

How To Set Up a Life Jacket Loaner Program

Step by Step Instructions and Resources
for Your Loaner Program



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Introduction

The BoatUS Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water is a national nonprofit with more than 30 years of experience promoting safe and clean boating. BoatUS Foundation provides educational outreach directly to boaters and supports partner organizations nationwide. BoatUS Foundation has been offering a Life Jacket Loaner Program for over 20 years and has over 550 loaner sites in all 50 states and DC. The demand for new loaner sites increases every year so to help establish more loaner sites and educate the public on life jackets, the BoatUS Foundation is offering this guide to help others setup and manage life jacket loaner programs.

Life Jacket Loaner Programs provide life jackets for the public to use free for a day or weekend. The goal of loaner programs is to increase the use of life jackets and to educate the public on the importance of wearing a properly fitting life jacket.

This guide provides you with step by step instructions on setting up a loaner program in your area. It also includes information on how to access free and discounted resources for your loaner program including promotional and educational materials and life jackets.



Getting Started

Create an Action Plan

The first step in setting up a life jacket loaner program is creating an Action Plan.

Below are some things to include in your action plan:

Set goals and objectives - What do you hope to accomplish with the program? Who is your audience - boaters, swimmers? How many loaner sites will you establish this year, next year? How will you maintain the program year after year? Why is the program needed in your area?

Partnerships - Will you have partners? What role will each partner play in the program? ([See Partnerships for more](#))

Budget - How much money is needed to set up each loaner site? How much is needed to maintain sites? Where will the funds for the program come from?

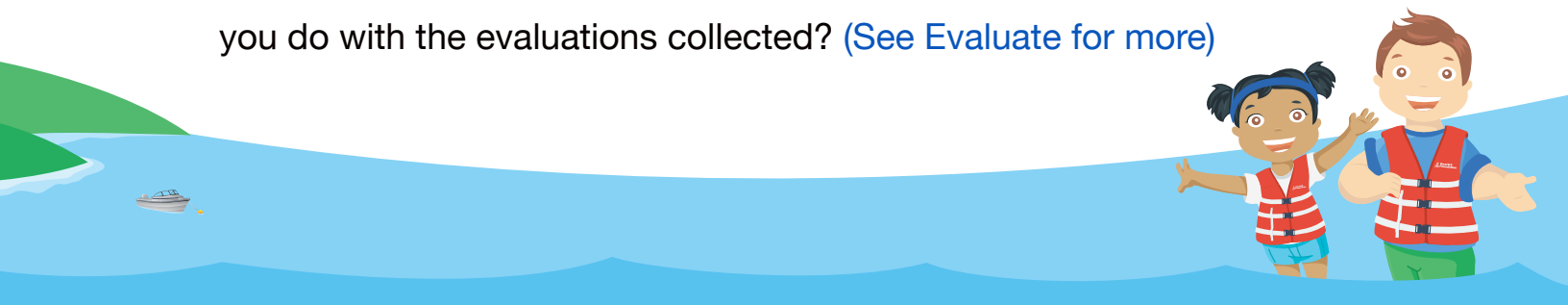
Site choices - Where will the site be located? Will it be staffed or unstaffed, inside or outside? ([See Site Choices for more](#))

Supplies - What supplies are needed? Where will supplies come from? ([See Supplies for more](#))

Promotion - What is your promotion plan? How will you notify the public of the new program? ([See Promote for more](#))

Monitor/Inspect Life Jackets - Who will monitor and inspect the loaner life jackets/location? What is your monitoring plan? ([See Monitor/Inspect for more](#))

Evaluate - How will you evaluate your life jacket loaner program? What will you do with the evaluations collected? ([See Evaluate for more](#))



