

- VISIT MILWAUKEE'S 2014 -

# Annual Report







## MISSION STATEMENT

VISIT Milwaukee's mission is to market the Greater Milwaukee area as the destination of choice for conventions, events, and leisure travel, thereby increasing the economic impact of tourism.

## VISION STATEMENT

VISIT Milwaukee is recognized as the chief image and tourism marketing organization of the Greater Milwaukee area, and continues to be recognized as a major contributor to a thriving tourism economy that supports job creation and the growth of our convention and tourism infrastructure.





2014 RESULTED IN  
RECORD OCCUPANCY  
FOR DOWNTOWN  
MILWAUKEE HOTELS

Tourism in Greater Milwaukee experienced a banner year in 2014, resulting in a substantial increase in local economic impact. We credit the team at VISIT Milwaukee for their continued dedication to selling Milwaukee as a destination for meetings, conventions, and leisure travel. Thanks to these efforts, total tourism business sales in Milwaukee County grew 5.9 percent to almost \$3.19 billion. Total tourism employment grew to 30,900 full-time positions with more than \$1 billion in labor income.

A strong year for conventions, business and leisure travel, 2014 resulted in record occupancy for downtown Milwaukee hotels. Hotel revenues showed impressive growth, up 7.4 percent in Milwaukee County and 13.5 percent in the City of Milwaukee.

But VISIT Milwaukee is about more than hotels. We want people to leave our city with a positive feeling that they can share with friends, colleagues, and family to encourage future visits.

The busy 2014 convention year was anchored by our annuals, Northwestern Mutual and the Bead & Button Show, but new conventions and events, such as Bombardier/Evinrude, John Deere, NCAA and International Society on Thrombosis & Haemostasis also made their mark. USA Triathlon returned to



the lakefront in August for an unprecedented second year, and due to the huge success of this event will be back in 2015.

On the PR and Marketing side, VISIT Milwaukee's renewed messaging for a "fun and easy" vacation resulted in nearly 340 articles and 700 million media impressions. The VISIT Milwaukee website had over 800,000 unique visits and 4.1 million total visits, due in large part to the massive rebrand, including 46 new website articles and social media videos.

Our Partnership department had a great year and our numbers are up 3.5 percent overall, with a 91 percent partner retention rate. A few of the partners we added this year included Aurora Health Care, Cousins Subs, the Mayfair Collection, Hospitality Democracy Restaurants, Uber and Bublr Bikes.

Looking ahead, the forecast for our industry remains very positive in 2015. Industry experts predict that the upcycle in travel will continue well into 2016 with steady growth in both business and leisure travel. Overall demand for hotel rooms in 2015 will continue to outpace supply growth in most markets, resulting in an estimated increase in hotel RevPAR nationally of 4.3 percent as estimated by Smith Travel Research.

Throughout the Greater Milwaukee area, we expect to see continued revenue growth in 2015 with a shift in mix to more business and leisure travel with a slight decrease in convention room nights. Hotels are in the best position they've been in for many years to grow rate, and as a result less inventory is available for discounted convention/event bookings. We expect this trend to continue beyond 2015, affecting overall convention booking pace. We will see fewer large city-wide conventions than we have in years past, particularly during the high demand summer period. We will target smaller conventions that fit best with the new demand patterns. While the number of conventions booked and serviced will not decrease, we expect to see smaller blocks that fill fewer available convention dates. This trend is being seen in cities throughout the US as we've shifted from a buyer's market to a seller's market in the hotel industry.

As market mix shifts, VISIT Milwaukee will increase its leisure marketing to increase overall leisure demand. While prices for hotel rooms will be increasing for leisure travelers, we should see overall travel costs staying relatively flat in 2015. The significant decrease in the cost of gas should bode well for more car trips to Milwaukee. We offer so many unique leisure activities that are easy to enjoy and are a great value. Our 2014 research indicated growing positive awareness of these activities in Northern Illinois. Leisure travelers tend to



book short term and we will continue to ensure Milwaukee is top of mind in this key market.

