ADVANCING
CONSERVATION
THROUGH
**EMPATHY FOR
WILDLIFE**™

Welcome Guide

2025

WOODLAND
PARK ZOO

www.zoo.org/empathy

Contact: empathy@zoo.org

Welcome to the Network

Welcome to the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife™) Network!

The ACE for Wildlife Network facilitates the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and data to drive conservation change through fostering empathy for animals and the environment that sustains them. Created in 2019, this Network is based on the foundational work done by Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo.

Due to the geographic priorities of our private donor, the Network's initial membership included the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited organizations in a seven-state region: Alaska, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin. We have since begun to expand to additional AZA accredited organizations in the U.S. These institutions are called Partner Organizations (sometimes referred to as Partners) and their staff and volunteers who have made an account through our website are considered Network Members. In 2022, we began welcoming individuals who worked at organizations outside our original seven-state region to join the Network as Affiliates.

The Network is staffed by the Advancing Empathy team at Woodland Park Zoo. They oversee the overall direction and everyday facilitation of the Network. The activities and priorities of the Network are sculpted by the Network's various committees. These committees are made up of both Network Members and Affiliates who provide a diverse range of perspectives. To learn more about these committees and how the Network is governed, we encourage you to read our bylaws on our *About Us* or *Leadership Opportunities* pages.

Additionally, U.S.-based, AZA accredited organizations interested in joining the ACE for Wildlife Network as a Partner Organization can review the application process and requirements on our website. As part of Woodland Park Zoo's Advancing Empathy Initiatives, the Advancing Empathy Grant Program operates *alongside* the ACE for Wildlife Network. All individuals and organizations are encouraged to explore project summaries and access tools and resources developed through grant projects, including webinars, workshops, and more, by visiting the Resource Library or learning more at zoo.org/empathy.

Quotes throughout this guide were collected from our 2023 Empathy Summit survey.

Network Diversity Statement

The ACE for Wildlife Network celebrates the variety of perspectives Network Members, Affiliates, and Partners bring to our work. Our diverse abilities, practices and capabilities make us stronger. By fostering a space that supports these strengths, we help our community to flourish. We support and stand with our Network Members, Affiliates, and Partners as they work to create inclusive and empathetic conservation solutions.

We believe each one of us has a role to play in furthering this work. As a Network, we are continuously working to keep ourselves accountable for embodying these values. To learn more about the work of our DEAI Committee, please visit their page on our site.

Getting Started: How to Make an Account

If you work or volunteer at a Partner Organization, you will become a Member upon the creation of an account. When creating an account, please use the email domain associated with your organization (e.g., yourname@zoo.org). These email domains are automatically preapproved and your access to the website and discussion board will be immediate.

