



# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC FY 23/24

Uplifting the Midlands  
Through Travel & Tourism



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## A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Travel and tourism not only allows us to broaden our view of the world. It also brings great economic value to the destinations. The Columbia region is fortunate to have a team of sales, marketing and event staff at Experience Columbia SC dedicated to both creating an exceptional experience for visitors and expanding the local economy.

Each visitor who finds their way to the heart of SC, whether for a conference, sporting event or simply to enjoy the vibrancy of our region, leaves behind dollars spent at local businesses and takes an experience to share with family and friends. With growing visitor volume and visitor spending year after year, it is evident that our efforts positively impact on our economy and reputation.

The Columbia region's growing reputation as an excellent place to hold events and spend leisure time is not a coincidence. This success is the result of networking, creativity and optimism for our region. In the following pages, you'll learn of the work that Experience Columbia SC staff has done to secure the future of travel and tourism in the region by booking events and building relationships that will benefit our community for years to come.

In Partnership,

Bill Ellen

President & CEO | Experience Columbia SC



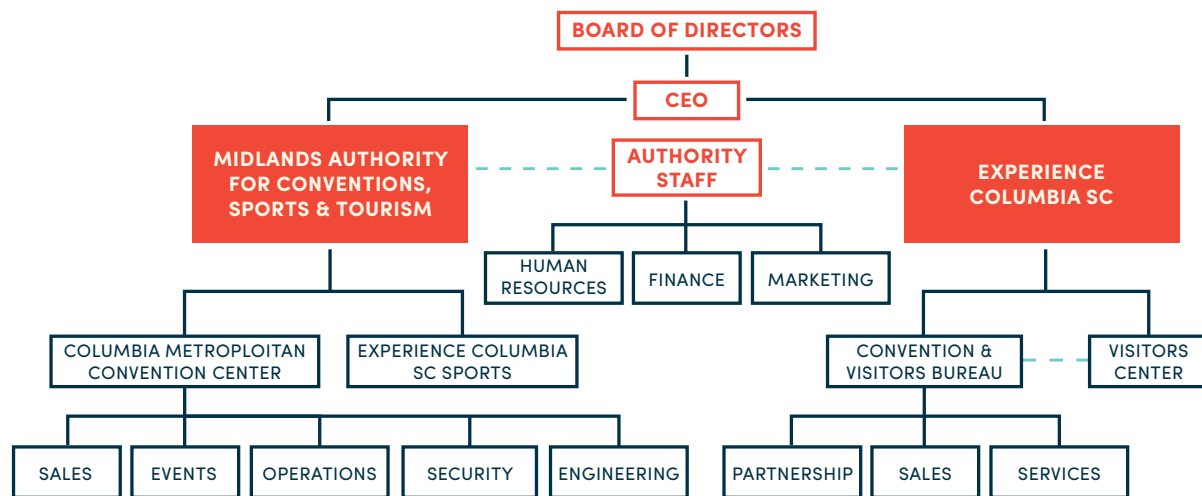




# WHO WE ARE

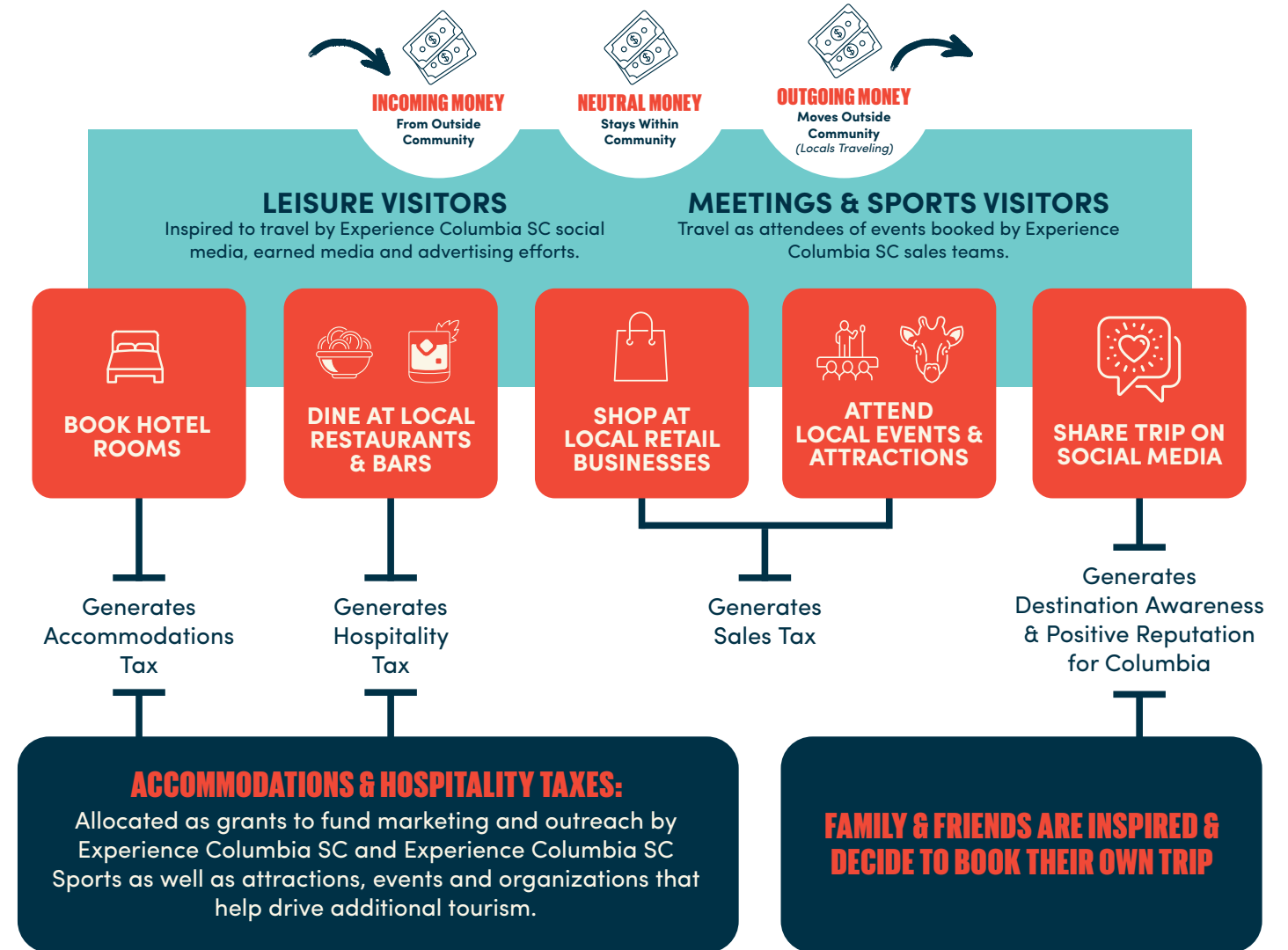
## The BIGGEST CHEERLEADERS FOR HEART OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Tourism is big business in Columbia, South Carolina. Welcoming 16.4 million visitors annually to Richland County, Lexington County and the City of Columbia doesn't happen without lots of hard work and it doesn't happen overnight. We are the Experience Columbia SC and the Midlands Authority for Conventions, Sports & Tourism - sister organizations that encompass the Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Columbia Regional Visitors Center, the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center and Experience Columbia SC Sports. Together with a strong tourism brand and a vibrant hospitality community, we use sales, marketing, convention services and visitor information services to inspire, inform and educate potential visitors about holding an event or planning a trip to the Columbia region, and help them make the most of their time once they arrive.



