



## 2015 Meeting Planner Focus Groups

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Prepared by



# Project Overview

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of conducting focus groups among local Springfield meeting planners was to gain a better understanding of how the Springfield CVB can help attract more meetings, groups and events to book in Springfield.

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## **METHODOLOGY**

The Meeting Planner Focus Groups were conducted among meeting planners from Springfield and other areas within driving distance of Springfield. A total of 11 meeting planners were interviewed in June 2015 over the course of 2 focus groups.

Meeting Planners discussed their preferences for booking meetings in destinations, their perceptions of the Springfield area and looked at the Springfield Meeting Planner website to give feedback on the functionality of the resources available online.

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# Executive Summary

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# Springfield Brand is Strong

- Most meeting planners are booking events far in advance. The bigger meetings are often booking 4-5 years in advance with smaller meetings as close as 45-90 days out. This poses a hurdle in that even as Springfield works to improve the area for planners, the selling cycle means booking may not occur for many years on the larger conferences.
- Meeting planners were very encouraged to see all Springfield has to offer for activities and raved about the community's easy wayfinding, low crime rate, thriving arts community, easy access by interstate and more. The Springfield brand is strong in their minds.
- Yet, Springfield isn't at the top of Missouri's meeting destinations list. There is a perception that the capacity for large meetings isn't available and there are no large convention centers with an attached hotel to satisfy meeting delegates.





## Attendees Prefer a Connected Space

- Meeting planners (especially those who plan large meetings) look for destinations with spaces large enough to hold their attendees in both hotel rooms and meeting space. Bonus points are given to those with connecting spaces so all attendees can be together for ease of planning and increased delegate satisfaction.
- Planners also like to ensure that there are enough area activities for their attendees to participate in while meeting in a destination. If the destination doesn't have attractive activity options, the turnout is usually lower.
- Meeting planners appreciate being able to quickly and easily access this type of information online, and if it's not online, being able to quickly connect with someone within the destination is appreciated.



# The Website is a Key Selling Point

- The information meeting planners expect to find online pertains to hotel space/price, types of rooms, area activities, air lift information, location of hotels, proximity to area activities, etc. Once their primary needs are met, they are comfortable calling the CVB or individual hotel to get more details on the destination or facility. The destination website is the first source to attract planners and to get a destination in their consideration set.
- The website is key in selling the destination to meeting planners and the [springfieldmo.org](http://springfieldmo.org) website has visually appealing and professional photos that help support the positive Springfield brand. However, when planners start searching for information, they begin to have some difficulty. The separate meeting site is very similar to the visitor site and trying to navigate between the two seems counterintuitive to some.





## Navigation Issues Could be Addressed

- The meeting planners appreciated the information on meeting locations and being able to find information on each location quickly. Additionally, they indicated it would be better for the site to have the available activities tailored to the group audience, rather than the individual visitor audience.
- The one thing missing from the site that almost every meeting planner wanted was a way to upload their own RFP documents, without having to fill out a form.
- Meeting planners indicated that the labels at the top of the webpage need to be very intuitive and describe what they would find on the page if they navigated there. Additionally, many didn't realize they could scroll down the page to get more information. Most are still in the habit of clicking to a new page and navigating back to where they started. Making the site more intuitive for those who aren't used to the new style will be important as more websites are still transitioning to the new style.





