



“Midwest Journalists Covering the World”

Request for a Proposal to Host an MTJA Conference

About MTJA

MTJA is the nation’s only professional travel writing association that maintains a policy of limiting membership to approximately one public relations (PR) member (Associate) for every two or three journalist members (Actives) who include writers, editors, photographers, bloggers, and broadcasters. This ratio helps promote a majority of Actives at each conference.

MTJA members are based in thirteen states in the nation’s heartland: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Actives, however, truly do cover the world for the scope of their work is national and international.

MTJA is the nation’s only professional travel writing association that strictly enforces a policy of annual requalification for all of its journalists. Actives must verify their production to a review committee annually. Associate members or PR firms within the Midwest add value as networking partners and as promoters of a host destination via industry events, blogs, social media posts and word-of-mouth communications.

MTJA Conferences

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

As a media familiarization tour, the host destination is responsible for Actives’ and Associates’ costs including hotel rooms, local transportation, meals, tours, and meeting facilities. Hosting costs incurred by your destination marketing organization (DMO) can be greatly reduced by encouraging your hospitality community, state tourism organization, and others within your community to provide complimentary guest rooms, services, or sponsorships.

About Previous Conference Hosts

DMOs that have hosted MTJA conferences have found their return on investment (ROI) to be significant, not only from the opportunity to meet writers, editors, and publicists in the travel industry, but also because of the value received from dozens of articles, broadcasts, and online posts generated by showcasing their destinations to this dynamic group of travel media professionals. Hosts also find that MTJA conferences have the added benefit of uniting local travel, business, and leadership communities.

Host DMOs generally experience an ROI ranging from 4-to-1 to 10-to-1, and find that within a year, 25-50 travel stories are published about their destination. Additional stories appear in subsequent years, and of course, the social media exposure is incalculable. Please visit www.mtja.us/conferences/ to view past conference destinations and story clips produced from each of them.



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Hosting Perks

- **Before & After:** DMOs chosen to host an MTJA meeting are invited to send one representative to the MTJA conference immediately prior to their conference. The opportunity to promote their destination, spur interest among MTJA Actives, and experience a conference first hand is invaluable. Promotion typically takes place at the MTJA business meeting and may include a brief personal invitation and video presentation. The future host DMO’s representative also may participate in the Media Marketplace. In addition, host DMOs will be invited to send a representative to the two conferences immediately following their conference to maintain contact with MTJA members. Future/past host representatives register and pay costs such as registration, transportation, lodging and incidentals at rates identical to those paid by Associate members.

Host destinations are promoted in MTJA’s monthly newsletter beginning about six months prior to the conference they are hosting. In the MTJA newsletter immediately following each conference, a recap in story and images also highlights members’ experiences at the destination-

Future conference hosts receive a complimentary copy of MTJA’s Directory, which lists all members, their contact information, and the outlets for which Active members write.

Registration Fees

All MTJA members and spouses/guests who attend a conference pay a registration fee. The host DMO sets, handles, and collects the registration fees, which help offset the costs of holding the conference. Fees usually range from \$100 - \$200 for Actives; from \$150 - \$250 for Associates; and from \$175 - \$300 for spouses/guests.

- **Note:** Conference attendance by MTJA members’ spouses and guests is solely at the discretion of the host DMO, and spouses/guests should always pay higher fees than Actives or Associates. Fees generally should be on the lower end of the range for Midwest destinations and on the higher end of the range for other domestic or international destinations. If you have questions about these fees, please consult the Sites Coordinator.
- **Note:** Members, spouses, or guests who cancel their registrations no later than 30 days before the starting date of a conference (excluding pre-tours), shall receive a full refund of their paid registration fees.

Except in the case of illness or other unforeseen/unavoidable circumstances, members, spouses, or guests who cancel their registrations no later than 15 days before the starting date of a conference (excluding pre-tours), shall receive a 50 percent refund of their paid registration fees.



