



COLUMBIA SC

FY20/21

A Year of Innovation

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A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

I think everyone could not wait to usher in 2021. Shortly after the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine, we have seen a tremendous uptick in business demand. Cancelled bookings for 2020 began rebooking for 2021 and new bookings demand picked up beyond pre-COVID-19 numbers. The pent-up demand to attend in-person meetings again is certainly trending in a very positive direction. Leisure travel, sports events, and other outside activities exceed pre-pandemic demand. Our local hotel occupancy is seeing increased weekend demand and weekend business is keeping our hotels busy.

We are seeing positive trends for a strong recovery going forward. I'm very proud of our team for staying strong and taking whatever steps necessary to attract groups and events. Our marketing department has done an amazing job planning and implementing an aggressive recovery marketing strategy with positive results. We must now focus on making sure our clients feel comfortable and are confident that we are carrying out CDC safety protocols and that we are prepared to deliver an enjoyable and safe event or conference. This will continue to be important going forward to guarantee our success. We are happy to have pushed through the past challenges and stand prepared to face the challenges that might lie ahead.

We thank all our local partners that have fought this battle with us and we all stand together in our quest to welcome back the many visitors attracted to our region. We look forward to finishing 2021 strong and moving forward to an even stronger 2022 and beyond.

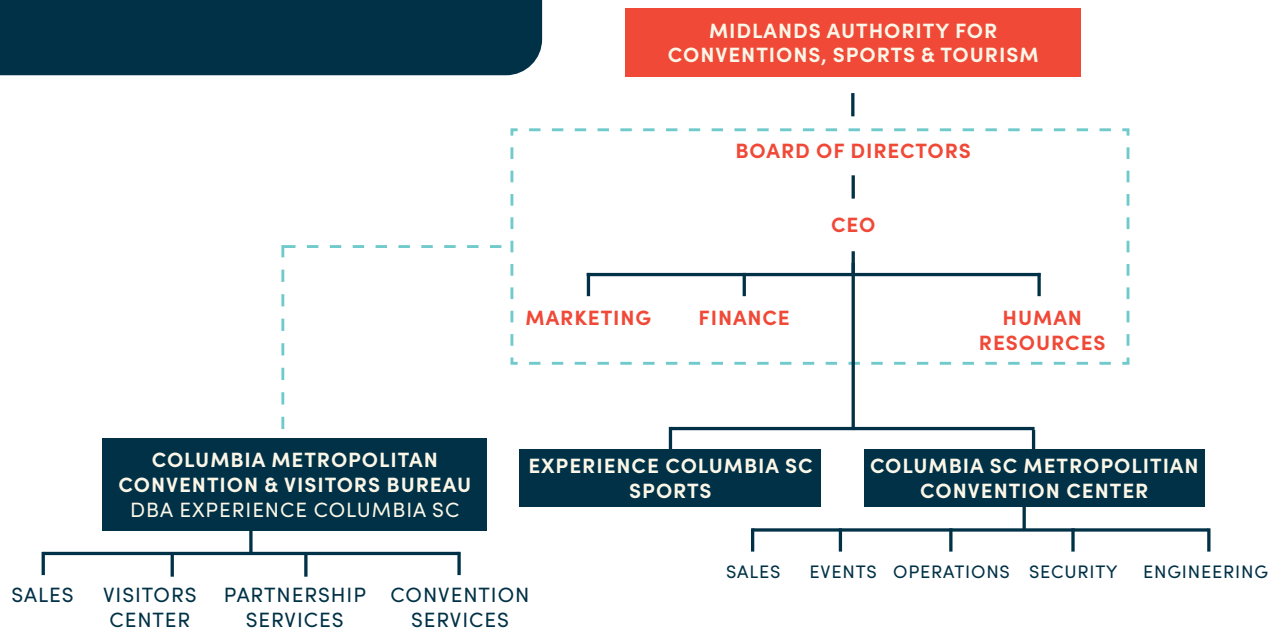
In Partnership,

Bill Ellen

President & CEO | Experience Columbia SC



WHO WE ARE

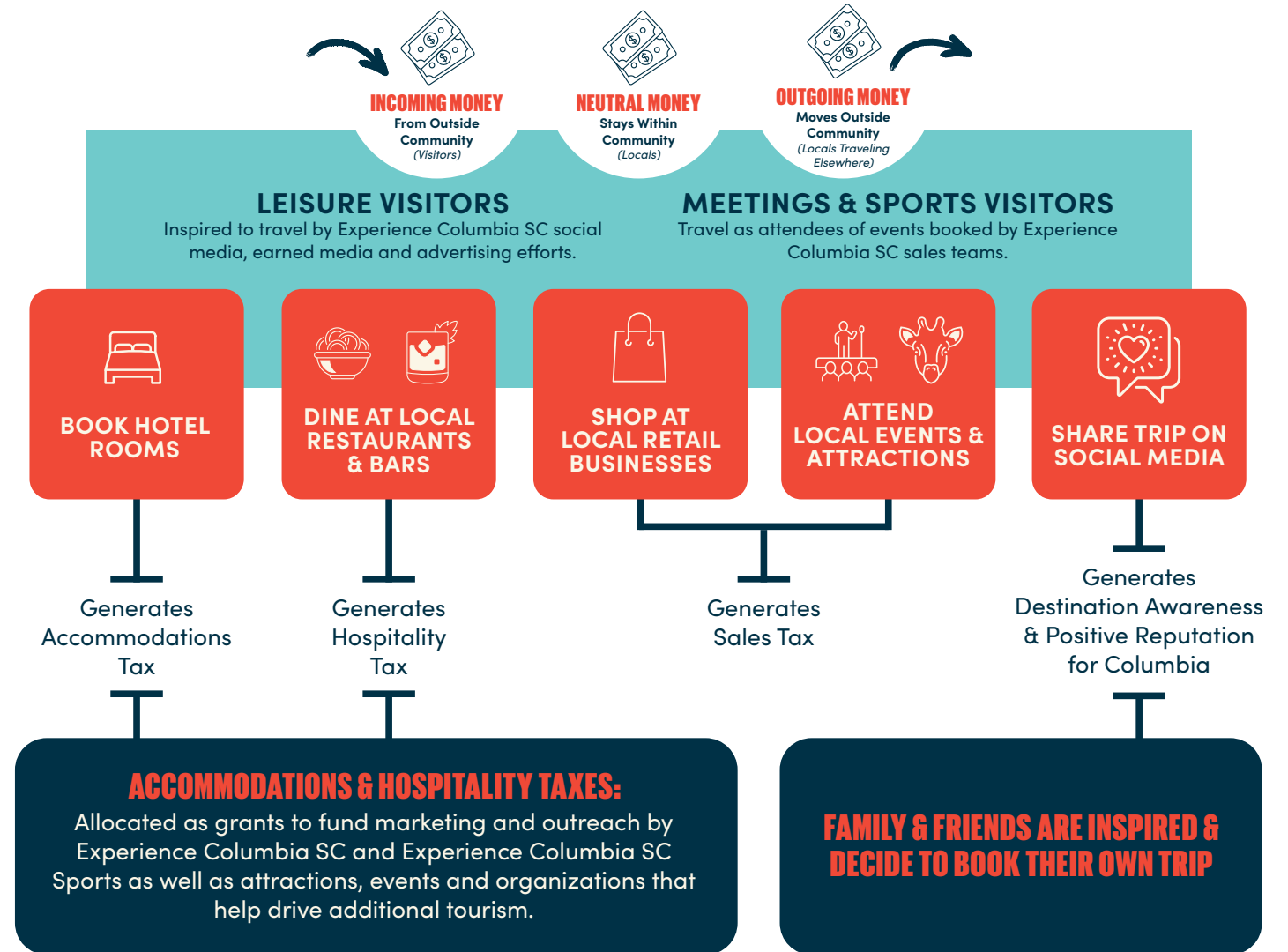


The mission of the Midlands Authority for Conventions, Sports & Tourism includes:

- Directing and managing the activities and mission of the CVB (dba Experience Columbia SC), to include the operation of the Columbia SC Visitors Center.
- Overseeing the development and operation of the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center under a long-term management agreement for the benefit of the City of Columbia, Lexington County and Richland County government entities.
- Directing and managing the activities and mission of Experience Columbia SC Sports.

