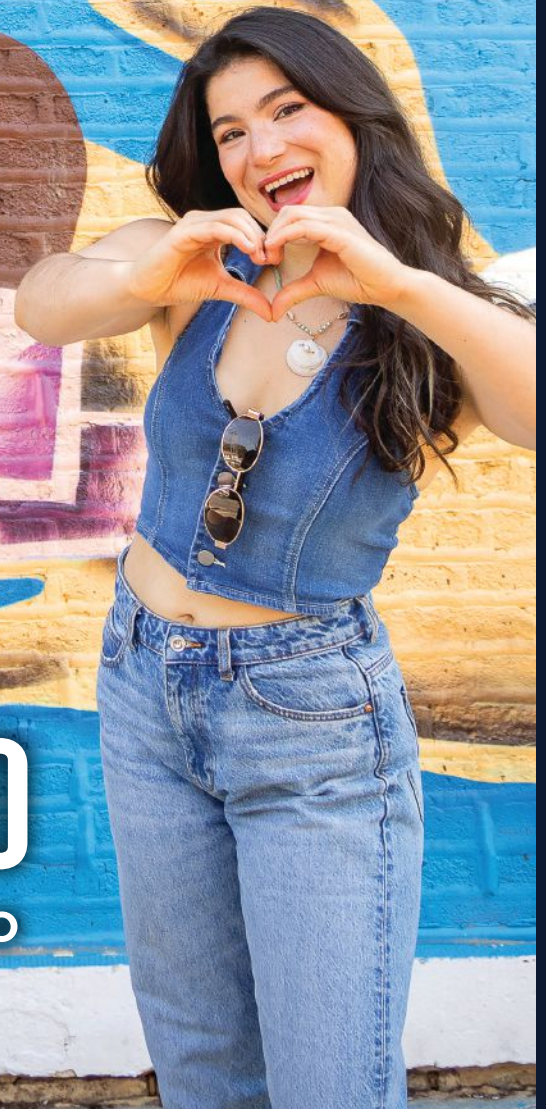


★ **2026** ★

SALES AND MARKETING PLAN

WHERE WE'RE FOCUSED. HOW WE COMPETE. WHY CHICAGO WINS.



CHICAGO

CHOOSE CHICAGO

NEVER DONE ★ NEVER OUTDONE

A Message from Our Leadership★

On behalf of the Choose Chicago Board of Directors, I am proud to present the 2026 Sales and Marketing Plan. Tourism is a powerful economic engine for our city, generating more than \$20 billion annually, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs, and strengthening communities across Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. As Chicago's official destination marketing organization, Choose Chicago remains focused on driving visitation, meetings, and major events that deliver measurable economic impact and shared opportunity for our city.

2025 marked a year of meaningful progress and foundational growth. We launched a bold new marketing campaign, Never Done. Never Outdone., that celebrates the people, neighborhoods, and stories that define our city. Our sales team met ambitious goals, filling more hotel rooms than ever before. The Chicago Sports Commission secured difference-making sporting events that will shape Chicago's future. And we did all of this during an incredibly turbulent and challenging time for the tourism industry nationwide and here in Chicago, underscoring both the resilience of our local industry and our concerted efforts to respond directly to the challenges at hand.

That momentum carries directly into 2026, a milestone year filled with globally significant opportunities. Chicago will mark the centennial of Route 66, celebrate the opening of the Obama Presidential Center, and join the nation in commemorating America's 250th anniversary. The city will welcome international visitors during the FIFA World Cup, supported by our Kick Back in Chicago initiative designed to attract and inspire World Cup travelers. Additional moments, including International Jazz Day and the NAACP Annual Convention, will further showcase

Chicago's cultural depth, global relevance, and leadership on the world stage.

To seize these opportunities, our strategy is clear. We are focused on securing stable, competitive funding to support long-term growth; capitalizing on major moments that elevate Chicago's global profile; strategically increasing investment in high-impact marketing campaigns; working tirelessly to attract meetings of all sizes and seasons; and delivering world-class sporting events that transform Chicago as a destination. These priorities ensure we are not only responding to opportunity, but proactively shaping Chicago's future as a premier destination for visitors and events year-round.

Chicago has faced challenges before and emerged stronger each time. With partnership, investment, and shared belief in this city, we will continue to meet the moment, deliver results, and advance tourism as a force for economic vitality and community impact. Thank you for your continued support and collaboration as we look ahead to an extraordinary year for Chicago.

