



100 Sailing Clubs Share Ideas for Energizing their Programs

By [Gowrie Group](#)

Gowrie Group's 2010 yacht club survey reveals optimism amidst sailing's generational challenges. Over 100 of the country's leading yacht clubs and organizations shared their ideas for ensuring the long term health of sailing.

Always on Watch.

As the US SAILING endorsed insurance experts behind The Burgee Program – the nation's leading insurance program for yacht clubs – Gowrie Group is always on watch for trends related to sailing and yacht clubs. The Gowrie team is comprised of yacht club members and sailors who are invested in sailing. We know that clubs across the country are exploring and implementing a range of initiatives to preserve and enhance the sailing experience in their communities and at their clubs, and we want to facilitate the sharing of these ideas.

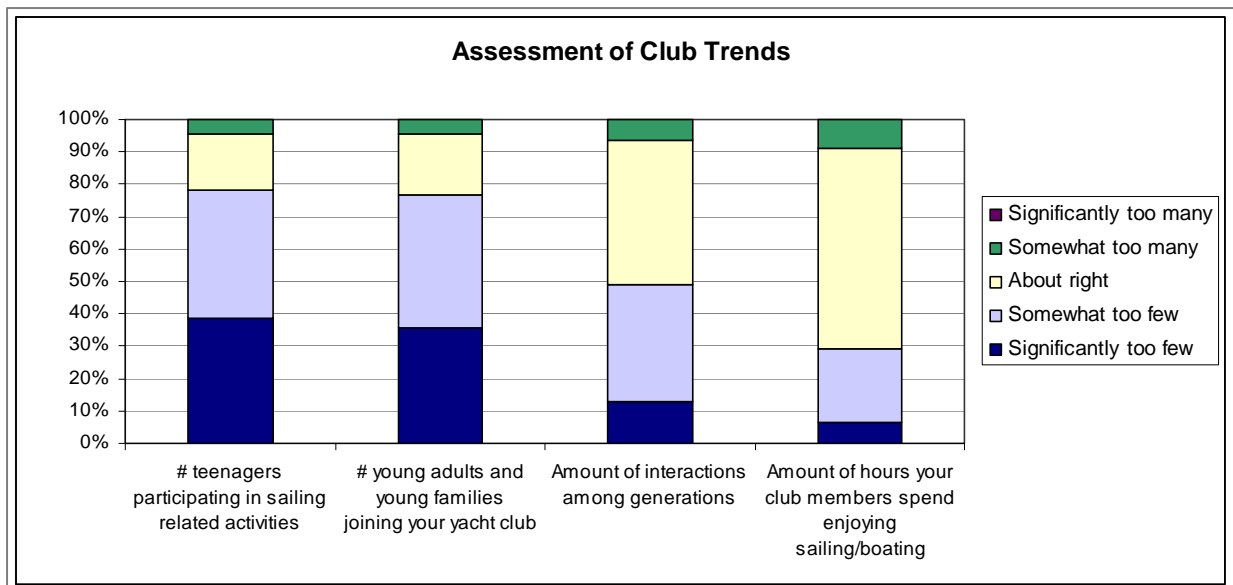
Gowrie initiated a survey in May 2010 to capture what clubs are doing to successfully energize and evolve their club's programs and sailing activities. Over 100 clubs of all different sizes and types from across the United States participated in the survey.

Probing Questions Asked.

We asked clubs to rate the amount (from too few to too many), of each of the following at their club or organization:

1. Numbers of teens involved in sailing related activities.
2. Numbers of young adults and young families joining their clubs.
3. Amount of inter-generational interactions at their club.
4. Amount of hours members are devoting to club and sailing activities.

It is clear from the response that clubs are passionate about these themes, and committed to the future success of their club and programs.





Passion Evoking Trends.

More than half (61%) of clubs say the amount of time members **spend enjoying sailing and boating is “About Right”** at their club. And only about a third (29% of clubs) say that today their club members spend “Too Few” hours simply enjoying sailing and boating in general.

