

2024 Annual Report

Performance, trends and updates from 2024

CHARTING OUR TRUE NORTH



[VisitCOS.com](https://www.VisitCOS.com)

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a letter from **DOUG PRICE**

2024 was a vibrant, exciting year in Olympic City USA. Alongside our partners at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center and the City of Colorado Springs, we embarked on an ambitious campaign centered around the Paris Games. With Olympic Gold Medalist Missy Franklin as the spokesperson, we invited visitors not only to watch the games but also to experience them in Olympic City USA.

Later in the year, VCOS worked alongside journalist Cindy Hirschfeld to land what every destination dreams of: a New York Times feature – “36 Hours in Colorado Springs”. More than 30 partner businesses were included in the robust weekend itinerary that surely inspired many to add Colorado Springs to their travel list.

We are proud to have officially become Destination Verified with Wheel the World and worked throughout the year to showcase our incredible, accessible attractions, lodging and outdoor adventures to visitors. The COS Airport continued to grow with more nonstop routes, progress on the Elevate COS concourse

modernization project and the announcement of the first-ever nonstop international route to Cancun, Mexico.

“As we enter 2025, we can feel the pull of the stars guiding us to what’s next as an industry, a destination and a community.”

After more than 27 incredible years with VCOS, our VP of Sales Kathy Reak embarked on a well-earned retirement. We welcomed Lee Reijgers, who brings a wealth of regional sales knowledge and experience, as our new VP of Sales.

Leveraging the \$400K Tourism Recovery Marketing Grant from the Colorado Tourism Office, we completed a successful campaign dedicated to driving more awareness

on holding meetings and events in Colorado Springs.

We ended the year gathering once again as an industry to celebrate “Excellence in Bloom” at Hillside Gardens. It was a magical evening that put a spotlight on our amazing industry leaders who make visitor experiences so unforgettable.

With our commitment to excellence and adhering to industry best practices, VCOS submitted its renewal application for the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program. We were notified in December that our status has been renewed through the end of 2028.

As we enter 2025, we can feel the pull of the stars guiding us to what’s next as an industry, a destination and a community. As growth continues across Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak Region, it’s up to our tourism and hospitality leaders to help shape the future of our destination.

INDUSTRY REPORT

The tourism industry made great strides in 2024 toward fully recovering from the pandemic on a global scale. It was originally predicted that international travel would recover by 2025. However, 2024 data from the UN's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) shows that 1.4 billion people traveled internationally, which is nearly the same as the amount of international travel in 2019 and considered full recovery.

According to U.S. Travel, domestic leisure travel is normalizing and continues to experience growth. In 2024, travelers were increasingly more interested in experiential travel – spending more of their budget on memorable experiences. This trend is expected to continue in 2025. Experts from STR and Tourism Economics reported that business travel boosted U.S. hotel performance in fall 2024, and they expect 2025 will bring more business-travel recovery. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) predicted in October 2024 that global business travel spend by the end of the year would rise 6.2% from 2019 levels, marking a quicker pandemic recovery than previously expected. The U.S. led this prediction with a 13.4% increase over 2019. The WTTC cited several reasons for a quicker recovery, including businesses reallocating funds to corporate travel and the growth of “bleisure” travel.



2024 global business travel spend increase from 2019 levels

6.2%



2024 U.S. business travel spend increase from 2019 levels

13.4%





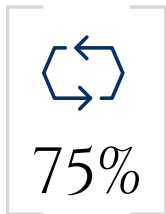
DESTINATION REPORT

LONGWOODS & LART

The 2024 year-end Lodgers and Automobile Rental Tax (LART) report showed a 1.15% increase over 2023. Overall, the year remained steady compared to the previous year, with a few months dipping below 2023 collections. Dips were attributed to factors like continued inflation, a reignited interest in international travel and the election year impacting travel plans.

