

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

Cooperative agreements are useful tools that may be used in a variety of situations among an array of organizations. For example, the Auxiliary has an agreement with the Coast Guard to act as the Coast Guard's Executive Agent for the Vessel Safety Check program - and another agreement with the United States Power Squadrons to recognize their willingness to act as providers in the VSC program. Recently, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Auxiliary and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) to recognize the mutually supportive roles between the two organizations.

Another family of agreements deals with the Coast Guard to State agreements that outlines how the states are to perform the purposes of the State recreational boating safety program. Each Coast Guard District is charged with forming a close working relationship with its assigned states. These relationships are defined in cooperative agreements which cover a lengthy menu of responsibilities for each party including law enforcement, accident reporting, training, SAR coordination, use of the Auxiliary, coordination of public education and other important items. The Districts may also authorize field commanders to enter into supplementary agreements with local jurisdictions, provided the supplemental agreements are appended to the appropriate CG/State agreement.

COMDTINST 16750.8A Federal/State Relations - Recreational Boating Safety contains the latest guidance to the district commanders on policies and guidelines for entering into cooperative agreements with the States.

Over the years some states have entered into MOUs with the Auxiliary on a District/Region basis. The current direction is to have all or as many as possible, agreements with any given state combined into one comprehensive document. However, there is provision for the option of a separate cooperative agreement with the Auxiliary. This agreement can be used to expand or separately cover the public education provisions contained in the main agreement. COMDTINST 5216.18 Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement provides further guidance and a format template for developing such agreements. It should be noted that some Coast Guard Districts favor separate agreements while others do not.

Some states may be pressing for an Auxiliary to State agreements on any number of issues such as public education or vessel safety checks. Each Coast Guard District will have a strategy for how to handle such requests. The DCO, DSO-LP, and DSO-SL/SLO working with the DIRAUX, RBS Specialist and others at the District office, will know the current best practices that are to be employed. If the issues are simple or amount to clarification of an existing agreement a letter of intent may suffice. In other situations an agreement in the form of an addendum to the existing state agreement may be a choice. Or, changes may be plugged into the main agreement at the next review or revision. In an effort to reduce complexity of state cooperative agreements, there is also the possibility that some Districts will restrict the use of added or supplemental agreements. Again the DCO and DIRAUX can provide guidance.

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State Liaison Officers, who are on the front lines in dealing with the states, need to know what approaches their leadership favors. If a given state is interested in some type of agreement, the possible approaches should be explored with Auxiliary leadership early in the discussion process. In other situations the Auxiliary may be the party that is seeking an agreement and possible options should be worked out before contacting the state.

While all of this may seem a bit complicated the message is good news. The states and local jurisdictions value the services offered by the Auxiliary. The challenge is to respond to those needs in a spirit of cooperation and ensure that each party understands what the other is willing to do. Whether day-to-day activities are based on discussions, past experiences or written agreements, the Auxiliary leadership and local DIRAUX should understand current practices being followed by Flotillas and Divisions. This way good ideas may be shared and reapplied by other units.