



VISIT CHICAGO SOUTHLAND FY25 ANNUAL REPORT



Statement of Purpose

Visit Chicago Southland enhances the Region's Quality of Life by attracting visitor spending that powers job creation, the generation of non-resident taxes and the development of new hospitality amenities.

Vision Statement

The Chicago Southland will be recognized as the most excitingly diverse, accessible, inclusive and safe region in all of the Chicago area.

Mission Statement

Visit Chicago Southland promotes the region's communities as an exceptional destination for meetings, events and leisure pursuits while advocating for the development of outstanding inclusive experiences that attract visitors and residents alike.

Our History

Visit Chicago Southland was founded over 38 years ago as a subsidiary of the Regional Economic Development Coordinating Corporation. In 1993, VCS separated from its parent organization, servicemarked the name and became an independent 501(c)(6) organization. As a regional cooperative, Visit Chicago Southland represents the south and southwest communities approximately 25 miles south of downtown Chicago.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

Adopted in FY23, VCS's Four-Year Strategic Plan is the guiding document as Visit Chicago Southland and the local hospitality region take the next steps in destination marketing and development.

Goals

1. Advocate for Destination Enhancing Development
2. Support Initiatives to Elevate the Destination Experience
3. Continue to Increase the Ability for Visit Chicago Southland to Positively Impact the Region

To Our Valued Partners

At Visit Chicago Southland, we're not just keeping up with the future of tourism—we're shaping it. While tourism platforms have evolved, one thing remains constant: every great journey begins with a compelling story. In May 2025, we launched our first-ever influencer campaign, surpassing our goals with over seven million impressions—four times the expected reach.

We've redefined the visitor experience, starting with the Chicago Southland Lincoln Oasis. There, we've integrated two interactive kiosks that offer real-time connections to local activities and personalized itineraries. Additionally, our VCS Agent AI on our website has transformed trip planning, providing dynamic recommendations tailored to each visitor.

Digital innovation is the heartbeat of modern travel, reshaping how people explore, create and share. Travelers now crave deep, personalized connections with destinations, and they share those moments instantaneously, influencing future travel decisions. While the tools may be digital, the impact remains profoundly human, linking travelers to our communities, rich history and vibrant people.

In FY2025, our sales efforts resulted in over 10,000 hotel room bookings for group business, complemented by an additional 7,649 room nights secured through our leisure marketing initiatives—demonstrating a strong and growing demand for travel to our region. Our presence at 19 national tradeshow helped showcase the best of Chicago Southland to a broader audience. This success culminated in Chicago Southland earning the Illinois Crafted Community designation and winning the 2025 Readers' Choice Awards from *SportsEvents Magazine*.

The Wind Creek Chicago Southland Casino & Resort opened to great acclaim, and the Peotone Holiday Inn Express marked another milestone in our region's growth. More hotels are coming soon in Bedford Park, Lansing, Matteson and Orland Park, further proving our rise as a key suburban destination.

Signature initiatives like our mobile passport and 3-D signage continue to drive engagement and deliver impressive results. Our mission goes beyond simply promoting Chicago Southland—it's about infusing every corner of our region with life, resonating with travelers worldwide. We're not just telling stories; we're building connections, one digital interaction at a time. Thank you for being part of the journey. Let's keep our storytelling in motion.



