

# How Stadiums and Arenas Engage Fans

Dive into the data to explore how sports venues drive fan engagement with superstar athletes, winning teams, and audience-centric initiatives.

## 1. Starpower drives engagement.

**Lionel Messi's** transfer to Inter Miami CF reshaped audience demographics and travel patterns, attracting a more affluent, long-distance visitor base. 31.3% of visitors to Inter Miami's 2024 home opening game came from more than 250 miles away, up from 5.3% in 2023 and 6.4% in 2022.

**Caitlin Clark's** WNBA debut also led to an increase in stadium visitor affluence, even at away games. During the July 14th, 2024 Fever-Lynx game at Target Center in Minneapolis, for example, visitors hailed from areas with a median HHI of \$93.7K – up from \$83.7K the week before.

## 2. Fans rally around winners.

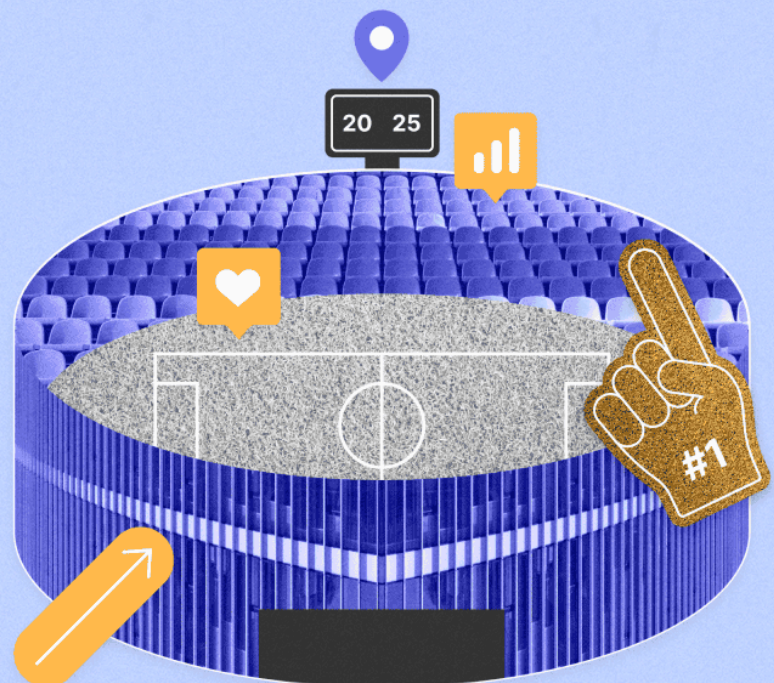
The **Baltimore Orioles'** resurgence led to a notable increase in repeat visits and visitor dwell time at Oriole Park, creating an opportunity for high-value sponsorships. In 2024, the share of visitors frequenting the park at least three times nearly doubled from 2019, and the average dwell time increased to 178 minutes from 150 five years prior.

Improved team performance by the **Detroit Lions**, meanwhile, led to a steady expansion of Ford Field's trade area, with fans traveling greater distances to attend games – underscoring the relationship between team success and regional fan engagement.

## 3. Stadiums can also succeed by adapting to visitor preferences.

At the **Phoenix Suns' Footprint Center**, the introduction of a \$2 value menu led to a notable decline in off-premises dining after games. During the five games immediately following the launch, only 2.2% to 5.8% of fans went to outside restaurants post-game – down from 7.0% to 9.3% previously.

**Lumen Field** in Seattle has been actively leaning into the eco-conscious preferences of its local audience by focusing on plant-based offerings and sustainability, creating a deeper connection with fans.



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Stadiums and arenas – and the communities they call home – have a stake in cultivating engaged team fanbases eager to participate in live events. And venues and teams can employ a variety of strategies to strengthen their connection with fans and draw crowds to the stands.

In this report, we leverage location analytics and audience segmentation to uncover some of the ways that sports franchises and venues are driving engagement – attracting visitors from farther away and appealing to fans more likely to splurge on stadium fare. How does the signing of a star athlete impact arena visitor profiles? What happens to stadium visitation trends when a team’s performance improves dramatically? And how can teams and venues tailor their offerings to more effectively cater to visitor preferences?