Sincerely,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KR' followed by a long, sweeping flourish.

Kristen Reynolds, CDME
President and CEO
Choose Chicago

The Work of a DMO ★

The work of a destination marketing organization (DMO) like Choose Chicago is critical to the strength of a city. As this chart shows, destination promotion is a catalyst for community vitality, driving what is needed for a community to become that destination where people want to visit, live, work and play. Through brand management, destination stewardship and investment, and through programs for promotion and sales, it all starts with destination marketing organizations.

1. VISIT

If you built a place where people want to visit, then you have built a place where people want to live.

2. LIVE

And if you built a place where people want to live, then you have built a place where people want to work.



3. INVEST

And if you built a place where business and residents will invest, then you have built a place where people will want to visit.

4. WORK

And if you built a place where people want to work, then you have built a place where business and residents will invest.

2026 Marketing★

In 2026, Choose Chicago's marketing strategy is designed to drive demand for leisure travel, meetings and conventions, and mega-events by showing up dynamically in the markets, moments, and channels where decisions are made.

This section serves as a roadmap for our partners, outlining who we are targeting, where and when we are marketing, and how shared investment can drive stronger, more coordinated results.

WHO WE ARE MARKETING TO

Marketing efforts focus on three core audiences, each supported by national and international segmentation to ensure relevance and efficiency.

- 1. Leisure Travelers:** People are visiting Chicago for vacation nationally and internationally, staying in our hotels, eating at our restaurants, taking in our cultural scene, exploring our 77 neighborhoods, and so much more.
- 2. Meeting & Convention Planners:** People who are visiting Chicago to do business, primarily nationally, staying in our hotels and attending a meeting or convention hosted at McCormick Place.
- 3. Locals:** People who live in one of our 77 neighborhoods. They call Chicago home and are the city's best brand ambassadors.

NEW THIS YEAR

In partnership with MMGY, we have identified key audience segments within our national and international leisure traveler audience that are more likely to travel to Chicago than others. Our marketing efforts will aim to target those desirable segments to maximize the return on every advertisement.



Culture Enthusiasts



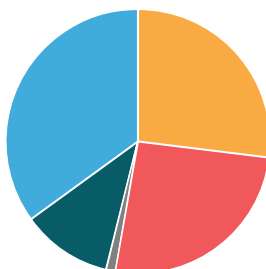
Family Nesters



Family Fun Maximizers



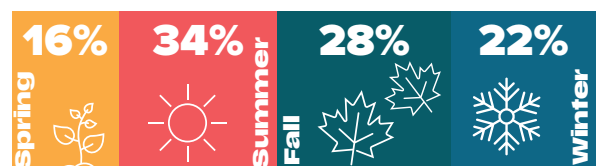
Urban Adventurers



Generational Profile

- Millennials - 37%
- Gen X - 29%
- Boomers - 19%
- Gen Z - 14%
- Silent - 1%

Season of Trip



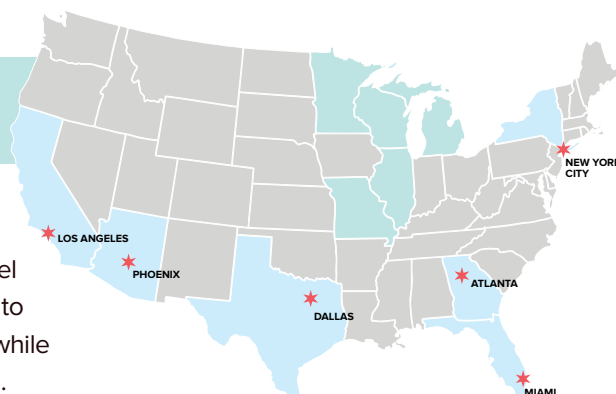
MARKET PRIORITIZATION

Our market focus is intentionally tiered and phased throughout the year, concentrating resources where Chicago can compete to be at the top of the consideration set.

Peak Season (Q2–Q3)

Key National Markets*

During Chicago's busiest travel season, marketing investments focus on priority national markets where we can drive the greatest impact on overnight visitation, hotel demand, and visitor spending. Campaigns are designed to keep Chicago competitive among top U.S. destinations while converting travel interest into bookings and trip planning.



