

American Mock Trial Association  
Tournament Future Committee



**Summary of Fall 2018 Survey**

## **Introduction**

In July 2018, AMTA launched the ad hoc Tournament Future Committee to address the fact that the growth in AMTA's membership is outpacing any growth in its number of tournament hosts. The Committee includes Justin Bernstein (chairperson), Adam Detsky, Dan Haughey, Toby Heytens, Devon Holstad, Melissa Schuett, Neal Schuett, Abbe Stensland, Mike Walsh, and Johnathan Woodward. President William Warihay created the committee and serves as an *ex officio* member.

This Fall, the Committee conducted a survey to learn more about how AMTA can improve its tournament structure. The survey aimed to discover why some teams host AMTA tournaments, why some choose not to, and how we might incentivize more teams to do so.

We promoted the survey and made it available to all teams on AMTA's website and social media. In particular, we sought feedback from hosts – schools who host AMTA tournaments and schools who host invitational tournaments.

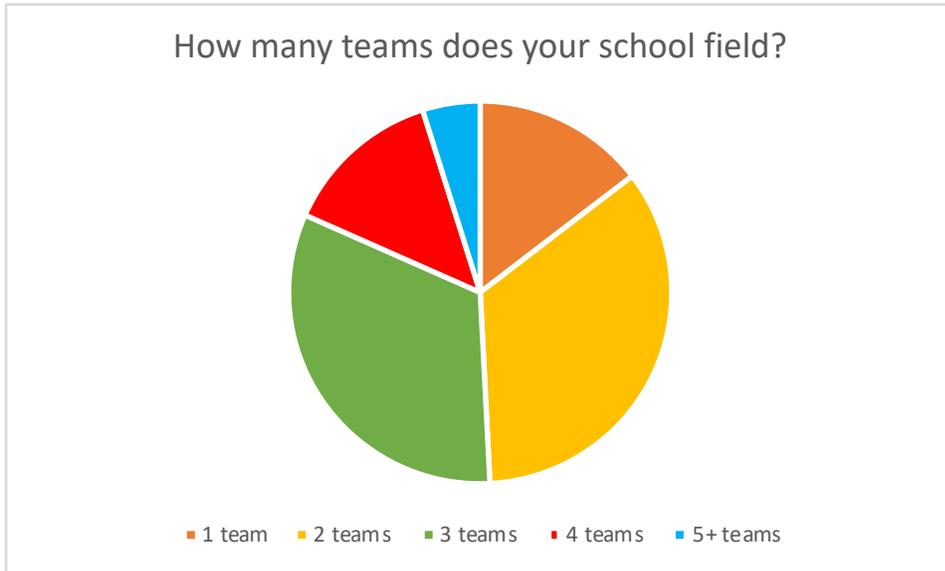
We received 186 survey responses. The survey was completed by 66 coaches, 23 professors, 23 school administrators, 90 current competitors, and 60 former competitors (the sum is greater than 186 because many survey takers fall into more than one category).

The survey drew responses from more than 150 different schools. Because the survey was open to all—not merely schools' official contact persons—we received submissions from more than one person associated with some schools. Since no school submitted more than three surveys and sometimes people affiliated with the same school provided different answers, we utilized every survey response because we wanted to capture the full range of schools' views.

