



NEW ENGLAND

Franklin Park Zoo • Stone Zoo

# Search for the President and CEO

Boston  
Stoneham  
Massachusetts





## THE SEARCH

Zoo New England (ZNE or “the Zoo”) seeks a dynamic, business-minded leader as its next President & CEO (CEO). This individual will harness the organization’s recent success and forward momentum to propel Zoo New England into an exciting new era. With three consecutive years of more than one million annual visitors, the support of a strong, long-serving staff, a committed board, and a unique two-site facility, the CEO has a meaningful foundation on which to chart the organization’s future as a world-class zoo fit for its world-class hometown of Boston.

Zoo New England is a private, non-profit conservation organization committed to ensuring connections between humans and the natural world. ZNE’s two distinct sites, each accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) – the Franklin Park Zoo in historic Boston and Stone Zoo in suburban Stoneham – attract guests from around New England and beyond.

The organization has close to 200 species of animals on its 100-acre grounds, and supporting these animal residents – and connecting guests to their wild counterparts – is at the heart of what ZNE does. Additionally, the organization has significant conservation projects both domestically and internationally, spending nearly five percent of its annual budget on initiatives that range from local turtle headstarting to One Health programs in Madagascar. In addition to its significant investments in health genomics through its Center for Zoonomics, ZNE is also a leader in educating visitors about the natural world and their role in it.





The CEO will step into the role at a significant moment for Zoo New England. The organization's recent growth has made it more important than ever to ensure financial sustainability and connections to resources, both to sustain progress and continue moving forward. The successful leader will be a strategic thinker with a passion for conservation, a demonstrated ability to identify sustainable sources of revenue, including philanthropy, and experience overseeing complex capital projects that result in an engaging and educational guest experience. The CEO will empower staff to do their best work and be an ambassador with external partners, both community and government, to elevate ZNE's place as a trusted expert in animal care, health, and wildlife conservation. All of the building blocks are in place to fuel this exciting trajectory, and a successful CEO will have the chance to vault ZNE into the upper echelon of cultural institutions in Greater Boston and the world.

Zoo New England is assisted by Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, in this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search firm.



### ABOUT ZOO NEW ENGLAND

Zoo New England's mission is to inspire people to protect and sustain the natural world for future generations by creating fun and engaging experiences that integrate wildlife and conservation programs, research, and education.

Created in 1991 by Governor William Weld, the Commonwealth Zoological Corporation—publicly known as Zoo New England—is a private, non-profit organization that runs the Franklin Park and Stone Zoos.

Both locations are accredited separately by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) Accreditation Commission, and 2025 marks an accreditation year for the two facilities. This unique two-site model is an asset for Zoo New England; though separated by less than 15 miles, the Zoos are located in different settings and have curated complementary, not duplicative, collections, amenities, and experiences.

Franklin Park Zoo is a 72-acre site nestled in Boston's historic Franklin Park, considered the crown jewel of Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace Park System. The Zoo was founded in 1912 and managed by the City of Boston until 1958, when the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), a state agency, assumed management. The MDC ran the Zoo until 1991.

Stone Zoo, formerly known as the Middlesex Fells Zoo, is located on a 26-acre site near the Spot Pond reservoir in Stoneham, MA. Charles Price, Superintendent of the Middlesex Fells Reservation, founded the Zoo in 1905, and in 1969, the site was renamed in honor of Walter D. Stone, a former Zoo Director.

The two Zoos are home to 1,464 animals representing 190 species. The Franklin Park Zoo features 79 public animal habitats, and Stone Zoo has 53; both Zoos have recently invested in projects to positively impact animals' habitats and off-exhibit space. Key new construction projects include the Butterfly Oasis, which opened in 2024 at Stone Zoo, and the African Experience at Franklin Park Zoo, scheduled to open in 2026. Future plans include replacing the current hospital at the Franklin Park Zoo with an entirely new facility to support animal care and health.

Two signature seasonal events, ZooLights at Stone Zoo and Boston Lights: A Lantern Experience at Franklin Park Zoo, have driven off-hours attendance at both Zoos and introduced many new visitors to ZNE's conservation mission.

Click to learn more about [Zoo New England](#).

