



**FROM HOST TO OWNER:  
*HOW LEADING  
SPORTS CITIES ARE  
TAKING CONTROL  
OF SPORTS EVENTS  
AND REVENUE***

## IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE SPORTS TOURISM LANDSCAPE, LEADING SPORTS CITIES ARE SHIFTING FROM REACTIVE HOSTING TO PROACTIVE OWNERSHIP OF EVENTS AND REVENUE.

This Whitepaper explores why this transition is crucial and outlines the evolving expectations for convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs), sports commissions, and event planners. Traditional models, reliant on external event owners and opaque revenue flows, are giving way to strategies that firmly put control in destination marketing executives' hands.

We break down three dominant event management models:

- 1 FULL OWNERSHIP OF TOURNAMENTS
- 2 HYBRID PARTNERSHIPS SHARING OPERATIONAL CONTROL
- 3 SMALLER-SCALE, EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN LOCAL EVENTS

Each approach delivers unique benefits, from enhanced community alignment and richer data ownership to stronger hotel engagement and diversified revenue opportunities.

Technology is at the core of this evolution—platforms like *EventConnect* that unify registration, housing, reporting, and communication. With centralized data and real-time visibility, destinations gain confidence and tools to negotiate better hotel blocks, provide transparency to stakeholders, and craft memorable experiences for athletes and families alike.

By embracing strategic control, cities don't just host events; they become owners of their sports tourism destiny. This shift maximizes return on investment and ensures that sports tourism development aligns with long-term community goals.

This collaboration between *Sports Planning Guide* and *EventConnect* offers practical insights, case studies, and best practices for CVBs and sports event planners ready to lead this transformation.



# WHY CITIES ARE RE-THINKING SPORTS TOURISM



**F**or years, many destinations followed a simple model: win the bid, host the event, and hope for a measurable boost in economic impact and exposure. This approach relied on external event owners to handle operations and absorb financial risk, while cities waited for benefits to materialize.

As the sports tourism industry has matured, enhancements to this model have become clear. Without direct control, cities often lacked visibility into hotel bookings, attendee experience, and the data needed to prove return on investment. This lack of transparency made future bids harder to justify.

At the same time, the landscape has shifted. Bid fees are rising, ROI expectations are sharper, and DMOs face growing pressure for accurate reporting. Hotels want confidence that their

inventory is being marketed and filled effectively and not left to manual, error-prone processes.

In response, cities are rethinking their role, not as passive hosts but as active managers and, increasingly, owners of sports events. They're taking control of packaging, marketing, execution, and data collection to drive long-term growth.

With a strategic, tech-enabled approach, destinations can engage hotel partners directly, improve room block performance, and elevate the athlete and fan experience. Just as important, they can deliver transparent, data-backed reports that strengthen stakeholder trust.

The era of "hopeful hosting" is giving way to a new model—one where cities own their sports tourism success and build sustainable strategies that benefit their entire community.

# THREE MODELS OF EVENT MANAGEMENT



## 1

### FULL OWNERSHIP: CVBS CREATING AND OPERATING THEIR EVENTS

Some destinations take bold steps by fully owning their sports events, designing, managing, and executing them in-house. This approach gives them end-to-end control over the athlete experience and the community brand.

**Case in Point:** Houston Sports Authority and Maryland Sports Commission both have embraced full ownership of key tournaments as part of a broader strategy to ensure quality, maximize local impact, and secure long-term returns. By investing in their IP, these organizations create signature experiences that reflect their region's identity.

Owning events allows these commissions to design events around their unique infrastructure, offer exclusive experiences, and collect vital data across the entire customer journey. It's not only a competitive advantage, but also a long-term investment.

## 2

### HYBRID PARTNERSHIPS: STRATEGIC COLLABORATION WITH GREATER OVERSIGHT

For many cities, the sweet spot lies in hybrid partnerships. In this model, the CVB or sports commission doesn't own the event outright. Still, it plays a significant role, whether managing registration and housing, overseeing tech integration, or influencing the event format to meet local goals.