# The TOURISM LIFE CYCLE

## VISITORS HELP FUEL OUR ECONOMY



### MORE VISITORS MEANS...

- Increased Livability**  
More Things for Residents to Do  
More Reasons for People to Stay or Relocate Here
- Increased Demand for Development**  
Hotels  
Meeting Venues  
Sports Venues
- Increased Business Investment**  
Restaurants & Bars  
Entertainment Venues  
Festivals & Events
- Attractive City to Recruit and Retain Business and Talent

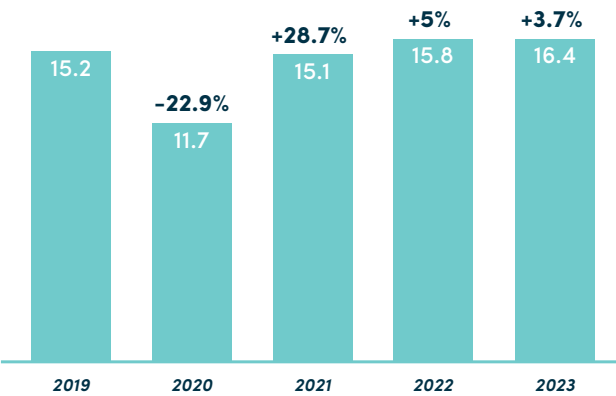
# TOURISM = ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



# Our TOURISM STATISTICS

## COLUMBIA REGION VISITOR VOLUME

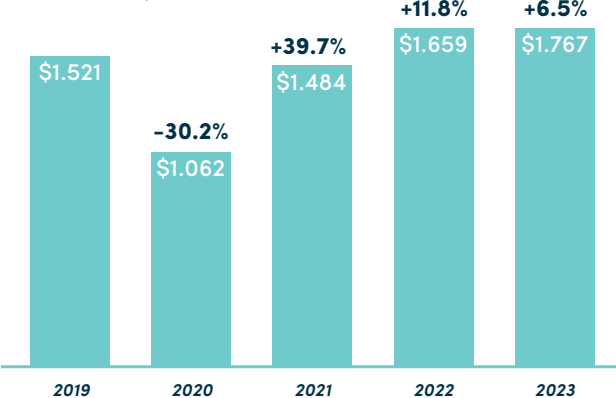
AMOUNTS IN MILLIONS



Sources: Longwoods Int'l, Tourism Economics

## COLUMBIA REGION VISITOR SPENDING

AMOUNTS IN \$ BILLIONS



Sources: Longwoods Int'l, Tourism Economics

**16.4 MILLION**  
VISITORS

**\$1.8 BILLION**  
DIRECT VISITOR  
SPENDING

**\$2.8 BILLION**  
TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

**\$137 MILLION**  
STATE & LOCAL TAXES  
GENERATED

**23,546**  
TOTAL JOBS  
GENERATED

Research reflects data from Lexington County, Richland County and the City of Columbia in 2023 gathered and reported by Tourism Economics on behalf of Experience Columbia SC.

# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC CO-OP ADVERTISING PROGRAM

For nearly a decade, Experience Columbia SC has produced a cooperative advertising plan for travel and tourism partners each year. Because we buy advertising in bulk, partners receive significant discounts on advertising rates through this program. The Co-Op advertising guide includes opportunities for leisure advertising and meetings and convention advertising. The selections range from digital billboards and targeted display ads to print ads and e-newsletters. Not only do our partners benefit from the discounted prices, ECSC also handles the implementation of their selected advertising components on their behalf. While ECSC's own marketing efforts encompass promoting the Midlands region as a whole, this program gives our partners the opportunity to give themselves additional promotion and get in front of potential out-of-market visitors.



### EDVENTURE AWAITS!

Where else can a kid ... Sit in the cockpit of a real airplane? Explore the iconic 40-foot-tall kid, Eddie? Drive a real firetruck?

