

How to host an MVOR

What is MVOR?

MVOR is the Mississippi Valley Ozark Region, an internal organization of the National Speleological Society. The Region consists of all or parts of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Wisconsin. The MVOR conducts semi-annual meetings, one in the spring (around the last weekend of April to the first weekend of May) and one in the fall (from around the last weekend of September to mid-October).

Although the acronym letters 'MVOR' stand for the region itself, the term also informally refers to the event held in conjunction with the business meeting (hence, the 'Spring MVOR' and the 'Fall MVOR').

The Purpose of the MVOR is to promote the conservation of caves within the caving community of the MVOR area of the NSS, as prescribed by the guidelines set forth by the NSS cave conservation policy, and to promote fellowship and safety among those involved.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the MVOR may be found on the region's website (www.mvor.org), and can answer many of the questions you may have about the MVOR. The website also has data about past MVORs, who hosted them and where. It also lists the contacts for the current MVOR Board, who should be able to answer further questions or refer you to someone else if necessary.

Please remember as you go through this process that you are representing the MVOR as a whole (Board and Membership) and to take care to maintain our good name and reputation.

Making the bid

If you decide to bid on a MVOR, it is suggested you send a written (or e-mail) notice to the MVOR Regional President and a copy to the MVOR Secretary. Express your intentions as to where and when you plan to host an MVOR (this may give you a jump on other bidders at an MVOR Business Meeting). Be prepared to attend the business meeting in person to formally place your bid before the membership and answer questions about your proposed MVOR.

If there were no bids taken at the MVOR business meeting, the MVOR Regional Officers then decide who receives the MVOR sponsorship (rather than the MVOR members).

Picking a campground

The first thing a potential host for MVOR must do is locate a campground in a caving area and negotiate a price. The campground can vary from a hot and sunny primitive cow pasture to a commercial facility

with shade and luxuries such as flush toilets and hot showers. Other considerations are detailed in the paragraphs below.

'Commercial' campgrounds

The biggest problem of locating a campground is knowing where to look and finding the owner if he does not reside on the property. Some facilities to consider might include commercial campgrounds, private resorts, sport clubs, fishing clubs, Boy Scout camps, Lion's Club camps (or other fraternal organizations), fair grounds, etc. Although you can look-up phone numbers and addresses on the Internet or in the phone book, it's almost always better to negotiate in-person. Private clubs and resorts may operate on a tight budget and welcome the opportunity for unexpected revenue like a caver campout. Such facilities may be closed for the season and difficult to contact, but they're worth checking out (--it may be what you need, at the least cost). Good luck!

Negotiating with a campground

Be sure to assign someone who is a good negotiator to do your bargaining with a campground. Your negotiator should point out to the campground owner the many aspects in favor of hosting an MVOR event. MVORs do not interfere with the tourist season, for one. If the price you pay the campground owner is based on attendance, you can guarantee the owner he will have at least 200 people. His alternative on such a weekend is that the campground may otherwise have none.

A campground owner frequently has a restaurant, grocery store, canoe rental, or horseback riding for which cavers will spend money. Accordingly, you should point out to the owner that what he feels he may lose in campground fees, he will probably more than make up with the restaurant, grocery store, canoe or horse rental.

Tell the owner you are going to provide for him free advertising of the campground and accommodations in the MVOR flyer throughout at least ten states. In addition, if attendees become familiar with the campground and enjoy the accommodations, they may return on their own in the future with friends. The idea is to point out to a campground owner what he stands to gain by having the MVOR in his campground as well as what he stands to lose if the MVOR is held elsewhere.

Campground costs

The campground owner will have costs, too. You can help keep his costs down by assuring him you will clean the campground and leave it spotless if he provides a dumpster. In fact, he may go for the idea if you and your caver-volunteers assume the usual chores of the campground (trash pickup, firewood distribution, restroom maintenance). Point out to him that MVOR is a conservation organization and not the usual indifferent campground visitor. It may help you to keep the campground clean by including in the MVOR flyer and Guidebook messages asking people to clean up after themselves. Some of the newer members may need this extra little nudge.

Helping the owner with some of the chores, such as cutting the grass and gathering firewood, may also bring him around to your way of thinking. Of course he will not have to deal with collecting fees or registering the members as you will do it and pay a lump sum.

After you have secured your campground, it's a good idea to have an alternate campground in case the primary location has a flood, inaccessibility due to a washed-out bridge or sustains damage from a fire. All these scenarios have occurred with previous MVORs!