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Except in the case of illness or other unforeseen/unavoidable circumstances, members, spouses, or guests who cancel their registrations no later than 7 days before the starting date of a conference (excluding pre-tours), shall receive a 25 percent refund of their paid registration fees.

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In consideration of MTJA’s organizational and promotional expenses and services before, during, and after the conference, the DMO shall remit 25 percent of the total registration fees (minus refunds) it has collected to MTJA within 30 days of the end of the conference. For example, if registration fees total \$1,000, the remittance to MTJA will be \$250 ($\$1,000 \times 25\% = \250).

If the DMO prefers MTJA handles and collects the registration fees, the remittance to MTJA shall be 30 percent of the total registration fees (minus refunds). In this case, MTJA shall pay the DMO a sum that equals the registration fees that MTJA has collected minus 30 percent of those fees within 30 days of the end of the conference. For example, if registration fees total \$1,000, MTJA’s remittance will be \$300 ($\$1,000 \times 30\% = \300), and thus its payment to the DMO will be \$700 ($\$1000 - \$300 = \700).

Meeting Dates

Please specify the dates on which your destination would like to host MTJA. Bids are typically expected 12 months prior to the conference’s start date.

DMOs may bid on more than one conference to increase their chances of being selected. If a DMO opts to leave the decision on exact dates open, its bid will still be considered. The following information should be helpful in determining appropriate dates:

- **Dates**
MTJA holds two conferences each year. The Spring Conference typically occurs in April or May and the Fall Conference in September or October. Conferences, however, have occurred outside those months. When selecting dates, please avoid major religious and national holidays. Because many MTJA members also belong to the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW), please avoid dates within two weeks of SATW Central States Chapter Meetings and SATW Annual Conventions. (Check those dates at www.SATW.org.)
- **Days:**
Domestic conferences typically last five days, beginning with general membership arrivals on Wednesday and ending with departures on Sunday. If necessary, this schedule can be modified after consultation with the MTJA Sites Coordinator. For international conferences the duration may be increased to allow for travel days and expanded itineraries.



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Conference Schedule

Please note that the host DMO has the flexibility to adjust the schedule. The Board Dinner, Board Meeting, Media Marketplace, Professional Development session, concurrent Vice Presidents’ Hours for Actives and Associates, MTJA Business Meeting, and Day Four dinner/awards must be included in the schedule. Below is a sample conference schedule:

- Saturday – Wednesday
 - Pre-tours
- Tuesday: Arrival Day for Board Members
 - Board members will arrive throughout the day.
 - 6:00 pm MTJA Board Dinner

As a gesture of appreciation to the DMO, MTJA treats a few DMO members to dinner at a restaurant selected by the DMO on the evening of the Board’s arrival day. MTJA usually invites the DMO’s primary contact and two or three DMO/local tourism representatives. The selected restaurant should be of particular interest to the Board’s Active members, and in advance of the conference, the DMO should coordinate the selection of the restaurant with MTJA’s President and conference Sites Coordinator.

- Wednesday: Day One
 - Members arrive and registration is open throughout the day.
 - 9:00 am – noon – MTJA Board Meeting
 - Boardroom style for 10 people
 - Breakfast provided by the host organization.
 - Zoom capability provided for Board members who are unable to attend in person.
 - Lunch provided for Board members.
 - Optional Afternoon FAM Tour
 - Opening Reception and Dinner for members
- Thursday: Day Two
 - 8:00 am – 9:00 am – Breakfast provided for members
 - 9:30 – 12:00 pm – Media Marketplace
 - (20) 8-ft tables with 2 chairs
 - 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm – Lunch for members
 - 9:00 am – 12:30 pm – Morning FAM tours with lunch
 - 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm – Afternoon FAM tours
 - 6:00 pm – Dinner



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- **Friday: Day Three**
 - 8:00 am – 9:00 am - Breakfast provided for members
 - 9:00 am – 11:00 am – MTJA Business Meeting
 - 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm – Professional Development
 - 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm – concurrent Vice Presidents Hours for Actives and Associates
 - 6:00 pm – Dinner for members

- **Saturday: Day Four**
 - 8:00 am – 9:00 am – Breakfast provided for members
 - 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 in members unable to attend in person.
 - 11:00 am – 12:00 pm – Lunch for members
 - 12:30 pm – 5:00 pm – FAM Tours
 - 6:00 pm – Dinner for the members.
 - Please note: Immediately following dinner at the Fall Conference, MTJA honors the Mark Twain Award recipients. Therefore, a podium with a microphone, an awards table, a screen, LCD projector, seating for everyone in attendance, and stable Wi-Fi for Facebook Live will be needed at the venue.

