



toronto
ZOO

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

A Framework for Action at Toronto Zoo

“We desire to have this caring culture be grounded in principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. We commit to collaborating with our team, guests and community to reflect and celebrate the rich diversity that makes our City and our country a beacon of hope for all those who call them home.” – from draft Toronto Zoo equity statement

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INTRODUCTION

The Toronto Zoo is a top tourist destination in the City of Toronto. It is also actively involved in conservation and environmental sustainability initiatives and introduces school-aged children to zoology through its school visits and educational programming. Among the priorities in its strategic plan is the desire to build the team for the future, re-imagine the guest experience and envision the Zoo as the heart of the community.

The strategic plan rightly acknowledges that as the Zoo grows and adapts to societal changes, its human resources investments necessarily need to grow and change as well. Key human resources functions of recruitment, training and development are part of addressing the need for change. Embracing the value of diversity and inclusion as key enablers to positive workplace culture will require efforts from across the organization, including the Board, management, and staff.

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are principles that are a critical part of societal consciousness. The demand to provide equitable opportunities, diversity of teams and inclusive environments is being made to organizations of every size and in every sector. The Zoo embraces the call to build a diverse team, to re-imagine the guest experience and to take action on authentic engagement with the diverse communities that surrounds it. One way to expedite the desired change is to leverage the work that the City of Toronto is doing to support organizational leadership in driving change.

This framework provides suggested strategies and actions that will help the Zoo reach its equity, diversity, inclusion goals.

Governance: update policies to reflect EDI commitment

*Strategy: Ensure that the Zoo's governance body proactively endorses
EDI efforts and adopts strategies to support them*

Actions Required:

- Review all governance policies to ensure inclusive language is contained;
- Ensure that governance policies reflect the Zoo's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion;
- Consider whether the Board's skills matrix includes competencies related to equity, diversity and inclusion (i.e., intercultural competence, experience in community engagement, experience working with traditionally marginalized communities).

Management: Drive implementation of EDI policies, practices, and procedures

Strategy: Ensure that management staff of the Zoo have the necessary supports and develop the appropriate competencies to serve as EDI ambassadors

Actions Required:

- Conduct needs assessment among management staff to identify areas for development related to equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- Provide training, coaching, and mentoring to management staff so that they can support their teams to implement a culture of inclusivity;
- Consider adopting a policy that ties the attainment of EDI goals to management performance;
- Reward management efforts to embed EDI principles in Zoo operations (e.g. EDI award, appreciation recognition).

Human Resources: Lead the transformative change required to embed EDI principles in policy and practice

“We care about our team. Our staff and volunteers are the driving force behind our mission; we value their diversity, skills, and commitment. Their pride and passion in their work is evident and their retention, engagement and development is important to us.” From Zoo’s Strategic Plan

Strategy: Position the Human Resources function at the Zoo as the go to department for EDI support and resources

Actions Required:

Recruitment

- Support Zoo departments to diversify their teams;
- Ensure that diverse advertising channels are used to promote Zoo staff and volunteer positions;
- Include the Zoo’s diversity commitment statement in all Zoo position vacancies;
- Proactively encourage hiring managers to widely advertise vacant positions;
- Consider promoting volunteer vacancies in local community venues (i.e. community centres, libraries, high school guidance offices, religious organizations-mosques, churches, temples).

Retention

- Widely promote the Zoo's policies on harassment, discrimination, and anti-racism so that all staff and volunteers are aware of the procedures for filing complaints, if necessary;
- Reinforce the fact that reprisals are not tolerated at the Zoo by creating a process whereby staff who feel victimized, vulnerable or targeted can safely share their experiences, with appropriate supports offered;
- Develop a promotion and retention policy that transparently outlines the process for promotion at the Zoo.