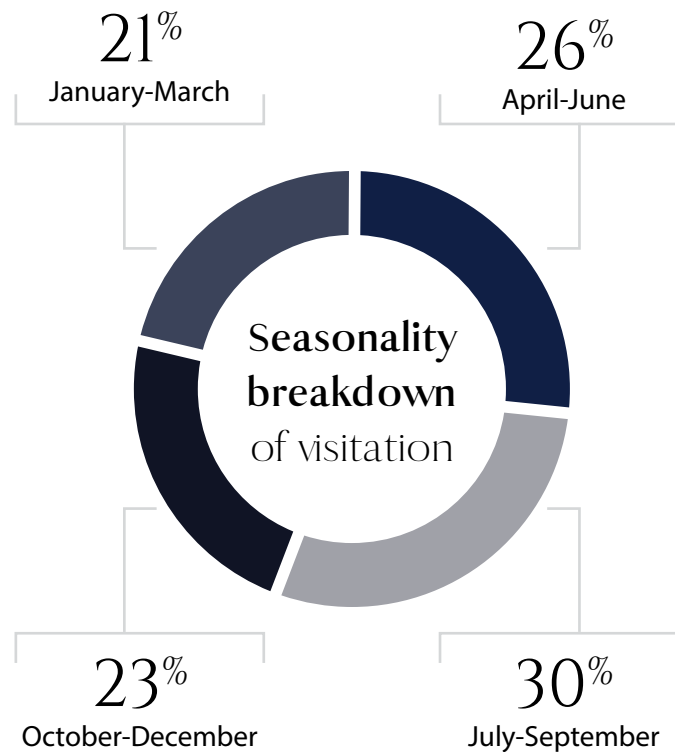
In June, VCOS received the 2023 Longwoods Visitor Profile Study results. Key findings included:

24.8 million visitors
spent \$2.9 billion



Percent of overnight travelers were repeat visitors, with 53% having visited before within the last 12 months

Percent of travel parties that had a member who required accessibility services, compared to the U.S. norm of 17%



WHAT'S NEW/ RENOVATED

The year was packed with new and renovated attractions, food and wellness offerings, which all added to the overall excitement and vibrancy of both visitors' trips and quality of life for residents.

Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum

HVAC renovations, new permanent exhibits and new exhibit space

Ford Amphitheater

Grand opening featuring fire pit suites and panoramic views

Louie Louie's

New dueling piano bar opened in the heart of the New South End, downtown

ICONS

New location and redesign after the old location closed due to smoke damage from a nearby fire

Space Foundation Discovery Center

Redesign and expansion with new interactive experiences

Weidner Field

New meeting space and Exponential Impact accelerator space opened



New restaurant openings

(VCOS Partners)

Evergreen Restaurant
Nacho Matrix
King Restaurant



New wellness openings

(VCOS Partners)

Colorado Salt Cave Wellness Center
Aspen Aesthetics + Wellness
Facial Aesthetics

NEW & UNDER-CONSTRUCTION HOTELS

New in 2024

Hotel Polaris
at the U.S. Air Force Academy

Home2 Suites by Hilton
Colorado Springs Airport

Homewood Suites by Hilton
Colorado Springs Airport

Tru by Hilton
Colorado Springs Airport



Updated & New Construction

The Mining Exchange Hotel
Renovated

**Residence Inn by Marriott Colorado Springs
Airport**
New construction

TownePlace Suites by Marriott
Colorado Springs I-25 South
New construction

Candlewood Suites Colorado Springs Airport
New construction

Home2 Suites by Hilton Colorado Springs NE
New construction

Tru by Hilton Colorado Springs North
New construction

Cheyenne Mountain Resort
Changed its flag to become a Destination by Hyatt property

COLORADO SPRINGS AIRPORT

Performance

The COS Airport had a record performance in 2024 with 1.2M total enplanements – an increase of 5% over the previous year.

Additionally, the number of seats available in the market increased by 5.4% over 2023, and the load factor rose to 81.4%.

Elevate COS

The concourse modernization project, which started in 2023, successfully completed the first two phases of the project. Now in phase three, the project is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

Grant funding was received to support the project, which includes: a complete remodel of the terminal concourse, space for new retail, new food and beverage options and increased sustainability and accessibility features.

