



President & Chief Executive Officer

Position Specification

The Organization and Opportunity

The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) seeks an experienced President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to lead the organization. The President & CEO will be responsible for providing a clear vision and strategy for the Zoo, which is consistently ranked as one of America's best small zoos and is renowned for its outstanding beauty. The Zoo is the top attraction in the county and was listed in TripAdvisor's Travelers' Choice for three years. It has been voted Best Family Fun Spot, Best After School Program, and Best Kids' Summer Camp by the readers of the Santa Barbara Independent. Santa Barbara Zoo has been the second most popular attraction in three counties for eight years, second only to the international destination, Hearst Castle. Additionally, the Zoo is consistently listed among the Best Places to Work by Pacific Coast Business Times. As a beloved community organization, the Santa Barbara Zoo endeavors to significantly impact conservation efforts, educate and inspire the public, set high standards for animal care, and provide an exceptional visitor experience.

The Santa Barbara Zoo is dedicated to preserving, conserving, and enhancing the natural world and its living treasures through education, research, and recreation.

Situated on 30 acres of land with stunning views of the Pacific Ocean, the Andree Clark Bird Refuge, and the Santa Ynez mountains, the Santa Barbara Zoo attracts almost half a million visitors yearly. The Zoo is home to more than 400 animals of over 100 species, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, fishes, and invertebrates. The animals live in open, naturalistic habitats that encourage natural behaviors and provide daily enrichment activities. The Zoo also features lush, beautiful botanic gardens with diverse species, including native plants and trees, cacti and succulents, ornamentals, exotic species, and rare specimen plants. Visitors enjoy the many different styles of plantings that range from formal gardens and lawns to those that recreate specific habitats. Guests can enhance their experience by learning about animals and their habitats, and the Zoo is committed to being a leader in local and global conservation efforts while providing exceptional animal care and educational experiences. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).





Mr. Rich Block has been providing strong leadership to the Santa Barbara Zoo since 1998 and will continue until his retirement in early 2025. Under his guidance, the Zoo has achieved several significant milestones. It became the first zoo on the West Coast to receive the Certified Autism Center designation, created California's first licensed outdoor preschool program, and worked with California condors as one of only six accredited zoos in the country, helping to bring them back from the brink of extinction. In the last six years alone, the Zoo has undertaken 18 capital projects worth \$6.5 million, improving exhibits, modernizing facilities, and enhancing the experience for animals and visitors alike. The team is leading [a pioneering conservation partnership with California State University Channel Islands](#) (CSUCI) to establish a Zoo-owned and managed conservation center on the CSUCI campus. This partnership is the first of its kind in the country and will expand the Zoo's conservation programs. Additionally, it will provide a learning laboratory where students can assist in wildlife conservation, education, zoo management and marketing, animal husbandry, guest services, and more. The partnership helps address the Zoo's urgent need for more space to expand its wildlife conservation efforts.

The current [Repair, Renovation, and Redevelopment Plan](#) (R3) is a comprehensive guide that lays out the Zoo's mission and operations, documents its history and status, outlines the specific steps to be taken to maintain and enhance its exhibits and facilities, and provides insight into its strategic planning. The priority capital projects included in the R3 plan are the \$2.8 million renovation campaign of the main exhibit hall of the former Eeww! exhibit, which featured reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates, and the \$1.2 million multi-phase project to renew and repair the Donald Whittier Train Track, scheduled to be completed by 2030. In addition, the Zoo has long-term plans for a new exhibit and guest experience called Heart of Asia. This ambitious project aims to replace the old collection of exhibits created over 30 years ago with dynamic and renewed habitats featuring mammals, birds, and reptiles native to Asia.



The President & CEO will be responsible for utilizing the Zoo's platform and the community's trust to advocate for animal conservation and the protection of the planet. To succeed in this role, they will need to have an entrepreneurial mindset and the ability to foster a collaborative and supportive working environment that is inclusive and accountable. Capable of seeing how organizations can work together to advance their respective missions, the President & CEO will help form mutually beneficial partnerships that provide the resources and space needed to grow the Zoo's conservation impact. This executive must understand the relationship between the Zoo's revenue generation and its ability to support its conservation and education initiatives. This innovator will comprehensively review existing business strategies focusing on key performance indicators. One primary goal will be to enhance the current programs and identify new revenue streams consistent with the Zoo's mission and brand. Building on strong local and regional support, the President & CEO will focus on initiatives that increase attendance by targeting guests from far and wide.

