

## Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion at Potter Park Zoo

Valuing diversity at Potter Park Zoo (PPZ) by creating an inclusive, equitable and accessible environment for employees, volunteers, and community.

### Key Definitions:

**Diversity** – Range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

**Equity** – Fair and just treatment of all members of a community. Equity requires commitment to strategic priorities, resources, respect, and civility, as well as ongoing action and assessment of progress toward achieving specified goals.

**Access** – Giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how the organization makes space for the characteristics that each person brings.

**Inclusion** – The intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes. It also refers to the ways that diverse participants are valued as respected members of an organization and/or community.

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Diversity</b>	Establish a workplace that supports employees, volunteers, and guests of all backgrounds and encourages their individuality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide training for employees and volunteers annually</li> <li>2. Build an inclusive environment</li> <li>3. Recruit and retain diverse representation</li> <li>4. Gather demographic data annually of Potter Park Zoo's employees, volunteers and guests</li> <li>5. Receive feedback on workplace culture through Employee Satisfaction Surveys for all staff</li> </ol>
<b>Equity</b>	Implement practices and guidelines that are fair and impartial to employee, volunteers, and guests.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review and implement new practices and guidelines to identify and improve the workplace culture</li> <li>2. Commitment to supplier diversity</li> <li>3. DEAI Committee and Strategic Plan</li> </ol>
<b>Access</b>	Provide facilities and services that allow all individuals to experience the zoo.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide virtual tours</li> <li>2. Accessible buildings and exhibits</li> <li>3. Sensory tools and areas for guests</li> </ol>
<b>Inclusion</b>	Provide ongoing opportunities for all to feel welcomed and included while at the zoo.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community outreach</li> <li>2. Onsite programming and events</li> </ol>

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## Strategy: Diversity - Areas of Progress and Advancement

### Action 1: Provide training for employees and volunteers annually

#### Progress

1. Potter Park Zoo provides training for Zoo Staff through opportunities with partner organizations. Current partners are: KultureCity, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Mid-Michigan Autism Association and trainings provided by individual professionals through various organizations.
  - a. Volunteers are required to take any trainings provided by KultureCity.
2. The DEAI program lead (Equity and Engagement Program Manager) attends additional trainings and educates staff through what is learned. The information is shared through weekly newsletters or at monthly all staff meetings. The trainings include autism trainings by multiple organizations, sensory processing disorders trainings, and DEAI themed trainings.
3. The Zoo Director is completing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) evaluation and yearlong process through Ingham County and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.
4. The Civility Project provided all staff a training in October 2023 that focused on individual differences and how to work through them and create a kinder working environment.
5. Zookeeper, Annie Marcum, completed Mental Health First Aid through GRAZE. (2023)\*
6. In 2023, all staff meetings incorporated DEAI topics into the meetings. Topics included: Correcting pronouns, what the zoo offers to be sensory inclusive, quiet rooms, nursing room, virtual tours, gender neutral bathrooms, community programming, Equity vs. Equality vs. Justice, difficult guests (L.E.A.R.N.), service animals, active violence training, intersectionality and guest feedback.

#### Advancement

1. Continue to enhance staff capacity and skill for DEAI at Potter Park Zoo.
  - a. Integrate DEAI training and educational materials at each all-staff meeting.
2. Work with the volunteer department to encourage volunteers in DEAI offered trainings.
3. Expand training to Potter Park Zoo and Potter Park Zoological Society board members.
4. Volunteer Department to create and implement Volunteer Community Agreements to enhance the experience at in person meetings.

### Action 2: Build an inclusive environment (staff and guests)

#### Progress

1. Pronouns are included on name tags of individuals (volunteers included) that choose to share this information.
2. Gender neutral/family restrooms are provided in the Welcome Center and Discovery Center.
3. Equity and Engagement Program Manager is a certified Safe Space Advocate through Ingham County to allow a safe place for employees to go when they need guidance or a listening ear. \*
4. New internship opportunity created, Community Engagement and Inclusion Intern, to help build the knowledge and experience of those working in the DEAI field and prepare them to guide other organizations in this work. \*
5. Employee mental health supported by providing resources to staff through the staff newsletter and in person.
6. The different cultures of employees and volunteers are recognized through the staff newsletter and social media and highlight conservationists of different cultures during monthly heritage and historical days (I.e. Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month).

