



**COLUMBIA SC**

**FY 21/22**

Inspiring Today's Traveler

# INSPIRING TODAY'S TRAVELER

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## A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

So much has changed over the past two and a half years. Work life and family life have shifted. Perspectives have changed. Even the way people think about travel has evolved and continues to evolve as all these other shifts take place. At Experience Columbia SC, it's our job to keep our finger on the pulse of the prospective traveler. How do they like to receive information? What inspires them to book a trip or conference in a certain destination? How far in advance are they booking from the time they plan to travel? In FY 21-22 we engaged in several research projects to help inform our decisions on how we market to travelers.

We found that 15.1 million visitors traveled to the Columbia region in 2021. That is not far off from tourism numbers from 2019, a banner year for tourism, with 15.2 million visitors (and a little event called March Madness). Thanks to the innovation and creativity of our staff, partners, and stakeholders, we have been able to explore new ways of reaching visitors. We've tapped into new markets that can host events in our destination and we've developed new ideas and partnerships to help educate locals and visitors alike on the unique attributes and gritty spirit of the Columbia region. We are off and running in the new visitor economy, armed with the best data and research, a talented and enthusiastic staff, and the support of a strong local community that is quickly learning the importance of tourism to our region. We are looking forward to what's next.

In Partnership,

Bill Ellen  
President & CEO | Experience Columbia SC



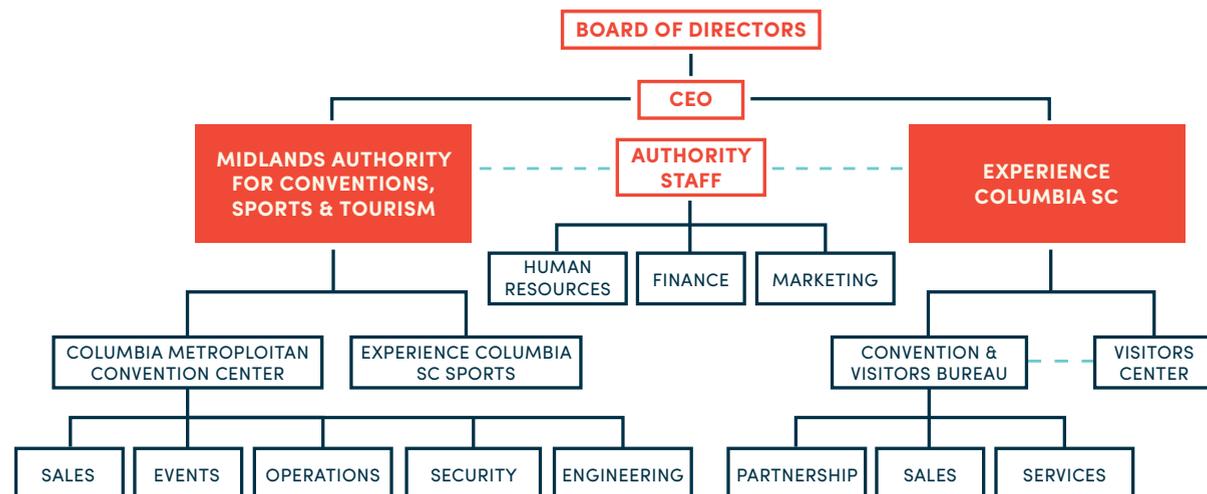
# WHO WE ARE

## THE BIGGEST CHEERLEADERS FOR *the* HEART OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Tourism is big business in Columbia, South Carolina. Welcoming 15.1 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.