The new President & CEO will work with an enthusiastic and devoted community to chart the course for the Zoo's next exciting chapter. To be successful, this executive should demonstrate strong leadership skills and implement a world-class strategy across the organization. Providing the vision to build upon the Zoo's past success, the President & CEO's priorities include continuing the commitment to animal exhibits that reflect the best in design, education, conservation practices, and welfare. They will also nurture a mission-centric culture by engaging and motivating the staff and modeling the Zoo's core values. The President & CEO will ensure financial sustainability to support growth opportunities and conservation, furthering a positive brand identity with widespread community awareness of the Zoo's conservation work. Focusing education efforts, this leader will help find new ways to involve and inspire people of all ages to become advocates for the natural world and its living treasures. This relationship builder will cultivate partnerships with diverse organizations to broaden the Zoo's impact and enhance advocacy. Finally, the President & CEO will ensure the Zoo leads in science-based conservation initiatives that contribute to saving endangered species.

Conservation

The world's wide variety of animal and plant species is a natural treasure that guarantees quality of life, especially in California, which is home to more endemic plant and animal species than any other state in the US and is a hub of biodiversity. The state's southern coast is one of North America's five biodiversity "hotspots." Two of the Zoo's primary initiatives are focused on species native to California. The [California Condor Recovery Program](#) aims to save this highly endangered scavenger through field efforts. Visitors to the Zoo can see condors, the largest land birds in North America, as the Santa Barbara Zoo is one of the few allowed to exhibit them. Three island fox subspecies, endemic to California's Channel Islands, have recovered from near-extinction thanks to a [science-based conservation strategy](#) designed to assist their recovery. The Zoo also helps with local wildlife conservation programs to aid the California red-legged frog, southern sea otters, western snowy plovers, and the unarmored threespine stickleback fish, among other species; they are a member of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network.

Further, the Zoo contributes to conservation programs, including one conserving gorilla habitat through a [recycling program](#) that reduces the need for Coltan mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo and raises funds for conservation. The Zoo also provides ways for the community to actively help the environment, such as participating in citizen science efforts like [FrogWatch USA](#). The Santa Barbara Zoo participates in cooperative AZA programs with accredited partner zoos and aquariums, such as a number of [SAFE](#) (Saving Animals From Extinction) collaborative conservation programs, including those for North American songbirds, vaquitas, African vultures, and monarch butterflies as a few examples. Through the [Species Survival Plan](#), a crucial AZA population management program, the Zoo helps manage more than 200 species to maintain diversity among animals in human care and guard against extinction in the wild. They have been a certified Santa Barbara County Green Business since 2012.



Education and Community Engagement

The Santa Barbara Zoo strongly focuses on education as a critical part of its core mission. By providing interactive and enjoyable experiences with animals and dedicated educational initiatives, the Zoo team aims to inspire visitors to develop a better understanding of and love for the natural world while promoting environmental stewardship. The Zoo's education programs play a crucial role in turning visitors into conservationists by providing valuable information and programs designed to enhance the knowledge of learners of all ages. The Zoo offers private, grade-appropriate lessons aligned with the California Science Standards for students on [school field trips](#). They additionally provide an array of multi-disciplinary, hands-on, and engaging programs, including the play-based early education [Early Explorers Preschool](#), the popular summer [Zoo Camp](#) for kids ages 3-12, the experiential and interactive [Outdoor Ed](#) program for ages 3-15, the [After School Enrichment Program](#) for K-6th grade students, [teacher resources](#), and private, behind-the-scenes tours and [Safari Sleepovers](#) for children and adults with curious minds. In recognition of their Inclusion Initiatives Project, promoting inclusive education, the Zoo was awarded the AZA's Significant Achievement in Education Award in 2022; they received an AZA Innovation Award honoring Early Explorers Preschool in 2023.

The Santa Barbara Zoo is dedicated to supporting other nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and underserved audiences through outreach programs and staff-led giving. The Zoo prioritizes community access by dedicating funds and time to these causes. Some programs they offer include Sponsor a Class/Zoo4U, Zoo Camp Scholarships, and Early Explorers Scholarship programs. The Santa Barbara community shows their love and support for the Zoo through membership, attendance, contributions, and time. With more than 500 volunteers serving in various roles such as special event helpers, Storytime readers, plant tenders, and animal care aides, the Zoo is able to carry out its mission effectively.





Core Values

Integrity We conduct ourselves and our organization with integrity; we are honest, accountable, and loyal at all times.