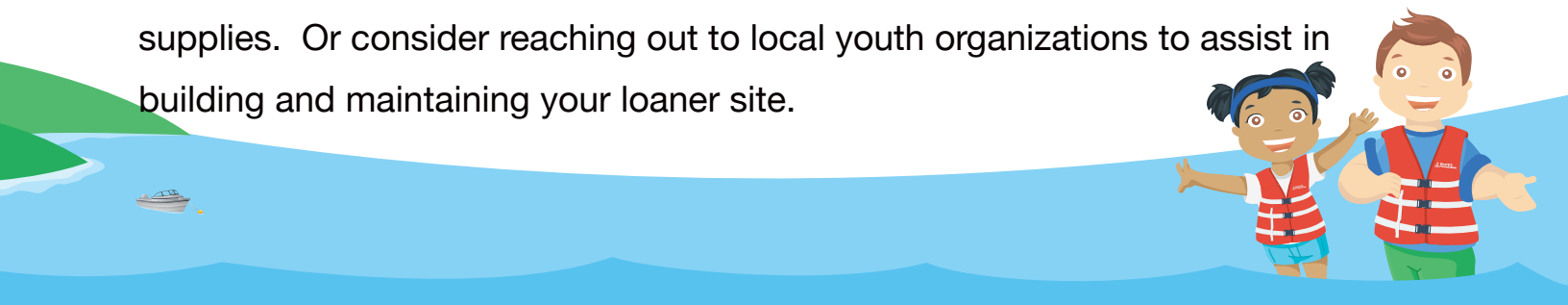
Partnerships

The Life Jacket Loaner Program is a great way to bring multiple groups together to promote boating and water safety.

On the national and state level, there are several organizations that operate loaner programs. The BoatUS Foundation offers applications for loaner sites every other year. Through this program, a group can receive all the supplies needed to start a loaner program free of charge. To learn more about BoatUS Foundation's program visit www.boatus.org/life-jacket-loaner. Other groups with established loaner programs are the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Safe Kids Coalition and Sea Tow Foundation. Additionally many states have life jacket loaner programs including Alaska and Washington. Check with your state's Department of Natural Resources or parks agencies to see if they have a life jacket loaner program.

Partnerships are not limited to national or state organizations. When looking for partners, consider what your organization can provide (the site, the maintenance, etc) and what you need help with. Once you find partners, clearly outline each organization's role and expectations for the program.

Partnerships are also a great way to secure funding for the program. Consider talking to local boating and safety organizations or businesses that would like to get their name in front of your target audience to assist with purchasing supplies. Or consider reaching out to local youth organizations to assist in building and maintaining your loaner site.



Possible Partners

Below is a list of possible partners for your loaner program. While they are organized in categories, many of these groups could fill multiple/different roles.

Partners with established loaner programs

BoatUS Foundation
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
Safe Kids Coalition
Sea Tow Foundation
State Agencies such as Department of Natural Resources and Department of Health

Partners to assist with funding/supplies

National Retailers
National Boating and Outdoor Retailers
Local sporting good/marine retailers
Hardware stores

Partners to assist with education/promotion

Local Water Safety Councils
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Power Squadrons
Local Schools

Partners to assist with site location and oversight

Marinas
Fuel Docks
Waterfront businesses
Libraries
Fire/Police Stations
Local Parks



Site Choices

There are many different types of life jacket loaner site setups and there is no one size fits all option. Below are several setup options.

Staffed vs. Unstaffed

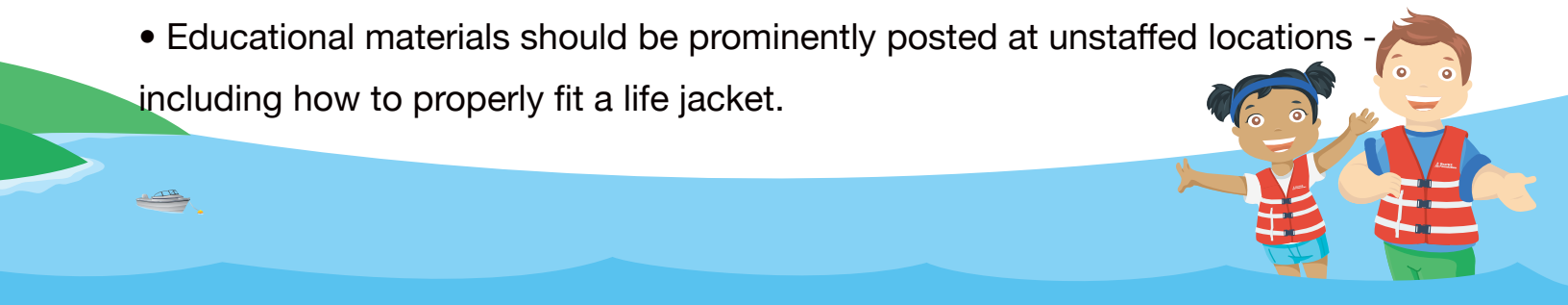
Some life jacket loaner sites have personnel to sign the jackets out, others are set up as loaner boards or stands where users can borrow the life jackets on the honor system.