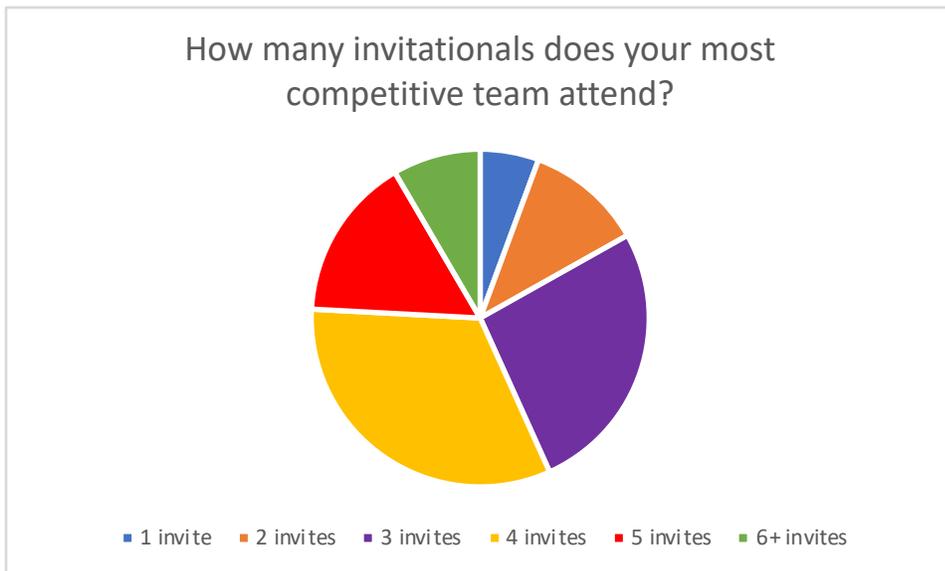
The responding schools represent every important facet of our membership. We received survey responses from at least one school from each of the 2018 regional tournaments, representing every geographic area of the country. The responding schools also represent every level of competitive success. We received responses from schools in the Team Power Ranking top 50; schools ranked 51-100, 101-150; etc.; and schools unranked in the Team Power Rankings. Finally, responses covered the gamut of schools with regard to hosting events. We received 45 responses from schools that host an AMTA tournament (Regionals, ORCS, or the National Championship); 67 responses from schools that host an invitational but not an AMTA event; and 73 responses from schools that host no tournaments.

## School Participation

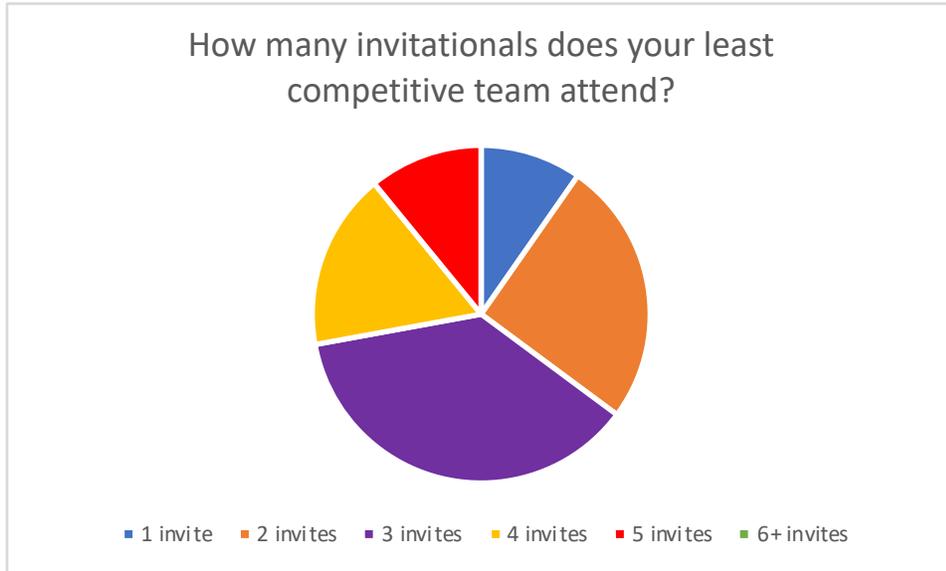
Overwhelmingly, schools take advantage of the fact that AMTA permits participation from multiple teams per school. More than 85% of schools that completed the survey field more than one team, and half field more than two.



The survey reveals that schools attend *a lot* of invitational tournaments. More than 80% of schools send their most veteran/competitive teams to three or more invitational tournaments.



About 65% of schools send their least veteran/competitive teams to three or more invitational tournaments.



## AMTA Hosts

We received 45 responses from schools that host AMTA tournaments. While surveys could be completed anonymously, about two-thirds of the respondents who identified their school were regional hosts.

