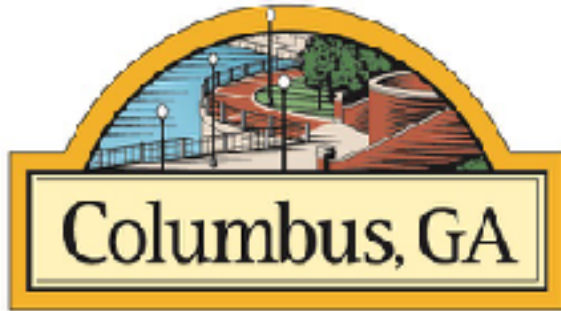


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## NEWS RELEASE

### Columbus New Visitors Audience Study

**Columbus, GA (December 30, 2016)** — Changes and growth in Columbus have resulted in a need to identify new visitor audiences to increase the local tourism economy. The Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau (CCVB) has been monitoring the economic impact and visitor travel patterns to Columbus to determine whether the change has been due to a slow recovery from the Great Recession or impacts from other indicators, like sequestration, taking place in the market place. The CCVB has retained Gray Research Solutions (GRS) as its strategic research partner to assist in confirming the changes as well as provide solutions to augment the Bureau's strategic plan and marketing strategy.

Throughout 2016, GRS conducted workshops and meetings in Columbus with tourism stakeholders and community leaders, analyzed travel industry trends, interviewed lodging and attraction partners, and more. That research identified the need to focus on growing the leisure visitor segment to make up for lost military related revenue, along with other factors, and to leverage the opportunity for Columbus and Phenix City to enhance their respective regional destination marketing efforts.

The next step in the process is identifying which "new" leisure visitor audiences — traveler types not currently being targeted — are the Bureau's best niches. In January, GRS will launch a comprehensive quantitative survey of potential visitors in top markets outside of 150 miles of Columbus including Tallahassee/Tampa, FL; Dallas/Houston, TX; Athens, GA; and Chicago, IL.

This survey will identify which traveler types are most likely to visit Columbus and which aspects are most likely to attract them. These results will help inform the CVB's overall marketing strategy and define messages targeted to specific leisure visitor types. This study is modeled off of "Likelihood to Purchase"

and “Market Segmentation” studies in the consumer industry. The study will explore different types of travelers based on current industry trends — e.g., multi-generational families, adventure travelers, health and wellness travelers, arts and cultural travelers, history buffs, etc. — to understand which groups are most likely to travel to Columbus, and why. The study conclude to coincide with the CVB’s planning for fiscal 2018.

Sales and advertising work will reflect the new messages directed at this different and new customer base. The Bureau will continue to target existing customers such as meetings and conventions, group leisure, education, association, fraternal, etc. The anticipated relocation and opening of Westville in late 2018 will also play into the destination marketing efforts of the Bureau - stitching together a strong education and “fun-edutainment” experience with venues such as Westville, the National Infantry Museum, Oxbow Environmental Learning Center, the National Civil War Naval Museum, the Coca-Cola Space Science Center, the Columbus Museum.

In FY 2016, the Columbus COnvention & Visitors Bureau tracked 1.9 million visitors to the city which created an \$340 million economic impact from visitor spending, creating jobs, contributing to worker payroll, and providing over \$500 in tax relief for every Columbus household.

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