Quality We commit to quality. We provide the finest animal care and facilities; a safe, fun, easy, and educational experience for our guests; progressive and relevant programs; and a clear vision for our future.

Respect We treat others with respect; we are compassionate and considerate in our actions.

Collaboration We make better decisions when we work together as a team, including with our partners. We are more productive and satisfied when we know each other and there is great energy when we are all working together to achieve our goals.

Inclusion We commit to a culture of inclusion, accessibility, and equity for everyone. We welcome people from diverse backgrounds, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes us stronger.

Justice We consider the impact of our decisions on future generations. The impact of our efforts includes a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for the people and the environment.

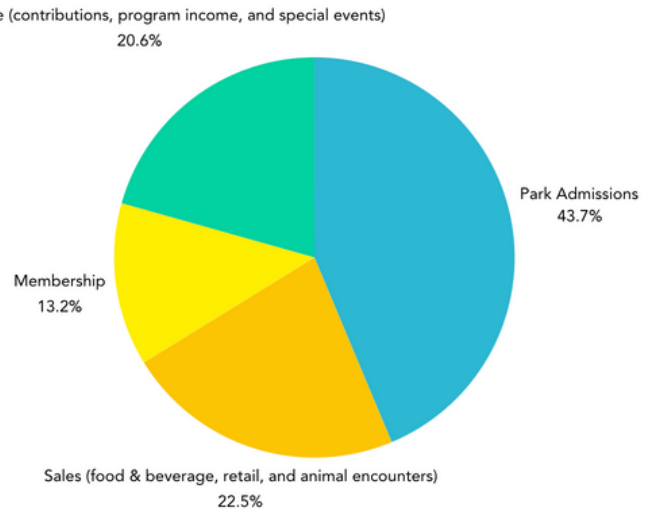
Have Fun! We enjoy and value the people we work with and the environment we work in. It decreases burnout, increases collaboration, and improves employee retention. It makes our workday enjoyable. This impacts our experience as well as our guests' experience positively.

Governance and Financial Health

The Santa Barbara Zoo is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1961. It was created to fulfill the City of Santa Barbara's request for a park that honors Lillian Child's wishes. The Zoo's land is owned by the Santa Barbara Department of Parks & Recreation and is leased by the Zoo for \$1.00 per year. The [Board of Directors](#) consists of 23 directors, including four officers, representing influential leaders from the region's public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Unlike many zoos that receive public funding, the Santa Barbara Zoo depends entirely on revenue from operations and community support.

The Zoo is currently in a solid financial position and is poised for future growth and success. Over the years, they have seen an increase in annual revenues and have successfully funded extensive renovation, construction projects, and conservation efforts. In 2023, the Zoo generated over \$16.8 million in operating revenue, with expenses of \$16 million, not including donations for capital projects, investment gain/loss, interest income/expense, investment fees, or depreciation. For the 2024 fiscal year, the projected revenues and costs for the Santa Barbara Zoo are \$17.2 million.

2024 Projected Revenue:



The Zoo ended the last fiscal year with \$21.2 million in cash and investments, which included a \$7 million endowment and a strong balance sheet. In the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, monies from the PPP and ERTC funds increased the annual budget surplus. More detailed information is available in the most recent [audited financial statements](#). The most recent [Santa Barbara Zoo Overview](#) provides a current snapshot of the organization.

Location

[Santa Barbara](#), located on California's central coast, is popular among locals and tourists. The city's welcoming atmosphere, vibrant arts and culture scene, diverse food and wine options, and great shopping opportunities make it a gem. With a population of over 88,000, Santa Barbara boasts excellent schools and a strong economy with various job opportunities in industries such as tourism, education, technology, aerospace, and defense. The city's mild climate and access to pristine beaches, majestic mountains, wildlife reserves, and beautiful vineyards make it an ideal destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Position Concept and Key Relationships

The Santa Barbara Zoo is looking for a skilled and goal-oriented President & Chief Executive Officer to provide exceptional leadership and shape the future of the Zoo. The President & CEO will work closely with the Board and staff to develop and implement policies and strategies that align with the Zoo's mission and brand. They should be a purposeful architect and consensus builder for the path ahead. The President & CEO will oversee all aspects of the Santa Barbara Zoo's operations, including animal welfare, education, guest experience, fundraising, financial management, and conservation efforts. The ideal candidate will have a proven track record of building and leading high-performing teams, providing inclusive leadership, and managing a complex business. They will champion the organization and advocate for wildlife with a demonstrated passion for the Zoo's mission.