Richard Brink
Chairperson

Mary Patchin, CDME
President, CEO

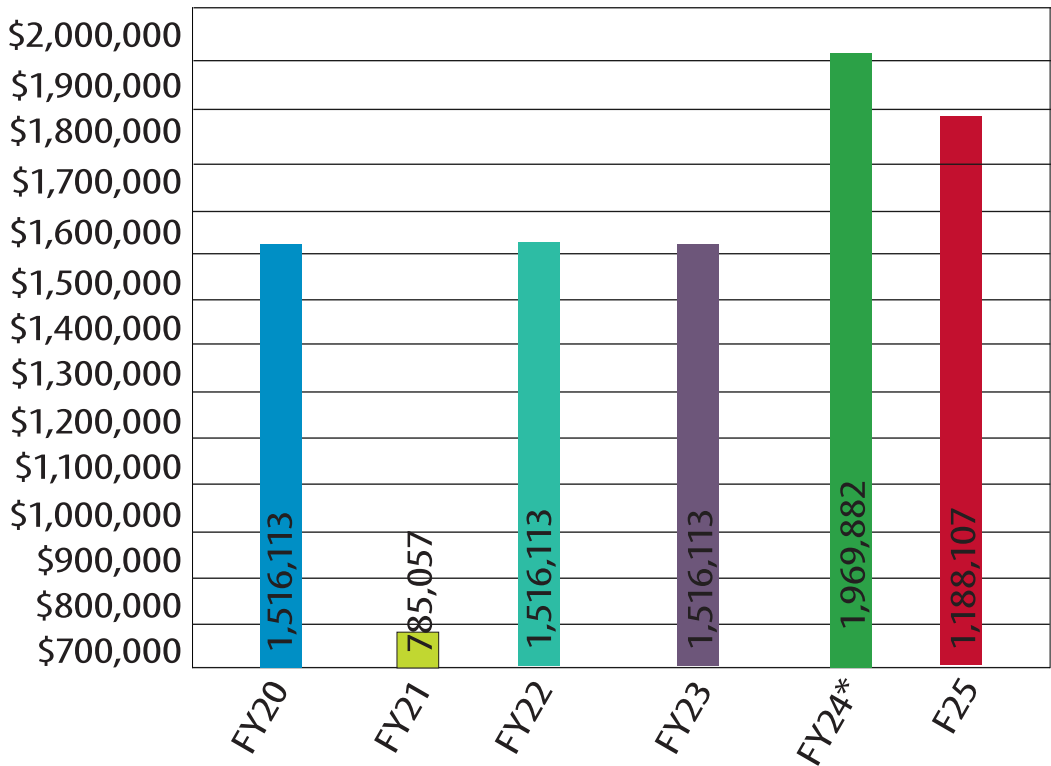
How the VCS is Funded

Visit Chicago Southland is a regionally funded Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO). Its FY25 annual budget includes multiple revenue streams, with a significant portion—\$1,188,107—provided by the State of Illinois through the Local Tourism Convention Bureau (LTCB) Grant Program. This grant requires locally-funded match dollars, which Visit Chicago Southland fulfills through three primary sources: first, funding agreements with 18 partner municipalities that allocate a portion of their hotel/motel tax revenues to support marketing efforts; second, a growing partnership base that pays annual dues to support the organization’s programs; and third, the development of non-dues revenue through sponsorships and other initiatives to enhance and expand programming.

The LTCB Grant supports Illinois-certified Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) in executing national and regional sales, marketing and promotional initiatives designed to increase visitation and generate economic impact for their destinations.



Local Tourism Convention Bureau (LTCB) Grant Growth



*Includes an additional state grant of \$650,000

Tourism Impact

2024 Illinois Tourism Impact

More than 113 MILLION visitors enjoyed Illinois

Visitors spent \$48.5 BILLION in Illinois

Illinois state and local tax revenue reached \$4.7 BILLION

Illinois generated \$367 MILLION in Hotel/Motel tax

Visitor spending supported 282,165 JOBS

(Source: Economic Impact of Visitors in Illinois 2024)

Illinois tourism **SAVES** the average Illinois household **\$1,361** in taxes each year

Fiscal Year 2025 Hotel Performance

Chicago Southland hotels reached an average hotel occupancy rate of **65.3%** for Fiscal Year 2025.

Average daily rate reached an average of **\$109.21** for the region.

Hotel revenues reached **\$211,728,885** this year.

Chicago Southland hotels sold **1.92 Million** room nights.