We look forward to working with all of our community partners to maximize tourism spending in 2015. We all need to think big in building a new sports and entertainment complex, expanding our transportation options and maintaining healthy cultural and entertainment venues. Important decisions will be made in 2015 that will impact our tourism economy for years to come. ■

**PAUL UPCHURCH**

President & CEO

VISIT Milwaukee

**ALDO MADRIGRANO**

Chair

VISIT Milwaukee Board of Directors



THE USA TRIATHLON  
WILL RETURN TO  
MILWAUKEE IN  
AUGUST 2015 FOR AN  
UNPRECEDENTED  
THIRD TIME IN THE  
SAME HOST CITY.

VISIT Milwaukee's largest department, convention sales, is responsible for attracting meetings and conventions to the Milwaukee area from local, regional and national organizations. The sales managers work in specific geographical and vertical markets where they have developed an expertise in order to foster strategic relationships with meeting planners and contract conventions for both long-lead annual meetings and short-contract bookings.

In 2014, the convention sales department continued its core convention sales strategy of bringing meeting planners to experience the destination, as studies have shown that the likelihood of securing business significantly improves when planners visit Milwaukee. The team conducted 102 individual site tours and one unified familiarization tour.

When meeting planners weren't able to visit Milwaukee, the sales staff brought Milwaukee to them, participating in more than 15 trade shows, 25 industry events and 13 sales events throughout the United States.

The ASAE Annual Meeting was held in Nashville in August 2014, and was the best attended annual meeting in nearly 10 years. VISIT Milwaukee, as in years past, hosted a large-scale client event for current and prospective customers in conjunction with its three-city coalition partners Visit Pittsburgh and





Travel Portland. It was among VISIT Milwaukee's most successful coalition events ever, with 175 customers attending. VISIT Milwaukee's booth enjoyed heavy traffic flow thanks in part to its perennially popular "spice blending" promotion using Spice House's base ingredients.

VISIT Milwaukee's second year of participating in IMEX America took place in October 2014 in Las Vegas, and set an attendance record. Through marketing, PR and good old fashioned sales prospecting, the convention sales team walked into the 2014 show with 100 percent more appointments than the previous year.

## ROOM NIGHTS

The sales team booked 195,907 convention room nights for 2014 and future years, 100.47 percent of the goal. The team also generated 885,831 lead tentative room nights, 126.55 percent of the goal.

The department also achieved 203,502 actualized group room nights, representing \$148.5 million in economic impact.

By expanding on strategic partnerships with key third parties, the sales team produced 10,218 room nights and \$1.527 million in room-night revenue from Conference Direct, and 11,296 room nights and \$1.634 million in room-night revenue from Helms Briscoe.

A focus on key tertiary markets continues to produce positive results with the sports market, delivering more than 35,000 room nights. These results contributed to both Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee experiencing a 3.7 percent occupancy growth, and Milwaukee Downtown achieving a record 69.5 percent annual occupancy. Demand grew by 5.5 percent outpacing a supply growth, which ended the year up 1.7 percent. The Milwaukee MSA RevPAR ended at \$62.18, up 6.3 percent and fourth in our nine-city competitive set.

For Milwaukee West, which includes VISIT Milwaukee's strategic partner, Wauwatosa, there was a 10.8 percent increase in occupancy growth, to 68.7 percent. The average rate jumped over \$3 to \$86.82 and the RevPAR grew from \$51.74 to \$59.68, making this a strong market for sales.