- **Sunday, Day Five**
 - Optional Morning FAM Tour
 - Members Depart
 - Post-Tours Begin

Pre and Post Tours

For many MTJA Actives, gathering several stories on one trip is *essential*. Thus, pre- and post-conference tours are very important to bringing Actives to the conference. MTJA strongly encourages DMOs to work closely with state, regional, and nearby tourism organizations to offer pre- and post-tour options with lots of story potential.

Pre- and post-tours typically last 2-3 days. Pre- and post-tour destinations are responsible for transporting participating Actives from pick-up at the host destination to drop-off at the airport.

Pre- and post-tour destinations benefit from the exposure to travel writers and can help share the cost of hosting the conference. Although they cannot participate in MTJA’s Media Marketplace (this is a benefit reserved for paid Associate members), pre- and post-tour destinations may wish to sponsor breakfast,



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lunch, or dinner during the core conference. The host destination also may invite them to a function, such as the opening night reception, where they can mingle with Actives and Associates.

Lodging

Please note that MTJA prefers to house all conference attendees at one hotel. This minimizes transportation expenses and time lost in coordination of tours, meetings, and meals. However, two or more hotels in very close proximity have been used successfully when the single hotel option is impractical. If possible, the inclusion of a destination hotel such as a boutique or historic property will lure writers because of their unique story angle.

Members do not share rooms except with their guests. Hotel rooms for Actives and the Sites Coordinator are complementary. Associates pay a reduced travel industry, government, or group rate.

All members pay their own incidental hotel expenses such as phone calls, room service, 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 is usually in the 35 to 55 range. All members should have the opportunity to participate in all conference meetings. DMOs needing to limit the number of attendees due to hotel availability or budget considerations should discuss the situation with the Sites Coordinator prior to finalizing their bids.

DMOs should include details about the host hotel in their bids. If your DMO has not determined a host hotel, please include descriptions of available lodging options in the bid.

Itineraries

This is the most important part of the bid. Please include a preliminary itinerary for the conference. This 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. This does not have to be a complete, final itinerary. However, the Sites Coordinator and Board will use the itinerary to determine if your destination offers sufficient story-worthy material.

Ideally, a DMO includes multiple options or “tracks” to provide members with the flexibility to choose stories of interest to their specific markets. Some members specialize in topics such as food, family travel, outdoor sports, and recreation, soft adventure, history, arts/culture, golf, etc. Repeating tracks during the conference is always a good idea, giving members an optimal opportunity to choose the tracks that best fit their markets. Free time with optional personal assistance is also appreciated by a few members who want to pursue stories that are not in the regular itinerary. If your destination is selected, the Sites Coordinator will work with you to maximize the potential of your destination for coverage by MTJA members.



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

The itinerary should include one 2-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 at all possible. Also included are two 1-hour blocks of time for concurrent Vice President’s Hours (one for Actives, one for Associates) and concurrent Professional Development Sessions (one for Actives, one for Associates, but occasionally for all attending members).

If you are bidding on a Fall Conference, please note that an awards ceremony honoring the best travel coverage of the year (Mark Twain Awards) is conducted during the final night’s dinner (usually Saturday night). A podium with microphone, an awards table, seating for everyone in attendance, and stable Wi-Fi for Facebook Live is required. Please include this event in the itinerary.

