



WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER
ACCELERATES RENOVATION
PLANS TO ACHIEVE BETTER
RESULTS FASTER

Upgrading an outdated convention center can be the key to enticing more visitors and surviving in an increasingly competitive market. Here's how the Walter E. Washington Convention Center made the transition from an outdated to a modern venue and reestablished its "vendor of choice" market position.

QUICK STATS

Location Washington, D.C.

Space 2.3M sq. ft.

Capacity Events can be anywhere from a few hundred up to 42k

Meeting Rooms 77

Exhibit Space 700K sq. ft.

Ballroom Space 53K sq. ft.

Renovation Investment \$16.4M

Phase 1 July 2020 to June 2021

GOAL

Upgrade the convention center with new on-trend features that improve global visitors' experience and attract more events.

The Walter E. Washington Convention Center is a 2.3 million-square-foot convention and meeting facility, equipped to handle events from small groups and break-out meetings to conferences for anywhere from 500 to 42,000 attendees. From international policy events to industry conventions to black-tie fundraisers, the center brings together locals and visitors from around the world to experience the best of the nation's capital. With a prime location in the heart of downtown's convention and entertainment district, visitors are close to the "D.C. scene."

At 20 years old, it's a stalwart of the D.C. convention scene. However, the facility had not been improved in two decades and was starting to look and feel its age. The center's management decided it was time for an upgrade to attract more and bigger events and make sure it didn't lose any business to its on-trend competitors.

Achieving these goals required upgrading its outdated venue and dining services in ways that would meet the expectations of its global target audience. The facility chose Aramark as its partner in April 2019. Based on extensive experience in venue renovations, Aramark created a master plan to guide the massive project, which required major changes to the venue.

The building and dining services upgrades were originally planned to take place over four phases that would occur over a series of years with a plan that did not impact events. However, owing to the impact of COVID, the Aramark team decided to pivot and take advantage of the opportunity to work on three phases at one time, rather than sequentially. Thanks to the team's flexibility, Phase 1 through Phase 3 would all be completed as one phase during the downtime. This included remodeling the ground-floor lobby and exhibit hall and adding a new themed restaurant to the top-floor dining location. The ground-floor lobby renovation included adding a souvenir shop and a grab-n-go market.

The project required overcoming a few challenges to ensure it went off without a hitch. One of the biggest issues the Aramark team discovered was that several areas were not up to code because building codes had changed since the center's original construction in 1980. Aramark oversaw the rework of the plans to fix the issues. This involved completely redoing the demo and rebuilding plan. In the process, the team created a way forward that saved money and time.

Aramark also faced challenges working with small local vendors who did not have experience working on such largescale projects, such as electricians, plumbers and equipment providers. D.C. requires construction project contractors to include 35% small local business vendors. Aramark's vast experience working on large design and capital projects and its dedicated Design team and Innovations team allowed the company to work through any timeline and equipment availability challenges that arose.

The next phase of the master plan will be remodeling the food court on the lower level of the building. Demolition started on July 6, 2021, and it's expected to reopen in Fall 2022.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CENTER'S MASTER PLAN PROJECT INCLUDED:

- Adding on a brand new location for receptions
- Opening up and adding two sections of windows to a previously dark location on the first level
- Adding four rotating dining concepts in the exhibit halls
- Renovating four restaurants in the venue's "Uptown Food District"
- Building a store for a souvenir vendor
- Adding a local, well-known restaurant called Ben's Chili Bowl
- Adding a Corner Market to the grand lobby
- Adding a grab-n-go food store in the concourse
- Replacing all equipment in the main kitchen with upgrades

“Aramark provided us with strategy input based on conference center trends, and its experience and data from working on similar projects. They understood our attendees and their expectations. The Aramark team's experience also helped us resolve a few very big challenges, which saved us time and money in the end.”

— Samuel Thomas, Chief Operating Officer, Events DC

IF YOUR CONVENTION CENTER NEEDS RENOVATIONS OR MASTER PLANNING, DON'T HESITATE TO REACH OUT.

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