Staffed

- Staffed locations with signout procedures tend to have higher return rates.
- Personnel should be trained on how to sign out and properly fit the life jackets.
- Having a staffed location give organizations a better way to track the usage of life jackets for reporting purposes.
- Locations with staffing provide the opportunity for face to face education on life jackets.

Unstaffed

- Unstaffed locations can provide greater access for the public because they aren't limited by hours of operation like staffed locations.
- Unstaffed locations typically have a higher loss rate and more wear and tear on the life jackets than staffed locations.
- Liability releases (See [Resources](#) for an example) should be prominently posted at unstaffed locations.
- Educational materials should be prominently posted at unstaffed locations - including how to properly fit a life jacket.



Indoor vs. Outdoor

Life jacket loaner sites can be set up indoors such as a marina office or a visitor's center or they can be set up as kiosks or boards.

Indoor

- Make sure there is signage outside informing people where they can borrow a life jacket.
- Put the life jackets in a visible location so people can easily find them.

Outdoor

- Consider using a cabinet instead of a board to protect the life jackets from weather. UV damage can shorten a life jacket's life span.
- Life jackets kept outside will likely need to be replaced more often due to wear and tear and the chances they can be lost or stolen.
- Make sure any signage is durable and can hold up to the outside elements.

Possible Locations

Below is a list of possible locations for life jacket loaner programs:

- Marinas
- Waterfront businesses
- Beaches
- Boat Ramps
- Campgrounds
- Visitor Centers
- Fire/Police stations
- Libraries
- Hospitals

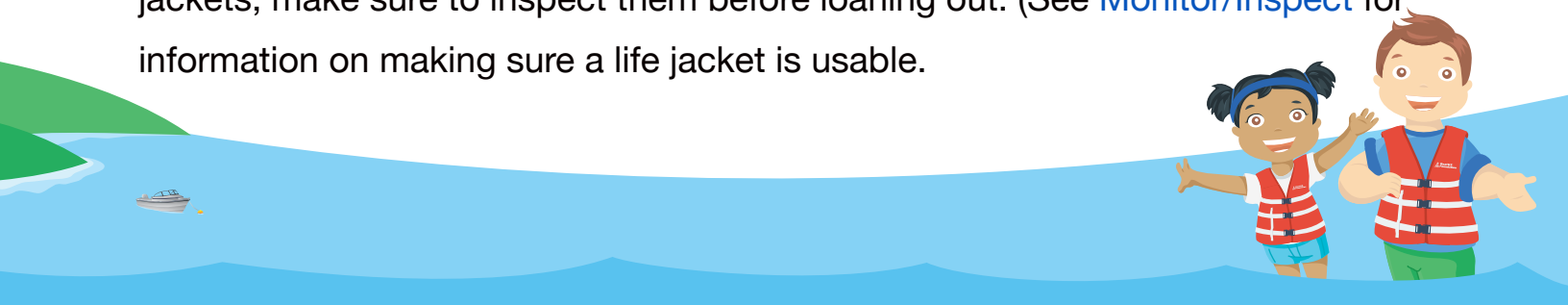


Supplies

Below are the types of supplies you will need for your life jacket loaner program and sources to get them.

Life Jackets

- Loaner life jackets should be Coast Guard approved and comfortable to wear such as Type II and Type III vest styles.
- Most locations will need at least 2 life jackets in the most common sizes (Infant, Child, Youth and Adult). BoatUS Foundation's program provides loaner sites with 2 Infant, 4 Child, 4 Youth and 2 Adults but your program may need more or less depending on usage and your targeted audience.
- If you are maintaining your own location, keep a reserve stock of life jackets to replenish your site if life jackets are not returned or as they wear out.
- If possible, include information on the life jackets about who it belongs to and where to return it. BoatUS Foundation uses luggage tags with the organization's name and contact information to ensure the life jacket are returned.
- BoatUS Foundation is offering discounted life jackets for life jacket loaner programs. To find out how to purchase these life jackets, see the [Resources](#) section at the end of this guide.
- Other options to secure life jackets are through donations or discounted pricing from local sporting good stores and marine retailers.
- Some program accept donated gently used life jackets. If you receive used life jackets, make sure to inspect them before loaning out. (See [Monitor/Inspect](#) for information on making sure a life jacket is usable.