The President & CEO is accountable to the Board of Directors and is responsible for directing the executive team and managing an organization with 377 staff members. Of these 377 staff, 126 of the employees are full-time, 194 are part-time, and 57 join the team seasonally. The Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Vice President of Community Relations, Director of Conservation & Science, and an Executive Assistant report directly to the President & CEO and are joined on the Executive Team by the Vice President of Animal Care & Health. This dynamic and charismatic leader will act as the chief relationship officer of the organization by fostering personal relationships with volunteers, employees, donors, city leaders, conservation partners, and the Zoo's surrounding community. The President & CEO will work with team members at all levels within the Zoo to achieve this objective.





Essential Functions

Under the direction of the Board of Directors and working closely with the executive team and key stakeholders, the President & CEO will implement the organizational vision and ensure long-term financial security to further the Zoo's mission, now and in the future. The President & CEO will maintain the highest levels of excellence while advancing the Santa Barbara Zoo's priorities and increasing the enterprise's mission impact. This will be achieved through the following essential functions:

- Take a complex, world-renowned organization to new heights by fostering a mission-driven culture that supports staff achievement, leadership, and passion while creating the infrastructure needed to achieve strategic goals. Ensure smooth and efficient day-to-day operations of the Zoo, utilizing a nuanced understanding of the economic and regulatory factors that affect complex commercial operations.
- Diversify and expand the Zoo's resources to support wildlife conservation objectives and establish the Zoo as a leading global and local organization in this field. Develop strategic and long-term business plans that utilize market intelligence to increase engagement with members and visitors. Work collaboratively with Zoo colleagues to boost attendance and membership, ideally reaching new audiences and elevating market share.
- Enhance public recognition and visibility. Foster a solid public identity by developing branding strategies that drive marketing. Strengthen the connection between the Zoo and the Santa Barbara community while extending the Zoo's impact beyond the immediate region.
- Ensure that the pioneering collaboration with California State University Channel Islands is a priority for the entire organization and continues to be a focus area for philanthropy. Equally vital is continuing and nurturing genuine and jointly beneficial relationships with CSUCI's leadership.
- Energize, engage, and gain support from volunteer leaders across the organization. Establish and maintain positive relationships that promote mutually beneficial outcomes. Bring together various interest groups and entities to enhance the organization's success in the local community and boost its visibility and reputation.



- Ensure the Zoo promotes diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in all community interactions and Zoo offerings.
- Assess the organization's overall operations to coordinate the efforts of professionals and volunteers effectively. Streamline operations to achieve financial objectives while constantly balancing budgets.
- Implement straightforward methods of accountability and ensure that they are applied fairly at all levels. Conduct an in-depth organizational analysis to identify improvement, change, and innovation opportunities. Strategic planning will be an element of this evaluation and foundational work.
- Take the lead in raising private and public funding for the Santa Barbara Zoo by planning, orchestrating, and implementing fundraising practices in collaboration with the Vice President of Community Relations and her entire team. The objective is to provide ongoing support and enrich the Zoo's donor list.
- Continuously improve the level of care by creating opportunities to develop the team's skill sets, promote professional growth, and ensure that the Zoo is a model that follows the best practices in animal care and welfare.
- Elevate the Zoo's conservation and education programs by strengthening the connection between its conservation efforts and formal/informal education initiatives. This will involve engaging more partners and audiences and creating awareness about wildlife conservation issues among visitors.
- Ensure adequate funding to support, maintain, and improve the property and facilities infrastructure. Collaborate with the team to create and implement physical security measures and park safety procedures. Facilitate effective communication to inform all stakeholders of financial and operational status, ensuring transparency and stewardship.
- Ensure that the Zoo remains at the forefront of animal welfare and AZA sustainability needs, stays current on trends and issues in the zoological community, and provides practical, forward-facing leadership.
- As the face of the Santa Barbara Zoo, this executive position is expected to be primarily an on-site leader and resource; some evening and weekend activity is expected within the responsibilities of this role.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Traits

As the face of the organization and a public champion for the natural world, the President & Chief Executive Officer must exhibit exceptional integrity and maintain the highest standards of professional conduct. Furthermore, the President & CEO must have extensive experience and achievements and possess the ability to lead a team of motivated and collaborative colleagues. We seek someone willing to make a significant commitment to the Santa Barbara Zoo and the local community as an engaged and immersed citizen. While no candidate will meet all the desired qualifications, the ideal candidate should possess most of the following attributes and traits while prioritizing critical objectives:

