

**U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**



**EVERGREEN
NTRAIN 2010
STRATEGY SESSION**

*We must anticipate our desired futures
or we will be dealt a future not by choice but by happenstance.*

Index

Page 3	Summary
Page 4	NTRAIN 2010 Evergreen workshop synopsis <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which strategic decisions of the last five years have had the most impact on the Auxiliary?
Page 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing change-centricity• Are we a learning organization?• What is the Auxiliary value proposition from our own perspective?
Page 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is the Auxiliary seen by others?• Decision point: Regional or National?
Page 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision point: Integral or Partner to the Coast Guard?
	Recommendations
Page 8	The course ahead

Summary

Almost all of what was heard at the NTRAIN 2010 *Evergreen* session echoes and reinforces what has been heard in previous sessions with these leaders. Notably, in this workshop the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary executive and senior leadership who were the participants narrowed their focus, for the first time, on what they felt was too much change happening too quickly, with no change management process in place.

As an example, they cited technological advances leading to the perception of “too much, too fast.” Cultural inertia across the Auxiliary faces off against rapidly changing technology, resulting in technological capabilities that are inconsistent throughout the organization, prompting significant negative impact on the Auxiliary as a virtual organization.

Change management and measurement, they felt, are closely coupled with effective communications. The need for better communications is a perennial issue but at this workshop, the leadership for the first time tied it specifically to change management. They also cited a critical need for a formal feedback process so that as change is implemented, there is a process for making improvements following evaluation.

The participants said that leadership at all levels needs to create an environment to facilitate change; and leaders throughout the organization need to do better at communicating the need and benefits of change. They specifically pointed out the need for better communications competency in the field leadership.

Change management was not one of the original robust strategies the group developed in the NTRAIN 2009 three-day *Evergreen* workshop.

It was not a goal of this workshop to form tactics to deal with change but rather to realize an area of strategic need that would be followed by development of a tactical program.

The report that follows summarizes the discussions at NTRAIN 2010.

NTRAIN 2010 *Evergreen* workshop

At the request of the Coast Guard Auxiliary Office of Strategic Analysis, CDR Joe DuFresne, of the U.S. Coast Guard Office of Strategic Analysis (CG-0951), conducted a three-hour *Evergreen* workshop during NTRAIN 2010. Participants were the executive and senior leadership of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary (Deputy National Commodores, Assistant National Commodores, District Commodores and their Chiefs of Staff, and the Directorate Chiefs and their Deputies).

The workshop opened with a review of the January 2009 Auxiliary *Evergreen* robust strategies and key insights¹. CDR DuFresne spoke briefly about culture change and how difficult it can be for individuals and organizations to become change-centric. The workshop portion of the session consisted of having the attendees respond to five strategic questions and discuss two strategic decision points.

Strategic Questions

1. Which strategic decisions of the last five years have had the most impact on the Auxiliary?

The participants without question felt the modernization initiative of the Coast Guard Auxiliary was THE high impact event of the past five years. The initiative saw flotillas and divisions merging, aligning with sectors and developing streamlined points of contact at field units. Further, it brought about refocusing resources to balance traditional RBS with newer marine domain awareness missions that resulted in increased efficient use of people and time and more efficient mission planning and execution.

The second strategic decision, participants felt, was developing strategic plans at the National level.

Third was the technology advances that included eliminating paper and going to all electronic distribution, as well as using off-the-shelf training to reduce cost. Participants felt that decision led to a perception of “too much, too fast,” and technology beyond some members’ capabilities.

Other strategic decisions that had impact on the Auxiliary include mandatory training programs, which created more problems than expected. Security background checks, which led to member disenrollments; and the Incident Command System (ICS) training requirements, which saw resistance to change from some members, and which led to loss of qualified people but was balanced by allowing the Auxiliary to participate in inter-agency response.

¹ http://naco.cgaux.org/anaco_sa/documents.html: *U.S. Coast Guard Evergreen Summary*

2. Implementing change-centricity: What aspects of the Auxiliary are most difficult to change? Why? What should we focus on to become more able to change and more agile?

Participants said the main difficulty the Auxiliary faces is cultural inertia across the organization. This inertia competes with rapidly changing technology, resulting in technological capabilities that are wildly inconsistent throughout the organization, prompting significant negative impact in a virtual organization.

Second, the participants said there's too much change, and it happens too quickly. They felt the leadership at all levels could effect better change management by pacing change appropriately and by creating an environment to facilitate change, both by demonstrating the value of each change and by making the vision/strategy actionable to make it understandable. Participants felt the leadership throughout the Auxiliary could do better at communicating the need and the benefits of change.

Third, the group was concerned about communication and felt there was a distinct need for better communication competency in the field leadership. Tightly tied to dealing with change, they felt messaging/marketing the strategy and value of changes needs to be better understood and leveraged. Some participants felt the leadership should explore what drives the perception of communications inadequacy and that communications were nowhere as bad as perceived. They agreed that the Auxiliary should establish a formal change management process to include: streamlining communications with members about changes; establishing a feedback process for after a change is made; and developing a process for making modifications after feedback is received and evaluated.

3. Are we a learning organization? If not, what do we need to do differently to become one?

The participants suggested the Auxiliary is an organization of individual learners, not a learning organization and cite the continuing focus on response, rather than planning and prevention, as one example. The organization needs to improve sharing information, good and bad, not only across the Auxiliary but also with its partners. They again asked that a feedback loop be created to assess effectiveness after implementation.