## Finances and Growth

ZNE is on an exciting growth trajectory, with fiscal year (FY) 2024 marking the third consecutive year with more than one million annual visitors. With a budget of over \$25M, the organization has a diverse base of supporters. As a public-private partnership, ZNE receives \$6.6M in operating support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Additionally, the state provides \$3M in capital support for deferred maintenance, asset preservation, and capital improvements from state bond funds. These funding levels have stayed consistent in recent years, with some increases related to pandemic-era funding and special capital projects like the African Experience exhibit. Total private fundraising in FY 2024 was just over \$5M, with an all-time high for the Zoos of \$2.4M in unrestricted gifts.

In FY 2024, ZNE completed a five-year strategic plan with the assistance of Wellspring Consulting. At its core, this new strategy commits to ZNE becoming a comprehensive, integrated conservation organization that incorporates conservation thinking and action into all activities. The plan focuses on seven critical areas of institutional growth and development to increase visitation, enhance the visitor experience,



continue capital improvements, raise public awareness of ZNE as an iconic institution, advance conservation efforts, inspire visitors to protect nature, and build a more inclusive zoo community. The organization is poised to begin implementing this new strategic plan throughout 2025.

## Conservation

As a conservation organization, ZNE endeavors to have a meaningful impact on wildlife conservation both locally and internationally. In recent years, the organization has grown the percentage of its overall budget spent on conservation from three percent to nearly five percent, making it one of the leaders in conservation investment in the AZA community.

Regionally, ZNE is a leader in turtle conservation, and the Hatchling and Turtle Conservation through Headstarting (HATCH) program was awarded top honors in the North American Conservation Award category by the AZA in 2024. The Zoo also supports 20 international projects, ranging from community-led conservation of lions and other large predators in Tanzania to conserving threatened jaguars in Northern Mexico.

ZNE has a strong One Health program, headlined domestically by a curriculum partnership with Harvard Medical School. Internationally, its Madagascar Research Program works closely with Duke University, the National Institutes of Health, and other partners.

The ZNE Center for Zoonomics aims to build capacity for AZA member institutions to use health genetics research to study and advance the health of populations in AZA care. This emerging institution will coordinate and merge the target areas of standardized metadata, the shareability of biospecimens, and accessibility to health genetics expertise to facilitate and promote research studies on the causes of disease. Partners in these efforts include the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, Species360 and its Zoological Information Management Software (ZIMS), and the Great Ape Heart Project (GAHP). ZNE aims to build dedicated space for the [Center for Zoonomics](#) to support this important conservation work.



ZNE also works with institutions worldwide on cooperative captive breeding programs. Significant births and hatches in recent years have included a Hartmann's mountain zebra, Masai giraffe, wattled crane, yellow-billed storks, eastern black-and-white colobus, and a two-toed sloth. Several animals moved to Franklin Park Zoo and Stone Zoo from other institutions, including African painted dogs, nyala, North American river otter, red-crested turaco, hadada ibis, boat-billed heron, and kea.

Click to learn more about [Zoo New England's conservation initiatives](#).

### Education

Education and community outreach are core to the Zoo's identity; nearly 228,000 visitors participated in 7,800 educational activities in FY 2024, ranging from animal encounters to full-day, school-based learning experiences. Both Zoos offer field trips at no cost to Massachusetts students and very popular summer camp programs. Additionally, the Franklin Park Zoo is part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Quarter of Learning initiative in partnership with Boston Public Schools and Boston After School & Beyond.

A key education initiative in the new strategic plan is the Connector Program, which seeks to increase interpersonal interpretation at both Zoos and more closely link visitors with ZNE's conservation mission. Staff and volunteers trained in interpretation will interact more frequently and deeply with visitors and tell the Zoo's conservation story, supported by conservation-focused graphics and interactive digital technologies.

### Community Outreach and Access

Both the Franklin Park and Stone Zoos are vital members of their local communities and strive to inspire, educate, and engage people about the wonders of wildlife. ZNE works with community centers, camps, groups, and organizations such as Greater Grove Hall Main Streets, Project RIGHT, Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center, Franklin Park Coalition, Wonderfund, The Emerald Necklace Conservancy, and the Stoneham Chamber of Commerce.