## CONVENTIONS

**CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES** (14,000 room nights)

**DEERE & COMPANY** (9,068 room nights)

**THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR ARBORICULTURE** (3,945 room nights)

**USA TRIATHLON** (3,751 room nights)

**BRP** (3,105 room nights)

**SVP WORLDWIDE** (2,014 room nights)

The USA Triathlon will return to Milwaukee in August 2015 for an unprecedented third time in the same host city. The Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses is also anticipated to return to Milwaukee in 2015 in a smaller format. VISIT Milwaukee is currently in talks with other organizations that operated in Milwaukee in 2014 to return in the coming years. ■





IN 2014, THE  
CONVENTION SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT ASSISTED  
472,201 ATTENDEES  
AT 273 CONVENTIONS,  
MEETINGS,  
AND EVENTS.

The convention services department works with booked conventions and events to coordinate local convention logistics. They also assist groups with promoting Milwaukee both prior to and during their convention. The team ensures an exceptional Milwaukee experience and may assist the convention in many ways, from welcomes to transportation, hotel arrangements, meeting logistics, entertainment, dining and events. The convention services managers connect conventions and their attendees with local businesses.

In 2014, the convention services department assisted 472,201 attendees at 273 conventions, meetings, and events. Ninety-five percent of meeting planners who held events in Milwaukee this year rated the convention services staff as “Excellent” or “Very Good” on post-event surveys.

Due to the team’s outstanding reputation throughout the industry, VISIT Milwaukee is recognized and receives a series of awards each year. For the 13th year, the services department was awarded the Pinnacle Award by Successful Meetings Magazine for “setting the standard for others to follow.” Furthermore, for the 8th consecutive year, the convention services department was awarded the Meetings and Conventions Gold Service award, presented to CVBs that are “dedicated to meeting professionals.”



Convention Services welcomed several large, national conventions and events to Milwaukee in 2014, including:

- Pheasants Forever 2014 National Pheasant Fest
- National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts Annual Conference
- NCAA Division 1 Men's Basketball Championship (2nd and 3rd Round)
- International Institute of Municipal Clerks Annual Conference
- National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors, Inc. Annual Convention
- Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses District Convention
- International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis
- International Association of Administrative Professionals Annual International Convention
- International Society of Arboriculture Annual Conference and Trade Show
- Deere & Company New Product Introduction Meeting

The convention services team maximized relationships with event planners of annual meetings to ensure their continued success in Milwaukee and their return for future years, including:

- Wisconsin Association of School Boards
- Anime Milwaukee
- Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services Association
- Wisconsin State Reading Association
- Kalmbach Publishing Bead and Button Show
- Kohl's
- Wisconsin Restaurant Association
- Northwestern Mutual's Annual Meeting of Network Professionals

In addition to assisting incoming conventions, the services department also organizes the Visitor Information Center and over 160 active volunteers, giving 3,300 volunteer hours. Visitor Information assisted more than 22,000 visitors over the course of the year.





DEARMKE CONTINUES  
TO PENETRATE  
THE MILWAUKEE  
MARKETPLACE AND  
FLOURISH THROUGH  
LOCAL EVENTS, SUCH  
AS THE DEARMKE  
PREMIERE EVENT AT THE  
MILWAUKEE  
FILM FESTIVAL.

The communications department told Milwaukee's story in regional, national and international media outlets, exceeding the department's goal and resulting in almost \$38 million in public relations advertising value. For a convention and visitors bureau with a marketing budget that is lower than its peer cities, earned media is a great way to compete and get the Milwaukee story heard.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The VISIT Milwaukee social media presence has continued to grow. Overall, Facebook fans increased 22 percent and Twitter followers increased by 58 percent. Additionally, the team worked to foster and grow Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn accounts for the VISIT Milwaukee brand.

In 2014, the communications team implemented four large-scale social media promotions. Kicking off the year, the team coordinated with the NCAA tournament to create a unique "Milwaukee bracket" and pitted local



attractions against each other to draw attention to Milwaukee being a host city for the games. Running back-to-back this summer, the team launched two JEM Grant social promotions for the Harley-Davidson Museum “The American Road” exhibit and IndyFest. Both giveaways offered amazing Milwaukee prize packages and garnered over 1,000 entries. Finally, to promote shopping in Wauwatosa, the team worked with local partners to put together a holiday promotion in November.