Zoo Diversity Statement for job ads:

The Toronto Zoo respects the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and seeks to model these principles in all that we do. We are committed to fostering an inclusive workforce where all employees feel respected, supported, and valued. We strive to create an environment that represents the rich diversity of our guests and our community and encourage applications from all qualified individuals who can contribute to enhancing our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Applications are especially encouraged from racialized persons/ persons of colour, Indigenous/ Aboriginal People of North America, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ persons, and women.

Internal culture change: support a culture of inclusivity

Strategies (from the Zoo's strategic plan)

Live our plan and continuously evolve our organization to keep pace with societal, market, and cultural changes

Implement, foster, and/or update diversity and inclusion practices among staff and volunteers to better reflect our community policy and document results

Actions Required:

- Conduct regular training on topics related to equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, qualities of a respectful workplace;
- Incorporate mandatory training for all staff and volunteers on EDI topics;
- Include EDI topics as part of onboarding and orientation for Zoo staff and volunteers (i.e. awareness of EDI policies, list of training topics for staff to take);
- Encourage staff to participate in community outreach and engagement events (i.e. fairs, information sessions about the Zoo and its role in the community);
- Include adherence to EDI policies and principles as part of the annual performance review process (i.e. check for participation in training activities and community engagement activities).

Building community: develop long-term and meaningful relationships with diverse communities in ways that lead to authentic engagement and changes the look and feel of the visitor experience at the Zoo

*“We care about our guests. Our guests are our partners in our mission; they sustain us; and they are our agents of change going out into the world. We strive to create an easily accessible, fun, safe, and comfortable experience that encourages learning and creates iconic and lifelong memories.” From
Zoo Strategic Plan*

Strategies (from Zoo Strategic Plan)

Be a welcoming place for new Canadians to “settle in” and learn about nature and our community, host newcomers and citizenship ceremonies

Become a key venue for meetings and conferences, locally and internationally

Deepen relationships throughout our community to engage new and diverse audiences

Actions required:

- Establish Zoo reputation as a gathering place for all; a “Cosmopolitan Canopy” that breaks down barriers and celebrates diversity (from Zoo strategic plan);

EDI FRAMEWORK – TORONTO ZOO

- Expand the Zoo’s partnerships with community organizations in ways that provide accessibility of opportunity for members from traditionally marginalized communities to participate in Zoo activities and programming;
- Consider ways in which the Zoo can reduce barriers to engagement for the high priority neighbourhoods within its catchment area (i.e. address transportation issues, ticket pricing, virtual Zoo experience, program pricing);
- Offer meeting space for community organizations so that they have an opportunity to experience/visit the Zoo;
- Partner with local schools to help raise awareness of zoology, environmental and conservation issues among students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds;
- Consider internship opportunities for students from local high school, colleges and universities.

Leverage Zoo location to proactively engage with local communities

“We care about our community. We are part of, not apart from, our community. They are our champions for wildlife conservation and their support of our Zoo is critical. We must be “outward-facing” and always aware of and responsive to their needs and interests.” *From Zoo Strategic Plan*

Strategy:

Develop a culture of inclusivity by creating programs and services that foster a sense of belonging among local communities

Actions Required (from Zoo Strategic Plan):

- Partner with local schools on conservation projects and Zoo events;
- Partner with community gardens to highlight plant diversity and grow food for the Zoo;
- Encourage and support staff involvement in nearby community activities such as neighbourhood organizations, boards, special events, fairs;
- Create “pop-up zoos,” concept throughout the community to increase local engagement (i.e., ambassador animals, programs, etc.);
- Create fitness and health and wellness programs for all ages with Parks Canada, UTSC, Centennial, Scarborough Health Network, TRCA, Woodgreen Settlement Services, Toronto Housing Corporation, fitness centers and others to encourage healthy living;
- Develop deeper relationships with First Nations, honoring and enacting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations;
- Build relationships with key regional groups that represent cultural diversity;
- Ensure access for all in transportation, language, facilities, and admission policies;
- Work with transit agencies to explore options for improved public transportation during regular operating hours and for evening events.