We dove into the data to find out.

## Superstars on the Squad

In sports, the signing of a star athlete can have a ripple effect across the organization, hometown, and league. In addition to driving up overall attendance at games, star power can impact everything from visit frequency to audience profile – and the buying power of stadium attendees.

### Lionel Messi: A Footballer’s Foot Traffic Impact

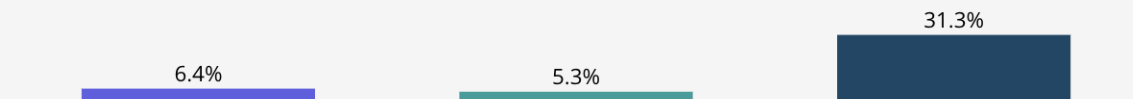
Lionel Messi’s [move](#) to Inter Miami CF after decades of European play brought a [foot traffic boost](#) to Chase Stadium (formerly DRV PNK Stadium). But it also shifted the demographics of stadium visitors and increased the distance they traveled to attend a game.

At Inter Miami’s 2022 and 2023 home openers without Messi (he joined the team mid-season in 2023), only 6.4% and 5.3% of visitors to Chase Stadium came from over 250 miles away. But for the 2024 home opener with Messi on the squad, 31.3% of stadium visitors traveled more than 250 miles to attend.

## Lionel Messi's Superstar Status Boosts Inter Miami's Reach Among Fans From Afar and Older, Affluent Demographic Segments

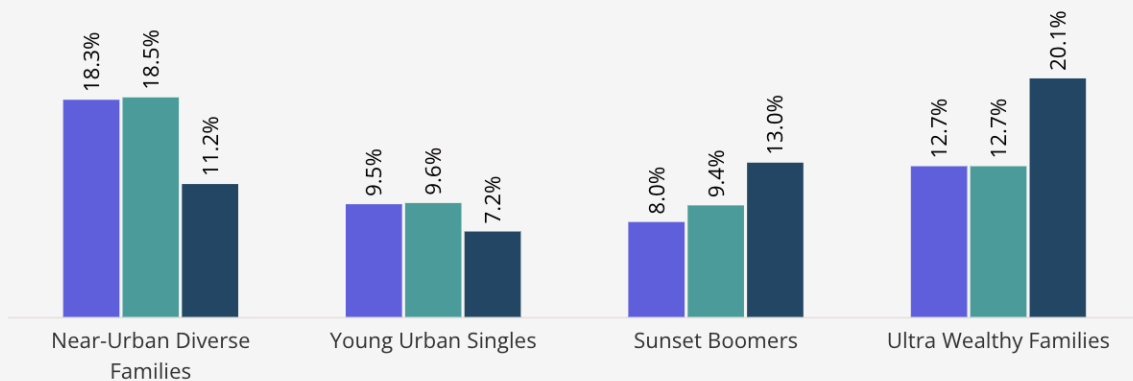
Chase Stadium (Fort Lauderdale, FL) | Opening MLS Home Game

Share of Visitors Coming From More Than 250 Miles Away



Download data

Share of Households in Captured Market\*



Legend: Feb. 26th '22 (Without L. Messi) | Feb. 25th '23 (Without L. Messi) | Feb. 21st '24 (With L. Messi)

Download data

\*Based on [Spatial.ai: Personalive](#) Combined with Placer.ai Data



The demographics of visitors at the home opener also changed with Messi on the team. [Trade area data](#) combined with the [Spatial.ai: Personalive](#) dataset reveals that the 2024 home opener received a smaller share of households in the “Near-Urban Diverse Families” (11.2%) and “Young Urban Singles” (7.2%) segments than the two previous years. Meanwhile, shares of “Sunset Boomers” (13.0%) and “Ultra Wealthy



Families” (20.1%) increased, indicating that Messi brought an older and more affluent demographic of visitors to the stadium compared to previous years.

Messi’s arrival has generated increased [revenue](#) for Inter Miami CF, Major League Soccer, and Apple TV+, which has [exclusive](#) streaming rights for MLS games. And an influx of affluent out-of-town visitors also has the potential to drive positive outcomes for [tourism](#) and [employment](#) in the Miami area.

