

EXPERIENCE  
**COLUMBUS**  
MEMBER HANDBOOK





We're pleased to have you on board with Experience Columbus! As you now know, we are the only organization 100 percent dedicated to marketing our great city. We can't wait to connect you to the \$9.7 billion tourism economy in Central Ohio.

The following guide will help you to learn about all the tools available to you as an Experience Columbus member.

We know your business is unique, which is why we offer a wide variety of resources to help you meet your individual business objectives. The tips throughout this handbook will help you determine which tools will be most beneficial to you. Choose what works best for you. We are happy to meet with you to walk through all the options and help develop a plan tailored to your needs and interests.

Begin with the **Getting Started** section, where you'll find a checklist to help you get your membership tools up and running. And if you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us at 614-222-6147 or [members@experiencecolumbus.com](mailto:members@experiencecolumbus.com).

We're here to help any time.

Sincerely,

*The Experience Columbus  
Membership Department*

## CONTENTS

---

2

GETTING STARTED

3-4

MEMBER PORTAL

5-8

MARKETING TOOLS

9

GET INVOLVED

10

STAFF OVERVIEWS



## GETTING STARTED

Use this checklist as a guide to getting started.

### WITHIN 3 MONTHS:

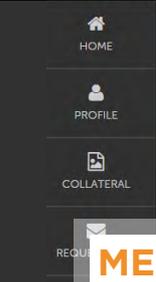
- Update your business/contact information in the Member Portal.
- Update all publication and web page listings in the Member Portal.
- Add events to the calendar.
- Send us photos.
- Send us brochures for distribution in our visitor centers.
- Hang your member decal.
- Read the Member News e-newsletter for upcoming events and industry news.
- Schedule a consultation with the Membership Department to develop a plan to maximize the value of your membership.

### WITHIN 6 MONTHS:

- Talk to us about setting up a meeting so key Experience Columbus staff members can get to know you, at our place or yours.
- Attend a quarterly networking event, educational event or member orientation.
- Utilize the Convention Calendar to connect with meeting planners and see events coming to Columbus.
- Network using the Member Directory.

### WITHIN 9 MONTHS:

- Update Experience Columbus on any changes or news since you joined.
- Touch base with the Membership Department to follow up on your original consultation and find out what else you can do to take advantage of member tools.
- Get involved with the *Certified Tourism Ambassador™* (CTA) and *Experience Dedicated™ Destination* (EDD) programs.
- Review the Get Involved section of this handbook to choose other ways to engage in the industry.
- Review and update your Member Record information (listings and contact information) in the Member Portal.



## MEMBER PORTAL

The Experience Columbus Member Portal is an online hub where you'll access many of your member tools. The following are items you'll manage via the Portal. Access it at [experiencecolumbus.com/member-portal](http://experiencecolumbus.com/member-portal).

Learn how to navigate the Member Portal by watching the tutorial videos on [experiencecolumbus.com/members/portal-videos](http://experiencecolumbus.com/members/portal-videos).

**PARTNER BULLETINS** Interact with Experience Columbus and members using this feature. Post questions, business events or job listings.

**POST BOARD** Upon logging into the Member Portal, you will see Partner Bulletins on the homepage. In this section, Experience Columbus will share any important information for our members, such as Member Portal updates, industry stories or reporting. Please make sure to read any new bulletins you see in this section.

**PROFILE** This section is where you can manage your account, input your business' contact information, update and add contact details and pay any invoices online. Be sure to keep this current, as it feeds Experience Columbus' internal address book and tells us how to contact you.

**Accounts** | For use by those members who have multiple accounts, so they can easily toggle between each one.

**Contacts** | Experience Columbus' master database of contacts we have on file for your organization. It is used to communicate with you regarding special events, opportunities, leads and marketing information. Add any staff that you would like to receive Experience Columbus communications.

**Invoices** | Review your payment history, renew and pay any new invoices online.

**COLLATERAL** In this section, you can manage your external account information. Update your listings and photos, add events and request Experience Columbus materials.

**Listings** | You will manage your listings for Experience Columbus' Visitor Guide, website, member directory and Tour Planner Guide (if applicable) via the Portal. Change, freshen and tailor your messaging and keywords at any time to ensure visitors and/or meeting planners find your business.

