introduction text for Accident Response Case Studies.

As of April 14, 2017, the following fact sheets were produced under this grant and are pending approval by the Coast Guard:

- Personal Watercraft and Water Jet Devices
- Boating Emergency Preparedness
- Boating Preparedness Recommendations
- Trash and Marine Debris (MARPOL)
- VHF Radio with Digital Selective Calling (DSC)
- Cold Water Boating Safety Gear
- Communication Device Comparison
- Rental Boats
- Life Jacket Loaner Program

When they are approved, the NSBC will then go through the ADA/PDF process and post the finals to BoatBeat.org.

Part 2. Distribute the Toolbox through traditional and non-traditional methods.

Because the Toolbox will be marketed and available to different audiences (Media, Boating Educators, and the Industry), the NSBC took a multifaceted approach in its distribution methods. To support promotion of BoatBeat, Werth wrote a press release, designed an e-blast and produced a demo video.

The press release was distributed on the national newswire and picked-up by 203 outlets. Werth also shared about BoatBeat with boating trade media outlets, and it was featured by BoatIndustry.com and BoatSelect.com. Overall media outreach resulted in 59,589,630 possible impressions and \$51,461.55 ad equivalency value.



Werth designed the e-blast to complement the BoatBeat website modern design. There are three additional templates set up in MailChimp that may be referenced for future BoatBeat Alerts.

The first alert was distributed on Tuesday, March 27, and sent to a 111 contacts, including boating law administrators, education coordinators, and others that opted in to receive BoatBeat Alerts through the website. The open rate was 39.4%, exceeding the nonprofit average of 25%.

The demo video will be used to raise awareness of BoatBeat and quickly explain the benefits of the website to a viewer. It will be posted on YouTube, and uploaded to NSBC's Facebook page to grow awareness of BoatBeat.

Part 3. Coordinate the Toolbox with key organizations where each association's membership and volunteers are used to spread the message of boating safety.

The NSBC and NASBLA coordinated outreach with key partners and organizations to create a larger and more effective distribution network. By utilizing the work of dedicated partners and volunteers, the message of boating safety is promoted from people that understand the needs of the recreational boating public the best. This technique broadens the scope of the message to local boating communities and organizations with a unified and consistent message.

Part 4. Develop and Offer Media Training Program, and implement Training Opportunities at IBWSS and at other in-person settings.

After the Boating Safety Media Toolbox went live, the NSBC and NASBLA co-hosted a free webinar to introduce and provided initial support for the Toolbox. The webinar was offered as a one-hour session, and was provided an overview of the Toolbox, its goals and purpose, and introduced how the user can customize it to have the greatest impact on their own boating community. The webinar was also placed on www.BoatBeat.org to ensure that those interested entities have the chance to participate as well as provide valuable feedback to further enhance the Toolbox for future use.

Part 5. Develop and implement evaluation processes and measures of effectiveness. Use the evaluations and results to build up and improve upon the program.

Focus Group: Werth conducted an online focus group to evaluate BoatBeat.org for: (1) overall user satisfaction, (2) usability, and (3) content. Findings will be used as a benchmark to measure the website's success and to determine recommendations for future enhancements.

NSBC and Werth recruited 10 people to participate in the focus group, representing individuals of various ages and boating backgrounds, including a college bass team captain, retired BLA, magazine reporter, public information officers, boat accident investigation instructor, and boating safety advocates. Participants answered a detailed qualitative online survey about the website (125 questions) and participated in a one-hour and 45-minute video conference to review responses and clarify comments with other focus group members. Participants will also complete a short online survey in March 2018 to evaluate their use of BoatBeat.org over the prior year.



Overall, focus group participants were very satisfied with BoatBeat and excited about the possibilities that the site provides them for education and outreach. The site was noted for its user-friendliness, responsive design (works on any device), and visual appeal. There was consensus that the website's target audiences should be expanded from media, PIOs and law enforcement to include the entire boating community and individual boaters, where applicable for education purposes, as the site is very comprehensive and provides useful information.

The focus group cautioned NSBC and NASBLA that for the site to maintain a reputation for providing accurate recreational boating safety information, it must be updated frequently.