Shoulder Season (Q1 & Q4)

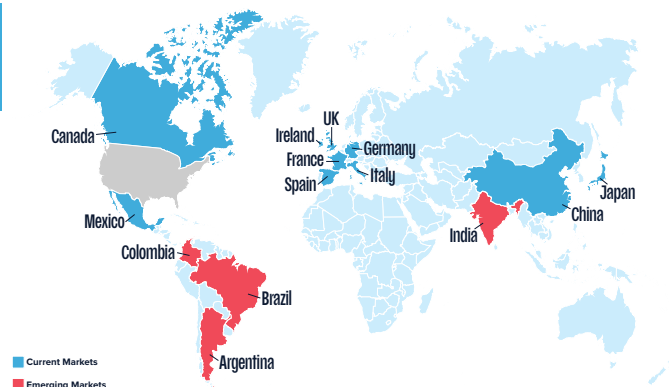
Regional and Drive Markets **

As seasonal demand softens, marketing efforts shift closer to home. We prioritize regional and drive markets where travelers are more likely to make shorter-term travel decisions and can be influenced by timely offers, events, holiday experiences, and seasonal programming. This approach helps extend visitation beyond the summer months and supports year-round demand for our partners.

Year-Round

International Markets

International markets remain a consistent focus throughout the year. Given longer planning and booking windows, we maintain an always-on presence through marketing, travel trade, and public relations efforts that build awareness, strengthen global partnerships, and drive future visitation to Chicago.



HOW WE REACH AUDIENCES

We focus on high-impact, data-informed strategies that move audiences from inspiration to action. Our core marketing mix includes digital media, paid social, search, streaming, and strategic out-of-home placements with JCDcaux, complemented by partnerships with the Chicago Department of Aviation to ensure Chicago remains visible in key travel decision-making moments.

We also extend our reach through compelling original content, strategic partnerships, and innovative marketing opportunities that help Chicago stand out in a competitive

marketplace. From the *All For the Love of Chicago* podcast to partnerships like Amazon Prime Travel Deals, MLB Spring Training, and seasonal surprise and delight moments, we continuously identify new ways to connect with travelers and elevate Chicago's visibility.

Every effort is designed to drive action — directing audiences to Choose Chicago's digital platforms. Together, these strategies ensure Chicago shows up where demand is forming, captures intent when it peaks, and drives measurable results for the destination and our partners.

POWER OF OUR ADVERTISING

Our approach to marketing is rooted in accountability. Through our partnership with Tourism Economics, we are strengthening our attribution model to better understand how marketing investments influence visitation, hotel demand, visitor spending, and economic impact.

By evaluating performance across channels and touchpoints, we can better understand the traveler journey — from initial awareness and consideration to booking and visitation. These insights help us identify what is working, optimize future investments, and ensure resources are focused on the strategies that deliver the greatest return.

This data-driven approach allows us to move beyond traditional marketing metrics and demonstrate how our efforts contribute to measurable outcomes for Chicago, our partners, and the broader visitor economy.

CHOOSE CHICAGO CREATIVE CAMPAIGNS

Never Done. Never Outdone.

Chicago is a city that is always creating, evolving, and pushing forward. Designed to drive awareness, consideration, and visitation, Choose Chicago's global brand campaign showcases the experiences, people, and moments that prove Chicago is never done and never outdone. Through seasonally relevant storytelling and audience-specific messaging, the campaign inspires travel, creates year-round demand, and reinforces Chicago's position as one of the world's most dynamic destinations.

In 2026 the campaign will be spotlighting milestone moments:

★ **Route 66 Centennial**

Activate Chicago's role as the eastern anchor of Route 66 to drive international heritage travel, neighborhood discovery, and partner-led experiences.

★ **Illinois 250 (America's 250th)**

Position Chicago as a city of civic leadership, culture, and innovation with national and global relevance.

