

# Publicizing and Promoting a Fishing Derby

Any event, especially a first-time event, can be only as successful as the publicity used to bring participants to the event.

In one fishing derby in Lubbock, Texas, participants “heard about the fishing derby” from television (37 percent of participants), newspaper (26 percent), a friend (15 percent), radio (10 percent), and a poster (8 percent). Television and newspaper were the most effective means of publicity, but all methods successfully invited people to participate.

Printed publicity, such as posters and handbills, may be less effective in attracting derby participants than television and newspaper, but they can do several things. Posters can be displayed in schools, public buildings, and stores (especially sporting goods stores); this announces the program to school teachers and administrators, local government employees, and the local business community. Posters and handbills provide an easy reference for information about the event. Handbills, whether distributed at stores or in schools, get the announcement of the event to parents and guardians—the people who are responsible for scheduling the family’s activities. Sometimes handbills can be mailed to families with utility bills or store sale fliers. Posters and handbills also allow you to give appropriate credit to co-sponsors of your event.

Another good avenue of publicity is a community calendar of events. The park and recreation department of the chamber of commerce may keep these. Event calendars may be published as brochures or appear as upcoming events in a newspaper.

Displaying banners is a common means of publicity. The banners state the event name, location, date, and time. The effectiveness of banners depends on where they are displayed.

Publicity can be tricky because it usually involves several agencies and many people. We offer two suggestions. First, use a public relations person or office if one is available. These people know how to get your message to your target audience, and they often have contacts with the media and know how to prepare and submit your message so the media will use it.

Second, do not pay for publicity. Public service announcements (PSAs) are important to the survival of most public media organizations. Not all PSAs have equal effectiveness. The form, length, and time that it is aired (television or radio) or where it is located in a newspaper change the effectiveness. If possible, have a local official or celebrity do a news release or a press conference.

“Free” is a significant word in all publicity. Although a fishing derby can be a good fundraiser, an entry fee will probably reduce the participation, especially if it is a first-time event and is targeted at youth. An entry fee can also discriminate among different participant groups. Having a free event qualifies your event for advertising as a PSA.

## Getting Help

The many components of conducting a successful fishing derby range from the availability of a site to awarding prizes. Agencies in the fishery and recreation business should be the first stop in the route to a successful event. Discuss your plans with Mississippi 4-H Youth Sportfishing Program leaders and the nearest office of your state fishery management agency, federal land management agency (Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), MSU Extension county office, or local park and recreation department. These agencies can provide important information about fishing sites and, depending on the office, may have experience conducting fishing derbies or educational events. The local park and recreation department may be able to provide many resources needed to conduct a fishing derby, such as tables, chairs, stage, public address system, toilets, and construction capabilities. Most importantly, the park and recreation department is in the people management business and is experienced at conducting public sport and recreation events.

You may get prizes for participation, drawings, and awards from local businesses and outdoor and fishing equipment manufacturers and suppliers. The greatest success at receiving contributions will be by directly contacting, by letter or in person, selected businesses. You are trading publicity and good will for their products. Give these contributors exposure at your

event—announcements during the awards ceremony and posters listing contributors. Ask manufacturers willing to contribute materials also to provide banners or posters for their companies or products. In addition to their contributions, some of these businesses will be good sources of publicity, marketing information, and staff for your event. After the event, send these contributors a letter of appreciation that summarizes the event and states the distribution and dollar value of their contributions. It is wise to ask the contributor to estimate the value of his or her contribution when you receive it.

Concessions for food, beverages, and fishing supplies can be a desirable addition to the derby. It is better if products are free or proceeds from the sale of products are donated to funding the fishing derby. Local restrictions may affect the sale of products at your derby site. The concessions should be located for the convenience of the participants but should not interfere with registration or the awards ceremony.

It is desirable to have a principal co-sponsor to provide funds for necessary expenditures; however, be cautious choosing a co-sponsor. Selecting a “for-profit” business as a co-sponsor may limit your opportunities for free publicity. On the other hand, co-sponsorship by a nonprofit organization can enhance your publicity opportunities.

## Scheduling

The date and time of a fishing derby will affect the success of your event. The ideal time is when there are no conflicting events, the fish are biting, and the weather is pleasant. Consult your community calendar to select a time when there are no large events that

would attract a similar audience (such as outdoor, family-oriented events). Also, it may be desirable to schedule a fishing derby as a part of another event such as a city or county fair.

Good times to catch fish vary throughout the country, but avoid very hot or very cold times. A “natural” date for a fishing derby is during National Fishing Week, which begins on the first Monday in June and extends through the following Sunday. Conducting your derby at this time provides an opportunity to benefit from National Fishing Week publicity and materials. Another good idea is to schedule the derby to coincide with the opening day of the fishing season in locations that have closed fishing seasons for certain fish species.

What if it rains? Schedule the event in a season that generally has pleasant weather. With good planning, it may be possible to arrange a “rain day.” To do so, however, requires selecting two dates that do not conflict with other events and obtaining a commitment from volunteers to be available for two dates.

## For More Information

Additional information about planning and conducting fishing derbies is available in the Extension fishing derby series of publications:

[P3769 What Is a Fishing Derby?](#)

[P3770 Planning and Organizing a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3666 Selecting a Site for a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3771 Facilities Required for a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3773 A Basis for Competition in Fishing Derbies](#)

[P2219 Operations and Procedures for a Fishing Derby](#)

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