

Fleet Development Tips

Before embarking on an effort to develop a fleet in your area, you need to ask two questions: (1) Is there a void (no strong double-handed dinghy fleet to compete against) in your area's double-handed dinghy scene? And (2) are there a suitable number of people interested in that type of sailing to make it worthwhile? These are two very good questions to answer prior to spending money on a boat and a lot of time (which is the real key) trying to make a fleet successful. Luckily (at least for people interested in Vanguard 15 sailing), for most of us the answer is yes. Here are a few key points to successful fleet development

- **Seeding the Fleet:**

If you have no boats or very few boats in your area, it's time to start talking-up the concept. It's important to seed a new fleet with about 8 to 10 boats to really have a good chance of long-term success. Call your sailing buddies and other experienced sailors in the area that might enjoy a new challenge. Post messages on the bulletin boards of area Yacht Clubs or in Sailing Associations. Talk it up at local dinghy or keelboat regattas. You'll be surprised how many interested people are out there. They just won't move without a group effort.

- **A Place to Call Home:**

A central location with a good sailing venue goes a long way in helping a fleet establish itself and grow. In general, most people would rather leave their boats at a sailing site for quick access and low transportation hassle. By negotiating a deal with a local Yacht Club, community sailing center, or other type of water-access entity early on, you can help solve the storage and transportation problems some fleet members would experience and in doing so help to eliminate another barrier to joining the fleet.

- **Fleet Hierarchy—Spreading the Load:**

Establishing a fleet hierarchy early on goes a long way in helping a fleet develop as quickly as possible. Just like a well-run business or nonprofit organization, a well-organized fleet structure helps distribute responsibilities and keeps things running smoothly. Identify areas such as regatta organization, fleet funding, social activities, and recruiting prospects, and assign people to make sure each is proactively taken care of. Make sure no one individual is saddled with an undue load, or the motivation factor will slip pretty quickly. The key is to distribute the load fairly and hold each party accountable for timely results (within reason of course).

- **Communication is the Key:**

I hate to sound like a broken record, but the web has definitely made it a lot easier to communicate. Every fleet should have a web site set up that details its schedule, fleet contacts, helpful information, regatta information, and so on. This can be used as a central information resource, accessible by all, and will save everyone a lot of time in the long run. A list server is another great tool that facilitates communication and the spread of information. Set these tools up early and use them often.

- Regatta Schedule—Mix It Up:

The Vanguard 15 is fun, versatile, and easy to transport. Keep these things in mind when you set up your regatta schedule. Varying the racing format is an easy way to keep things interesting for the fleet. Fleet racing, team racing, long-course racing, and short-course racing are just a few options you have when putting a schedule together. Selecting different venues is another great way to mix up the schedule. While it is great to have a central location for the majority of events, travelling to different venues definitely adds some spice. Last but not least, try doing something completely different like camping regattas or mixed sport events. Be creative!

Everyone is a Recruiter:

Fleet development is an ongoing process that really never ends. A fleet that stops proactively trying to grow will quickly stagnate and begin to shrink. Once the shrinking starts, it is very hard to stop. To make sure that the fleet continues to grow, everyone in the fleet should act as a recruiter. Make it a fleet policy that you give up your boat to a prospect if you can't sail it in an event. Hold A/B division prospect regattas where every owner brings someone new to sail opposite them. Above all, never be satisfied with the status quo, it will change before you know it.—Nick Adamson, Fleet 53