**Calendar of Events** | The events calendar is the most popular section of [experiencecolumbus.com](http://experiencecolumbus.com). The calendar only lists events with broad appeal that would interest visitors outside of Columbus, such as festivals, sporting events, live music, visual arts and events of similar nature.

**Media** | Upload photos to your account to use on your business' member listing page on [experiencecolumbus.com](http://experiencecolumbus.com).

**Monthly Activity** | (HOTELS ONLY) Update monthly with occupancy and tour group numbers for reporting.

**Materials Request** | Request Visitor Guides and trail guides to be sent directly to your business.

**OPPORTUNITIES** This section contains all RFPs sent from our Convention Sales team as well as any service requests from our Convention Services, Events and Tourism departments.

**RFPS (HOTELS ONLY)** The Convention Sales, Convention Services and Tourism departments and the Greater Columbus Sports Commission send RFPs through the Member Portal to hotels. To have the best chance of earning business, it is important to respond by the response due date and follow the instructions under action requested. The system does not allow you to respond after the due date; all leads default to a pending status at that time.

**Service Requests** | The Convention Services, Events and Tourism departments send any request from a meeting planner, event planner or tour group operator through the portal in this section.

**REPORTS** This section houses all reports and reporting to and from Experience Columbus.

**Member Directory** | Use the Experience Columbus Member Directory to network with other members and develop new business opportunities.

**Booking Roomflow Calendar** | This report, which can be pulled by month, provides definitive and tentative sales leads from both Experience Columbus and the Greater Columbus Sports Commission.

**Citywides Summary** | Pulls a list of leads from Experience Columbus with 1,000+ room nights on peak.

**Convention Calendar** | Use the Experience Columbus Convention Calendar to promote your business to association executives and meeting planners bringing conventions and events to Central Ohio.

**REQUEST HELP** If you need any assistance or have questions about the Member Portal, this allows you to send an email directly to Experience Columbus.



# COLUMBUS VISITOR CENTER



## MARKETING TOOLS

**LISTINGS** You'll manage your listings via the Member Portal. Change, freshen and tailor your messaging and keywords at any time to ensure visitors and/or meeting planners find your business. *Note: service-related members are listed only on the Experience Columbus website and Member Directory.* After you have submitted an update in the Portal, it will be reviewed and approved by Experience Columbus staff within two business days.

**Website** | Experiencecolumbus.com helps you promote your business directly to visitors, locals and professional meeting and travel planners, while also funneling them to your website. Your description may contain up to 2,000 characters and should include keywords that would commonly be used to find your business. You also may post up to eight photos of what a visitor would experience when they visit your business.

**Member Directory** | This online publication available via the Member Portal is a directory of all Experience Columbus members. This valuable resource is used for networking with other members and to develop new business opportunities.

**Visitor Guide** | (IF APPLICABLE) Published twice per year, the Visitor Guide is the primary fulfillment piece for requests at experiencecolumbus.com and the 866-EXP-COLS tourism hotline. The Visitor Guide is also distributed in Experience Columbus' Visitor Centers, regional AAA offices and travel shows, hotels, the airport, the convention center and various meeting facilities, and through member organizations. It also is available to view online at experiencecolumbus.com.

**Tour Planner Guide** | (IF APPLICABLE) The Tour Planner Guide is an annual publication that promotes group-friendly Experience Columbus members to leisure group tours. The Tourism Department distributes 4,000 guides annually on-site or in follow-up to tour operator conventions and tradeshows, in addition to general inquiries by tour operators and group leaders.

## MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR LISTINGS

- Have good descriptions that include key search terms in your member web page description on experiencecolumbus.com.
- Be sure to add photos to website listings (logos will not be posted).
- If you have meeting space, complete the meeting space grid in the Member Portal.
- Hotels, facilities and restaurants should update amenity information on a regular basis, as we use this information to search for the venues that meet the needs of our clients.

## DISCOUNTED ADVERTISING IN EXPERIENCE COLUMBUS PUBLICATIONS

Experience Columbus members receive discounted advertising in the Visitor Guide and Tour Planner Guide. For details, contact Great Lakes Publishing at 614-461-7645.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS** In addition to entering your events in the Member Portal, you have the option to submit them to [ohioeventfinder.com](http://ohioeventfinder.com) to be promoted on [artsinohio.com](http://artsinohio.com) and [columbusmakesart.com](http://columbusmakesart.com). It will be shared with Experience Columbus, TourismOhio and Ohio Magazine.

