EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Austin Convention Center | Austin, TX



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AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER

A new Austin Convention Center is on the way

The Austin Convention Center is expanding! Since opening in 1992 and undergoing its first expansion in 2002, the facility has helped Austin grow into a top-ten convention destination.

The City has now begun a major redevelopment to create a larger, more efficient Convention Center with a smaller footprint, an active, community-friendly space in the heart of Downtown Austin. The new facility will nearly double its rentable space and position Austin to compete for the next tier of convention business.

When complete, the expanded Convention Center will offer approximately 620,000 square feet of rentable space, including 70,000 square feet of outdoor areas. This $1.6 billion project, known as UnconventionalATX, will be funded through Hotel Occupancy Tax and Convention Center revenues.

The new, larger Austin Convention Center will significantly increase the rentable square footage of the existing facility, growing from 365,000 square feet to 620,000 square feet of rentable space. The $1.6 billion project, known as UnconventionalATX, will be funded through Hotel Occupancy Tax and Convention Center revenues.

The Austin Convention Center is redefining what's possible for events, meetings, and festivals. Reopening in 2028, just in time for the 2029 Spring Festivals, the all-new facility will be the world's first Zero Carbon Certified convention center, setting a bold standard for innovation, sustainability, and Austin pride. The Convention Center is designed to host everything from intimate gatherings to major conventions. Inside, guests will experience flexible exhibit halls, high-tech meeting rooms, elegant ballrooms, and dramatic pre-function spaces with mass timber ceilings, all built to inspire. The City is not just building a venue; it's building the future of events.

Floor Plans and Project Updates

View the floor plan guide online here.

Project updates are also available online here. The updates page is the hub for current information on the expansion and redevelopment of the Austin Convention Center, including links to news articles and press releases, engagement opportunities, and construction updates.

POSITION SUMMARY

The City of Austin seeks a visionary, commercially minded executive to serve as the Executive Director of the Austin Convention Center during the most consequential period in the facility's history. Reporting to an Assistant City Manager, and in close collaboration with City management, the Executive Director will lead the Convention Center through its $1.6 billion UnconventionalATX expansion and redevelopment, guide the organization from construction to opening, and position the new facility for decades of success in one of America's most dynamic cities.

The Austin Convention Center Department operates as an enterprise department of the City of Austin, within a council-manager form of government. The Executive Director must be comfortable leading within a complex, highly visible municipal environment, working effectively across City departments and with City leadership, City Council, and the community.

The Executive Director will serve as the Convention Center's external representative, collaborating with Visit Austin on destination marketing initiatives and engaging key partners, including hotels, customers, and community stakeholders, to support long-term business development. Beyond the Convention Center, the Executive Director oversees the Palmer Events Center, two City-owned downtown parking garages, the Convention Center warehouse, and the Marshaling Yard, providing leadership across Austin's convention and events infrastructure.

This expansion is a rare opportunity to shape the operating model, culture, customer experience, and revenue strategy of a next-generation convention center from the ground up.

THE TRANSFORMATION

The Austin Convention Center is undergoing a complete transformation through the UnconventionalATX project:

- $1.6 billion expansion and redevelopment funded through Hotel Occupancy Tax and Convention Center revenues.
- Construction is well underway, with major demolition complete, excavation substantially complete, and foundation and structural work in progress.
- Opening targeted for early 2029.
- Expanding from 365,000 to 620,000 square feet of rentable space, a 70% increase in capacity, including 70,000 square feet of outdoor space.
- Designed to be the world's first Zero Carbon Certified convention center, with state-of-the-art technology, sustainable design, and world-class amenities.
- Strategic downtown location surrounded by 14,000 hotel rooms within a one-mile radius.
- Positioned to compete for the largest and most prestigious conventions, trade shows, and events in North America.

