



Request for Proposal to Host MTJA Conference

updated 3.4.25

About Midwest Travel Journalists Association

MTJA is the only professional travel writing association in the United States that ensures journalists remain the membership majority. MTJA limits membership to one public relations representative (Associate) for every two journalists (Actives). Actives include writers, editors, photographers, bloggers, and broadcasters.

MTJA members are based in 13 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Although based in the nation's heartland, Active members cover the world. The scope of their work is national and international.

Organized in Wisconsin in 2017, MTJA is the nation's oldest (with its predecessor organization dating to 1951) and only professional travel writing association with a strict and annual qualification policy. Actives must submit new work samples annually to a review committee. Associates, who must also qualify annually, add value to MTJA as networking partners helping promote host destinations via industry events, blogs, social media posts, and word-of-mouth communications.

“Hosting the Midwest Travel Journalists Association provided Fort Wayne the opportunity to introduce our destination to influential travel journalists connected to our target audiences. With the tours, hands-on activities, and dining experiences, we were able to efficiently showcase Fort Wayne’s unique stories and brought together our partners and community to help in the effort. During and after the conference, we saw significant returns on our investments through social media posts and media coverage resulting in millions of total impressions, and we expect those benefits to grow as we continue to connect with those in attendance.”

Jessa Campbell, Visit Fort Wayne

MTJA Conferences

Each conference is primarily a press trip or media familiarization tour designed to showcase a destination to travel journalists who write, publish, and post stories and photos about the destination. MTJA recommends that the staff person assigned to this project be a communications/public relations specialist rather than a meeting/convention salesperson.



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Much like a press trip, the host destination is responsible for Actives' and Associates' costs including hotel rooms, local transportation, meals, tours, meeting facilities, and Internet access. Associate members pay for their lodging, in addition to paying a higher conference registration rate than Actives do. Costs incurred by your destination marketing organization (DMO) can be greatly reduced by encouraging your hospitality community, state tourism office, and others within your community to provide complimentary guest rooms, services, or sponsorships.

Benefits for Previous Conference Hosts

DMOs that have hosted MTJA conferences have found their return on investment (ROI) to be significant. They meet writers, editors, and publicists in the travel industry. Dozens of articles, broadcasts, and online posts about a conference destination are generated during and after the conference. MTJA conferences have the added benefit of uniting local travel, business, and leadership communities.

Host DMOs generally experience an ROI of 4-to-1 to 10-to-1. Within a year, 25-50 travel stories typically are published about their destination. Additional stories appear in subsequent years, and the added impact of social media exposure is incalculable. To view past conference destinations and some of the story clips produced, please visit www.mtja.us/conferences/. MuckRack.com is another indication of writers' productivity, such as <https://muckrack.com/krodeghier>.

“I worked with the former Midwest Travel Writers Association on a media tour of South Korea. It was delightful to showcase all that Korea has to offer to such inquisitive writers, who published articles, photos and essays for years after the trip. As a national tourism board, we felt it was a very impactful return on our investment.”

Bradley S. Brennan, Marketing Manager Midwest, Korea Tourism Organization USA

Hosting Perks

- Before: DMOs chosen to host an MTJA conference may send one representative to the MTJA meeting that immediately precedes their conference. Attendance is paid by the DMO at the Associate member rate. The opportunity to promote the destination, spur interest among MTJA Actives and experience a conference firsthand is invaluable. Promotion typically takes place at the MTJA business meeting and may include a brief personal invitation and video presentation. The future host also may participate in the Media Marketplace for one-to-one meetings with Actives.



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- After: Host DMOs may send one representative to the two conferences following their conference to maintain contact with MTJA members. Attendance is paid by the DMO at the Associate member rate.
- Host destinations are promoted in MTJA's monthly newsletter beginning about six months before the conference. Afterward a conference recap, in story and images, is published in the MTJA newsletter.
- Future conference hosts receive a complimentary copy of the MTJA membership directory, which lists members, their contact information, and work outlets.

