



Chief Human Resources Officer
Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance
Denver, Colorado

THE SEARCH

The Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance (DZCA) seeks a dynamic, strategic, and people-centered leader to serve as its next Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). The DZCA is a dynamic organization that merges traditional zoological practices with modern conservation science. Formerly known simply as the Denver Zoo, the organization rebranded in 2024 to better reflect its global conservation mission. Still headquartered on 80 acres in Denver's City Park, it welcomes nearly two million visitors annually and is home to over 3,000 animals. DZCA is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and American Humane, and is a member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).

Reporting to the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), this critical position will provide strategic leadership on all human resource (HR) matters, including, but not limited to, benefits, compensation, employee relations, organizational culture, recruiting, and training and learning for DZCA's 400 employees and 600 volunteers. As a member of DZCA's Executive Team, the CHRO will act as a thought partner to leadership, assuring the implementation of HR best practices and compliance with applicable HR laws and regulations. The CHRO plays a significant role in developing a dynamic and diverse workforce that values psychological safety, respect, and inclusion within a high-performing culture. The CHRO will lead a team of nine HR professionals and serve as a role model to demonstrate DZCA's commitment to a culture of excellence, kindness, equity, and compassion in which all employees feel recognized and valued, contributing to DZCA's status as an employer of choice. The CHRO will join at an exciting time as the DCZA embarks on its next strategic plan and master planning process.

The Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance has retained Isaacson, Miller, an international executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important recruitment. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE DENVER ZOO CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

Home to more than 2,500 animals representing 450 species, Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance (DZCA) is a global nonprofit wildlife conservation organization that inspires and empowers communities to save wildlife and wild places. DZCA connects people to the wonders of nature through well-cared-for animals in immersive habitats, engaging learning experiences, and impactful conservation programs in Colorado and around the world. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and American Humane Certified™, DZCA pursues its mission—*Inspiring Communities to Save Wildlife for Future Generations*—with the support of guests, members, donors, and partners who form a collaborative alliance dedicated to saving wildlife together.

For 129 years, DZCA has connected people with the wonders of wildlife—from a few iconic Colorado species in its early days to the more than 2,500 animals representing 450 species it cares for today. In 2024, the Zoo unveiled its new name—Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance—as a renewed call to action for its guests, members, donors, staff, volunteers, and community to join us in saving wildlife. Together, they have supported more than 600 wildlife conservation projects in 62 countries over the past 30 years.

Each year, DZCA invests more than \$2 million in global programs led by its Field Conservation Department, emphasizing long-term partnerships, community empowerment, and an adaptive, science-based approach often rooted in the “One Health” philosophy, which recognizes the interconnected health of animals, humans, and ecosystems. Since 2024, DZCA has expanded its global wildlife conservation efforts with new programs and partnerships in Asia and Africa, while continuing to strengthen existing programs in Colorado and Latin America.

DZCA welcomes nearly 2 million guests annually and is committed to ensuring that everyone—regardless of background—has access to its campus and programs. Twenty-five percent of its guests visit with free or reduced admission through initiatives such as school programming, SCFD Free Days, and SNAP/EBT ticketing. More than 17,000 students from 517 schools across the region participate in free school programming supported by philanthropic contributions. DZCA also donates thousands of tickets each year to organizations including Children’s Hospital Colorado, Denver Public Library, Denver Police Department, Denver Indian Health and Family Services, and many others.

To learn more about DZCA, please visit: <https://denverzoo.org/>

LEADERSHIP

Bert Vescolani is the President and CEO of the Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance, where he leads a team of over 400 employees and 600 volunteers in caring for more than 3,000 animals representing 500 species. Since taking the helm in 2018, Vescolani has championed the zoo’s transformation into a conservation-focused institution, emphasizing community engagement, education, and global wildlife preservation.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER

The Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) serves as a staff member at will of the DCZA. In that capacity, the CHRO will lead the strategic direction and operational execution of all HR, Learning and Development (L + D), and Volunteer Management, and drive the integration of HR strategies with broader business objectives. This role is pivotal in ensuring that DZCA's workforce aligns with and advances its mission and strategy and provides visionary leadership in formulating and implementing comprehensive HR policies, processes, and practices to optimize the development and utilization of DZCA's human capital. Ultimately, as the steward of DZCA's human capital, this leadership position plays a crucial role in realizing DZCA's mission by empowering the workforce and fostering a culture of unity, transformation, and compassion.

CORE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Drive the development and execution of strategic initiatives in alignment with DZCA's mission. Serve as a vital business partner alongside the CEO and Executive Team, leading and developing comprehensive human capital strategies to support DZCA's overall business needs and achieve its mission.
- Provide visionary leadership to the HR department, fostering a culture of teamwork, innovation, and accountability. Lead a team of collaborators and cross-functional teams to enhance objectives and oversee the formulation and implementation of comprehensive HR policies, processes, and practices.
- Establish and model behavior expectations aligned with DZCA's core values. Promote teamwork, cooperation, planning, productivity, and clear communication across the organization, fostering a collaborative and positive work environment.
- Partner with leadership to develop and review workforce planning strategies for optimum staffing levels aligned with priorities and budget projections.
- Establish and monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the effectiveness of HR programs.
- Prioritize a comprehensive strategy for the recruitment, onboarding, and retention of employees and volunteers, ensuring that the organization has the right people with the right skills to achieve its goals.
- Emphasize employee relations by resolving conflicts, creating a positive work environment, and promoting a healthy organizational culture.
- Identify employees' training and professional development needs and support the implementation of programs to enhance skills and knowledge that are essential for employee growth and the overall development of the workforce.
- In partnership with the Belonging team, promote diversity and inclusion within the workplace, ensuring fair and equal opportunities for all employees and volunteers.
- In partnership with OHS, ensure the review and improvement of OHS initiatives, ensuring that policies and programs are compliant and create a safe and healthy work environment.
- Leverage technology to streamline HR and volunteer program processes, enhance efficiency, and provide valuable data for decision-making.

