

Empowering People.
Saving Wildlife.



Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and The Wilds Request for Proposals for a Feasibility Study July 1, 2024

Project Overview

The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and The Wilds are seeking a qualified independent consulting firm for the purposes of conducting a feasibility study for our organization. We are looking for a partner who is experienced with planning and conducting a fundraising feasibility study and is familiar with the zoo and aquarium environment. The plan should assess our current situation, potential fundraising capacity for a campaign and make recommendations on a strategy to maximize our fundraising efforts. A project budget, timeline and action items should be clearly identified.

Background

Home to more than 10,000 animals representing over 600 species worldwide, the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium leads by making a positive impact on people, wildlife, and wild places. The Zoo complex is a recreational and educational destination that includes the 22-acre Zoombezi Bay water park and 18-hole Safari Golf Club. The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium also manages The Wilds, a 10,000-acre conservation center and safari park located in southeastern Ohio. The Zoo is a wildlife conservation organization with regional, national and global impact, annually supporting conservation and research projects locally and worldwide.

The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium welcomes more than two million guests each year to enjoy up-close animal encounters, keeper talks, educational presentations, and more. In addition to being a premier family destination, the Zoo also enriches the lives of more than 300,000 children and adults annually through activities and outreach programming for schools and organizations.

The Zoo is also an innovator in animal management and husbandry – caring for and conserving some of the world’s most endangered species through numerous Species Survival Plan (SSP) programs and conservation initiatives.

As we celebrate the Zoo's journey from its inception in 1927 to the present day, we're reminded that the story is far from over. With ongoing efforts to conserve species, educate the public, and advocate for a sustainable future, the Columbus Zoo's legacy is one of hope, transformation, and a shared responsibility to care for the planet and its inhabitants.

Mission and Vision

Mission: Empowering People. Saving Wildlife.

Vision: To become one of the most impactful wildlife conservation institutions globally.

Current Situation

As we approach our centennial in 2027, the Columbus Zoo has long been cherished as a treasured family tradition, a vaunted source of civic pride, a leader in conservation, and the region's top attraction. Now, we are inspired to pursue a compelling vision that leverages our strengths, enhances our ability to engage with guests, advances our conservation mission, and delivers an incredible array of compelling attractions and attractive amenities. These transformative changes will enable us to dramatically increase our impact on local and global conservation initiatives, as we reposition from a regional seasonal attraction to a year-round national destination.

The Zoo's transformation timing aligns perfectly with central Ohio's surging business activity, which is injecting fresh vitality into the region's economic landscape. All these factors – a thriving job market, increasing development, a favorable business climate, and a burgeoning population – support the Zoo's commitment to this region and the strategic relevance of this transformational plan. With the Framework, the Columbus Zoo stands poised to capture the attention and patronage of a growing visitor base, ensuring our financial security to build on our legacy for the next century.

THE PLAN

To be phased in over the next two decades, this comprehensive, forward-thinking plan centers the guest experience with unrivaled animal encounters, distinctive lodging options, engaging educational opportunities, and one-of-a-kind recreational activities.

With our mission of *"Empowering People-Saving Wildlife"* as our North Star, this plan aims to raise awareness, generate excitement, boost attendance, and dramatically increase funding to support our mission-focused programming: animal wellbeing and wildlife education, conservation and research. Reflecting a thoughtful balance between mission-delivery and guest experience, several major new features anchor our plan:

- The **Columbus Center for Wildlife Conservation** – connecting guests to critical conservation initiatives through engaging storytelling and opportunities to make an impact;
- The **Columbus Aquarium** – A major new free-standing attraction highlighting amazing aquatic life and the wonders of the water.
- **Entertainment Village** – providing a vibrant hub of activity with restaurants, lodging, retail, and guest amenities; and

Beyond these cornerstone projects, this plan calls for transformative changes throughout the Zoo. A significant expansion and enhancement in our award-winning **Heart of Africa** will welcome guests into the fascinating world of great apes with an amazing, enclosed habitat. Pygmy hippos join the Zoo for the first time. Expanded habitats in **Asia Quest** will double the habitat size for elephants and provide new homes for our red panda, Amur tiger and many more. A major redevelopment in the west side, the oldest section of the Zoo, will showcase an indoor rainforest that will transport guests to a tropical paradise teeming with monkeys and birds. A new high-flying **Skyride** gondola and an **Electric Tram**, will provide guests with new opportunities to traverse the expanded Zoo campus with ease.

