



2026 Impact Brief: Sailing Veterans and First Responders Toward Calm, Connection, and Hope

January – August 2026



Where We Stand

Through August 31, VetsBoats put 211 veterans, first responders, and family members on the water across eleven sailing outings, reached 204 more through seven community events and speaking engagements, and drew 77 volunteer participations into seven Clover work parties. That is 492 engagements across twenty-five activities in eight months.

The cost to put one veteran on the water is \$100. 96% of every dollar spent went to mission programs and veteran services. The organization is operating at a net surplus of \$17,879 on \$126,254 of income against \$108,375 of expenses.

Clover went operational on July 4 and carried her first veterans and first responders that day.

Nine more sailing outings, three more events, and the Veterans Day Gala remain on the 2026 calendar.

1. What Your Support Made Possible

Between January and August 2026, donor generosity funded no-cost sailing experiences on San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta for veterans, law-enforcement officers, first responders, dual-status participants, and family members. Every participant sailed free. VetsBoats has kept the program free for thirteen years.

Each sail combined hands-on participation — steering, raising sails, working lines — with unhurried time to talk, reflect, and simply be on the water in a safe, welcoming environment.

The 2026 sailing season to date:

Date	Vessel	Group	Aboard
April 10	Baylis	VA Palo Alto PRTP and Domiciliary	18
April 24	Saving Grace	Board and invited guests	6
May 16	Baylis	VA Mather Recreational Therapy	22
May 22	Baylis	VA Law Enforcement Partners	24
June 15	Baylis	Oakland Police Department and veterans	23
June 25	Baylis	VA BROS Clinic	25
July 4	Clover	VFW Posts and first responders	18
July 11	Sea Spirit 1	Placer County Stand Down veterans	14

Date	Vessel	Group	Aboard
July 13	SF Bay Ferry	Sponsored outing	10
August 15	Baylis	VFW Post 10125, Rancho Cordova	25
August 20	Baylis	San Carlos VFW veterans group	26
		Total	211

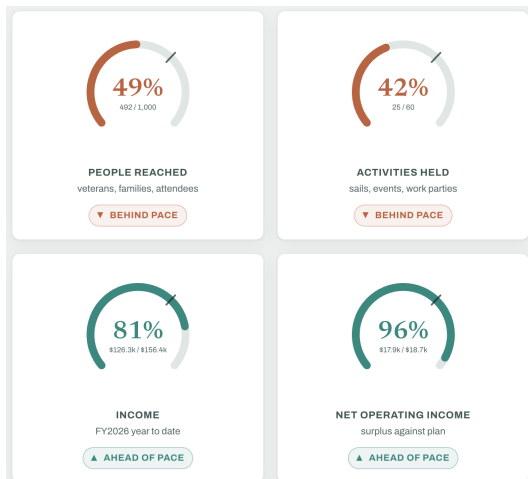
Two of those days deserve particular note. The May 22 sail with VA law-enforcement partners opened the door to a standing relationship with the Oakland Police Department, which sailed with us three weeks later.

Donor support also funded Clover's completion, vessel maintenance, fundraising capacity, and the infrastructure for what comes next.

"This event was very therapeutic and gave me insight into the world of sailing... I needed the connections."

2. Results

VetsBoats uses the Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale (PACES) plus open-ended post-sail questions to understand impact, while the board tracks organizational KPIs covering mental well-being, safety, camaraderie, confidence, reach, and cost efficiency.



Participation and retention

- 35% return for three or more events
- 9+ Net Promoter Score in answer to "how likely are you to recommend VetsBoats to another veteran?"

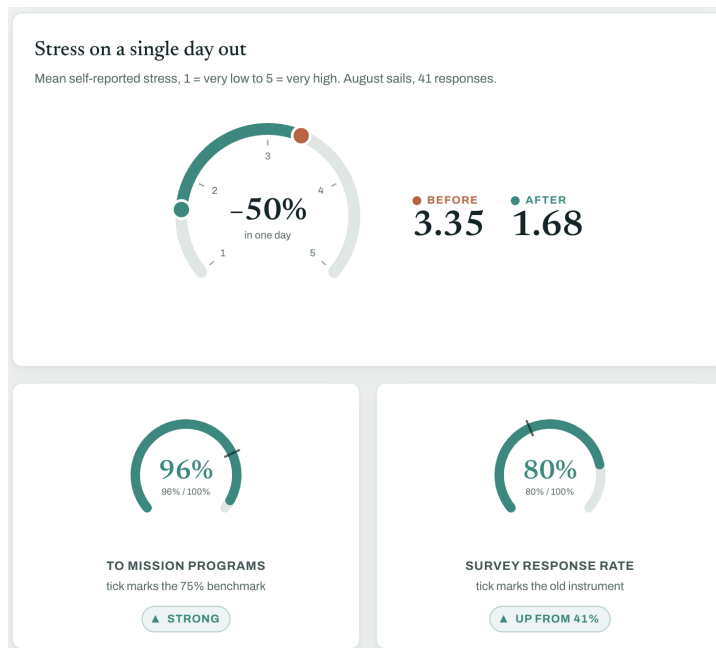
"What you do matters, it really matters and it really helps us Veterans. I needed this experience and I noticed others did as well."