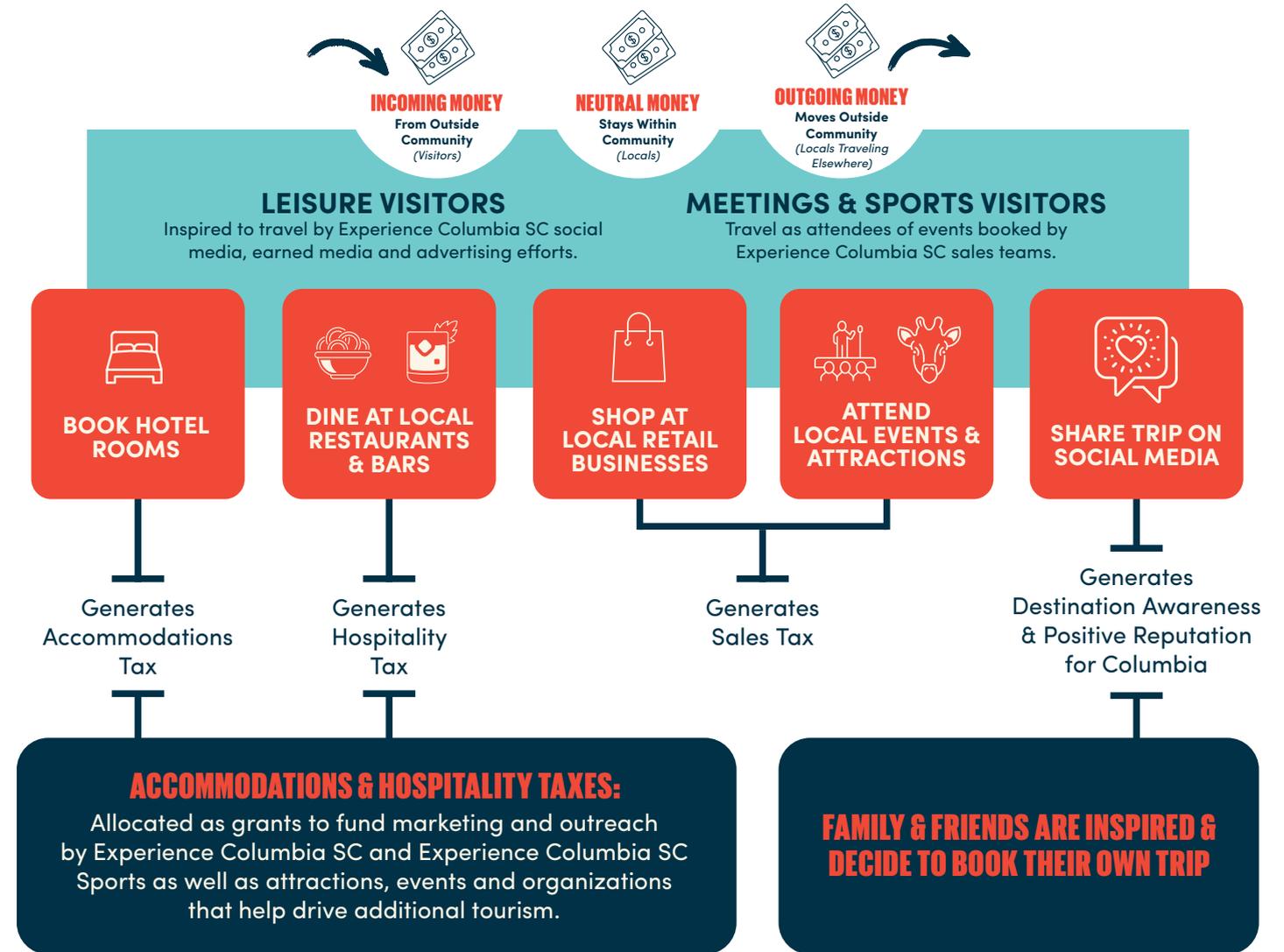
We are Experience Columbia SC and the Midlands Authority for Conventions, Sports & Tourism - sister organizations that encompass the Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Columbia Regional Visitors Center, the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center and Experience Columbia SC Sports.