**Case in Point:** Sports Salt Lake, a division of Visit Salt Lake, has adopted a high-touch, data-first approach by aligning closely with event organizers and using EventConnect's platform to gain clearer performance insights.

"Without a partner like EventConnect, many of our events were operating in the dark, and so were we," said Clay Partain, chief sports officer at Sports Salt Lake. By accessing real-time analytics, Salt Lake City is now identifying gaps and turning that insight into future infrastructure planning.





# 3

## EXPERIENCE-FIRST, SMALLER SCALE: EVENTS WITH LOCAL DNA

Not every destination is chasing massive multi-sport tournaments. Many are finding success by creating smaller, experience-driven events that highlight the uniqueness of their community while delivering measurable impact.

**Case in Point:** In Huntsville, Alabama, Huntsville/Madison County CVB Sports Development Manager Joel Lamp leverages the platform to create a "one-stop shop" for events, especially for first-time visitors. "[EventConnect] gives us a clearer picture of where people are staying, so we can tailor the experience around them."

**Destinations may not own or fully operate every event, but they have mastered influence through tech, service, and data to shape lasting experiences.**

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but the common denominator is clear: greater involvement leads to greater value. Whether cities choose to own, co-manage, or shape events from the sidelines, they're all moving toward more innovative, more strategic control, and they're doing it with the help of platforms designed to make that vision possible.



# KEY BENEFITS OF MANAGING OR INFLUENCING EVENTS

In an increasingly competitive landscape, destinations proactively managing or influencing events are reaping a new tier of benefits. These aren't just upgrades but levers to drive revenue, elevate experiences, and future-proof a community's sports tourism strategy.

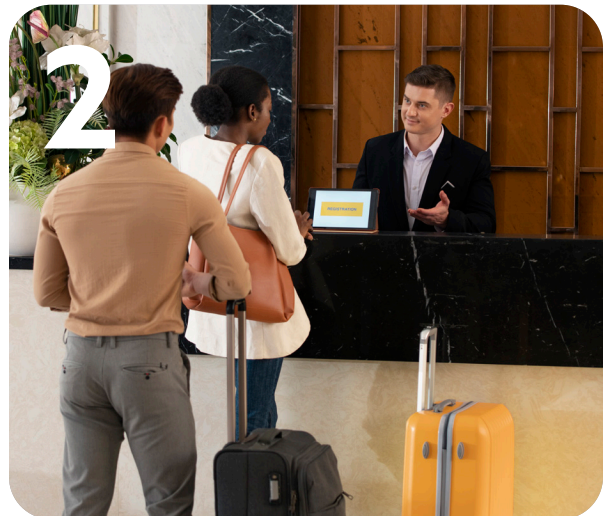
Here are five key advantages that emerge when cities take the wheel:



## STRONGER STAKEHOLDER CONFIDENCE THROUGH TRANSPARENT DATA

Destinations that manage events or key systems like registration and housing are positioned to gather accurate, real-time data. This transparency pays dividends, with data-backed stories inspiring investment and local leaders' support.

*For Lance Fite, vice president of sports at Visit Mesa, reporting tools allow him to "speak knowledgeably to hotels about overall event performance" and benchmark properties against each other. This strategy builds trust and leverage when bidding for future events.*



## HIGHER HOTEL ENGAGEMENT AND ROOM NIGHT CAPTURE

When cities participate in event housing directly or through partnerships, they can dramatically improve hotel buy-in and room-night performance.

*"We had to update Excel files and re-upload links constantly," said Cherie Gwinn, senior director of events at Spokane Sports, recalling the challenges of the old system. "It was time-consuming and prone to error." Now, the process is centralized, real-time, and accessible, giving hotels the tools to succeed while reducing friction.*



### **BETTER EXPERIENCES FOR ATHLETES, FAMILIES, AND TEAMS**

Event influence leads to experience control, from booking convenience to on-the-ground logistics. A smoother journey means happier guests and better retention.