Routes

In June, COS launched a nonstop flight on Southwest Airlines to Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI). Later in the year, COS announced that Allegiant would bring back service to COS in February 2025 with three nonstop routes: Mesa/Phoenix, St. Pete/Tampa and Orange County/Santa Ana. At the end of the year, COS also announced the airport's inaugural international route to Cancun, which will begin seasonal service in June 2025. American Airlines will resume nonstop service to Chicago O'Hare in June 2025.



DESTINATION ACCOLADES

As a destination, Colorado Springs received several notable recognitions, including:



#3 Best Place to Live in the U.S.

U.S. News & World Report

#13 Best Places to Live Out West

Livability

100 Best Places to Live in America

Livability

#1 Most Neighborly City

Neighbor.com

10Best Readers' Choice Awards

USA Today



Best Dog Bar in America

#4 Pub Dog



Best Zoo

#5 Cheyenne Mountain Zoo



Best Zoo Exhibit

#2 Rocky Mountain Wild



Best Dude Ranch

#10 The Ranch at Emerald Valley



Best Hotel for the Holidays

#2 The Broadmoor



Best Zoo Lights

#2 Electric Safari



Best Small Town in the West

#5 Manitou Springs



Best Minor League Baseball Mascot

#5 Toasty from the Rocky Mountain Vibes



Best Attraction for Sports Fans

#2 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum



ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR | Gus Krimm, The Mining Exchange

SECRETARY | Becky Leinweber, Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance

TREASURER | Dave Harris, Ghost Town Museum

Curtis Bova, Hotel Polaris

Susan Davies, Trails & Open Spaces Coalition

Scott Flexman, The Broadmoor

Jenifer Furda, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

Johnna Reeder Kleymeyer, Colorado Springs Chamber & EDC

Crystal LaTier, El Paso County

Megan Leatham, Colorado Springs Sports Corp

Dan LeClerc, Ent Credit Union

Wendy McHenry, Flying Horse Resort & Club

Lisa Neener, U.S. Air Force Academy

Ed Okvath, SpringHill Suites/Element

Greg Phillips, The Colorado Springs Airport

Jenny Sherman, Odyssey Gastropub

Dr. Cary Snow, Pikes Peak State College

Michelle Talarico, Picnic Basket Catering Collective

Marisa Wigglesworth, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum

Board of Directors

Doug Price
President & CEO

Amy Long
Chief Development Officer

★ Kimberlie Griffis
Sr. Director of Partnerships

◇ Lindsey Pevey
Partner Relations Manager

★ Christy Long
Director of Visitor Services

◇ Nadine Keaney
Visitor Services Specialist

◇ Doris McCraw
Visitor Information Specialist

◇ Volunteers

April Perez
Director of Finance

★ Nate Morrill
Account Clerk

Melissa Williams
Director of Marketing

★ Lindsay Cluckey
Marketing Coordinator

Alexea Veneracion
Director of Communications

★ Sheridan Powell
Communications Manager

★ Kate Hertz
Content Coordinator

Peggy Manter
Executive Assistant

Lee Reijgers
Vice President of Sales

★ Brittany Hunt
Senior Sales Manager

★ Claudia Dolak
Group Sales Coordinator

★ Cheryl McCullough
Sr. Director of Sports & Events

◇ Juliet Jacoby
Group Sales Manager

◇ Holly Taylor
Manager of Destination Services

STAFF UPDATES

New Hires



JULIET JACOBY
Group Sales Manager



KATE HERTZ
Content Coordinator



LINDSAY CLUCKEY
Marketing Coordinator



NATE MORRILL
Account Clerk



LEE REIJGERS
VP of Sales

Staff Changes

- ✦ Former VP of Sales Kathy Reak retired after more than 27 incredible years with VCOS.
- ✦ Lee Reijgers joined the team as the new VP of Sales, overseeing the five-person Sales department.
- ✦ Amy Long became Chief Development Officer, now overseeing the Partnership, International and Visitor Services departments.
- ✦ Melissa Williams, Alexea Veneracion and Lee Reijgers joined the executive leadership team.
- ✦ Sheridan Powell was promoted to Communications Manager.