Both Zoombezi Bay and Safari Golf Club are also included in the scope of the transformative plan. **Zoombezi Bay** will continue to delight families with the addition of new experiences, additional new attractions and amenities. Golfers will appreciate the enhancements at the **Safari Golf Club** which include expanded and weather-proof driving range bays, an enhanced clubhouse featuring golf and sports simulators and the addition of a mini golf course.

And the visionary innovations continue with our plans for **The Wilds**. From the moment of arrival at a strikingly redesigned entry portal, guests will enter a new world at The Wilds, where they can experience local and global conservation initiatives in a living laboratory environment housed in **The Wilds Conservation Center**.

New paths and elevated walkways lead guests on a journey through the carnivore region while a variety of boutique tree-top cabins, and lodge options are available for those seeking an overnight adventure. The Giraffe Lodge, a truly unique experience, will allow guests to share quarters with our ever-growing giraffe family. New species such as Red Wolf and rehabilitated birds of prey, and a strong focus on American Bison interpretation and conservation will expand our mission-based conservation efforts to save wildlife.

OUR GOAL

The Columbus Zoo is poised to usher in its next century with boundless enthusiasm and an enterprising determination to pursue and achieve ambitious and impactful goals. Our Framework will redefine the guest experience, set new standards for animal wellbeing, and position the Columbus Zoo as a global conservation leader.

Transformational change requires a transformational level of support: a twenty-year \$1 billion investment, with a \$400 million first phase, represents our forward-thinking belief in the power of innovation and our commitment to excellence in partnership with our community. Together, we will honor the legacy of the Columbus Zoo – *The Pride of Columbus* – with a momentous campaign that will distinguish the Columbus Zoo and make a monumental impact on the Central Ohio region. We invite you to join us on this unprecedented journey.

Study Objectives

Our goal in conducting this feasibility study is to understand what the potential is for a fundraising campaign and to gauge the level of support for this project in our community. The feasibility study report should address the following:

- Columbus Zoo and Aquarium's real and perceived strengths and weaknesses in fundraising
- The community's perception of the Columbus Zoo and The Wilds
- Identification of potential leaders in the fundraising effort
- Names of potential major donors/funders and what their interests might be
- Determination of the amount of money that can be reasonably raised
- Feedback on the preliminary Case for Support to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Other major fundraising campaigns in the area that might compete for the same donors
- Roles and responsibilities of Board Members, staff and volunteers in a campaign
- Appropriate timeframe for both the campaign planning study and the fundraising itself

Proposal Requirements

Firm Information

Provide your firm's name, address, website URL and telephone number. Include name, title and e-mail address of the individual who will serve as firm's primary contact. Include a brief description and history of your firm.

Experience and References

Proposals should include a list of 3-5 references for similar projects that your firm has completed.

Project Approach

Please explain your project approach, style and process.

Schedule and Timeline

Proposals should include the proposed work schedule, timeline and deliverables resulting from the feasibility study. The contract is expected to begin July 29, 2024, and should ideally be completed by September 23, 2025.

Cost

Proposals must include the estimated cost for all work related to tasks and deliverables outlined in the Schedule and Timeline.

Provide Biographies of Key Staff

Please include a summary of experience of all key staff.

Required Deliverables

Findings summary

- List of key donor prospects and their potential interest, including giving range.
- Key areas of the case for support that resonate or hinder.
- Presentation of findings to the Board of Directors and key staff.

Proposed Timeline

With the Board of Directors meeting taking place on September 25, 2024, we request that the project be completed in time to give the presentation of findings during the September 25th meeting.

Submit To / Project Contact

Please contact Mayme Norman, VP of Philanthropy by July 10, 2024, with any questions you may have regarding the project or RFP.

Deadline

Please submit your proposal to Mayme Norman, VP of Philanthropy at mayme.norman@columbuszoo.org by July 17, 2024.

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Schedule

The preliminary schedule is as follows:

Issue Request for Proposal	July 3, 2024
Questions from potential consultants	July 10, 2024
Responses to questions sent	July 12, 2024
Proposal due	July 17, 2024
Interviews conducted with finalists	July 18-19, 2024
Notification of selected firm by telephone	July 23, 2024
Consultant begins work	July 29, 2024
Presentation of findings to the Board of Directors and key staff	September 25, 2024