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

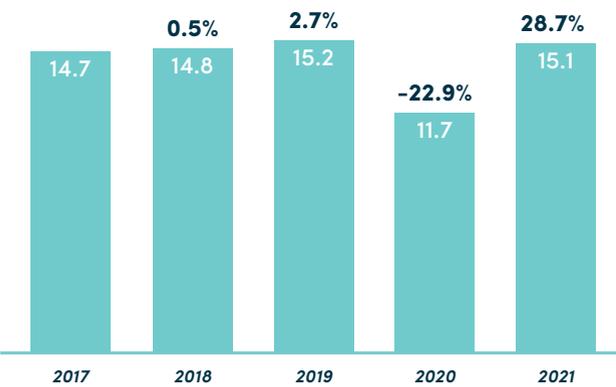


# TOURISM = ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# Our TOURISM STATISTICS

## COLUMBIA REGION VISITOR VOLUME

AMOUNTS IN MILLIONS



Sources: Longwoods Int'l, Tourism Economics

## COLUMBIA REGION VISITOR SPENDING

AMOUNTS IN \$ MILLIONS



Sources: Longwoods Int'l, Tourism Economics

**15.1 MILLION**  
VISITORS

**\$1.5 BILLION**  
DIRECT VISITOR  
SPENDING

**\$2.4 BILLION**  
ECONOMIC IMPACT

**\$120 MILLION**  
STATE & LOCAL TAX  
GENERATED

**21,000**  
TOTAL JOBS  
CREATED

Research reflects data from Lexington County, Richland County and the City of Columbia in 2021, gathered and reported by Tourism Economics on behalf of Experience Columbia SC

# 2022 COLUMBIA SC AMBASSADORS

To really know a city, you need to see it through the eyes of its locals. That's why every year we team up with some of our most tuned-in locals to give their insider tips on what to do in South Carolina's capital city. Our 2022 ambassadors span a diverse array of interests and industries.



Ashley Elsey (Content Creator), Preach Jacobs (Writer & DJ), Michael Mayo (Executive Director of Palmetto Outdoor), Angela Yung (Owner of FIT Columbia).

"In Columbia you have all the aspects that you'd want in a bigger city like incredible food, world-class arts and live music, but they are condensed to an area that is manageable and easy to get around."



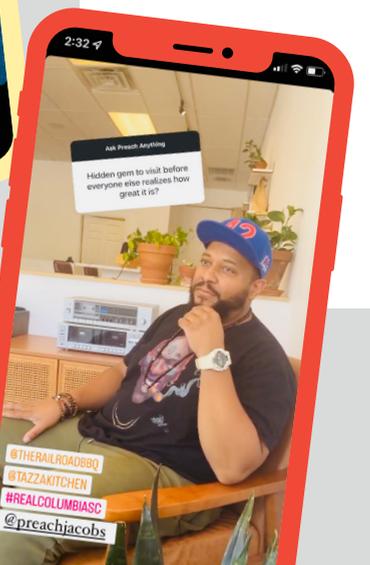
ASHLEY ELSEY



ANGELA YUNG



MICHAEL MAYO



PREACH JACOBS

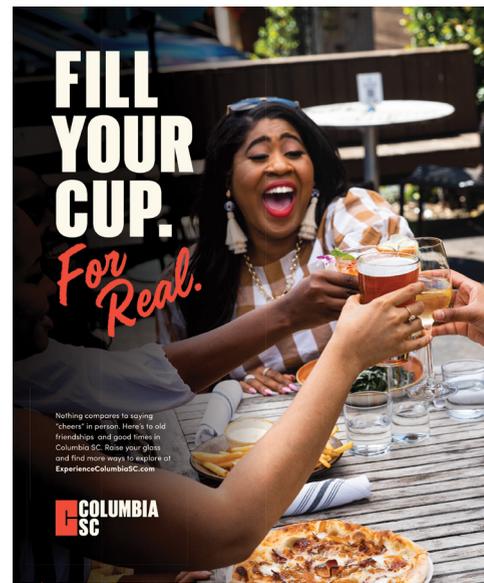
"When you go to bigger cities, you might feel like you're more of a number. The great thing about Columbia is, when you go to a place two times, you're a regular."