The TOURISM LIFE CYCLE

VISITORS HELP FUEL OUR ECONOMY



TOURISM = ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The CHALLENGES

Our RESPONSES

SOME EVENT PLANNERS NOT READY FOR TRADITIONAL SITE VISITS

MAINTAIN VIRTUAL SITE VISITS
 ECSC continues to promote SKYNAV to showcase a virtual experience of Columbia for event planners who are not ready to conduct an in-person site visit. SKYNAV is also used to inspire future leisure travel.

LINGERING HESITANCY TO ATTEND EVENTS OR GATHERINGS

INFORM THE PUBLIC
 ECSC shares messaging about hybrid meeting options, outdoor meetings and unconventional meeting setups to keep groups safe and comfortable. ECSC regularly updates website and social media with safety procedures in place across the region to put visitors at ease when traveling to the destination.

OBTAIN SAFETY ACCREDITATION
 CMCC earns Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Facility Accreditation along with Columbia Metropolitan Airport and a number of preferred hotels.

FLUCTUATING TRAVEL SENTIMENT

CREATE FLEXIBLE MESSAGING
 ECSC crafts flexible, phased messaging that can be shifted based on the audience and comfort level.

FLUCTUATION IN FUNDING

BOLSTER OUR RECOVERY CAMPAIGN
 Decrease in some recurring funding amounts is buoyed by statewide tourism recovery funding and a robust recovery marketing campaign from November 2020-June 2021.

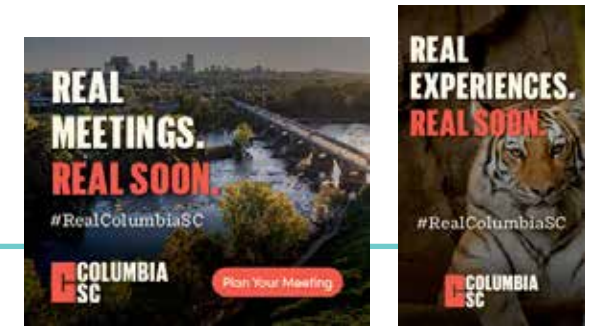
A FOCUS ON RECOVERY

As COVID-19 concerns ebbed and flowed over the last year, we worked proactively to update messaging in our advertising, websites, social media and signage in an effort to be sensitive to the travel climate.

RECOVERY MESSAGING

STAYING TOP-OF-MIND

When businesses started re-opening, we reinstated our advertising with the "Real Soon" messaging to remain top-of-mind as a road trip destination for our target audiences. Our website and blogs continue to benefit visitors and locals with inspiration & up-to-date information.



PROVEN SAFE

After hosting sporting events safely and a region-wide reopening, we shifted our advertising to a message of "Real Safe" and adapted it for each audience.



VACCINE ROLLOUT

In response to vaccinations rolling out and an overall positive sentiment, we dropped the safety verbiage and shifted our advertising to a message of "Real Experiences/Cheers/Meetings" to play on the idea that people were ready to be in-person again.



ADVERTISING STATISTICS

While recurring funding sources were limited this year, we were given a grant from SCPRT to assist with recovery marketing. All data shown is a direct result of Experience Columbia SC advertising.

