



2026 J.W. & Vertielee Floyd Memorial Old Time
Fiddlers' Contest
Arizona State Championship – Payson, Arizona



2026 Fiddle Festival Rules

Registration

All fiddlers entering this contest must be legal residents of Arizona for at least 6 months immediately prior to the contest and be able to provide proof, if questions arise. Registration will be accepted online at www.paysonparks.com from Monday July 6th, 2026, to Wednesday September 30th, 2026 at 11:59pm. Registration in person will start at 8am on October 3rd at the Mazatzal Casino Event Center and Ballroom. Contestants must be present to draw for order of appearance at check in. Contestants must complete a W9 at check in. Contestants will not be allowed to compete without it. Please have your social security number handy to help check-in move steadily. Contestants are responsible for being on stage, ready to perform, at the appointed time. Failure to appear can result in forfeiture of entry fee. Registration signature by the contestant, and/or parent/guardian, acknowledges such photo/video/recording rights and acceptance of all rules and regulations of the contest. Entry fees will not be refunded.

General

Contestants are responsible for being on stage, ready to perform, at the appointed time. Failure to appear can result in forfeiture of entry fee. Contact microphones, amplified instruments, and music stands are not permitted. Acoustic instruments only in all competitive categories. No tune may be played more than once by the same contestant during all divisions of the fiddle contest or band competition, if applicable. Repeating tunes or unqualified tunes may result in disqualification. For inexperienced fiddlers, repeating a tune does not automatically result in disqualification this will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the judges and the event coordinator. If a contestant is uncertain whether a tune qualifies, he/she may submit the title in writing to the Contest Committee/Staff for verification by the judges. The submittal will need to happen prior to the contestant playing the tune on stage. If a string breaks, the fiddler may continue or stop. If the tune is complete, it will be judged as played. If the fiddler stops, he/she will be allowed to begin with that tune and complete his/her program. The five-minute time limit will be appropriately adjusted to the start of that time. Fiddlers may play without an accompanist, or with not more than four. Accompanists must be listed by the contestant. Scores will be entered on a form provided to the judges. The scoring method will be at the discretion of the judges and decided, and agreed upon, by the judges before the event. In the case of a tie, a playoff will be at the discretion of the judges. Tunes played in the playoff must not have been played prior in the category by the contestant unless the fiddler is deemed inexperienced by the judges and the Event Coordinator. All decisions by the judges are final. Any questions or concerns will need to be communicated with the Town of Payson Special Event Coordinator. Any protest must be submitted in writing to the Event Coordinator and signed by no fewer than three contestants within one hour of the occurrence. Songs, material, and dress must be appropriate for this family entertainment event. Any contestant that appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be disqualified, and all registration fees and/or prize money will be forfeited. If any contestant is acting in an unsportsmanlike manner to other participants, volunteers, or staff, they will be disqualified at the discretion of the coordinator, and all registration fees and/or prize money will be forfeited. Contestants must be ready and in the staging area at the beginning of the contest. Contestants must remain in the staging area throughout their category. If a playoff is required and a contestant is not present, the award will go to the other contestant. Once a division begins, the previous division is officially closed. The Town of Payson has the right to cancel this event (on or before contest day). If canceled due to COVID, low participation, or venue/facility availability, registered participants will be refunded.

Fiddle Rules: Contestants must play in order (1) a hoedown tune, (2) waltz, and (3) tune of choice, other than a hoedown or a waltz.

Five-minute time limit will be enforced after the contestant begins playing. Ten points will be deducted from the total score for each 30 second interval over, or portion thereof. (I.E., a 10-point deduction is assessed at 5:01. An additional 10 points will be deducted at 5:31, and so on at each subsequent 30-second interval).

No trick or fancy fiddling, or cross tuning, is allowed in these divisions.



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If a large number of contestants sign up for any age division that division may be asked to play only a hoedown and a waltz. They would then have a three-minute time limit and the top four would be eligible for the Championship Division. Members of the Payson Old Time Fiddle & Acoustic Celebration Organizing Committee and/or Festival directors, and employees of the Town of Payson Parks and Recreation Dept. are not allowed to compete.

Championship Division

The top 15 scoring fiddlers, plus the top 3 from each age division are eligible, but not required to enter the Championship Division. A list of eligible fiddlers will be posted at the end of divisional rounds.

Scores from the age division competition will not be added to the score a fiddler receives in the Championship Division. The first round of the Championship Division will narrow the contestants down to the top seven. The top seven scoring fiddlers will then play the second round. A five-minute time limit will be enforced for both rounds. Round one and round two scores of the Championship Division will be added together to determine the winners. After a third win as State Champion, a fiddler will be retired for the following year before being eligible to compete in any age specific division of the state contest again.