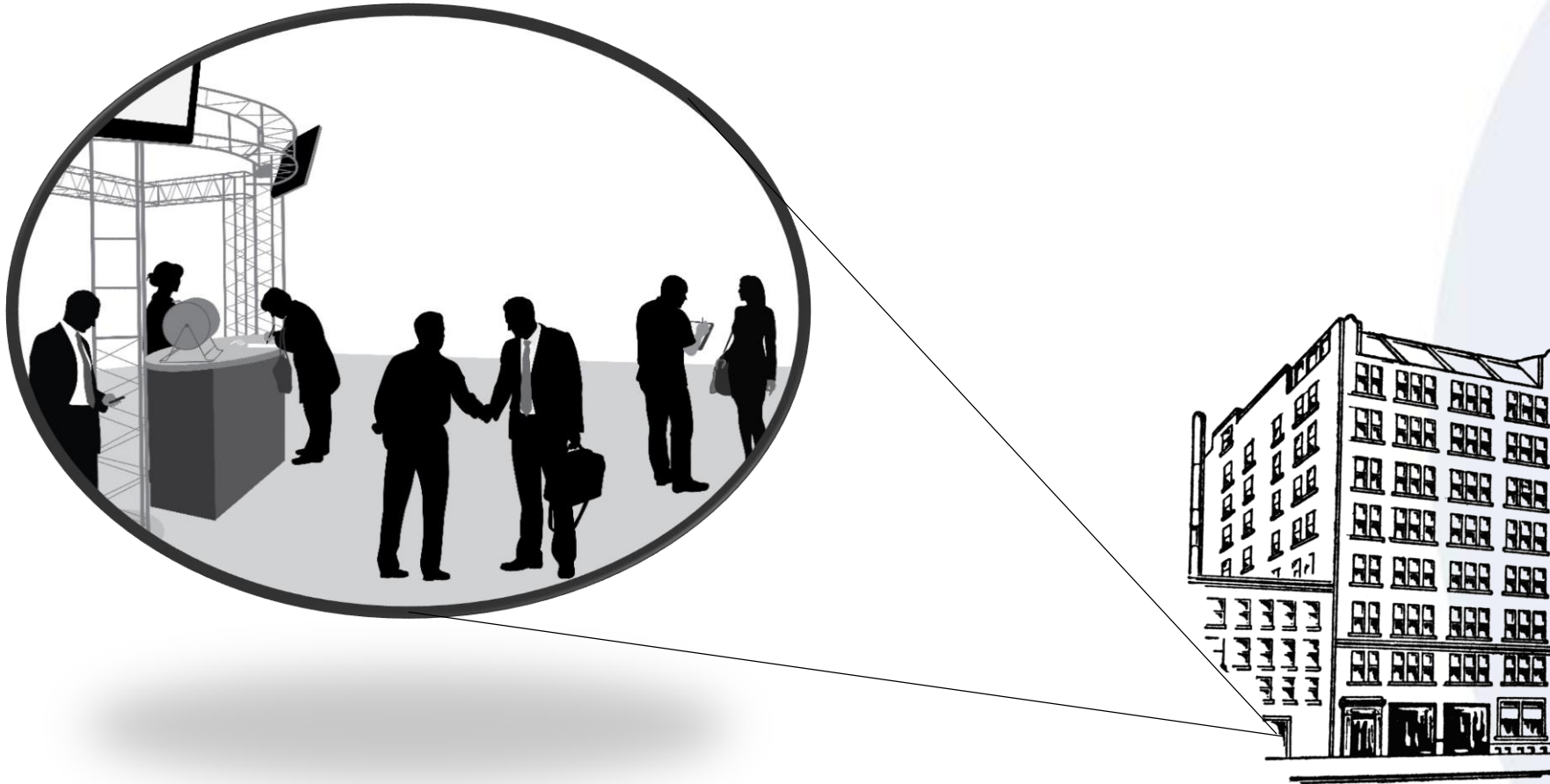
# Desirable Attributes for Meeting Planners

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01

# One Facility – One Place Where Everyone is Together

Meeting planners say their attendees prefer to meet in locations where the hotel and meeting space are connected to make meeting and networking easier. Without this feature, planners could, and do, lose attendance.



## Activities Within Walking Distance

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Meeting attendees are away from home and without personal transportation. Having activities within walking distance of the meetings and hotel are key to choosing a destination. Additionally, being able to easily find and share the information about area activities online is important to planners.

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# Resources for Meeting Planners

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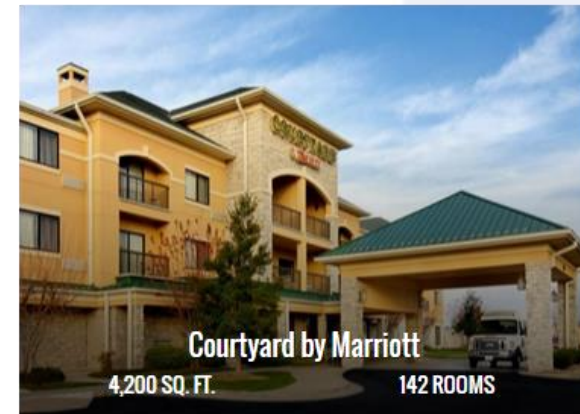


# Accommodation Information

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Meeting planners appreciate having quick access to the available accommodations, meeting space and rates for the spaces available in a destination. They are familiar with the process of getting ADR from the hotels and, therefore, they don't expect to find that information on a CVB website.

