



# VetsBoats

2026 Strategic Plan

Draft Version 1.0 Board of Directors Review

Oct 5, 2025

## Executive Summary

VetsBoats is transitioning from founder-led, volunteer-based operations to a scalable, network-driven model to serve more veterans and create lasting impact through therapeutic sailing. The strategy centers on expanding group-based outings, deepening partnerships with veteran service organizations, recruiting volunteer captains and boat owners, and codifying best practices for nationwide adoption.

## Current State Assessment

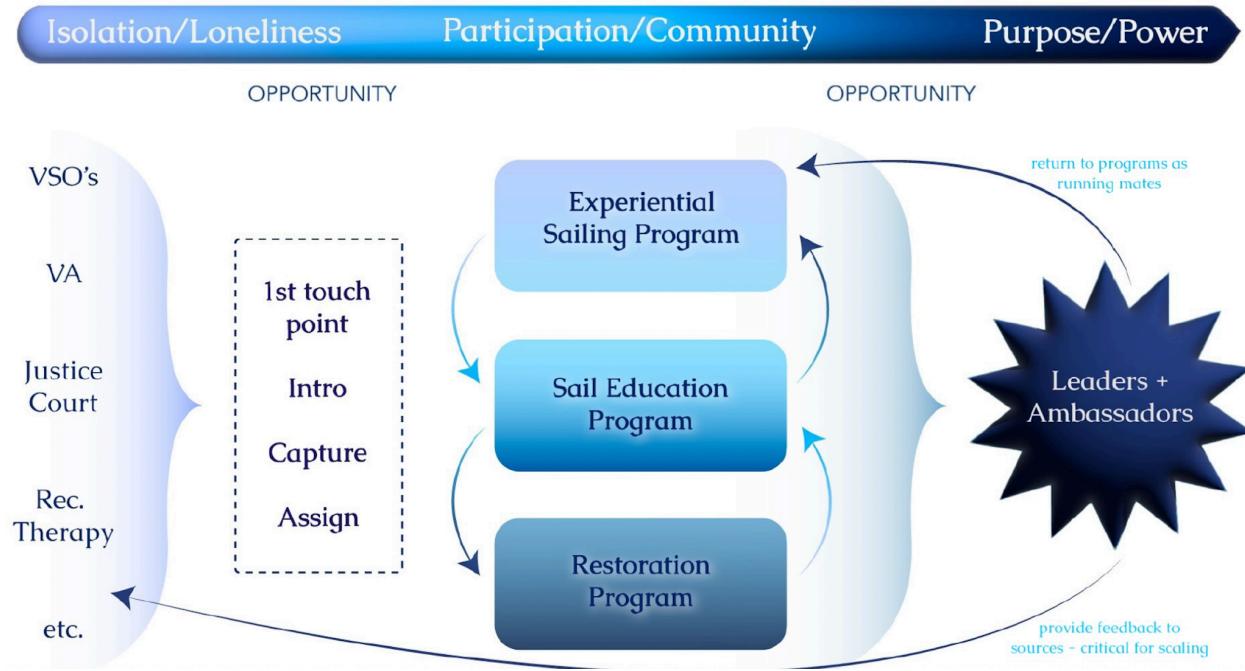
- VetsBoats has evolved from serving individual veterans to organizing group outings to foster community and maximize therapeutic benefit.
- Partnerships with VA clinics, VFW, and American Legion posts have amplified outreach, reaching those with the greatest need for support.
- Licensed charter operators provide instruction, ensuring participants actively engage in sailing rather than passively receiving a service.
- Operational costs remain sustainable at about \$100 per participant; last year, 500 veterans and family members participated, with plans to double reach annually and serve 2,500 by next year.
- Outcomes are strong: post-event surveys show 95%+ satisfaction and retention rates exceed 75%.
- The greatest constraint is lack of paid management and professional leadership capacity—previous growth has depended on an all-volunteer team, and future scalability requires structured board development and staff investment.

## Strategic Vision & Rationale

The next phase of growth is about expanding—transitioning from centralized control to empowering others nationwide. The strategy turns VetsBoats into a connector, teacher, and catalyst for therapeutic sailing across regions, modeled after successful “network effect” charity organizations. Key principles include:

- Decentralization of program delivery
- Standardization of outreach models and event procedures.
- Incentivization through recognition and swag for volunteer-driven events.
- Partnerships with marinas, yacht clubs, VA and veteran organizations, and like-minded nonprofit foundations.