# For Real. CAMPAIGN

From hiking through Congaree National Park to scoring a table at one of the hottest restaurants in town, it's easy to find a heaping helping of fun in Columbia SC. Find more ways to explore at ExperienceColumbiaSC.com



Whether you're dancing the night away with friends or playing the day away with the fam, Columbia SC is here for it. Paint the town your way in the heart of SC. Plan safely at ExperienceColumbiaSC.com



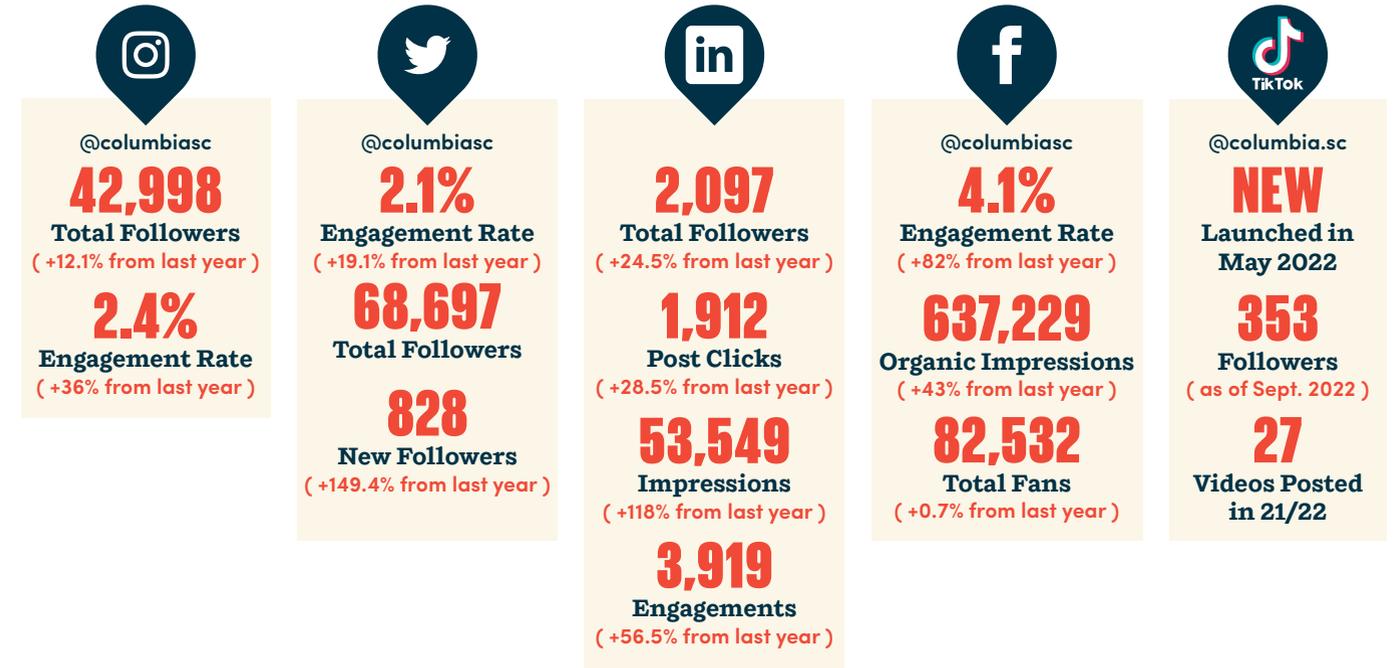
Nothing compares to saying "cheers" in person. Here's to old friendships and good times in Columbia SC. Raise your glass and find more ways to explore at ExperienceColumbiaSC.com



# 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 hard 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



## ADVERTISING STATS

### Hotels

Total Searches:  
**55,690**

### Flights

Total Searches:  
**5,959**



Average Length of Stay:  
**3.7 Days**

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.