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# Transportation Information

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Transportation information is vital for meeting planners as well—especially if the airport is not located near the hotels/meeting space. Easy access to air lift, highway access and taxi information is also important for those events that have attendees traveling from many different areas. Making this information easy to find helps reduce stress for the planner.

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## Online Resources

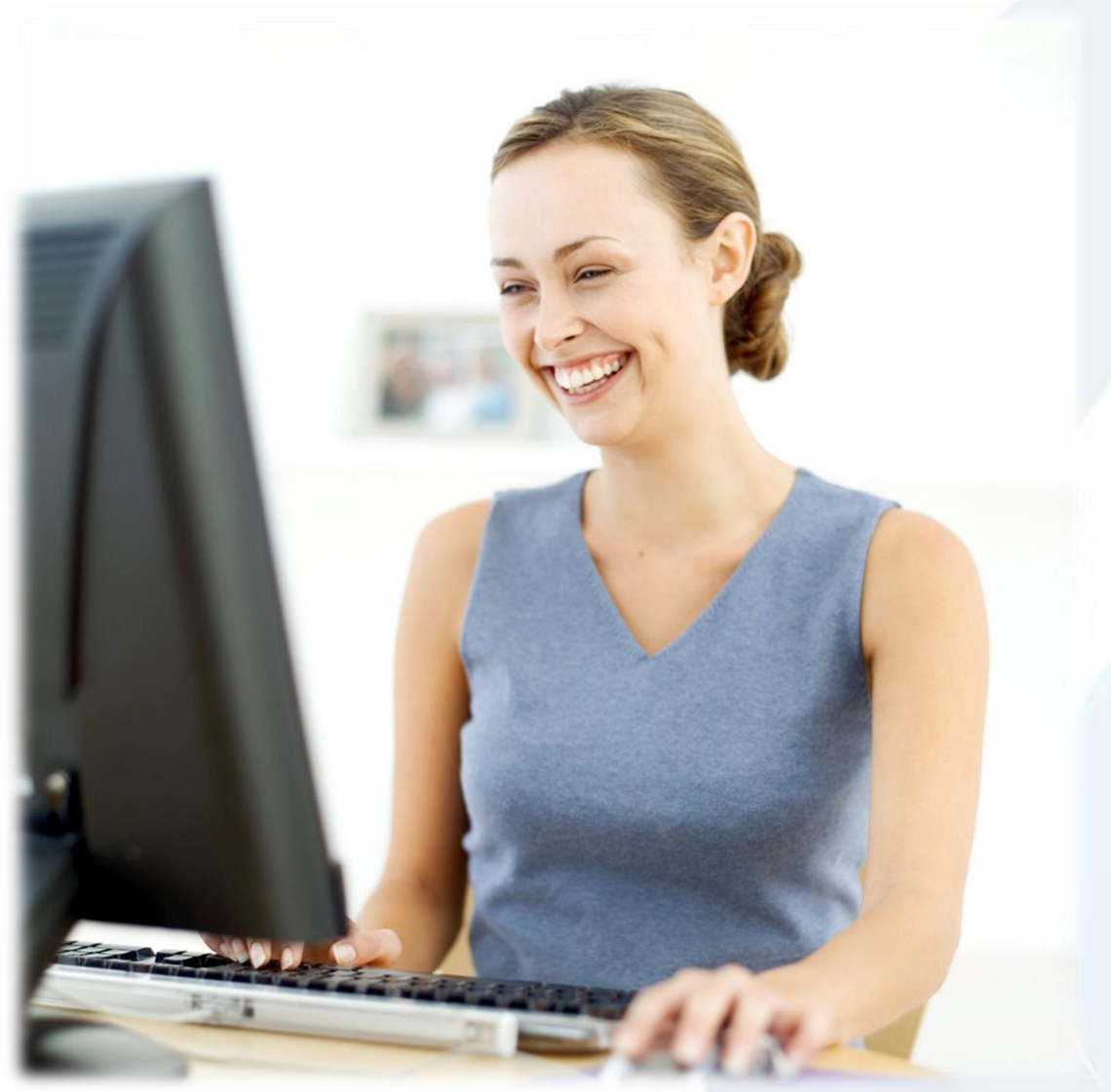
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Meeting planners tend to gather most of their information online—especially when they are in the beginning phases of planning a meeting/conference. For more detailed information, they turn to the CVBs in the destination of their event.