In its third year, DearMKE launched the remainder of the 14 films to critical acclaim and proceeded to grow its social media presence on Facebook and Twitter. DearMKE continues to penetrate the Milwaukee marketplace and flourish through local events, such as the DearMKE premiere event at the Milwaukee Film Festival, which included a VIP pre-party and a sold out viewing of all the films at the Oriental Theater. Other local sponsorships included Fish Fry & a Flick, Gallery Night at the Iron Horse Hotel, Millennial Train and various Yelp! events.

## Media Hits

- USA Today: 10Best: Bookstores Around the USA
- Conde Naste Traveler: Best Airport Food in the World
- USA Today: 10Best: Top 10 Must-See Museum Exhibits this Summer (Harley-Davidson Museum, The American Road)
- ABC Travel Guides for Kids: Top Destination for Family Travel in 2014
- USA Today: 10Best: 10 Best City Art Districts Around the USA (Historic Third Ward)
- Conde Naste Traveler: 15 Best New Restaurants (Ardent)
- Jetsetter: Where to go in 2014 – “Hot destination!”
- New York Times: “In Milwaukee, A District for a Bite and a Brew”





DUE TO THE SUCCESS  
OF THE REBRAND,  
VISITMILWAUKEE.ORG  
RECEIVED MORE THAN  
801,340 PAGE VISITS, UP  
10 PERCENT OVER 2013  
AND TOTAL PAGE VIEWS  
ARE UP 29 PERCENT  
AT 4.1 MILLION.

In 2014, the marketing team expanded the leisure advertising campaign launched in 2013 by VISIT Milwaukee's agency of record, Jigsaw LLC. While the overall look stayed the same, the summer and fall campaigns expanded into niches through a new itineraries section with 30 vacation inspiring itineraries on topics such as music, family friendly, beer and brewing, dining and romantic weekend getaways. The promotion of these itineraries was highly targeted through platforms like Pandora online radio. The campaigns were in market for over six months and generated over 61 million impressions.

To coincide with the leisure campaigns, the marketing and communications team created 25 videos to help brand the city. Twenty short social media clips showed off things that make Milwaukee unique, an economic impact video that explained VISIT Milwaukee's core mission and two new leisure videos showcased Milwaukee's entertainment options and identity as a beer and brewing destination, respectively. The team also conducted several photo shoots to expand VISIT Milwaukee's photo library. All of the new assets gathered from the photo and video shoots help to populate VISIT Milwaukee's online media database, WebDAM, which has over 3,124 assets.

The team also worked on two off-season campaigns – "Pack for Milwaukee" and "Five Star Shopping Spree." "Pack for Milwaukee" was promoted through a collaboration with the Packers' mailing list and generated almost 9,000 entries and 508,750 impressions. The "Five Star Shopping Spree" campaign was promoted through social media advertising to Chicago, Green Bay and Madison areas and generated over 4,000 entries.



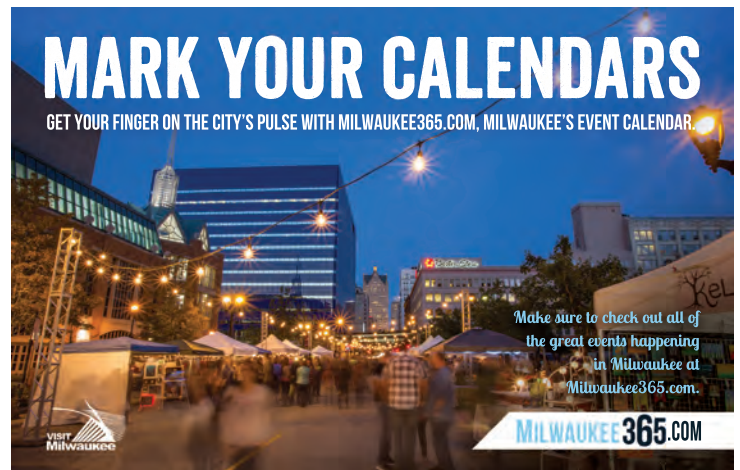
In addition to the leisure campaigns, VISIT Milwaukee placed ads marketing the city to both meeting planners and group tour operators, generating over six million impressions.

