



**ac**  
**HQ** association  
career  
headquarters  
POWERED BY ASAE

# Association Career Management Toolkit

“Career management is conscious planning of one’s activities and engagements in the jobs one undertakes in the course of [one’s] life for better fulfilment, growth and financial stability.”<sup>1</sup>

**The association sector is a place where you don’t just make a living, you can make a difference.** Here you can put your talents to work in the service of industries, professions, causes, and issues you care about.

**America’s 65,000+ associations** range from very small niche organizations to very large trade associations and professional societies and they are all striving to make our world stronger every day. **These organizations offer competitive salaries and benefits in diverse workplaces**, and they need an array of professionals to achieve their missions, from accountants and lawyers, to project managers and IT professionals, to writers and researchers.

This toolkit is provided as a resource to help individuals effectively manage their career in the association sector.



# OVERVIEW

**The end goal of career management is crafting a career that leads to self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment. It is an ongoing process that involves the following essential activities:**



**Visioning** – You need to pause from time to time and cast your eye to the horizon. This is important to be sure you're on the path you want to be on career-wise. Here are two quotes that sum up the visioning process nicely.

*"Tell me what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" ~ Mary Oliver, Poet – from The Summer Day*

*"You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction."*

*~ Alvin Toffler, American writer, futurist, and businessman*



**Life-long Learning** – This may seem like a buzz word, but it really is essential for success in the 21st century. Wikipedia defines life-long learning, and its purpose, this way:

*the "ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons...it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, as well as competitiveness and employability.*



**Engaging Expert Support** – From time to time we need to know when to call in a professional, such as a career coach or a resume writer, who you can pay to help you when you are stuck, in need of some polishing, etc.



**Professional Community Building** – We have all heard about the power of a network. Building and maintaining a strong professional community is key for a host of reasons, not just when we need of a new job. A circle of trusted colleagues, mentors, and sponsors can also help us with the jobs we are in – to tackle a work conundrum or project. Further, building a network is something that should be taking place all throughout your career and serves as an all-important "insurance policy" for your career.



**Conducting Effective Job Searches** – When it comes time to find a job, it is important to understand how the job search process works today. There are a lot of players in the talent management ecosystem and technology is taking an ever more active role in employers' talent management processes, so you need to carefully consider where and how you search.

# CAREER PATH CONSTRUCTS

As you consider your own association career path, here are three constructs that can help:

## CONSTRUCT #1 – LIBRARY CHAIR, LATTICE, LADDER

So often when we think about a career path, we think linearly and climbing a ladder seems like the best and only option. However, the reality is that this path is not right for everyone. The good news? The average professional today will experience 17 unique jobs across five industries throughout their lifetime. As a result, new, less linear career paths are emerging.



The **“library chair” career path** is where someone finds their niche or specialty and grows into a true expert over the course of their career. Association professionals on this path can have a range of titles, and are usually, but not exclusively, individual contributors versus managers. Some examples of these roles in associations include graphic designers, payroll specialists, researchers, and application developers.



The **“lattice” career path** is where someone moves around (up, down, or laterally) over the course of their career. While association professionals on this path may appear to be on the ladder path described below during parts of their careers, their motivation for upward movement is not a quest for the top job in an organization. Often the moves are to gain new experiences and/or skills and/or to facilitate management of work/life values and priorities. These association professionals are often, but not exclusively, in management and supervisory roles.



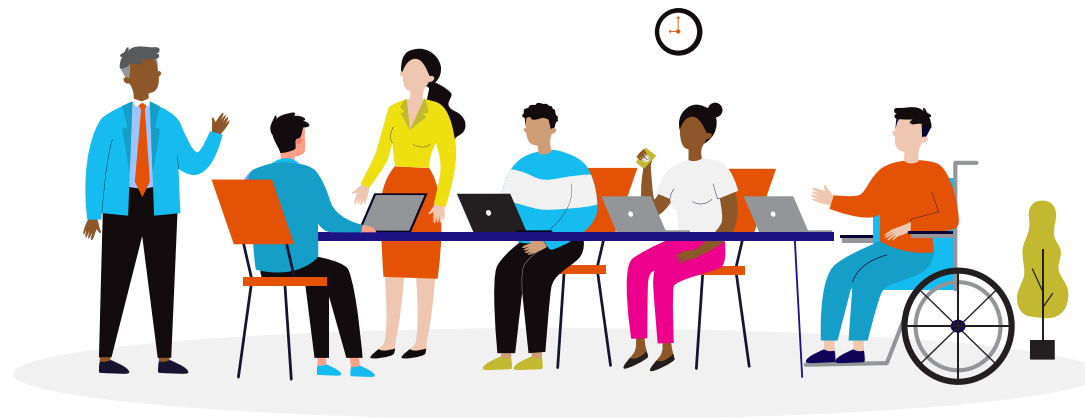
The **“ladder” career path** is where someone moves steadily upwards in their career in terms in terms of title, responsibility, and salary and attaining a “top slot” is their focus. This is the career path of aspiring Association CEOs.