★ **Kick Back in Chicago**

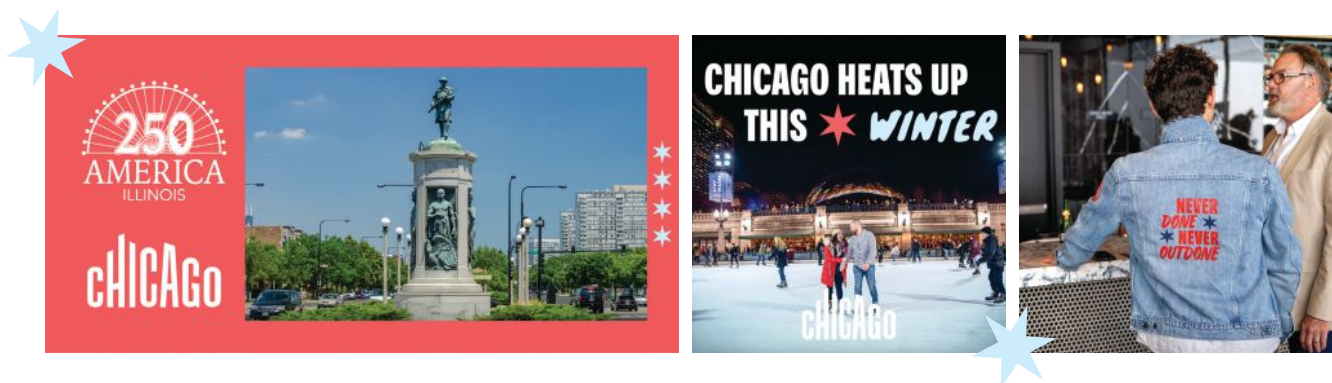
Tapping into the global attention from the FIFA World Cup, we are positioning Chicago as the most accessible and connected destination for everything beyond the match. From restaurants to architecture to our world-class culture and lakefront — we've got you covered.

★ **Holidays in Chicago**

Seasonal campaign driving year-end visitation and partner activation.

★ **All For the Love of Chicago**

Civic pride and storytelling.



COMMUNICATIONS

Our Communications strategy amplifies Chicago's strongest stories across owned, earned, and paid channels —generating visibility, credibility, and measurable impact.

Content & Storytelling

We create original, campaign-driven content that elevates Chicago's culture, neighborhoods, culinary scene, meetings product, and major moments like Chicago Restaurant Week. From influencer mailers and curated experiences to integrated seasonal storytelling, our narratives are designed to travel — fueling media, social, and partner promotion.

Owned & Paid Platforms

Through newsletters like the Never Outdone Network, website and blog content on choosechicago.com, and social media — supported by paid and search investments — we drive audiences to plan their visit, explore partners, and convert.



Follow Us!

@choosechicago ★ @allforthe loveofchicago ★ @meetinchicago



Earned Media & Industry Engagement

Our team proactively pitches top-tier media, hosts travel writers and influencers through FAMs, and conducts desk-sides and in-market meetings to maintain strong national and international visibility.

The **All For the Love of Chicago Roundtable** brings together marketing and communications leaders from Choose Chicago partner organizations to align messaging, strengthen relationships, and elevate the stories that showcase Chicago at its best.



SHARE YOUR MEDIA
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND
NEWEST HAPPENINGS WITH
US AT **COMMUNICATIONS@
CHOOSECHICAGO.COM.**



WHAT WE ARE SAYING

The Never Done. Never Outdone. platform positions Chicago as a city defined by momentum, confidence, creativity, and constant reinvention. It reflects a place that is never static — always building, evolving, and pushing forward.

This core idea is applied consistently across audiences, with emphasis tailored to decision drivers.

Leisure Travelers

Core Message

Chicago is a city that rewards curiosity and repeat visits — where culture, neighborhoods, food, and experiences are constantly evolving.

- ★ A city that is never finished
- ★ Discovery beyond the expected
- ★ Authentic, creative, and lived-in experiences

Why it resonates

Supports inspiration and trip planning while reinforcing Chicago as more than a one-time visit. Our calendar of events is the top-visited page on our site and is the primary destination to find out the latest happenings in Chicago.

Meetings & Convention Planners

Core Message

Chicago is a proven, confident host city — delivering scale, infrastructure, and execution, paired with cultural depth and memorable experiences.

- ★ Big-city capability matched with authenticity
- ★ A place that delivers, adapts, and outperforms expectations
- ★ Reliability without being predictable

Why it resonates

Aligns Chicago's momentum and confidence with planner priorities around trust, execution, and attendee experience.

Mega-Event & Civic Decision Makers

Core Message

Chicago is a city that executes global moments and turns them into lasting impact.

- ★ A city built to host the world
- ★ Forward-moving, resilient, and ambitious
- ★ Capable of scale, complexity, and legacy

Why it resonates

Positions Chicago as competitive on the global stage and ready for high-stakes, high-visibility events.

