



Search for the Director



ISAACSON, MILLER

SEARCH OVERVIEW

The Cameron Park Zoo (“the Zoo” or “CPZ”), a treasured city zoo in the heart of Waco, Texas, seeks a visionary and collaborative leader and effective communicator in its next Director. This is an exciting opportunity to provide the next chapter of vision and leadership to an organization that’s been on a positive trajectory since its founding almost 70 years ago with just 30 animals and a small but dedicated staff. Today, Cameron Park Zoo is a nationally recognized, highly respected zoo and an essential part of the Waco Community. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and on a path of continued transformation with construction currently underway, the Cameron Park Zoo welcomes approximately 310,000 visitors annually and will celebrate its 30th birthday at its current location this year.



CPZ is home to 1,464 animals and 91 exhibits spanning over 52 acres in a beautiful park-like setting. The zoo operates successfully through a partnership between the City of Waco and the Cameron Park Zoological & Botanical Society (“the Society”). The City provides oversight and management of the Zoo, and the Society provides funding through private donations and amassing public support for critical initiatives and animal programs, conservation efforts, and facility improvements.

The new Director will assume leadership at a time of change and opportunity for the Cameron Park Zoo and the broader Waco Community. Underscoring this is a successful AZA reaccreditation in 2022, the recent approval of a new contract between the City of Waco and the Society, and several bond projects

Cameron Park Zoo

that are already underway to improve facilities and build new exhibits. Specifically, the Education Center, Veterinary Hospital, and the Penguin Shores Exhibit are under construction and will open in the next year. The Director will play a key role in shaping the zoo by maximizing the positive impact of the projects and funding.

The Cameron Park Zoo 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.

ZOO BACKGROUND

The Cameron Park Zoo's roots began in 1955 when a group of outdoor sports and wildlife enthusiasts made real a vision to showcase live animals to the public of Central Texas for the purpose of education and the Central Texas Zoological Park was formed. During its early years, the Zoo was located at Lake Waco and was run by a dedicated group of staff. By the 1970s, the Zoo's infrastructure and income could not support the needs of a sophisticated organization or the growth and nutrition of the animals. In the late 1970s, the Zoo became an entity of the City of Waco, and the Zoo's ultimate location was debated.



Cameron Park Zoo

Cameron Park was recognized as the perfect location because of the abundance of flora and fauna, ponds, and other natural elements. Interest in the project gained momentum throughout Waco and community members became involved with raising money to move the Zoo. Eventually, a county bond election vote passed in support of the Zoo's move to Cameron Park. The new Zoo, known as Cameron Park Zoo, opened its doors on July 18, 1993, on 52 acres of lush land with over 40 animals in natural habitats.

Since its opening in 1993, CPZ has built new attractions such as a reptile house, Lemur Island, and an African Lion Exhibit. In 2005, the Brazos River Country Exhibit opened to showcase indigenous plants and animals found on the banks of the Brazos River. In 2009, the Asian Forest Exhibit opened with orangutans, Sumatran tigers, and Komodo dragons. CPZ serves the Waco Community as a recreational place to experience the wonders of wild animals as well as an educational resource for students from early childhood to graduate school. In addition to its important role in Waco, CPZ plays a large part in wildlife conservation by caring for endangered species and returning animals to the wild.

CAMERON PARK ZOO TODAY

Cameron Park Zoo is nestled near the Brazos River and near downtown Waco, Texas. It is Waco's second most visited tourist attraction, with 2022 attendance at almost 310,000. As an accredited member of the AZA and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), CPZ upholds exceptional standards for the care and management of its 1,464 animals including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates. The animal care staff devotes a tremendous amount of time and energy toward providing the best of care, including training, proper nutrition, veterinary care, and life enrichment. The Zoo is focused on its mission, "To promote conservation awareness and cultural enrichment through education and recreation. To be a survival center for native and exotic animal species and an active community partner in economic development through tourism."



Master Plan

The Zoo's current master plan is designed to further align with current AZA standards, amplify the guest experience, and solidify the Zoo as a state-of-the-art conservation and education facility. Several key projects are underway or slated over the next one to three years including bond projects for an Education Center, Veterinary Hospital, Penguin Exhibit, the replacement of the African Hoofstock Barn, and a commissary remodel. Both the Education Center, Veterinary Hospital and the Penguin Shores Exhibit are under construction with openings slated for next year.

The state-of-the-art Veterinary Hospital is designed to elevate the care of the Zoo's animals and support its conservation programs. The facility will include a new surgery suite and treatment room, flexible indoor and outdoor animal holding rooms, and a necropsy space and clinical pathology lab.



Organizational Structure and Governance

Cameron Park Zoo is owned and operated by the City of Waco and receives fundraising support via the [Cameron Park Zoological and Botanical Society](#). The Society is a 501c3 non-profit organization, which is governed by a volunteer board of directors, and focuses on fundraising, the zoo membership program,

Cameron Park Zoo

conservation efforts, education, and marketing. The Zoo Director works closely with a leadership team that includes the Deputy Director and four senior managers. Approximately 62 dedicated and talented full-time staff from Administration, Animal Care, Animal Health, Guest Experience, Education, and Maintenance ensure the smooth operations of the Zoo and report to the Director.

The most recent operating contract between the City and Society was agreed upon in April 2023. The new contract, which is approved through September 30, 2025, with the opportunity for two yearlong renewals, further clarifies roles and comes at a pivotal time for the Zoo amidst the planned bond projects and improvements. The agreement augments the current positive momentum with a capital improvement matching challenge, in which donations received by the Society will be matched dollar for dollar in contributions by the City up to \$7.5 million over the next three years. Additional provisions of the contract include a permanent seat on the City Zoo Commission for the Society, further paving the way for cohesiveness between the City and the Society.