*For Spokane Sports, the ability for teams to compare properties, amenities, and rates in one place enhances the booking process, which reflects positively on the destination's professionalism.*



### **SMARTER EVENT DESIGN AND VENUE PLANNING**

Data from managed or semi-managed events helps cities make better decisions, not just about the event itself, but about long-term facility investment.

*Sports Salt Lake, for example, analyzed booking and registration data to identify a shortfall in youth baseball events. That insight is now fueling stakeholder discussions around new facility development. Without that level of data integration, those conversations would remain anecdotal or delayed.*



### **ENHANCED BIDDING POWER AND REPEAT BUSINESS**

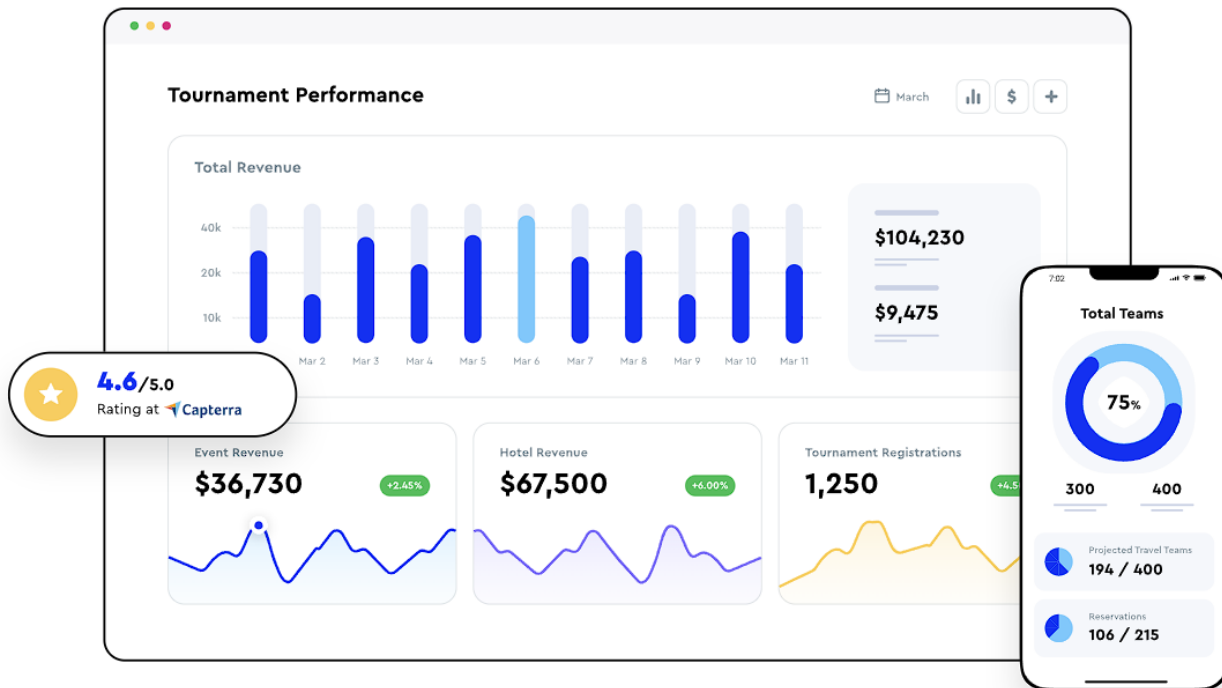
When a city can show that it delivers better outcomes- more room nights, satisfied attendees, responsive support- it becomes a more attractive partner for rights holders.

*Salt Lake City's Partain noted that that having a reliable partner like EventConnect who shares the sports authority's vision has helped the destination "capitalize on more opportunities and show a greater return on investment to stakeholders."*

## **The Bottom Line:**

Influence equals insight, and insight equals impact.