FACILITIES UNDER MANAGEMENT

The Executive Director oversees the City's public event and parking facilities:

Austin Convention Center (upon completion)

- 620,000 square feet of rentable space upon opening.
- Premier downtown location at 500 E. Cesar Chavez Street.
- State-of-the-art exhibition halls, ballrooms, meeting rooms, and pre-function spaces.
- Currently under construction, with approximately 100 future events already confirmed and booking active for 2029 and beyond.

Palmer Events Center

- Sister facility located at 900 Barton Springs Road.
- Approximately 131,000 square feet of flexible event space.
- Currently operational and accepting bookings.
- Serves as a critical venue during the Austin Convention Center construction.
- Hosts concerts, trade shows, conventions, and community events.

FACILITIES UNDER MANAGEMENT (CONT.)

City-Owned Parking Garages

- 201 East 2nd Street: 10-story, 1,000-space garage.
- 601 East 5th Street: 5-story, 685-space garage.
- Both garages remain operational during construction.
- Critical revenue-generating assets supporting downtown events and daily parking needs.

Convention Center Warehouse and Marshaling Yard

- Essential support facilities for storage, staging, and logistics for major events.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Serve as the senior leader and external face of the Austin Convention Center through its full transformation, from active construction through pre-opening and into sustained operations.
- Work with city and municipal officials, partnering with architects, contractors, and project managers as an informed owner's representative to ensure the build meets operational needs, guest experience standards, and long-term facility goals.
- Lead pre-opening planning, including staffing, vendor selection, systems implementation, event booking strategy, and soft and grand opening execution.
- Direct the promotion, operation, and maintenance of the Convention Center and related facilities, including repair and preventive maintenance programs.
- Establish and manage fees and revenues for facility use, including lease and rental rates, concessions, and parking.
- Identify and develop new revenue opportunities beyond traditional space rental and Hotel Occupancy Tax funding.
- Develop long-range plans for the usage and enhancement of the Convention Center, positioning it as a premier destination in Austin's economy and civic life.
- Direct department personnel in the marketing, planning, and booking of events, in close partnership with Visit Austin's sales and marketing efforts.
- Develop and monitor the annual budget, ensuring financial accountability across construction, pre-opening, and operations.
- Maintain effective working relationships with City Management, City Council, Boards and Commissions, convention planners, community business leaders, the media, and the public.
- Align with Visit Austin, hotel partners, and community stakeholders to support the economic development of the destination.
- Disseminate City and departmental policies, procedures, and guidelines to staff, ensure their consistent application, and develop and revise operating procedures.
- Foster open, two-way communication with staff that encourages discussion and shared understanding.
- Evaluate employee performance regularly, provide feedback, and drive a culture of continuous improvement.

EXPERIENCE AND SKILL EXPECTATION

Venue and Facilities Management

- Knowledge of the convention and tradeshow industry and of facility management.
- Deep understanding of venue operations, including event management, scheduling, concessions, parking, maintenance, and facility services.
- Skill in managing emergency-related incidents.

Chief Ambassador for the Convention Center

- Collaboration with Visit Austin to drive the convention center's commercial strategy and citywide business.
- Proven ability to represent the convention center at industry events and with key clients and stakeholders.
- Skill in identifying and developing new revenue streams.

EXPERIENCE AND SKILL EXPECTATION (CONT.)

Construction and Pre-Opening

- Familiarity with construction phases and commissioning, and the ability to translate operational needs into built-environment decisions.
- Ability to build teams, establish operational systems, and execute a launch strategy that delivers a strong book of business at opening.

Financial and Strategic Leadership

- Knowledge of fiscal planning and budget preparation.
- Skill in operations forecasting, strategy design, and implementation.
- Skill in projecting long-range goals for facility usage, revenues, and expenses.
- Skill in data analysis, problem solving, and analyzing issues related to the service industry.

