

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue puffer jacket, an orange scarf, and blue jeans, is standing on a grassy hill. She is holding a smartphone up to take a photo of a lake and the surrounding landscape. The background features a calm lake, distant hills, and a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The woman has a black backpack on her back.

Three Ways to run a Travel Focused Photo Contest

Photo contests can be tricky! Between defining goals, guaranteeing quality submissions, and maintenance, they are easier said than done. However North Dakota Tourism has run multiple successful contests that have become a consistent part of our content strategy.

So if you're interested in trying your own, here are three different ways to try out! Our list will include step by step processes, pros and cons of each and essential tips to help your contest run smoothly.

#1

Audience Engagement Contest

Set it up for Success

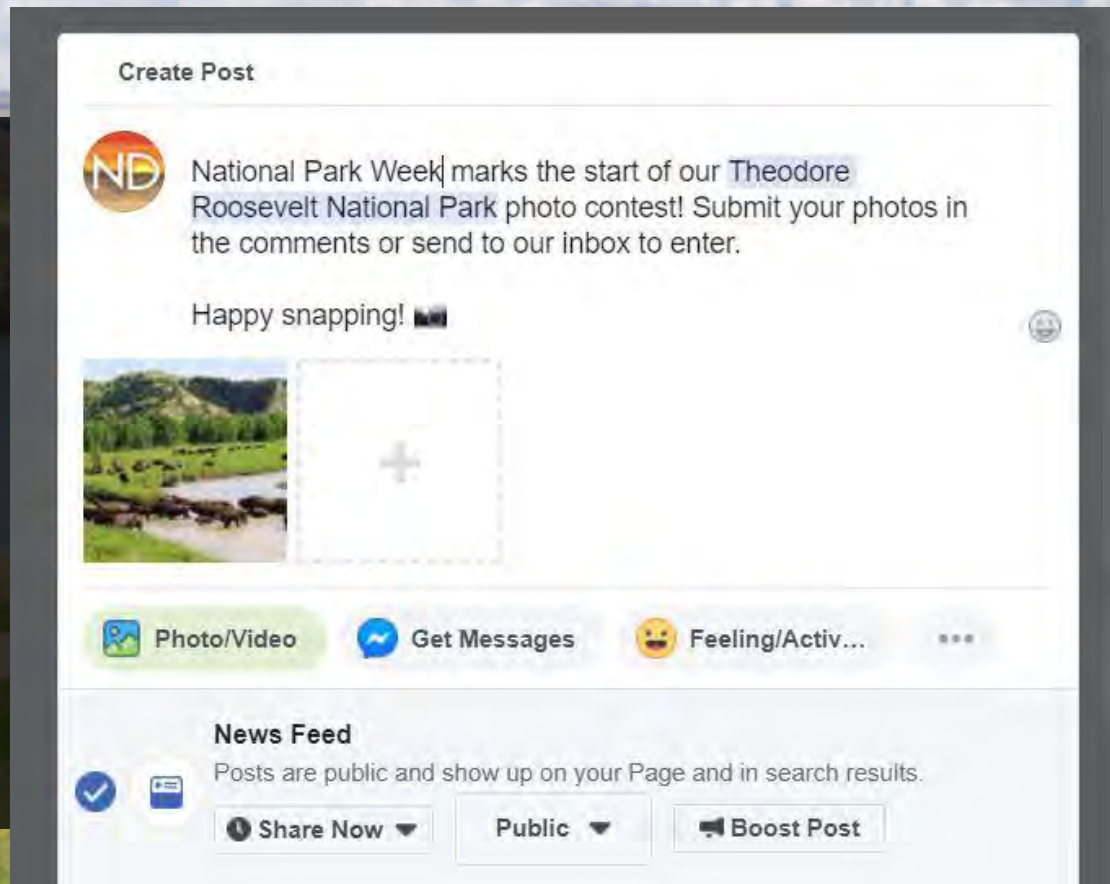
This is the most common way to run a photo contest. It is great for boosting impressions and growing your Facebook page since it's all about putting it in the hands of your audience. Here's how to do it...

1. Decide on a topic for your contest. Pick something generic or something that has performed well on your page in the past. For example, if your audience sends in or engages with wildlife photos you post, choose that as your focus. Try not to choose something too specific or a piece of content you have never tested on your page, or you'll risk getting less submissions.
2. Decide how people can submit. It is good practice to give people multiple ways to submit a photo but not give too many where it becomes hard to track. We typically ask submissions to be directly on the posts promoting the contest or be sent to the inbox to be saved in a separate library. Remember to save the names of the photographers too!
3. Decide on your prize! We'll share some ideas later in the presentation.