If you do not work at a Partner Organization, sign up to become an Affiliate by clicking "Sign Up" in the top right-hand corner of our website and enter the requested information. **Please use your work email associated with your current employer when creating your account**. Individuals who work at an AZA-accredited facility should receive access to the website within 7 days of account creation. Individuals who sign up to join the Network as an Affiliate that do not work at an AZA-accredited facility will be reviewed by the Network's Membership Committee before their account is activated. As a result, access to the Network's website and resources may be delayed by an additional 1-2 weeks.
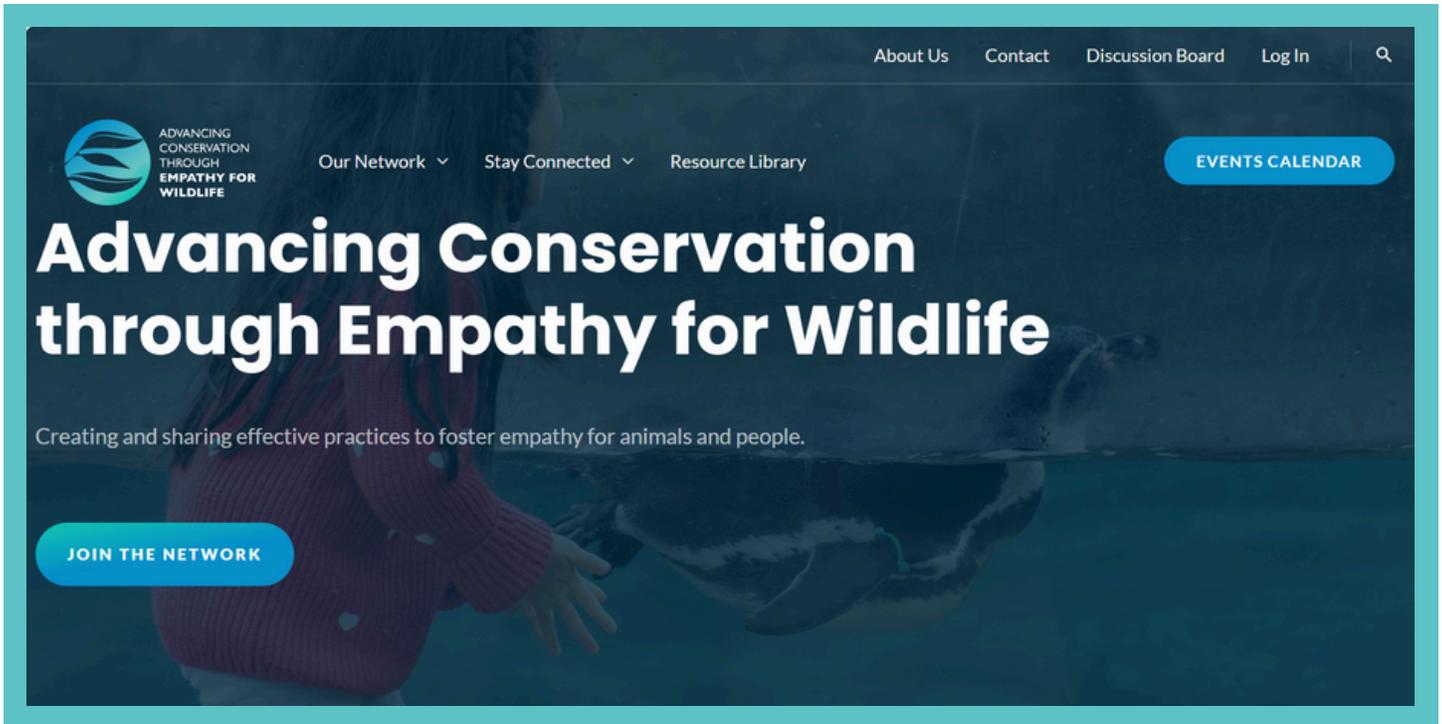
Creating an account gives you access to the ACE for Wildlife Network's discussion board and full website with event registration, the Resource Library and Network directory.

To create an account, follow the steps below:
- Navigate to www.aceforwildlife.org.
- Click on the "Log In" button in the top right corner of the screen.
- Click on "Create an Account" and follow the steps.
- You will soon have access to our website and discussion board!

If you have any questions about this process, please email us at empathy@zoo.org.

There are three main tabs for navigating our website. Under the *Our Network* tab you can find information about various leadership opportunities, our *About Us* page, as well as our *How to Join* page, which contains information on how to become a part of the Network. Under the *Stay Connected* tab you can find our *Events Calendar*, a *Contact Us* page, the *Network Directory* and a link to the discussion board. Lastly, our *Resource Library* is where you can find recordings of previous events, toolkits and documents created by our committees, literature reviews and other scholarly articles on empathy and conservation psychology, results of Partner projects and more.

New Network Partner Organizations and Members

When a zoo or aquarium becomes a Network Partner Organization, all their staff and volunteers become Network Members once they create an account on our website. For many organizations, interest in joining the Network started because staff were active in the Network as Affiliates. For those Affiliates, their accounts transition over to Member permissions when their organization becomes a Partner. Any staff who have not yet created an account can do so using their work email and will be automatically approved to access the site and discussion board. Any volunteers wishing to create an account can do so, but a staff member responsible for volunteers should email empathy@zoo.org to let us know which volunteers are creating accounts. This way, the Advancing Empathy team can approve them as they come through.

If you are unsure whether your organization is a Partner Organization, please refer to the list of organizations on our *About Us* page before emailing us at empathy@zoo.org.

Discussion Board

There are multiple ways to customize the discussion board to meet your needs. Depending on your preference, you can sort discussion board posts chronologically by selecting the "latest" view, or you can sort them by topic by selecting "category" view. We recommend sorting them by category.