20,219,808
 IMPRESSIONS

66,729
 HOTEL SEARCHES

9,275
 FLIGHT SEARCHES

5,004
 TRAVELERS

\$637,514
 TOTAL HOTEL REVENUE

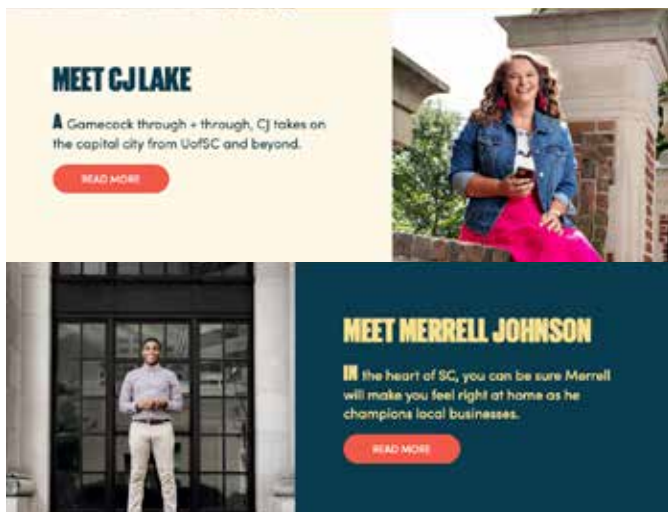
2,860
 HOTEL BOOKINGS

499
 FLIGHT BOOKINGS

5.3 NIGHTS
 AVG. LENGTH OF STAY

2021 COLUMBIA SC AMBASSADORS

ECSC continues our local ambassador program to highlight local voices and showcase authentic enthusiasm for our region. Each ambassador helps contribute to website and social media content, including providing messages of hope and community during troubling times. 2021 Columbia SC ambassadors include Merrell Johnson (MIRCI), CJ Lake Tomasco (UofSC), Lee Snelgrove (One Columbia) and Ashley Jenkins (City of Columbia).

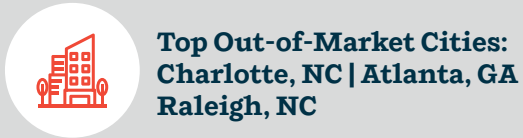


Ambassador Microsite: ExperienceColumbiaSC.com/ambassadors



Ambassador Video Series

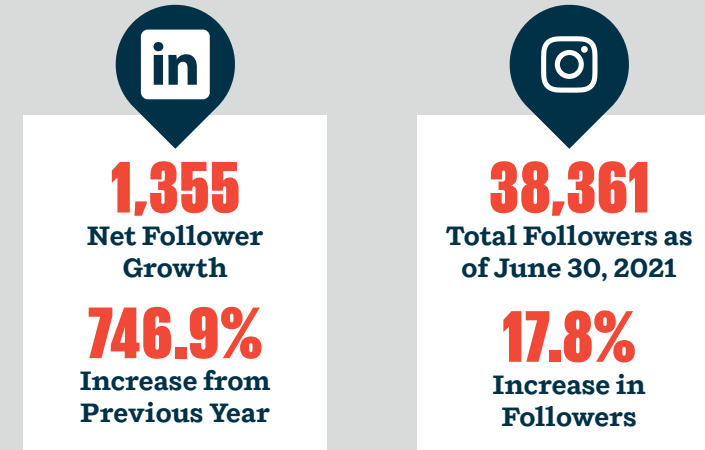
ON THE WEB



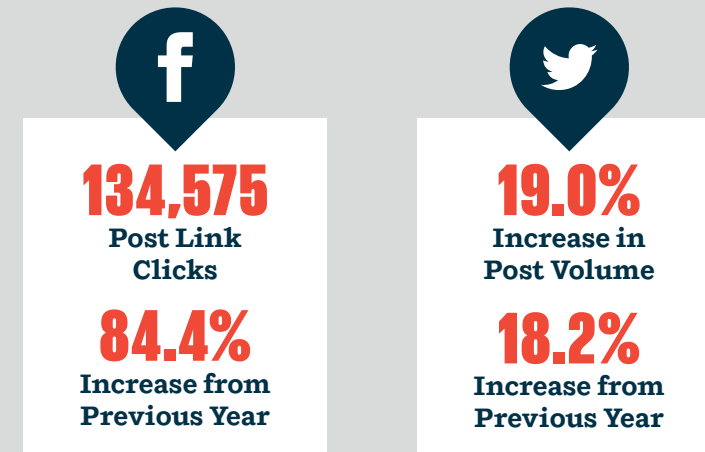
TOP 3 BLOG POSTS From FY 2020/2021

- #1 23,137 PAGEVIEWS**
But First Brunch: 13 Delicious Brunch Spots in Columbia SC
- #2 16,991 PAGEVIEWS**
8 Date Nights Across Columbia SC
- #3 5,791 PAGEVIEWS**
17 Burger Joints You Have to Try in Columbia SC

ON SOCIAL MEDIA



New creative posts like the use of Reels and illustrations contributed to follower and engagement growth on Instagram.