Tip #1.

If you would like to expand the contest to Twitter and Instagram, try also including a hashtag as a submission option. However keep in mind social platforms track hashtags differently and could make gathering submissions harder.

Promote your contest!



Post, Post, Post!

We would suggest giving yourself a week or two max to promote submissions in your contest organically. If you are accepting submissions in the comments, the more posts you have the most likely you are to get photos. Try not to overwhelm your audience though. ;)

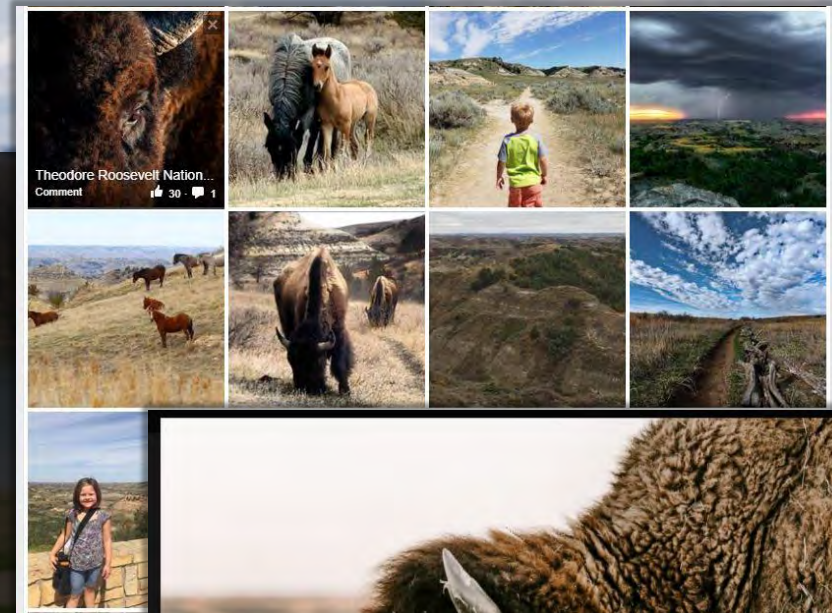
Consider a small paid promotion

Got \$25-\$50 bucks to spare? Try boosting your post or creating an ad to target local photographers letting them know about your contest. Try interests and behaviors related to the contest theme or targeting locals who have recently bought or shown interest in photography equipment/brands.

Start the voting process

Here is where the fun starts! You can either dwindle down the photos to your favorites (if you have some low-quality submissions, we suggest this being the best route), or add them all to an album and post it to your profile. Instruct your audience that likes, comments and shares can all be counted as votes on individual photos.

Continue this process by only keeping the top performing photos to the next round until you have a winner!





Pros

1. Great for boosting your audience and impressions on your main page.
2. Super helpful for gathering user-generated content for the future (if permission is granted by the photographer).

Cons

1. Can be hard to keep track of all submissions with multiple ways to enter, especially if you expand to other platforms.
2. This contest could potentially award a low-quality photo as a winner since the audience gets to choose.

#2

Group Page Photo Contest

Set it up for Success

Creating a Facebook group to run your photo contest is another route you can take. Of course creating ANOTHER social presence to manage can be intimidating but here are some potential factors to consider when deciding if this is the right route for you.

1. Consider creating a group if your contest is “off-message” from your main account. For example, if your main account is out-of-state visitor focused and you want to run a contest for locals or local tourism partners, it would be a good idea to separate the two.
2. If you’re running the contest with a partner, creating a separate page could also be an option. This way you can both have easy access to the page and can team up in managing it.
3. If you’ve never run a photo contest before and are nervous on putting it on your main page, this is a good “test-run” option since it can be a temporary account and not associated directly with your main page.

*Running a Group Page Photo Contest is similar to running an Audience Engagement Contest with the main difference being the set up.

Tip #2.

When setting up your group it is important you choose the settings to allow the right people to interact with you.

Not sure how to set up a Facebook Group? [Click Here](#)

Promote your group!