- Ensure compliance with labor laws, regulations, and industry standards, overseeing the management of legal and ethical aspects of HR practices.
- Design and manage competitive compensation and benefits programs to attract and retain top talent. This includes salary structures, incentives, total rewards, and employee wellness programs.
- Lead HR initiatives related to organizational change, restructuring, and transformation, managing communication, and ensuring a smooth transition for employees.
- Foster a culture of employee and volunteer engagement and satisfaction, including conducting surveys, feedback sessions, and implementing initiatives to enhance the overall employee experience.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Build and lead an HR function that synergistically supports DZCA's organizational structure and goals

Leading the integration of L+D back into the HR portfolio, the CHRO will define and advance an HR department that is collaborative, high-performing, innovative, and rigorous in communicating its vision, direction, and priorities to a diverse organization. This leader will continue to professionalize and deepen the bench strength of the HR department by investing in training and professional development for the team. They will identify and uplift team strengths to ensure people are working to the top of their abilities and will work to build an internal culture of collaboration and mutual respect. Further, the CHRO will focus on balancing both regular and ongoing workloads with time to work on innovative projects and initiatives in service to the wider organization.

Functionally, the CHRO will lead the organization's recruitment strategy to ensure DZCA meets its talent acquisition objectives. They will also work across the organization to boost employee engagement, professional development opportunities, and cross-functional relationships. Additionally, they will oversee and find new ways to advance the vital contributions of volunteers in the mission of the organization.

Implement systems to track organizational data to address organizational concerns

The CHRO must be a big-picture thinker with the ability to anticipate and understand the details that are required to bring an idea to life from thought to implementation. To ensure that they can be proactive rather than reactive leaders, the CHRO will work to implement systems across the organization to track and aggregate important data like employee satisfaction and retention metrics, as well as salary benchmarking, all while pipelining critical information to DZCA's major constituencies from senior leadership to staff to community leaders. They will work to determine what metrics of success will be tracked over time, build strong systems to track that data, and utilize it to guide organizational decision-making.

Contribute to an inclusive environment that supports a highly diverse employee population

The CHRO must be a human-centered leader, devoted to ensuring that DZCA's practices speak to and serve all members of its workforce in an inclusive and welcoming way. Critical to this goal is bridging and increasing the trust between front-line staff and leadership. The CHRO will also partner closely with the Chief Belonging Officer to actively support and prioritize initiatives across the organization around diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure that DZCA's approaches and values are consonant with best practices nationally. Leading with curiosity and a sharp focus on psychological safety and workplace well-being, the CHRO will also strengthen and grow programs that contribute to the recruitment, development, and retention of a talented, diverse workforce. This individual will also stay abreast of trends and changes in the workforce and what is needed to best foster a welcoming and engaged community.

Effectively communicate HR plans, goals, and outcomes to a variety of constituents

The CHRO will be a visible and accessible presence and will be expected to connect with organizational units and other key constituents through clearly articulated priorities, advocacy on behalf of employees, and defined pathways for feedback across the organization's diverse constituencies. As such, they must possess a clear, concise, and compelling communication style that works to connect DZCA's mission with the lives and impact of each individual contributor to help them understand how their work impacts the organization. Furthermore, the CHRO must be a deep listener who is adept at balancing employee concerns and feedback with actionable improvements that resolve issues in a timely manner and strengthen communication at both the individual and organizational levels.

QUALIFICATIONS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND EXPERIENCE

Research shows that women and people of color are less likely to apply for a position if they do not meet almost 100 percent of the desired skills and experience. **Please note that this is not necessary.** If you meet the minimum requirements and have a passion for the work, you are encouraged to apply. While no single candidate will have all the qualifications, DZCA seeks candidates with a well-rounded combination of the following abilities:

- A minimum of ten years of experience in an HR-related leadership role and five years of experience in an executive-level position is required.
- Experience with human capital strategy development, workforce planning, and business strategy development, or any equivalent combination of experience, lived experience, and/or special skills, is strongly preferred.
- An outstanding record of progressive experience and accomplishment within the various program intersections of HR and management, as well as organizational development.
- Strong interpersonal skills and ability to uplift and motivate a team with diverse backgrounds and identities. A track record of successful team leadership, introducing change, and fostering a positive organizational culture. Strong track record of institutional change management in challenging environments.

- Ability to think strategically, and to manage and operate at both a strategic and a hands-on level as needed. Expert knowledge of HR best practices.
- Comprehensive knowledge of state and federal regulations governing employment, compensation, and benefits practices.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills, strong facilitation skills, strong negotiation skills, and the ability to communicate effectively at all levels of an organization.
- Demonstrated success in providing superior service to internal stakeholders.
- Track record of identifying, designing, and implementing business improvement processes to increase the quality of programs. Ability to complete multiple tasks within critical deadlines.
- A four-year degree is required; a master's degree in an HR-related field is preferred, or any equivalent combination of education and/or experience.
- Proven computer skills are necessary, including Microsoft Office Suite.
- Sophisticated emotional intelligence and resiliency skills to lead and/or actively participate in advancing DZCA's work relative to racial, social, and economic justice.
- PHR/SPHR certification is preferred.

COMPENSATION

This position offers a hiring salary of approximately \$250,000. The final salary will be based on education, experience, skills relevant to the role, and internal equity.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website below. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/denver-zoo-conservation-alliance/chief-human-resources-officer>

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