Member events are candidates for additional exposure, such as a feature on our website homepage, a feature in our monthly Insiders Club emails or other community newsletters.

**COLUMBUS INSIDERS CLUB** Insiders subscribers receive a monthly e-newsletter with discounts and special opportunities only available to club members. Registration is free.

Submit an Insiders Club offer and your business will be promoted to 60,000+ subscribers. For details on how to submit an Insiders Club offer, call the Marketing Department at 614-221-6623. Sign up to receive the Insiders Club e-newsletter at [experiencecolumbus.com/travel-tools/insiders-club](http://experiencecolumbus.com/travel-tools/insiders-club).

**VISITOR CENTER BROCHURE DISTRIBUTION** Experience Columbus' Visitor Centers, located in the Arena District, at the Greater Columbus Convention Center and at Easton, serve 35,000+ visitors per year. We'll display your brochures if your establishment is an attraction, entertainment venue, retail store or restaurant.

**PHOTOGRAPHY** Attractions, entertainment, culinary, shopping and lodging members can gain extra exposure by sending us photos that show all there is to see and do at your business. Images should feature people, action and diversity. We use them in promotional tools, including, but not limited to, our website, publications, signage, direct mail and brochures to promote Columbus. We also distribute photos to outside sources promoting Columbus as a destination, including media and meeting or tour planners.





**MEMBER NEWS E-NEWSLETTER** Keep us in the loop about what your business is up to and we may feature you in the e-newsletter sent to members. This is a great way to market your business to Experience Columbus' 1,000+ members. You can also purchase a banner ad. Add [members@experiencecolumbus.com](mailto:members@experiencecolumbus.com) to your business' press release distribution list. Call the Membership Department for details at 614-221-6623.

**MEMBER DECAL** Display your Experience Columbus member decal on your business' window or front desk to welcome visitors and convention attendees to your business.

**SOCIAL MEDIA/BLOG FEATURES** When the content is relevant to the visitor audience, Experience Columbus can help amplify online stories and dialogue about your business via our blogs, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Flickr accounts. Contact the Marketing Department for details at 614-221-6623. Be sure to connect with us on these platforms.



@experiencecolumbus | #expcols



**LEISURE ADVERTISING CO-OPS** An annual advertising campaign targets a 3-4 hour drive radius from Columbus, focusing on Cleveland, Charleston, Huntington, Pittsburgh, Erie, Fort Wayne and Ann Arbor. Target audiences are families, empty nesters, grandparents and young professionals. Messaging focuses on family fun, culinary, arts and culture and fashion/shopping. The overarching media strategy is to reach consumers when they are in the beginning stages of the travel planning cycle in order to increase leisure travel with overnight stays to Columbus. Cooperative advertising opportunities may be available for members throughout the year. Call the Tourism Department for details at 614-221-6623.

**CONVENTION AND SPORTS ALERT** Each month, we send an email containing details on the groups coming to Columbus. It includes helpful information on group attendance, location, accommodations, if attendees are on their own for meals and more. Use this tool to plan your staffing as well as identify potential networking and marketing opportunities. To be added to the email list, contact the Convention Services Department at 614-221-6623.

**CONVENTION CALENDAR** The Experience Columbus Convention Calendar is a valuable marketing tool you can use to find upcoming conventions. Use the calendar to promote your business to association executives and meeting planners who are bringing these conventions and events to Central Ohio. The planners' contact information is available and you can contact them via mail or email. Be sure you know best practices to follow when marketing to this audience.

**NETWORKING EVENTS** Relationships are vitally important in business. Mix and mingle with members and staff of Experience Columbus at our quarterly networking events, which are free to attend for members. We often partner with other Columbus networking groups to ensure there are always new people to meet.

**EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS** Experience Columbus hosts professional development workshops six times per year to help members stay on top of the latest marketing trends and tools. These workshops are free to attend for members. Topics have included everything from pitching the media and Facebook advertising tips, to using and understanding Google Analytics.

**EXPERIENCE COLUMBUS ANNUAL MEETING** 900+ industry professionals gather from throughout the community to learn about the latest developments within the hospitality industry in Central Ohio. Purchase sponsorships, tables and individual seats for this fantastic networking opportunity.