Program Materials

- It is important to have signage and promotional materials to make the public aware of the life jacket loaner program.
- BoatUS Foundation has created posters and flyers to help promote your life jacket loaner program. You can download free images to print locally (consider finding a local printer that will give you a discounted rate!) or you can purchase printed copies with your logo included through our online store. For links to download or purchase materials see the [Resources](#) section.
- If you create your own promotional materials, make sure the designs are easy to read and highly visible. Consider partnering with a local artist or art school to create images for your program.
- Create/purchase promotional materials in multiple sizes and formats. Consider having large signs for outdoor areas, flyers for indoors and bulletin boards and decals to place on loaner bins or stands.
- Based on your target audience, consider translating and producing promotional materials in additional languages.
- In addition to promotional materials, you should use liability releases in your program. See the [Resources](#) section for sample liability releases that can be adapted for staffed and unstaffed sites.
- The [Resources](#) section also includes a sample borrower's letter for staffed locations to send to borrowers if the life jacket is not returned.



Site Construction Materials

- The construction materials needed depend on the type of life jacket loaner site you will set up and the location. See the [Resources](#) section for photos of different loaner site setups.
- Indoor sites may only need bins to hold the life jackets or even a merchandise rack to hang life jackets.
- Outdoor sites likely will need more construction materials to set up such as wood kiosks/boards or plastic stands.
- Contact local hardware stores to see if you can get donated or discounted materials to construct your loaner site.

Educational Materials

- Providing educational materials is an important part of any loaner program.
- Consider providing signage or brochures at loaner sites on how to properly fit a life jacket.
- BoatUS Foundation has created a sign demonstrating how to properly fit a life jacket and a rack card covering fit and important tips on life jackets. See the [Resources](#) section for links to download free copies of these materials or to purchase printed copies with your logo included.
- Based on your target audience, consider translating and producing educational materials in additional languages.
- The Wear IT! Campaign offers both free and paid resources on life jackets and other water related topics. Visit www.boatingorders.com/ for more information.



Promote

A Life Jacket Loaner Program only works if it's used! Here are some things to consider to help promote your program.

- Once your loaner site is set up, send a press release to local print, radio and TV media in your area. See [Resources](#) for a sample press release.
- Include information about the program on your website, your partners' websites, newsletters, emails and social media.
- Notify local organizations on and near the water about the program.
- Notify local marine law enforcement, dockmasters, etc. about the available life jackets.
- Place promotional signage and flyers at prominent locations such as swim beaches, boat ramps, marina stores.
- If you attend local boating and water safety events, promote the program during these events.
- Highlight the successes of the program to local media. It's not just about setting up the site, tell the media when the life jackets are used for a special event, or the availability of the program when the national spotlight is on boating and water activities like National Safe Boating Week, Memorial Day and Fourth of July.
- Promote your site on BoatUS Foundation's website! BoatUS Foundation maintains the only nationwide map with loaner sites managed by all known organizations. To view the map or add your site, visit www.boatus.org/loaner.



Monitor/Inspect Jackets

Once a life jacket loaner program is established, monitoring and maintaining it is key to success!

- Life jackets that are ripped or have damaged foam, missing/broken buckles, straps or zippers should never be loaned out. Damaged life jackets may not perform properly and could be a liability for your organization.
- Staffed locations should inspect life jackets before they are loaned and after they are returned.
- Unstaffed locations should inspect life jackets at least once a week.
- Some groups have created inspection logs for loaner sites. See the [Resources](#) section for examples.
- Maintain a stock of life jackets at your loaner site. There is nothing worse than someone trying to borrow a life jacket and finding out none are available.



Evaluate

Once your loaner program is running, evaluate how it's working. Use this data to improve your program and promote its success!

- Program evaluation should be done at least once a year.
- See the [Resources](#) section for sample program survey that can be used to evaluate multiple locations or adapted to a single location.
- Things to consider when evaluating a program:
 - Are there enough life jackets to meet demand?
 - Are the right sizes of life jackets available to meet demand?
 - Are we promoting the program enough? Does the public know about it?
 - How many life jacket are being loaned out?
 - Have any lives been saved by the program?
 - Is our current distribution process working for the program?
 - Are we losing life jackets?
 - Do we need more loaner sites in our area?
- Use your program evaluate and metrics (number of life jackets loaned, stories of lives saved) to promote your program's success and attract partners and sponsors.