- *“So much else going on, it is hard to spend all day at the club anymore.” – SHYC*
- *“Weekend recreational sailing seems to have diminished, as has participation in club racing.” – Anonymous Class Association*

However, three-quarters (74%) of clubs believe that there are **“Too Few” teenagers participating in sailing at their club.**

- *“Where 10 years ago we had 20-30 kids in our weeklong training programs, now we have 6-10 kids.” – Anonymous Sailing Club*
- *“We have far too few youth participating in ALL boating activities – building, rowing, paddling, sailing.” – Traditional Small Craft Association*
- *“Most teens nowadays set their own schedule, and sailing is not on their horizon. It seems to be something that old fogeys do, as far as they are concerned.” – Blackbeard Sailing Club*

The majority (73%) of clubs feel that **“Too Few” young adults and young family members are joining their clubs.**

- *“Our club is getting older, and our big problem is getting younger members to join.” - The Yacht Club of Hilton Head Island*
- *“The cost of buying and keeping a sailboat for a young family seems to be an impediment to enjoying the sport.” - Caloosahatchee Marching and Chowder Society*

About half (48%) of clubs say there are **“Too Few” interactions among the generations** of sailors and members at their club.

- *“A serious problem with all clubs, we don't have an answer. We have tried a few things to do this, but none have worked yet.” – The Yacht Club of Hilton Head Island*

- *“It seems like families sailing together is a thing of the past. Kids have their own boats and progress through them like sizes of shoes.” – Ensign Class Association*

These responses underscore themes discussed in Nicholas Hayes' recent book, *Saving Sailing*, where Hayes notes that the average age of yacht club members today is around 60 and that teens and young families have competing demands on their time outside of sailing.

Emerging Themes, in 3 Parts.

While the survey results pointed to the importance of addressing these issues, respondents went beyond mere diagnosis of the problem and provided a variety of suggestions and examples of solutions that are currently being utilized at their clubs across the country. The heart of the survey results are represented in these strategies and ideas for invigorating a club's family and youth oriented activities.

Emerging Theme 1: Strategies for keeping juniors interested in sailing as they become teenagers.

1. Offer opportunities for teenagers to get involved with **larger keel boats.**

- *“We try to get preteens out when we can on the longer cruises so they get a taste of life on the water.” – Stonington Cruising Club*
- *“Let them move to more advanced boats and get them out on the big boats.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*
- *“Hands on safety and seamanship training when transitioning from one design to larger keel boats.” – Storm Trysail Club*
- *“Having them race keel boats against the adults.” – Sachems Head Yacht Club*



2. Promote and offer access to alternative, **high performance boats.**

- *“Development of sport boat classes, kids are looking for speed & new technology.” – Mystic River Mudheads*
- *“Free catamaran sail boat rides” – Gulfport Yacht Club*
- *“Use of different kinds of boats that appeal more to the older kids (skiffs, sailboards etc.)” – Sachems Head Yacht Club*
- *“Adding sailboards and a great director who makes the program fun.” – Anonymous YC*

3. Get **juniors involved in club management** through committees and as junior instructors.

- *“We have a junior committee reaching out to the junior members keeping them informed about all the club activities to encourage more junior participation.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*
- *“Have them volunteer or work as sailing instructors.” – Stonington Harbor Yacht Club*
- *“Youth are encouraged to join race committee during races.” – Gulfport Yacht Club*

4. Invest the needed time, resources, and human capital to ensure the **success of the junior program.**

- *“Active parental/mentor involvement - driving to regattas, talking conditions and strategy, etc.” – Madison Beach Club*
- *“Forming a separate youth sailing organization to mentor them through early adulthood.” – Davis Island Yacht Club*
- *“Creating Sailing Teams for the youth and summer camp programs.” – Sailing Center*
- *“Hire a full-time program director.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*

5. **Reach out to non-members** through camps, schools, and outreach programs.