# PLATFORM POWER: HOW EVENTCONNECT ENABLES THE SHIFT



Owning or influencing sports events at the local level requires more than ambition—it demands the infrastructure to support it. That's where EventConnect comes in. Built for sports tourism events, EventConnect is a strategic enabler that empowers cities to operate like event owners, even if they don't hold the rights.

## ONE PLATFORM, TOTAL VISIBILITY

At its core, EventConnect consolidates housing, registration, and reporting into a single system. This integration allows destinations to see the whole picture: real-time registration trends, block pickup rates, room night performance, and more, all from one dashboard.

By managing data centrally, destinations can reduce manual errors, eliminate duplicated efforts, and spend more time on strategy. The result is faster decision-making and more agile event execution.

## CENTRALIZED HOUSING, DECENTRALIZED EMPOWERMENT

One of EventConnect's standout features is its HousingConnect system. It allows in-house staff and team members employed by the destination to manage hotel blocks dynamically, giving hotel partners live insights into demand, inventory, and performance.

### SEAMLESS REGISTRATION THAT FUELS ENGAGEMENT

EventConnect's RegConnect module isn't just about signing up teams—it's a robust data pipeline that gives destinations early insights into demand, travel patterns, and participant preferences with integrated tournament registration and housing. This option helps destinations optimize hotel sourcing, event logistics, and local marketing.

### STAKEHOLDER REPORTING THAT DRIVES ACTION

For Sports Salt Lake, EventConnect's analytics help fill in the blanks: "It gives us the colors we need to paint a vivid picture," said Partain, one that stakeholders understand and support.

### MORE THAN A VENDOR-A TRUE PARTNER

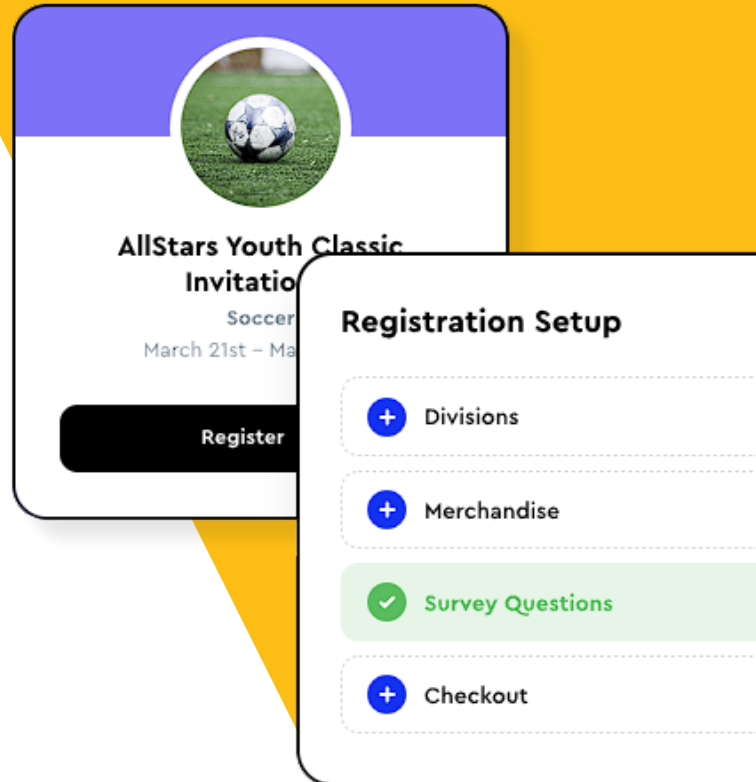
Most importantly, EventConnect doesn't just deliver software; it delivers service as needed. Multiple clients cited the EventConnect team's responsiveness and relationship-driven approach as a major differentiator.

Fite described the company as "world-class partners... not just tech providers." From in-person hotel training to bi-weekly stakeholder calls, the EventConnect team actively works to ensure every player in the ecosystem is supported.

Gwinn noted that EventConnect's hands-on training and support made the onboarding experience smoother for hotels, even those unfamiliar with the system.