'Primitive' campgrounds

Primitive campgrounds, such as a cow pasture, have no facilities, roads, running water, toilets or showers. They tend to have a limited amount or no shade and are usually on private property. Some believe this can be bad or good. But with a little hard work, mostly on your part, many of those problems can be solved. Many past MVOR sponsors have thought that free primitive camping in a farmer's field was the least expensive way of obtaining a campground. But this is not always true. You must consider whether damages will have to be paid if it rains and the farmer's field is torn up by ruts made from people try people trying to get in and out (it happened!). If vehicles get stuck, who is going to pay to get them out? You also must look at the costs of moving fences, adding gates and renting portable toilets.

Despite the obstacles, choosing a low-cost primitive campground might enable you as the host to provide some other (more costly) feature or amenity that you'd like to provide or showcase for attendees.

Setting a date

Please inform the MVOR Regional Board what the date of the MVOR will be as soon as possible so they can pass along the information to potential attendees via the Internet (Mocaves, MVOR discussion board) and for those who make inquiries. You should avoid picking dates that conflict with other NSS caving activities (published in the NSS News) and certain other dates.

You will lose participation in your event if you pick Mother's Day weekend, Easter weekend, Memorial Day weekend, and Labor Day weekend. The Kentucky Speleofest is always held on Memorial Day weekend. Old Timer's Reunion is held on Labor Day weekend. Many college students have remarked that if school was not in session, they would use the opportunity to go home rather than attend MVOR. It may also be wise to pick a date two weeks before final exams. It's important to not pick the wrong dates and avoid forcing cavers to choose between events (instead of allowing them the opportunity to attend all). Historically, the dates have been around the last weekend in April until first weekend in May (for Spring MVOR) and the from the last weekends of September until the middle of October (for Fall MVOR).

Money/checking account

We suggest starting a separate checking account for your MVOR funds. Several previous MVOR sponsors have confirmed that it may save you many headaches if you start a separate checking account rather than using an existing personal or grotto account. You will need a checking account not only to write checks but also to cash checks that you receive from registration. Check with your bank on how much time they will need to have a check clear in order to prevent being stuck with a bad check. Some banks will give you a free account if you are a nonprofit organization.

Loans available

If you need a monetary loan from the MVOR Region in order to initially finance and sponsor your event, you must contact the Regional Treasurer. Send him a short letter stating how much you need to borrow, to whom the check is to be made out (your appointed treasurer) and to what address it is to be sent. Loans from the MVOR Region normally are not made more than six weeks in advance of the MVOR event. Please be advised the MVOR makes loans that must be repaid, not grants. Loans must be repaid within six weeks following the MVOR.

Portable toilets

The number of units will depend on the number of people expected to attend the MVOR and the type of site that you get. The toilets also must be pumped-out before Saturday night activities. Some commercial campgrounds will put this in their contract for the weekend, but make sure that it includes a pump-out. But whether you go with a commercial campground or a field it is suggested that you purchase a case of toilet paper to restock the toilets overnight (--for this will make for Happy Campers in the morning!). One manufacturer tells us that a portable toilet is good for 200 uses within a 4-hour period (for a group that is 50-percent male and female).

Banquet

A banquet is not a 'must' like a campground is, but most cavers have come to expect and appreciate a good hearty meal after a hard day of caving. Sometimes the campground has a kitchen facility on site and can also cater the banquet. Sometimes a caver will take the responsibility for the meal, or an outside entity can be used.

Sometimes church or school-related organizations will be interested in gaining income by contracting to provide the banquet. Examples include St. Ann Sodality, Knights of Columbus and PTA and athletic associations. Phone or contact the church pastor to obtain phone numbers or addresses.

Other organizations you may wish to contact about a banquet include the American Legion, the local V.F.W. Post, Lions Club, Rotary Club, Eagles, Moose Lodge (and ladies auxiliary of each), etc.

It is highly recommended, for 'flow' of the weekend, that the Banquet be on-site. It can become a big headache should the banquet be located far away.

MVOR Business meeting

Since we are all at the MVOR for the Business meeting, and since it generally is held after the banquet, carefully consider the banquet location and that it be able to accommodate everyone who attends your MVOR.

It is also nice to have some lights in the area so that the board can see the membership to count votes and conduct business. In the Spring there is usually enough natural light in the early evening for the business meeting. But in the Fall, when it gets dark earlier, and the Board is holding elections, light become very important. Also, a sound system is helpful so everyone can hear the proceedings. There have been previous MVORs when the business meeting has been held on Sunday mornings rather than Saturday evening, but this is discouraged due to the low attendance.