Critical to the success of BoatBeat is building a partnership strategy to encourage collaboration with other boating safety organizations and advocates to continually generate new and engaging content. This collaborative effort should create a synergy between boating safety organizations to ultimately make the waters safer.

The focus group recommended some immediate edits and future enhancements for the website. All focus group participants received a thank you note. Read more details in the BoatBeat Focus Group report.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: Executive Summary

BoatBeat Focus Group

March 27, 2017

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Focus Group Demographics: Focus group participants were of various ages and backgrounds, including one 18 to 34-year-old, four 35 to 49-year-olds, four 50 to 64-year-olds, and one



participant older than 65. There were seven men and three women. All noted themselves as expert or efficient internet users, however, survey responses revealed that a few participants older than 50 had some difficulty returning to the Home page (unaware of the website design best practice that the logo in the upper left corner returned to the Home page when clicked).

The focus group recommended some immediate edits to the website to support the public launch, which were to be completed before the current grant expires on March 31, 2017.

These updates included:

- Create a “Collaborate with BoatBeat” page
- Explain the purpose of the Accident Response Case Studies
- Reorganize the Accident Response Tips to better appeal to media, public information officers, and law enforcement; include information for boaters
- Distinguish the contact form from the direct contacts

- Add a button to sign up for BoatBeat Alerts and display it prominently on the Home page
- Add the colored box sub navigation to the top of the individual Fact Sheet and Case Studies pages
- Add Discover Boating and National Marina Day to the National Campaigns page
- Add buttons to the Speakers’ Bureau page to request and to nominate a speaker
- Rename the “Most Recent” filter on the Events & Training page to “Chronological”
- Add images to main Accident Response Tips subpages and Resource Center page

The focus group also recommended future updates to enhance user-friendliness and awareness for consideration under the 2017 grant, such as:

April – June 2017

- Integrate the Fact Sheet and Accident Response Case Studies so that users may view and click through to read suggested fact sheets for a specific accident response case study topic they are browsing, and vice versa
- Develop more fact sheets on topics such as propeller safety, safe boating courses and education requirements, and primary factors of boating accidents
- Add information about BoatBeat on NSBC and NASBLA websites, and share about the site in their member communications (i.e., e-newsletter, social media, meetings)
- Change the default main image size on the subpages so it does not dominate the page (i.e., BoatBeat Alerts)
- Add a back button to the Fact Sheet and Accident Response Case Studies pages so a user may go back to the main Fact Sheet or Accident Response Case Studies page instead of using the back button in the web browser



July – August 2017

- Add additional items to the Glossary of Terms, including acronyms for organizations (i.e., USPS, USCG, NSBC, NASBLA) and other terms such as kill-switch, watercraft (different from a vessel), torque, traveling, box riding, and jet propulsion
- Add photos from the Lake Mead shoot to the photo and image library
- Look for opportunities to add more photos to share diversity of boaters and recreational water activities, such as Hispanic boaters and personal watercraft
- Add a main image or other suggested media assets to the individual factsheets

September – October 2017

- Use Google Analytics to evaluate the need to add a link to the Resource Center in the header before Sign Up
- Enhance the Events & Training page to include the ability to archive past events, and search for materials from past events (i.e., proceedings, recordings, webinars reports)
- Add a list of suggested speakers, along with headshots and bios, to the Speakers' Bureau page, and note any fees required to book a speaker

November – December 2017

- Enhance the user experience on the Home page with a photo slide show for the Welcome to BoatBeat section and explore incorporating video on the page
- Evaluate the need for BoatBeat to have its own branded Facebook and Twitter accounts (if yes, create/brand/manage the social media accounts)

The focus group also recommended updates that may be considered for future work in 2018:

- Determine if there is a need to have a members-only, password-protected area of the website (perhaps to access Media Assets)
- Build out the photo and image library to include a search and filter feature by type of media asset (i.e., photo, infographic, video) and recreational boating category
- Determine the need for new infographics and other media assets specifically created for BoatBeat
- Explore the possibility to develop interactive quizzes incorporated on the site to engage the user
- Consider opening up some of the blog features on the site for comments, such as the BoatBeat Alerts, Fact Sheets, and Case Studies

Procedural Recommendations: It is necessary in the immediate future to develop a partnership strategy that outlines a plan of action to encourage collaboration in content sharing (i.e., boating trade associations and nonprofits, manufacturers and state organizations). This strategy should



include a plan of action to provide Spanish-language resources for boaters, as this is a growing boating demographic.

