

H. HOSTING RECREATION EVENTS

Recreation events are another effective tool for enticing more people to get out and recreate in the SLV. Events can be planned to attract more people to the SLV's recreation destinations and outdoor spaces while also boosting awareness of the region's recreation opportunities. This tool kit suggest ways in which the SLVGO Coalition, SLV communities and organizations throughout the SLV can work together to promote recreation through outdoor events and programming.

Best Practices for Hosting Outdoor Recreation Events

Support Existing Outdoor Festivals and Events.

There are outdoor events already hosted on an annual basis throughout the San Luis Valley, and many of them already have an outdoor recreation emphasis (e.g., Monte Vista Crane Festival). The SLVGO Coalition and its partners could support events by:

- Helping with promotions (utilizing SLVGO's growing social media reach)
- Setting up a table and distributing information about recreation
- Recruiting volunteers
- Leading or sponsoring programming (e.g., a guided tour, a group hike, a fishing clinic, etc)

Start small. The prospect of an "event" can sound daunting. While any event takes organization and some extra time to pull off, a community or organization can start small with an event. To start all you need is a concept, a location (and permission to use it) and then a few social media posts to spread the word. Even 25 participants in year 1 is a success – you've turned these 25 people on to something fun to do in the SLV and chances are they are going to tell someone about it. So, start small and go for it!

Events are "SLV Appetizers" for tourists, so be sure to promote them outside the SLV.

Events provide opportunities to showcase the SLV's outdoors, recreation facilities, and communities in a positive and vibrant light. Encourage tourism organizations and recreation groups to spread the word about the events outside of the SLV.

Build An Event Around Recreation

Needs. If there is a recreation need to address in a community, consider building an event around it. An event is a great way to draw attention to a community's recreational facilities and provides a fun way to introduce forms of outdoor recreation. Some examples for the SLV could include:

- How about a wintertime event that draws attention to outdoor winter recreation pursuits and encourages more people to venture outside during the cold months. This could be a Nordic ski race; a fun run along the frozen Rio Grande; a group hike ending with hot chocolate; a sledding event; or a even a winter gear swap (where folks can buy/sell winter clothes and gear).
- In an effort to promote more water-based recreation in the SLV, communities could host the Fly-Fishing Film Tour (www.thef3t.com), sponsor a kid's fishing derby, stand-up paddle demo day, or organize a "Get to Know Your Rio" weekend and highlight recreation opportunities and opportunities along the Rio Grande, Conejos and other rivers and creeks in the SLV.
- Want to showcase your trails? Host a fun run, a bike race, a trail work day, or a group hike.
- Encourage Youth Participation. When hosting a race of some sort, be sure to include at least one youth category so children can participate too. Consider waiving the race fee for the youth categories. This gesture will often entice more family participation and may turn some local youth onto the more competitive recreation pursuits.

Appeal to the Non-Competitive Types,

Too. Races will definitely draw out the competitive crowd, and are likely to recruit participation from non-SLV residents. To increase the size of the event turn-out and to make the event more inclusive, be sure to include some messaging that will also appeal to the non-competitive crowd encouraging them to come, spectate and cheer; to participate in one of the non-competitive race categories (e.g., costumed, slow-n-steady); or to volunteer for the event. Additionally, adding kid-friendly and/or entertainment elements to an event typically draws more people families (e.g., jumpy castle, strider bike race, arts-crafts table).

Recruit volunteers. Volunteers can be recruited to help with nearly all aspects of an event and they are typically a HUGE help and an essential element to pulling off a successful event. Volunteer duties could include:

- Promote the event (social media, graphic design, and/or media volunteers)
- Take photos
- Provide medical or mechanical support
- Line the race course to cheer and make sure participants are OK and spectators are staying out of the way
- Set up an information table and distribute information about SLVGO, the community and its recreation opportunities.

Recruit Sponsorship. Local businesses may be interested in sponsoring events since they provide positive exposure. Once an event idea is hatched, begin recruiting sponsors. These could be small in-kind donations for food and beverages or title sponsors who would donate a significant amount to cover event expenses.

Event Promotions. Advertise events early and often and solicit the help of partners to spread the word. As soon as the venue, date and time are set, conduct an initial wave of promotions so people can get the event on their calendars. Encourage partners to use their social media and newsletters to announce. Repeat waves of promotions, with the biggest push being the week before the event in which you'll want to recruit participants as well as spectators if it's a competitive event.

List of Potential Outdoor Recreation Events

The following list offers a variety of outdoor events and programming that the SLVGO Coalition and its partners could consider hosting and/or supporting as part of their objective to inspire more outdoor recreation within the SLV.