4. What is the Coast Guard Auxiliary Value Proposition from our OWN perspective?

Participants believe the Coast Guard sees the Auxiliary as cost effective, dependable and credible force-multiplier; a low-cost resource with professional skills bringing local knowledge and local continuity to Coast Guard programs. They felt the boating public/marine industry sees the Auxiliary as a point of contact for Coast Guard information; a resource for technical information and information on safety standards with a local context; an honest broker between the public and regulatory/law enforcement

bodies; and providers of safety training for insurance discounts, licenses and certifications. Members, the participants said, see the Auxiliary as an organization where there is an opportunity to make a difference in their community that brings them both patriotic pride and personal satisfaction. Members see the Auxiliary as a source of training to become a better boater; provide fellowship within the organization and with other boaters; and a place to get something from, and contribute to, the organization.

5. What is the CG Auxiliary Value Proposition as seen by the Coast Guard, the boating public, the marine industry and other stakeholders?

The workshop participants felt that the Coast Guard sees the Auxiliary as an inexpensive work force, a competent force-multiplier and that the Coast Guard's range of respect for Auxiliary services varies by component of the Coast Guard. Points of discussion concerned the risk of lack of Coast Guard control of a volunteer workforce; a lack of confidence perception, in part because of the difference in their respective cultures – “the Coast Guard isn't democracy but the Auxiliary thinks it is”; and a lasting memory among some of the Coast Guard of previous Auxiliary failures. The Auxiliary is seen as a stoic, slow-to-change organization (across stakeholders) but can be quicker to change than the Coast Guard. A positive note was the perception that the Auxiliary provides regional continuity between Coast Guard personnel turnover.

The leadership felt the Auxiliary is seen by the boating public/marine industry as directly associated with Coast Guard successes and failures and is viewed as wannabe Coast Guard because they are not informed on how well the Auxiliary is trained and because the Auxiliary is not well identified to the boating public. On the other hand, the public and marine industry see Auxiliary volunteers as safety/boating experts, have respect for their knowledge and services (safety, helpfulness); and are highly regarded as a public safety partner without the law enforcement component.

Strategic Decision Points

The workshop began a discussion of key strategic decision points for the Auxiliary. There wasn't sufficient time left for in-depth discussion on the final two questions. The participants did have some thoughts in the time that remained that are included here as a quick overview, but deserve further consideration to reach a viable and accurate conclusion.

1. Decision Point: REGIONAL or NATIONAL: What opportunities and strengths does the current regional structure of the CG Auxiliary afford it? What are its limitations? Should the Auxiliary pursue a more cohesive, coordinated structure nationally? (“One Auxiliary”)

The participants said the need for uniformity, where appropriate while allowing for regional flexibility was paramount - as one person asked, “Do we need 16 different ways

(the Auxiliary has 16 districts) of doing a specific thing?” Yet the participants recognized that adaptability for local circumstances, not necessarily standardized practices, was a key to the Auxiliary’s effectiveness to better address local needs. Regional control has limitations, however, and chief among them is a reduced ability to share information and a limited ability to share resources.

2. Decision Point: INTEGRAL or PARTNER to Coast Guard? “Partnering” was defined to mean moving away from the Coast Guard. Participants saw it as putting funding at risk and a creating a loss of credibility with the boating public and marine industry. Partnering did, however, allow the Auxiliary to do more with local agencies and state departments of natural resources for fish and game, and the Red Cross. “Integral” was defined as moving closer to the Coast Guard, which blurs the line between the two organizations and which leads to a loss of Auxiliary independence. The best outcome when considering the questions, the participants said, would keep opportunities open for members to move into either realm.

Conclusions

Of the strategic questions discussed, the responses to the “Value Proposition” questions are the weakest. While the responses were interesting, they are pure speculation. There wasn’t time to dig deeper into this important area. To accurately explore the topic, more time and access to representatives from the various stakeholder groups is needed. That poses a significant logistical problem, how to identify and fund a representative sample of the boating public and the marine industry to discussions.

Likewise, the complex discussion on Strategic Decision Points came at the end of the evening and could not be fully explored.

Recommendations based on the NTRAIN 2010 workshop

Based on the findings of this and prior *Evergreen* workshops, we cannot recommend too highly that the NEXCOM charter a group to develop, or obtain, a change management process. This would need to be done in conjunction with the tactical planning for effective communications. It should include a feedback loop to provide a mechanism for testing change effectiveness and making adjustments, based on feedback from the field, as well as a measurement process to chart the effectiveness of the change management process.

We also recommend the NEXCOM charter the Strategic and Contingency Planning Office with the responsibility for development of tactical plans to address effective communications throughout the Auxiliary. This is no small task. It will most likely need to be broken down into several sub-components, for example “communicating change to members,” to avoid becoming an unwieldy exercise.

The course ahead

The Auxiliary Office of Strategic Analysis will conduct interviews with the executive leadership at NACON 2010 in August with the goal of determining what the individual executives see as long term *strategic* opportunities and challenges. The interview questions will be structured to look forward into the future, not dwell on the past. While each interviewee will bring their own unique perspective and history to the interview sessions, we expect to hear common themes that will provide us with a framework for the next phase(s) of strategic analysis.

The Auxiliary Office of Strategic Analysis' next workshop with the Auxiliary leadership will be at NTRAIN 2011 in January. This workshop will be a scenario-based workshop with the goal of producing specific robust strategies concerning a specific Auxiliary mission and its program. The topic for this workshop will be determined after we analyze the results of the executive leadership interviews from NACON 2010.

To download the more detailed outline of NTRAIN 2010 *Evergreen* workshop, as well as other reports and documents produced by the U.S. Auxiliary Office of Strategic Analysis, go to http://naco.cgau.org/anaco_sa/

Please note there is a feedback section for your comments on the website.

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary office of Strategic Analysis

Fred Gates
Commodore

f.gates@yahoo.com

Linda Merryman
Deputy

linda@wormhole.com



*We must anticipate our desired futures
or we will be dealt a future not by choice but by happenstance.*