Communication: Consider EDI in material development

Strategy: Create a communications strategy targeted at refining the zoo experience from an equity lens, ensuring that marketing and promotional materials reflect inclusive communication best practices.

Actions required:

- Update the Zoo web site to include plain language, more diverse visuals and options that respect Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA) principles (i.e. large print, ability to translate content);
- Consider launching a public relations campaign (for when Zoo reopens to physical visits) that promotes the Zoo to local communities. The campaign should be sensitive to price concerns;
- Develop a calendar of events that showcase cultural events and celebrations that the Zoo can participate in or support (i.e. Diwali, Chinese New Year, Black History Month, Indigenous Awareness Month);

from Zoo Strategic Plan

- Create an iconic entry experience with a lively, highly visible “front door” virtually (e.g., website, media) and actually (guest concierge — real or virtual, multi-lingual maps, interpretation);
- Develop programs and events that reflect our diverse communities’ interests such as summer picnics, community days, farmers’ markets, wine tasting, art exhibits, pet adoptions;
- Market the Zoo as a “gathering place” for learning, recreation, fun; promote “the park in a park”;
- Provide different modes of communication, including digital technologies for multi-lingual maps, wayfinding signs, and exhibit interpretation, beginning at website and continuing throughout the Zoo.



Measuring Impact

In creating a culture that is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion, it is important that the Zoo regularly measures the efficacy of its efforts. Measurement mechanisms can include:

- Regular check ins-with staff and volunteers;
- Keep EDI on meeting agendas and create safe space for staff and volunteers to provide input/suggestions/feedback on EDI efforts;
- Conduct surveys and communicate what will happen with the information gathered;
- Create a confidential suggestion/feedback process for staff and volunteers;
- Collect demographic data and track progress towards increased diversity among staff and volunteers;
- Track the diversity profile of Zoo visitors as a result of enhanced outreach efforts;
- Quantify community partnerships to gauge impact of engagement efforts.

APPENDIX:

The Toronto Zoo's Statement of Intent regarding Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The Toronto Zoo is one of Canada's destinations of choice for visitors from all over the world. Our internal "One Toronto Zoo" brand is centered on caring for our animals, our team, our guests and our community. The value of caring is the foundation of the Zoo's work, including our internal culture.

We desire to have this caring culture be grounded in principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. We commit to collaborating with our team, guests and community to reflect and celebrate the rich diversity that makes our City and our country a beacon of hope for all those who call them home.

The Zoo is committed to enhancing the diversity of its team, and to creating an equitable, inclusive and welcoming guest experience for all. Our commitment is reflected in how we interact with and engage our team, guests, and our community.

Our team:

As the driving force behind The Zoo's mission, we value the diversity, skills and commitment of our staff and volunteers, and we will provide them with the resources and supports they need to be their authentic selves in our environment. Their pride and passion for our work is important to us and we will engage them in enhancing the environment by:

- **Establishing working groups to provide input;**
- **Offering regular and relevant training related to equity, diversity and inclusion;**
- **Providing safe spaces where they are free to share feedback, ideas, and experiences**

Our guests:

We believe that our guests are our partners and sustain us in our growth and development. We strive to create a guest experience that is accessible, fun, safe and comfortable. We desire to ensure that all guests feel welcomed. With this goal in mind, the Zoo will:

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- **Encourage guest input and feedback into its programming and services;**
- **Consider creative, innovative ways to deliver a guest experience that reflects the rich diversity of our City**

Our Community:

Recognizing that we are a part of the community, we desire to be actively engaged with our community, always being aware of and responsive to its needs and interests. We desire to:

- **Create meaningful partnerships with our community by co-creating programs and services that benefit those who wish to work for, volunteer with or participate in our Zoo experience;**
- **Be responsive to the needs of our community so that we create an experience that is inclusive and welcoming**