One way to encourage attendance to the business meeting is to hold the drawing for door prizes immediately following the meeting. (see section on Vendors)

Registration flyer information

The Host Organization should e-mail a copy of the flyer to the MVOR President and Secretary at least two months in advance of the MVOR date in order to insure the information reaches the individual MVOR members in time. The MVOR board secretary is responsible for mailing the flyer (the MVOR pays the postage). The flyers sent to MVOR members must be mailed no later than 30 days in advance of the MVOR. It has been shown that mailing the flyer to individuals six weeks before the MVOR is ideal, as it meets the 30-day deadline as set by the by-laws and is not so far in advance that the members tend to forget about the event. Your MVOR Secretary will have to have time to print and fold the flyer, make and install address labels, and stamp the flyer and get it in the mail in time.

The MVOR Flyer should be on a single sheet (8-1/2 x 11 or 8-1/2 x 14). Items that must be on the flyer include the address label, the MVOR Minutes from the last business meeting, the preregistration form for the Host Grotto, a map and directions to the site. Make sure that directions and other important information on the MVOR is not printed on the back of the preregistration form, which the people will be returning. You will need to contact the MVOR secretary for a copy of the MVOR Minutes. Preregistration sales of t-shirts tends to improve if the t-shirt logo is printed in the flyer. Also include any regulations (no firearms, no fireworks, no open fires) imposed by the MVOR site or the Hosts. The MVOR Region does not use envelopes to mail the MVOR flyer (it's an additional cost and is time-consuming).

When figuring out the cost of your MVOR registration, please keep in mind that the MVOR will collect \$1.50 per Adult registration for dues. So make sure that is included in the final registration price.

Late fees: It has been typical to add late fees to registration at the gate in order to promote pre-registration. Also extra fees are tacked onto t-shirts, banquets and other services that otherwise are paid for at the gate. It is ultimately up to the host whether to add additional fees. These are not mandated.

Pre-registration

This is a very important job that can make or break your MVOR. You will need someone to collect the registration slips and money and keep an accurate account of who and how much. Past experience has shown that two-thirds of MVOR attendees will pre-register. Ultimately, this is a good way to gauge how many people will be attending and how much other stuff to have on hand.

Registration

At the MVOR you will have to set up an on-site registration booth. Everyone who attends MVOR is required to complete a registration slip. Remember to have other things on hand like extra registration slips, money, a money box, pens (to fill out the forms), markers, blank paper for signs in the booth, hangers for shirts and assembled pre-registration packets.

At registration, ask the pre-registrant to check and make sure the address on the registration slip is still current and that all items are there. A copy of the pre-registration form typically is attached to a large envelope which contains all of the items a person had ordered through pre-registration.

Also, some events require a liability release from each attendee, including children. All children (that is, anyone under age 18) must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

A full record of registration will be given to the MVOR Secretary after the event is over. This is how we maintain the mailing list for the next MVOR.

T-shirts

It is customary for the host to provide t-shirts/sweat shirts for sale for the event.

100% heavyweight shirts from a reliable manufacturer (Hanes/Gildan) provide the best value for the money spent. 50/50 cotton/poly shirts are cheap, but not durable.

Once all shirt details are selected, the order should be put out to bid to at least three vendors (unless you have a suitable preferred vendor).

In order to provide a reasonable bid, the vendor must know the shirt details, the approximate quantity and pickup date. Vendors will often "cut a deal" on other items such as caps, bandanas, coolies or other items if they are awarded the shirt order. The MVOR shirt committee should see vendor samples before providing details for a bid.

Style(s): The committee should decide what styles of shirts will be offered before deciding on the artwork as shirt style will affect the design of latter. The basic T, long-sleeved T, Henley (3-button long underwear style) and sweatshirt have been offered; these are listed in increasing price order. Extras of basic or long-sleeved Ts are customarily provided; Henleys or sweats by preorder only.

Colors and artwork: Light-colored shirts sell better than dark colored shirts, and are cheaper to print. Be aware that ink and shirt colors need to be compatible: dark ink on dark shirt doesn't work. Printing on dark shirts requires a white underprint unless the ink is light-colored. Special inks (glow in the dark, shiny, non-standard colors) are more expensive than standard ink. Digital transfer or airbrush are the cheapest way to go for multiple colors; consult vendor to see if they offer this.

For best result use vector art (Adobe Illustrator, CorelDraw, SVG, WMF) or black and white original drawings. Let the vendor scan original art. If you must use raster (bitmap), art must be at a resolution of 300 ppi or greater at the finished size. TIF or BMP format is far superior to any jpeg bitmap art.

Shirts should be completed and delivered to the MVOR host a minimum of a week in advance of the event. This gives the vendor a little slop time for emergencies beyond his/her control.

