



# Funds Distribution Report

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**Recipient Organization:**  
**Woodland Park Zoo**

**Address:**  
5500 Phinney Ave N  
Seattle, WA 98103

**Contact:**  
(206) 548-2500  
<http://www.zoo.org>

**Organization's General Goals:**  
Woodland Park Zoo saves wildlife and inspires everyone to make conservation a priority in their lives. We are a non-profit zoo dedicated to saving animals and habitat.

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<b>Date of Award:</b>	<b>Level:</b>
2021 Q1	\$2,501 to \$5,000

For more information, please read the attached report from Woodland Park Zoo.

8802 27th Ave NE  
Tulip, WA 98271

**TulipCares.org**

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Last year, Woodland Park Zoo ([www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org)) launched a new project to prepare the zoo to co-create responsive and relevant programming with communities historically underserved by the zoo. Through the generous funding of Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund and other funders, we sought to (1) increase our staff's ability to accomplish this goal through cultural competency training and other internal activities, (2) develop a deep and collaborative partnership with two communities historically underserved by the zoo (Rainier Beach, as defined by zip code 98118, and Beacon Hill, as defined by zip code 98108), and (3) undergo a collaborative planning process with these communities to co-design programming that is responsive and relevant to the self-identified needs of the community and incorporates the mission priorities of the zoo. This report describes the key activities, successes and changes made to the project, **which impacted more than 1,260 community members last year.**



## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Between January and June 2021, project staff at Woodland Park Zoo, in collaboration with our project partner Antioch University Seattle, conducted listening sessions with more than 90 staff across multiple zoo departments including senior and executive leaders to learn more about past community engagement work, learnings from that work, and visions, goals and considerations for future work related to the co-design process. High-level feedback gathered from these internal listening sessions included:

- Authentic community engagement takes time and is collaborative and reciprocal. Long-term engagement is necessary to achieve conservation action.
- The zoo does not always have to be in the “leadership” role in partnerships. It can serve as a supporter, facilitator or connector.
- Partnerships have ended because of the end of funding or staff turnover. The zoo needs strategies to ensure that relationships last beyond a single individual or grant period.

During these internal listening sessions, the project team also mapped the zoo's existing relationships and engagement experience in the South Seattle area, identifying connections with approximately 200 organizations, businesses, and neighborhood groups in Beacon Hill and Rainier Beach that might influence or be affected by the project.

Externally, we concentrated our work on developing the foundation of trust-based relationships that are needed to co-create and implement empathy-focused, culturally relevant programming. Through the AmeriCorps VISTA program, three paid Community Collaborators were brought on to support the outreach and relationship-building with community partners as well to support external listening session and focus group preparation and implementation. The Community Collaborators were recruited from the Rainier Beach and Beacon Hill communities by sharing a one-page information flyer and a job description with Woodland Park Zoo Community Access Partners (local nonprofit partners that provide social services to under-resources groups) and on the neighborhoods' Facebook groups. Each Community Collaborator has a strong background in community engagement and in working directly with the communities in South Seattle.

From May through August 2021, we worked with the Community Collaborators to reach out to the 200 previously identified organizations, businesses and neighborhood groups to assess stakeholders' interests, attitudes, influence, resources and needs for project participation. Overall, 95 organizations expressed interest in getting involved, and ultimately, **we conducted listening sessions with 20 community-based organizations in summer 2021 and with approximately 60 individual community members and residents in the fall and winter 2021.**

During these listening sessions, project staff gathered feedback on organizations' and individuals' past experiences with the zoo, their interests and priorities, and their ideas for collaboration with the zoo. Through this process we learned more about barriers community members have experienced in accessing the zoo and zoo programming, including the high cost of entry, transportation limitations and the lack of diverse representation of zoo staff and zoo promotional materials. We also explored ideas for making zoo programming more accessible and relevant to the priorities of the neighborhoods, including creating mentorship and professional development opportunities for youth and connecting conservation to local environmental justice issues. The critical information we gained during these listening sessions provides a foundations for us to co-create and implement responsive, relevant programming in the coming year and beyond.