Media

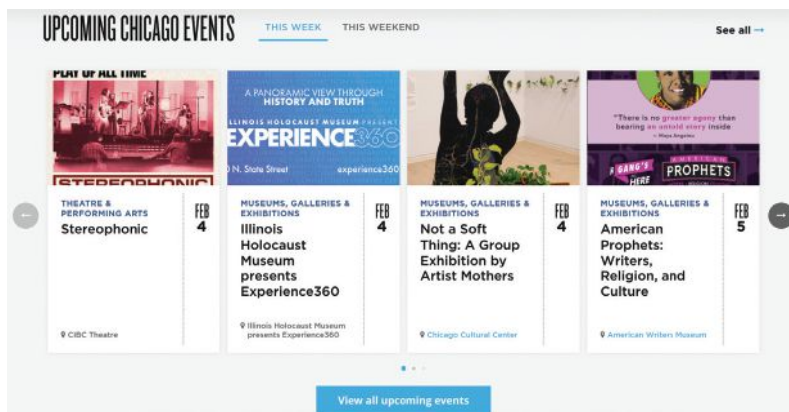
Core Message

Chicago is a city of constant stories — driven by people, neighborhoods, and creativity.

- ★ Always in motion
- ★ Rooted in real voices and real places
- ★ A city that continually redefines itself

Why it resonates

Generates earned visibility and reinforces Chicago's relevance in national and global conversations.



**SUBMIT
YOUR EVENTS**

TRADE & MEDIA

International travelers often book through tour operators, travel advisors, and wholesalers. Trade shows are where those buying decisions happen. If Chicago isn't at the table, we're not in the itinerary.

What we do:

At major international travel shows and sales missions, we:

- ★ Meet directly with tour operators and travel buyers
- ★ Pitch Chicago experiences, hotels, attractions, and neighborhoods
- ★ Secure placement in tour packages and multi-city itineraries
- ★ Host in-market events and FAMs to bring buyers closer to the product

How it benefits partners:

- ★ Your product is represented in front of qualified international buyers
- ★ Increased opportunity to be included in packaged tours and group travel
- ★ Expanded reach in priority global markets without having to attend every show yourself
- ★ International visitors who stay longer and spend more across hotels, attractions, dining, and retail



**INTERESTED IN PARTNERING
ON A TRADE MISSION?**



★ Major Travel Shows ★

Mississippi River Country Japan Sales Mission (Tokyo)	BUSA South East Asia Sales Mission (Taipei, Ho Chi Minh, and Manila)	Brand USA Travel Week Europe (Amsterdam)
Brand USA Spain Immersion (Madrid)	IPW 2026 (Fort Lauderdale)	



PARTNERSHIP-DRIVEN GROWTH

Choose Chicago exists to drive demand for our partners and the city as a whole. We connect travelers, meeting planners, and event organizers with the businesses, experiences, and communities that make Chicago unique.

Our role is to:

- ★ Generate awareness and visitation through marketing, public relations, sales, and travel trade efforts
- ★ Amplify partner stories through campaigns, content, and media opportunities
- ★ Convene the tourism industry around shared opportunities, major events, and citywide initiatives

By working together, we create greater visibility for our partners, stronger experiences for visitors, and a more competitive destination for Chicago.



**PARTNERSHIP AND
SPONSOR OPPORTUNITIES**

INCLUSION AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Reflecting the full city — and reaching the full world

Chicago's neighborhoods, diversity, and cultural institutions are not side stories — they are central to its appeal. Inclusion is embedded into how Chicago is marketed, strengthening its ability to host and welcome audiences of all kinds.

You'll see this through:

- ★ Neighborhood-focused storytelling tied to global moments
- ★ Cultural institutions and local businesses featured in campaigns
- ★ Representation that reflects Chicago year-round, not just during major events

Meeting & Convention Sales★

SALES AND CLIENT SERVICES

In 2026, Choose Chicago's Sales & Meetings team is focused on **balanced, sustained growth** — strengthening our citywide convention pipeline while accelerating impact in short-term and need-period demand. This work reflects a shift from recovery to momentum, grounded in collaboration, customer-centricity, and thoughtful use of insights to reinforce Chicago's value proposition.

Our approach is guided by four strategic pillars designed to position Chicago as **the premier destination for all meetings — all sizes, all seasons**.

2026 GUIDING PRINCIPLES & INITIATIVES

Acquisition of New Clients by Building the Citywide Convention Pipeline

We are continuing to strengthen Chicago's long-term convention calendar by expanding and diversifying our pipeline. In 2026, we are broadening our acquisition list from 250 to 350, adding high-value corporate opportunities, and engaging non-Chicago legacy accounts to secure future growth.