Visit [EdVenture.org](http://EdVenture.org)



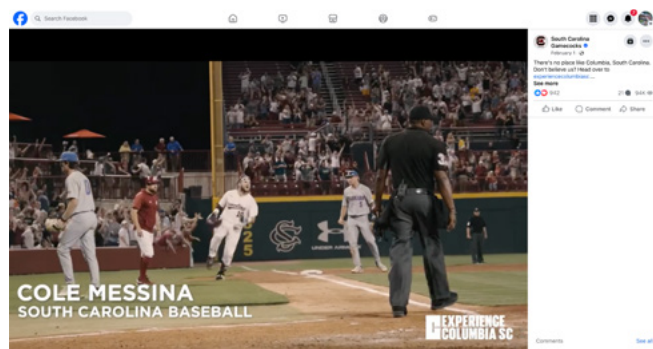
# DIGITAL ADVERTISING STATISTICS

The numbers shown indicate results from a user seeing an Experience Columbia SC digital ad and then taking an action like searching for a hotel or flight to the region. This does not capture all hotel and flight searches to the region.

**Total Hotel Searches** **46,579**

**Total Flight Searches** **1,831**

## NAME, IMAGE, LIKENESS



### ALIYAH BOSTON

Experience Columbia SC also entered into a partnership with former Gamecock Women's Basketball player and current Indiana Fever player Aliyah Boston in January 2024. Over the course of the year, Aliyah will share on her social media platforms 12 times and will join the Experience Columbia SC team for appearances three times.



5:52 PM · Feb 1, 2024 · 13.8K Views

### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

For the first time, Experience Columbia SC partnered with athletes on NIL advertising campaigns. In 2023-2024 Tehina PaoPao (Gamecock Women's Basketball) and Cole Messina (Gamecock Baseball) created two radio advertisements and a video that was shared on social media encouraging University of South Carolina sports fans to visit Columbia, SC.

#### USC NIL Campaign Results:

<b>f</b> <b>30,426</b> Impressions	<b>X</b> <b>13,554</b> Impressions
<b>387</b> Engagements	<b>258</b> Engagements
<b>29,109</b> Reach	<b>4,324</b> Video Views
<b>9,360</b> Video Views	

# WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

We want the whole world to know what makes Columbia SC so great. From website content to social media to traditional advertising, we work on and off the clock to change perspectives and encourage travel and local pride for our region. Think of us as the biggest cheerleaders for the heart of South Carolina.

## ON SOCIAL MEDIA

**Instagram** **49,420** Followers **+8.2% increase**  
**Facebook** **84,493** Followers  
**LinkedIn** **3,075** Followers **+10.93% increase**  
**@** **7,104** Followers **Launched in July 2023**

## ON THE WEB

**Total Pageviews:**  
**3,128,261**  
**+17.55% increase**

**Total Users:**  
**918,484**

**Top Out-of-Market Cities:**  
**ATLANTA, GA**  
**CHARLOTTE, NC**  
**RALEIGH, NC**

## TOP BLOG POSTS

- #1** **18,568** PAGEVIEWS But First, Brunch
- #2** **12,258** PAGEVIEWS Date Night
- #3** **7,049** PAGEVIEWS Unexpected Activities with Kids in Columbia SC
- #4** **6,635** PAGEVIEWS Buzzworthy Coffee Shops

The numbers shown indicate results from a user visiting ExperienceColumbiaSC.com and then taking an action like searching for a hotel or flight to the region. This does not capture all hotel and flight searches to region.

**Total Hotel Searches** **78,895** **Total Flight Searches** **3,582**

# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC

## Media Relations



One way Experience Columbia SC strives to live out its mission is through public and media relations efforts. We promote the Columbia region by pitching story ideas and hosting media to garner regional, national and international destination coverage.

### BY THE NUMBERS



### CONNECTING WITH THE MEDIA

Part of Experience Columbia SC's communications team's efforts include meeting writers where they are in target markets to tell the story of the Columbia region.

#### OCTOBER 2023

Held six virtual meetings with Washington DC-based journalists.