Specialty Divisions

Twin Fiddle

i. One entry per fiddler in this division. One slow tune and one fast tune within a five-minute time limit. Up to two accompanists are allowed for each pair of contestants. Must be at least two teams entered or division is canceled.

Trick Fiddle

i. Trick Fiddle Division is for those who wish to hold their fiddle or bow in unusual positions, and/or perform a special trick while playing. Three-minute time limit. Must be at least two contestants entered per division, or division is canceled.

Open Talent

i. Open Talent is a free division for those who wish to "show off." This division is open to all instruments (vocal or not) and talents of an entertainment capacity. A five-minute time limit will be enforced. Must be at least two contestants entered or division is canceled.



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2026 Fiddle Festival Schedule

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Saturday, October 3rd, 2026

Location: Mazatzal Hotel and Casino and Payson Event Center

8:00am Registration at the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino Ballroom

9:00 am

Contest Kick off - Introductions

9:05 am

National Anthem

9:10 am

Small Fry Division, Junior Junior Division, Junior Division

10/15-minute break

Awards Announcement/Tie Breaker for Small Fry, Junior Junior, Junior Divisions

10:30

Young Adult, Senior, and Adult Divisions

Awards Announcement/Tie Breaker for Young Adult, Senior, and Adult Divisions

12:30-1:30 pm

LUNCH BREAK

1:30pm

Grand Champion Division Round 1

2:45 pm

Open Talent Division

3:15 pm

Grand Champion Division Round 2

10/15-minute break for scoring

Award Announcement – Top 2 scores will do a face off on stage during Headliner concert at the Payson Event Center @ 8pm

4:45 pm Twin Competition

5:00 pm Trick Competition

5:15 pm Band Competition

6:30 pm

Closing Remarks

Fiddlers Jam (if time allows)

Spectators will be allowed to clap after the contestant performs their entire set list.

Divisions and Competition categories may appear earlier or later than the time expressed on the schedule based on participation. Schedule subject to change based on participation. Times above are not guaranteed.



2026 Ben Sandoval Memorial Fiddle-In Band Contest



This contest is intended to enhance the overall festival experience as well as provide further craft honing and showcase opportunities for the fiddlers and other musicians/performers. The *Payson "Fiddle-in" Acoustic Band Competition* will once again be intermingled into the 56th Old Time Fiddle & Acoustic Celebration and will be open to the first six bands to register.

Fiddlers from the Band competition are eligible to compete in the AZ State Fiddlers Championships, if they are Arizona residents and otherwise eligible; they are not required to do so and are not required to be Arizona residents.

Prize: Winners of the 2026 Band Competition will receive \$1000.

1. Registration: Entry in the *Payson Fiddle-in Band Competition* is on a first-come, first-served basis and will be **limited to six bands**. Minimum of three bands required for contest to proceed. Entry fee is \$30.00 for each band. Registration will be available online prior to the event or **in** person on the contest day. Bands will have to complete the registration/release form listing all members during the registration process. The \$30 registration fee is fully refundable if you notify us that you need to withdraw before September 30th, 2026.

Upon registration bands will draw for their place in the lineup, review the rules, and ask any questions pertaining to judging. Contestants must be present and ready to perform at their scheduled time, or they will be disqualified. Contestants must remain available in the area in case, of a tie. If a playoff is required and a contestant band is not present, the award will go to the other competitor.

2. Contest procedures: Each band is allotted up to 15 minutes stage time. Stage time begins immediately **after** the emcee introduces the group. Your score will suffer an automatic 5% reduction if you exceed this time frame. Talking between songs is allowed and encouraged, since it reflects a band's rapport with the audience.

Winners of the band contest will be announced by the conclusion of Friday night's festivities.

Accidents beyond the control of the contestant (such as string breakage, etc.) may happen during your performance, just as in any performance. The band will be expected to improvise, recover, and complete the performance within the 15-minute time frame. No time extensions or "re-dos" will be granted for mishaps.

Bands must be ready to take the stage when the previous competition finishes. Absolutely no exceptions will be made to this provision. If you miss your call to the stage, you will not be allowed to compete.

3. Musical Styles, Material and Instrumentation: Each band will play three selections: a slow song, a fast song, and an instrumental number of any genre, in any order.

To stay within the "Old Time fiddling" tradition in Payson, any type of traditional acoustic music is allowed in this contest, including but not limited to "Old-Time," "Bluegrass," "Western," "Gospel" or "Appalachian." A fancy lick during an instrumental break is GREAT. The judges will ultimately judge on song selection, musicianship, stage presence, and overall performance.