Leadership and Public Sector Acumen

- Skill in directing the activities of a large and complex organization.
- Knowledge of supervisory and managerial techniques.
- Knowledge of Federal, State, and Local laws and ordinances as they apply to public facilities, and of City practices, policies, and procedures.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with City Management, City Council, Boards and Commissions, City employees, and the public.
- Exceptional oral and written communication.
- Skill in handling conflict and uncertain situations, and the ability to manage frequent interruptions and changing priorities.
- Ability to use an equity lens and framework to create inclusive, diverse, and safe workplaces, and to build constructive relationships with diverse communities.

Leadership Scope

Reporting to an Assistant City Manager, the Executive Director exercises full supervisory authority, including selection, training, evaluation, counseling, and recommendation for dismissal. This is a true executive role with direct accountability for people, finances, and outcomes across every phase of the Convention Center's transformation and beyond.

IDEAL BACKGROUND

- Senior leadership experience with a leading convention center, convention hotel, destination organization, tradeshow organizer, or related meetings and events organization.
- Strong understanding of convention center funding, operations, sales, and revenue generation.
- Demonstrated success creating alternative revenue sources through events, above and beyond traditional space rental.
- Experience working effectively with government, community, and destination partners. Public sector or municipal experience is a plus.
- New-build or major redevelopment experience strongly preferred, including serving as an informed owner's representative with architects, contractors, and project teams, and the ability to quickly understand and influence a project already in progress.
- Pre-opening or re-opening experience with a major venue or hospitality asset is a plus.
- Well-connected within the meetings, conventions, and tradeshow industry, with active participation in industry organizations and events.
- Current knowledge of convention center, tradeshow, and event industry trends.
- A strong external presence and proven ability to sell a vision to customers, partners, and elected officials.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Visionary and forward-facing. A leader who can articulate and sell a compelling vision for the new Convention Center to customers, industry partners, City leadership, and the public.
- Creative and innovative. Brings fresh thinking to event formats, customer experience, and the use of space, and stays current on convention center, trade show, and event trends.
- Commercially minded. Strong instincts around sales, service, and revenue, with a track record of creating new revenue streams beyond traditional room rental and Hotel Occupancy Tax funding.
- Politically aware. Understands how to navigate within a City-owned and managed facility in a City Manager form of government, builds trust with elected and appointed officials, and operates comfortably in a publicly funded, highly transparent environment.
- Collaborative partner. Works hand in hand with Visit Austin, hotel partners, City departments, and community stakeholders, recognizing that the destination succeeds when all partners work together.
- Strong communicator. A credible, polished external presence with City Council, the media, customers, and staff, able to translate complex construction and operational realities into clear messages.
- Confident but humble. Leads with conviction while listening well, respecting existing expertise, and giving credit to the team.
- Driven and decisive. Moves with urgency, cuts through unnecessary bureaucracy, creates accountability, and maintains momentum and team alignment through a multi-year transition to opening.

TOP PRIORITIES (first 6-12 months)

- Establish credibility and trusted working relationships with the City Manager, City leadership, and City Council.
- Build strong partnerships with Visit Austin, hotel partners, and key community stakeholders, aligning on sales strategy and the destination's long-term goals.
- Develop a thorough understanding of the construction calendar, critical milestones, and project risks, and use that knowledge to influence a project already well underway so the building meets operational and customer needs.
- Assess and redeploy the staff structure, and define service standards, training, and opening-readiness needs across sales, operations, technology, and guest experience.
- Break through unnecessary bureaucracy and establish clear accountability across the organization.
- Begin shaping the Convention Center's future positioning and brand, in partnership with the City and Visit Austin, as well as with the customer experience and long-term revenue strategy.
- Evaluate and prioritize net new revenue opportunities above and beyond traditional room rental, including Convention Center-produced or partnered events.
- Support the pipeline of confirmed future business and help secure anchor events for 2029 and beyond.



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If interested in learning more about this great opportunity, please send your resume to our SearchWide Global Executive, Carmen Rodgers.

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