## ON THE WEB

**2,640,673**  
Total Pageviews

**949,975**  
Total Users

Top Out-of-Market Cities:  
Charlotte, NC | Atlanta, GA  
Raleigh, NC

## TOP 3 BLOG POSTS

From FY 2021/2022

**#1**  
26,194 PAGEVIEWS  
But First Brunch

**#2**  
17,453 PAGEVIEWS  
Date Night

**#3**  
7,110 PAGEVIEWS  
Seven Ways to Spend a Day  
with Kids in Columbia SC

# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC

## Media Relations



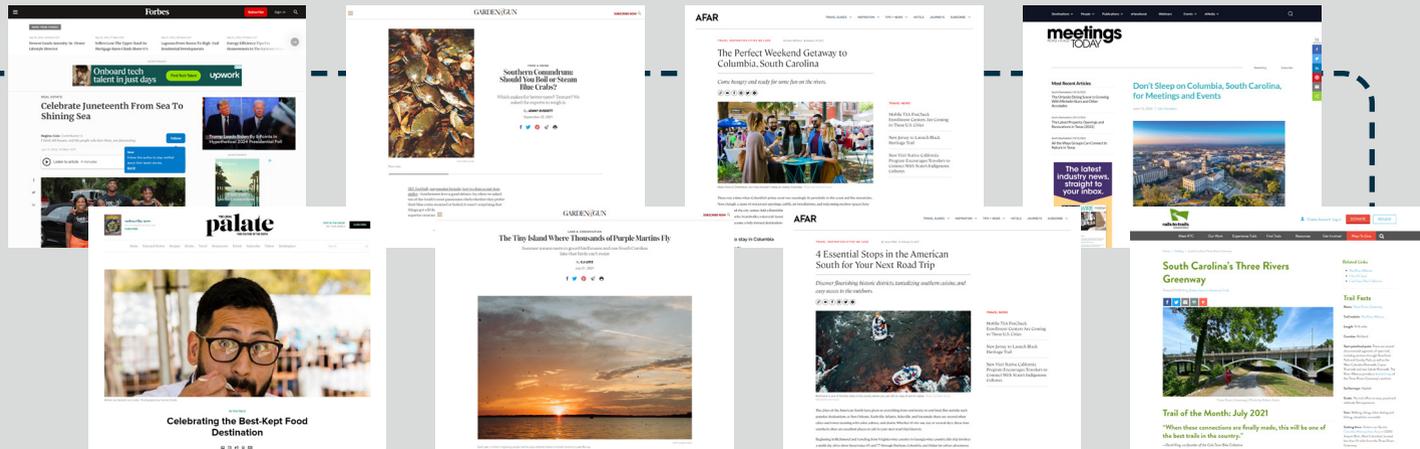
One way Experience Columbia SC strives to live out its mission is through public and media relations efforts. We promote the Columbia region by pitching story ideas and hosting media to garner regional, national and international destination coverage.

