

PRESS RELEASE

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Woodland Park Zoo to continue accessibility and inclusion work *IMLS grant to fund new Guest Inclusion Program*

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is the recipient of a \$247,965 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to create the **Guest Inclusion Program**. The program will continue to build upon the zoo's commitment to inclusion by partnering with a **Universal Design for Learning** expert to increase its capacity and cultivate its expertise through specialized training for zoo staff and volunteers about Universal for Design Learning best-practices, the assessment of on-grounds programs and, ultimately, the design of an inclusive suite of programs.

Universal Design for Learning enlists the ideas of the universal design movement in architecture and expands them to deal explicitly with **access to engagement in learning**. It is a framework for how to develop lessons and assessments with the goal of using a variety of teaching methods to give all people, regardless of ability, equal opportunities to engage.

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 Guest Inclusion Program, which follows a two-year IMLS grant awarded in 2018. Through this grant the zoo created a Volunteer Inclusion Program that ensures all people, including individuals with disabilities, are able to fully access the zoo's volunteer opportunities.

Through this new grant, the zoo will continue to partner with disability organizations in the community to provide expert guidance on several components including creating a welcoming environment that promotes accessibility and inclusion, and offers meaningful learning experiences for guests with disabilities to engage with conservation.

Woodland Park Zoo is in a unique position to authentically involve people with disabilities in the community by leveraging the relationships that were built in the development and implementation of the Volunteer Inclusion Program. The Guest Inclusion Program will meet the goal of providing inclusive and meaningful learning experiences through accomplishing two major objectives: 1) cultivating a workplace culture that values and utilizes a Universal Design for Learning lens in creating programming, planning events and communicating opportunities, and 2) modifying and creating programming that intentionally includes people with disabilities.

"The Guest Inclusion Program is another important step forward in making conservation more accessible and relatable to *all* guests, and inspiring and empowering them to take conservation actions. We are excited to build this new component of our Diversity and Inclusion initiative that we believe can become a model for other cultural organizations who also aspire to reduce barriers for participation of all audiences," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal, PhD.

Benefits from the Guest Inclusion Program will enable people living with disabilities to have accessible opportunities where they can engage in learning from programs at the zoo. The project activities will expand the zoo's capacity to foster an accessible, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, promote meaningful collaboration with the inclusion community, expand learning engagement for people living with disabilities, and deepen guests' sense of connection to Woodland Park Zoo and its community of staff and volunteers.

In 2016, Woodland Park Zoo launched a multi-year Diversity and Inclusion initiative dedicated to fostering systemic change toward the zoo becoming accessible, inclusive and relevant for all community members. That same year, Woodland Park Zoo partnered with the Northwest American with Disabilities Act Center to conduct a three-year accessibility study of the zoo's



public spaces. Since 2018, Woodland Park Zoo has made several advancements to ensure individuals of all abilities can participate and contribute meaningfully, including but not limited to: establishing an internal Diversity & Inclusion Council; establishing a Volunteer Inclusion Program to remove barriers to participation for volunteers with disabilities; creating resources and tools for staff; overhauling the zoo's accessibility webpage; developing a sensory map for zoo visitors; and offering access to sensory tools.

"The Haring Center on Inclusive Education at the University of Washington was excited to partner with Woodland Park Zoo on the Volunteer Inclusion Program and is thrilled to see the continuance of inclusion efforts beyond that project. We have been working with people with disabilities for over 50 years and have a proven track record in education, research and training," said Ilene S. Schwartz, PhD, Director, Haring Center for Applied Research and Training in Education, University of Washington. "We plan to continue to bring that experience to the table as members of the zoo's Inclusion Advisory Council. It will be exciting to see how Woodland Park Zoo expands on our guidance to make all experiences more inclusive for people with disabilities."

"As pillars of our communities, libraries and museums bring people together by providing important programs, services and collections. These institutions are trusted spaces where people can learn, explore and grow," said IMLS Director Crosby Kemper. "IMLS is proud to support their initiatives through our grants as they educate and enhance their communities."

About WPZ

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park 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. The zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the wild through more than 35 wildlife conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. 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. Visit 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.imls.gov and follow us on [Facebook](#)

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