HOTEL BOOKING WIDGET



“Columbia is a small town with a big heart. South Carolina’s capital is a Southern hotspot with a rich history, outdoor adventures, chef-driven restaurants, and a diverse cultural scene. From state-of-the-art museums to one of the most unique national parks in the world, there is something for every kind of traveler in Soda City.”

Sucheta Rawal
Cuisine Noir

“Established in 2003, Congaree National Park in South Carolina is home to astonishing biodiversity. The Cedar Creek waterway passes through a primeval old-growth forest that contains some of the tallest trees in eastern North America. Opportunities are plentiful for viewing various types of wildlife such as river otters, deer, turtles, wading birds, and even the occasional alligator.”

Michelle Stansbury, Marie Claire
New York Amsterdam News

“Forget what you think you know about Columbia. Yes, the downtown is still home to the University of South Carolina. And state legislators still convene at the capitol, where the scars of Union cannonballs mar the granite walls. But these days, students, politicians, and cannonballs are not the only hallmarks of the South Carolina city. Dubbed “Cola” by the cool kids, Columbia is on a high-energy roll. You can now do things like zipline over the Saluda River, cheer on the Columbia Fireflies, step into a room-sized work of art, sip craft beer on a rooftop bar, ponder the Busted Plug, and earn a stamp for your Pimento Cheese Passport.”

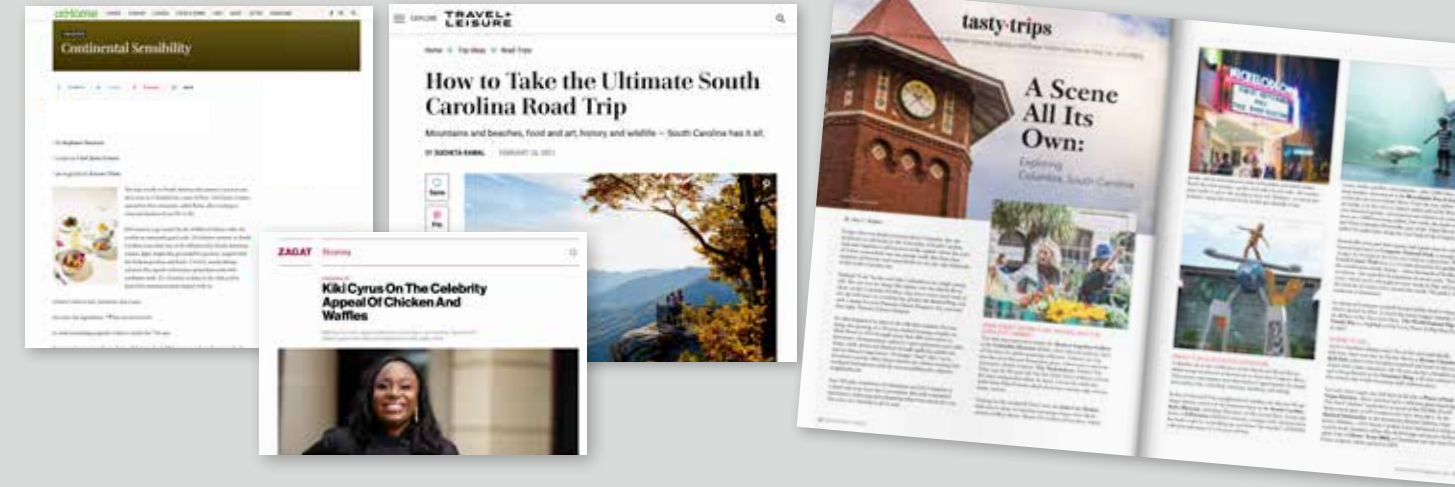
Amy Balfour
Southern Flavor Magazine

“From concerts to cocktail lounges, big bands to Grammy-nominated headliners, there are plenty of ways to experience the sounds of jazz in Columbia.”