We wanted to identify why teams choose to host regionals, ORCS, or Nationals:

What are the primary reasons that your school hosts an AMTA tournament?	
76%	It reduces our travel costs.
67%	Hosting means we don't have to pay the \$450 case access fee
67%	We enjoy hosting.
53%	We like controlling the date of our regional/ORCS.
40%	We profit from the tournament.
36%	Hosting means we don't have to pay a case licensing fee for the invitational we also host.
27%	If we don't host, we might have to travel really far for the tournament.
18%	It's easier than hosting an invitational because AMTA handles the tabroom, trophies, etc.

Avoiding travel motivated 80% of respondents. Financial issues—whether bypassing the case access fee, avoiding licensing fees, or other money-related reasons—motivated more than 90% of respondents, though as the chart above indicates, different schools are motivated by different financial considerations. We also received several write-in responses:

- “Home field advantage”
- “We like competing in a courthouse and our previous regionals were in schools.”
- “[Our school] has a tradition of hosting tournaments and I didn't want to be the one to stop that, at least for now.”
- “Our [relationship with two schools with whom we share a campus] makes some problems like judge recruitment and parking a little easier.”
- “To be supportive of AMTA and the schools in our region.”
- “AMTA needs quality tournaments above all else, so we feel like we need to do our part.”

In addition to that checkbox question, we asked respondents to describe their reason for hosting in their own words. We received 30 written responses. A third said they host because they enjoy it. Half mentioned money. Eighteen of the 30 mentioned a sense of duty, tradition, or desire to do their part. A handful mentioned that their coach hosts as part of her/his board duties (note: hosting an AMTA tournament is not a requirement for board membership, though it is something that AMTA considers when evaluating candidates for the board).

We also want to know how we can make sure our hosts continue to offer to host:

Which of these changes would most make your school want to continue hosting for AMTA?	
76%	Larger stipend (more money)
62%	If AMTA helped with judge recruitment
62%	If we could offer CLE credits to recruit judges
49%	If we had help finding financial sponsors
49%	If hosting provided a competitive advantage (e.g., if AMTA hosts were guaranteed a bid to ORCS)
22%	If hosting allowed our school to send more than two teams to the same regional (i.e., we wouldn't have to send our teams to different regionals)
18%	If there were easier access to volunteers to assist with some of the smaller tasks.
0%	If our school had a larger speaking role at opening and closing ceremonies (e.g., if we could present awards).
0%	If we could host fewer teams.
0%	If there were fewer forms to complete.

More than 80% listed one of the judge recruitment answers. More than 80% listed one of the financial answers (larger stipend or help finding financial sponsors).

Significantly, respondents did not seem particularly motivated by competitive or structural changes: fewer than half checked boxes for competitive advantage or waiver of the two-team-per-regional rule. In fact, several teams wrote in the comments that they affirmatively did not want a competitive advantage for hosting (e.g., “No sir. No ma’am. We should have to earn it.”)

Hosts were unmoved by the possibilities of smaller tournaments (i.e., fewer teams) and larger speaking roles at the ceremonial portions of AMTA tournaments, as none of the respondents checked those boxes.

Finally, we asked AMTA hosts, “If your school also hosts an invitational tournament, why do you choose to host both? How are you able to manage doing both?” We hoped that the answer to this question might help us persuade some of the invitational hosts to consider hosting for AMTA. Here, we received 18 responses from the 45 AMTA hosts. Eleven of the 18 cited money as the sole motivator. Other answers included a desire to provide opportunities for local schools with fewer resources, program prestige, and the ability to enter three teams in the invitational.

We saw a divide on the question, “How are you able to manage doing both?” Coach-run programs pointed to adult leadership—generosity of their coach’s time, community judge connections—as allowing them to host both types of events. Student-run programs pointed to necessity (e.g., “as a student run team, we have to fight for every dollar”) and specific resources (e.g., access to free facilities) as the reason they are able to host an invitational and a regional.

## Invitational Hosts

We received 67 responses from those whose schools exclusively host invitationals—that is, they host invitational tournaments, but do not host an AMTA event. In some ways, these schools might be AMTA’s primary market for hosting an AMTA tournament; they already have the demonstrated capacity and interest to host a tournament. If we understand why they have chosen to host an invitational instead of an AMTA event, we might better identify ways to incentivize these schools to host an AMTA tournament in the future (instead of or in addition to their invitationals).