★ To support this work, we are **repurposing an existing sales position** to focus on driving net new corporate events to Chicago — strengthening short-term opportunities, filling need periods, and expanding intermediary-driven business in a more intentional and focused way.

★ We will also continue to leverage immersive **familiarization tours (FAMs)** — curated, hosted experiences that allow customers to experience Chicago firsthand — by aligning them with the city's most iconic moments and milestones. In 2026, these experiences will be built around signature opportunities such as the **opening of the Obama Presidential Center**, major sporting events, and cultural and civic milestones, offering customers authentic connections to the destination while strengthening long-term relationships.

Retaining our Legacy Clients

As we work on growing Chicago's citywide meetings and conventions, we remain equally focused on strengthening relationships with our long-standing, legacy clients to ensure their continued commitment to Chicago. These partners have helped build Chicago's reputation as a world-class meetings destination, and we do not take their business for granted. Just as we are targeting legacy clients from other cities, we know that other cities are going after our long-term customers, and we need to work hard to keep their business in Chicago.

In 2026, we will work closely with legacy clients to prioritize their experience at every level — bringing our executive leadership directly to the table with legacy clients CEOs to understand evolving needs at the highest level, anticipating challenges, solving problems, and delivering seamless, high-impact events. This hands-on, relationship-driven approach ensures Chicago continues to be the destination of choice for our most valued partners.

Driving Meaningful Impact into Short-Term Need Periods

While building long-term demand remains critical, 2026 places an increased emphasis on **immediate opportunity and near-term impact**.

We are broadening Chicago's narrative beyond large-scale conventions to reinforce our ability to deliver exceptional experiences across **all meetings, all sizes, and all seasons**. This includes expanding our acquisition strategy to 3,000 peak hotel room meetings and partnering with industry leaders to identify near-term opportunities that directly support need-period demand.

Key areas of focus include:

- ★ Continued investment in Chicago's **Hotel Collections**
- ★ Elevating **Navy Pier** as an additional convention center option for mini-wide events
- ★ Accelerating bookings through **immersive FAMs** tied to high-profile industry events
- ★ Expanding Chicago's position as a leading destination for **multicultural meetings and events**, building on the inaugural multicultural FAM and partnerships with organizations such as NCBMP
- ★ Strengthening the **Connecting to Chicago (C2C)** program to deepen relationships with local corporations and encourage meetings and events to remain in Chicago

Future Proofing

As the meetings and events landscape continues to evolve, Choose Chicago is committed to continuously improving the client experience and adapting to changing customer expectations.

In 2026, we will launch **Future Proofing Chicago** — a collaborative platform designed to bring customers and hotel partners together to share industry trends, identify opportunities, and co-create solutions that enhance Chicago's competitiveness as a meetings destination.

This initiative will be grounded in:

- ★ Active customer listening
- ★ Targeted client surveys
- ★ Insights from the biennial **Evidenz Study**

These insights will help inform ongoing communication, strengthen alignment with partner priorities, and guide how Chicago continues to evolve to meet customer needs.

2026 GROWTH TRENDS AND KPIs

In 2026, success will be measured through a set of **directional growth indicators** that reflect confidence in Chicago, balance across the convention calendar, and sustained momentum in the marketplace. Rather than focusing on individual targets, these indicators help assess the overall health, diversity, and resilience of Chicago's meetings and events business.

Key indicators include:

- ★ **Continued strength in definite room night production**, signaling sustained demand and planner confidence, and reinforcing Chicago's position as a reliable, large-scale meetings destination.
- ★ **A healthy balance of legacy and new business**, ensuring long-term stability while introducing new customers, sectors, and event formats into the pipeline.
- ★ **Strong sales activity and engagement that rebuilds the pipeline**, recognizing that future success depends on replenishing and strengthening the funnel through consistent lead generation, customer outreach, and proactive market engagement.
- ★ **Improved pacing and visibility into future years**, supported by the use of tools such as FuturePace, a third-party-validated analysis that helps assess Chicago's year-end consumption benchmarks and monitor progress toward annual pace targets.
- ★ **Increased impact on short-term and need-period demand**, particularly during lower-demand periods such as **December and Q1**, demonstrating the ability to drive bookings where they are most needed and support year-round hotel and convention center utilization.
- ★ **Continued growth in emerging verticals**, including **multicultural meetings and youth sporting events**, which naturally align with shorter booking windows and near-term impact, while requiring close monitoring as these segments continue to mature.
- ★ **Greater diversification across sectors, meeting sizes, and seasons**, reflecting Chicago's evolution from a primarily citywide-focused market to a destination capable of supporting **all meetings — all sizes, all seasons**.
- ★ **Continued focus on a strong conversion rate** to build on the success achieved in 2025, turning leads into definites.
- ★ **Turning new clients into long-term customers** through a specific effort from the Client Services team to rebook new clients for future years.