Registration Fees and Refunds

All MTJA members and spouses/guests who attend a conference pay a registration fee. The host DMO sets and handles the costs of holding the conference. Fees usually range from \$100 — \$200 for Actives; from \$150 — \$250 for Associates; and from \$250 — \$300 for spouses/guests.

- **Note:** Conference attendance by MTJA members' spouses/guests is solely at the discretion of the host DMO. Spouses/guests always pay a higher registration fee than Actives or Associates.
- **Note:** Members and spouses/guests who cancel their paid registration no later than 30 days before the starting date of the core conference (excluding pre-conference tours), shall receive a full refund.
- **Those who cancel their registrations** from 15 to 29 days before the core conference begins, shall receive a 50 percent refund.
- **Those who cancel from 7 to 14 days** before the core conference begins, shall receive a 25 percent refund.
- **Those who cancel less than 7 days** before the core conference begins, shall receive no refund. A refund exception because of illness or other grave circumstance will be decided on a case-by-case basis by MTJA and the DMO.

MTJA incurs organizational and promotional expenses before, during, and after the conference, so the DMO shall remit 25 percent of the collected registration fees (minus refunds) to MTJA within 30 days after the conference end date. For example: If registration fees total \$1,000, the remittance to MTJA would be \$250 ($\$1,000 \times 25 \text{ percent} = \250).

If the DMO prefers, MTJA will handle registration and collect registration fees, but then MTJA shall retain 30 percent of the collected total (minus refunds) and payment to the DMO will be made within 30 days after the conference ends. For example, if registration fees total \$1,000, MTJA will keep \$300 ($\$1,000 \times 30 \text{ percent} = \300) and payment to the DMO would be \$700.



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Meeting Dates

Please specify the dates in spring or fall when your destination would like to host members of MTJA. DMOs may bid on more than one conference. If a DMO opts to leave the decision on exact dates open, the bid will still be considered.

- **Dates:** MTJA holds two conferences each year. The Spring Conference typically occurs in April or May and the Fall Conference in late September or October. Please avoid major religious and national holidays. Many MTJA members also belong to the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW), Central States Chapter of SATW, and/or North American Travel Journalists Association.
- **Days:** Domestic conferences typically run for five days, with general membership arrivals on Wednesday and ending with departures on Sunday. Modifications are possible. For example, for international conferences, the duration may be increased for travel time and expanded itineraries.

“We hosted the spring MTJA conference in 2018 with about 70 attendees and the relationships we built along the way continue to deliver for Milwaukee ... This is a great group of media to get to know and we were really thrilled with the amount of input we had throughout the planning process.”

Communications Director, Claire Koenig, Visit Milwaukee

Conference Schedule

The host DMO has the flexibility to adjust the conference schedule, but slots must be included for the Board Dinner, Board Meeting, Media Marketplace, Professional Development, concurrent Vice President’s Hour for Actives and Associates, MTJA Business Meeting, and Day Four dinner with possible awards presentation. The following provides a sample conference schedule:

Saturday – Wednesday

Optional pre-conference tours

Tuesday: Arrival Day for Board Members

Wednesday: Conference Day One

Members arrive throughout the day

9:00 am — Noon – MTJA Board Meeting



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- Boardroom style for 10 people
- Breakfast and lunch provided by the host organization
- Internet access with Zoom capability for Board members unable to attend
- Afternoon: Optional FAM (familiarization) tour for early arrivals
- Evening: Opening Reception and Dinner

Thursday: Conference Day Two

- 8:00 am – 9:00 am – Breakfast
- 9:30 – Noon – Media Marketplace
 - 20 (8-foot) tables, each with 2 chairs
- Noon – 1:00 pm – Lunch
- 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm – FAM tours
- 6:00 pm – Dinner

Friday: Conference Day Three

- 8:00 am – 9:00 am – Breakfast
- 9:00 am – 4:00 pm – FAM tours including lunch
- 4:30 pm – 5:30 pm – Concurrent Vice President's Hours for Actives and Associates
- 6:00 pm – Dinner

