



REPORT FOR ACTION WITH CONFIDENTIAL ATTACHMENT

Interactive Guest Experience Opportunity - Lantern Festival

Date: September 30, 2025

To: Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo

From: Director, Guest and Site Operations

Wards: All

REASON FOR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

The report pertains to a position, plan, procedure, criteria or instruction to be applied to any negotiations carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of the City.

SUMMARY

This report recommends that the Toronto Zoo enter into a partnership with Zigong Lantern Group to host a lantern festival in Fall 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director, Guest and Site Operations, Toronto Zoo, recommends that:

1. The Toronto Zoo Board of Management authorize the Chief Transformation Officer, or their designate, to negotiate and execute a commercial agreement with Zigong Lantern Culture Industry Group Co. to deliver a lantern festival experience in 2026, including a revenue-sharing agreement and an option to extend up to three years, all on terms acceptable to the Chief Transformation Officer and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. The Toronto Zoo Board of Management direct that the confidential information contained in Confidential Attachment 1 remain confidential as it contains information about a position, plan, procedure, criteria or instruction to be applied to any negotiations carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of the City.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The financial impacts and related agreement terms are described in Confidential Attachment 1.

DECISION HISTORY

RFP 07.2025.02 Interactive Guest Experience Opportunity was released by the Toronto Zoo in February 2025. Three of the submissions received were proposals to hold a lantern festival at the Toronto Zoo, opening Fall 2026. After the evaluation process was completed, Zigong Lantern Group received the top ranking and the recommendation of the evaluation committee. The proposed lantern festival supports the key strategic priority of the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan to position the Zoo as a must-see destination, delivering customized experiences and facilities resulting in increased attendance and community engagement.

COMMENTS

Lantern festivals have proven to be very successful at many Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) institutions and often become an annual tradition. It is an opportunity to bring people together, embrace the arts and share conservation and traditional knowledge storytelling.

Zigong Lantern Group will create an immersive festival atmosphere combining lanterns, tree and ground lighting, lighted interpretive signs, music, interactive elements and entertainers. The theme will be developed in co-ordination with the Toronto Zoo and will be brought to fruition on an approximately 1.5km trail with 50 sets of lanterns in various zones, each having its own theming and music. Interactive installations, three 20-minute Chinese cultural entertainment shows, retail and food & beverage offerings will enhance the experience. The festival will run for 60 nights over a 12-week period beginning in September 2026 and will increase attendance, revenue and activate the site in the evenings after regular operating hours. To ensure the success of this event, animal welfare assessments will be completed throughout the set-up and duration of the Lantern Experience to ensure we are monitoring and addressing any impacts to animals in a timely fashion.

Zigong Lantern Group will assume responsibility for the vast majority of tasks and expenses including design, manufacturing, shipping and customs, installation, maintenance, and removal. A project manager, lantern operating staff and entertainers will be provided during the festival period. Toronto Zoo will be responsible for marketing, ticket sales, festival operation staff and supplying required electricity to the junction boxes. It is anticipated that electrical infrastructure improvements will be required on site in the first year to meet the electrical requirements. While only a one-year commitment is required it is expected that the lantern festival will be very successful and will be continued in future years.

Zigong Lantern group successfully hosts lantern festivals around the world. They have included a letter with a pledge of support for the event from the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto. They are committed to sustainable operations utilizing LED lighting, and over 90% recyclable materials. Environmental management systems in the production facility are certified as GBT 24001 (China equivalent to ISO 14001).

In partnership with Zigong Lantern Group, the Toronto Zoo will deliver a Wow for Good experience increasing revenues through a unique and engaging festival, share our conservation science stories, and embrace the arts to make community connections.

For examples of lantern festival experiences executed by Zigong Lantern Group please visit - [Home - InLight](#)

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SIGNATURE

Adam Huston
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ATTACHMENTS

Confidential Attachment 1 - Interactive Guest Experience Opportunity - Lantern Festival