Additional Considerations to Incorporate into the Itinerary

- **Dine Around:** Plan a dine-around for at least one evening so members can experience restaurants that can’t accommodate the entire group. Select a variety of restaurants and divide members into small groups of six or eight, 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—including food/travel editors, guidebook authors, etc.—to attend functions. Often their perspectives on the destination can be of value to the members.
- **Open to the Public:** Do NOT include places or activities that are not accessible to the public.
- **Meals:** Avoid heavy breakfasts and lunches. Be prepared to accommodate a few dietary requirements, such as vegetarian and gluten-free.
- **Tour Tips:** If your destination is known for soft adventure or outdoor activities, include those options in the itinerary, such as sailing, golfing, hiking, biking, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, etc.
- **Motorcoach Touring:** Use time on buses to your advantage. Have someone describe area history, point out attractions, tell anecdotes, or give insight into local customs and traditions. Avoid long rides where there is little to see between stops.



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Transportation

Please indicate the transportation options that your destination will offer for travel to and from your destination. MTJA appreciates assistance from the host DMO in seeking reduced transportation costs for Active members. Frequently, the easiest way to do this is to offer a travel allowance (past allowances per Active member have ranged from \$100-\$400 to full reimbursement of airfare), although this is not necessary. Associate members and guests pay for their own transportation to and from the destination; however, assistance with acquiring a group or reduced fares for these members is appreciated. For international destinations, charter transportation is an option.

Competitive Edge

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

Additional Amenities

- **Winning destinations competing to host an MTJA conference** have offered these amenities: a hospitality suite; assistance with professional development; free parking for members driving to the destination; and passes for complimentary or discounted mass transit or attractions, which can be helpful for individual research.

Timeline for Conferences and Submitting Bids (timeline is subject to change)

2023 Spring Conference Timeline:

- November 1, 2022 Request for Proposal Open
- November 30, 2022 Proposal Submission Deadline
- January 13, 2023 Conference Location Selected

2023 Fall Conference Timeline:

- November 1, 2022 Request for Proposal Open
- January 13, 2023 Proposal Submission Deadline
- February 28, 2023 Conference Location Selected



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2024 Spring and Fall Conference Timeline:

- March 1, 2023 Request for Proposal Open
- May 31, 2023 Proposal Submission Deadline
- August 11, 2023 Conference Location Selected

Proposal to Include

- Cover page
- Proposed Dates
- Proposed Conference Itinerary
- Member Costs
- Proposed Hotel Details
- Propose at least 4 FAM tours options
- Provide airport information
- Main contact information

Testimonials

“Hosting the Midwest Travel Journalist 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

“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 and we expect to continue to reap the benefits from the relationships forged from this experience.”

Brandy Evans, Visit Wichita Vice President of Marketing

“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 four years later. 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.”

Claire Koenig, Visit Milwaukee



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“Hosting the Midwest Travel Journalists Association has proven to be a win-win, and win-again relationship. At first, hosting over 45 writers and guests at one time seemed daunting, but when all the plans were put together and the feet, eyes, notebooks, and cameras were on the ground in the Finger Lakes, we couldn’t have been happier. The members were attentive, eager to learn and experience, fun, and very professional.

We are still receiving information on placements from those who visited, making it among the most prolific media events a destination could host. And, beyond that, we feel like we made so many friendships and new ‘Finger Lakes family members.’”

Valerie Knoblauch, Visit Finger Lakes

“Hosting Midwest Travel Journalists was a high point for our public relations team at Experience Columbus, providing an exceptional opportunity to introduce our city to a large number of influential travel writing professionals. What at first seemed to be a somewhat overwhelming undertaking turned out to be an efficient, effective and fun way to showcase a wide range of what makes Columbus special. We already have gotten a great return on our investment and expect to reap the benefits for a long time to come.”

Beth Ervin, Experience Columbus

“Bidding on MTJA was the best decision the Detroit CVB ever made. It was an excellent investment since months after hosting in September 2016, the articles are still coming in and the ROI has been very impressive. This is a gracious, productive group and our hospitality community is thrilled with the results of their visit.”

Renee Monforton, Director, Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau

Send your completed proposal to:

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