# Formalize Flow & Pull Through the Funnel



## Strategic Initiatives

### 1. Integrated VA Sailing Events (Current Program Remains in Place)

- Partner directly with regional VA departments (Recreation Therapy, Sight Impaired, Domiciliary, Wheelchair Bound) for scheduled, well-being focused sailing outings.
- VA provides recruitment, transportation, and feedback; VetsBoats organizes introductory sailing free to veterans and caregivers.
- Use validated “Well-Being Index” for measuring impact pre and post event, supporting both qualitative stories and quantifiable outcomes for grantors and partners.

This maintains our legitimacy as a foundation delivering services on our own.

### 2. Crew Volunteer Program (Clover Project - Continuing the Volunteer Program)

- Develop a robust volunteer program modeled after successful maritime museums and tall ship organizations.
- Offer training in rigging, maintenance, seamanship, and more, with roles accommodating all physical abilities.

This builds stewardship, skill-building opportunities, and deeper engagement for both veterans and general volunteers.

### 3. Subscription-Based Model for Boat Owners & Captains (New Initiative - “Link In the Chain” Program)

- Recruit captains and boat owners with established boating credentials and safety standards.
- Standardize onboarding using background checks, safety training, and documentation uploads.
- Implement an online scheduling system for flexibility and transparency—volunteers sign up for outings via a dashboard, receive reminders, and can co-captain as part of a mentorship process.
- Annual affirmation of compliance, expanding partnerships with marinas and boat clubs for greater access, and developing a mobile app for managing trips and communication.
- Ensure programs are accessible for veterans with disabilities and varied in length and group size to meet diverse needs.

### 4. Program Cohort Model

- The centerpiece for advanced engagement: four boats support a 6-week cohort serving 10 veterans, capped with a celebratory voyage and ongoing community events (e.g., outreach, racing, additional learning).
- Integrate US Sailing curriculum, application of federal registration standards, and create meaningful off ramps for those who wish to continue with advanced sailing or transfer to other community sailing organizations.

By finding one launch customer, we can develop a program using the Derek Baylis to deliver meaningful sail training.

### 5. Adopting Angel Flight's Model for Scaling

Angel Flight West provides an instructive template for recruiting and managing volunteers across a distributed geography. Core elements for adaptation:

- Centralized online platform for pilot volunteer recruitment, vetting, and event scheduling.
- Emphasize local autonomy—volunteers offer their services within a standard framework but have the flexibility to choose frequency and style of participation.
- Tiered reward system (recognition, swag, referral incentives).
- Encourage storytelling and sharing of best practices across the network.

## 6. Moon-Shot: From Local Impact to National Network, Create the VetsBoats Network

This is simply the final phase of VetsBoats maturation as a non-profit - partnering with the local and regional sailing non-profits that support Veterans. By leveraging our brand and what it represents, we build a national network that is elevating the recognition of all players.

- Codify best practices, program materials, and event procedures into open-access playbooks for affiliate nonprofits and community groups.
- Develop partnerships with existing sailing nonprofits and veteran support organizations to grow a federated network branded as VetsBoats, leveraging the proven model for greater scale and impact.
- Lead with the demonstrated success and partnership-building track record to establish credibility and attract new participants, donors, and volunteers.

### Implementation Timeline & Milestones

Milestone	Target Date	Description
Board/Governance Expansion	Nov 2025	Recruit 2-3 new board members and onboard paid staff
VA Partnerships Formalized	Dec 2025	Launch co-branded events with four VA departments
"Link in the Chain" Launched	Jan 2026	Open online application, training, and scheduling system
Cohort Program Launch	Mar 2026	Enroll first cohort and implement syllabus
Network Affiliate Expansion	June 2026	Share playbook and onboard first group of affiliates
Impact Evaluation	Sep 2026	Aggregate participant surveys, wellness data, and retention

## Leadership & Board Growth

- Prioritize recruiting members and paid staff with mission passion, nonprofit experience, and strong systems thinking.
- Develop roles focused on program growth, grant writing, fundraising, volunteer management, and technology implementation.
- Empower current and new leaders to champion a more scalable model.

## Key Metrics & Outcomes

- Veterans and family members engaged per year (target: 2,000 in 2026)
- Veteran satisfaction and program retention (target: >90%)
- Number of affiliated nonprofit groups and regional partnerships
- Cost per participant and total program capacity
- Stories and qualitative feedback shared on media platforms

## Conclusion

This strategy document sets VetsBoats on a path toward scalable impact, deeper partnerships, and an enduring national legacy in veteran well-being through therapeutic sailing. It is built on measured results, open collaboration, and the intentional empowerment of volunteers and partner organizations.