(Source: Smith Travel Research report)

Hotel Occupancy

FY21:	65.5%
FY22:	66.7%
FY23:	66.6%
FY24:	64.1%
FY25:	65.3%

Average Daily Rate

FY21:	\$76.10
FY22:	\$97.96
FY23:	\$106.96
FY24:	\$107.53
FY25:	\$109.21

Front Line Training

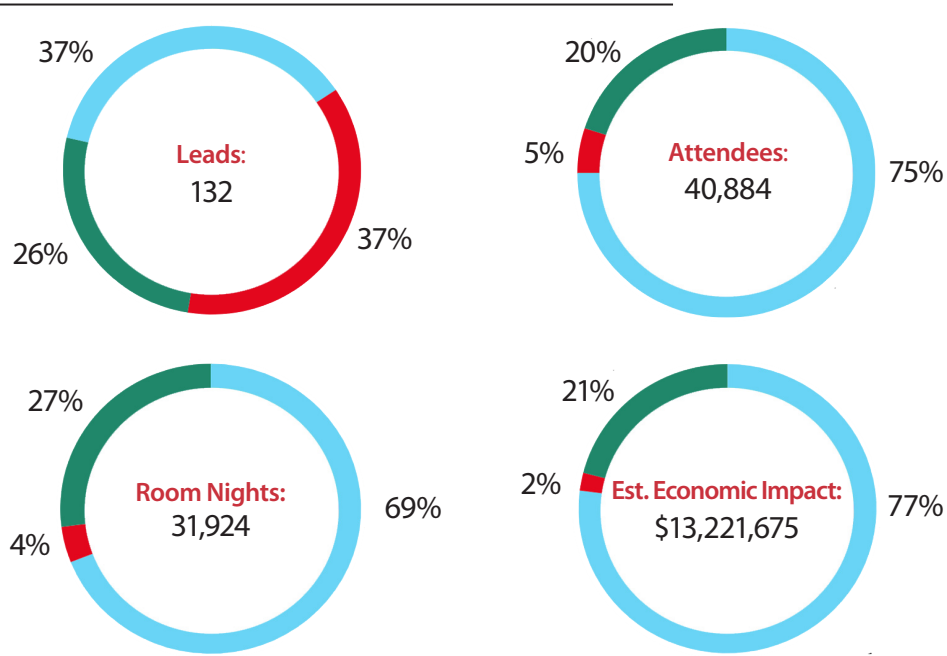


In FY15 VCS developed a front line training program and since has successfully certified **221** area front line staff as official Chicago Southland Front Line Ambassadors.