## The Bottom Line:

This isn't about replacing event rights holders—it's about amplifying their success while giving destinations more control, visibility, and value.



# CASE STUDIES IN ACTION

Across the country, sports commissions and CVBs are no longer waiting for events to arrive—they're actively shaping how those events succeed. From managing hotel logistics to proving economic impact, these destinations use EventConnect to take a more strategic and influential role in their host events. Below are four examples that illustrate how EventConnect empowers this transformation.



## **Sports Salt Lake:** Filling Gaps and Building Strategy

### **Challenge:**

Salt Lake City had a strong event calendar, but a lack of operational support meant many tournaments handled hotel booking and registration independently. This structure limited the destination's access to data and made it harder to track true event impact.

### **Solution:**

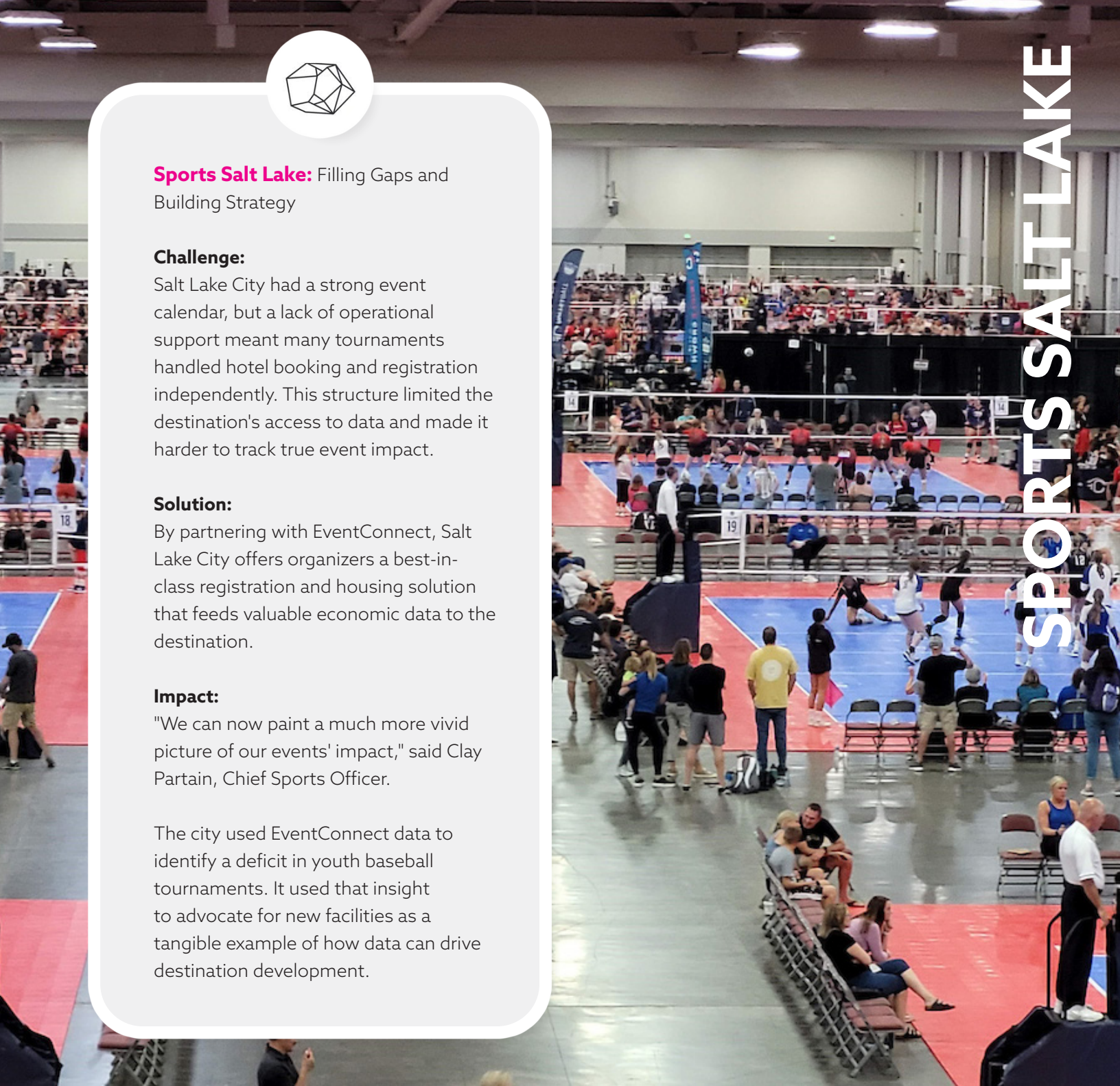
By partnering with EventConnect, Salt Lake City offers organizers a best-in-class registration and housing solution that feeds valuable economic data to the destination.