- *“We offer the ‘Fast and Fun’ program which invites those not normally exposed to sailing to come and try a day on the water.” – Sail Sand Point*

- *“We are teaching boating safety to 150 young people through the library summer reading program.” – Belhaven Yacht Club (NC)*
- *“Supporting the local YMCA camp sailing program.” – St. Croix Sailing Club*
- *“Open up sailing classes to non-members so friends can take lessons together even if they are not both members.” – Ram Island Yacht Club*

6. Create, promote, and publish electronically a **junior calendar of events that is full of activities** and includes a wide range of things including sailing and non-boating oriented options.

- *“Get kids out on the water and having fun. Activities to include racing, safe boating requirements, games, and responsibility for the care of equipment.” – Anonymous Sailing Club*
- *“Expand the number of regattas the club participates in.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*

7. Offer **grants and scholarships to children who need financial aid** to participate in lessons and regattas.

- *“Our organization awards college scholarships to the youth and we also provide grant funds for the youth to ladder step their way to participate in National events.” – Inter Lake Yachting Association*
- *“Incentives and grants to help pay costs for US SAILING level events. These events have become more competitive and expensive, with higher tech boats, gear, and coaches.” – Mystic River Mudheads*

8. Reach out to and integrate **local school sailing teams.**

- *“Sponsor the high school sailing team.” – Sherborn Yacht Club*
- *“Offer sailing and crewing opportunities to local schools and colleges.” – Blackbeard Sailing Club*



Emerging Theme 2: Ways to increase membership among the 20-35 age group.

9. Implement ways to **reduce the initiation fees and dues** for this age group.

- *“Waive initiation for legacy member.” – Annisquam Yacht Club*
- *“Lower the annual dues to almost nothing for this age group.” – Stonington Harbor Yacht Club*
- *“We have lower dues/initiation for members under age 33.” – Sachems Head Yacht Club*
- *“Clubs should have some kind of flexible membership for those that live 100+ miles from the club and only use it weekends.” – MBC*

10. Create opportunities for young adult members to **get involved in the yacht club management.**

- *“We have a reserved board position that is offered to a younger member. They like it for their resume, we like it for the involvement and the social interactions that it starts. Yacht clubs are not just about sailing.” – Oshkosh YC*
- *“Getting them on a committee, involving them in running JR regattas, etc.” – Madison Beach Club*
- *“We try to add/keep a younger member (under age 30) on our Board of Managers” – Mystic River Mudheads*

11. Consider a **wide range of possible strategies to encourage this age group to join**; best solutions will differ depending on the nature of each organization.

- *“I encourage my son and his friends to join. Keep them active in sailing and the MYC social scene.” – Milford Yacht Club*
- *“To attract younger members’ i.e. 35-45 yr olds, we have redesigned our website and advertise on meetup.com.” – Shoreline Sailing Club*
- *“Hold open houses with free sailboat rides and food.” – Anonymous Sailing Club*
- *“General outreach to younger sailors to not just crew on boats, but to JOIN our club.” – St. Croix Sailing Club*

- *“Put publicity in areas like the community college.” – Anonymous Sailing Club*
- *“Establishing a website has been very helpful in recruiting new members.” – New Haven YC*

12. Create an **adult learn to sail program** that is open, friendly, and non-threatening.

- *“We have an adult learn to race program. It is still in its infancy, but shows promise for the future.” – Belhaven Yacht Club (NC)*
- *“We offer ‘Mom (Dad) and Me’ learn to sail programs.” – Sail Sand Point*

13. Offer **usage of club boats** for broad usage applications, **from lessons, to recreational sailing, to team racing.**

- *“Initiation of a club boat program to encourage match and team racing.” – St. Francis YC*
- *“Providing club boats for members to sail for fun in the evenings.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*

14. Make the club attractive to young adults and young families by scheduling and promoting a range of **social events and activities** that will be of interest to this age group.