The plan should outline the type of content needed for the site by section, and identify the approval process to post information to the website.

It's also important to develop a distribution schedule for the BoatBeat Alerts e-blast at least once a month, which includes a suggested content calendar of BoatBeat Alerts topics such as women in boating, important seasonal boating safety information, guest blogger, and social media posts. The BoatBeat Alerts e-blast will help build awareness and use of the website.

The focus group revealed these other procedural recommendations to maintain the site:

- Manage the partnership strategy to encourage content sharing
- Post new content to the website on a weekly basis; less wordy, more bullet points and stick to the facts
- Distribute the BoatBeat Alerts e-blast at least once a month
- Manage and build the BoatBeat Alerts distribution list
- Add a main image or other suggested media assets to the individual fact sheets as new information is added to the site
- Continue to develop ADA-compliant PDFs for every fact sheet and case study shared on the website
- Review the site content on a monthly basis to check for any outdated information and update as needed, such as statistics and Federal & State Point-of-Contacts
- Review Google Analytics to determine most popular pages and evaluate page content

Metric Recommendations: There are a few tools available to measure the success of BoatBeat.

Google Analytics should be reviewed on a monthly basis to identify overall website visits, popular pages, and length of visits. This information will help inform which pages are attracting the most visitors, identify if any pages need enhancements, and note which pages visitors are remaining on the longest.

The feedback form will be helpful in identifying any comments or unforeseen usability issues with the website. These should be addressed immediately as comments are received.

BoatBeat Alerts e-blast data should be reviewed to note which state agencies are opening and clicking on the information. If data shows the information is not being used, it may be assumed the state agency is not aware of BoatBeat and deleting the email. Personal outreach, as well as increased promotion at events and social media (demo video), will help build awareness and use by state agencies.

Detailed Responses: Due to the extent of the qualitative responses, please reference the Detailed Summary Data for individual responses and comments, 128 page PDF report attached to this Final Report.

BoatBeat received positive reviews when publicly launched:

“Very impressive compilation of substantive boating safety content, easy to navigate and reader/researcher friendly. While this may become a one-stop destination for many users, the embedded links will help connect and introduce new sites to many other users. This online compendium can only help to provide useful, actionable information, and increase recreational boating safety awareness. The United States Coast Guard greatly appreciates this effort, and especially the cross promotion of other boating safety user groups and organizations. Good luck in generating foot traffic, page views and contributions which will ultimately lead to better informed, better prepared & safer boaters.” ~ Captain Tom Boross, United States Coast Guard

“The website looks really nice! I noticed the inclusion of Take Me Fishing in the national campaigns section and our upcoming Hispanic webinar in the events/training section. Awesome. Thank you!” ~ Stephanie Hussey, Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation

Boat Beat is a terrific resource! Great job. I plan to include a note when we send out class materials to our boating safety instructors to point them to Boat Beat as a valuable resource. ~ Ro Woodard, Education Specialist, NYS Parks, Marine Services Bureau

BoatBeat.org will be a great tool and I am anxious to see its use and growth. Keep up the good work! ~ Rob Lucas, Ohio DNR, Division of Parks and Watercraft

As someone that will use the site, I appreciated the opportunity to participate. Thank you. Christina Fremont Communications Consultant | Boating Program Focus Group Participant Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

I thought the web site turned out really great. ~ Ed Lyngar, PIO, Nevada Department of Wildlife

The YouTube video is excellent! Congrats to ALL INVOLVED on getting this site launched and running in time for the boating season! It looks great and it will be an excellent tool for the boating media! ~ Pam Dillon, NASBLA Education Director

Great work creating and introducing BoatBeat’s intuitive and user-friendly webpage! Webinar no longer needed. ~ Joleane King, California Division of Boating and Waterways.



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