



Expansion plan

The ACE for Wildlife Network has begun expanding past the original 7-state region (Alaska, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin). Expansion will continue on a flexible basis that allows interested applicants to choose their level of participation through either an individual Affiliate status or consideration as a full Network Partner Organization.

The first step to joining the Network is to join as a Network Affiliate (for interested individuals) by filling out the Affiliate application and getting approved. If an institution is ready to commit to Partnership, it can review the requirements below. If their application is approved by the Membership Committee, they are considered a Partner Organization. When an individual's organization becomes a Partner Organization, their individual affiliation will transfer to Member status in the Network.

In order to apply to be a part of the ACE for Wildlife Network as a Partner Organization, a zoo or aquarium:

- Must be accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)
- Must be located within the United States (US)
- Must have had at least two individuals at the organization engaged in the Network as Affiliates for at least six months
- Must reach out to empathy@zoo.org expressing their interest in joining as a Partner Organization. If an organization is eligible, the AE team will send an application link.

As the Network intends to expand slowly and strategically, priority consideration will be given to organizations that show strength in the following categories:

- The number of staff participating as Affiliates (contact empathy@zoo.org for confirmation of the number of Affiliates to submit with your application)
- The extent to which organizational empathy infusion project(s) is already underway (to be described in their application)
- The level of involvement in the Network by your organization's Affiliate(s). Have they:
 - Presented at a Network event or on an empathy panel at AZA Conferences
 - Submitted a resource to the Network website or a toolkit
 - Shared a project in Empathy Matters
 - Have a staff member who serves on a committee or hosts a discussion board channel (aka Special Interest Group)
 - Have staff members that have been active on the discussion board

- The size and type of organization you represent to ensure balance of voices in the Network. For size, the committee will look at the current make-up of small/medium/large organizations to determine what size may be eligible for a potential bonus point to help with balance. For organizations other than zoos (e.g. aquariums, aviaries, insectariums), they will receive one bonus point as long as the Partners continue to be primarily zoos.
- A strong response to the application question about why the organization is interested in joining as a Partner.

Application Process

As outlined above, an organization will reach out to empathy@zoo.org to express interest in becoming a partner. AE staff will confirm that they are:

- A US-based, AZA accredited organization
- Have at least two Affiliates who have been involved for at least six months prior to this inquiry

If they do not meet the above criteria, AE will explain why they cannot (yet) apply. If they do meet the above criteria, AE will send them an application link and let them know the deadline for applying and the timeline for consideration. As part of the application, prospective Partners must have organizational leadership sign [the ACE for Wildlife Network's Letter of Commitment](#).

Applicants may apply for Partner status year-round, with the Membership Committee reviewing applications twice a year. Applications should be submitted by the end of March and September for consideration in April and October, respectively.

The Membership Committee will use the following rubric to assess applications:

Expansion Review Criteria Matrix			
Category	Minimal Criteria Met	Somewhat Above Minimal Criteria	High level of Achievement
# of Affiliates	2 Affiliates	At least 3 Affiliates or 10% of staff are Affiliates for small organizations if that number is less than 3 Affiliates.*	More than 5 Affiliates or over 10% of staff for small organizations if that number is less than 5 Affiliates*
Empathy Infusion Projects Underway	One example in a beginning phase	2-3 examples in various stages, with at least 1 more than introductory	4+ examples, and/or one in advanced stage of implementation
Presented+submitted a resource+serves on a committee + acts as SIG host+Newsletter feature = points for this category	1 of these options fulfilled	2-4 of these options fulfilled	5+ of these options fulfilled
Has been active on the discussion board	1 post or response	2-3 posts and/or responses	4+ posts and/or responses
Size of Applicant staff	N/A	N/A	+1 if the organization helps to balance out the ratio of small to medium to large organizations
Type of organization	N/A	N/A	+1 for facilities that focus on non-mammalian taxa
Reviewer response to "Why does your organization want to join as a Partner?"	Weak response, raises concerns	Adequate response, no concerns	Really positive response, exciting contributions/opportunities for the Network

