

Houston First taps Jorge Franz as president of Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau



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COURTESY OF HOUSTON FIRST



By [Jeff Jeffrey](#) – Reporter, Houston Business Journal
6-21-2021

Houston First Corp. has tapped [Jorge Franz](#) to serve as president of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau, filling a position that has been vacant since 2019.

In his new role, Franz will act as a liaison between Houston First and the GHCVB, a hospitality industry association and advocacy organization that helps to market the Bayou City as a site for conventions and other large-scale events. Houston First is the quasi-governmental organization charged with promoting the city's tourism and convention industries.

Franz has served as senior vice president of tourism and industry relations at Houston First since 2007.

In a June 16 staff-wide memo, Houston First acting President and CEO [Michael Heckman](#) said Franz will retain the position of senior vice president of tourism and industry relations

while serving as president of the GHCVB. Franz will report to Heckman in both of those roles.

“Jorge will do an outstanding job with this added responsibility,” Heckman said. “He is very familiar with the business of the GHCVB and is a tremendous ambassador for Houston and our hospitality community. He has built many relationships not only locally, but throughout the industry, that benefit Houston.”

As president of the GHCVB, Franz is stepping into a role that has remained vacant since the previous president, [Mike Waterman](#), stepped down to become chief sales officer of Visit Orlando in 2019.

Heckman’s memo went on to announce that Houston First is creating the new position of executive director of the GHCVB, which will report to Franz and be responsible for managing the day-to-day affairs of the organization. Heckman said Houston First would work with the GHCVB to develop a search process for the new position.

“I am more confident than ever about where we are going as a company and as a destination,” Heckman said. “I firmly believe that we have the right strategies in place to create significant value for Houston.”

Houston First and the GHCVB merged in 2014 as part of an effort to unify the city’s convention and tourism marketing efforts. The GHCVB maintains its own board of directors and executive committee and also recommends four candidates to Mayor [Sylvester Turner](#) for the Houston First board.

Over the past year, Houston First and the GHCVB have struggled as business and tourism travel all but evaporated as a result of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. With no large-scale events being held, the two organizations were forced to get creative and pursue alternative strategies like [marketing the city to local residents seeking a “staycation”](#) in lieu of traveling amid social distancing mandates.

But already this year, Houston First is seeing signs of life as more organizations feel comfortable hosting events amid climbing vaccination rates.

Last month, Heckman [told the Houston Business Journal](#) that the city already has 16 citywide conventions booked for the fall and is fielding inquiries from other organizations interested in relocating events to Houston.

Heckman said people are becoming more confident in their ability to return to the way things were before the pandemic. Hotel occupancy rates continue to rise as tourism starts to pick up, and Heckman expects business travel to accelerate as the summer goes along.

“Citywide occupancy rates have been above 60% for five of the past six weeks,” Heckman said at the time. “Leisure travel is pushing the occupancy rates higher. I expect that business travel will follow suit after Labor Day.”