

ZOO CAREERS

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify and describe various careers within the zoo community.
- Students will be able to explain the avenues necessary to undertake a career in the zoo community.
- Students will understand the importance of research within the zoo community.

Background:

There are many types of career opportunities within zoos and aquariums from which your students can choose. These activities are set up for them to not only be exposed to these careers, but also to be able to understand how zoos work on the inside, and how research fits into that picture.

The work environment in zoos is unique. Animals that reside in zoos need care seven days a week. Not only do zoos care for collections of all sorts of animals, but personnel also deal with the public on a daily basis. More than 110 million people visit zoos annually. Furthermore, there is more to a zoo than just the animals and the keepers. A zoo requires many different staff members to operate: Educators, Directors, Maintenance, Human Resources, and Marketing.

There are some requirements for positions within zoos. Of course, accountants need an accounting degree and veterinarians need 4 years of professional vet school after college. However, for research, education, and keeper positions the requirements may not be so clear. A desire to work with animals is a definite requirement. Some experience is necessary, but a positive attitude and a love of learning about these animals may get one's foot in the door. Generally, a four-year degree in animal science, marine biology, zoology, wildlife management, or something similar is needed for most entry-level animal husbandry positions. Many keepers, researchers, and zoo educators have these backgrounds, but some positions require even more schooling. For instance, most directors, curators, and researchers are working on or already have their Masters or Doctorate degrees.

Here is a listing of several different types of positions within zoos. If you and your students can come up with more, please add them to the list.

Positions in Zoos:

Director/Chief Operating Officer – This person executes policies as directed by the governing authority of the zoo. The director is also responsible for the institution's operation and plans for future development.

Finance Manager – The Finance Manager takes care of the institution's finances, including the payment of bills, purchasing, investments, and the preparation of financial

statements. This person more than likely has many people working for him/her such as **accountants, account managers, payroll managers, accounts payable staff, accounts receivable staff**, etc.

Wildlife Director – This position is responsible for overseeing the Wildlife Department.

Curators – These people are responsible for various areas of the Zoo. The **General Curator** oversees the entire animal collection and animal management staff. The **Animal Curator** manages a certain portion of an institute's animal collection, such as birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. The **Curator of Exhibits** creates exhibits and assists in the design of graphics to educate people about the exhibits. The **Curator of Horticulture** is in charge of all the plants on zoo grounds. The **Curator of Education** plans and implements the institution's education programs. Several other people may work for this curator, such as **Reservationists, Education Sales Coordinators, Program Supervisors** and **Instructors**. The **Curator of Research** supervises research projects, serves as a liaison between an institution and the academic community, and publishes articles in scientific journals. The **Curator of Conservation** oversees the institution's conservation activities, including field projects. Many of the curators will work closely with the **Conservation Biologist** who is out in the field (Africa, Asia, etc.) researching the animals in their natural habitats.

Veterinarian – This doctor is responsible for the healthcare program for the animal collection and the maintenance of those animals' health records. A **Veterinary Technician** will assist the veterinarian.

Registrar – The registrar maintains computer records on the animal collection and applies for permits and licenses to hold or transport the animals. This person is the record keeper for the whole zoo, tracking all births in the zoo and the history of animals transferred to the zoo.

Lead Keeper – This person supervises a section or department of the institution. He/She also provides scheduling and training for keepers. The lead keeper is in charge of a certain group of animals (for instance, lead keeper of elephants and carnivores), and is assisted in the care of the animals by the **keepers**.

Commissary/ Diet Manger – This manager is in charge of the food that is fed to all the animals in the zoo. He/She also participates in nutritional research, and formulates diets for new animals within the zoo. Along with a staff of **Diet Technicians** and **Diet Supervisors**, the Commissary/ Diet manager will prepare and maintain all the diets for the animals in the zoo.

Operations Director/ Manager – This person is responsible for the daily operation of the institution's physical plant and maintenance. This person makes sure all the buildings and parts of the zoo are running properly, and they usually have help from **Maintenance Technicians**.

Public Relations/ Affairs Manager/ Director – This manager promotes the institution, its missions, and its programs to the public, via the media. This person may also have a **Public Relations Assistant** who helps in dealing with the public and media outlets.

Development Director/ Officer – This position develops and manages fund-raising activities, which can include writing grant proposals and attracting corporate sponsors, as well as soliciting private donations. The Development Director also has many **Development Assistants** who may organize the fundraisers or solicit the funds from people and companies.

Marketing Director/ Manager – This director creates advertising campaigns and other activities to increase public awareness of the institution. The Marketing Director could have many **Account Supervisors**, who help with each specific campaign. A **Special Events Manager/Coordinator** works with the Marketing Manager to develop and implement events to attract visitors throughout the year.

Membership Director/ Manager – The Membership Director is responsible for maintaining and increasing institution memberships for families and individuals, and designing special events for these members. He/She may also have **Assistants**, people helping him/her answer telephone requests for memberships, promoting memberships, and dealing with the members on a day-to-day basis.