**53**  
MEDIA  
PITCHES

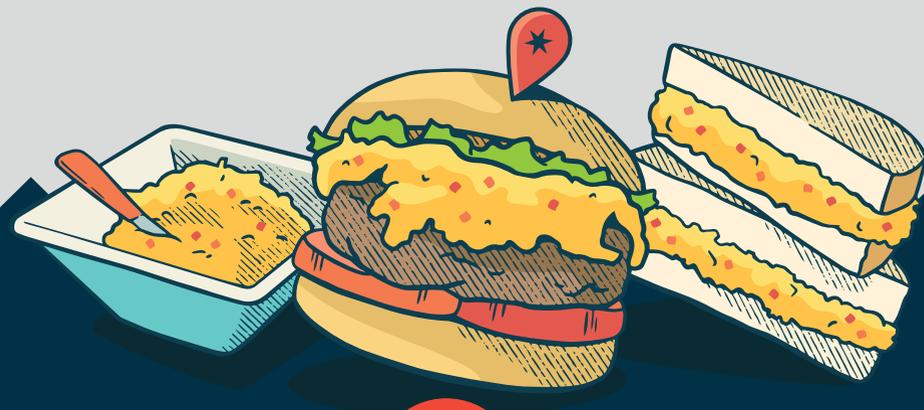
**34**  
STORIES  
GARNERED

**14**  
MEDIA  
HOSTED

**20**  
PRESS  
RELEASES



Regina Cole, *Forbes Magazine* (June 2022); Jenny Everett, *Garden + Gun* (Sept. 2021); Katie McElveen, *AFAR* (Jan. 2022); Tyler Davidson, *Meetings Today* (Jun. 2022); Hannah Lee Leidy, *The Local Palate* (May 2022); CJ Lotz, *Garden + Gun* (July. 2021); Taryn White, *AFAR* (Feb. 2022); Robert Annis, *Rails to Trails Conservancy* (Jul. 2022);



**715** PASSPORT  
DOWNLOADS  
SINCE APRIL 2022

This year we refreshed the Pimento Cheese Passport to be an all-digital format, gave it its own sub-brand, and added five new eateries to make our total restaurant count 17, with more to come.

# RAVE REVIEWS For COLUMBIA SC

"South Carolina's state capital city, Columbia, offers all the meetings and events lures one would expect from a state seat of government – think museums, historic houses and a bustling downtown – but it also adds that somewhat unquantifiable amenity: a college community filled with friendly locals, students and faculty who greet attendees in a spirit of conviviality."

**Tyler Davidson**  
*Meetings Today*

"On my visit, I spied hundreds of people—fisherman lined the riverbanks or stood in shallow pools, while a seemingly endless stream of 20-somethings floated downstream on inner tubes. The views of the Saluda were absolutely stunning; water rippled against smooth, tan rocks, while several pairs of turtles sunned themselves on branches sticking out from the water. I couldn't believe all of this was in the middle of a metropolitan city."

**Robert Annis**  
*Rails to Trails Conservancy*

"Each spring, food and beverage professionals gather in Columbia, South Carolina, to celebrate the Midlands' distinguished and growing culinary scene. After a couple years of postponed and then scaled – down events due to Covid – 19, the 2022 Columbia Food and Wine Festival showcased the state capital's rich eating and drinking culture through expertly crafted small bites from local restaurants, multi-course meals that turn eating into education, and culinary crawls to destinations throughout the area."

**Hannah Lee Leidy**  
*The Local Palate*

"There was a time when Columbia's prime asset was seemingly its proximity to the coast and the mountains. Now, though, a spate of restaurant openings, public art installations, and welcoming outdoor spaces have reinvigorated the city center. Add a flourishing craft brewery scene—coffee lager anyone?— and a greenway system of parks, boardwalks, watercraft launches, and trails providing easy access to a trio of rivers, and the place has become a fully formed destination unto itself."

**Katie McElveen**  
*AFAR*

"The only place where you'll find rapids alongside Spanish moss in a city center is Columbia, South Carolina. Whether you'd like to experience Columbia from the misty seat of a whitewater raft or you'd prefer to stay dry, the Palmetto State capital offers friendly, casual, artsy and intellectual pursuits for groups of all kinds"

**Kati Hyer**  
*The Group Travel Leader*

"On a humid summer evening, the thick temperate deciduous forest is hauntingly dark. As soon as the last twilight of dusk disappears, you begin to see sparkling dots emerge from the canopies. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, more and more flashing lights become visible. Soon, there is a carpet of magical synchronized firefly display – a rare phenomenon that occurs very few places in the world."