As a rule of thumb, shirts should be provided in S-M-L-XL and 2XL sizes. Other sizes by special order only. A 20 to 30% overrun in excess of preorders should cover walk-ins without excessive overprinting.

MVOR staff members often are given an easily identifiable shirt.

Signage

Be sure and place MVOR signs in a location where they are clearly visible. In general, signs should be placed at the entrance of the MVOR site, at major intersections and confusing turns along routes approaching the MVOR. They must also be placed in time for early arrivers to the site (Wed evening or Thur morning), not on Friday afternoon.

Guidebook

Having a Guidebook is not mandatory, although most MVORs in the last 20 years have had one. (One statement the MVOR Region would urge you to print in the MVOR Flyer and Guidebook is "FIREWORKS AND FIREARMS ARE STRICTLY FORBIDDEN." This is a rule that goes way back. Although there have been no human injuries, damage to property and livestock/pets have occurred.)

Guidebooks typically contain maps to locations of area attractions, gas stations, hospitals, restaurants and grocery stores. Also included can be local history, geology, caves and other karst fun.

Quiet camping versus loud camping

When choosing/developing your campground, please consider that some people would like a quiet area in which to camp. Please place some signage in the camp designating the quite area. This should be away from most of the evening's activities that could make a ruckus. This could make your weekend more pleasant. Likewise, designating the Loud Area would be a good idea too.

RV Campers

Be sure to print in the flyer whether it is not advisable to bring RV camper vehicles. If the road to the site is “bad” you would want to post that too. If there are a limited number of “electric” sites, it would be advised to give them to the vendors, followed by the first pre-registrants. RV sites should be by pre-registration only.

Vendors

Make sure that you contact your many Speleo-Vendors as soon as you have a date picked so they can plan to attend. Typically, vendors are not charged registration or electric fees, but they should pay for any t-shirts, banquets and other extras. Vendor attendance could help attendance to your MVOR event.

Vendors usually donate door prizes in lieu of payment for ad space in the Guidebook.

Security

Security at your MVOR may vary from other events. The primary function is to make sure that only registered guests are in the campground. Your security detail could be made up of cavers, or you can hire a security guard for the night. See Chapter VI of the MVOR's Bylaws as to dealing with unruly attendees. Try very hard to keep the local police out of our private event.

With the constant influx of vehicles to the campground, easily-recognizable parking passes, affixed to the rear-view mirror, will aid registration personnel in determining whether a vehicle and its passengers already have registered for the event.

Bonfire

Saturday night traditionally has a Bonfire. The purpose is to promote fellowship within the group. Please make sure that your fire is safe to stand around. Be sure to mark the surrounding area as “no camping” so there are no charred tents from stray embers or soot. Sometimes the campground will help you with your fire, or you might have to get your own wood. Contact sawmills in the area for prices on delivery of wood. It is a good idea to place the fire centrally to keep everyone together.

Cave trips and other karst fun

If you will be having cave trips at your MVOR you will need to have a designated time and place for sign-ups. All cave trips should follow recognized conservation and safety techniques. You can also have self-led trips to area attractions that could be written-up in the guidebook or to separately hand out that weekend. Other attractions could include: springs, rivers, canoe trips, geology, mines, sinkholes and other Karst Fun. As of this writing, White Nose Syndrome protocols are very important. A decontamination station should be provided, along with a document advising approved techniques.

First Aid

A first-aid station is not required to be set up all weekend. But, in case of emergency, it is advisable to know where to take a patient. Having just a first-aid kit on hand could help most problems. If the area does not have 911 service, make sure that the numbers are posted and/or in the guide book, as well as how to make a call out if there is no cell service.

Frills

There are many frills that can add to the enjoyment of a MVOR. Although none is required, many have become tradition. Here is a list:

Howdy party - Friday night party is held early evening, usually simple with hot dogs and soda, free to all registered.

Beer cups - Cups are sold if you are having a beer wagon. Be aware of your local liquor laws and underage drinking.

Bandanas - Bandanas are sometimes make available in addition to t-shirts, for a cost.

Bands/DJ - Bands can make or break you. It can be a draw to the weekend or it could be costly. It is better to get a quality band over just some guy you know. A good live band will be more entertaining than a DJ. And make sure that you have a signed contract (should the Beatles break up).

Consideration must be made to music type versus the group you're playing to. If in doubt, don't do it!! Although a grotto member's friends or a heavy-metal band might offer to play for free, their music may not be well-received by MVOR attendees (this happened!). Experience has shown that a band playing a well-rounded blend of music (like the 'Terminal Siphons') will be appreciated by the most cavers.

While the cost of a band may be significant part of your budget, it may be an amenity that will make your MVOR memorable for years to come.