To avoid delays with band setup, all bands must use a single mic. setup provided by Payson Fiddle-in, acoustic Band Competition. A separate bass mic. or amp is allowed and will be provided by the Fiddle-in acoustic bands competition, at the band's preference. While the contest is not restricted to any specific genre of music, contestants must perform with acoustic instruments in this contest; no electrically amplified instruments, pickups, or contact mics, with the exception of electric bass. Minimal percussion instruments, shaker or hand-held drum are allowed.

1. Band Members: A band will consist of at least three, but no more than seven members. Each Band **MUST have a fiddle in the band**, and, at least, **1 other different** kind of instruments to qualify for this competition. I.E., since a minimum of three members is required, you could compete with a guitar, an acoustic bass, and a fiddle to qualify as an eligible band. With 5 or 6 pieces in the band you could compete with two guitars or twin fiddles on top of the previously mentioned ensemble. You would not be eligible if you had an acoustic bass, and two fiddles. A vocalist that does not contribute instrumentally would **not** be included as one of the "two different instruments."

Songs, material, and attire must be of an appropriate nature, suitable for family entertainment. No band member may compete in more than one band. Any contestant appearing under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be allowed on stage.

The following performers are ineligible.

- Paid performers at the event are ineligible to participate.
 - Bands will be ineligible to participate the year following their win. This ineligibility term is one year.
 - Winning bands may be invited to participate in the festival in some capacity the following year during their ineligible term of the band competition.
 - A previous paid performer, or band member of the previous years band competition winner may compete with a new group, if they are the only member of the new group that meets the above ineligibility rule.
- Members/staff who take part in and/or have an active role that can be categorized as a Payson Old Time Fiddle & Acoustic Celebration organizing committee/event staff.

2. Judging Criteria: Judges will be selected from paid performers and/or the Old Time Fiddlers contest judge crew. Contestants in the Payson Fiddle-in acoustic Band Competition will be judged as follows:

- 30% - Material Selection- difficulty, taste, authenticity/originality. You'll get more points for playing a simple tune well than a difficult tune poorly.
- 50% - General Instrumental Musicianship -rhythm & timing, intonation, expression, for both solos and overall instrumental blend.
- 10% - Performance - overall quality.
- 10% - Stage Presence -audience rapport and entertainment value. The highest scores are given to bands exhibiting high entertainment qualities, showing comfort with the audience, expertise with and confidence in their musical performance and appropriate stage attire. Shorts and tank tops, flip flops and jeans with holes are discouraged and would result in a loss of potential points.

3. Finality: Decisions by the judges will be final and not negotiable. After the contest is over, contestants are encouraged to review their score sheets and judges are encouraged to provide comments to provide constructive feedback for band contestants.

4. Recording Rights: All commercial recording rights are reserved and shall become the property of the Town of Payson. Completion of the A/V Release form, by contestant, acknowledges such recording rights and acceptance of all rules and regulations of the Payson Fiddle-in Acoustic Band Competition.

Prize Money Breakdown: 1st Place: \$1000 / 2nd Place: 500 / 3rd: \$250



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Band Competition – 15-minute time limit

Fiddlers competing as a member of a band in the *Payson Fiddle-in Band Competition* are eligible and encouraged to compete in age group and championship divisions, as long as they are not otherwise ineligible. *The Payson Fiddle-in Band Competition* is a completely separate competition, scored separately from individual competition and is not considered "Entertainment" by the definition of these rules.

Entertainment

All entertainment used during the weekend festival is at the discretion of the Town of Payson.

Accompanist

Unless an accompanist is retained on staff, prizes will be based on the number of times you are on stage accompanying fiddlers during the contest. Winners will be determined by counting accompanists' names as listed on fiddlers' tune sheets. You do not need to be an AZ resident.

Miscellaneous

For specific category rules and contestant packets, visit the Payson Parks and Recreation booth.

Dry Camping will be offered at the Payson Multi-Event Center on a very limited basis from Thursday, October 1st-Sunday, October 4th, at no charge. Fire restrictions may apply. Register online at paysonparks.com or call Payson Parks and Recreation 928-472-5110; first come first serve basis at the event.

This is a Town of Payson sponsored event. All marketing and promotional material for this event is owned and copyrighted by the Town of Payson.

The Town of Payson reserves the right to change or modify contest rules prior to the start of the competition. A copy of finalized rules will be available at the registration table prior to the start of the contest.

The Town of Payson reserves the right to alter the time schedule, order of categories, or number of tunes to be played as needed.

Ineligible members will consist of those who, take part in and/or have an active role that can be categorized as a Payson Old Time Fiddle & Acoustic Celebration organizing committee, and Employees of the Town of Payson Parks and Recreation Department/event staff.