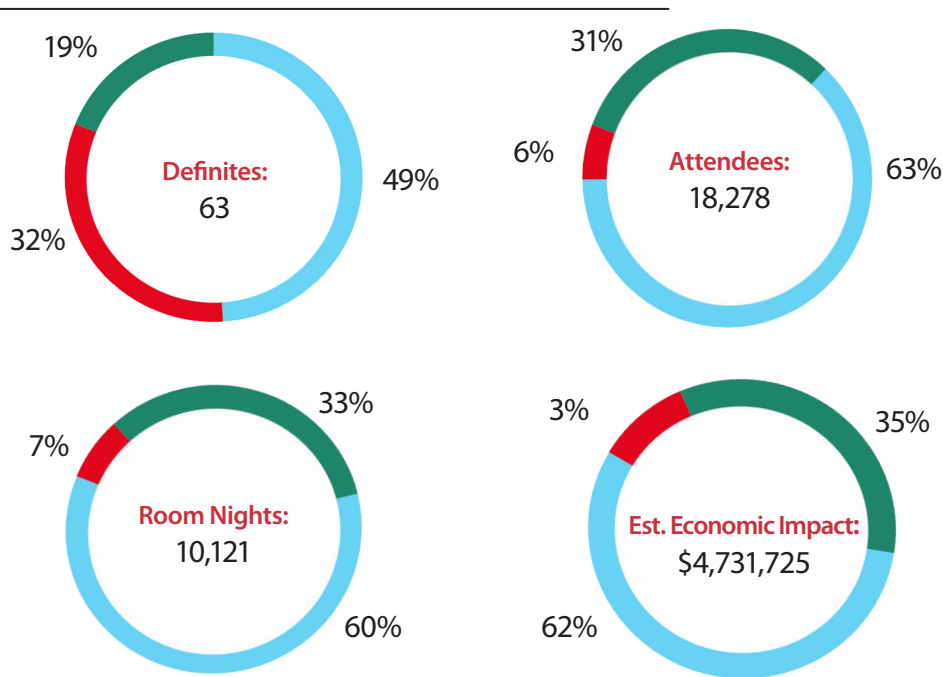


Sales Impact

Leads



Definites



Advertising Campaigns Definite Room Nights

Meetings

- State Co-op Campaign: 1,662 Room Nights

Leisure

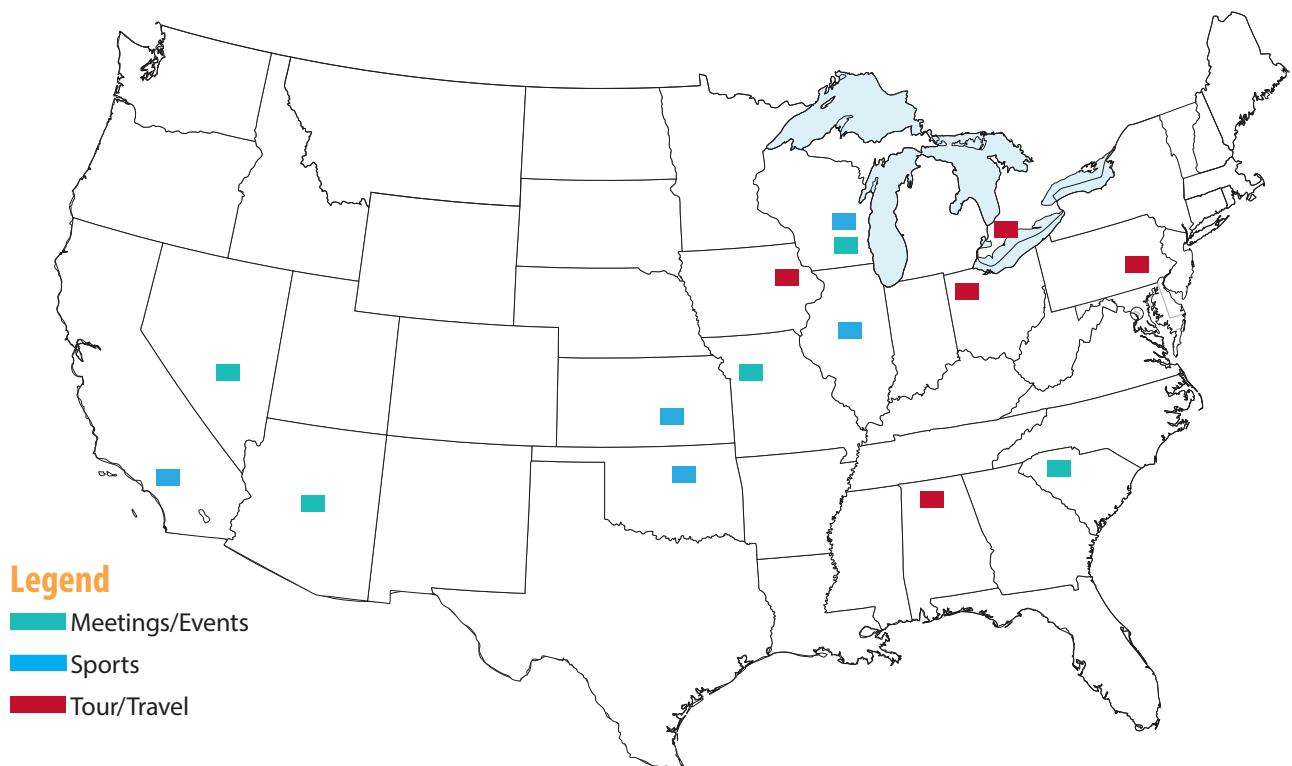
- Adara State Co-op Campaign: 1,605 Room Nights
- Expedia Campaign & State Co-op Campaign: 4,352 Room Nights
- Sojern State Co-op Campaign: 30 Room Nights



Attended 19 Tradeshows in FY25

Attending national tradeshows is vital to bringing new meetings, group tours and sporting events to the Chicago Southland region. It is the responsibility of Visit Chicago Southland to represent the Chicago Southland and its hotels, venues and communities on a national level at these tradeshows. Bringing new events to a region is very competitive, therefore it is imperative that the Chicago Southland is represented at these tradeshows by the official destination management organization, Visit Chicago Southland. The sales department attended **19** industry tradeshows in FY24, resulting in **573** appointments and **249** prospects.