By default, if you do not log into the discussion board for one week, you will get a digest email with all the content you have missed since you last logged in. However, if you wish to change the frequency with which you receive those emails, you can do so by clicking on your profile avatar in the top right corner, click on preferences and then manage your notification settings. You can also select categories and tags to follow and get notified when posts within those categories or including those tags are created.

Some Network Members and Affiliates have stated that these discussion board digests go to their spam folder. If you find yourself not receiving these emails, we recommend checking your spam or junk folder and adding them to your list of approved senders.

> "
> *The ACE for Wildlife Network helps to facilitate discussions surrounding how we talk about conservation. Sometimes these conversations get left behind in our individual organizations, but as a community of practice we can push these conversations further.*
> **-** Network Member
> "

How to Connect with Other People in the Network

One of the benefits of being part of the ACE for Wildlife Network is being able to connect with other motivated colleagues across the zoo and aquarium world. Under the *Stay Connected* tab, you can find our Network Directory. This directory includes Members and Affiliates who have opted in and may not include everyone in the Network. Those who have opted in and included items under *Ask me About* are happy to answer questions.

If you would like to be added to, removed from, or make an update to your directory information, please email us at empathy@zoo.org.

> *I appreciate that the network has given me the opportunity to learn and connect with other people from small zoos in my region who have similar structures, similar projects, and face similar challenges.*
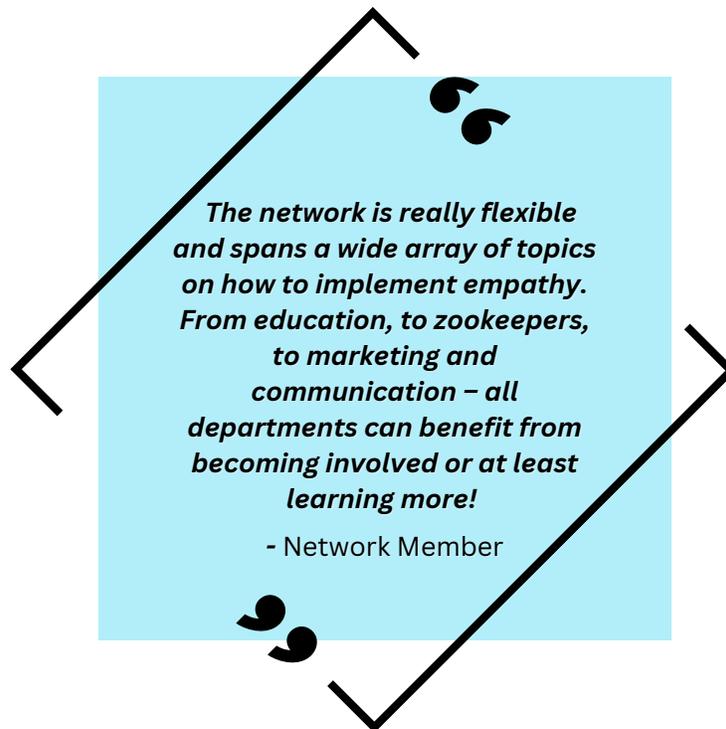>
> - Network Member

Learning About Empathy

Are you brand new to empathy work and don't know where to start? The Empathy Resources page on the website is for you! On this page you can find the foundational documents created by Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo, as well as empathy related books, articles and recordings. We recommend starting with the Seattle Aquarium's Best Practices in Developing Empathy toward Wildlife document and the Empathy Primer to familiarize yourself with the foundations of empathy work. In addition, we recommend reading the Empathy Wheel by Woodland Park Zoo to learn about how to incorporate empathy practices into programs, signage and more.

If you prefer to engage in video content to get the same information, we recommend checking out the "What is Empathy?" section of our Empathy Training Toolkit. Within this section, you will find five videos—Empathy & the ACE for Wildlife Network, Types of Empathy, Effective Empathy Practices, The Empathy Wheel, and Anthropomorphism. Each video is between 6–14 minutes long.

The network is really flexible and spans a wide array of topics on how to implement empathy. From education, to zookeepers, to marketing and communication – all departments can benefit from becoming involved or at least learning more!