During listening sessions, community members emphasized the importance of the zoo having an ongoing presence in the community. They explained that this would demonstrate a sincere interest and intent to meet and get to know community members and organizations and support community-led priorities. To act on this feedback, project staff attended five community-based events (including the Tilth Farm Fest, Duwamish River Festival and Rainier Beach Boo Bash) to show support for Southeast Seattle organizations, share information about the project and recruit participants for program co-creation. At these events, **we spoke with over 1,200 community members about the project and shared 430 arts-based educational activities with attending children.**



## **CHANGES AND CHALLENGES**

Our Learning & Innovation Department, the lead department on the project, experienced several leadership transitions in 2020 and 2021, which led to a delayed hiring process for other project positions including the manager and coordinator. This delay was further complicated by staffing challenges within our People & Culture (Human Resources) department, including losing employees through attrition given the increased pressures of the pandemic and having to reassign remaining staff to focus on the creation and management of an intensive contact tracing and monitoring system for zoo employees.

As a result of these hiring delays, we were not able to implement the cultural competency training in 2021. However, last year the zoo initiated a search process for two new positions to assist the zoo with an analysis of current diversity, equity, access and inclusion (DEAI) -related efforts and to create an organizational-level DEAI action plan for the next five or more years: a new DEAI Executive Advisor and an external Culturally Responsive consultant. The zoo hired Marvin Williams as the DEAI Executive Advisor in January 2022, and shortly thereafter decided to contract with Alina Santillan of Seattle Arts & Culture for Antiracism, whose work, of all consultant candidates, best aligned with the goals of the project and community values. Although we are behind in implementing the cultural competency trainings and other staff ability-building activities, we believe that integration of these activities into the zoo's broader DEAI approach will enhance their outcomes and help ensure their longevity.

At the recommendation of our project partners at Antioch University Seattle, who bring expertise in participatory design methods, we decided to make changes to the overall model we are using for community engagement and program co-design. Instead of drawing only from the zoo's existing partnerships to identify an organizational partner at the start of the project, we broadened our approach to ensure that we included organizations with whom the zoo had no prior relationship. This approach allows for partnership opportunities to arise more organically and will help ensure the co-designed programming will represent the needs of the community more authentically, which is the project's most important outcome. Because of this shift, we spent more time attending community events and building new relationships over the past year, which changed our overall project timeline. As a result, we have not yet selected the organizational partner(s) with whom we will undergo programming co-design nor began the programming and evaluation plan design process.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Through coordination with the DEAI executive advisor and external Culturally Responsive consultant, planning for the internal cultural competency training will resume. We anticipate that these training sessions will be held from March through August 2022. The training sessions will be made available to all zoo staff and will address topics such as anti-racism in programs and how to shift internal culture and norms toward more equitable practices.

Using the findings from the listening sessions, and building from the relationships the project team has strengthened through those conversations and participation at community events over the past year, we plan to begin implementing "responsive programming" in early 2022, meaning we will offer existing zoo programs that have been modified to be responsive to specific community interests and priorities. One example of an existing program that aligns with an identified community interest—nature-based early childhood learning—is Nature Play training for educators and caregivers. Woodland Park Zoo currently offers Nature Play training that is open to a wide audience and offered in English. To make this programming more responsive to Beacon Hill and Rainier Valley community interests, we are now exploring the possibility of recruiting South Seattle educators and offering

bilingual Nature Play workshops. Later this year, we will also begin to co-design new programs and plan to pilot those experiences in 2023. This will include working in collaboration with committed community partner(s) to identify program outcomes and draft an evaluation plan to measure the extent to which community members view the co-designed programs as responsive and relevant to their own interests and priorities.

We are grateful for the generous support of the Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund and look forward to continued partnership. For any questions on this report, please contact Anna Johnson, Grant Writer, at [anna.johnson@zoo.org](mailto:anna.johnson@zoo.org).