- American Bus Association (Philadelphia, PA)
- Circle Wisconsin (Dubuque, IA)
- Connect Faith (Greenville, SC)
- Connect Marketplace - Association (Milwaukee, WI)
- Connect Marketplace - Corporate (Milwaukee, WI)
- Connect Marketplace - North (Kansas City, MO)
- Connect Marketplace - Specialty (Milwaukee, WI)
- Connect Marketplace - Sports (Milwaukee, WI)
- Connect Spring Marketplace - Association (Las Vegas, NV)
- Connect Spring Marketplace - Corporate (Las Vegas, NV)
- Connect Spring Marketplace - Diversity (Las Vegas, NV)
- Heartland Travel Showcase (Toledo, OH)
- National Tour Association (Huntsville, AL)
- Ontario Motor Coach Association (Windsor, Canada)
- Religious Conference Management Association (Phoenix, AZ)
- S.P.O.R.T.S. - The Relationship Show (Wichita, KS)
- Sports Events & Tourism Associates (Tulsa, OK)
- Sports Illinois Huddle (Peoria, IL)
- TEAMS (Anaheim, CA)



Marketing Impact

Google AdWords

AdWords Pay-Per-Click program generated **25,888** clicks with **1,546,217** impressions.

Print Publications

Publications	Annual Circulation
Visitors Guide	100,000
Festivals & Events Guide (Fall/Winter)	8,000
Festivals & Events Guide (Spring/Summer)	8,000
Coupon Book	7,500
Mobile Passport Rackcard	5,000

Website

www.VisitChicagoSouthland.com

Visit Chicago Southland's website
VisitChicagoSouthland.com inspires travel to the Chicago Southland and provides pertinent information for all market segments. The site's responsive design lets visitors access Chicago Southland info on desktop or tablet, and find last-minute information on their phone when they arrive. **243,361** unique visitors came from **200** countries and all **50** states. **95%** of web visitors are from beyond the Chicago Southland.



Social Media



Facebook

Followers	9,671
Posts	1,457
Interactions	71,661
Interactions/Post	49



Instagram

Followers	1,829
Posts	433
Interactions	1,967
Interactions/Post	4.5



X

Followers	3,752
Tweets	441
Interactions	623
Interactions/Post	1.4



LinkedIn

Followers	1,102
Posts	402
Interactions	6,340
Interactions/Post	16



YouTube

Views	4,975
Minutes Watched	3,258

Overall organic social media impressions
544,252

Visit Chicago Southland continued to boost group market and leisure social media posts resulting in over **9 million** impressions and **67,514** clicks.*

*Includes boosted social media posts through Cook County Tourism Recovery Initiative



Chicago Southland App

The Visit Chicago Southland App was launched in FY18, providing visitors an interactive experience featuring attractions, restaurants, hotels and events. The app also allows visitors to find amenities nearby while in the Chicago Southland. In FY25, the app/widget had **47,199** sessions and **45,330** page views. Additionally, the Chicago Southland trails app had **1,587** users in Fiscal Year 2025.

Destination Video

Visit Chicago Southland continued to promote the interactive destination video, which resulted in **846** video clicks for the fiscal year.

Advertising Highlights

Publications/Digital Insertions	Annual Circulation/ Impressions
29 Meetings/Conventions	4,012,580
16 Tour/Travel	205,234
78 Leisure	36,644,257
16 Sports	82,447
6 Social	30,823
145 Total Placements	37,975,341*

*Includes campaigns completed through the Cook County Tourism Recovery Initiative.

Targeting/Retargeting Campaign

Visit Chicago Southland implemented a group markets targeting/retargeting campaign (Cook County Tourism Recovery Initiative) using Google display network, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. The campaign resulted in over **2.1 million** impressions and **4,711** clicks to the website.

Brochure Distribution

1,198 visitors were assisted at the Visitor Information Center at the Chicago Southland Lincoln Oasis in South Holland. Digital billboards at the VIC allowed Visit Chicago Southland to promote available guides when not staffed and partners to advertise as well.