- Network Member

Resource Library

Joining the Network gives you full access to our resources. Our Resource Library allows you to search through over 100 resources related to empathy and more. Within this library, you can find previous event recordings, literature reviews, toolkits, evaluation tools and more. We recommend checking out the following resources that are used the most by our Members and Affiliates or are essential for developing an understanding of effective empathy practices and their role in driving conservation change.

Starting your Empathy Journey

Empathy Primer: The case for empathy with an overview of the effective practices and the Network
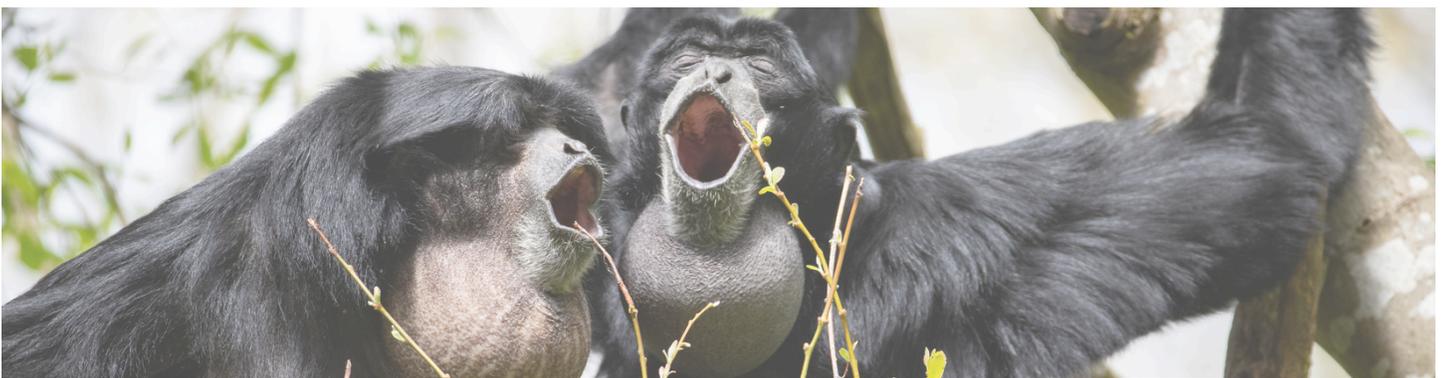- This tells you all you need to know about the ACE for Wildlife Network, the case for empathy, tools you can use to effectively infuse this work into your organization and examples of projects done by Partners.

Best Practices in Developing Empathy Toward Wildlife
- Developed by the Seattle Aquarium, this practitioner-focused document describes the six practices for developing empathy towards wildlife, how empathy can be developed across age groups, and summarizes the literature review Young, A., Khalil, K. A., & Wharton, J. (2018). Empathy for Animals: A Review of the Existing Literature. Curator: The Museum Journal, 61(2), 327–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12257. This literature review can also be found in our Resource Library.

The Empathy Wheel OR The Empathy Bridge
- Developed by Woodland Park Zoo, both of these resources are effectively the same interpretive framework but modeled in different ways. The Empathy Bridge follows a more linear story-arc format, while the Empathy Wheel is seen by some to be more flexible in its non-linear structure. Both can help individuals craft a guest interaction that fosters empathy for wildlife.

Diving Deeper

Empathy Training Toolkit
- This is our Network's most used resource! Developed by our Strategic Learning Committee, this toolkit contains videos, PowerPoints, and other training materials from across our Network that individuals and organizations use to train staff and volunteers on effective empathy practices and fostering empathy for wildlife.

Anthropomorphism and Empathy Report
- Developed by Woodland Park Zoo, this literature review explores the role of anthropomorphism and perceptions of animals in motivating conservation action and to help clarify how its use factors into fostering empathy for wildlife.

Empathy Evaluation Toolkit
- The instruments included can be used as is or adapted to meet the unique needs of the program, project, or experience being evaluated. The goal of this toolkit is to serve as a resource for all organizations and individuals interested in evaluating their use of empathy effective practices and/or their impact on audiences' empathy for wildlife, regardless of evaluation capacity or prior experience.