Meeting planners want to be able to find the key points to make their decision online, yet don't want to be overwhelmed by too much information. The information they expect to find online pertains to hotel space/price, types of rooms, area activities, air lift information, location of hotels, proximity to area activities, etc.

Finding the right amount of information to present online is key to selling a destination for meetings and conventions.

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## Working with Local CVBs/Hotels

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There is some information that is just not available online, or is easier to talk to a person to obtain. Meeting planners work closely with area CVBs, Chambers of Commerce and other local entities within a destination to finalize the details of their meetings and conventions. These services vary from printing needs to trophy making.

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# Springfield, MO Evaluation

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03

## Lack of Facilities

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Springfield is not at the top of the list of Missouri destinations for meeting planners. Some have considered the area, but for many the space limitations eliminate Springfield from their consideration set. Many have the perception that the area does not have the capacity to hold large meetings and conventions. The spaces that do have a convention space connected to hotel rooms don't have enough rooms available for all of the attendees like larger cities (St. Louis/Kansas City) do.

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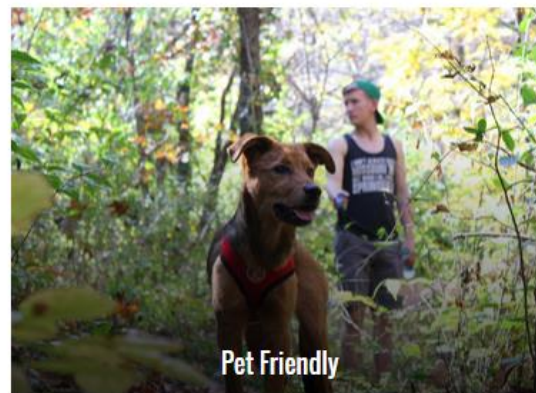
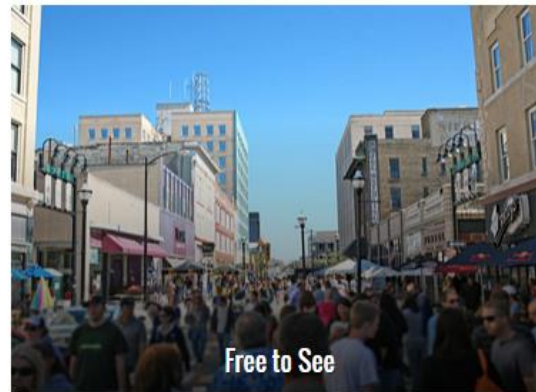
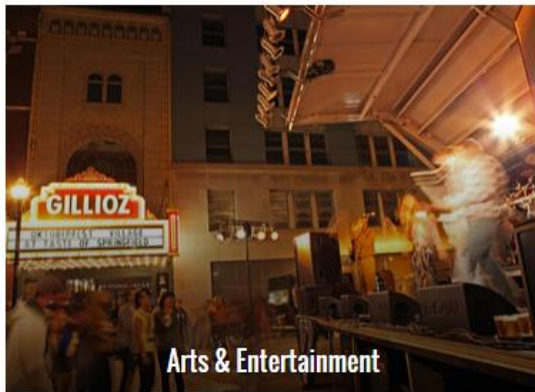


## Activities/Local Entertainment

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Meeting planners who are familiar with Springfield are aware of the wealth of activities and attractions available for meeting attendees. However, those not familiar may need more information. The new website does a great job of educating meeting planners about the area, but could use more information on group activities.