**Sucheta Rawal**  
*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

# THE COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



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



<b>71</b> New Hospitality Partners	<b>31</b> Preferred Hotel Partners	<b>6</b> Partner Events Held	<b>27</b> Live Tradeshows/ Events Attended
<b>32</b> In-Person Site Inspections With Planners	<b>146</b> Groups Booked For A Total of 18,416 Room Nights	<b>72</b> Groups Were Provided Service Upon Arrival	<b>36</b> Lobby Welcome Boards Created for Hotel Partners

"The CVB sales team was spot on from the very beginning. This was the first time I've had the opportunity to work with a CVB and their questions helped me with my RFP. They have properly set the bar very high in terms of my expectations when working with future CVBs."

**Ray Clark**  
*Georgia/Carolinas PCI*

"We've had a wonderful working relationship with the Columbia CVB for many years. When South Carolina is again selected for a future event, the Columbia CVB will be our first contact for scheduling."

**Clyde Shepard**  
*Islam Temple #1*

## VISITOR'S CENTER BY-THE-NUMBERS



"Our Experience Columbia SC sales manager kept the communication going during the RFP process, sent me the information I needed before my deadline, and was always quick to respond. The proposal packet they sent made my job easy! I presented the comparison of hotel quotes, amenities and pricing directly from the proposal during a WebEx meeting to the decision makers and they were so impressed! I will definitely be working with Experience Columbia SC again!"

**Meredith Morris Lide**  
*The Electric Cooperative of SC, Inc.*

# 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 which provide an economic benefit to the region by generating room nights, food and beverage sales and associated tax revenues. For more info visit [ColumbiaSCSports.com](http://ColumbiaSCSports.com)



**38**  
Events Hosted

**6,296**  
Total Room Nights Booked

**\$5.1M**  
Estimated Economic Impact

## KEY EVENTS HOSTED

Event | Attendees | Estimated Economic Impact

2021 SC High School Football State Championships | 20,000 | \$937,667

2022 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament | 18,295 | \$778,539

2021 Chick-fil-A Classic | 6,600 | \$394,710

2022 Battle at BullStreet | 9,070 | \$391,008

2022 Dance Makers | 1,100 | \$335,067

The Clash 2022 | 2,000 | \$260,325

Adrenaline Dance Competition | 600 | \$202,336

2021 Sunfish Women's National Championship | 300 | \$103,091

2021 AJGA Mathew Nesmith Junior Championship | 300 | \$102,175



"Experience Columbia SC Sports has been fantastic to work with on all aspects of the event planning process. Columbia has so much to offer in the sports world, and the staff helped us navigate our needs to ensure that our members had the absolute best experience possible while visiting Columbia, SC. We greatly appreciate and cherish our relationship with everyone at Experience Columbia, and we are excited to continue to build on that relationship moving forward."

**Houston Denney**  
American Junior Golf Association



"The team at Experience Columbia SC Sports were a great group to work with. It was easy communication to lock in an awesome venue as well as hotel block and dining/entertainment options for our event. Columbia was a beautiful city and we can't wait to go back!"

**Nora White**  
Spikeball, Inc.



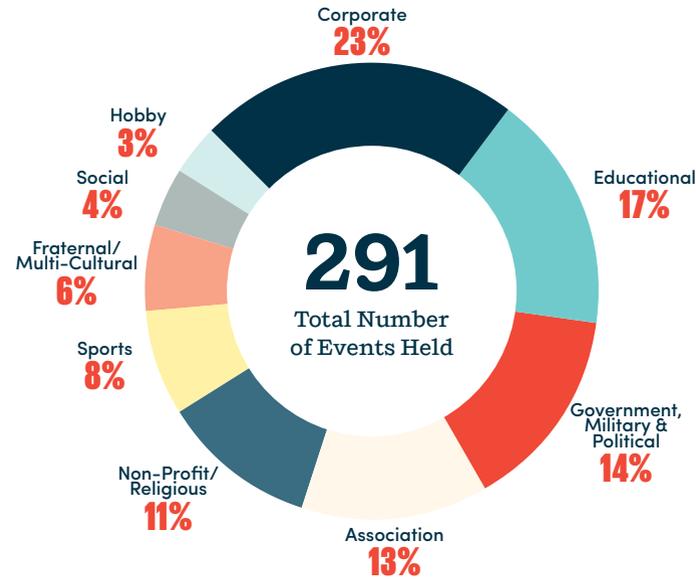
# EXPERIENCE COLUMBIA SC COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN CONVENTION CENTER