Building Empathy for Wildlife in Zoos and Aquariums: What We Know About Inspiring Conservation Action and Caring
- This practitioners guide was developed by the Social Ecology Lab at Stanford University and Woodland Park Zoo in an effort to understand the most current research on the relationship between empathy and conservation action. This resource page also consists of a 60-minute presentation from the authors.

Advancing Empathy Grant Program Toolkits
- Interested in learning about what Advancing Empathy grantees have created? These toolkits condense over 140 resources into ten themed toolkits. Toolkits are continually being developed and will be posted in this resource tile upon completion.

Empathy Adoption Self-Assessment Rubric
- This rubric, created by our Steering Committee, is a tool that organizations can use to reflect on the progress of empathy infusion into their organizations.

Have you or your organization created a resource related to fostering empathy for wildlife? We would love to include it in our library! We are currently working on a submission portal that anyone in our Network can use to submit a resource for consideration. If you are reading this before that portal is live on our website, send us an email at empathy@zoo.org!

Getting the Most out of the Network

As a Network, we value shared leadership and collaboration and aim to offer a variety of ways for individuals to engage. Whether you're ready to dive in immediately and get involved in Network leadership, or just looking for resources, we offer something for everyone. This Network wouldn't exist without YOU! If there is a way you would like to engage with the Network that you don't see outlined in this section, feel free to send us an email with your idea to empathy@zoo.org.

We host a variety of virtual events every year to help Network Members and Affiliates connect with one another and provide learning opportunities. Network Members and Affiliates can participate in events, access resources on our website, and utilize Network directories to connect with other professionals. You can find events on the homepage of the website as well as the Events Calendar. The Membership Committee recommends Members and Affiliates attend a minimum of four events per year to maximize their experience in the Network. We record the majority of our events, so if you happen to miss them, you can usually find the recording in our Resource Library.

In addition to our virtual events, we also host an annual Empathy Summit each February. In odd years, this gathering is in person, whereas in even years, it will occur virtually over Zoom.

Outside of events, we encourage you to use the Network discussion board to interact with other Members and Affiliates, ask questions and offer learnings. Think of it like the AZA discussion boards, but smaller! Per our Code of Conduct, the discussion board is meant to be a place of collaboration that values progress over perfection. An idea at any stage is worth posting—don't worry about it not being a perfectly polished product! Odds are, someone else in the Network is curious about the exact same thing.

> **"**
>
> *The Empathy Summit will help your organization to create connections with your guests and animals in more meaningful ways. This will give us more support in our communities.*
>
> **-** Network Member
>
> **"**

Committee Information

For those who wish to have a deeper involvement in the Network, we recommend serving on a [committee](). Requirements of serving on a committee are detailed in our bylaws. The most recent version of our Network's bylaws can be found on the *About Us* or *Steering Committee's* pages of our website. The Network currently has six committees.

Communications Committee: This committee aims to effectively facilitate communication within and about the Network in an accessible and inclusive way.

Conservation Action Committee: This committee's mission is to share a common vision to promote Partner conservation missions and motivate visitors to take conservation action.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) Committee: This committee responsibly promotes an inclusive environment within the Network and facilitates conversations that help Network Members and Affiliates feel supported to incorporate DEAI initiatives into their organizations.

Membership Committee: This committee is responsible for developing the guidelines and practices of ACE for Wildlife Network membership levels and collaborating with the other committees to nurture connections between and within membership levels as the Network grows.

Steering Committee: This committee decides the priorities, goals, structure and direction of the Network. They prioritize goals, establish a timeline and provide implementation support. Decides what committees and groups need to be in place to achieve our goals and make sure the right expertise is in the discussion.

Strategic Learning Committee: This committee drives the learning priorities of the ACE for Wildlife Network so we can collaboratively learn, build skills and share expertise.