30,691 Visit Chicago Southland and partner brochures were distributed at the Visitor Information Center and **7,811** more through inquiries to Visit Chicago Southland. The digital visitors guide garnered over **652** views.

Communications

Visit Chicago Southland continues to craft compelling pitches for local, national and trade media that resulted in **41** articles that earned over **4.5 million** media impressions.

Social Media Influencer Campaign



Photo Credit On the Road with Jen

In May, Visit Chicago Southland hosted four Midwest-based social media influencers—Gleason Family Adventure, Getting Stamped, Keeping Up in Carmel and Sarah Conery—for an immersive tour of the region. Their curated itineraries included visits to more than 40 Chicago Southland locations, ranging from restaurants, hotels and nature preserves to art galleries, historic landmarks and sporting events.

This inaugural influencer campaign generated over **7 million** impressions across social media platforms, significantly expanding the region's digital reach and showcasing the Southland's diverse offerings to new and engaged audiences.



Photo Credit Getting Stamped



Photo Credit Gleason Family Adventures



Photo Credit Sarah Conery

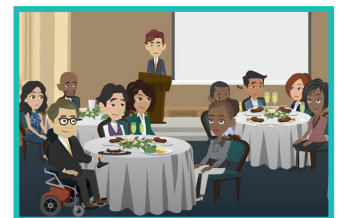
Threshold 360

In Fiscal Year 2021, VCS partnered with **Threshold 360** to create virtual tours of local hotel properties, sports facilities, unique venues and more. For FY25, this program resulted in **268,643** web views, **5,830,865** Google views and **695,827** engagements. These virtual tours allow event planners to safely visit or tour a facility, or revisit the space after an in-person site inspection. These videos are embedded into each member listing, and they are displayed in Google searches as well. The partnership with Threshold 360 is an exciting way to promote our partners and their one-of-a-kind facilities that help make the Chicago Southland a unique and exciting place to visit.



Animated Video

In FY25, Visit Chicago Southland unveiled "What is Visit Chicago Southland", a comprehensive, animated destination video designed to showcase the region's full potential to prospective visitors, event planners and tour groups. Serving as a dynamic visual introduction to the area, the video highlights a wide range of attractions, from outdoor recreation and family-friendly experiences to arts, dining and



entertainment. It also outlines the many services offered by Visit Chicago Southland to support group travel and event planning. Whether inspiring a weekend getaway or securing a future conference, the video captures the spirit, convenience and hospitality that define the Chicago Southland experience.



Scan to watch animated video.

Visitor Information Center

Unveiled in summer 2024, our state-of-the-art Visitor Information Center offers an immersive experience with interactive displays, touch-screen kiosks and a 360-degree panoramic view of the region.



Photo Credit Gleason Family Adventures

With a staffed information desk and comprehensive guides, it provides an ideal starting point for a seamless and memorable visit. In its inaugural year, the kiosks alone recorded **10,497** views in FY25—demonstrating strong early engagement and interest from visitors.