The mission of the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center is to provide a first-class venue offering superior operations management and state-of-the-science amenities for the successful coordination of meetings, conventions, 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)

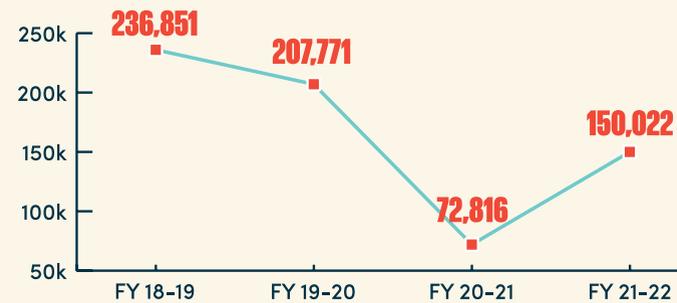
**COLUMBIA SC  
METROPOLITAN  
CONVENTION CENTER**



## EVENT BREAKDOWN



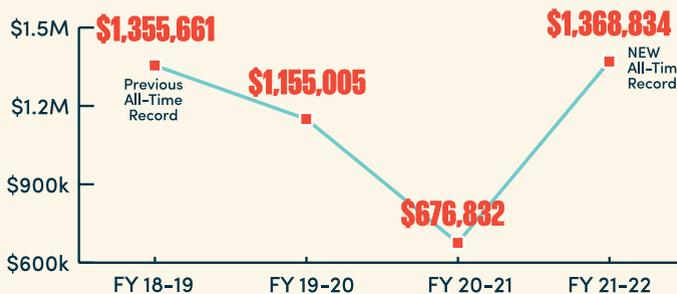
## ATTENDANCE



## # OF FULL-TIME CMCC STAFF



## BOOKINGS REVENUE



## KEY EVENTS HOSTED

**USC Darla Moore School of Business** returned for their first post COVID event "Business Expo Fall 2021" September 28-30, 2021 with about 1,200 total students/ employers throughout their 2 days, using about 75 hotel room nights and \$9,000 of space.

**Soda City Comic Con** returned for their first event since COVID October 29-31, 2021, they had about 7,500 attendees, using 125 hotel rooms and \$21,000 of space.

**SC Music Educators Association** returned for their first annual conference with us since COVID, but 7th consecutive conference here outside of their 2021 hiatus. The event was February 3-5, 2022 and welcomed 800 attendees, generating 615 hotel room nights, using almost \$23,000 of space.

**Southern Gas Association** also returned for their first Spring Gas Conference & Expo since COVID March 13-16, 2022 welcoming 650 attendees using 550 hotel room nights and \$20,600 of space.

**INSPIRE National Dance Competition** returned for their 2nd event with us March 25-27, 2022 welcoming 1,522 attendees using 200 hotel room nights and \$16,500 of space.

**SC Democratic Party** hosted Vice President Kamala Harris at their fundraising dinner June 10, 2022, and the Events and Security teams did an amazing and detailed job coordinating with secret service & their team for a smooth event, followed by their Annual State Convention the next day, welcoming about 1,000 attendees, using 150 hotel room nights and \$16,000 of space.



 **COLUMBIA  
SC**

 **EXPERIENCE  
COLUMBIA SC**

 **COLUMBIA SC  
SPORTS**

 **COLUMBIA SC  
METROPOLITAN  
CONVENTION CENTER**

 **COLUMBIA SC  
VISITORS  
CENTER**



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