Promoting your group page organically will be similar to promoting an audience engagement contest. You can post about it from your main page, but you'll also want to prioritize engaging with your audience on the group page as it grows. Pose questions to them, ask about their photos or experiences, etc. The more interactions you have, the more Facebook will show your page to others who will potential be interested. Luckily Facebook Groups have proven to be a much more engaging platform for users since it's a more "exclusive" and intimate platform to hold conversations.

Start the voting process

Of course for a group, you can choose between your team picking a winner or letting the audience do so just like the Audience Engagement Contest. But for a group, it is typically best to let your audience do the voting since the purpose of group pages is to give the members as much ownership of the page as the creator and let them drive the conversations while you play more of a "moderator".





Pros

1. Useful option for test-running a photo contest if you never have before.
2. Great for interacting with your audience on a more personal level.
3. Easier submission process.
4. Can be a temporary page or long term depending on the success of the contest.

Cons

1. Requires you to create a new page to manage with rules and expectations for users.
2. Having a public group page means people can post whatever they want. This can be risky if you're not keeping tabs on what others are posting or how they're treating others within the group.
3. Engagements aren't going towards your main page.

Free Prize Ideas

The great part of this types of contests is they are cheap! And there are ways to give a social “prize” without any change out of pocket. Here are three free social/digital prizes.

1. Make the winning photo a month-long Facebook banner giving them credit on the photo.
2. Extend the first option into also making it a lead photo on a landing page or article on your website.
3. If they’re a professional photographer, promise them a certain number of posts promoting their other work!

#3

Governors Photo Contest

The Governor's Photo Contest is a yearly contest held to celebrate the many types of beauty North Dakota holds and local photographers. Although it is not a solely a socially driven contest, we thought it would be a good addition to understand all the different ways you can hold events such as these.



Set it up for Success

1. You'll want to give yourself a long period of time for photographers to submit, but not too long where they will forget without constant reminders or promotions. Around three months is recommended.
2. Write your contest rules.
3. Determine who is eligible. Can anyone enter, or will you keep it strictly to locals?
4. Write a usage agreement beforehand to break down how you plan to use photos that are awarded.
5. Partner with another organization that would be interested in sponsoring the event that would also get usage rights to the photos.
6. Determine your categories! Just like the other contests, choosing what your photo contest is about can be one of the hardest and most important parts. Luckily in this type of contest you can have multiple categories, but you still risk not getting enough or low-quality submissions if the theme is too specific or your audience doesn't have a high interest in it.

How to submit

Here are some additional ways you can offer entrants to send in photos outside of social. Make sure you instruct photographers to include necessary information when submitting.

1. Set up a google photos account for photographers to upload submissions.
2. Upload photo to a specific group on Flickr.
3. Mail-In Method, for the less tech-savy entrants.
4. Drop off in person (this was an option before COVID but was dropped due to safety guidelines in 2020)

[Read the full Governors Photo Contest Rulebook Here.](#)

Promote the contest!



1. Send press releases at relevant times. When the contest starts, for one final push at the end, and of course when winners are announced.
2. Set up a social schedule around how often you want to promote the contest in the upcoming months.
3. Encourage partners to also share the news on their channels.
4. Directly reach out to past or potential photographers to spread the news by word-of-mouth
5. Consider building a web page that holds all relevant information about the contest to send people to.

*Make sure to keep a close eye on the number of entrants to match your promotions to your most needed areas, such a categories that might not have a lot of submissions.

Voting Process and Prizes

Voting in this type of contest is simpler since it includes only involved partners. You review all photos and select ones that best match the written description of your categories. Once you determine category winners, you can even award a "Best in Show".

A cash prize is included in these types of contests as well as all of them being showcased in a specific locations. Preferable somewhere everyone will be able to enjoy them!





Pros

1. These contests typically bring in the most high-quality photos.
2. It encourages cooperation between partners and builds connections that can help in other initiatives in the future!
3. Broadens your photographer pool for future shoots.

Cons

1. Takes the most time and work to complete this contest.
2. Takes more people to manage all the different pieces.
3. Is the most expensive (although is helpful purchasing new photography on a budget).
4. Just defining one successful category can be difficult and this type of contest can have multiple. Choose wisely!



Just remember when it comes to these contests, the goal is to have fun! Try mixing and matching different pieces of our three examples to see what works for you. Thanks for reading and if you have any questions or anything else you would like to learn more about, please email Alicia Jolliffe at ajolliffe@nd.gov

Click on the icons below to follow North Dakota's Tourism social channels here. Use the hashtag #BeNDLegendary or tag us so we can build up North Dakota together!