Sheryl Nance-Nash
New York Amsterdam News

“Many Americans have learned to associate the Reconstruction era with sleazy “carpetbaggers,” corrupt politicians, financial opportunists and heavy-handed lawmakers. A visit to Columbia can teach us that this was a period of progress and hope here, in South Carolina.”

Regina Cole
Forbes.com



Stephanie Burnette, *atHome Magazine* (June 2021); Sucheta Rawal, *Travel + Leisure* (Feb. 2021); Amy Balfour, *Southern Flavor Magazine* (June 2021); Sucheta Rawal, *Zagat* (Feb. 2021)

RECONSTRUCTED: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA IN COLUMBIA SC



In April 2021, we launched *Reconstructed: A Journey Through the Reconstruction Era in Columbia, SC*, a new history trail curated with the assistance of Historic Columbia. The featured locations and notable people identified in the trail tell the story of the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era in Columbia and offer connections to understand important events that shaped the period.

 **Voted Coolest Up-and-Coming City**
in *Hemispheres Magazine*, September 2020

 **210**
MEDIA LEADS

 **65**
STORIES GARNERED

 **11**
MEDIA HOSTED
Up from 2020

 **18**
PRESS RELEASES

"Experience Columbia continues to be an advocate and partner for the Doubletree Columbia Conference Center. The leadership and sales force works to uncover those pieces of business that "work" for the city and our hotel. Additionally, being a partner in the DMF has given the hotel opportunities in advertising and the ability to attend tradeshow that budget constraints may not have allowed. My hat's off to Experience Columbia!!!"

Rick Lackland
DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel & Conference Center

"We have been partners of the DMF program since our hotel opened back in 2015. This program has been so beneficial to our hotel's marketing efforts and allowed us to do things that in my previous markets we weren't able to do, due to budget restraints. The fact that we can take our annual allotment and allocate it to specifically what our hotel and management group think will benefit our hotel's growth, makes this program so valuable to the success we have had."

David Erbacher
Hyatt Place Columbia Downtown

"Our Experience Columbia SC sales manager kept the communication going during the RFP process, sent me the information I needed before my deadline, and was always quick to respond. The proposal packet they sent made my job easy! I presented the comparison of hotel quotes, amenities and pricing directly from the proposal during a WebEx meeting to the decision makers and they were so impressed! I will definitely be working with Experience Columbia SC again!"

Meredith Morris Lide
The Electric Cooperative of SC, Inc.

57
 New
 Hospitality
 Partners

30
 DMF
 Hotels

11
 In-Person
 Tradeshow

43
 Virtual
 Tradeshow
 & Events

Hot PROSPECTS TO FILL THE GROUP BUSINESS PIPELINE

- The Heritage Foundation, 2022
- The Association for Rural and Small Libraries, 2022
- SC Worker's Compensation Educational Association, 2022
- Children's Trust of South Carolina, 2022
- Stress Neurobiology Workshop, 2022
- Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, SE, 2022
- South Carolina Bar Association, 2023
- Columbia Moles, Inc., 2023
- Association of Concert Bands, 2023
- American Massage Therapy Association, 2024
- Rotary District 7670, 2024
- American Choral Directors Association, 2024

VIRTUAL SITE VISITS

Created SKYNAV virtual site visit for planners and leisure visitors to get a feel for the destination while traveling was halted.