# CAREER PATH CONSTRUCTS

## CONSTRUCT #2 – STAFF SPECIALIST, MANAGER, EXECUTIVE

As you envision your association career, it is important to consider the role you want to play in an organization. In associations, there are three primary roles. Having high functioning, motivated professionals working in these roles is essential to an organization's success, and all three roles may have responsibilities that involve interacting with members and other external stakeholders.

- **Staff Specialists** are individual contributors who are experts in their area of focus. They are responsible for managing their individual workload, contributing to team projects, and providing data and insights to managers and executives.
- **Managers** are both individual contributors and oversee one or more employees. They are responsible for aligning their area's work with the organization's strategic plan, providing vision and direction to their team, supervising and motivating team members, ensuring team members are informed of important organizational news and information, budgeting activities, reporting on their area's activities to internal and external stakeholders, and providing data and insights to other managers and C-suite executives. Manager titles in associations can include Manager, Director, and Senior Director.
- **Executives** are responsible for ensuring strategic operation, management, and administration of staff, headquarters, and field activities. They work closely with an organization's board of directors to develop the organization's vision and strategic focus. In addition to the Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer titles, executive titles in associations can include Vice President and Senior Vice President, plus an assortment of "Chief" officer positions (e.g., Chief Financial Officer, Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Operating Officer).



# CAREER PATH CONSTRUCTS

## CONSTRUCT #3 – CAREER STAGE

In every association career, regardless of the chosen path and role, there are generally four stages:

- **Entry-level Professional** – First five years of career
- **Mid-Career Professional** – Six to 15 years of career
- **Senior Professional** – 16 to three years before retirement
- **Emeritus Professional** – Three years left in career through retirement

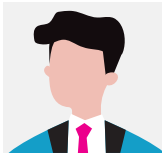
In each stage, there are activities you can engage in that will help you grow your career and advance in your chosen role.



# CAREER PATH CONSTRUCTS

## Bringing it all together.

Here are some examples of how these constructs come together in real life:



**Meet Pete.** He is on a library chair career path. He's a Bookkeeper at the Widget Association, a staff specialist role, and he's been working in his chosen specialty, accounting, for 20 years, so he is in the senior professional stage of his career.



**Meet Polli.** She is on a ladder career path. She is an entry-level professional and within two years of starting at her first job out of college as a Membership Coordinator at the Balloon Animals Association she was promoted to the position of Member Services Manager. Her aim is to become an Association CEO.




**Meet Fatima.** She is on a lattice career path. She is a mid-career professional who has been working in the association sector for 14 years. She has worked at an association, an AMC, and an industry supplier company, and has held several manager and director-level positions in various functional areas including membership, meetings, and marketing. She stepped in as interim Executive Director at one point in her career, returning to a director-level position once the new ED was hired.



**Meet Jose.** He is an emeritus professional. He has worked in the association sector for 33 years. He has been on a ladder career path and will retire in two years from his position as Vice President of Advocacy at the Rain Gauge Association.

# CAREER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES




The following charts provide some specific ideas for how to develop your association career vision, be a life-long learner, and build your professional community at each career stage in each of the three primary roles – staff specialist, manager, and executive. Information regarding ASAE resources that can support your association career management success is also included.

Key	
	<b>Career Vision</b>
	<b>Life-long Learning</b>
	<b>Professional Community</b>

## Entry-Level Association Professionals

### First five years of career

When starting out in the sector, entry level association professionals should take time to get to know themselves, their values, their workstyle, and preferred career path image and role.

Career Management Essentials	ASAE Resources that Can Help
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take assessments to learn preferred working style and values</li> <li>• Conduct informational interviews to help inform career aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Association CareerHQ Career Action Center featuring assessments and career mapping tools</a></li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue relevant certifications</li> <li>• Attend relevant conferences, events, and online learning courses to develop your skill set</li> <li>• Gain an understanding of the role of associations in society and the role of boards and volunteers</li> <li>• Learn the specific vision, mission, values, and business model of the organization(s) where you work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The ASAE Association Orientation course</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The ASAE Certificate in Association Management</a></li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a member of your professional society</li> <li>• Cultivate contacts among your peers and more senior association professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">ASAE Membership</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ASAE Collaborate – Join and participate in the ASAE Young Professionals Community and other communities of interest.</a></li> </ul>






# CAREER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Mid-Career Association Professionals

### Six to 15 years of career

By the time of mid-career association professionals should have developed a foundational sense of their personal values, workstyle, and preferred role – staff specialist, manager, or executive. They should focus in this stage on continuing to build their hard and soft skills, personal brands, and networks.