### **Impact:**

"We can now paint a much more vivid picture of our events' impact," said Clay Partain, Chief Sports Officer.

The city used EventConnect data to identify a deficit in youth baseball tournaments. It used that insight to advocate for new facilities as a tangible example of how data can drive destination development.

SPORTS SALT LAKE





## **Spokane Sports:** Turning Chaos into Control

### **Challenge:**

Spokane Sports previously managed hotel rates through manual spreadsheets, which were uploaded to their website and updated each time changes occurred. This existing process strained staff resources and created a cumbersome experience for travelers who had to navigate outdated links or contact hotels directly.

### **Solution:**

By adopting EventConnect, Spokane centralized its hotel inventory management. Real-time updates, live comparisons, and integrated communication tools transformed the process.

### **Impact:**

"The platform enables users to easily compare multiple hotel properties... which supports more informed decision-making," said Gwinn. "It's seamless and transparent for us and our partners." With a streamlined experience for participants and hotels, Spokane can now focus on what matters: building better events and proving its value with real data. The successful integration of EventConnect with major events like the USA Wrestling Women's National Championships has set a new standard for how Spokane manages its sports tourism.



## **Visit Mesa:** Managing Scale and Educating Stakeholders

### **Challenge:**

For Visit Mesa, one of the biggest challenges was persuading hotels to take on larger blocks for growing events. Many properties hesitated to commit without real-time visibility into team registration and room pickup.

### **Solution:**

EventConnect's transparent, real-time dashboard helped hotels see how events were trending. Dedicated training and ongoing support have built hotel confidence in the system.

### **Impact:**

"It gives so much guidance yet so much autonomy," said Lance Fite, Vice President of Sports at Visit Mesa. "I truly wish this level of technology and service existed when I was managing hotels."

Mesa now runs a massive, multi-city event that produces 21,000+ room nights annually, with EventConnect at the center of its housing strategy. The platform now unites hotels, event owners, and tourism leaders.

**Huntsville/Madison County CVB:**

Curating the Guest Experience

**Challenge:**

For major city-wide events, Huntsville needed a better way to track where guests were staying and what their experience looked like, especially when welcoming first-time visitors.

**Solution:**

EventConnect became the central hub for booking and participant engagement, giving the CVB valuable insights into guest patterns and hotel performance.

**Impact:**

"It helps us curate the experience better for everyone," said Lamp.

From pinpointing hot spots of activity to working more collaboratively with hotel partners, Huntsville is using EventConnect to elevate its visitor experience and build a more innovative, more responsive event strategy.

**These case studies all reflect a common thread:**

Destinations that leverage EventConnect are better equipped to lead, measure, and evolve. They're no longer passive hosts—they're active players, shaping the future of the sports events they attract.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESTINATIONS



The landscape of sports tourism is changing fast. To remain competitive and maximize returns, destinations must move beyond simply hosting events—they must take ownership of the whole event lifecycle, from hotel inventory and registration to data insights and long-term strategy. Below are five key recommendations for destinations ready to make that shift.

