

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.

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

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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. Mental Health First Aid through GRAZE*
 - a. Zookeeper, Annie Marcum (2023)
 - b. Zookeeper, Cagney McDermott (2024)
 - c. Zookeeper, Carolyn Schulte (2024)
6. Staff Meeting 2023 incorporated DEAI topics into the meetings.
 - a. 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.
7. Staff Meeting 2024 incorporated DEAI topics into the meetings.
 - a. Topics included: How to assist those with hearing loss, how to use communication cards to assist guests
8. Volunteer Department implemented Volunteer Community Agreements to enhance the experience at in person meetings. (2024)
9. Financial advisors were invited onsite to provide information to employees. (2024)
10. Response staff are trained look for disability IDs in case of medical emergency. (2025)
 - a. Incorporating this training with the zoo's American Red Cross CPR Training.

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.
 - a. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Academy Courses
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.

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.

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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).
 - 2025: Featuring our own staff on social media during these months
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.
 - 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.
10. Provide feeling thermometers to all staff and volunteers to help better assist with guests that may be non-verbal. (2024)
11. Potter Park Zoo provides a voluntary disclosure process for visitors to self-identify any specific needs related to a potential emergency situation. (2025)
 - Information available on our website and posted at our admissions booths.
12. On our contact page, we invite visitors to reach out if they have suggestions for improving the accessibility of our zoo. This is also called a ‘grievance procedure’. (2025)
13. 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.
 - Meeting was held Feb. 21, 2025 – focused on advancement for the zoo in regard to the DEAI Program Plan.
14. Develop partnerships with community organizations that represent marginalized communities and work together to promote events and initiatives that align with DEAI values.
 - Partnered with North Star Birthing Services to provide a space for their movie nights that are educational on women’s health and provided to the public. (2023/2024/2025)

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 by 2030 of our current communication channels to identify areas where diversity and inclusion are lacking.
 - a. Review visuals in marketing materials, websites, and internal content for diverse representation.

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- b. More in depth plan: Determine which communication channels to audit (e.g., internal emails, website, social media, marketing materials, employee handbooks, press releases, etc.).
 - i. Set clear DEAI-focused objectives, such as evaluating representation, accessibility, language, and inclusivity.
- 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.
 - a. Allyship Workshops: Train employees on how to be effective allies to different communities.
 - b. Service Learning Days: Partner with local organizations to engage employees in volunteer work with marginalized communities.
 - c. Language & Communication: Offer training in inclusive language, cultural etiquette, or even language-learning opportunities.

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.
4. Our hiring materials include an easy way to request reasonable accommodations to complete the application. (2024)
 - a. Verbiage included on our website hiring page.
 - b. Potter Park Zoological Society added it to all intern, volunteer and job descriptions.
5. Begin sending out job opportunities (quarterly) to community partners that work with those with disabilities. (2025)
 - a. Peckham and Michigan Rehabilitation Services.

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.

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

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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.
4. A demographic survey created and sent to Potter Park Zoo Members. (2024)
5. Created new and improved surveys that include collecting demographic data for the following surveys: Big Zoo Lesson, Homeschool Zoo Crew, Wild Wanderers, Zoo Teen, Twilight Adventures and Summer Camp (2024)
6. Created a new survey 'How Did We Do' survey that provides feedback on all aspects of the zoo and provides demographic data of the visitor. 2024

Advancement

1. Complete demographic survey of employees bi-annually. Summer 2025.
2. Create a demographic survey for volunteers that can be used annually.
 - a. Work with the volunteer department to implement this survey in 2025.
3. Continue to include demographic data on new surveys created.

Action 5: Employee satisfaction survey for all staffProgress

1. Updated employee satisfaction surveys were completed. (January 2023/July 2024) *
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/July 2024)

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.
 - b. Equity and Engagement Program Manager, Mariah Martinez, joined the Mid-Level Leadership Co-hort for 2024-25.

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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.
 - 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)
8. Potter Park Zoological Society Employee Handbook was revised (2024)

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: 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.
2. DEAI Committee created Committee Member Guidelines. (2024)
3. DEAI Committee application form was created (2024)

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

Progress

1. AbleEyes virtual tours were completed for four main buildings: AniMall, Discovery Center, Feline and Primate House and Reptile House.
 - a. Virtual tour of the entire zoo completed. (2024)
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.

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- a. These options are free for those that need them when attending a FALCONERS program.
- 6. Two audio tours were created: Reptile and Small Mammal House and Wonderland of Lights. (2023)
 - a. Tours can be found on our website: Accessibility > Audio Tours
- 7. Audio tour of the Feline/Primate House created. (2024)
- 8. 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.
- 9. 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. (2023)
- 10. All animal signage translated to braille and available for check out for any guest. (2024)
- 11. Audio Tour – Wonderland of Lights (2023/2024)
- 12. Potter Park Zoo AbleVu webpage is up to date and accessible for those using the site. (2025)

Advancement

- 1. Create audio tours for those that are visually impaired.
 - a. Entire zoo

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)
- 9. Asphalt replacement project is complete and creates an accessible zoo for those in wheelchairs, mobility devices and those using strollers. (2023)
- 10. A maintenance schedule was created for all doors in the Discovery Center building to ensure requirements are consistently and dependably met. (2025)

Advancement

- 1. Installation of touchless doors.
- 2. Continue to remove visual barriers at current exhibit viewing areas.
 - o Feline/Primate House
 - o Rosella Exhibit
 - o Emu and Tufted Deer Exhibits
- 3. Continue to review the accessibility of exhibits and buildings as they are renovated.

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- Creating Enter and Exit signs for Reptile House to help with traffic and allow easier access to the building.

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 boards were created to provide extra support to all guests during large events if they felt overwhelmed. (2024)

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.
2. Little Free Library installed in Potter Park to allow the community an opportunity to donate books and/or take books. This contributes to our literacy initiatives as we promote its importance in the Lansing community.
 - i. As the zoo obtains children's books we add to the library. In our first year over 100 books were taken from the library. (2022)
3. StoryWalk installed in Potter Park on the River Trail to allow the community an opportunity to read animal related children's books while they are out in nature walking the trail. This contributes to our literacy initiatives as we promote its importance in the Lansing community.
 - i. Books are changed out four times a year (seasonally). (2024/2025)
4. New partners added to the ZIYN program:
 - i. Lansing Housing Commission – Central Offices, Angel House, EVE (2023)
 - ii. Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Ele's Place (2024)
5. Attended Neighborhood Resource Summits hosted by Department of Neighborhoods, Arts and Citizen Engagement. (2023/2024/2025)

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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 eventsProgress

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. *
2. Wild Wanderers Club – A club that provides early access to the zoo from May 1 – Labor Day. As part of the club, members can use the main paths in the zoo one hour before opening, seven days a week. This program provides an opportunity for our community to enjoy the zoo at no cost and an opportunity in nature that benefits their mental and physical health. (May 2024)
3. Diversity Day – An event that brought awareness to service organization and food establishments in the Mid-Michigan area. (2024)
 - a. Continues to be a yearly event.

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.*