Saturday: Conference Day Four

- 8:00 am – 9:00 am – Breakfast
- 9:00 am – 11:00 am – MTJA Business Meeting
 - Crescent rounds of 6 for 40 people
 - Head table for 10 for the Board of Directors
 - Podium microphone
 - Screen and LCD projector
 - Ability to Zoom for members unable to attend
- 11:00 am – 12:00 pm – Professional Development
- 12:30 pm – 5:00 pm – FAM tours including lunch
- 6:00 pm – Dinner

Please note for Fall Conferences: Immediately following dinner at the Fall Conference, MTJA announces and honors Mark Twain Travel Writing Award recipients, which necessitates additional set-up including a podium with a microphone, awards table, projection screen, LCD projector, stable Wi-Fi for live streaming and seating for everyone in attendance (theater-style, if possible).

Sunday: Conference Day Five

- Optional morning FAM tour



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- Members depart
- Optional post-conference tours begin

Optional Pre- and Post-Conference Tours

For many MTJA Actives, gathering material for several stories during one trip is essential. Compelling pre- and post-conference tours are very important when Actives decide whether to attend a conference.

MTJA strongly encourages DMOs to work closely with state, regional and other tourism organizations to offer destinations with story potential. Pre- and post-tours typically last two to three days. These destinations are responsible for transporting participating Actives between their pick- up/drop-off location and the core conference location.

Tip: Pre- and post-tour destinations, which benefit from the exposure to travel writers, are good resources to help share the cost of hosting the core conference.

Although they cannot participate in MTJA's Media Marketplace, as this is a benefit reserved for Associate members, pre- and post-tour destinations may wish to sponsor an event or a meal during the core conference. The host destination may wish to invite them to a function, such as the opening night reception, where they can mingle with Actives and Associates.

Lodging

MTJA prefers to house all conference attendees at one hotel. This minimizes transportation expenses and time lost in coordination of tours, meetings, and meals. Two or more hotels in very close proximity are considered if a single hotel option is impractical. When possible, favor a destination hotel such as a boutique or historic property that will lure writers because of a unique story angle. Members do not share rooms except with their guests. Hotel rooms for Actives are complimentary. Associates pay a reduced travel industry, government, or group rate.

All members pay their incidental hotel expenses such as phone calls, room service, mini-bar, valet, and pay-per-view movies. They will present credit cards at check-in to cover these expenses.

Attendance ranges from 30 to 70 members and guests, but usually is in the 35 to 55 range. There is no attendance cap as all members should have the opportunity to attend a conference. If a DMO needs to limit the number of attendees due to hotel availability or budget considerations, this must be discussed with the Sites Chairperson prior to finalizing a conference bid.



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A bid should include details about the host hotel. If a DMO has not determined a host hotel, please include descriptions of available lodging options.

“Hosting Midwest Travel Journalists in the Heart of the Country has proven to be a beneficial endeavor for the marketing team at Visit Wichita, providing an amazing opportunity to introduce our lively city to a large number of influential travel writing professionals. While it did require an ‘all hands on deck’ effort from our staff members, it turned out to be an effective and fun way to showcase our vibrant destination. Hosting MTJA resulted in invaluable earned media [placements] and we expect to continue to reap the benefits from the relationships forged from this experience.”

- Brandy Evans, Visit Wichita Vice President of Marketing

Itineraries

This is the most important part of the bid: Please include a preliminary itinerary for the conference.

The itinerary should showcase the best of your destination with tour options to include local arts/culture, sports, history/heritage, cuisine, shops, scenery, and outdoor adventure/recreation. The itinerary should give members time to explore sites, conduct interviews, shoot photos, and take notes. For photographer members, a sunrise photo shoot is always appreciated. The submission does not have to be a complete, final itinerary, but it will be used to determine whether a destination offers sufficient story-worthy material.