2020/2021 NUMBERS

71
 # of Booked Groups

12,885
 # of Room Nights Booked

VISITOR'S CENTER BY-THE-NUMBERS

1,680
 In-Person
 Visitors

4,178
 Information
 Web Requests

\$6,690
 in Merchandise
 Sales



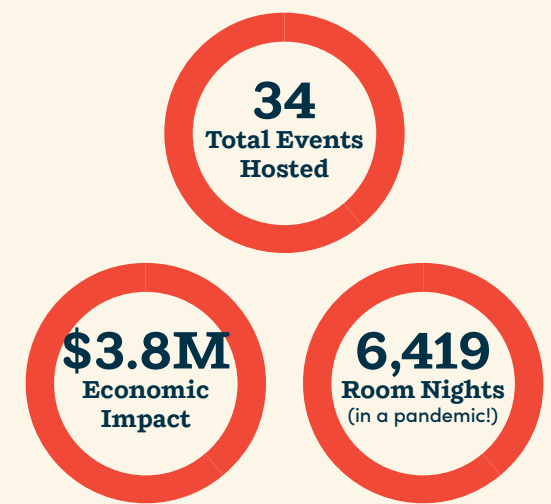
World Championship of Cornhole

“Scott and his team at Experience Columbia SC Sports were a great group to work with. It was easy communication to lock in an awesome venue as well as hotel block and dining/entertainment options for our event. Columbia was a beautiful city and we are can't wait to go back!”

Nora White
Senior Sport Development Manager of Spikeball Inc.

SPORTS ARE BACK IN ACTION

Dusting off that uniform. Allowing the cheers from the crowd to overtake you. Giving your all and leaving nothing on the table. Sports are back, and Experience Columbia SC Sports has been here to host old favorites and welcome newcomers to our region. Ranging from uncommon sports like Cornhole and Spikeball, to the traditional like golf and baseball, our team has been busy booking and servicing events that couldn't go to their typical destinations due to restrictions. With an influx of new sports planners and attendees in the region, we are confident that many of these events and visitors will return now that they've gotten a taste for what our region can offer.



Kayak Bass Fishing Tournament

KEY EVENTS HOSTED

Event | Attendees | Estimated Economic Impact

- 2020 World Championship of Cornhole* | 1,000 | \$353,668
- 2020 AIGA Junior Open | 300 | \$128,904
- 2021 Dance Makers* | 1,100 | \$320,095
- 2021 Diamond Cheer and Dance Competition* | 1,500 | \$375,760.36
- 2021 AAU Basketball Super Regional | 500 | \$400,414
- 2021 Braves Country Battle | 600 | \$276,363
- 2021 AAC Track and Field Championships | 3,000 | \$304,676
- The Clash – AVP Pro Grass Tour | 3,000 | \$362,111
- 2021 USATF – SC Youth Championship | 3,000 | \$284,260

*events hosted at the CMCC



Dance Makers

"The Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center always goes far above and beyond. This season was no different! All of the team members on site were excellent to work with and very professional in this new environment for event planning. Sara Fordham was instrumental in the execution of our event! I do not know if it would have happened if she had not been a part of planning. She was so thorough and very clear on what was needed in order for us to host the event safely!"

Felicia Taylor
Dancemakers, Feb. 2021



Columbia College Hybrid Graduation, April 2021

"The South Carolina Funeral Directors Association (SCFDA) has been meeting at the CMCC for the past 17 years. The location is great, the rooms are perfect, hotels are close and above all the staff. The Convention Staff are some of the best. They communicate and are always willing to make adjustments."

Rion Rampey
SC Funeral Directors Association, Feb. 2021



GLOBAL BIORISK ADVISORY COUNCIL STAR FACILITY ACCREDITATION

We applied for and received the cleaning industry's only outbreak preparation, response and recovery accreditation – the gold standard for safe facilities. To qualify we follow a rigorous set of cleaning protocols and disinfection techniques. To date, we are only 10% of convention centers in North America that have received this credential.

KEY EVENTS HELD

SC Governor's Conference on Tourism

We were thrilled to have the SC Governor's Conference on Tourism relocate to Columbia for **February 15-16, 2021**, which had about **175 in attendance**, and generated about **40 hotel room nights**.

INSPIRE National Dance Competition

Relocated from North Carolina to hold their first event with us **April 23-25, 2021** and welcomed about **800 attendees**, using about **100 hotel rooms**.

Palmetto Family Council

Featuring former VP Mike Pence in his first public speaking engagement since being in the White House, this event was held on **April 29, 2021** for about **450 attendees**. Our team collaborated with secret service & the planning team on walk throughs, security briefings and COVID protocols.

