

# Society of Environmental Journalists

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## SEJ Annual Conference - Request For Proposals



The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is the premier North American organization for journalists who cover environment-related issues on all media platforms. SEJ's Board of Directors is inviting inquiries, letters of intent and proposals from prospective hosts and sponsors for conference events in 2021 and 2022.

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SEJ seeks letters of intent to be submitted by April 26, 2019.

### Organizational background

SEJ was founded in 1990 by a small group of award-winning reporters and editors. They incorporated and qualified the organization as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, educational and charitable membership association. SEJ has a time-tested track record of significant achievement serving an important mission: To strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues. More than 1,400 journalists, students and educators in the U.S., Canada and 45 other countries are members of SEJ. They cover science, energy, health, food systems, biodiversity, public lands, parks, land use, water quality, marine issues and more for news services, print, broadcast and digital publications serving communities worldwide. The organization is well known for educational events, publications, awards, reporting grants, SEJ's Freedom of Information WatchDog Project and its lively and collegial network of members.

### What SEJ seeks in a host

For each annual conference, SEJ is looking for an enthusiastic host that shares SEJ's mission for improving public understanding of environmental issues. We are seeking as a host and partner an institution with rich intellectual resources to help strengthen our conference program — and with financial resources to partner with us to help us make the conference happen.

### What SEJ brings to the table

Working closely with honored university hosts, SEJ staff and volunteers organize, market and execute what some members have described as the best all-purpose environmental issues conference in North America. SEJ staff shares in the financial commitment and coordinates its fundraising activities with its host.



## **Why host an SEJ conference?**

Host institutions have found that SEJ's annual conference offers a unique opportunity to bring journalists and newsmakers to their campuses, from throughout the United States, Canada and many other countries, and to showcase top faculty and relevant research. SEJ's comprehensive and nonpartisan agenda of education and news-making activities leads to considerable social media buzz and news coverage, immediate and long term interaction between journalists and university faculty and researchers, student engagement, and a great appreciation for the intellectual and financial contributions of the host.

SEJ offers a robust and time-tested platform for an important and rewarding exchange between campus researchers and reporters. SEJ events are widely recognized for the rich menu of full-day educational field trips, informative mini-tours, workshops and panel discussions. The field trips and tours often explore how host communities and others across a region are navigating complex environmental issues.

Journalists tell us they leave the conference with a long list of ideas for news stories and new sources. They say they are much better equipped to cover complex environmental issues. Conference attendees take to Twitter, Facebook and Instagram before, during and after the conference to report on what they are learning, engaging, collectively, many thousands of social media followers.

For more on what journalists say about the SEJ conference, go here: <https://www.sej.org/sejs-29th-annual-conference-evaluation-comments>

Faculty members participating as speakers benefit from the meaningful experience of working with journalists to communicate messages and findings to a broader audience. This contributes to faculty and institutional advancement, attracting future students and energizing others on campus. University hosts and their supporters benefit from — and add to — the stellar reputation of SEJ conferences, and they share in every success.

Host universities benefit from increased visibility, along with new, lasting connections and international attention to faculty, academic programs, research and other accomplishments. SEJ is honored to partner with university hosts to advance mutual interests and shared vision of an informed society with much greater science and environmental literacy.

## **Typical SEJ conference agenda and timing**

SEJ is seeking to develop a comprehensive, five-day agenda of workshops, tours, exhibits, panels, plenary and special events for September or October of 2021 and 2022. Dates are selected in close consultation with hosts to avoid scheduling conflicts and maximize participation. SEJ is weighing whether to switch to an annual spring conference and would want to discuss those opportunities with potential hosts. If that were to happen, the fall 2021 conference would be held in spring 2022.

SEJ's preferred program agenda typically begins Wednesday morning with a pre-conference workshop followed by a large plenary event Wednesday evening, full-day reporting tours on Thursday and plenary sessions, breakout panels, exhibits, mini-tours and special events on Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning.