We began by asking the main reason for the invitational preference.

<b>What are the primary reasons your school chooses to host an invitational instead of an AMTA tournament (regional, ORCS)?</b>	
54%	AMTA generally requires JDs for its judges, and we cannot recruit enough actual lawyers to judge.
46%	We don't want to divide our students'/coaches' attention between hosting and competing/coaching at regionals/ORCS.
43%	We prefer to host earlier in the year.
33%	We wouldn't have anyone to run the tournament if our teams are competing there (and we don't want to host one weekend and then compete on another).
22%	We make more money hosting an invitational.
19%	We enjoy deciding which teams to invite (and not invite).
18%	We think hosting an invitational brings more notoriety to our program.
18%	AMTA tournaments require us to host too many teams.
16%	We like to experiment with innovative/fun tournament ideas.
15%	I don't know -- we never considered hosting an AMTA tournament.
15%	Hosting schools at our invitational helps get us invitations to other schools' invitationals.
13%	We like running our own tabroom, ceremonies, etc.
13%	We have too much annual turnover in our leadership to guarantee a quality tournament year after year.
12%	Our region of the country doesn't have many invitational tournaments.
6%	We would make more money hosting an AMTA tournament, but it's not worth it given other issues/drawbacks.
4%	School requirements for AMTA events are unattainable (please describe below).
1%	We like providing certain amenities that AMTA's structure and/or stipend does not support. (Please list those amenities below.)

Unlike AMTA hosts, for whom financial benefits were a large reason for their decision to host, invitational hosts indicated that money was only a small factor in their choice. Only 22% of invitational hosts said they host invitationals instead of AMTA events because they make more money that way; indeed, some schools said they would make money hosting AMTA events.

Instead, invitational hosts focused on what can be categorized as three main reasons. The first was judge recruitment, an answer chosen by more than half of the invitational hosts. From the comments, it is clear that many invitationals are judged in ways that AMTA would not prefer (and in some cases might not accept): tournaments in which the majority of judges are not JDs, tournaments in which a large fraction of the judges are coaches or non-JD alums, and/or trials with only one judge. These schools indicated that, given their connections and other resources, they did not think they could successfully recruit enough lawyers to judge. Some schools said they might be able to do so, but it would not be worth the extra effort. These results further support AMTA's decision to launch a Judge Committee, which is designed to identify ways to help our hosts recruit judges more easily and effectively.

The second category of reasons that invitational hosts chose to host invitationals instead of AMTA events involved human resources: student-run programs could not host while competing, and many schools—coached and uncoached—did not want to divide their attention between competing and hosting. Of course, hosting an invitational also divides attention from hosting and competing; in fact, it probably does so even more than hosting an AMTA tournament, as AMTA handles tabulation, captains' meetings, judge instruction, judge assignments, interventions, etc. But implicit in these responses (and sometimes explicit in the accompanying comments) is the notion that AMTA tournaments are more competitively important. They determine whether a team advances. Many teams were reluctant to jeopardize their competitive success by focusing on hosting instead of competitive performance. However, AMTA may want to examine the extent to which perception matches reality—just eyeballing the names and ranks of teams who host AMTA tournaments, it seems that many AMTA hosts excel competitively.

The third common answer was timing. More than 40% of respondents indicated that they prefer hosting earlier in the year. In reviewing the written comments, there was no universal explanation for this preference. Some schools said they needed the money earlier to fund the rest of their season. Other said that spring academic calendars do not sync well with AMTA tournaments. Others said they like to complete their hosting early so they can focus on competition readiness for the remainder of the year.

When given the opportunity to write in other reasons, three respondents indicated that they applied but were not chosen as an AMTA host or they believed AMTA would not select them.