Committee Representative Directory

Communications Committee:
- *Co-Chair*: Delanie Jellison, Santa Barbara Zoo
- *Co-Chair*: Natalie Stier, Utah's Hogle Zoo
- Brent Weston, Dakota Zoo
- Cher Vatalaro, Lehigh Valley Zoo
- Leanne Schuh, Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center
- Liz Hines, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

Conservation Action Committee:
- *Co-Chair*: Erica Carnes, Blank Park Zoo
- *Co-Chair*: Kelsey Raffel, Zoological Society of Milwaukee
- Bethanie West, Idaho Falls Zoo
- Brooke Tucker, ZooMontana
- Toby Seegert, Zoological Society of Milwaukee

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) Committee:
- *Chair*: Crystal Fox, Lake Superior Zoo
- Abigail Flores, Racine Zoo
- Alejandra Medina, Minnesota Zoo
- Julie Pickard, Zoological Society of Milwaukee
- Kirinne Slaughter, Visitor Studies Association
- Sharon Spencer, Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens

Membership Committee:
- *Co-Chair:* Autumn Russell, Akron Zoo
- *Co-Chair:* Isabelle Bieser, Zoological Society of Milwaukee
- Chris Berg, Shedd Aquarium
- Heather Harelson Nutick, CuriOdyssey

Steering Committee:
- *Interim Co-Chair*: Liz Gilles, Minnesota Zoo
- *Interim Co-Chair*: Shana Kent, Alaska SeaLife Center
- Austin Reich, Zoo Boise
- Courtney Cordova, Henry Vilas Zoo
- Hannah Tilden, Woodland Park Zoo

Strategic Learning Committee:
- *Chair*: Jessica Schellhorn, Blank Park Zoo
- Cameron Whitley, Western Washington University
- Dani Ford, ZooMontana
- Jennifer Gauble, Saint Louis Zoo
- Kelly McAdams, Clearwater Marine Aquarium
- Monica Digre, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I work at a zoo or aquarium in that is a Partner Organization but don't have an email address associated with the zoo or aquarium I'm a part of?

Use your primary email address. Once you go through the process of creating an account, please email empathy@zoo.org to let us know that you've tried to create an account and specify the email that you used. This will let us know to approve your account request.

I just joined as a Network Affiliate, does that mean my whole zoo or aquarium is a part of the ACE for Wildlife Network?

No. The Affiliate status is designated for individuals, not organizations. If you are interested in learning more about how your organization can become a Partner, please contact empathy@zoo.org.

I am a consultant; can I offer my services to others in the Network?

Per our Network Code of Conduct, individuals should not use the Network or its resources for "personal or professional promotions with the exception of peer-to-peer recommendations with a clear connection to the scope of the Network (e.g., individuals should not use their access to directories and the discussion board to promote their business(es) or services)."

I would like to convince others at my zoo or aquarium about the value of fostering empathy for wildlife. Does the Network have resources that can help me make the case?

We recommend A Case for Empathy by Kathryn Owen, our Empathy Training Toolkit, and our Anthropomorphism and Empathy Report, Building Empathy for Wildlife in Zoos and Aquariums: What we Know About Inspiring Caring and Conservation Action, and any project other Partners have done that focuses on strategic/master planning or training. Additionally, our committees are currently working on creating targeted resources to help cultivate buy-in for empathy across organizations.

Glossary of Network Terminology

You can find these definitions and more on our [Empathy Glossary](#) webpage. The page can be found on the "Empathy Resources" dropdown.

Advancing Empathy (AE) Staff: The staff at Woodland Park Zoo dedicated to managing and facilitating the ACE for Wildlife Network and the Advancing Empathy Grant Program.

Affiliate: Individuals not at a Partner Organization (such as researchers, consultants, former staff at Partner Organizations, staff at other AZA organizations, and students), but interested in the Network's mission can apply to become a Network Affiliate. They have access to Network resources, the discussion board, communications, activities and events upon the acceptance of their application by the Membership Committee. They are encouraged to serve on committees and/or assist in implementing Network activities.

Advancing Empathy Grant Program: A grant initiative led by Woodland Park Zoo that supports eligible AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums in their efforts to plan, build and expand programs that advance empathy for animals and wildlife. Learn more at [zoo.org/empathy](#).

Member: Individuals who work or volunteer at a Partner Organization and participate in the Network. They have access to Network resources, the discussion board, communications and all activities and events after creating an account. They are encouraged to serve on committees and/or assist in implementing Network activities.

Partner Organization: A zoo or aquarium accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) within the United States that has taken all the required steps to join the Network and is committed to empathy as a strategy for conservation.