SC Republican Party Silver Elephant Dinner

Held on **September 11, 2020** though much smaller than usual, this was our first significant plated meal function since reopening, safely serving a plated meal to approximately **325 guests**.

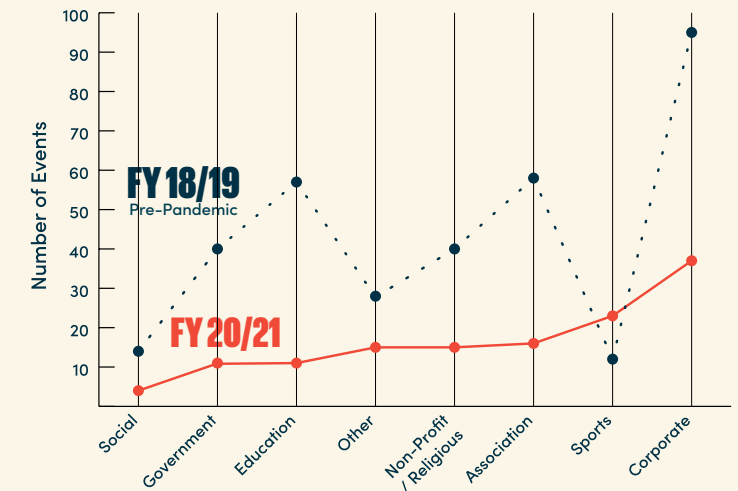
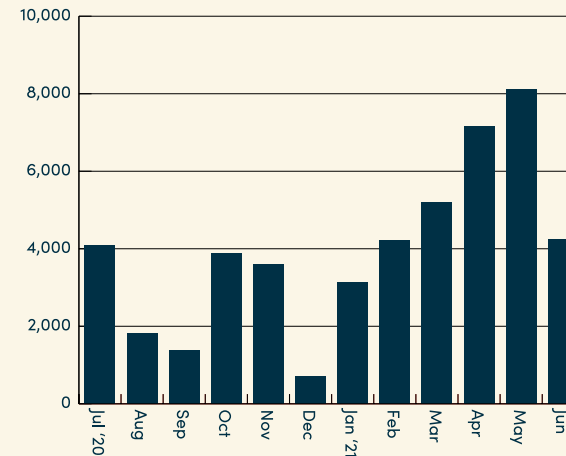
SC State Firefighter's Association

We welcomed about **2,000 attendees** throughout the week, using about **850 hotel rooms**, with fun elements like an outdoor dunk tank, bag pipes, and youth explorer competition to go along with their workshops and expo.

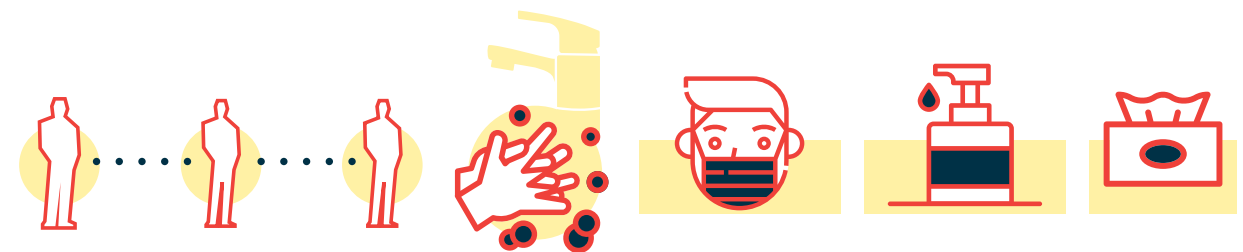
MARKETS OF HOSTED EVENTS

While overall volume was down from a pre-pandemic year, some markets proved to be more resilient than others, with Sports in particular actually growing to more events that we typically hold in a normal year.

ATTENDANCE OF HOSTED EVENTS



SIGNAGE USED TO COMMUNICATE SAFETY POLICIES THROUGHOUT BUILDING





ExperienceColumbiaSC.com