Conservation and Education

CPZ's commitment to conservation is exhibited by its participation in numerous conservation programs worldwide. The Zoo provides financial support for many local and global projects while also being directly involved in key programs such as Cuban crocodile conservation and the [Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation](#). CPZ is known for its successful work with orangutans and is the proud host of the [2023 Orangutan SPP Husbandry Workshop](#). The Zoo has gained wide recognition for its free orangutan cardiology workshops, which serve as a model for zoo staff around the world. When the new Penguin Shores Exhibit opens it will allow breeding of the endangered African black-footed penguin to take place at the CPZ.



Cameron Park Zoo

The new 18,520-square-foot Education Center will house four multipurpose classroom spaces to support the existing educational programs and summer camps. Flexible room layouts will also allow the space to be rented for receptions and conferences. In addition to the classroom spaces, there will be ambassador animal care facilities to accommodate current and future animals. The Education Center will also contain staff offices and building support spaces.

Supporting its educational mission, the Zoo offers programs both on-site and in the local community focused on education and conservation. Visitors of all ages can increase their understanding of the animals through events such as Zoo School, Zoo Snoozes, and Wild Nights programs for organized groups. A Zoo mobile travels to nursing homes and an outreach classroom program is offered to schools in the county at various grade levels. With conservation as a theme, special events at the Zoo celebrate specific animals and conservation days. For a full listing of education programs, please visit cameronparkzoo.com.

DIRECTOR

Reporting to the City Manager, the Director of the Cameron Park Zoo has oversight of the Zoo's activities and operations. The overarching challenges for the next Director are both internally and externally focused and grounded in maximizing the working relationship between the Zoo, the Society, and the City of Waco, and leveraging the positive momentum around the new exhibits and facilities.



The broad objectives for the Zoo's new Director are as follows:

- As the face of the Zoo, proactively work to synergize the aims and trajectory of the Zoo with those of the City of Waco and the Society;

Cameron Park Zoo

- Provide vision and inspiration to continue to propel Cameron Park Zoo successfully towards a growing level of influence and impact in the Waco region;
- Steward the continued development of collaborative leadership between the Zoo, the Society, and the City of Waco;
- Oversee the successful completion of the bond project and new facilities including the Penguin Shores Exhibit, Education Center, and Veterinary Hospital, with astute budget and financial management. In addition to new construction, major upgrades, and renovations, pay careful attention to deferred maintenance;
- Provide leadership for the design, fundraising, and execution of future phases of the current master plan. Inspire and guide the development of a new master plan at the completion of the current one;
- Continue and enhance productive community relationships, including those with zoo neighbors, the mayor and other city and county officials, peer institutions, and others, and underscore the Zoo's longstanding important role in the vitality of the Waco region;
- Ensure effective leadership and management throughout the organization, promoting high morale and a sense of shared purpose. Promote transparent and accessible communication and collaboration within the Zoo and across the City and Society, so that all parts of the dispersed enterprise are well-informed and aligned.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

For this pivotal role, the Cameron Park Zoo will search broadly for a leader who embraces the Zoo's mission and values and will boldly yet collaboratively galvanize the talented Zoo staff, the Society, and the City of Waco as CPZ moves toward its next chapter.



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

Experience

- Track record of providing visionary leadership and effective management in an AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium;
- Track record of building and sustaining innovative partnerships and working with diverse stakeholders, including community members, public officials, board members, and professional colleagues;
- Outstanding demonstrated skills in internal and external communication, team building, and staff development;
- 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;
- Demonstrated experience working collaboratively and facilitating collaboration between internal and external stakeholders including staff, community groups, boards, and local government.



Attributes

- Boundless curiosity, enthusiasm, and ambition for the varied, multi-faceted work of the Cameron Park Zoo;
- Public presence, exceptional communication skills, and the ability to be a persuasive outgoing spokesperson and ambassador for the Zoo;

Cameron Park Zoo

- An outgoing and positive personality, strong interpersonal skills to work effectively with the full range of constituents;
- Imagination, tenacity, gracious self-confidence, flexibility, good humor, and high energy, as well as high emotional intelligence and impeccable integrity.

THE CITY OF WACO

Located in Central Texas and situated on the I-35 corridor between Dallas and Austin, Waco is a thriving midsize city with a growing population. Waco is nestled in the heart of the Texas Triangle, one of the strongest economic regions in the US. Anchored by the Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio metro areas, the Texas Triangle spans 35 counties and four major metro areas, all of which are within a three-hour drive time of Waco. Home to over 20 national and worldwide headquarter locations, Waco is ranked in the top 10 in low cost of living cities.

Cameron Park

[Cameron Park](#) is one of the biggest and best municipal parks in Texas, boasting 416 acres in the heart of Waco, next to downtown. It features scenic overlooks, wildlife, and playgrounds, plus approximately 20 miles of [nationally recognized trails](#) that weave through the natural landscape. The park runs along towering limestone bluffs and overlooks the Brazos and Bosque Rivers.



The City of Waco offers a competitive salary based on qualifications and experience and a full range of benefits including health, dental, vision, and life insurance along with an attractive time-off package. The

City participates in the Texas Municipal Retirement System (TMRS) with a 7% employee contribution and a municipal matching ratio of 2:1.

Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations

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

Natalie Leonhard, Partner
Sharon Hansen, Senior Associate
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/cameron-park-zoo-city-waco/director-cameron-park-zoo>

The City of Waco is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is committed to providing fair and equal treatment of all applicants for employment without regard to race, gender, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. We value diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for all.