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7. Received a grant for new CPR manikin with diverse skin tones for training staff. (2023)
8. Wonderland of Lights recognizes multiple cultures at the event. A line of trees now represents eight different holidays: Christmas, Chinese New Year, Bodhi Day, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Three Kings Day, Yule and Las Posadas. The zoo invited organizations to decorate the trees that represented their holidays.
  - o Three neon signs were created and featured that say: Happy Kwanzaa, Happy Hanukkah and Merry Christmas.
9. The Education Department updated their Summer Camp Behavior Policy to include a “No Negative Talk” section to ensure children weren’t bullied while at camp. After the policy was implemented the environment of the classrooms was positive and beneficial.

#### Advancement

1. Continually encourage feedback from staff as they voice ideas they would like to see implemented.
  - a. Feedback is given through a survey staff can submit anonymously, through their department’s DEAI committee representative or in person to the Equity and Engagement Program Manager.
2. Bi-annual meetings held with the Equity and Engagement Program Manager, Zoo Director and Society Executive Director on DEAI topics, goals and potential new changes.
3. Conduct an audit of our current communication channels to identify areas where diversity and inclusion are lacking.
  - a. Gathering diverse photos, website layout, etc.
4. Develop partnerships with community organizations that represent marginalized communities, and work together to promote events and initiatives that align with DEAI values.
5. Create opportunities for staff to engage with and learn from members of different communities, such as hosting speakers or organizing cultural events.

### **Action 3: Recruit and retain diverse representation**

#### Progress

1. Removed biases in the hiring process and partner with organizations like Peckham and Disability Network Capital Area.
  - a. Applicants’ personal information is removed from review process until they are selected for an interview.
  - b. Peckham, Inc. is a nonprofit vocational rehabilitation organization that provides job training opportunities for person with disabilities and other barriers of employment.
  - c. Disability Network Capital Area partners with community agencies like Potter Park Zoo to help those with disabilities improve their quality of life.
2. New employees and volunteers recruited through different avenues: onsite job and volunteer fairs, email, news and social media.
  - a. Onsite job fairs for entry level positions did not require an application process.
3. Partnership with Rosier Consultants, LLC – vocational rehabilitation agency.
  - a. Work with this agency to provide volunteer opportunities for individuals to regain strength and skills to re-enter the workforce. The individuals get paid by the agency to volunteer at the zoo.
    - i. Other partnerships with similar avenues: Residential Options and Disability Network Capital Area on intermittent basis.

#### Advancement

1. Provide additional information and trainings for hiring managers to mitigate implicit biases during the hiring process.
2. Increase staff retention rates by continuing to encourage learning and development opportunities for staff.

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**Action 4: Gather demographic data annually of employees, volunteers and guests**Progress

1. Gathered demographic data of employees in 2021. \*
2. Demographic survey for guests was created and implemented in late 2022. \*
  - a. As of December 2023, 160 surveys were completed.
3. A demographic survey was provided by an outside organization to Potter Park Zoo and Zoological Society board members.

Advancement

1. Complete demographic survey of employees annually.
2. Increase the number of guests completing the demographic survey by continuing to find unique ways to inform guests of the survey.
  - a. The survey is for those that visit the zoo provided through QR codes on signs throughout the zoo or on event materials.
3. Create a demographic survey for volunteers that can be used annually.
  - a. Work with the volunteer department to implement this survey in 2023.
4. Gather demographic data on those that attend onsite programming (i.e. Summer Camp, Big Zoo Lesson).

**Action 5: Employee satisfaction survey for all staff**Progress

1. Updated employee satisfaction surveys were completed. (January 2023) \*
2. Complete employee satisfaction surveys annually at a time of year when seasonal employment is the highest.
  - a. Seasonal/temporary employee satisfaction survey completed. (August 2023)

Advancement

1. Use survey results to provide yearly check-ins with senior management to discuss specific DEAI topics brought up by employees.