## GET INVOLVED

**BECOME A CERTIFIED TOURISM AMBASSADOR™** The *Certified Tourism Ambassador™* (CTA) program is a national certification and respected professional achievement. You will improve your knowledge of the Columbus region and develop a better understanding of your roles in increasing tourism business. Sign up at [joinuscolumbus.com/cta](http://joinuscolumbus.com/cta).

**PARTICIPATE IN THE EXPERIENCE DEDICATED™ DESTINATION PROGRAM** Join other area businesses to bring more visitor business to our community. When you participate in the *Experience Dedicated™ Destination* (EDD) program, you work with the entire local industry to collect ongoing visitor data. There is no cost to participate. Learn more and sign up at [joinuscolumbus.com/feedback](http://joinuscolumbus.com/feedback).

**VOLUNTEER WITH COLUMBUS** Find entertaining leisure volunteer opportunities in Columbus. It's one-stop shopping for you and your friends to engage in the fun events and activities that take place in our city. Learn more at [joinuscolumbus.com/volunteer](http://joinuscolumbus.com/volunteer).

You can also use this program to recruit and manage volunteers for your event(s). Call the Visitor Services staff to learn more at 614-221-6623.

**MAKE IT COLUMBUS** Think about your organization. Do you have regional or national meetings? Do you belong to a professional association with meetings? Let us help you with our free services; we'll do all the heavy lifting to get the group here. All you need to do is provide information on a group that can consider coming to Columbus. Then, Experience Columbus and the Greater Columbus Sports Commission will take it from there. Visit [makeitcolumbus.com](http://makeitcolumbus.com) or contact the Convention Sales Department at 614-221-6623.

**LEISURE GROUP NETWORK** If your business services group travel customers, you should belong to the Columbus Leisure Group Network. Joining the network is the best way to receive business from the group tour market and keep current with changing trends. In addition, all Leisure Group Network members receive leads from Experience Columbus after attendance at national and regional trade shows. To learn more and sign up, contact the Tourism Department at 614-221-6623.

## DEPARTMENT OVERVIEWS

The **CONVENTION SALES DEPARTMENT** sells Columbus as a convention, meeting and tradeshow destination to a national audience. The department collaborates with other hospitality industry professionals, including hoteliers and facility operators, to produce bids to host meetings and conventions in Columbus. The department also exhibits at tradeshow, conducts sales calls and hosts site inspections, among other sales activities.

The **CONVENTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT** works with meeting planners after an event is committed to be held in Columbus. Staff help to promote the destination, connect planners with our members who can supply goods and services, welcome attendees to the city and make sure visitors have a great experience in Columbus. The department offers these free services to planners no matter if the planner booked through our office or not. The Services team verifies room blocks for all meetings that are managed solely by a Convention Services manager and requests from hotels the actual sleeping room pickup numbers for all groups in our database.

The **EVENTS DEPARTMENT** creates and manages high-profile events for Experience Columbus and the Greater Columbus Sports Commission. These annual events increase awareness of our organization and the local hospitality industry, while providing increased funding opportunities. The Events staff also manages the downtown banner program and the Greater Columbus Events Council.

The **MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT** supports sales efforts via strategic marketing, public relations and social media tactics. Marketing and communications staff manage all outbound communication, working closely with each department of Experience Columbus, as well as the Greater Columbus Sports Commission, to achieve objectives. The department is also engaged in efforts to raise the profile of Columbus as a vibrant, world-class city. Finally, the department is charged with creating awareness of the economic and social value of the hospitality industry, as well as enhancing the reputation of Experience Columbus both within and outside of Greater Columbus.

The **MEMBERSHIP DEPARTMENT** handles all sales, services and retention of Experience Columbus' 1,000+ members, representing a variety of industries. Additionally, Membership works with all departments of Experience Columbus to assist in the promotion of members.

The **PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT** serves as a liaison between Experience Columbus and its members and partners to local government and civic leadership. Public Affairs coordinates activities with regional elected officials, business leaders and leading nonprofits aligned with our mission.

The **TOURISM DEPARTMENT** markets and sells Columbus as a leisure destination to groups and individual consumers. The Tourism department also manages the *Certified Tourism Ambassador*<sup>™</sup> (CTA) and *Experience Dedicated*<sup>™</sup> Destination (EDD) programs, the Columbus Leisure Group Network, the Experience Columbus Visitor Centers and the Volunteer with Columbus program.

[experiencecolumbus.com/members](http://experiencecolumbus.com/members)