To enhance the online experience of tourists looking to plan vacations to Milwaukee, the marketing team completed a total redesign of VISITMilwaukee.org and Milwaukee365.com and improved the sites' navigation. This redesign included the addition of 46 new content articles that both boosted SEO and provided more useful content to visitors. Based on the redesigned VISITMilwaukee.org, the team created a completely new tourism website for Wauwatosa, VISITWauwatosa.org, to promote help Milwaukee's neighboring city to the west. Finally, the team created custom microsites for the Gateway/Airport area, VISIT Milwaukee's sports event planning and more.

Due to the success of the rebrand, VISITMilwaukee.org received more than 801,340 page visits, up 10 percent over 2013 and total page views are up 29 percent at 4.1 million. In July 2014, VISITmilwaukee.org had its highest monthly traffic ever – more than 111,000 visits, surpassing the traffic of the previous year that included the Harley-Davidson 110th Anniversary. Milwaukee365.com also had a great year with over 307,000 web visits.

Additionally, the team produced four guides and a city map this year: the Official Visitors Guide, the Meeting Planner Guide, the Group Tour Planner, the Bikers' Guide (for the Milwaukee Rally), and the Official Visitors Map. Both the copywriting and the design of the guides were produced in-house. The team also distributed quarterly group tour, travel writer and meeting planner newsletters, and monthly leisure and partner newsletters.

Finally, with the help of JEM (Joint Effort Marketing) Grants from the State Department of Tourism, VISIT Milwaukee promoted "The American Road" exhibit at the Harley-Davidson Museum and IndyFest, which was televised to a live audience of 640,000 people.



Milwaukee365.com



2015 Official Visitors Guide





PARTNERSHIP HAS A  
91 PERCENT PARTNER  
RETENTION RATE,  
HIGHER THAN THE  
INDUSTRY STANDARD.

VISIT Milwaukee, as the primary organization marketing to visitors, also provides tools to partner hospitality businesses to market themselves to leisure visitors and convention attendees. Benefits to partners include sponsorship and advertising opportunities, enhanced website presence, inclusion in collateral (maps and guides), social media promotional opportunities, educational seminars on hospitality issues and networking events for the hospitality community.

In 2014, the partnership department worked to grow engagement within the Greater Milwaukee community by strengthening its outreach through new collaborations. These efforts resulted in a 3.5 percent increase in the number of VISIT Milwaukee partners and a 6.6 percent increase in partner dues revenue.

Key new partners include:

Cousins Subs  
Aurora Health Care  
Mayfair Collection  
Hospitality Democracy Restaurants  
Uber  
Bublr Bikes

Outpost Natural Foods Cooperative  
Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce  
Courtyard by Marriott Milwaukee Brookfield  
Bounce Milwaukee  
Foamation, Inc.  
Neroli Salon and Spa



Additionally, the department has a 91 percent partner retention rate, higher than the industry standard. To keep this retention rate up, the team works to organize and host several partner events that help to create partner engagement, teach partners about VISIT Milwaukee and its impact on the city, and encourage networking.

The 2014 events kicked off with a Customer Service Training seminar, followed by the VISIT Milwaukee Annual Meeting held at the Intercontinental Milwaukee, with more than 400 community members in attendance. The team hosted its annual Partner Showcase, bringing partners together with potential customers, as well as the Greater Milwaukee Hospitality Open golf outing, which helped to raise \$23,000 for the GMHLA Scholarships and the VISIT Milwaukee Education Fund. Finally, the year ended with VISIT Milwaukee's annual Marketing to the Meeting Planner event, which saw a 45 percent increase in attendance over 2013.