**Strategy: Equity - Areas of Progress and Advancement****Action 1: Review and implement new practices and guidelines to identify and improve the workplace culture**Progress

1. Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion document now included in the Employee Handbook. \*
2. Breastfeeding Practices now included in the Employee Handbook provide guidelines and resources for employees that breastfeed. \*
3. Potter Park Zoo and Potter Park Zoological Society board members receive regular updates on the zoo's DEAI efforts through monthly board reports.
4. Support employee's mental health by providing resources to staff through the staff newsletter and in person.
  - a. Example - mental health break held for staff offering various resources including fidgets, snacks, and a space to relax.
5. New Partnership with GRAZE, Growing Resiliency for Aquarium and Zoo Employees, to provide a Critical Incident Stress Management meeting for staff. (2023)
  - a. These debriefs for employees came after a mass shooting that happened in our community.
6. Staff completed a de-escalation training through Ingham County Sheriff's Department. (2023)
  - a. The training was requested by staff as they needed tools to help them with guest interactions.

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- b. Difficult guest interaction tips added to the employee manual and reviewed during staff orientation.
- 7. Safety Committee members attended a Run, Hide, Fight training that they implemented in the employee handbook and discussed at an all-staff meeting. (2023)

#### Advancement

- 1. Facilitate the development and implementation of curricula, tools and opportunities that are shared among employees on their expressed needs in the areas of DEAI.
- 2. Continue to update and improve Employee Handbook policies and have a focused time during onboarding to educate new staff.

### **Action 2: Commitment to supplier diversity**

#### Progress

- 1. Potter Park Zoo is required to follow all Ingham County Purchasing Policies.
  - a. See document EOE Resolutions, page 2.
  - b. As stated in their policies:
    - i. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that notice of the requirements of this policy shall be included in all formal Requests for Proposals or Bids issued by Ingham County for goods and services, that for statistical purposes only County vendors responding to formal requests for proposals or bids should provide statistical information regarding their workforce diversity, and the vendors shall certify their knowledge of the County's policy and disclose any conclusive findings of violations of federal, state, or local equal opportunity statutes, ordinances, rules/regulations, or policies within the past three (3) years.

#### Advancement

- 1. Create a supplier diversity plan for the Potter Park Zoological Society.

### **Action 3: DEAI Committee and Strategic Plan**

#### Progress

- 1. The Potter Park Zoo DEAI Committee was created and has since met bi-monthly. (2022)
  - a. From the committee, a DEAI Strategic Plan Goal was created. \*
  - b. Multiple departments are represented on the committee and all staff are aware of who is on the committee and are encouraged to join the committee.
    - i. It is encouraged that staff bring up any DEAI ideas or concerns to either the DEAI program lead or a committee member.

#### Advancement

- 1. DEAI Committee will continue its efforts by the following actions:
  - a. Continue to meet at least six times a year.
  - b. Recruit new members, as well as retain current members.
  - c. Work on advancement of PPZ DEAI strategies.

## **Strategy: Access - Areas of Progress and Advancement**

### **Action 1: Provide accessible resources**

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1. AbleEyes virtual tours were completed for four main buildings: AniMall, Discovery Center, Feline and Primate House and Reptile House.
2. Created an Accessibility Webpage on the zoo website, allowing guests to find accessible initiatives in one location.
3. Hired an outside company to improve the accessibility of our website.
  - a. Example: Updated the website to be screen reader friendly for those who are blind or visually impaired.
4. Braille booklets with the layout of the zoo are available for checkout in the Welcome Center. A large braille map is accessible at the front of the zoo for all guests to use.
5. Provide wheelchairs, electric scooters, strollers and wagons to guests for a cost.
  - a. These options are free for those that need them when attending a FALCONERS program.
6. Two audio tours were created in 2023: Reptile and Small Mammal House and Wonderland of Lights.
  - a. Tours can be found on our website: Accessibility > Audio Tours
7. Equity and Engagement Program Manager worked with the Education Department to create a Visually Impaired Tour.
  - a. The tour creates an opportunity for those who are visually impaired to have a tour experience. They are given a 45-minute tour of the zoo that provides descriptions of the habitats and animals. Then they take 30 minutes to touch and smell animal artifacts and biofacts.
8. Boo at the Zoo accessible hayride was created by the zoo's logistic technician. A grant was applied for and received by the zoo to provide a one-of-a-kind ride that is accessible to those in wheelchairs or have a mobility disability.