Next, we asked how we might encourage these invitational hosts to host an AMTA tournament. These results provide a fairly clear roadmap:

<b>Which of these changes would most make your school want to host an AMTA tournament?</b>	
84%	If AMTA helped with judge recruitment.
64%	Larger stipend (more money).
55%	If hosting provided a competitive advantage (e.g., if AMTA hosts were guaranteed a bid to ORCS).
24%	If hosting allowed our school to send more than two teams to the same regional (i.e., we wouldn't have to send our teams to different regionals).
18%	If we could host fewer teams than most AMTA tournaments currently include.
0%	If our school had a larger speaking role at opening and closing ceremonies (e.g., if we could present awards).

More than 5 out of 6 respondents said that help recruiting judges would make them consider hosting an AMTA tournament.

Interestingly, while invitational hosts rarely stated they hosted invitationals instead of AMTA tournaments because of the money, almost two-thirds said more money might motivate them to host an AMTA tournament. Perhaps the fairest conclusion is that invitational hosts are hosting invitationals instead of AMTA tournaments despite—not because of—financial considerations.

We tried to determine if educating invitational hosts about the advantages of hosting an AMTA might spur more of them to do so.

<b>Which of these advantages of hosting an AMTA tournament was your school already aware of when it decided to host an invitational instead?</b>	
87%	AMTA handles tabroom, ceremonies, captains meeting, judge assignment, judge instruction.
78%	AMTA provides ballots, tab cards, trophies and awards at AMTA's own expense over and above the stipend.
69%	\$3,250 stipend for hosting a regional with 18 or more teams.
60%	No case access fee (\$450).
35%	No invitational case licensing fees.
35%	Host can usually choose their weekend.

This suggests AMTA can better publicize the benefits of hosting AMTA tournaments. More than 80% of all invitational hosts were unaware of at least one of the financial benefits of hosting (stipend, waiver of case access fee, waiver of case licensing fee). Teams were unaware of facts that our board probably assumes all hosts know: that AMTA handles most tournament duties during the tournament weekend (as opposed to pre-tournament work, which is largely performed by the host) and that AMTA pays for trophies, ballots and tab cards beyond the stipend.

## Non-Hosts

We received 73 survey responses from individuals whose schools do not presently host any tournaments (either invitationals or AMTA events).

We asked why they opt not to host any tournaments:

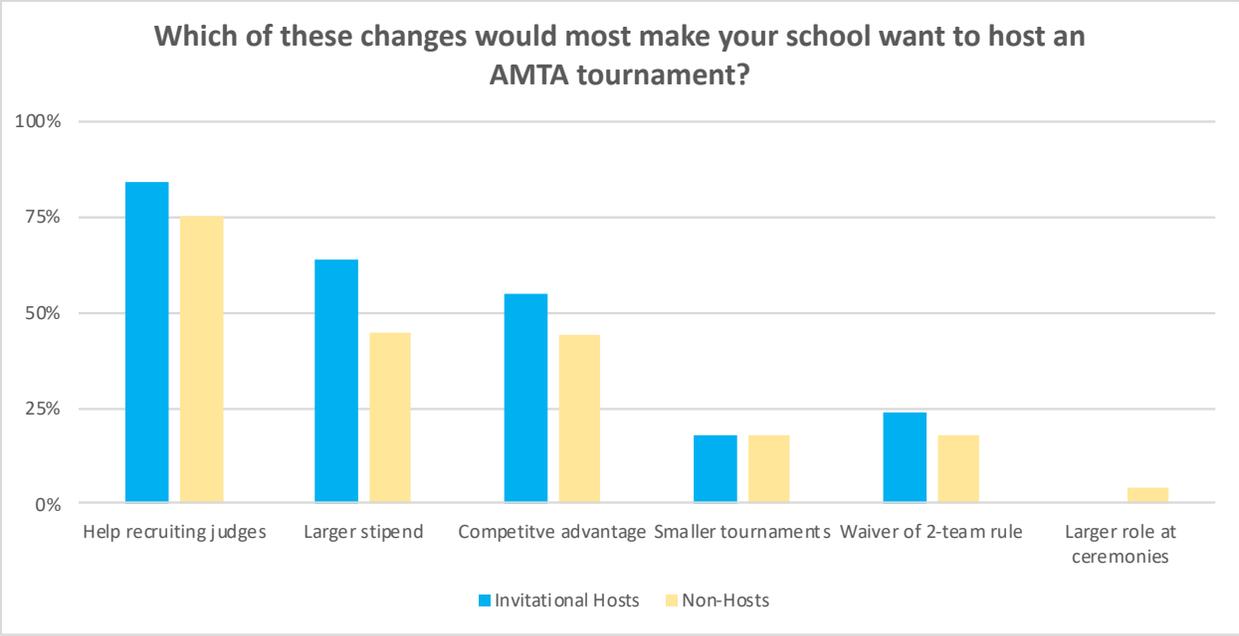
<b>What are the primary reasons your school chooses not to host an AMTA tournament (regional, ORCS)?</b>	
51%	Judge recruitment challenges.
44%	Our competitors/coaches are already too busy.
38%	Lack of facilities.
37%	We don't want to divide our students'/coaches' attention between hosting and competing/coaching.
25%	The stipend is not large enough.
5%	AMTA tournaments require us to host too many teams.