Together, these indicators reflect a **stable, balanced, and forward-looking convention calendar** — one that supports consistent economic impact, reduces volatility, and positions Chicago for sustained growth in an evolving meetings landscape.

CHICAGO SPORTS COMMISSION ★

2026 GUIDING PRINCIPLES & INITIATIVES

In 2026, the Chicago Sports Commission will continue to advance Chicago's position as the premier global sports destination by leveraging major sporting events to drive economic impact, community pride, create jobs and generate international visibility. Guided by our mission to attract, support, and grow world-class events, our work is grounded in the following principles and initiatives:

Champion Chicago on the World Stage

We will strategically pursue and deliver high-profile domestic and international sporting events that elevate Chicago's global profile and reinforce its reputation as a dynamic, welcoming, and world-class host city.

Maximize Economic and Tourism Impact

Our efforts will focus on events that generate measurable benefits for the city including live broadcast and major media partner opportunities, hotel room nights, visitor spending, and long-term tourism growth, in alignment with Choose Chicago's destination marketing priorities.

Foster Collaboration and Partnership

Success is built through strong partnerships with civic leadership, sports organizations, venues, community stakeholders, and tourism partners. We will continue to serve as a connector and trusted partner across Chicago's sports and tourism ecosystem.

Deliver Excellence in Event Execution

We are committed to operational excellence, thoughtful planning, and seamless delivery of events that reflect positively on Chicago and strengthen long-term relationships with rights holders and governing bodies.

**CONTACT THE CHICAGO SPORTS
COMMISSION TEAM**



2026 CALENDAR

January 17–19 | 2026 Boys Winter Volleyball Championship @ McCormick Place

February 28 | WWE Elimination Chamber Event @ United Center

March 10–15 | Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament @ United Center

March 11 | CSC Speaker Series: Big Ten Tip-Off Luncheon @ RPM Events

March 27 & 29 | NCAA Men's Basketball Midwest Regionals @ United Center

March 31 | MexTour: Mexico vs. Belgium @ Soldier Field

April 3–5 | Adidas Windy City Qualifier @ McCormick Place

May 9–15 | NBA Draft Lottery and Combine @ Wintrust Arena & McCormick Place

June 6 | Coca-Cola Send-Off Match: U.S. Men's National Team vs. Germany @ Soldier Field

July 23–25 | WNBA All-Star Game @ United Center and McCormick Place

July 24–27 | Nike Tournament of Champions @ McCormick Place

September 5–6 | AVP League Championship @ Oak Street Beach

September 22–27 | Presidents Cup @ Medinah Country Club

October 11 | 48th Bank of America Chicago Marathon

October 22 | Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Dinner @ Rosemont Convention Center

CHOOSE CHICAGO FOUNDATION ★

MISSION

The Choose Chicago Foundation strategically advances equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives that support youth, community, and workforce development. The Foundation provides financial assistance and training opportunities to help individuals from ethnically and economically diverse communities pursue and grow careers within the broader tourism industry and connecting industries.

In 2026, the Choose Chicago Foundation is looking for partners to support their key initiatives:

Student Tourism Day in partnership with CIBC: Choose Chicago Student Tourism Days help bridge the gap in career pathways within the hospitality and tourism industry by providing high school seniors with hands-on exploration opportunities across neighborhood and downtown hospitality partners. Students engage with diverse industry leaders and enjoy complimentary breakfast and lunch. Partners are encouraged to sign up as a host location for an upcoming Student Tourism Day.

Mentorships and Internship: Get involved with the Choose Chicago Foundation by becoming a mentor or offering an internship. Your support can make a meaningful difference in shaping a student's future.



DONATE TODAY!

Scan the QR code to donate to support Choose Chicago's scholarship program and community initiatives.

CHICAGO
CHOOSE CHICAGO