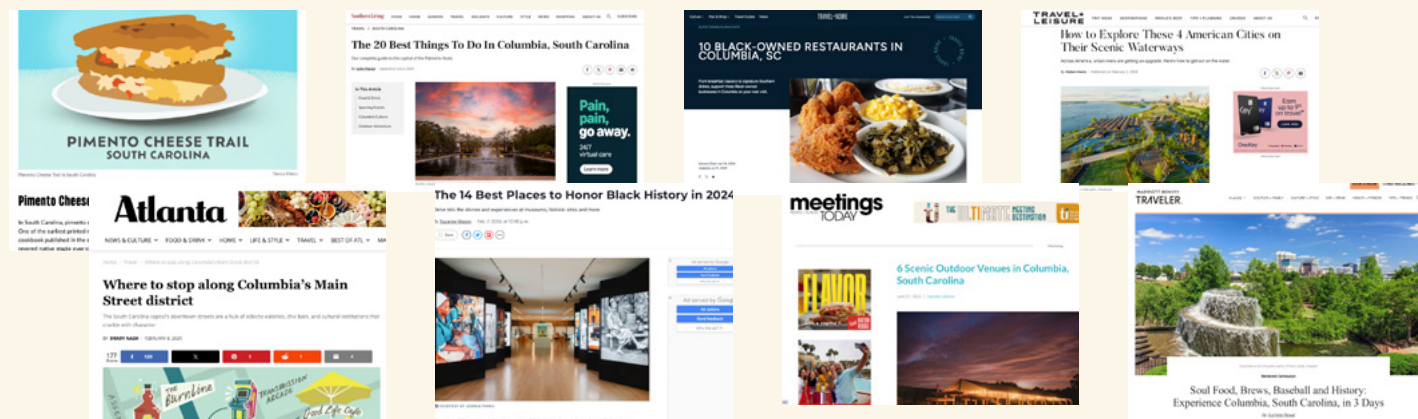
#### JANUARY 2024

Attended TravMedia's International Media Marketplace in NYC to meet with 21 travel writers and content creators. Met with an additional five NYC-based journalists while in the area.

#### FEBRUARY 2024

Partnered with the Garden & Gun Club at the Battery Atlanta to host 50 Atlanta-based influencers, media and friends of Garden & Gun.

### FEATURED ARTICLES



Matt Kirouac, *Inside Hook* (July 2023); Lydia Mansel, *Southern Living* (July 2023); Simone Cheri, *Travel Noire* (Jan. 2024); Robin Annis, *Travel + Leisure* (Feb. 2024); Brady Nash, *Atlanta Magazine* (Feb. 2024); Suzanne Mason, *U.S. News* (Feb. 2024); Danielle LeBreck, *Meetings Today* (June 2022); Sucheta Rawal, *Marriott Bonvoy Traveler*

# PRAISE for COLUMBIA SC

"The city's location may be convenient to other parts of the state, but Columbia's unique appeal and distinct characteristics give plenty of reasons not to wander."

**Lydia Mansel**  
*Southern Living*  
July 2023

"Sitting at the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers, scenic Columbia, South Carolina, is marked by waterfront landscapes, historic buildings and revitalized neighborhoods. Not only can you browse the capital's morning markets, savor fresh Carolina seafood and enrich yourself on Civil Rights trails, but you can also experience outdoor adventures in a splendid national park."

**Sucheta Rawal**  
*Marriott Bonvoy Traveler*  
November 2023

"The South Carolina capital's downtown streets are a hub of eclectic eateries, chic bars, and cultural institutions that crackle with character."

**Brady Nash**  
*Atlanta/Southbound Magazine*  
February 2024

"Although Columbia, South Carolina, is a bustling capital city, it's not hard to feel connected to nature and get outdoors during meetings and events. Thanks to a temperate climate and a location that sits at the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers, which merge to form the Congaree River, the area is flush with trails, gardens, parks – and venues that take advantage of it all."

**Danielle LeBreck**  
*Meetings Today*  
June 2024

"Home to the University of South Carolina Gamecocks, Columbia amalgamates collegiate verve with Southern hospitality, balmy weather, and progressive ideals."