- Our client seeks a dynamic, solution-oriented, innovative, and proactive leader with a proven track record of at least ten years of progressively responsible management experience, including executive-level experience overseeing multiple departments across the organization. The ideal candidate can come from various backgrounds, such as zoos, aquariums, conservation or environmental stewardship organizations, theme parks, sports teams, hospitality, or the entertainment industry.
- Successful management expertise gained in a complex organization undergoing planned growth and change while maintaining fidelity to mission and fiscal responsibility. Experience from organizations celebrated for providing exemplary guest experiences is valuable. An appreciation for and demonstrated understanding of the nuances of profitable commercial recreation facility operation is also fundamental to achievement in this position.
- The President & CEO will clearly understand the Zoo's operations and opportunities and how they enrich the community's resources for education and entertainment while supporting wildlife preservation efforts. They should possess emotional resilience and flexibility, as they will deal with the ambiguity that comes with helping any enterprise redefine its limits.
- A strong advocate for diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, this leader should have a proven track record of taking impactful actions that create an inclusive environment and promote diversity among visitors, staff, and volunteers. The President & CEO should encourage community engagement and discussion around diversity and equity issues while being a sophisticated voice and thoughtful advocate around access and representation.



- The Zoo's next President & CEO should be visible, approachable, collaborative, and hands-on. This individual will realize that the organization can only thrive when all staff members are supported holistically as individuals and professionals. Recognizing and appreciating each team member's contributions while supporting mentorship and professional growth, they will also be an empathetic leader who can train, develop, and motivate their team.
- Transparent, compassionate, and authentic, this executive will be able to form genuine relationships with others. They must also display the confidence and self-assurance to hold others accountable.
- A record of being politically aware and astute while remaining apolitical. This connector will be able to build coalitions, facilitate collaboration, and blend the interests and resources of disparate groups—from public officials to influential leaders and donors from the private sector, higher education, and other not-for-profit organizations—to advance the mission and purpose of the Zoo.
- The foresight and vision to help the Zoo see the way forward regarding philanthropy and its relationship to advancing the mission. This engaging communicator will be able to tell the Zoo's story and will bring a record of success and proficiency at fundraising, cultivating relationships, and donor satisfaction.
- The ability to cultivate a genuine customer-centered attitude, incorporating it into the Zoo's overall philosophy to ensure that attendees consistently have positive experiences. The candidate should also lead by example and serve as a role model for the staff in pursuing this goal.
- They should possess excellent communication skills and be a good listener who can bring people together and create a consensus among individuals with differing viewpoints.
- The ideal candidate will demonstrate comprehensive financial knowledge to ensure the organization's financial stability. The President & CEO must be able to balance innovation with practical stewardship, envision and pursue new ideas, and evaluate and take calculated risks, always keeping in mind the realities of the situation.



Education

The ideal candidate should possess a bachelor's degree and an advanced degree or a combination of professional experiences that optimize success in the role.



Anticipated Compensation

The Santa Barbara Zoo offers an annual salary ranging from \$350,000 to \$375,000. Performance-based bonuses, relocation assistance, a housing allowance, and a comprehensive benefits package will augment the salary. The salary offer will depend on several factors, including educational qualifications, training, years of experience, and performance in previous roles.

Process

The Santa Barbara Zoo believes in providing equal opportunities to all job applicants and is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetics, or any other characteristic protected by law. Moreover, the Zoo considers diversity essential for successfully fulfilling its mission. Therefore, we encourage people from various backgrounds, cultures, races, educational qualifications, life experiences, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, ages, genders, gender expressions, and physical abilities to apply for employment at the Zoo.

The Board of Directors of the Santa Barbara Zoo has enlisted the services of Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc., a fully retained executive search firm, to aid in their search for suitable candidates. If you have any questions or nominations or wish to apply, kindly contact the search firm. All communication will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.



We will begin reviewing applications immediately, and those submitted before the May 20, 2024, deadline will be given priority. If you're interested in the opportunity, please submit your complete credentials as soon as possible for full consideration. To apply, email your cover letter and resume reflecting all work experience. Please explain your commitment to the Zoo's mission in your cover letter and how your experience aligns with the job description.

Please read your resume for accuracy before submitting it for this position. Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc. verifies academic credentials for candidates, and our clients frequently conduct background checks before finalizing an offer.

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