## **Caitlin Clark: The WNBA Catches Superstar Fever**

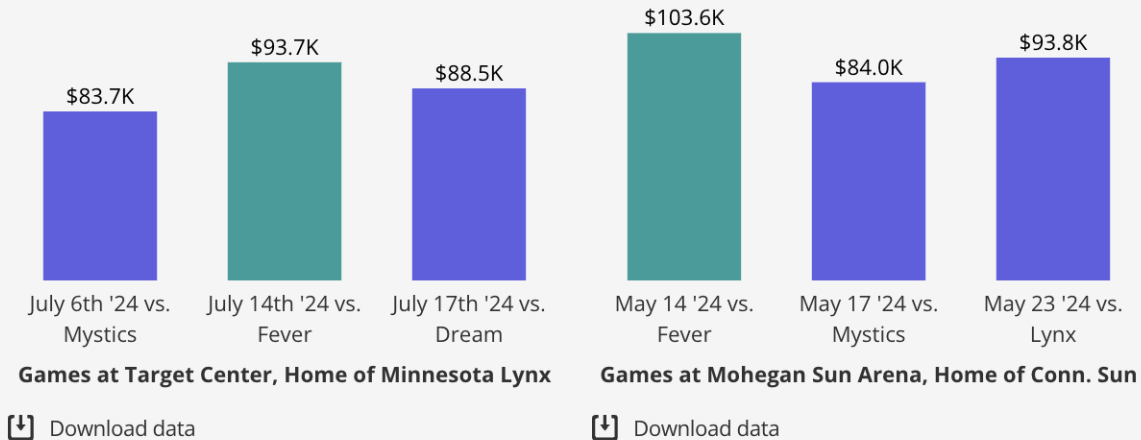
Caitlin Clark’s WNBA debut was another star-powered game changer – this time for women’s basketball. After [dazzling](#) the sports world during her college basketball career, Caitlin Clark was [drafted](#) first overall to the Indiana Fever before the 2024 WNBA season. The superstar’s arrival has had a staggering [economic impact](#) on the city of Indianapolis and the [Fever](#) franchise, highlighting the benefit of a top athlete within the local community.

However, Clark’s stardom also had a far-reaching impact on the league as a whole, adding tremendous [value](#) to the WNBA. Trade area analysis reveals that several WNBA arenas saw an uptick in visitor affluence when hosting the Fever with Clark in the lineup – likely driven in part by the elevated [ticket prices](#) associated with her appearances.

When the Minnesota Lynx hosted the Fever on July 14th, 2024, for example, the median HHI of Target Center’s [captured market](#) shot up to just over \$93K/year, well above the median HHIs for the games immediately before and after that event. (A venue’s captured market refers to the census block groups (CBGs) from which it draws its visitors, weighted to reflect the share of visits from each one – and thus reflects the profile of the venue’s visitor base.) Similarly, the Fever’s away game against the Connecticut Sun on May 14th, 2024 at Mohegan Sun Arena drove a higher audience median HHI (\$103.6K/year) than either of the Sun’s next two home games.

## Indiana Fever Away Games Attract Wealthier Households Compared to Other WNBA Games in the Same Arena

Median HHI Based on [STI: Popstats](#) Combined with Placer.ai Data for Captured Trade Areas