- Fun runs
- Cross country running race
- Marathon/Half-marathon
- Triathlon / Xterra Race
- Mountain bike race
- Frozen Rio Grande Run/Walk
- Snow/Fat bike race
- Nordic races
- Sledding and hot chocolate
- Fishing derby
- Star gazing / Meteor shower meet-up
- Motocross race
- SLV stage race (for road riders, mountain bikers, or OHVs)
- Bike to Work Day
- Green street event / Cyclovia (a day when people and bikes take over a portion of a community's streets)
- Grand Fondo / road riding event
- Fishing tournaments
- Geocache contests.
- Music and art festivals
- Rodeo / competitive horse events
- Trail project days / Stewardship events
- Agritourism events (e.g., tour of local ranches and farms)
- Heritage outings / Historic hikes (e.g., interpretive tours of SLV heritage sites)
- Recreation-oriented film festivals

HOSTING RECREATION EVENTS

EVENT CHECKLIST

The following list provides simple direction for a community or group looking to host an event. The list is geared toward smaller scale events that an organization or community is looking to pull off on a limited budget.

- Choose a venue, date and time.**
Give yourself at least a month to organize, so start early. For outdoor events, check with the land managers to get permission and secure a permit if needed.
- Initiate Advertising.**
Get your event on local calendars, send out an announcement via social media channels, inform the local paper.
- Recruit Graphic Design Help.**
If possible find a volunteer to design a event announcement graphic that can be emailed around, posted on Facebook and around town, and printed in the local paper.
- Secure In-kind Donations.**
Tap the community for food and drink donations. In return for the donation, be sure to recognize the sponsors in all advertising media and thank them often. Donations for swag (aka “free stuff”) are handy too as these are items that can be given away and/or used as door/raffle prizes at the event. Be sure to keep a detailed log of all in-kind donations and follow up with receipts if the donor requests them.
- Secure Sponsorships.**
Recruit industry, local and/or corporate sponsors to assist with the event. Sponsors could provide financial, volunteer and/or media support. Be sure to keep a detailed log of all sponsors and donations and follow up with receipts if the donor requests them.
- Solicit Volunteer Help & Organize the Volunteers.**
Ask and advertise for volunteer support. Emphasize that volunteers will have fun while doing a great service for their community. Assign volunteers shifts and give them clearly defined tasks. Keep assigned volunteer shifts to 3 hours or less so people are daunted by the time commitment (typically they will stay longer if they see their help is needed). Make sure contact information (cell phone number) is included on all volunteer coordination emails. Assign a volunteer coordinator to oversee all the volunteers and to be their main point of contact.
- Event Advertising.**
Get event announcements in the local paper and distributed via social media. Post event graphics around town. Work with partners to include an event announcement in their e-newsletters. Event announcements should be posted on social media once per day for 3-4 days preceding the event.

- **Collect Supplies & Stage the Event.**

At least 1-2 days before the event, make sure you have all the needed supplies (e.g., sign up sheets, registration info, tables) organized and ready to set up on the event day. Coordinate and confirm delivery of all food and beverages vendors so that they are clear on when and where to drop off their supplies. If the event involves a race, get out on the course and clearly flag and sign the race course (be sure to re-check and be prepared to re-do some of the race flagging the morning of the race)

- **Running the Event.**

Check in with volunteers on a regular basis to make sure their questions are answered and needs are met.

- **Thank all sponsors, volunteers and participants.**

Follow up with thank you calls or emails to those that helped support the event. Also thank the participants and encourage them to stay involved in outdoor recreation in the SLV.

- **Event De-Brief.**

After the event, check in with key volunteers and jot down a list of what went well and what could be improved on next year. Also note down all event sponsors and make a note of expense/income accounting. Save this summary report in an obvious spot for future event coordinators to reference.

CASE STUDIES: Recreation Events



The Gunnison Growler is an annual fundraising mountain bike race that is hosted by and raises money for the local trails organization - Gunnison Trails. The event sells out every year and brings people from all over the state to Gunnison for the Memorial Day weekend. <http://gunnisontrails.com/gunnison-trails-events/the-original-growler/>



Community-oriented "fun runs" like Bozeman, MT's "Huffing for Stuffing" run are a great way to encourage residents to get outdoors and recreation together.



Recreation-based film screenings and film festivals are a great way to promote outdoor recreation and nurture the growth of SLV's culture of recreation.



With chapters throughout Montana, the Montana Wilderness Association supports a number of trail building projects and events throughout the summer. A free lunch goes a long way in keeping volunteers happy. <http://wildmontana.org/>



Winter Trails Day is a national event offering the public free winter outdoor sports and educational activities. Whitefish Legacy Partners coordinates a winter event that includes complimentary cross-country ski, snow shoe and "fat bike" equipment demos, family friendly wilderness skill and animal tracking activities. Events like this provide opportunities to explore the outdoors in the winter and try out a new winter sport. <http://whitefishlegacy.org/winter-trails-day-on-the-whitefish-trail/>



In Boulder, CO the rubber ducky race brings folks down to the creek while raising money as people pay \$5 to enter a ducky into the river "race". <https://bouldercolorado.gov/parksrec/expand-duck-race>



Corporate sponsors as well as in-kind donations can make hosting outdoor recreation events far more affordable for communities. The annual Fruita Fat Tire Festival is sponsored by US Bank and a number of other industry, corporate and local sponsors. <http://www.fruitamountainbike.com/>