### **Previous hosts**

A full list of past SEJ conference hosts can be found on the SEJ website. SEJ was hosted by University of Michigan – Flint in 2018, University of Pittsburgh in 2017, University of California Davis (with other local supporters) in 2016, and University of Oklahoma in 2015. Colorado State University in Fort Collins is the host in 2019 for SEJ's 29th Annual Conference. Previous hosts include Stanford University, MIT, Duke, University of Wisconsin, Texas Tech, University of Miami, Virginia Tech, Carnegie Mellon University, UCLA, Portland State University and the University of Montana.

Upon request SEJ can put prospective hosts in touch with previous hosts to discuss the benefits and opportunities of hosting an SEJ annual conference.

### **Attendees for SEJ Conferences**

We usually have between 700 and 1,000 participants, with professional journalists and members comprising more than half of each year's attendees. Other participants include newsmakers, academics and expert sources, business representatives and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Our participants enrich the gathering each year as enthusiastic speakers, exhibitors and attendees. We've had distinguished scientists, government officials, including multiple Cabinet secretaries, U.S. Senators and Governors, CEOs, philanthropists, environmental advocates, students and members of the host community participate.

### **How it works**

SEJ marshals project support from news organizations, foundations and sponsors to help fund the conference. Campus partners develop other funding sources, corporate underwriting and funding from local businesses to make the SEJ/university partnership possible.

SEJ members are appointed to chair the conference, and they oversee the development of the program with SEJ staff's Director of Conferences, to ultimately deliver the robust agenda of events. They work closely with member-volunteers and a designated university liaison and faculty during this process.

We work in partnership with our host, drawing heavily on university faculty, research facilities and other campus resources available for the program.

SEJ personnel does the legwork for inviting and coordinating with speakers and moderators. We help market the event and coordinate production and

distribution of conference promotional materials and the program agenda book.

### **What elevates a host proposal for consideration?**

SEJ is looking for strong partners for the planning team, through faculty and departmental resources and cash underwriting for direct expenses of the conference, such as catering and transportation and venues.

In reviewing proposals, SEJ will be keenly interested to learn about the intellectual resources on campus that we can tap for panels and other programs. We'll also want to hear a variety of ideas for tours and field trips of interest to journalists who cover the environment. While our conference explores international and national issues, we'd like potential hosts to share their excitement with us about why their institution and their community is a good match.

With regard to meeting space, SEJ generally needs a ballroom that can accommodate plenary and meal events for up to 500 people, eight or nine breakout rooms for panels and audiences ranging from 50 to 100, a registration area, and space for 30 to 60 exhibit booths and tables. We need a venue with free WiFi, which helps journalists easily and immediately share conference news via social media.

Many of our conferences have been hotel-based with conference facilities built in. But we have also met on college campuses, using campus conference centers.

On-campus meetings can be very successful if meeting and exhibit space is adequate for the program, includes sufficient catering and A/V support and is favorably located relative to affordable hotels.

### **What is the preferred process for responding to this RFP?**

SEJ first seeks letters of intent from potential host institutions. SEJ is grateful for any and all inquiries and we welcome the opportunity to talk with representatives of potential hosts, answer questions and provide further details.

A letter of intent should be sent by an authorized university official and should be an invitation to SEJ, outlining conference opportunities, and telling us the benefits you see of our two organizations partnering.

In the letter, please tell us the year you are interested in hosting, 2021 or 2022, and the resources you are prepared to commit including faculty and academic access and the amount of financial support. We will also need to know whether you envision the conference being hotel or campus based, and brief information on meeting space and other facilities to be made available.

If SEJ and the potential host decide to proceed further in the selection process, SEJ will ask potential hosts to submit a full, detailed proposal later.

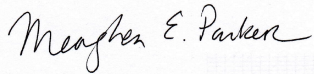
## Timing

SEJ seeks letters of intent to be submitted by April 26. Send them to James Bruggers, SEJ Future Conference Sites Coordinator, 186 N. Bellaire Ave., Louisville, KY 40206.

The SEJ board would like to make a final decision this summer.

Feel free to contact SEJ's Future Conference Sites Coordinator James Bruggers if you have any questions about this request for proposals. He can be reached at 502-693-0357 or [james.bruggers@gmail.com](mailto:james.bruggers@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Meghan E. Parker". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Meghan Parker  
Executive Director