## Teams for the Win

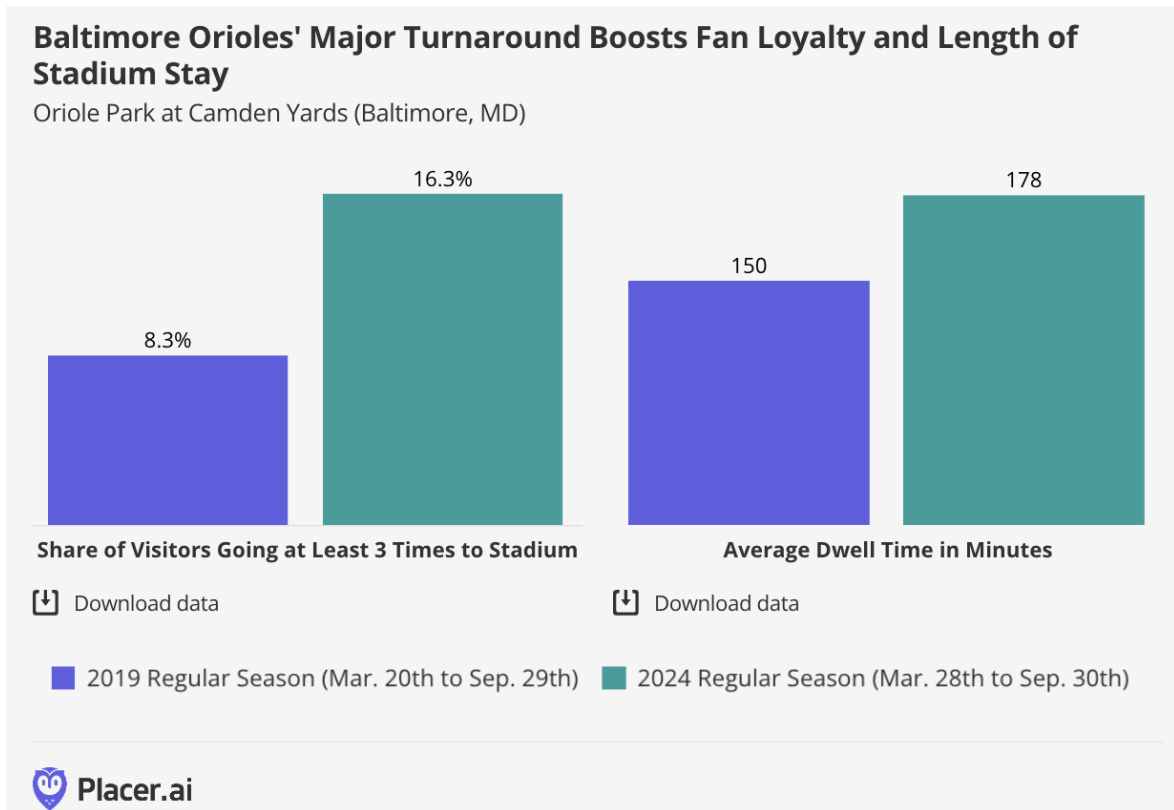
Having a superstar on the roster can drive positive outcomes locally and league-wide – but overall team success is the ultimate goal for any franchise. So it may come as no surprise that stadiums and arenas can drive engagement when their home teams perform well on the field or court. And teams that reverse their fortunes often spark even greater excitement, boosting visitor loyalty, visit duration, and other key metrics.

### Baltimore Orioles: Fans Flock to On-Field Success

The Baltimore Orioles had one of the [worst records](#) in baseball just a few years ago. But since 2022, the team has flipped the script – stringing together [winning seasons](#) and postseason berths. And location intelligence shows that as the team finds success, fans are becoming more engaged with their hometown stadium.



During the 2019 regular season, one of the [worst](#) for the club in recent history, stadium [attendance](#) suffered, with only 8.3% of visitors to Oriole Park at Camden Yards visiting the stadium at least three times. But during the 2024 regular season, Oriole Park's share of repeat visitors (those who visited at least three times) was almost double 2019 levels (16.3%) – consistent with a sharp increase in sales of multi-game [ticket packages](#).