## 1 CENTRALIZE HOUSING AND REGISTRATION TO GAIN VISIBILITY

A fragmented process means missed opportunities. Third parties often handle housing and registration, or leave entirely to the far-too-busy event owner, leaving destinations in the dark about who's attending, where they're staying, and what they're spending.



### Recommendation:

Adopt a unified platform to manage housing and registration in one place. A platform like EventConnect improves the participant experience and gives your organization real-time access to the metrics that matter, like room nights, pick-up trends, and conversion rates.



## 2 USE DATA TO ADVOCATE FOR INVESTMENT

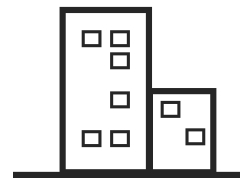
Hotel room nights and visitor counts are only part of the picture. Destinations need granular data to tell a more complete economic impact story to secure funding for future sports facilities or events.

### Recommendation:

Leverage EventConnect's robust reporting tools to demonstrate value to stakeholders. Show what an event brought in and where gaps, growth potential, and new opportunities exist to explore. Data-backed storytelling moves funding conversations from anecdotal to actionable.

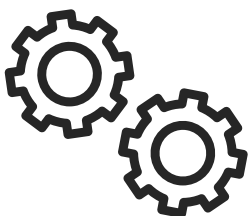
### 3 TRAIN AND SUPPORT YOUR HOTEL PARTNERS

Many destinations report initial hesitation from hotels when adopting new technology. But when hotels understand the system and see its value, their buy-in grows, and so does your ability to scale events.



#### Recommendation:

Work with EventConnect's team to host onboarding sessions and ongoing training for hotel partners. Empower them to manage inventory, adjust real-time rates, and see direct ROI from event participation. When hotels are aligned, events run smoother and more profitably for everyone.



### 4 GET STRATEGIC ABOUT EVENT OWNERSHIP

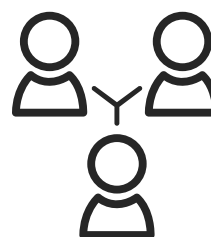
Owning more of the event process means you can better control outcomes. Whether co-hosting a new tournament, working directly with rights holders, or building your signature event, destinations are increasingly becoming producers, not just providers.

#### Recommendation:

Use EventConnect to support this evolution. The platform reduces operational friction, allowing your team to focus on higher-level goals like brand building, long-term retention, and economic development strategy. With the right tools, owning an event becomes more achievable and less risky.

### 5 MAKE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE A PRIORITY

As events grow in complexity, so do participant expectations. Whether finding a hotel close to a venue or comparing amenities and rates across properties, the booking process plays a significant role in overall satisfaction.



#### In Summary:

Becoming an owner in the sports tourism space doesn't require hiring an army—it requires the right technology, strategy, and partnerships. Destinations that embrace this shift aren't just helping events succeed - they're redefining what it means to be a host city.

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

The evolution from host to owner is not just a trend; it's a strategic imperative for destinations that want to grow, compete, and thrive in the next era of sports tourism.

It is no longer enough to provide fields and cheer from the sidelines. The most successful sports cities are stepping into the game as active partners, data-driven strategists, and operational leaders. They're leveraging platforms like **EventConnect** to reclaim control over the most vital aspects of event success—housing, registration, data, and experience they can maximize economic impact, build trust with stakeholders, and create signature events that define their destination's brand.

This transformation doesn't necessarily require a bigger team or deeper pockets. It demands smarter infrastructure, stronger alignment, and the courage to evolve. The good news? You don't have to go it alone. Learn more at [SportsPlanningGuide.com/sports-events-revenue](https://SportsPlanningGuide.com/sports-events-revenue).



**Sports Planning Guide** connects destinations, rights holders and planners with the resources to host winning events. From expert insights to venue spotlights, SPG is your playbook for successful sports tourism. Explore more at [sportsplanningguide.com](https://sportsplanningguide.com).