ZNE is committed to ensuring that personal financial challenges do not prevent people from visiting the Zoos. Outreach programs in partnership with local libraries, the EBT and WIC programs, and local non-profit organizations ensure that the Franklin Park and Stone Zoos are accessible to all guests. Starting in 2025, all Boston school-aged children and two guests can visit the Zoos for free on the first two Sundays of each month.

Additionally, the Zoo recently finished a three-year grant with Antioch University of New England, AmeriCorps, and the communities of Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Jamaica Plain to codesign programming opportunities that address academic and social-emotional school readiness. This partnership highlights the important role that the Franklin Park Zoo plays alongside its neighbors to ensure meaningful opportunities and investments are made in this historically marginalized part of the city.

The ZooTeen program, established in 1999, offers Boston youth meaningful work experience at Franklin Park Zoo alongside opportunities for professional development, life-skill training, and community building. Teens are paid for their work and often advance onto the paid Teen Ambassador program and other internships and jobs at ZNE.

## Governance and Organizational Structure

ZNE is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation governed by a dedicated Board of Directors of up to 30 members, which meets six times a year. Up to two members are appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth, and one member is appointed by the Mayor of the City of Boston. Directors serve up to two three-year terms with the opportunity for renewal.

There is a seven-member leadership team that includes the CEO, Chief Operating Officer, EVP for External Affairs and Programming, Vice President of Marketing and Communication, Vice President of Animal Care, Vice President of Education, Animal Health, and Conservation, and Vice President of Development. Under this team is a diverse group of 300 full-time and part-time staff supported by over 180 volunteers.



## ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Reporting to ZNE's Board of Directors, the president and CEO is responsible for the organization's activities and operations in support of its conservation-focused mission, including both zoo facilities and a staff of approximately 300 individuals (at its seasonal height). In partnership with the senior leadership team, the CEO oversees all departments related to both the Franklin Park and Stone Zoos, including animal care and health, conservation, development, education, exhibits and special projects, external affairs and programming, facilities, finance, guest operations, horticulture and sustainability, human resources, information technology, marketing and communications, and safety and security.



The CEO will provide strategic leadership and vision matched with sound resource allocation and financial planning across the enterprise. This individual will have both internal and external areas of focus, with the overall goal of capitalizing on ZNE's existing assets across all areas to achieve its future goals. With a commitment to top-notch animal care and health, conservation, and the experience of both staff and guests at the Zoo, the CEO will embody the mission and goals of the organization.

The broad objectives for the Zoo's new president and CEO are as follows:

**Provide strategic leadership that catalyzes the Zoo's current strengths and charts its next chapter.**

Zoo New England has experienced significant growth and success in recent years, and the CEO will join an organization looking to continue this forward momentum. This individual will identify ways to capitalize on current opportunities and proactively plan for the future. The CEO will lead ZNE in implementing its new strategic plan and take action to ensure that all activities are aligned with the organization's mission and vision. The new CEO will oversee the completion and opening of the African Experience as well as plan for future capital projects as the Zoos continue to evolve the physical campuses to embody world-class, conservation-focused Zoos. When hard decisions need to be made, the CEO will do so in informed, gracious ways. Alongside staff and partners, the CEO will be a key part of ensuring ZNE continues to become a world-class zoo in the world-class city of Boston.

**Secure the Zoo's long-term financial sustainability.**

The CEO is accountable for the operational and fiscal integrity of the organization. Much of ZNE's recent growth has been fueled by increasing gate revenues, and securing additional resources is crucial to future success. As ZNE pursues its exciting conservation, animal care, and guest-focused agenda, the CEO will ensure there is support for all important projects, with a special focus on updating and modernizing the physical plant, planning for new exhibits, and growing external partnerships. The CEO will leverage the Zoo's position as a public-private partnership to build a strong, consistent, and mutually reinforcing model of investment. This individual will bring an entrepreneurial spirit to the role and balance the mission and business needs of the Zoo at all times.