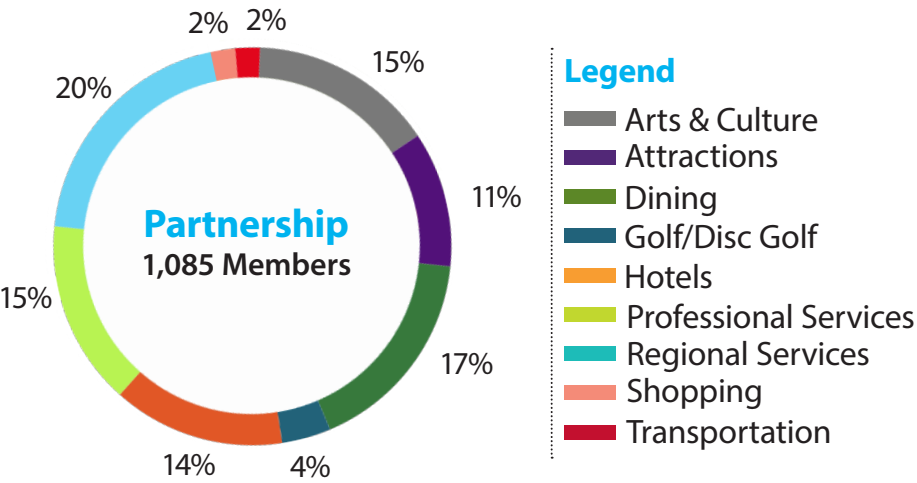
Partnership & Grants

Partnership

Visit Chicago Southland’s partners are the core of the hospitality industry in the Chicago Southland. From the little local pizza joints to the major shopping malls, VCS continues to attract and keep partners through the VCS orientation and front line ambassador programs and events like the Annual Meeting & Awards Luncheon and the National Tourism Week Hospitality Showcase.

Local Tourism Grant Program

VCS’s Local Tourism Grant Program awarded **\$28,422** in Local Tourism Grant Funds to **six** organizations/projects for the promotion of events aimed to attract visitors from outside the Chicago Southland. VCS hosted **six** local grant workshops and several individual consultations.



Village of Bridgeview North Coast Music Festival 2024 3rd Submission	Bridgeview	\$5,000
Village of Bridgeview North Coast Music Festival 2025 1st Submission	Bridgeview	\$5,000
Village of Bridgeview North Coast Music Festival 2025 2nd Submission	Bridgeview	\$5,000
Village of Bridgeview Lyrical Lemonade Summer Smash 2025 1st Submission	Bridgeview	\$5,000
Village of Bridgeview Lyrical Lemonade Summer Smash 2025 2nd Submission	Bridgeview	\$5,000
Chicago Gaelic Park Irish Fest	Oak Forest	\$3,422

Accolades



Chicago Southland is officially on the craft beer map! Named a Drink Illinois Crafted Community by the Illinois Craft Brewers Guild (ICBG), our region is now recognized for its vibrant and growing beer scene—home to standout breweries that put creativity and community first.

This designation brings more than bragging rights. Visit Chicago Southland will gain promotional support, visibility across ICBG’s platforms and access to industry connections that further spotlight our local brewers.

With 300+ breweries contributing over \$3 billion annually to Illinois’ economy, the state’s craft beer industry is a major tourism driver—and now, Chicago Southland is proudly part of that story.

Here’s to the bold flavors, passionate makers and hometown pride behind every pour.

Visit Chicago Southland and Wintrust Sports Complex at Bedford Park have been honored with **2025 SportsEvents Readers’ Choice Awards**, earning titles as **All-Star Destination Partner** and **All-Star Indoor Sports Events Venue**, respectively. Announced in the February 2025 issue of *SportsEvents Magazine*, the awards celebrate standout venues and organizations making a lasting impact in the sports tourism industry. Wintrust Sports Complex—home to eight hardwood courts, 16 volleyball courts, 24 pickleball courts and a wide array of amenities—continues to attract premier events to the region.



Suburban Cook County Travel & Tourism Recovery Initiative

In January 2022, the Cook County Board of Commissioners approved a \$10M allocation, over three years, for the Suburban Cook County Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Economic Recovery Initiative as part their American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) allocation. The funding is being used for countywide tourism projects and distributions for local projects to five convention and visitor bureaus - Chicago Southland, Chicago's North Shore, Meet Chicago Northwest, Rosemont and Visit Oak Park.

There are three major programs identified that are universal to all five Suburban Cook County convention and visitor bureaus.

Countywide Projects:

- Regional Tourism Marketing Campaign
- Workforce Development Project
- Outdoor/Recreational Promotional Program

Visit Chicago Southland received funding in FY25 for use in projects that generate increases in visitors to local tourism attractions, customers to local businesses and group business bookings for 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Chicago Southland Cook County Tourism Alive FY25 Highlights

Leisure Recovery Campaign

An extensive programmatic and social media campaign was continued with focus on leisure activities (golf, arts/culture, festivals/events, trails, railfanning, live music, restaurants and breweries). In addition to the digital placements, one print ad was placed in the fall issue of Midwest Living, and in several AAA newsletters. Results on pages 8-9.

