# Introduction to Career Progression Frameworks for the Attractions Industry – a step by step methodology

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*Attractions, encompassing theme parks, museums, zoos, and cultural sites, rely heavily on dedicated, guest-focused employees.*

*Implementing a structured career progression framework supports the goals of improving employee retention, enhancing engagement, and building a strong talent pipeline.*

*This white paper outlines a step-by-step methodology for creating a transparent and effective career progression framework focused on the needs of the attractions industry.*

## 1. Why it is important: The Need for Clear Pathways

The attractions industry is characterized by diverse roles, seasonal fluctuations, and a strong emphasis on guest service. Without clear advancement opportunities, employees often leave to seek growth elsewhere. A robust career progression framework addresses this by:

1. **Providing clarity**: Employees understand what skills and experiences are needed for advancement.

2. **Boosting morale and retention**: Showing a path forward motivates staff and reduces turnover.

3. **Aligning with business goals**: Ensuring that employee development is tied to the organization's strategic objectives.

## 2. Methodology: Building the Framework

Creating a career progression framework involves a systematic approach, starting with an assessment of current organizational needs and ending with implementation and feedback

## Step 1: Identify Organizational Needs and Goals

Before defining roles, understand where the organization is headed. Conduct surveys and interviews with current employees and leadership to identify skill gaps and future needs.

**Checklist: Needs Assessment**

- Conduct interviews with department heads to understand future talent requirements.
- Analyze current employee turnover rates and reasons for departure.
- Survey employees to gather insights on their career aspirations and perceived barriers to advancement.
- Review the organization's strategic plan to ensure the framework aligns with long-term goals.

**Illustration: Organizational Needs**

*Example Scenario:*
A mid-size museum is planning a major expansion into digital exhibits.

*Need Identified:*
Future roles in digital exhibit design and interactive technology management.

*Action:*
The new framework must include clear paths and training for these emerging roles.

## Step 2: Define Roles and Career Levels

Establish a clear hierarchy of roles and levels within each department (e.g., Guest Services, Operations, Curatorial, Marketing). Distinguish between individual contributor (IC) and management tracks.

**Checklist: Roles and Levels**

- Chart all existing roles within each department.
- Define 3-5 distinct career levels (e.g., Associate, Specialist, Senior, Supervisor, Manager).
- Ensure consistent titling and leveling across different departments to maintain
- fairness.
- Create detailed job descriptions for each level, outlining responsibilities and required qualifications.

**Illustration: Job Levels in Operations**

**Level 1: Attractions Attendant** (Entry-level, focuses on ride operation/guest safety, basic problem-solving)

**Level 2: Lead Attendant** (Supervises a small team, handles basic scheduling, on-the-job training)

**Level 3: Supervisor** (Manages daily section operations, emergency response coordination, performance reviews)

**Level 4: Manager** (Oversees entire department, strategic planning, budgeting)

## Step 3: Identify Key Skills and Competencies

For each role and level, define the specific skills (technical/hard skills and behavioral/soft skills) and behaviors required for success. These criteria should be measurable and observable.

**Checklist: Competency Mapping**

- Define universal competencies (e.g., communication, teamwork, guest service) applicable to all staff.
- Identify occupational group competencies specific to job families (e.g., exhibit conservation skills for curatorial staff, safety protocols for operations).
- Use active verbs (e.g., "manages," "develops," "coordinates") to describe expected behaviors.
- Detail the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences (KSAEs) needed to move from one level to the next.

**Illustration: Competencies for a "Guest Relations Specialist" (Level 2)**

*Communication:* "Resolves complex guest complaints with empathy and provides clear, effective solutions" (Advanced) vs. "Answers guest questions politely" (Proficient).

*Tech Savviness:* "Utilizes CRM software to track guest interactions and identify trends" (Advanced) vs. "Operates the reservation system" (Proficient).

## *Step 4: Develop Training and Development Plans*

A framework is only effective if employees have the means to acquire the necessary skills. Create structured learning and development (L&D) programs.

**Checklist: L&D Plan**
- Offer a mix of training modalities: workshops, online courses, on-the-job training, and mentorship programs.
- Align development plans with the specific skill gaps identified in Step 3.
- Provide job shadowing and cross-functional opportunities to expose employees to different departments.
- Encourage employees to attend industry conferences (e.g., IAAPA events) and network with peers.

**Illustration: Development Plan Example**

*Goal:* Move from "Attractions Attendant" to "Lead Attendant."

*Required Skill:* Basic leadership and scheduling.

*Actionable Plan:* Participate in a "Foundations of Supervision" workshop, job shadow a current Lead Attendant for two shifts, and take on a temporary scheduling project.

## *Step 5: Implement Regular Evaluation and Feedback Systems*

Integrate the framework into existing HR processes, such as performance reviews and one-on-one meetings. This ensures ongoing monitoring and support.

**Checklist: Evaluation and Feedback**
- Implement a structured performance review system using the framework's evaluation criteria.
- Train managers to have productive career development discussions, not just performance assessments.
- Revisit and adjust career plans regularly (e.g., quarterly) to reflect changing goals or business needs.
- Use employee testimonials and success stories to showcase the framework's effectiveness and encourage engagement.

**Illustration: Performance Metrics**

*Metric:* For a "Curator," success might be measured by the number of successful exhibit grant applications and positive visitor feedback scores, not just the number of artifacts cataloged.

## 3. Conclusion

A well-designed career progression framework is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining top talent in the attractions industry.

By providing transparency, structure, and actionable development plans, organizations can build a motivated and highly skilled workforce, ultimately leading to enhanced guest experiences and organizational success

If you woud like to learn more, please contact us:

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