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# Website Evaluation

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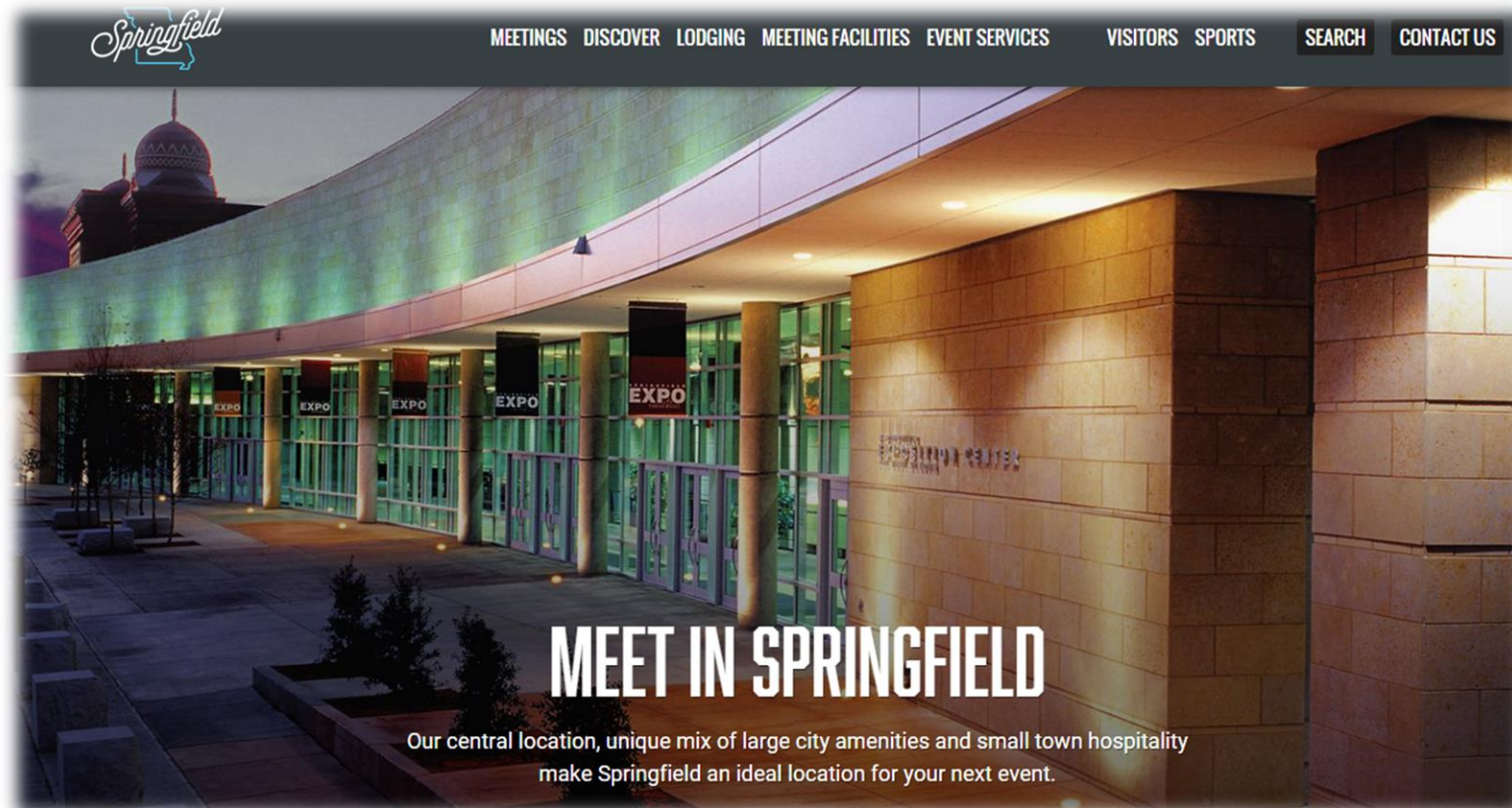


## Layout is Great

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Meeting planners like the modern “Pinterest” look and feel of the Springfield, MO website—as well as the idea of having a separate site for meeting planners. However, the look of the meeting planner site was very similar to the tourist site and, therefore, caused some confusion at first. An idea that emerged from the focus groups was to make the planners’ site a different color scheme, to make it easier to distinguish from the other sites.