Some of these reasons, such as a lack of facilities and the busy schedules of teams' coaches and competitors, would be difficult for AMTA to address. But the leading reason—judge recruitment challenge—is something with which we might be able to assist.

Non-hosts expressed a similar sentiment when asked what might make them consider hosting.

<b>Which of these changes would most make your school want to host an AMTA tournament?</b>	
75%	If AMTA helped with judge recruitment.
45%	Larger stipend (more money).
44%	If hosting provided a competitive advantage (e.g., if AMTA hosts were guaranteed a bid to ORCS).
18%	If we could host fewer teams than most AMTA tournaments currently include.
18%	If hosting allowed our school to send more than two teams to the same regional (i.e., we wouldn't have to send our teams to different regionals).
4%	If our school had a larger speaking role at opening and closing ceremonies (e.g., if we could present awards).

We compared these answers to those given by invitational hosts:



Invitational hosts and non-hosts generally provided similar answers to this question. This suggests that strategies designed to motivate invitational hosts to host AMTA tournaments might also be effective in motivating non-hosts to host AMTA tournaments.

## **“Anything else you want to tell us?”**

Every survey ended with the question, “Anything else you want to tell us? Suggestions, ideas, questions, concerns?” The responses below are drawn verbatim, except (a) where indicated by brackets it was necessary for clarity or to protect a school’s identity (either as the school making the comment, or as the subject of another’s comment) or (b) to correct typos.

Students and coaches expressed appreciation for AMTA running this survey and suggested that AMTA survey participants more often:

- “Thank you for soliciting feedback through this survey and publicizing it through Facebook. I hope AMTA continues to ask for community input this way in the future.”
- “I really appreciate the work you all do to improve AMTA’s structure and to make AMTA more competitive.”
- “Appreciate the survey, and looking forward to what y'all decide to do.”

Several respondents offered advice for recruiting more AMTA hosts:

- “The application to host is much longer and more complicated than it needs to be.”
- “Suggestion: coming up with a way to reach out to the newest programs that may not have considered this possibility yet and explaining the advantages this could bring the program.”
- “AMTA could do a better job advertising all of the benefits of hosting a regional/ORCs. I had never entertained the possibility of hosting a regional/ORC until I was browsing the AMTA website one day and found the information sheet for Prospective Hosts.”
- “Maybe this is already done, but I think it would be helpful to reach out to specific schools that you think would potentially want to host an AMTA tournament.”

Some participants used the comments section to reiterate their desire for help with judge recruitment:

- “I think CLE credits would be a big incentive for judges to help out, and I would definitely support adding that as an option!”
- “I think if AMTA helped with recruiting judges, that would be very beneficial.”
- “It could be helpful if AMTA had some sort of listserv or database with potential judges, as recruitment is hard.”
- “The biggest hurdle in running a good tournament that AMTA could help us with is judge recruitment.”

Some asked for assistance with securing sponsorships:

- “I wish there was a little more guidance on securing sponsors. It’s kind of difficult to find places that actually value the deliverables we can give them.”
- “I really like the idea of having financial sponsors. I’ve read about the profit sharing with AMTA; it seems straightforward and fair. However, I’m not exactly sure what kind of companies would be willing to sponsor, and what kind of companies AMTA would find appropriate (for example, would a coffee company be an appropriate sponsor?). I’m really not sure where to get started with sponsorships, and would appreciate some guidance from AMTA.”