Gift Shop Manager – This person manages the staff and all aspects of the gift shop operation from buying products to designing shops. The Gift Shop Manager could have several people working for him/her such as **Assistant Managers, Buyers, and Clerks**.

Visitor Service Manager – This manager supervises the staff and facilities that cater to the visiting public such as concessions and restrooms. Many different people could work for this manager including a **Food Services Manager, Distribution Manager, Cleaning Services Supervisors, Custodians, and Food Service Workers**.

Personnel Manager/ Director (Also known as Human Resources Director) – This manager is responsible for all personnel/employee matters, including hiring, payroll, insurance, and tax matters. Generally, this manager has people working below him/her as assistants.

Volunteer Coordinator – This coordinator is responsible for recruiting, training, and maintaining a staff of volunteers/docents. The Volunteer Coordinator schedules docents for on- and off-grounds activities, and keeping docents aware of developments as they relate to the public.

Note: These positions are very general. Each zoo has its own organizational approach and will not necessarily reflect this list. Lion Country Safari's organization includes many of these positions, but also includes others as well.

ZOO CAREERS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Career Skills

Materials:

- 1) Descriptions of Careers and Careers Checklist for each student

Time Frame:

45 minutes

Procedure:

- 1) Pass out the Career Skills Checklist sheet to the students. Have them work on them individually, but let them know that you will be discussing it later.
- 2) After they have completed the sheets, go through each career and what skills it would entail. Discuss with the students their reasoning behind what skills they believe each career needs.
- 3) Have a few students read to the class what career they would choose, and why.
- 4) Wrap up this activity by discussing with the students what is necessary (experience, education, or skills) for a career within the zoo community.

Career Skills Checklist

Here are a few of the different careers you can find within the zoo. Think about what each job entails and if it involves skills with People (P), Animals (A), Things (T), or Ideas (I). Label each job with the skill or skills you think are necessary for it.

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| Director/Chief Operating Officer _____ | Animal Curator _____ |
| Veterinarian _____ | Registrar _____ |
| Curator of Research _____ | Commissary/ Diet Manager _____ |
| Conservation Biologist/ Zoologist _____ | Maintenance Technician _____ |
| Lead Keeper _____ | Volunteer Coordinator _____ |
| Operations Director/ Manager _____ | Curator of Exhibits _____ |
| Finance Manager _____ | Distribution Manager _____ |
| General Curator _____ | Curator of Conservation _____ |
| Curator of Horticulture _____ | Education Instructor _____ |
| Public Relations Director _____ | Development Director _____ |
| Marketing Director _____ | Special Events Coordinator _____ |
| Visitor Service Manager _____ | Human Resources Manager _____ |
| Gift Shop Manager _____ | Membership Director _____ |
| Curator of Education _____ | Accountant _____ |

Review this list. Choose a career you feel you would be best suited for and explain why. Be sure to consider what you enjoy doing as well as those areas in which you excel.

ZOO CAREERS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

2. Let's Run the Zoo

Directions: As a group, select one person to represent each of the following zoo professionals: Director, Chief Financial Officer, Wildlife Director, Veterinarian, Animal Curator, Education Curator, Public Relations Director, Maintenance Director, Food and Beverage Manager, Gift Shop Manager, Landscaping Manager, Entertainment Manager, and staff members for each department. Role-play the following situations, offering advice and input according to your particular job description: *Note:* If you like, you may switch job descriptions for each situation, so that everyone has an opportunity to try various roles.

Situation #1: An animal has suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from your zoo.

Situation # 2: Attendance is down 25% this year from last year.

Situation # 3: Your zoo has just opened a new exhibit.

Situation # 4: Attendance at your zoo is average, but the restaurant and gift shops are losing money.

Situation # 5: Two people have tripped over a crack in the sidewalk near the carousel.

Situation # 6: Your education department has just created an exciting new educational program.

Situation # 7: You would like to give employee raises, but your zoo has not made a profit this year.

ZOO CAREERS WORKSHOP

Meets the Following Applied Technology Strands, Standards, and Benchmarks:

- Planning:** 1.1 Applies planning methods to decision-making related to life and work rules.
- Management:** 2.1 Employs management techniques to manage projects and enterprises related to work and life roles.
2.2 Applies marketing and promotional techniques to products and services in a business or social setting.
2.3 Demonstrates knowledge and abilities necessary as a contract employee or to initiate and maintain a service or product-based business.
- Finance:** 3.1 Demonstrates financial planning ability and decision-making related to work and life roles.
- Technical and Production Skills:** 4.1 Organizes work assignments by demonstrating product techniques.
- Technology:** 5.1 Integrates academic and applied technology principles to the workplace.
5.2 Applies appropriate technology to an industry to solve technical and production problems.
- Labor:** 6.1 Demonstrates an understanding of labor issues related to the work place.
- Community Issues:** 7.1 Analyzes and communicates the impact that industry and the community have on each other and on the individual.
- Health, Safety, and Environment:** 8.1 Analyzes and communicates health and safety issues in the workplace and community.
- Personal Conduct:** 9.1 Demonstrates an understanding of professional conduct in personal roles, as well as in work and industry.