Ideally, a DMO includes multiple options or “tracks” to provide Actives with the flexibility to choose topics of interest to their specific markets. Examples of coverage specialties are food, the arts, family travel, outdoor/water excursions and recreation, soft adventure, history, arts/culture, even golf. Repeating tracks is a good idea.

Free time with optional personal assistance is also appreciated by a few members who want to pursue stories that are not part of the itinerary. If your destination is selected, the Sites Chairperson and a dedicated Site Coordinator will work with you to maximize the potential of your destination.

The host DMO provides ground transportation throughout the conference as well as greeters and transfers to and from the transportation hub. It also provides all meals for MTJA members and guests for the duration of the conference, beginning Wednesday evening (often a heavy hors d’oeuvres welcome reception) and ending with breakfast or brunch on the Sunday of departures.



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The itinerary should include:

- One two-hour block of time, usually on Saturday morning, for the MTJA business meeting.
- A 2 1/2-hour block is required for Media Marketplace, generally held earlier in the week (e.g., Thursday), if possible.
- Two concurrent, one-hour blocks of time for Vice President's Hours (one for Actives, one for Associates) and Professional Development Sessions (one for Actives, one for Associates, but occasionally for all attending members).

When bidding on a Fall Conference, please schedule time for the Mark Twain Travel Writing Awards ceremony, as part of the final night's dinner. The independently judged awards recognize and honor the best travel writing among our members for the immediate past year, including a category on conference sites.

Additional Considerations to Incorporate into the Itinerary

Dine Around: Consider a Dine Around for at least one evening so members can experience restaurants that can't accommodate the entire group. Select a variety of distinctive restaurants and divide members into small groups of 6 or 8 each with a local host. Include the options and descriptions on the registration form so members can select their first, second, and third choices.

Local Experts: Invite local news media — such as food/travel editors, guidebook authors, etc.— to attend conference functions. Often their perspectives on the area can be of value to MTJA members.

Open to the Public: When crafting the itinerary, please do not include places or activities that are not accessible to the public.

Meals: Please avoid heavy or time-consuming breakfasts and lunches. Be prepared to accommodate dietary requirements such as vegetarian, shellfish allergies, and gluten-free.

Tour Activities: If the host is known for soft adventure or outdoor activities (sailing, golfing, hiking, biking, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, etc.), the itinerary should include a track to participate in these options.

Motorcoach Touring: Use time on buses to your advantage. Have knowledgeable and quotable experts describe area history, point out attractions, share anecdotes, or give insight into local customs and traditions. Avoid long rides where there is little to see between stops.

Gratuities: Conference registration fees are expected to include gratuities for meals, guides, transportation, etc.



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Transportation

Please indicate transportation options to and from your destination. MTJA appreciates assistance from the host to reduce transportation costs for Actives only, often involving a travel stipend or help with reduced fare arrangement. For international destinations, the host's assistance with group travel is encouraged.

Competitive Edge

- Complimentary Wi-Fi and a Business Center make it easier for members to keep up with their work loads and post on social media in real-time about your destination and the host hotel.
- Hands-on Activities (e.g., throwing clay pots, making jewelry, participating in archery, theater, cooking, etc.) provide the potential to add first-person color and excitement to stories.

Additional Amenities

MTJA conference hosts often offer additional amenities: a hospitality suite; assistance with securing professional development speakers; free parking for members driving to the destination; passes for complimentary or discounted mass transit or attractions.

We are currently considering bids for 2025 and 2026 MTJA conferences.

Proposal to Include:

- Cover page
- Proposed dates
- Proposed conference itinerary
- Registration fees for Actives, Associates, and possible guests
- Proposed hotel details
- Proposed FAM tour options
- Airport/Amtrak/transportation information
- Primary contact information

We are eager to hear from you and help you tell your story. Please submit Requests for Proposals to MTJA Administrator Erin Schmitz who shares them with the MTJA President and Sites Selection Committee Chairperson.



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Please submit your completed proposal, electronically or in print, to:

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Thank you for your interest in MTJA.