Upon acceptance as a Network Partner, each organization:

- Must have at least two staff attend the first Network onboarding session that occurs after their acceptance. It is recommended, but not required, that these staff are the points of contact
- Must have one of the Points of Contact post an introductory hello on the ACE for Wildlife Discussion Board
- Is encouraged to have at least one staff member attend or watch an introductory empathy training to ensure that they have a base level understanding of effective empathy practices and the ACE for Wildlife Network
 - These trainings can include anything within the ACE for Wildlife Network Empathy Training Toolkit, [Best Practices in Developing Empathy Towards Wildlife](#), [Empathy Executive Session](#), or a Seattle Aquarium empathy workshop. If you have any questions about what counts as a training, please email empathy@zoo.org
- Is encouraged to have Members attend at least 4 Network events (including recordings) per year

In the initial quarter as a Partner, one of the Points of Contact should confirm to empathy@zoo.org that they have posted an introductory hello on the discussion board and have participated in an onboarding session.

Maintaining Partner Status

Points of Contact will be notified each September whether they are on track to meet Partner status commitments for the year. These commitments include:

- Retaining AZA accreditation
- Maintaining two Network Points of Contact
- Having two staff attend a Network onboarding session upon acceptance as Partners (if not already having done so as Affiliates)
- Participate in the Network through one or more of the following in each calendar year: serve on a committee, serve on a working group, be a SIG Channel Host, or present at/help facilitate a Network event, etc.
- Supporting staff participation in the two annual all-Network meetings (February and October)
- Contributing to shared learning about empathy projects (e.g., presenting at a Network event, contributing a resource to the Network library)

The following participation options are not required but strongly encouraged:

- Having staff participate in at least 4 Network events (including recordings) per year

- Supporting staff participation in other Network opportunities, when travel funding and/or virtual option(s) are available

Partners should work to remedy any identified shortcomings by the end of the following quarter (i.e., the end of the year following notification in September). If they have not improved in that quarter window, they will enter a quarter-long probationary period (i.e., Q1 of the following year) and will need to work with the Advancing Empathy Team or a Network mentor (e.g., Empathy Champion, committee member or chair) to outline steps to regain their full status.

If an organization fails to meet requirements for sustaining Partner status by the end of the probationary period (i.e., the end of March), their status in the ACE for Wildlife Network will be suspended. Once suspended, organizations and their staff will not be eligible for Network votes or for travel funding. Individuals may continue to be involved through the Affiliate status. An organization interested in returning must reapply to become a Partner Organization for consideration by the Membership Committee at a future date.

Engagement Tracks

- *Network Affiliate*: Individuals who are outside of the Network (such as researchers, consultants, former staff at Partner Organizations, staff at other AZA organizations, students, etc.), but interested in the Network’s mission. They will have access to Network resources, the discussion board, communications, activities and events upon the acceptance of their application by the Membership Committee. They may serve on committees, but will not have voting rights in all-Network motions.
- *Partner Organization (also “Partner”)*: A zoo or aquarium accredited by AZA that has taken all the required steps to join the Network and is committed to empathy as a strategy for conservation. This is **only** open to institutions, not individuals. Individuals that are employed or volunteer at a Partner Organization are Network Members. Partner Organizations can have staff serve on committees, have voting rights, must sign the Partner Organization Letter of Commitment, and any other membership determinations that the Membership Committee details.

Definitions for consideration

- *Experience (with relation to empathy practices)*: Having prior exposure to the use of empathy/social-emotional learning as a conservation tool.
- *Leadership*: Someone who has the authority to speak on behalf of the organization.
- *Network event*: Events organized by the ACE for Wildlife Network; such as in-person/virtual Summits, learning groups, October Network meetings, and social gatherings. Committee meetings do not count as Network events.