

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Woodland Park Zoo to design program for individuals with disabilities *IMLS grant to fund new Volunteer Inclusion Program***

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo will create a new volunteer program to ensure that all people, including individuals with disabilities, are able to fully access the zoo's opportunities using a \$212,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). IMLS, the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums, has announced the two-year grant for the zoo's new **Volunteer Inclusion Program**, which was supported through nominations by U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.).



The zoo will partner with disability organizations in the community to provide specialized training for zoo staff and volunteer mentors to design an inclusive volunteer program and remove access barriers for individuals with disabilities. Initial partners will include Provail, University of Washington Haring Center, Northwest ADA Center and Alpha Supported Living Services.

An advisory council composed of disability partner organizations and community members will provide expert guidance on several components including the creation of an accessible and inclusive environment and the recruitment of volunteers. An inclusion coordinator—a new position at the zoo—will be hired to develop and implement partnerships, processes and trainings in support of the Volunteer Inclusion Program.

"The new Volunteer Inclusion Program is another critical step forward to making Woodland Park Zoo a place of inclusion in which people of all backgrounds and abilities feel welcome and inspired to make conservation a priority in their lives. We hope this new component of our diversity and inclusion initiative can become a model for other cultural organizations who also aspire to reduce barriers for participation of all audiences and to expand their volunteer programs," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal, PhD.

Benefits from the new program to the greater Seattle community will include an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to volunteer in a welcoming and inclusive environment, and a dedicated volunteer program for community disability organizations to direct clients who seek service opportunities and potential job and life skills development.

As part of its expanded diversity and inclusion program, Woodland Park Zoo began a three-year partnership in 2016 with Northwest ADA Center committing to accessibility site surveys of its public spaces. In 2017, the zoo's executive leadership team took a pledge through the Welcome Inclusion Network (WIN) to strive to understand and accommodate differences among the zoo's guests. This summer, the zoo held new Zoo for All events to honor families and individuals with special needs and U.S. military personnel and their families. More accessible parking spaces were added, a new zoo map was created to help identify quieter and less heavily trafficked locations, Zoomazium's nature play space was reconfigured to make it suitable for children with autism and other sensory disorders, and the new Seattle Sensory Garden was introduced for those with and without disabilities to enjoy. In the winter, a Zoo for All event will provide free access to the zoo through community partners for families experiencing homelessness or participating in foster care.

"Woodland Park Zoo has demonstrated great insight and leadership striving for inclusive practices within the cultural sector," said Gary Stobbe, MD, Clinical Associate Professor, University of Washington (UW), Director UW Medicine Adult Autism Clinic. "They have been a tremendous partner in the Welcome Inclusion Network initiative, and together with other community leaders, we have an opportunity to make great strides in economic gains and



community membership for children and adults with social, intellectual and behavioral differences.”

“As centers of learning and catalysts of community change, libraries and museums connect people with programs, services, collections, information, and new ideas in the arts, sciences, and humanities. They serve as vital spaces where people can connect with each other,” said IMLS Director Dr. Kathryn K. Matthew. “IMLS is proud to support their work through our grant making as they inform and inspire all in their communities.”

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) or call 206.548.2500.

### **About WPZ**

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo’s long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 30 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Each year, the zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives and a difference in our planet’s future ecological health and sustainability. Visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) and follow the zoo on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### **About IMLS**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s libraries and museums. We advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organizations through grant making, research, and policy development. Our vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. To learn more, visit [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov) and follow us on [Facebook](#)

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