3. Survey Tools and KPIs Align

In August, VetsBoats replaced its post-sail survey with a streamlined instrument. The old form asked participants to score eight separate Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale items before reaching any of the questions that mattered most to us. The new one is shorter, asks four outcome questions directly, and adds a measure the program has never had: participants rate their stress at the start of the day and again at the end. The change did two things at once. It made the survey easier to finish, and it made the result easier to act on.

Participation improved immediately. The new instrument drew 41 responses from the 51 people aboard the August 15 and August 20 sails, an 80% response rate. Board KPI reporting for the program as a whole has run at a 41% response rate. Nearly twice as many participants are now telling us what the day did for them.

Stress fell by half in a single day.



The people who arrive with the most to carry are the people the day moves the furthest.

Thirty-nine of forty respondents scored VetsBoats a 9 or 10 out of 10 on likelihood to recommend to another veteran. There were no detractors. The mean score was 9.85.

Eighty-five percent were veterans or veteran first responders. Twenty-four percent had sailed with VetsBoats before. Every single respondent granted permission to use their responses, the group photograph, and photographs showing their face.

In their own words, from these sails:

"Less alone." "Veterans are salt of the earth people. As if we have always known each other." "It is a validating thing to share the experience with others meeting their own challenges and coming together with teamwork."

"Connect with fellow River Rats... going back under the Golden Gate. Welcome home." — a Vietnam veteran

"Support on and off the boat while in a wheelchair."

"Met another female Veteran who I felt a real connection with. We have a lot in common."

4. How Donor Dollars Turned Into Change

a. Relief from daily stress and overload

Participants contrasted the calm on the water with the noise and conflict of daily life. Others described the day as peaceful, relaxing, and calm, noting that the open water and slower pace helped them be present in the moment.

Donor impact: support created a pressure-release valve, a day where the mission was simply to breathe, look at the horizon, and feel safe.

b. Rebuilding connection and belonging

Many veterans arrive unsure who will be there or whether they will fit in. Afterward, they described the day as a chance to socialize naturally, feel accepted across differences, and reconnect with a community that understands them without explanation.

Donor impact: support helped create a rare environment where veterans and first responders feel understood and begin building new, healthy connections.

"It meant the world to me to be able to socialize and have a fantastic time with many personalities."

"As a minority, I was accepted... it felt good to be in a melting pot where we all have the same common ground."

"VA supports my physical & mental health very well."

c. Restoring agency and confidence

The hands-on nature of sailing is central to the experience. Participants repeatedly highlighted steering under the Golden Gate Bridge, trimming sails, feeling the boat respond, and working together as a crew to raise canvas and handle lines.

One participant wrote, "I actually sailed the boat without running it on an island :)."

Another said driving the boat and learning how it behaved at speed was the highlight of the day.

Donor impact: support funded experiences that reawaken competence, teamwork, and pride, qualities that matter deeply to many veterans and first responders.

d. Creating powerful firsts and lasting memories

For many participants, donor support paid for a string of meaningful firsts: first time sailing, first time on the open ocean, first time seeing whales or dolphins, or first time going under the Golden Gate Bridge by boat.

Donor impact: support created not just a pleasant outing, but lasting memories carried forward as bright spots in otherwise difficult chapters.

5. Beyond the Water

Seven community events and speaking engagements between January and July reached 204 people and introduced VetsBoats to new partners & veteran networks.

Date	Event	Attendance
January 30	USS Hornet Mixer	36
March 14	Clover Mixer (LTA Research)	20
April 24	Oakland Yacht Club Mixer	50
May 5–6	Placer County Stand Down	43
June 9	San Francisco Veterans Commission	8
June 10	SAVE Training, VA Community Engagement	12
July 14	San Francisco Naval Order luncheon	35
	Total	204

6. Join Us on November 11

Everything this happened because people who had never been aboard decided to pay for someone else's day on the water. Once a year we ask those people to come and see what they paid for.

The VetsBoats Veterans Day Gala takes place on Wednesday, November 11, 2026 at the St. Francis Yacht Club. Cocktails and dinner overlook the Golden Gate. Admiral John Michael Richardson, who served as the 31st Chief of Naval Operations, is our Guest of Honor. Vito Biella serves as Honorary Chair. Joe Vazquez emcees and Liam Mayclem runs the live auction.

The evening is also how the work gets funded. One night on Veterans Day underwrites a full year of no-cost programs. Every ticket, every table, every sponsorship and every paddle raised in that room becomes sail days on San Francisco Bay next season. At approximately \$100 to put one veteran on the water, a table of eight is a season of Saturdays for someone who needs one.

Tickets, tables and sponsorships are at app.betterunite.com/vetsboats-vetsboatsveteransdaygala.

Every contribution is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Our EIN is 46-4194065.

If November will not work, consider helping by underwriting the event. At \$100 per veteran, the arithmetic of a gift is simple and the impact is tremendous..