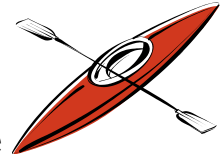


Kayak/Canoe Rental Business Startup Guide



Paddling is one of the fastest growing forms of outdoor recreation in the U.S. Ample opportunities exist for canoeing and kayaking along the upper and middle Monongahela River but there is currently only one rental operation on this stretch of river. The paddling trips organized by the River Town Program in 2012 and 2013 attracted close to 200 participants, many from the Pittsburgh and Morgantown areas, and nearly half of these paddlers rented equipment.

A rental business can range from one person renting kayaks and canoes along the river to a full-service outfitter offering shuttles, guide service, equipment sales, and even a bar or restaurant. If you have ever thought about starting your own rental business, here are some things to keep in mind, as well as contacts for the Mon River Towns.

What You Need to Know Before You Start:

- Understand that this is a lifestyle business, which means your main motivation should be a passion for outdoor recreation and a desire to help grow the community, rather than profit.
- A kayak/canoe rental business on the Mon is not likely to be your primary source of income. It is a seasonal business and you will likely need to have another source of income from Labor Day to Memorial Day.
- You will need cash and/or financing for the upfront expenses; you will likely have to be patient to achieve a modest income from this entrepreneurial venture.
- A kayak/canoe startup rental business is risky; we advise working with municipalities or community organizations to identify public-private partnerships that already exist within the community. For example, is there space in a public park that already has restrooms and/or other amenities, where a kayak/canoe rental could be set up?
- According to our market research, a successful rental business on the Mon should concentrate on attracting weekend/holiday and school-group markets.

Location

- It is suggested that a kayak/canoe rental operation form a partnership with an existing riverfront business or a municipality or community organization, rather than starting alone.
- Access to restrooms-- It is best if you can find existing restrooms to use. Portable toilets can work, but it is better if there is running water for washing up and enough room for a customer to change clothes.
- Storage-- Boats can be stored outside in season. If you have space on your personal property to store boats in the offseason you can avoid paying for a building for boat storage.
- You will need adequate storage space for life jackets and paddles. Life jackets should be hung with adequate airflow to keep them clean and dry.

Permits, Certifications, and Insurance

- Non-motorized boats do not require a state license unless you plan to use PA Fish & Boat launches. Cost per boat is \$10/year or \$18/two-year license.

- Safety Certification-- If you have staff, they should have, at a minimum, First Aid and CPR certification. Staff who will be on the water with participants should be trained in “boat over boat” rescue, so that they can flip a capsized canoe or kayak back over and help the paddler to get back in, all from their own boat.
- Other certifications include the PA Boater Safety Course, which is only required for fishing guides but provides useful on-the-water training, and the PA Water Rescue Certification, which is more targeted towards firefighters and first responders.
- Insurance-- It is absolutely imperative that you consult with an insurance agent who is familiar with outfitters and rental operations, to be sure you are adequately protected. Some insurance brokers specialize in outfitter insurance. One example is [Thompson Gusick Insurance Group](#). [American Outdoors](#) also provides information on liability and insurance for outfitters.
- Waivers-- You will need to develop a waiver for customers to sign, releasing you of liability for not only using your equipment but also riding on your shuttle, should you choose to shuttle clients. [Sample waiver](#).

Staffing Needs

- When determining how many staff you will need, consider the following tasks:
 - Reservations/trip planning
 - Guest services/equipment check out and return
 - Shuttle Drivers (if applicable)
 - Trip guides (if applicable)
 - Bookkeeping/office work
 - Equipment cleaning and maintenance

Transportation

- You can choose to offer a shuttle or allow people to paddle out and back. A shuttle is often a popular feature, as it allows customers to avoid paddling upstream.
- Only shuttle once. Either drive paddlers to the put-in and have them paddle back your location or have them paddle from your business and provide a shuttle at the end of trip back to the start.
- Consult with Federal DOT and Penn DOT to be sure you have all relevant licenses and certification.

Setting up a Business

- You will need to create a business plan to qualify for any loans. A template can be found [here](#).
- You will need to register with the [IRS](#) to receive an Employer Identification Number (EIN). Once you have the EIN, you can open a bank account in the business name.
- You will need to secure a Sales Tax license from the municipality.
- For any new business, resources are available through the local Small Business Development Center. Find your local Center [here](#).
- Local banks may be unwilling to finance a kayak/canoe rental start-up, but loans can be secured through the [PA Small Business Administration](#).
- For assistance starting a business in Fayette County, talk to the [Fay Penn Economic Development Council](#).
- Also, you can get special rates if you are opening your business in a [Blueprint Community](#). Locally, Brownsville is a Blueprint Community.

- [The Progress Fund](#) has helped the successful Wilderness Voyageurs outfitter on the Youghiogheny, and is a great place to start for startup advice and funding.

Equipment

- Buy Used!
- [America Outdoors](#) is a good source of equipment referrals, as well as buying and selling used equipment.
- Offer single kayaks, tandem kayaks, and/or canoes. One paddle per person.
- Most people will prefer sit-in kayaks, rather than sit on-top. Make sure you buy a variety of lengths and widths for both kayaks and canoes.
- Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) in different sizes to accommodate all paddlers. PFDs do expire over time, so be sure to replace as needed.
- PFDs will need to be cleaned occasionally to prevent odor and mold or mildew. You will also need a space, preferably with a floor drain, for cleaning and a space to hang the PFDs to dry.
- Remember that your business will also need office supplies, including clipboards, a computer, pens and paper, phones, and a cash register or a “Square” that works with your iPhone or iPad.
- You may also need internet access, accounting software, and IT support.

Contacts

All of the Mon River Towns have space that would be appropriate for a rental operation. There is an operating kayak/paddleboard rental operation, [Northeast Paddleboard Company](#), at Greene Cove Marina near Fredericktown.

To learn more about the opportunities in these towns, contact the following community leaders:

- **Point Marion-** Vicky Evans, Parks Commission, 304-285-1529
- **Greensboro-** Darlene Garrett, Elm Street Program Manager, 724-943-3612
- **Rices Landing-** Ryan Belski, Mayor, 724-785-8477
- **Fredericktown-** Dennis Slagle, Fredericktown Area Chamber of Commerce, 724-377-0881
- **Brownsville-** Norma Ryan – Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation, 724-785-9331
- **California-** Kelly Hunt, [Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership](#), 724-938-5663
- **Charleroi-** Donn Henderson, Borough Manager, 724-483-6011
- **Monongahela-** Claudia Williams, Borough Council, cjwilliams15063@verizon.net

This information is provided by the River Town Program as a general guide, and is not an exhaustive list. When starting any business, it is the sole responsibility of the owner to ensure that all legal, safety, and insurance requirements are met.