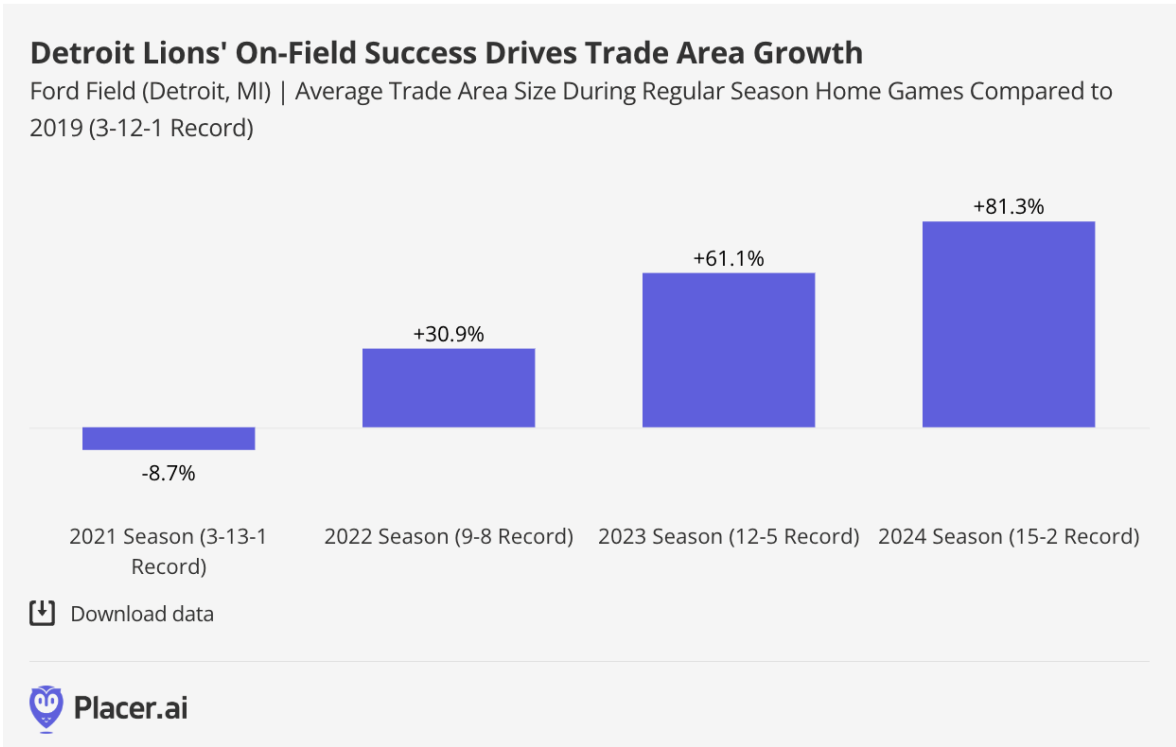


In addition to attending games more often, visitors to Oriole Park also appear to be spending more time at the ballpark. During the 2019 regular season, visitors spent an average of 150 minutes at the stadium, but in 2024, the average time at the park increased to 178 minutes – potentially boosting ancillary spending and in-stadium advertising exposure. The increased dwell time of visitors is particularly noteworthy when considering that MLB's [rule changes](#) have significantly shortened average [game time](#).

The more engaged fandom engendered by team success not only impacts stadium visitor behavior, but also has the potential to drive revenue. The Orioles added [20 new](#) corporate sponsors before the 2024 season, likely due to the attention garnered by the well-performing club.

### Detroit Lions: The Pride of the Region

The NFL's Detroit Lions provide another example of team success that has driven visitor engagement. As the franchise has improved its [record](#) in recent years, the trade area size of its stadium – Ford Field – has also increased, indicating elevated attendance from fans living further away.



The Lions finished the regular season with [losing records](#) from 2019 to 2021, but finished over .500 in 2022 (9-8), 2023 (12-5), and 2024 (15-2). And with the team's



increasing wins each consecutive season, the size of its stadium's trade area has also increased steadily – reaching 81.3% above 2019 levels in 2024.

This underscores just how much team success matters to fans, who may be more inclined to travel longer distances if they believe their team is likely to win. Ultimately, broader fan engagement across a wider trade area also increases a team's growth potential beyond in-stadium attendance – driving merchandise sales, increasing viewership, and benefitting both the team and the league as a whole.