In addition to educational seminars, the partnership department also hosted several mixers including a happy hour mixer in October that showcased the upcoming Milwaukee arts season. The team also held a mixer in conjunction with the MMAC on the rooftop of Ugly's on Old World Third Street, filling the facility to its capacity.

The department also worked to strengthen lines of communication between VISIT Milwaukee and partners using a LinkedIn group, which grew to more than 1,000 members in 2014. The team also organized the partner newsletter "The Voice," which was distributed monthly to 1,696 partner contacts.

Finally, the team worked with the Milwaukee Brewers in a special sponsorship and ticket promotion. The collaboration helped the Brewers to sell 450 club level tickets to Milwaukee hotel visitors and further increased collaboration between Milwaukee sports teams and hotel partners.





## 2014 CALENDAR

January 23	Advertising/Sales Opportunity
February 5	Special Event Showcase
February 19	Partner Mixer & Pep Rally
February 25	Partner Spotlight
March 20	VISIT Milwaukee 101
April 16	Partner Spotlight
May 8	Annual Meeting
May 13	VISIT Milwaukee 101
June 12	"The Great Milwaukee Summer" Customer Service Sessions & Expo
July 16	VISIT Milwaukee 101
July 17	Partner Mixer w/MMAC
August 3-4	Greater Milwaukee Hospitality Open
August 20	Partner Spotlight
October 1	VISIT Milwaukee 101
October 8	Happy Hour, Hot Water
October 23	Partner Spotlight
November 13	VISIT Milwaukee 101 VM Board Room, 9-10:30 a.m.
November 20	Marketing to the Meeting Planner



VISIT MILWAUKEE  
HAD ANNUAL  
BUDGETED REVENUES  
OF \$8.7 MILLION IN  
2014, OF WHICH 83  
PERCENT WAS  
DERIVED FROM THE  
OCCUPANCY TAX  
AND OTHER PUBLIC  
FUNDING.

VISIT Milwaukee, a private, non-profit corporation, was incorporated in 1967 as a 501(c)(6) tax-exempt organization. Governed by an independent board of directors, the President/CEO leads a full-time staff of 37, as well as additional part-time and seasonal staff members.

VISIT Milwaukee is a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). The role of a DMO is to market and sell the destination's convention facilities, hotels, attractions and other hospitality industry businesses to meeting planners and leisure visitors. In addition, VISIT Milwaukee works to enhance the image of the Greater Milwaukee area on a national level.

To accomplish this mission, VISIT Milwaukee's main funding source is the occupancy tax, also known as "room tax" or "bed tax," an industry-imposed tax paid by overnight visitors. Currently, VISIT Milwaukee receives a portion of occupancy taxes from the City of Milwaukee (through a contract with the Wisconsin Center District) and the City of Wauwatosa.

