

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE WORLD CUP BOON?

Despite unknowns, a sports tourism industry is taking shape in Seattle. Local businesses are looking to score big in the World Cup economy.

Since Seattle's selection as one of the 16 host cities for the FIFA World Cup 2026 almost three years ago, fans throughout the region have been counting down the days to the start of the world's biggest sporting event. That includes Gloria Alvarez Connors, the president and CEO of Seattle-based events company Connors & Co.

"I'm a Latina. We call it fútbol," she says.

Her focus right now is not the action that'll be taking place inside Lumen Field, though. Two miles north, on the other end of downtown, Connors is fixated on turning the Seattle Center into a mecca for soccer – or fútbol.

Local organizing committee SeattleFWC26 contracted Connors & Co. to organize and build out the Seattle Fan Celebration at Seattle Center.

"Our goal here is to make sure that we can represent Seattle in all forms on a global scale," Connors says. "This is going to be our gathering space. This is where Seattleites are going to come and participate in the World Cup and be a part of the excitement."

About 750,000 visitors from around the world are expected to descend on Seattle next summer to witness the massive spectacle. They will spill out across the region and splurge on local goods and services.



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To put that in perspective, Seattle's population is about 755,000.

The six World Cup matches scheduled to be played in Seattle will generate an economic impact of about \$929 million, according to a projection put out by Visit Seattle.

Chasing the potential windfall from the tournament, a cottage industry is taking shape.

Almost a billion dollars of "economic benefit will come from this three-and-a-half-week event in the summer of 2026," says Leo Flor, the chief legacy officer at SeattleFWC26. "The question for us is, 'Who will receive that benefit?'"

That remains an open question, and the answer may be clearer when contracts are doled out. But community members and small businesses tell the Business Journal, without specific interventions, they might not feel the full impact of the World Cup boon.

'Immense amount of responsibility' SeattleFWC26 is at the epicenter of the tournament in Seattle. The organizing committee will offer local companies a piece of the action through direct involvement as it continues to gather information and recruit business interests.

The committee is seeking partners to collaborate on various World Cup projects through a competitive bidding process. A range of services

will be required to bring the event to fruition, like catering, electrical, construction, lighting, photography and security, among others.

Before her company secured the Seattle Fan Celebration contract less than a year ago, Connors worked as a consultant for the committee, expanding on the relationships and reputation she carved out for herself in the local events industry over the last two decades.

"It's an absolute honor that Peter (Tomozawa, committee CEO) and the local organizing committee and all the stakeholders trusted us with such a huge responsibility," Connors says.

Touted as a cheaper alternative to a ticket to attend an actual World Cup match, the Seattle Center-based Fan Fest is expected to run for 24 days and hold about 20,000 fans per matchday. The event will require a team of about 625 people, according to Connors & Co.

Earlier this year, Connors & Co. invited other local companies to submit requests for qualifications to help out as subcontractors at the event. Connors says SeattleFWC26 has provided a "very clear, definitive outline" to make sure small businesses are represented.

From a pool of applicants, evaluations are ongoing to select food vendors, audio-video technicians and tent and security providers at the