Some teams expressed displeasure with conferring a competitive advantage to hosts:

- “Automatic bids to ORCS for teams that host a regional is, frankly, an awful idea. It would definitely incentivize more teams to host regionals but would catastrophically mess with the competitive balance and fairness of AMTA tournaments. There’s no merit-based justification for a bye through regionals if you host. Please do not do this.”
- “As a program where individually hosting an AMTA tournament is out of the question, we would find the competitive advantage given to schools that are able to host tremendously unfair. It seems to favor coach run programs that have the staff/time/facilities to plan an additional tournament ...”

Three participants expressed concerns regarding the invitational case licensing fee:

- “The case fee for invitationals is just increasing the costs born by the students. The fee also impacts less funded schools more. The programs with less money are seeing a big increase in costs to attend invitationals, while the programs with sufficient funding just see it as a slight increase in tournament fees.”
- “For smaller, low-fee tournaments, the invitational fee is unreasonable; as it stands we will be unable to host an invitational in the future.”
- “I’m concerned about the rising invitational fees. We try to make our invitational affordable for other teams, but with the fee per team per round increasing, we may have to raise our own fees.” *[Editor’s Note: AMTA presumes that some invitationals will choose to raise their registration fees to cover the licensing fees. In this way, the licensing fee is passed on to the teams using the case—and teams using the case more often will pay the licensing fee more often.]*

Several respondents expressed frustration with judges:

- “We would like more extensive training for judges so that they use only the criteria sanctioned by AMTA in their judging.”
- “I think there should also be some more oversight on AMTA's part on behalf of judging recruitment. I know it's incredibly tough to do and you really don't know what you're going to get until you've seen it. But, there are some very, very glaring issues with judging when [one team that placed highly at NCT barely qualified from ORCS.]”
- “More diverse and inclusive judges, also judges who have done mock trial before!!!! Have alumni judge please, I know that a lot of them would be willing to do so. Judges who have never done Mock Trial before have no idea what it takes to compete in a tournament, especially when it comes to judging witnesses.”

Some hosts expressed frustration with student participants:

- “Also, students’ behavior needs to improve. Every year, we have students who have negative interactions with court officers because the students break security based rules including the rule that they must stay out of certain areas (students have been found in the judge’s hallway) and to do what the officers say—no matter what.”
- “Students’ abject and willing disregard of the no food/bottles rule last year was a complete insult to me and cost-creator for us.”
- “The students who complain that our bench, largely composed of experienced trial lawyers, with maybe two non-JDs the whole weekend, are brutally disrespectful. Given the choice between a college undergraduate and a 25-year trial veteran, I am going to

guess the vet knows hearsay better than the student. Students need to know some/much of the mock trial shtick won't fly—and the desire to have judges who give high scores simply because the memorized script gets flawlessly recited will be unhappy, and should not think that it is appropriate to tell me—as they did—that I need to recruit better judges.”

Many individuals used this platform to propose other types of changes to collegiate mock trial:

- “Change the Nationals structure to allow more teams. On board with the splitting into divisions and one final round”
- “There aren't enough ‘tune-up’ tournaments (tournaments in January) due to how soon regionals is after some schools winter break. move back regionals a week or two to allow for more competition then”
- “It would be a benefit to the community if tournaments like regionals and orcs had judging panels larger than two people. I understand it would likely be difficult for some hosts to provide this. However, if a host can [do it]I think it should be allowed that this ORCS or Region expand its judging panel accordingly.”
- “I would simply encourage AMTA to find further ways (this form is a small but positive step) to engage teams outside the ‘bubble’ of the top 20, and make them feel involved in creating a fair new NCT system.” [*Editor’s Note: Approximately 80% percent of AMTA’s directors are affiliated with schools outside the Top 20.*]
- “Many schools who don't have dedicated mock trial staff will never be able to host a tournament given the pushback from school administrators as it is, but it would be great if AMTA switched their regional and ORC tournament locations/hosts around more so as to not create reputations among the tournaments.”
- “I would like to see it become mandatory to use courthouses for ORCS and NCT.”
- “Is there any way to mitigate the effect of high TPR schools being congregated in only a few areas of the country? Getting out of some ORCs (and Regionals) is far more of an accomplishment in some parts of the country than others. This isn't to say that it's easy to get to Nationals in some parts of the country, but the competition is on a different level.”
- “Maybe have large invitational winners skip regionals and go straight to ORCS.”
- “Allow more than 10 competitors to go to invitationals.” [*Editor’s Note: AMTA does not regulate roster size at invitational tournaments.*]
- “Please add to the ballots a category where the judges can decide which team they felt won the trial. Make it worth 1-3 points.”
- “There is not enough time between rounds for lunch. Instructions should be given to judges to limit their ... comments to five minutes, because many lunches have been forfeited by teams to not disrespect the judges. They volunteer their time, and we have an appreciation for them, but that should not come to the detriment of our own health.”
- “[Avoid repeat hosts.] [A particular school] qualifies two teams from ORCS every year because they recruit [their own alums as] the judges. Other teams have to practice their case in a style that the [school’s] judges will like.”
- “Since you all need to use the stats from the invitationals to continue to edit the cases, then maybe you should help us with invitationals. Not as much as you do for an AMTA tournament, but maybe something minor like judges or a small stipend for keeping AMTA going.” [*Editor’s Note: AMTA permits invitationals to use the AMTA case.*]

## Conclusions

Schools that reach the same decision when it comes to hosting—for example, the decision to host an invitational but not an AMTA tournament—often have different reasons for doing so. These decisions are informed by funding, access to facilities, presence of coaches, access to a judge network, geography, the history of their program (and history of hosting), and other factors.

**There is no one-size-fits-all solution to AMTA’s challenge of finding and retaining sufficient hosts for its growing number of participants.**

Nonetheless, the survey is instructive. **More than anything, schools want help recruiting judges.** Current hosts often struggle to find enough qualified judges. Most invitational hosts fill a significant number of their judge seats with non-attorney alums and coaches, and they acknowledge that the challenge of finding enough AMTA-qualified judges is a major reason they do not host AMTA tournaments. Many schools do not host any events because they doubt their ability to find enough scorers. AMTA’s new Judge Recruitment Subcommittee could help our current hosts and help recruit future hosts.

The financial component is complicated. On one hand, of course schools would prefer larger stipends. But very few schools indicated that they generate greater profit from hosting an invitational than they would by hosting an AMTA tournament. Hosting an AMTA tournament provides several financial advantages: a stipend (\$3,250 for a regional with 18 or more teams, \$6,000 for an ORCS); waiver of invitational case licensing fee (if the school hosts an AMTA tournament and an invitational); waiver of \$450 case access fees; and free ballots, tab cards, and trophies (AMTA covers these items and the shipping). From what we know about invitational registration fees, many schools would earn greater profit by hosting an AMTA tournament than an invitational. It seems many schools choose not to host an AMTA event *in spite* of the financial benefits. That said, perhaps increased financial incentives might alter teams’ decisions.

**Maybe the largest lesson from this survey is the need to better publicize advantages of hosting an AMTA tournament.** Almost every respondent was unaware of some of the benefits, including financial benefits and certain benefits that those most of us likely assumed all hosts knew (AMTA rep assistance with tournament administration; provision of trophies and other supplies). AMTA should improve communication of these benefits to potential hosts.

Even though many schools indicated that providing a competitive advantage might spur them to host an AMTA tournament, many schools expressed concern about the wisdom of making such a change. Indeed, many schools who said they would be motivated to host an AMTA tournament if it provided a competitive advantage were among those urging us not to do so.

**Finally, the survey is a good reminder that AMTA can and should address its challenges by seeking input from students and coaches.** Our board is diverse geographically, competitively, and demographically, but 30 minds cannot capture the experiences of 700 teams, especially when a large fraction of our membership comes from student-run programs.

The Tournament Future Committee intends to use the survey responses in formulating a plan for the board’s consideration.