ADMIN UPDATES



Completed a successful organizational audit in early 2024



Purchased the building at 515 S Cascade Avenue, which includes 6,300 additional square feet



Replaced the building's roof



Secured a long-term tenant and monetized the parking lot to generate additional revenue in 2025



Completed staff training in DISC for conflict resolution

DEIA UPDATES



Became Destination Verified with Wheel the World and launched a digital video campaign highlighting accessibility




Completed a partner Educational Series session dedicated to 'Disability 101' training with the Independence Center



Finalized and published a destination inclusion commitment statement on VisitCOS.com

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Marketing

 Advertising Impressions
60,563,734

 Organic Website Sessions
2,420,832

 Total Website Sessions
3,785,692

 Newsletter Subscribers
22,000

PR & Communications

 Paid Social
\$562.5K

 Media Placements
753

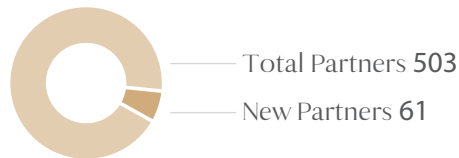
 Media Equivalency
\$30M+

 Influencer Visits
14

Partnership

Partnership Revenue
\$614,256

Partnership Retention
93%



Group Sales

Leads Sent 3,019

Servicing Activities 13,889

Trade Show Contacts 3,463

Trade Shows Attended 26

Economic Impact \$153,127,991

Conventions
109,089
Tourism
2,978
Sports
108,951





DEPARTMENT REPORTS

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

GROUP SALES

It was a successful year for meetings and events in Colorado Springs. The addition of the Baltimore-Washington direct flight at COS was an impactful access point to East Coast business travelers. The opening of Hotel Polaris is already providing more availability for events and filling a gap on the north side of town. The biggest challenges remaining are lack of adequate and available meeting space and keeping up with demand.

Domestic Tour

In 2023, VCOS successfully secured 29 bookings, generating 1,660 room nights, and contributing an economic impact of \$1,018,064. Building on this momentum, in 2024, a new Group Sales Manager was hired to specifically target this growing market. This strategic addition played a crucial role in increasing bookings to 49, which resulted in nearly 2,978 room nights and an economic impact of \$1,858,558. Through revitalizing relationships with tour operators and industry partners, VCOS enhanced its tracking of visits, providing valuable insights that will guide future efforts and help shape expectations for the coming years.

Accolades

- ✦ **2024 40th Annual Award of Excellence**
Corporate & Incentive Travel
- ✦ **2024 Best of Meetings Today Award**
Meetings Today
- ✦ **2024 Platinum Choice Award**
Smart Meetings
- ✦ **2024 Distinctive Achievement Award**
Meetings Magazine

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Attended 26 trade shows and made 3,463 contacts
- ✦ Completed meetings/events email campaign, funded by Tourism Recovery Marketing Grant, that reached more than 1M people with a 7.6% click-through rate
- ✦ Booked 221,018 total room nights
- ✦ Estimated economic impact of \$70.7M for conventions and \$1.9M for domestic tours
- ✦ Launched new meeting space search tool on VisitCOS.com



DEPARTMENT REPORTS

SPORTS & SPECIAL EVENTS

In 2024, the sports & events industry was impacted by high hotel rates, encouraging planners to keep registration costs lower and help offset expenses.

An exciting lineup of new baseball, soccer and lacrosse tournaments on our fields helped showcase the destination as a premier hub for youth sports. Collaborative partnerships with groups like Sports Corp, El Pomar Youth Sports Park, Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services and the U.S. Air Force Academy were instrumental in securing community sports fields and enhancing events. A key challenge that remains is the limited availability of fields and the lack of sufficiently large indoor facilities to accommodate bigger tournaments. Addressing these infrastructure gaps will be vital as we continue to position Olympic City USA as a top-tier sports destination.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Supported more than 90 sports events, generating 108,951 room nights
- ✦ Estimated economic impact of \$80.6M for sports and special events
- ✦ Attended Sports ETA in April and TEAMS Conference & Expo in September
- ✦ Established collaborative approach with Sports Corp for united trade show presence



DEPARTMENT REPORTS

VISITOR SERVICES

2024 presented a wave of challenges for Visitor Services, including heavy spring snow and an aging roof with leaks that damaged merchandise.

