

# ACE for Wildlife Network

## *Boilerplate Library – May 2026*

### What is boilerplate?

Boilerplate is short, standardized language that can be reused over and over as needed for communications purposes. Boilerplate consists of blocks of pre-written copy (text) that can be incorporated into written materials such as websites, blogs, handouts, or grant proposals. Boilerplate is written to be accessible for many different audiences.

### How do I use this?

Boilerplate is available to use as needed. This toolkit contains boilerplate language in both shorter and longer wordcounts. You are welcome to use this language for your communications about empathy practices. In general, boilerplate is meant to be used as-is, without editing or revising, but feel free to cut and paste the sections of boilerplate that work best for your communications needs.

## **About Empathy Practices**

### ***(Longer version)***

Every year accredited zoos and aquariums connect millions of people with animals, nature, and each other. By providing close encounters with animals, our institutions are uniquely positioned to help visitors feel empathy for wildlife, increase understanding of how animals are cared for, and encourage visitors to actively participate in our conservation efforts.

Emerging behavioral science shows that feeling empathy may be necessary to motivate someone to act on behalf of another. Zoos and aquariums inspire empathy for wildlife by helping people perceive, understand, and care about the lived experiences and perspectives of animals.

Empathy practices in zoos and aquariums combine knowledge and emotion during a visitor's experience, through techniques such as talking about animals as unique individuals or modeling caring behavior through choice and control handling and presentation techniques. These experiences can motivate visitors to take positive action on behalf of animals in human care and in the wild, and work to sustain the environment we all depend on.

### ***(Shorter version)***

Every year zoos and aquariums help millions of visitors learn about and feel empathy for wildlife. We can motivate our guests to actively support animal wellbeing and conservation by using empathy practices to connect people with the experiences and perspectives of wildlife.

## History of the ACE for Wildlife Network

### ***(Longer version)***

As zoos and aquariums seek to motivate our visitors to act in ways that benefit animals in human care and in the wild, we are learning through emerging behavioral science that feeling empathy may be a necessary step between learning and taking conservation action.

From 2015-2017, Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle Aquarium, and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium partnered through the [Measuring Empathy Collaborative Assessment Project](#) (MECAP) to define empathy for wildlife and develop tools to measure it.

While implementing empathy practices over the next four years, Woodland Park Zoo recognized how much there still was to learn. The zoo saw an opportunity for sector-wide growth by convening organizations that were working to achieve their missions through empathy practices. A needs assessment identified learning and collaboration opportunities that became the foundation of the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network, launched in 2019 with the support of private funding.

Today, over 30 US-based zoos and aquariums (Network Partner Organizations) and a global community of more than 1,200 Members and Affiliates continue to learn together, creating and sharing effective practices that promote empathy for animals and people.

### ***(Shorter version)***

Emerging behavioral science is demonstrating that feeling empathy may help motivate visitors at zoos and aquariums to act in ways that benefit animals in human care and in the wild. In 2019, Woodland Park Zoo founded the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network to convene hundreds of zoo and aquarium professionals to learn, create, and share effective practices that promote empathy for animals and people.

## About ACE for Wildlife Network Participation

### *(Longer version)*

Joining the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network is an opportunity to share knowledge, build professional skills, and work in coordination with a highly collaborative zoo and aquarium community to promote empathy for animals and people. Network participants have access to many benefits, from support and training for professional growth, to a national platform that allows zoos and aquariums of all sizes to influence their field through the innovative work that they are piloting.

The ACE for Wildlife Network is made up of Partner Organizations, Members, and Affiliates.

### Partner Organizations

These are AZA accredited organizations based in the United States that have formally committed to fostering empathy for wildlife as a conservation strategy, recognize the ACE for Wildlife Network as a leader in promoting that strategy, and have been accepted as a Partner through the Network's application process. We have over 30 Partner Organizations across the United States engaged in this work and you can learn more about them [on our Network website](#).

### Members

Any staff at a Partner Organization can become a Member by creating an account [on our website](#) using their work email. Volunteers can also be involved in the Network. Members have access to all of our resources, events, our discussion board, as well as leadership and professional development opportunities.

### Affiliates

Individuals who are not at a Partner Organization and are interested in learning about empathy work may join the Network as an Affiliate. Affiliates are welcomed into the Network monthly by our Membership Committee. Once accepted, Affiliates have access to all of our resources, events, our discussion board, as well as leadership and professional development opportunities. Affiliates may also apply for scholarships to present on empathy projects at professional conferences.

## **Advancing Empathy Grant Program**

(Longer version)

Woodland Park Zoo's Advancing Empathy (AE) Initiative was launched in 2019 to expand the use of empathy practices and build community and collaboration with other AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums. As part of this Initiative, Woodland Park Zoo was privately funded to develop a grant program to build capacity for fostering empathy for wildlife in accredited zoos and aquariums across Alaska, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.

In 2025, the Advancing Empathy Grant Program expanded beyond this original seven-state region and became open to selected US-based, AZA-accredited organizations with a strong record of engagement in the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network. This includes active participation in hosted events, sharing empathy-focused work, and helping shape and lead the growing community of practice.

The AE Grant Program supports organizational efforts to plan, build, and expand practices and programs that foster empathy for animals and wildlife. Through grant support, recipients are developing the resources and expertise they need to increase the long-term impact of empathy practices and have a lasting influence on their organization and their peers.

To date, the program has granted \$9 million to support 95 grant projects with 32 organizations that have developed and evaluated initiatives ranging from formal programs for children to infusing empathy into biofact usage, exhibit design, and interpretive plans. Grantees also benefit from the program's collaborative nature and cross-institution knowledge sharing, which happens during grant periods, across grant rounds, and in professional forums such as peer-reviewed journals and panels at the AZA's conferences.

AE grant recipients also share best practices, lessons learned, and resources developed through their grants with the ACE for Wildlife® Network. The Network is a global learning community that facilitates the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and data to drive conservation change through fostering empathy for animals and the environment that sustains them. This amplification allows grant outcomes to support collaboration among all zoos and aquariums working to inspire conservation action.

(Shorter version)

Woodland Park Zoo's Advancing Empathy (AE) Grant Program supports AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums across the US that are developing programming and expanding practices that foster empathy for wildlife. Grantees also share their learning with the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife®) Network to amplify and support empathy practice collaboration among the wider zoo and aquarium community.