Winery trips - If you have a winery trip, you may want to rent a bus to get people to and from the trip safely. This will become an extra cost to the weekend so it should be with the pre-registration and probably limited to the capacity of the bus.

Patches - Patches are sometimes done in addition with t-shirts, for a cost.

Fireworks - If you are going to have fireworks at your MVOR, please make sure that everyone knows that they are going to happen. They should be professionally ignited so that safety is paramount. We do not want burned down tents, singed dogs in other counties, dead turkeys and injured cavers.

Guest speakers - If you are going to get a guest speaker, make sure you take care of him and give the utmost respect. Make sure you schedule the speaker at a time when nothing else is going on in the campground as to provide full attention. Complimentary registration and banquet are the typical gratuities to a speaker.

Sauna / hot tub - Facilities usually are brought by a third party, but you will need to provide water as well as wood (or propane) for the fire. You also may have to deal with waste disposal after the weekend is over. Another good idea is to make sure that the hot tub or sauna is located in a more private area due to the fact that it is 'clothing optional'. Plastic sheeting may also be appropriate to shield the area from public view. Make sure that there are signs to warn others of NEKKID FOLKS.

'Bare minimum' MVOR

So what do you think it takes to put on a Bare Minimum MVOR? Not much. You will need: Meeting space, a campground that is not weather-dependent, Porta-johns, trash pick-up, registration and security.

MVOR committee structure

It has been said that 'organized caving' is an oxymoron. Indeed, caving attracts strong personalities, and getting a group of cavers all headed in the same direction to accomplish a common goal can be akin to herding cats. Sizes and complexities of MVOR's vary greatly and so can the committee structure used to organize and put on one. Regardless of the size there are several things that should be common to all groups that are hosting a successful MVOR:

1. There should be a single MVOR Committee Chair. Co-chairs have been done (see below), but it is useful to have at least one person who is aware of everything going on and who can keep the 'big picture' in focus.
2. There should be a Vice-Chair (or Co-chair) who can take over for the Chair should anything prevent the Chair from performing some of his/her duties. This person should also be concentrating on the big picture.

The various functions necessary to produce an MVOR can be divided many ways amongst many different subcommittees. Although the following may be subdivided into multiple committees, but at the minimum you will need these:

3. Treasury Subcommittee. While one primary Treasurer may be desirable for handling the money and imposing spending discipline, there should be at least two signatures on any bank account so that the entire MVOR does not hinge on a single individual. This is similar to the Chair and Vice-Chair. This subcommittee is responsible for receiving and dispersing all funds, including the membership fees to the MVOR Treasurer after everything is over.
4. Registration Subcommittee. The duties are to track everyone registering for the MVOR; seeing to it that registration fees are passed to the Treasury Subcommittee in a timely manner; tracking things like t-shirt purchases, banquet tickets, etc.; (security) ensuring that only those properly registered are allowed on site; and providing the list of registrants to the MVOR Secretary after everything is over.
5. Facilities Subcommittee. The duties are to arrange for the campground, porta-potties, potable water, MVOR meeting space, etc.

6. Guidebook Subcommittee (optional). The duties are to gather cave trip descriptions, articles, and advertisements for the MVOR guidebook if one is produced.

A few basic rules should be followed to see that everything runs smoothly.

- a. A budget should be written early on and approved by the entire MVOR Committee. Although this may have to be frequently adjusted, it should be strictly adhered to with no changes implemented before adjustments have been approved.
- b. Once the budget is approved, the entire MVOR Committee should set a maximum dollar amount for routine expenditures. As long as they stay within budget, the various subcommittees would have the authority and freedom to spend up to this amount on any single purchase without prior approval (see below).
- c. Major expenditures and the signing of contracts (i.e. for the campground, porta-potties, band, catering, etc.) should not be entered into, even by the MVOR Chair, without the advice and prior formal approval of the entire committee.
- d. Once the various subcommittees have been established and their responsibilities set, no one should undertake to perform the duties of a subcommittee of which that person is not a member. Anyone who has a good idea or knows of useful resources should bring it to the attention of the appropriate subcommittee. This avoids duplication of effort and working at cross-purposes.
- e. Subcommittee members should keep their subcommittee chair informed of their progress with assigned tasks. Furthermore, if a duty or task is not being completed, it should be formally assigned to different individual(s).
- f. The entire MVOR Committee should meet regularly, with the frequency of meetings increasing as the date of the MVOR approaches. Every subcommittee should make a formal report at each meeting.

Addenda

This document is a 'work in progress' is subject to future updates. If you feel that there is an area in need of updating, please write something up and then inform the Board.

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