The Visitor Center was temporarily relocated to the HR Branches office during roof repairs.

Ample signage and communication allowed visitors to still find the information they needed.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Kept the Visitor Center open in a temporary location during the building's roof installation
- ✦ Retained core group of 12 volunteers who provided invaluable support to our guests
- ✦ Maintained strong visitation and merchandise sales, albeit a slight decline from 2023
- ✦ Full-time staff attended the Visitor Services Summit at Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference in October

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

PARTNERSHIP

Together with the marketing and communications departments, the partnership team was able to showcase value to partners and achieve a 93% retention rate – 8 percentage points higher than the industry standard of 85%.

The economy and changing labor laws continue to impact small business owners, especially locally owned restaurants and retail establishments.

VCOS has worked on creative benefits for partners like social media programs, podcast interviews and media hosting opportunities to help businesses gain exposure and traffic. Both the Annual Business Meeting luncheon and Tourism Awards Celebration had record-breaking attendances as well as significant increases in event sponsorships from partner businesses. Attendance at Partner Orientations and Educational Series events also exceeded 2023 numbers.

EVENTS RECAP

- ✦ **Annual Business Meeting**
March at Colorado Springs Marriott
- ✦ **Tourism Awards Celebration**
September at Hillside Gardens
- ✦ **Educational Series topics**
Demystifying Creative Marketing Trends
Beyond the Basics – Finding Your Marketing Mojo
Accessibility 101 – Creating Inclusive Experiences
- ✦ **Mixer locations**
Bristol Brewing
Pub Dog
Mining Exchange
Holiday Open House at VCOS

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Partner retention increased by 6 percentage points year-over-year, from 87% to 93%
- ✦ The 2024 Tourism Awards Celebration at Hillside Gardens included high attendance and the presentation of a new award, the Janet Suthers Olympic City USA Community Service Award
- ✦ Attended Partnership and Community Engagement (PACE) Forum in February
- ✦ Ended the year with 503 partners, the highest number in several years



DEPARTMENT REPORTS

INTERNATIONAL

Our partnership with the CTO was critical to the overall success of VCOS's international work, including hosting FAM trips, industry introductions, advertising co-ops, market data and joining the Colorado booth at IPW.

2024 laid the groundwork for a new program called Tourism Exchange USA, a collaboration between Brand USA and the CTO. Plans were made during Q4 to hold a "Road Show" session in Colorado Springs to educate hotels, attractions, activities and museums on the platform.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Returned to pre-pandemic inbound travel levels from our key markets – Europe, Australia and Canada
- ✦ International arrivals in the U.S. increased by 8.9% year-over-year, reaching 72.4M visitors nationwide
- ✦ Attended Go West Summit in February and IPW in May to meet with international tour operators
- ✦ Partnered with the CTO to host successful international trade and media visits from the UK, Ireland, Canada, Germany, Mexico and France

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

COMMUNICATIONS

Performance across communications channels remained consistent throughout the year, with high-performing influencer collaborations each quarter and a mix of tier 1 and trade media placements. Most notable was the New York Times “36 Hours in Colorado Springs” feature article.

VCOS worked alongside reporter Cindy Hirschfeld to get the piece published and include 30+ businesses. Toward the end of the year, VCOS conducted in-depth research on media monitoring and reporter database platforms and made a switch from Cision to Muck Ruck. By December, the team was fully onboarded with a new coverage dashboard and capabilities to conduct more targeted media outreach in-platform.

VCOS created a new position, *Content Coordinator*, and Kate Hertz was hired to fill the role. This addition has been integral to the success of all @VisitCOS channels. From Facebook and Instagram to TikTok, Pinterest and blog content on VisitCOS.com, the team was able to consistently produce and publish high-quality, creative and trendy content that drove visitors to the website and partner businesses.