- *“Be sure to make events as social as they are competitive.” – Storm Trysail Club*
- *“Free beer.” – Gulfport Yacht club*
- *“Host more family oriented social events.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*
- *“We have a special committee focused on hosting events/activities for young families once a week in the evenings, including science projects, arts & crafts, family fun night, etc.” – Sachems Head Yacht Club*

Emerging Theme 3: Ideas for increasing interaction between the generations of sailors.

15. Create **social events that appeal to all age groups**, and encourage integration between the age groups.

- *“Focus on the ‘fun factor’, competitiveness and life long enjoyment will follow.” – Storm Trysail*



- *“Fun days, 4th of July parties, Santa at Christmas.” – Seabrook Sailing Club*
- *“A packed calendar of multi-generational activities including dinner-dances, casual pizza nights, clam bakes, etc.” – Sachems Head YC*
- *“As an added bonus, we have started having young children’s activities at each party (i.e. face painting, balloon clown, magician, etc.)” – Oshkosh Yacht Club*
- *“A summer lecture by a former instructor or sailor: this year an instructor who has just completed a round-the-world.” – St. George Community Sailing Foundation*
- *“We have cocktail cruises aimed at getting non sailors and non boaters out on the water on member boats. They have a blast.” – Madison Beach Club*
- *“Friday evening, casual, get-togethers at the clubhouse have recently been instituted and are popular.” – Anonymous Yacht Club*

16. Develop programs that encourage all age groups to go out and sail or race together.

- *“Our club highly recognizes successes of our young sailors, not necessarily for winning. We have young and old racing against each other (parents against children makes for a fun competitive spirit).” – Thimble Isl Sailing Club*
- *“We encourage families to go sailing and we organize groups of all ages to go out on evening sails/races.” – Sail Sand Point*
- *“Interclub 3-boat team racing that has one youth/women boat, open boat, and one senior boat.” – Madison Beach Club*
- *“We don’t segregate the kids or young adults from the adults. Helps keep the older members young too! Our Lightning class encourages kids and young adults by incorporating them into their crews.” – Malletts Bay Boat Club*
- *“We have an annual regatta between the older club members and the high school sailing team.” – Sherborn Yacht Club*

- *“All racing is held on the same day, same place, same RC.” – St. Mary’s River Club*
- *“Our J 22 program will be a bridge boat for kids to move from dinghies to keel boats. Sailing needs to be about team work and camaraderie.” – Milford Yacht Club*
- *“Having kids participate as crew on race boats.” – Lake Pend Oreille Yacht Club*

Start Something New at Your Club this Summer.

Kenneth Grahame wrote in *The Wind in the Willows*, *“Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.”* Luckily for us that spirit is alive and well in clubs across the country. By implementing just a few of the great ideas suggested here, clubs can energize their programs and engage the passions of young sailors this summer and for years to come.

Club Respondent Profile.

Number of Organizations: 107

Types of Organizations: 73% yacht clubs, 8% community programs, 5% organizations, 14% other

States Represented: 28 states across all regions, 43% from North East, 22% from South East, 14% from Mid West, 11% from West, and 10% from South West.

The Burgee Program by Gowrie Group is the only comprehensive insurance program developed to meet the unique needs of yacht clubs and sailing organizations. The majority of yacht clubs in the United States, 150+ One-Design class associations, and hundreds of other sailing organizations have already chosen The Burgee Program. The program enables each of these entities to confidently run regattas, borrow boats, teach sailing, hold social events, weather storms – and keep their club, board members, flag officers, volunteers, and employees well-protected. The program is managed by the marine experts at Gowrie Group, underwritten by Chubb Group, and endorsed by US SAILING. To learn more about The Burgee Program visit www.burgeeprogram.com, www.gowrie.com, email burgee@gowrie.com, or call 800.262.8911.