## Catering to Hometown Audiences

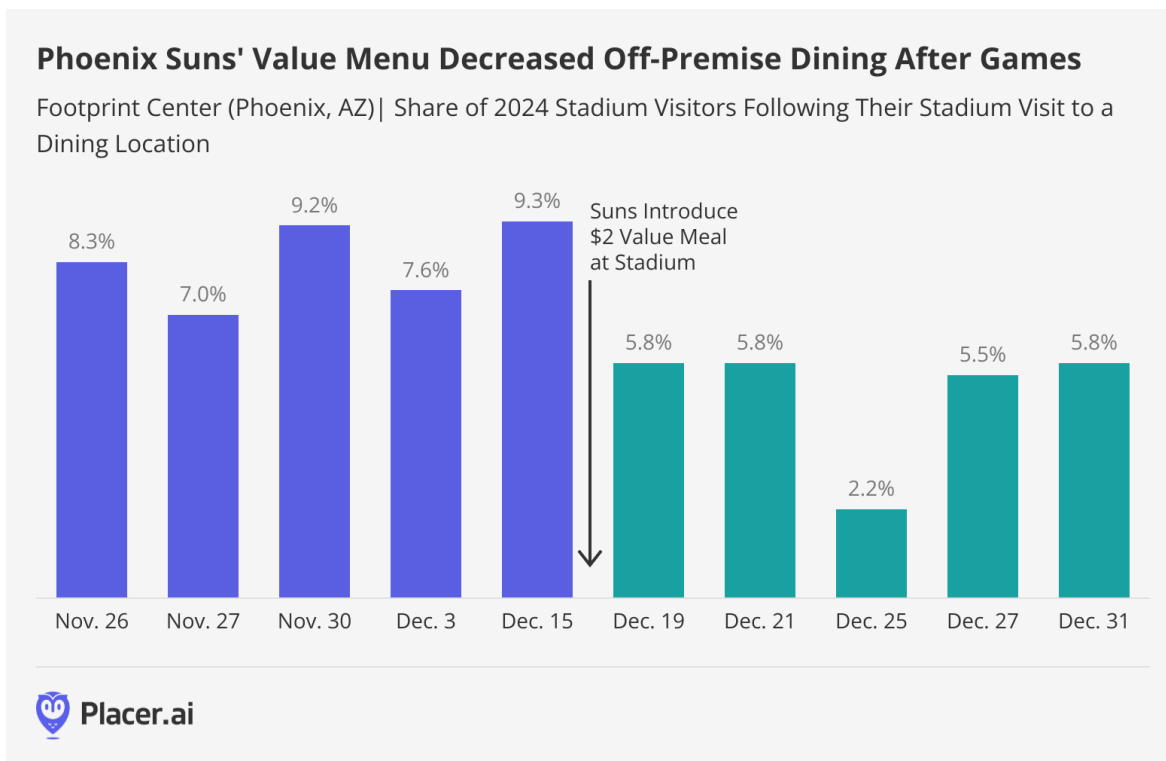
While stadium attendance and visitor behavior is often correlated to the performance of the sports teams that play in the arena, sporting venues can also drive fan engagement in ways that aren't solely tied to team success or big-name athletes. By adapting their concessions and venue operations to visitor preferences, stadiums and arenas can better serve their audiences and strengthen their community presence.

### Phoenix Suns: The Dawn of Value Dining

Consumers have been feeling the pinch of [rising food costs](#) for quite some time, but at least one NBA team has responded to make concessions at the game more affordable for fans. In December 2024, the Phoenix Suns announced a [\\$2 value menu](#) for all home games at Footprint Center – delivering steep discounts on hot dogs, water, soda, and snacks.

Location analytics suggest that since the value menu launch, more fans who would have otherwise waited until after leaving the venue to grab a bite are now enjoying food and drinks inside the arena. Analysis of five Suns home games just before the value menu launch – between November 26th and December 15th, 2024 – reveals that between 7.0% and 9.3% of stadium visitors visited a dining establishment after leaving the arena. But following the value menu launch before the December 19th, 2024 home game, post-game dining decreased to under 6.0% through the end of the year.

Suns owner Mat Ishbia's [announcement](#) of the new menu called out the need for affordable food options for families at Suns games. As the season progresses, the new menu may drive a larger share of family households to Suns games, which could provide opportunities for advertisers and other stadium partners.



