



POSITION AVAILABLE

DIRECTOR OF GUEST EXPERIENCE

Basic Purpose and Responsibilities:

The Director of Guest Experience provides strategic and operational leadership for all guest-facing functions at the Buffalo Zoo, ensuring an efficient, safe, and high-quality experience from arrival through departure. This role leads a high-volume operation and is responsible for service excellence, revenue performance, operational efficiency, and team culture across the Guest Experience Department. The Director oversees Admissions, Amenities, Attractions and Rides, Switchboard, Guest Relations, Birthday Parties, Parking, and Clean Team janitorial and support services, and manages key contracted vendor relationships. This position reports directly to the President/CEO, serves on the Zoo's Leadership Team, and collaborates closely with all departments to ensure seamless campus-wide operations and alignment with organizational strategy.

Compensation / Benefits / How to Apply:

This is a full-time, exempt position. Annual salary range is **\$65,000-\$80,000** commensurate with experience. Some of the benefits available include health plan, HRA/HSA, FSA, life insurance, long term disability insurance, dental, vision, 403B retirement plan, annual leave, holiday, and sick time benefits. Benefits are available the month following the successful completion and passing of a probationary period review at 60 days of work (sick time available upon hire).

To apply, please send resume and cover letter in **Word document or PDF** using subject line: GE Director by email to: buffalozoojobs@buffalozoo.org

No telephone calls please. Position open until filled. For more information about the Buffalo Zoo, please visit our website by the following link: <http://www.buffalozoo.org>

The Buffalo Zoo:

As one of the crown jewels of Western New York's cultural and recreational attractions, the Buffalo Zoo welcomes 400,000+ guests on an annual basis. The Zoo sits on 23.5 acres and is home to over 850+ animals, supports many conservation programs, and is a highly regarded educational facility. Being the third oldest zoo in the country, the Buffalo Zoo is proud to have several buildings of historic significance on its campus. The Zoo is operated by the Zoological Society of Buffalo, Inc., under a lease agreement with the City of Buffalo. Our mission of **Building Community → Creating Connections → Saving Wildlife** is guiding our strategic plan and campus development plan – both updated in 2025. These plans will guide the growth and development of the Zoo for the next ten years.

Essential Functions:

Department Director Competencies & Expectations

All Department Directors are expected to:

- Demonstrate initiative and ownership in leading their departments, setting direction, and driving continuous improvement. The person in this position should actively seek information, ask informed questions, and stay aware of operational, organizational, and departmental developments rather than waiting to be directed.
- Maintain high standards of excellence in daily operations, staff performance, and guest experience.
- Be accountable for department outcomes, decisions, and use of resources.
- Build trust with team members through consistency, transparency, approachability, and follow-through.

- Foster an environment where employees feel supported, informed, and empowered to succeed.
- Address challenges directly and constructively, including performance, conduct, and operational issues.
- Align departmental goals and actions with organizational strategy and values.
- Department Directors are accountable for the day-to-day performance of their teams, the quality of work delivered, and the culture they create.

People & Culture

- Lead and develop a team of 3FT, 12 PT, and up to 45 seasonal staff with full hiring and termination authority.
- Provide visible, hands-on leadership that models the Zoo's mission, vision, core values, and service standards.
- Recruit, onboard, train, evaluate, and retain a high-performing team; address performance issues promptly and constructively.
- Foster a respectful, inclusive, and collaborative culture focused on accountability and guest service excellence.
- Build leadership capacity and support succession planning within the Guest Experience department.
- Communicate effectively and professionally with guests, staff, volunteers, docents, vendors, and Zoo leadership.
- Serve as a cross-departmental leader and collaborative partner, building strong working relationships and communication across the organization.

Operations & Safety

- Proactively oversee daily Guest Experience operations, including admissions, group sales, birthday parties, rides/attractions, Clean Team, parking, switchboard, and campus guest flow.
- Ensure campus readiness daily through routine inspections emphasizing cleanliness, safety, accessibility, ADA compliance, appearance, and guest comfort.
- Direct staffing plans for daily operations, special events, and peak attendance periods.
- Oversee parking operations, crowd management, and guest circulation during normal operations and special events.
- Partner with all departments to ensure compliance with safety protocols, emergency procedures, and Zoo-wide response plans.
- Lead incident documentation, post-incident review, and operational risk mitigation related to guest experience functions.
- Maintain and annually review operational policies, procedures, and service standards.

Finance, Revenue & Technology

- Manage an operating budget of ~\$500,000-800,000 and oversee \$3-4 million in annual revenue operations.
- Develop and manage the annual Guest Experience department budget in collaboration with the CEO and CFO.
- Oversee Guest Experience Department payroll, expense management, and financial controls to ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance.
- Lead cash handling operations, loss prevention, fraud prevention, audit compliance, and revenue discrepancy resolution.
- Order and track inventory supply and works cross functionally to correct or repair equipment and functionality issues.
- Oversee revenue-generating activities, including admissions, membership sales, group sales, ride sales, animal encounter sales, tours, and other add-on experiences, rides, and attractions.
- Monitor KPIs including per cap revenue, guest satisfaction scores, attendance flow times, event throughput, and other ROI targets. Collaborate with executive leadership on pricing strategies and revenue optimization initiatives.
- Manage 5-10 vendor and partner relationships (including third-party vendors such as POS/ticketing, concessions, gift shop, face-painting, and revenue-share rides) ensuring contract compliance, service quality, and financial accountability.
- Administer and optimize guest-facing technology systems, including ticketing/POS, advertising displays, Virtual Reality units, and related guest-facing technology platforms.
- Use operational and financial data to track trends, identify opportunities, and inform decision-making.
- Develop and implement new revenue-generating programs and guest experiences.