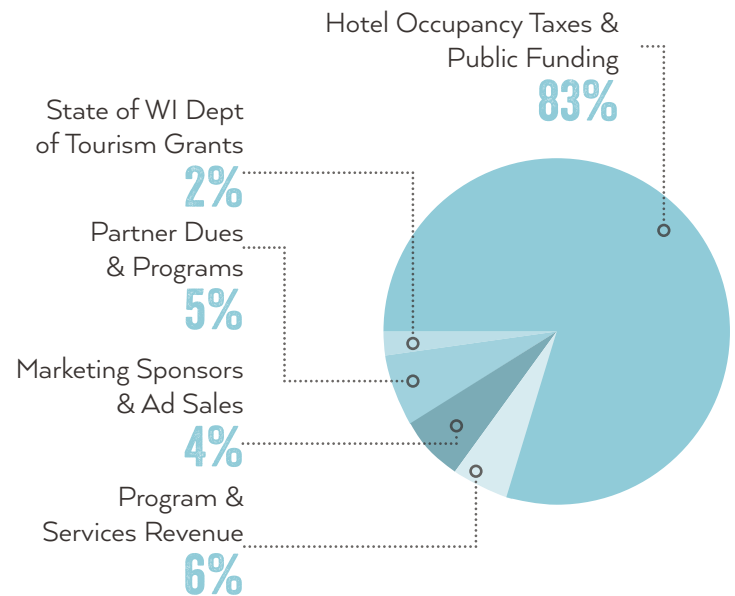
VISIT Milwaukee had annual budgeted revenues of \$8.7 million in 2014, of which 83 percent was derived from the occupancy tax and other public funding. In 2014, total City of Milwaukee occupancy taxes were \$12.3 million. VISIT Milwaukee receives approximately 46.5 percent of the total

city taxes collected. The remainder of the occupancy taxes are retained by the Wisconsin Center District in order to pay the bond debt on convention facilities.

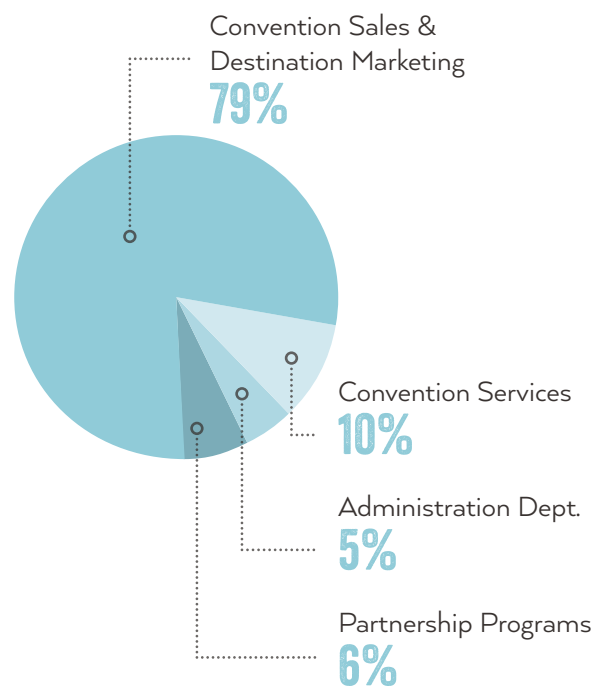
The balance of its funding comes from additional public support and tourism grants, marketing sponsorships, advertising sales, partner dues and programs and other program and services revenue.

VISIT Milwaukee's financial operations are reviewed by a four member Audit/Finance Committee of the Board of Directors, led by the Secretary/Treasurer. In addition, VISIT Milwaukee retains an independent audit firm, Ritz Holman CPAs, to conduct an annual financial audit of the organization's financial operations and internal controls. ■

## FUNDING SOURCES



## PROGRAM EXPENDITURES







## REGIONAL PARTNERS

City of Milwaukee

Wauwatosa

Milwaukee County

## STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Potawatomi Hotel & Casino

Wisconsin Center District

Spirit of Milwaukee

## CORPORATE PARTNERS

BMO Harris Bank

Marquette University

American Society for Quality

Aurora Health Care

Johnson Controls, Inc.

Cousins Subs

We Energies

Meijer

Kohl's Department Stores

Delta Airlines

Northwestern Mutual

Palermo's Pizza

Beer Capitol Distributing

Milwaukee Bucks

Summerfest

Rockwell Automation

Levy Restaurants at the  
Wisconsin Center District

Marcus Hotels & Resorts

MillerCoors

Milwaukee Brewers

Harley-Davidson Motor Company

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee





For more information,  
call 1.800.554.1448 or go to [VISITMilwaukee.org](http://VISITMilwaukee.org)