Targeting/Retargeting Group Markets

Visit Chicago Southland continued a group markets targeting/retargeting campaign using Google display network, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn to encourage recovery. Results on page 9.



Community Signage

In FY24, Visit Chicago Southland launched a groundbreaking signage program to elevate visibility for hotel communities and drive tourism across the region. The initiative provides funding for the design, development and installation of destination signage—including wayfinding signs, electronic displays, welcome monument signs and 3D letter installations designed to boost social media engagement. In FY25, four additional signage projects were completed, with more planned annually as Visit Chicago Southland continues to grow and enhance the program.

Bandwango Mobile Passports



Bandwango offers mobile passports that drive consumer engagement by organizing "Things To Do" into a curated selection of experiences, either free or paid, which seamlessly integrate into participating businesses' websites. Users of these mobile passports can check in at various locations to earn points redeemable for exciting prizes. In FY24, we expanded our offerings by developing six new Bandwango mobile passports, bringing the total to eight distinct passports. In FY25, these passports were actively promoted and have collectively achieved 621 check-ins to date. The passports include:

- Savor the Southland (Restaurants)
- Tee It Up (Golf Courses)
- Artistic Sights of the Southland (Visual Arts)
- The Curtain Call (Performing Arts)
- Suds Buds Pass (Breweries)
- Disc Golf Pro Pass (Disc Golf)
- Pizza Pass (Pizza Restaurants)
- Hot Diggity Dog Pass (Hot Dog Restaurants and Stands)



Additionally, we continue to distribute prizes, a range of Southland Swag, including stickers, coasters, mugs, tote bags, t-shirts and sweatshirts.



Fiscal Year 2025

Board of Directors

<i>Alsip</i>	John Ryan, Mayor Richard Brink, DoubleTree by Hilton
<i>Bedford Park</i>	David Brady, Mayor Joseph Ronovsky, Wintrust Sports Complex
<i>Bridgeview</i>	Sheena Fox, Hampton Inn & Suites
<i>Burbank</i>	Roy Patel, Best Western Inn & Suites
<i>Calumet City</i>	Deanne Jaffrey, Chief of Staff/City Administrator
<i>Chicago Heights</i>	David Gonzalez, Mayor
<i>Crestwood</i>	Brian Skala, Trustee
<i>East Hazel Crest</i>	Maureen Forté, Trustee
<i>Homewood</i>	Jodi Kennedy, La Banque Hotel
<i>Lansing</i>	Dr. Maureen Grady-Perovich, Village Clerk Aemish Patel, Holiday Inn Express & Suites
<i>Markham</i>	Derrick Champion, City Administrator
<i>Matteson</i>	Keith Chambers, Deputy Administrator Arnette Witherspoon, Hampton Inn and Suites
<i>Monee</i>	Edward Gross, Police Commissioner
<i>Oak Forest</i>	Paul Ruane, Asst. Dir. of Community & Economic Development
<i>Orland Hills</i>	Conrad Kiebles, Community Appointment
<i>Orland Park</i>	Ed Lelo, Economic Development Director
<i>Peotone</i>	Nick Palmer, Village Administrator
<i>South Holland</i>	Travis Bandstra, Director of Community Development
<i>South Suburban Mayors & Managers Association (SSMMA)</i>	
<i>Southwest Conference of Mayors</i>	
<i>Will County Governmental League</i>	
<i>College/University Appointment</i>	
<i>Exhibition Appointment</i>	
<i>General Membership Appointment</i>	
<i>Arts & Culture Appointment</i>	
<i>Transportation Appointment</i>	

Executive Committee

Chairperson: Richard Brink

Vice Chairperson: Jodi Kennedy

Treasurer: LaVern Murphy

Secretary: Vicky Smith

Executive Committee Board

Member: Aemish Patel

President/CEO: Mary Patchin, CDME

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Aemish Patel

Vicky Smith

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Meetings Market Manager: Jennifer Ziltz

Communications Manager: Liam Doyle

Public Relations Manager: Scott Rude

Administrative Assistant: Bernice Scheive

Partnership Development Manager: Chris Craven

VIC Information Specialist: Rolanda Hudson

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