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### **Champion the conservation, education, and animal care missions of ZNE to ensure the organization is a leader in the field.**

Leading an organization with a living collection and deep conservation mission is a unique opportunity. The CEO will bring an inexhaustible commitment to what the Zoo does and work with staff to consistently strive to do it better. When making decisions, the CEO will seek to understand the perspective of all stakeholders, from zookeepers, curators, and veterinarians to guests and external audiences. The CEO will ensure a guest experience that is engaging and educational, pursuing technology, signage, and interaction that is memorable. This person will ensure the Franklin Park and Stone Zoos have everything they need to not only maintain AZA accreditation but consistently raise the bar for what a modern, progressive conservation organization looks like.

### **Expand and sustain wide-ranging and robust fundraising activities.**

Working alongside the ZNE development team and Board, the President and CEO will actively engage in generating the revenues necessary to operate the Zoo. This individual will drive cultivation and stewardship efforts across the philanthropic landscape in Boston and New England, raising the visibility of the Zoo as a premier institution in the region. The CEO will interact with donors and prospects, bring new contacts into the Zoo's development pipeline, and continue to build a Board that is positioned to both give and get resources that contribute to the Zoo's growth and sustainability.



### **Reinforce and expand government and community partnerships that position the Zoo as an economic and educational asset to the region.**

The CEO is ZNE's primary external representative and is responsible for further raising the profile of ZNE as a cultural leader in the area and maintaining strong connections with government officials and community stakeholders. This individual will skillfully position the Zoo as a conservation-focused organization that engages people with the natural world and continuously highlights the organization's



economic and educational value proposition. Alongside partners and neighbors, the CEO will lead the Zoo to increase its ability to be an inclusive, accessible community hub.

Additionally, the CEO will work with elected officials at all levels to build innovative government funding pathways to support the Zoo's continued growth.

**Inspire and empower skilled staff and volunteers and build internal structures to cultivate and retain talent.**

One of ZNE's most important assets is, and will continue to be, its people. The CEO will build on the strong, positive culture and create additional internal systems that promote communication and cohesion. In the unique setting of two distinct facilities, the CEO will create opportunities for unity and consistently push for a "one zoo" feeling. This individual will assess the current organizational structure and find creative ways to foster cross-departmental collaboration and accountability. It will be important to ensure that the high-quality staff team is supported by salaries and benefits appropriate for the expensive landscape of Eastern Massachusetts. The CEO will also continue to champion internal equity work, including through the wellness and DEIA committees.





## QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one candidate will meet all the desired criteria, the successful candidate will bring most of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Commitment to and passion for the conservation mission of Zoo New England.
- Track record of providing visionary leadership and effective management in an AZA-accredited zoo, aquarium, or similar organization.
- Demonstrated ability to build innovative partnerships and work with diverse stakeholders, including community members, public officials, board members, and professional colleagues.
- Proven success in fundraising and philanthropy and an appetite for raising funds.
- Track record of developing and executing large-scale capital projects with animal care and guest experience as driving factors.
- Proven business acumen—discipline and focus in setting realistic priorities, meeting or beating goals, running a fiscally sound operation, and managing in a complex environment.
- Experience working collaboratively and facilitating collaboration between internal and external stakeholders, including staff, community groups, boards, and local government.
- Outstanding skills in internal and external communication, team building, and staff development.
- A positive, productive professional outlook with a commitment to being a part of a meaningful organizational culture.

## LOCATION AND COMMUNITY

### Boston, Massachusetts

As the capital and largest city of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston is also one of the oldest cities in the country and was the site of many important historical events. Today, Boston has a population of just over 650,000 and is a hub of higher education, medicine, and innovation.

Franklin Park, the city's largest green space at 527 acres, is part of Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace. Bordered by the communities of Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and Roxbury, the park has rural and woodland areas and space for recreation and sports.

### Stoneham, Massachusetts

Located less than 10 miles northwest of Boston, Stoneham is a suburban residential community known for its strong neighborhood feel, beautiful parks, and excellent regional transportation linkages. With a population of just under 24,000, the town is accessible via two interstate highways and multiple public transportation systems. Stoneham was a major shoe manufacturing center during the Industrial Revolution, and now serves as a hub for residents working across Greater Boston.



## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the search process is completed. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications, including a resume and letter of interest, should be directed electronically in confidence to:

Natalie Leonhard, Partner  
Caitlin Barrett, Senior Associate  
Kendra Moleé, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/zoo-new-england/president-and-chief-executive-officer>

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