Guest Experience, Engagement & Events

- Ensure a consistently positive, welcoming, inclusive, and memorable experience for all guests.
- Serve as a role model in direct guest engagement and service recovery. Establish and evolve guest service and guest recovery standards.
- Monitor guest feedback and satisfaction metrics; identify trends and lead continuous improvement efforts.
- Oversee group visits, presales, and event-related guest services.
- Partner with communications/marketing/events to operationalize public and private events.
- Oversee onsite add-on programs and experiential offerings as assigned.
- Serve as a key contributor in advancing technology initiatives that enhance the guest experience.
- Represent and promote the Zoo positively to guests, partners, and the community.

Professional Responsibility & Organizational Impact

- Stay current on industry best practices, emerging trends, and innovations in guest experience, accessibility, and customer service.
- Contribute to Zoo-wide strategic initiatives and leadership discussions.
- Demonstrate professionalism, adaptability, and a solutions-oriented mindset in a dynamic public-facing environment.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Position Qualifications

To perform at a proficient level and be fully qualified, a person would expect to have:

Education (Minimum Desired):

- Associate's degree required. Bachelor's degree (preferred)

Experience (Minimum Desired):

- 5+ years progressive experience in high-volume guest-facing operations.
- 5+ years of leadership experience, including supervision of managers (required) and large seasonal teams (desired).
- Demonstrated experience managing department budgets and revenue operations.
- Experience administering POS/ticketing systems and cash control processes required.
- Experience working cross-functionally in a complex organization.

Core Competencies:

- Proven ability to lead, motivate, and develop teams while maintaining high standards.
- Friendly, outgoing, and proactive approach. Possess strong communications and interpersonal skills with an ability to offer positive and constructive feedback to team members.
- Strategic thinker with strong operational execution skills.
- Sound judgement and calm decision-making in high-pressure situations.
- Quick adaptation and problem-solving skills, with the ability to exercise good judgment and a professional and poised attitude in changing and sometimes stressful environments.
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail.
- Proficiency in Microsoft office suite of programs desired.

Other:

- This position follows a Tuesday–Saturday or Sunday–Thursday schedule, determined by Zoo operational needs. Flexibility in schedule is required, including the ability to work weekend days, evenings, holidays, and school breaks to support Zoo operations as needed.
- This is an in-person, onsite position based on Buffalo Zoo grounds and requires a regular physical presence to effectively lead daily operations and staff.

- Required to be able to respond in a timely fashion as necessary to emergencies.
- Schedule, attend, and participate in regularly scheduled department meetings, all-staff meetings, and leadership meetings.
- Enthusiastic, self-reliant, independent attitude and approach to work. Must be able to multi-task and be a team player.
- Must support Buffalo Zoo's Vision, Mission and WILD Core Values.
- Must possess or be able to obtain within 30-days of employment a valid New York State driver's license and have an average or better driving record based on the evaluation process of our insurance company. Retention of position is contingent upon maintaining required license. Must upgrade to classification appropriate to requirements (non-CDLC or CDL class).
- Successful completion of a post-offer pre-employment general medical screen and drug test.
- Successful completion of a post-offer pre-employment background check.
- Successful completion of a post-offer fitness for duty test.
- Must understand the requirements, essential functions and duties of the position as per the job description, and certify such by signing the job description acknowledgement form prior to first day of work.
- Must be able to operate a computer, two-way radio, telephone system, and software on computer, printer, etc. after training.
- Must be willing to comply with department's Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) policies and procedures.
- Must provide proof of negative TB test at hire (results within the last 12 months). TB test conducted annually.
- Regular attendance and punctuality are essential functions of the position.

Physical Demands:

- Employee may be exposed to a variety of weather conditions or temperatures. Work may be required both indoors and outdoors in various weather and temperature conditions, ranging from rain, wind, snow, cool to cold weather, and extreme heat and humidity. The noise level in the work environment is usually moderate.
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to stand; walk; use hands; reach with hands and arms; stoop, kneel, crouch, crawl, climb, and talk or hear. Use computer hardware and software for periodic periods of time. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, peripheral vision, depth perception and ability to adjust focus.
- Passing a fitness for duty test will be required for the successful candidate to be given further consideration for the position.

While this job description attempts to describe the essential functions of the position, it does not prescribe or restrict the tasks that may be assigned. It does not restrict management's right to assign or reassign duties or responsibilities to this job at any time. The employee is expected to adhere to all policies and to act as a role model in the adherence to the policies.

The Buffalo Zoo is an At Will employer and all Buffalo Zoo employees are subject to employment eligibility and background security checks as well as testing for illegal substance use as allowed by law.

Equal Opportunity Employer

300 Parkside Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14214-1999