**Johnny Motley**  
*TimeOut*  
October 2023



# THE COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

## EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC

The mission of the Columbia Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau DBA Experience Columbia SC – DMO is to strengthen the area’s economy by marketing and selling the region, it’s accommodations, meeting facilities, restaurants, facilities and attractions as a premier destination for meetings, conventions, tradeshows, special events and leisure travel and by working cooperatively with the hospitality community providing informative materials and assistive services that enhance and promote the desired image of the metropolitan area. For more info visit [ColumbiaSCTourism.com](http://ColumbiaSCTourism.com).



**Danna Lilly**  
Vice President of Convention & Visitors Bureau



**178**

Groups Booked For A Total of 25,673 Room Nights

**110**

Groups Were Provided Service Upon Arrival

**22**

Industry Events & Tradeshows Attended

**\$13,368,947.69**

Economic Impact

## INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

Experience Columbia SC participated for the first time at the Chicago Six in the City and made new client contacts. Chef Robbie Robinson, James Beard nominee for Best Chef Southeast and his staff from City Limits BBQ in West Columbia was a featured guest.

ECSC sponsored the Pimento Cheese at Northstar IPEC in Greenville, SC and it was a huge success.



## VISITOR'S CENTER BY-THE-NUMBERS



## KEY EVENTS OF 2023 - 2024

Southern Association of Student Councils –  
600 People + 850 Room Nights

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity –  
500 People + Over 950 Room Nights

Miss SC Scholarship Pageant –  
2,000 People + Over 950 Room Nights (Client Since 2011)

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Named DoubleTree by Hilton Columbia’s Tourism Partner of the Year
- Supported and attended the 2024 Dupre Catering Spring Tasting & Open house
- Participated in the Columbia SC 63 Walking Tour & Lecture
- Danna and Twila served as guest lecturers this semester at the USC Hospitality & Tourism Management School
- Invited as guests and panelists at the 2024 CHRIE (Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education) at USC
- Supported and attended the 2024 DesignHER Women Panel event
- Staff of ECSC participated in the 2024 Connecting Columbia COR Class
- Supported and attended the 2024 Power in Heels event



# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC SPORTS



The mission of Experience Columbia SC Sports is to strengthen the area's economy by marketing and selling the region as a premier destination for sporting events, partnering with local sports organizations to grow and develop existing events, and by recruiting new events that provide an economic benefit to the region by generating room nights, food and beverage sales and associated tax revenue. For more info visit [ColumbiaSCSports.com](http://ColumbiaSCSports.com).



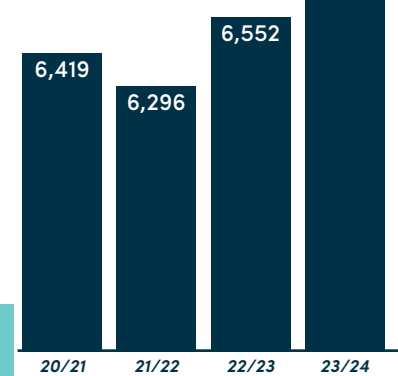
**Scott Powers**  
Executive Director of Experience Columbia SC Sports

## KEY EVENTS HOSTED

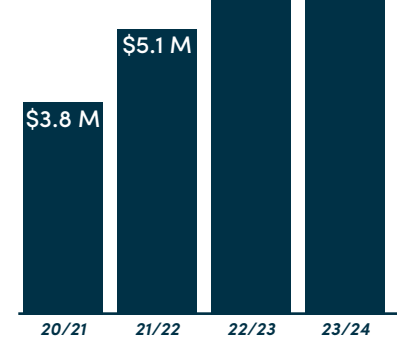
Event Name	Location	Direct Spending
2024 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament	Colonial Life Arena	\$1,330,304
2024 NCCAA Outdoor Track & Field National Championships	Columbia International University	\$610,815
2023 Chick-fil-A Classic	River Bluff High School	\$543,513
2024 Puerto Rico Women's National Team vs. Las Vegas Aces	Colonial Life Arena	\$331,790
2024 SC Senior Games Sports Classic	Multiple Venues Region-Wide	\$259,896