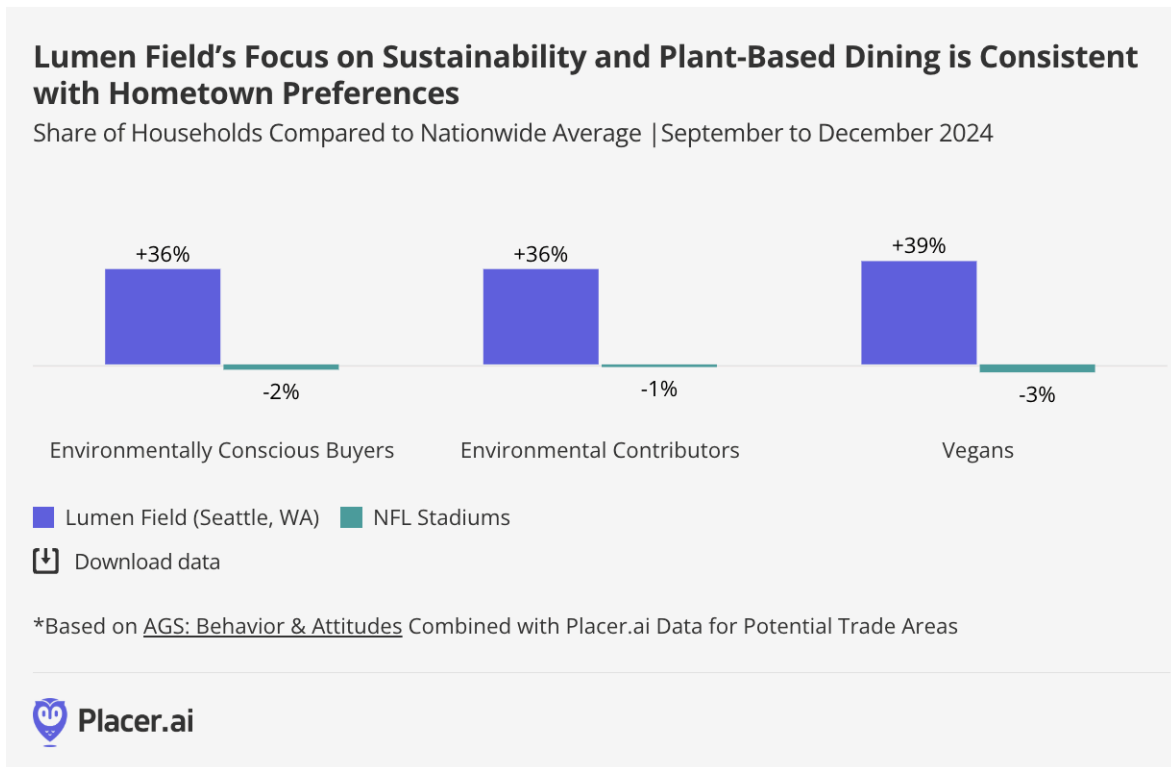
## Lumen Field, Seattle, WA: Hawkish About the Environment

Lumen Field, for its part, home of the Seattle Seahawks, has been leaning into the preferences of its environmentally-conscious and vegan-friendly visitor base.

Consumers in [Washington](#) – and especially [Seattle](#) – are known for their affinity for plant-based diets and [environmentally-friendly](#) lifestyles. And that goes for local football fans as well: Audience segmentation provided by the [AGS: Behavior & Attitudes](#) dataset combined with trade area data reveals that during September to

December 2024, households within Lumen Field’s potential visitor base were 36% more likely to be “Environmentally Conscious Buyers” and “Environmental Contributors” and 39% more likely to be “Vegans” compared to the nationwide average. By contrast, across all NFL stadiums, potential visiting households were 2%, 1%, and 3% less likely, respectively, to belong to these segments.

And Lumen Field has been actively catering to these consumer preferences. The stadium, which has been experimenting with plant-based culinary options for [quite some time](#), was recently recognized as one of the most [vegan-friendly stadiums](#) in the NFL. And in December 2024, Lumen became the second stadium in the league to achieve TRUE [precertification](#) for its efforts to become a zero-waste venue.



By remaining aligned with its visitor base – including both football fans and people that visit the stadium for other events – Lumen Field encourages visitors to feel at

home at their local stadium. And fans may be more connected to their team knowing the club shares their values and respects their lifestyle.

## **Winners All Around**

Stadiums and arenas can leverage a variety of strategies to engage visitors in attendance as well as wider audiences. Signing a star athlete, putting together a winning club, or adapting to local preferences are just some of the ways that sports franchises and athletic venues can find success.