#### Advancement

1. Provide a virtual tour through AbleEyes of the entire zoo.
2. Provide braille at exhibits with information about our animals.
  - a. In the process of transcribing zoo signs into a booklet that individuals can take with them on their zoo walk.
3. Create audio tours for those that are visually impaired.
  - a. Feline/Primate House
  - b. Entire zoo
  - c. Large events – Wonderland of Lights

#### **Action 2: Accessible buildings and exhibits**

##### Progress

1. Step stools were installed in the public bathrooms so sinks are accessible for those of shorter heights.
2. StepNPull door openers were installed on main doors.
3. Updated several exhibit viewing areas to be more accessible for those at all heights and eliminate visual barriers (i.e. kangaroo exhibit, anteater exhibit).
4. Savanna Grill provides tables that are wheelchair accessible and multiple ramps are available to enter the eating areas.
5. Michigan Rehabilitation Services provided ADAAG Reports for the AniMall and Discovery Center. \*
  - a. The AniMall and Discovery Center guest services desks were updated to be accessible for those in wheelchairs as a result of these reports.
6. Photo boards located in the zoo were created to be accessible for those in wheelchairs and can be used by a wide range of audiences.
7. Installation of touchless sinks and toilets in all main buildings with grand funding. (2023)
8. New Okapi habitat has a viewing area that was designed to be accessible. (2023)

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9. Asphalt replacement project is complete and creates an accessible zoo for those in wheelchairs, mobility devices and those using strollers. (2023)

#### Advancement

1. Installation of touchless doors.
2. Continue to remove visual barriers at current exhibit viewing areas.
3. Continue to review the accessibility of exhibits and buildings as they are renovated.

### **Action 3: Sensory tools and areas for guests**

#### Progress

1. Sensory bags provided for free to all zoo guests.
  - a. Bags include laminated sensory maps.
2. Sensory map created and posted on the website and with sensory bags.
3. Headphones available for free with or without a sensory bag.
4. Four quiet areas designated throughout the zoo and park.
5. Signage throughout the zoo indicates where headphones may be needed and the location of quiet areas.
6. Communication board is available near the playground in the park.
  - a. The communication board is a picture symbol board that can be used to support interaction in the playground area. The pictures on the board can be used to enable child to child or child to adult interactions when making comments, asking favors, or giving directions to each other.
7. Social story created and posted on the website to help guests have the best experience possible by allowing individuals and their families to prepare for their visit. \*
8. Sensory board was created to provide extra support to all guests during large events if they felt overwhelmed.

#### Advancement

1. Continue to enhance PPZ's sensory inclusive initiatives through increased knowledge and funding.

## **Strategy: Inclusion - Areas of Progress and Advancement**

### **Action 1: Community outreach**

#### Progress

1. Zoo in Your Neighborhood provides free zoo passes and programming to over 40 community partners. \*
  - a. In 2019, "Zoo in Your Neighborhood" was nationally recognized by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) by winning top honors for the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award.

#### Advancement

1. Continue to add new partners and continue programming with the Zoo in Your Neighborhood program.
2. Explore community events and additional partners for new program opportunities.
3. Conduct regular surveys with members of marginalized communities to gather feedback on the effectiveness of your DEAI initiatives and identify areas for improvement.

### **Action 2: Onsite programming and events**

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1. FALCONERS is designed to allow children or adults of all ages with special needs and unique challenges (such as autism or developmental disabilities) and their whole family to have an enriching educational experience in a safe, welcoming and sensory friendly environment. \*

Advancement

1. Continue to advance all PPZ DEAI strategies and welcome more families with diverse needs to the FALCONERS program. Continue to grow the program to those that may not be represented currently in the program (i.e. Visually impaired, deaf).
2. Begin evaluating and working with the events department to expand inclusion efforts at public, private, and fundraising events.
  - a. Create and implement a form to be completed four weeks prior to any event to evaluate if the event is sensory inclusive and/or accessible to everyone. (Early 2024)

*\*All items noted with an asterisk have supporting documents located in the S-15 folder.*