



EXPERIENCE
COLUMBUS

Experience Columbus Partner Handbook



WELCOME

Our team is pleased to have you on board! Experience Columbus is 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 learn about all the tools available to you as an Experience Columbus partner.

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. 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 partnership tools up and running. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us at **614-221-6623** or **partners@experiencecolumbus.com**.

We're here to help any time!

Sincerely,

The Experience Columbus Partnership Department

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GETTING STARTED

Use this checklist as a guide to getting started.

WITHIN 3 MONTHS:

- ☐ Update your business/contact information in the Partner Portal.
- ☐ Update all publication and web page listings in the Partner Portal.
- ☐ Add events to the calendar.
- ☐ Send us photos for our marketing efforts.
- ☐ Send us brochures for distribution in our visitor centers if applicable.
- ☐ Display your partner decal.
- ☐ Read the Partner News e-newsletter for upcoming events and industry news.
- ☐ Schedule a consultation with the Partnership department to develop a plan to maximize the value of your partnership and evaluate opportunities.

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 networking event, educational event or partner orientation.
- ☐ Utilize the Convention Calendar to connect with meeting planners and see events coming to Columbus.
- ☐ Network using the Partner Directory.
- ☐ Join our *Show Your Badge* and *Insider's Club* programs.

WITHIN 9 MONTHS:

- ☐ Update Experience Columbus on any changes or news since you joined.
- ☐ Touch base with the Partnership department to follow up on your original consultation and find out what else you can do with our partner 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 Partner Record information (listings and contact information) in the Partner Portal.

WITHIN 12 MONTHS:

- ☐ Renew your annual membership!



HOME



PROFILE



COLLATERAL



REQUEST HELP



PARTNER PORTAL

The Experience Columbus Partner Portal is an online hub where you'll access many of your partner tools. The following are items you'll manage via the Portal. Access it at experiencecolumbus.com/partner-portal.

Learn how to navigate the Partner Portal by watching the tutorial videos on experiencecolumbus.com/partners/portal-videos.

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

POST BOARD | In this section, Experience Columbus will share any important information for our partners, such as Partner Portal updates, industry stories or reporting.

PROFILE

Accounts | For use by those partners 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 new invoices online.

COLLATERAL

Listings | You will manage your listings for Experience Columbus' Visitor Guide, website, partner directory (if applicable) 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. 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 up to eight photos to your account to use on your business' partner listing page on experiencecolumbus.com. No logos please.

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

RFPS | (HOTELS ONLY) The Convention Sales & Services and Tourism departments and the Greater Columbus Sports Commission send RFPs through the Partner 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 Sales & 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

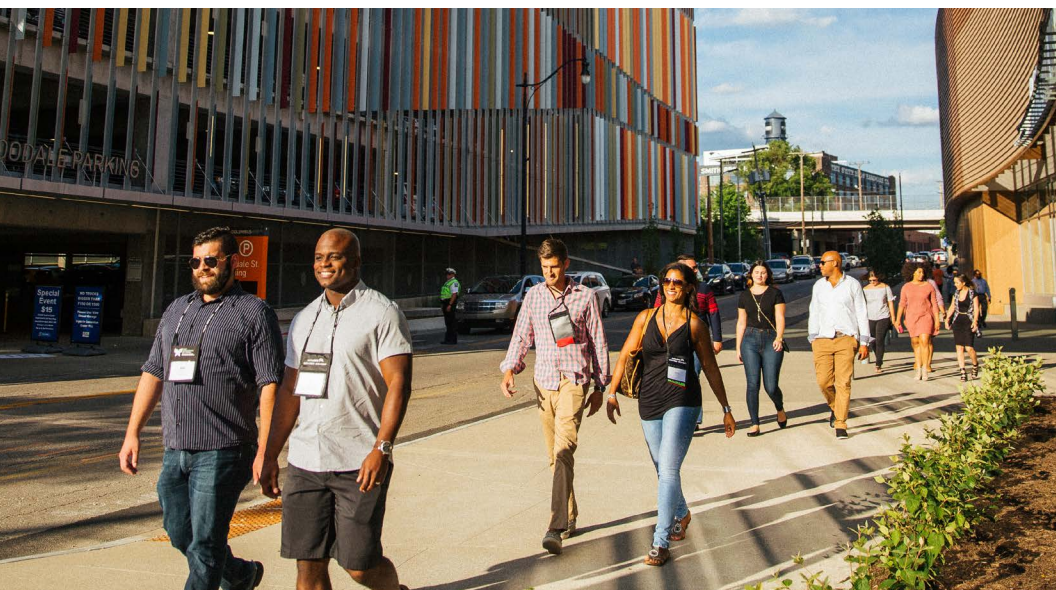
Partner Directory | Use the Experience Columbus Partner Directory to network with other partners and develop new business opportunities. Export the directory to Excel to make sorting easier.

Hotel 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 (citywides).

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. Export the calendar to Excel to make sorting easier.

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





MARKETING TOOLS

LISTINGS | You'll manage your listings via the Partner Portal. Change, freshen and tailor your messaging and keywords at any time to ensure visitors and/or meeting planners find your business. *Note: Business service-related partners are listed only on the Experience Columbus website and Partner 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. Our website has more than 1 million unique visitors per year.

Partner Directory | This online publication available via the Partner Portal is a directory of all Experience Columbus partners. This valuable resource is used for networking with other partners 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, printed more than 300,000 times per year, 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 partner 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 partners to leisure group tours. The Tourism department distributes 4,000 guides annually on-site or in follow-up to tour operator conventions and tradeshow, 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 partner 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 Partner 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.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS | In addition to entering your events in the Partner Portal, you have the option to submit them to ohioeventfinder.com to be promoted on artsinohio.com and columbusmakesart.com. It will be shared with Experience Columbus, TourismOhio and Ohio Magazine.

Partner 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 partners. 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, email Michelle Ford at mford@experiencecolumbus.com

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 partners can gain extra exposure by sending us photos. Images should showcase your business and 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. Please send your photos to Audrey Hall at ahall@experiencecolumbus.com.

DISCOUNTED ADVERTISING IN EXPERIENCE COLUMBUS PUBLICATIONS

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

PARTNER ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES | Experience Columbus now offers additional marketing and partner enhancement opportunities as an add-on to your existing partnership. For more information contact us at 614-222-6623 or partners@experiencecolumbus.com.





PARTNER NEWS AND EVENTS

PARTNER 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 partners. This is a great way to market your business to Experience Columbus' 1,000+ partners. You can also purchase a banner advertisement.

Add partners@experiencecolumbus.com to your business' press release distribution list.



CONVENTION AND SPORTS ALERT | Each month, we send an email containing details on convention and sporting events coming to Columbus. It includes helpful information on the events' attendance, location, accommodations, 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.

NETWORKING EVENTS | Relationships are vitally important in business. Mix and mingle with partners and staff of Experience Columbus at our quarterly networking events, which are free to attend for partners. We often pair 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 partners stay on top of the latest marketing trends and tools. These workshops are free to attend for partners. 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.

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.

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.

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.

LEAD IT HOME | 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 leadithome.com or contact the Convention Sales & Services department at 614-221-6623.

LEISURE GROUP NETWORK | If your business supports 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 partners 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.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