Career Management Essentials	Staff Specialist	Manager	Executive	ASAE Resources that Can Help
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess career vision and related goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take EQi and leadership style assessments</li> <li>Assess career vision and related goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take EQi and leadership style assessments</li> <li>Assess career vision and related goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Association CareerHQ Assessment Offerings</a></li> <li><a href="#">Association CareerHQ Coaching Service</a></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue and maintain relevant certifications</li> <li>Attend relevant conferences, events, and online learning opportunities to maintain up-to-date knowledge</li> <li>Develop budgeting skills and knowledge of financial reports</li> <li>Develop project management skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend relevant conferences, events, and online learning opportunities to maintain up-to-date knowledge</li> <li>Engage in learning and development activities pertinent to management and supervision</li> <li>Develop presentation skills</li> <li>Develop budgeting skills and knowledge of financial reports</li> <li>Develops strategic planning skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend relevant conferences, events, and online learning opportunities to maintain up-to-date knowledge</li> <li>Engage in learning and development activities pertinent to executive leadership.</li> <li>Engage a career coach to assist with development of executive presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">CAE Program</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Conferences</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Learning Online</a></li> <li><a href="#">Association CareerHQ Coaching Service</a></li> <li><a href="#">ReadyMe Experience</a></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to build and maintain network of fellow specialists</li> <li>Volunteer</li> <li>Mentor and be mentored by entry-level, senior, and emeritus professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build internal and external peer network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise and maintain visibility through publications, presentations, and volunteer activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">ASAE Volunteer Program</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Collaborate – Participate in relevant communities</a></li> </ul>

# CAREER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Senior Association Professionals

### 16 to three years before retirement

Senior association professionals are seasoned and should focus on staying relevant and keeping their hard and soft skills sharp. This is also an ideal time to “pay it forward” through engagement with younger professionals, volunteering time and expertise, and making donations to support association advocacy and research as finances allow.




Career Management Essentials	Staff	Manager	Executive	ASAE Resources that Can Help
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review career vision and related goals with an eye to desired professional legacy and retirement plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review career vision and related goals with an eye to desired professional legacy and retirement plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review career vision and related goals with an eye to desired professional legacy and retirement plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Association CareerHQ Coaching Service</a></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain relevant certifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain relevant certifications and CAE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain CAE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">CAE Program</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Conferences</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Learning Online</a></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentor and be mentored by early, mid-career, and emeritus professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentor and be mentored by early, mid-career, and emeritus professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentor and be mentored by early, mid-career, and emeritus professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">ASAE Volunteer Program</a></li> <li><a href="#">ASAE Collaborate – Participate in relevant communities</a></li> </ul>

# CAREER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Emeritus Association Professionals

### Three years left in career through retirement

Emeritus professionals are almost at the end of their full-time association careers or in retirement. They should focus on staying aligned with their desired professional legacy and, if still actively working, engaging in activities that will ensure a smooth exit when the time comes. As in the entry-level professional stage, the activities here are common across roles.

Career Management Essentials	ASAE Resources that Can Help
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make decisions regarding continued engagement in professional community based on desired professional legacy, retirement plans, health status, and other factors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Association CareerHQ Coaching Service</a></li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make decisions regarding maintenance of professional certifications</li> <li>• Contribute to the retention of institutional knowledge by effectively “passing the torch” to colleagues and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Keep up with current trends and knowledge through the end of active work life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CAE Program</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ASAE Collaborate</a></li> </ul>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Pay it forward” by mentoring entry-level, mid-level, and senior professionals, volunteering time and expertise, and making donations to support association advocacy and research as finances allow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">ASAE Volunteer Program</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ASAE Collaborate – Participate in relevant communities</a></li> </ul>

## About Us

**Association CareerHQ is your one-stop shop for association career and talent management resources.**

Whether you're an association professional navigating your career journey or an HR leader seeking to recruit and retain top talent in a highly competitive marketplace, Association CareerHQ's extensive job board, career and recruitment services, and content resources fuel both individual and organizational success.

## Learn More



## Have Feedback?

**We want to hear from you!**

Please submit your feedback for the Career Management Toolkit by scanning the QR code and completing the form.



## References

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