Resources

Below is a list of resources in this guide to help you set up and manage your loaner program.

Discounted Life Jackets

Promotional and Educational Materials

- Sample Promotional Flyer/Sign

- How to Fit a Life Jacket Flyer/Sign

- Sample Promotional Decal

- How to Fit a Life Jacket and Life Jacket Tips Rack Card

Sample Press Release

Sample Liability Release/Signout Form

Sample Borrower's Letter

Sample Site Survey

Life Jacket Inspection Checklist

Examples of Site Setups



Discounted Life Jackets

BoatUS Foundation is offering two ways to purchase discounted life jackets.

BoatUS and Stearns Partnership:

BoatUS Foundation and Stearns, a leading life jacket manufacturer have partnered to offer groups discounted life jackets directly from Stearns. The life jackets are red and white Type II and Type III vest style jackets. There is a minimum order of 12 life jackets and for an additional charge, the life jackets can be customized with your logo. To place an order, email government@stearnsflotation.com with the subject line of BoatUS Referral Order and include the below SKU numbers. Prices do not include shipping.

Type II Infant Red/White: \$13.70 (MSRP: \$29.99) SKU: 3000004401

Type III Child Red/White: \$11.37 (MSRP: \$29.99) SKU: 3000004402

Type III Youth Red/White: \$11.37 (MSRP: \$29.99) SKU: 3000004404

Type III Adult Red/White: \$16.80 (MSRP: \$29.99) SKU: 3000004406



Promotional and Educational Materials

The Foundation has created several promotional and educational pieces to help groups with their life jacket loaner program. Below are links to download free materials or purchase printed materials. The next few pages have examples of the materials created.

Free:

Visit <http://www.boatus.org/life-jacket-loaner/materials/> to download print quality signs, flyers, rack cards for your program. Downloads include loaner program promotional materials as well as educational materials on fitting a life jacket and life jacket tips.

Paid:

Visit the Foundation's online [store](#) to purchase print on demand promotional and educational materials. With these materials, you can include your logo at no extra cost.



Sample Press Release

YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME
2323 Sample St.
Your Town, ST 12345
Phone (123) 456-7891

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Suzy Safety
Phone: (123) 456-7891

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
XXX XX, 201X

(YOUR ORGANIZATION) TO LOAN FREE LIFE JACKETS TO KIDS THIS BOATING SEASON

This year (your organization) is continuing to help keep kids safe while on the water by offering loaner life jackets to the public for the day or weekend, at no charge!

Here's how the Life Jacket Loaner Program works. If a boater discovers they don't have enough properly-fitting children's life jackets on board, they can simply visit (your organization) and sign out an infant, child, youth or adult life jacket for the day or the weekend. When they've finishing boating for the day, they can return the jackets to the same location. (Your organization) is making (number of life jackets) available for loan, allowing hundreds of children to stay safer on the water.

If you would like to borrow a jacket, simply stop by (location) between (hours of operation) on (days of the week). You can also call (point of contact) at (phone number) to learn more about (your organization's) participation in the program.

To find other loaner sites near you, visit www.boatus.org/loaner. To check your state's life jacket laws visit www.boatus.org/LJLaws.



Sample Borrower's Letter

The following sample letter could be sent to borrowers who have not returned jackets. You may want to use your own letterhead to make the document look official.

(date)

Dear (borrower):

Our records show that you borrowed a life jacket on (date). This jacket was expected to be returned on (date). Please return the jacket to (organization) as soon as possible. We need to make the jacket available to other children so they may also benefit from this program. Thank you for your cooperation. Please contact (name/organization) if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

(name of person in charge of program)

(name of organization)



Life Jacket Inspection Checklist

Site Inspection

Location Name:

of Usable Infant:

of Usable Child:

of Usable Youth:

of Usable Adult:

and size of life jackets removed:

and size of life jackets missing:

Signage still displayed?

Educational Materials still available?

Site Notes:

Life Jacket Inspection

Is the life jacket free of tears or holes? Yes/No

Are buckles and/or zipper attached and working? Yes/No

Are the straps attached properly? Yes/No



Examples of Site Setups

Indoor Bin



Indoor Rack



Outdoor Loaner Boards/Kiosks/Stand



Photos courtesy of USACE



Outdoor Enclosed Cabinet/Storage



Photo courtesy of Safe Kids