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# Request For Proposals

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Many times, meeting planners will need to send out a request for proposal to many different destinations for an upcoming meeting/convention. Making this process as easy as possible will work in the destination's favor. An option to upload an RFP in any format is preferable to filling out the destination's request form, or asking them to contact the destination directly.

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## Activities for Meeting Attendees

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Meeting and convention attendees often enjoy participating in local activities/events together; therefore, the activities page for meeting planners should include the activities available for large groups of people—anything tailored to this group audience is better.

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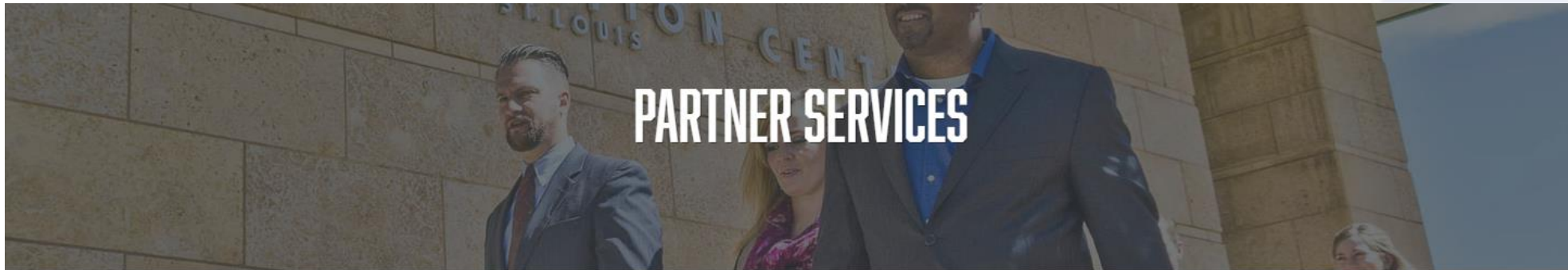


## Resources Page

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The resources available to meeting planners in Springfield is exhaustive. However, for those not familiar with the area, the list on the website seems small. Additionally, these resources don't usually make or break the decision to book a meeting in any area. Meeting planners normally get this kind of information directly from their CVB contact. If this page is to remain on the website, the lists of resources need to be more extensive and the pictures should all have logos so it doesn't appear to be paid advertising.

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### Caterers





# Thoughts to Consider

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05

## Thoughts to Consider

- **Connected hotel and meeting space.** The lack of a connected hotel and meeting space large enough to attract the bigger conventions to the area is not an unknown issue. However, combating the issue until it is resolved may help to placate meeting planners for the time being. Offering transportation and any other accommodations necessary to bring the larger conventions to Springfield will help the area to look more attractive to larger conventions and may even help to convince someone to build the space necessary to accommodate those larger meetings.
- **Progressive disclosure.** The Springfield area has the amenities of the larger cities, but has the advantage of a smaller town feel. With a thriving downtown, ball park, arts scene and low crime, it is a prime area for meetings and conventions. However, it's hard to disclose all of that information on a website without overwhelming a meeting planner. The most important information meeting planners need to know includes the meeting spaces available, how many hotel rooms are available and what activities are available in the area. Making the most important information the most easily accessible will be key in selling Springfield. Progressively disclosing more detailed information as the planner digs into the site will help keep the wealth of information organized and easily navigable for those who wish to find it.

## Thoughts to Consider

- **More calls to action.** While topline information found online is good, the real selling happens when a planner can talk to the CVB or even meet with someone in the destination. Creating calls to action on the website (call now for more information) will prompt meeting planners and let them know that the CVB is easily accessible for more detailed information. Additionally, many meeting planners need an easy way to get information from many different destinations. Creating a way to upload their own RFP in any format will make the planning process easier and stand out as a differentiator.
- **Separate Meeting Planner Site.** Currently, there is a separate website for meeting planners; however, the navigation, color scheme and even some of the pages overlap with the leisure traveler website. This causes some issues with navigation for meeting planners. Considering a different color scheme or some other way to differentiate the two sites will help meeting planners more easily find the information they are looking for. They also want to easily navigate the website—adding buttons for quick return to the top of the page and to the home page were mentioned by some participants and as helpful new additions.

# Thank You!



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