MEDIA & SOCIAL METRICS

753 media placements highlighting the destination and partner businesses

Hosted 14 influencers with 25+ posts that included 97 partner features



\$30M+ in ad equivalency value



10 press releases published



Grew Instagram following by 10%

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ★ Featured in New York Times article, “36 Hours in Colorado Springs”
- ★ Reached Peak Into COS podcast milestone 50th episode with 6,367 all-time downloads
- ★ Awarded \$40K Tourism Marketing Grant by the CTO for neighborhoods/areas project
- ★ Communications Manager Sheridan Powell was inducted into Destinations International’s 30 Under 30 program
- ★ Onboarded Kate Hertz as Content Coordinator, a new role to support stronger content strategy

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

MARKETING

The resident sentiment survey findings were a great foundation for future work on influencing local viewpoints on tourism. Overall, results were positive with some constructive feedback on terminology around "LART." Several areas were identified as negative impacts of tourism impacting our community's quality of life, giving our staff valuable insight into both valid concerns and common misconceptions surrounding tourism.

Attending the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta was a great starting point for more targeted ad strategy in the future. VCOS invested in a balloon banner, three billboards and thousands of stickers, all inviting festival goers to find their next adventure in Colorado Springs. In partnership with Orange 142, the team collected attendees' IP data to serve them digital ads in Q1 2025.

CONFERENCES ATTENDED BY MARCOM TEAM

✔ **Tourism Academy** in June

✔ **Destinations International Annual Convention** in July

✔ **ESTO** in August

✔ **ProFound Summit** in October

✔ **Crowdriff SEE** in October

✔ **Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference** in October

✔ **TravelAbility Summit** in November

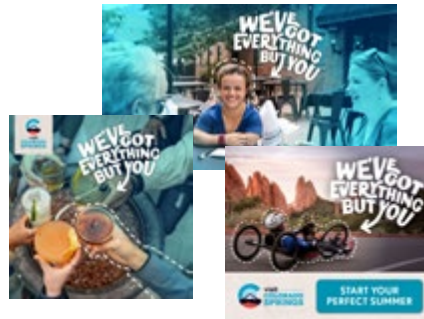
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Developed a well-researched and strategic AI policy with guidelines to ensure safe, ethical and efficient usage across the VCOS team
- ✦ Leveraged Tourism Management Grant funds to execute a resident sentiment survey with focus groups to better gauge local sentiment toward tourism and awareness of the lodging tax, known as LART
- ✦ Partnered with Pikes Peak Region Attractions to produce the 2025 Official Vacation Planner
- ✦ Attended the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta for grassroots marketing efforts and to begin targeting this lookalike audience of drive-market visitors

2024 CAMPAIGNS



OLYMPIC CITY USA



SUMMER LEISURE



FALL LEISURE + ARTS & CULTURE

ACCESSIBILITY



CRAFTS & DRAFTS DIGITAL PASSPORT



MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS



PARIS GAMES

In collaboration with the City of Colorado Springs, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum and the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center, VCOS launched a large-scale campaign capitalizing on the excitement surrounding the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

The spokesperson of the campaign was five-time Olympic Gold Medalist, Missy Franklin. Leveraging Missy, the message served as an invitation to our audience not only to watch the games but to experience them for themselves here in Olympic City USA.



MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

TOURISM RECOVERY MARKETING GRANT

Based on a \$400,000 grant from the Colorado Tourism Office using American Rescue Plan Act funds, VCOS successfully completed the 2023-2024 campaign to reach meeting and event planners who bring group business to the destination. Outside the scope of the grant, a portion of the campaign included co-op emails and print ads to give full-service hotels, airport and top attractions additional exposure to this lucrative market.

PRINT



Print Impressions

2,021,000

DIGITAL ADS



Impressions

10,602,093



Clicks

53,673



CTR

0.51%

(industry benchmark is 0.30%)

100% Video Views

2,144

EMAIL



Audience

1,012,000



Views

541,132



Clicks

78,053

MEETINGS & CONVENTION PERFORMANCE



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