## BY-THE-NUMBERS

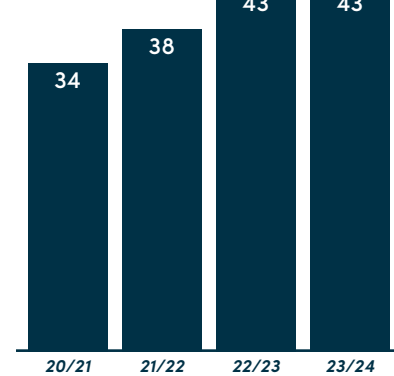
### TOTAL ROOM NIGHTS BOOKED



### ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT



### EVENTS HOSTED



"We worked with both Scott and Anna. They both did a great job communicating and helping us in the preparation for our event."

**Austin Daniel**  
Columbia Volleyball Club President

"We were a problem child that came out of nowhere. Scott provided me with opportunities and options that I never would have considered. He has been a steady hand from the day I met him. He and Anna never let us down when we made a request. Our games started in Florence over 40 years ago. I don't think they ever had the quality of assistance that Scott and Anna provided us."

**Jim Testor**  
SC Senior Sports Classic

"Anna, thank you again for arranging hotel accommodations for our tournament and the gift/goodie bags! They were well received. First class as always! Tremendous support!"

**Kevin Heise**  
Nike Palmetto Cup



## CONFERENCES ATTENDED

### 2023

- Connect Sports Marketplace
- SPORTS: The Relationship Conference
- TEAMS Conference & Expo
- Sports ETA 4S Conference
- US Sports Congress

### 2024

- Sports Xpress Conference
- Sports ETA CEO Summit
- Sports ETA Symposium
- Sports ETA Women's Summit
- Compete Sports Diversity Winter Conference (first time attended in '23-'24)





# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN CONVENTION CENTER

**COLUMBIA SC  
METROPOLITAN  
CONVENTION CENTER**

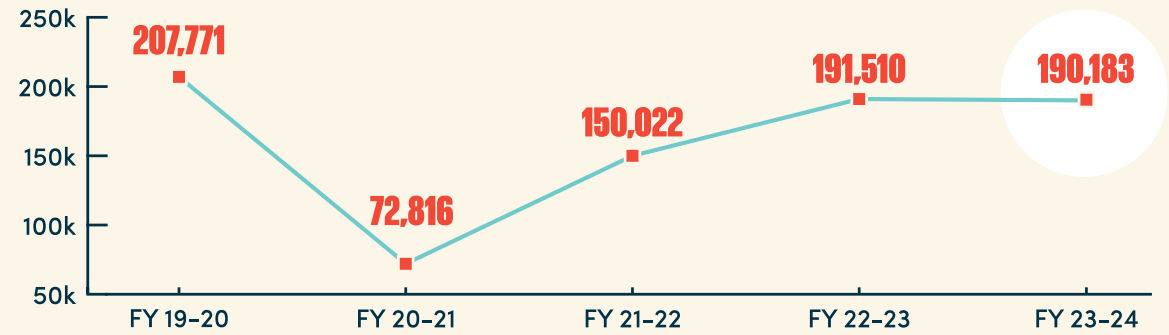


**Cheryl Swanson**  
Vice President & General  
Manager of the Columbia  
Metropolitan Convention Center

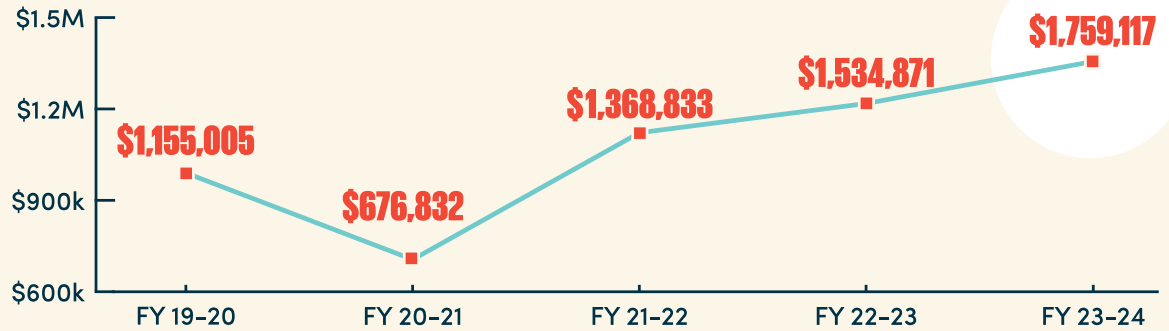
The mission of the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center is to provide a first-class venue offering superior operations management and state-of-the-art amenities for the successful coordination of meetings, convention, tradeshows, entertainment and other special events utilizing the facility, enhancing the economic viability and image of the area. For more info, visit [ColumbiaConventionCenter.com](http://ColumbiaConventionCenter.com).



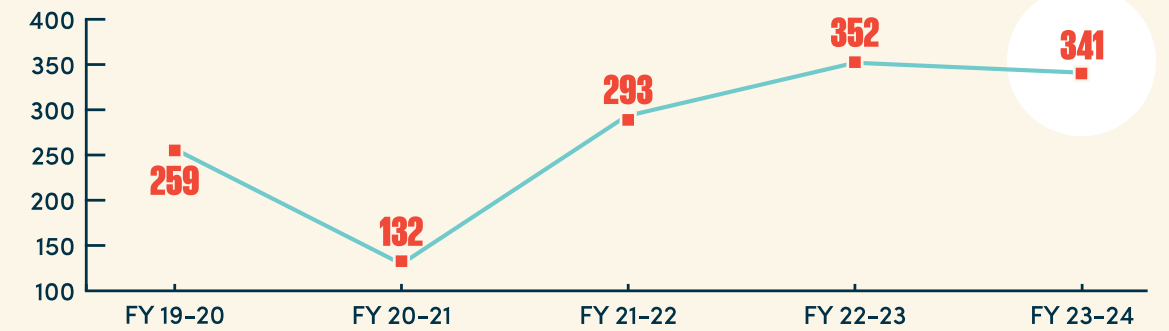
## ATTENDANCE



## BOOKING REVENUE



## # OF EVENTS HELD



## COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 19,557 Total Room Nights
- Participated in Vista Lights holiday event by running a holiday train for children and providing cookies
- Host 9/11 memorial service

## KEY EVENTS HOSTED

**Jurassic Quest** was here for their first time July 5-10, and welcomed 8,951 attendees, using 105 hotel room nights.

**National Council for Geographic Education** held their first event in Columbia with us October 27-29, welcoming 300 attendees, using 200 hotel room nights. This is a national event, and they were very complimentary of their experience in Columbia.

**Southern Gas Association** returned for their 6th Spring Conference & Expo with us in the last 10 years, welcoming 442 attendees using 550 hotel room nights.

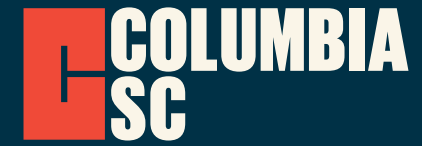
**Mungo Company** held their 2nd Annual Company meeting with us celebrating their 70th anniversary, April 15-17, welcoming 560 attendees, using 400 hotel room nights.

**The 6th District of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity** held their 79th District Annual Meeting with us April 25-28, for the first time with us, welcoming 1,200 attendees, using just under 1,000 hotel room nights.



# FUNDING PARTNERS

Our work is supported by municipal funding partners across the Midlands of South Carolina as well as our statewide tourism agency. These partners include City of Cayce, City of Columbia, City of West Columbia, Lexington County, Richland County, South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, Town of Blythewood, Town of Lexington.







[ExperienceColumbiaSC.com](http://ExperienceColumbiaSC.com)