

Search for the  
Chief Executive Officer



## THE SEARCH

The Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo, a renowned institution that aspires to capitalize on its unique position to influence conservation on a global scale, seeks an innovative, visionary, and courageous Chief Executive Officer. Since its founding, the Calgary Zoo has been educating generations of visitors about the need for conservation locally while also pursuing innovative conservation action that goes beyond its gates, the province of Alberta, and Canada. With the launch of the Wilder Institute in 2021, a bold conservation organization was born, specifically dedicated to research-based, collaborative work that engages local people and governments to influence policy and advance global conservation practices. This is an exceptional opportunity to lead a world-class zoo and revolutionary conservation organization in redefining approaches to saving endangered species across the world.



The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) reports to the Board of Directors and provides strategic leadership to the two arms of this vibrant organization- the [Wilder Institute](#) and the [Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo](#). The CEO will champion the work across the organization, which is anchored by three critical and interconnected cornerstones: Conservation and Sustainability, Engaging Others and Inspiring Change, and

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Care for Endangered and At-Risk Species. The opportunity for the new CEO will be to define the pace of change and strategic plans to continue to evolve the delicate balance between the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo's conservation ambition and operating a world class Zoo. Supported by a committed and accomplished board and exceptional leadership team, the CEO will be positioned to make a significant impact in defining what it means to be a modern conservation organization and zoo.

The new CEO must be an experienced and agile leader who is passionate about the mission of the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo ("WICZ") and especially driven by the conservation mission that underpins all endeavors across the organization. The CEO will champion the work and mission of WICZ externally, on local, national, and global stages, and strategically position the organization to achieve the growth in conservation impact to which it aspires. Additionally, the CEO will work with the talented team at the Zoo to continue to nurture a world-class guest experience and maintain exceptional animal welfare for the over 100 species for whom the Zoo is home. This position requires an astute ability to influence and persuade, determination to achieve goals, the capacity to inspire vision, and a firm commitment to supporting WICZ's high-performing staff in their ongoing exceptional work and professional growth. The successful candidate should bring significant leadership experience in a complex organization and demonstrate the ability to lead with vision and unite internal and external stakeholders to achieve common goals.

The Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo is assisted by Isaacson, Miller, an international executive search firm, in this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search firm.



## WILDER INSTITUTE/CALGARY ZOO

Founded in 1929, the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo is at the forefront of critical conservation work and one of Canada's signature destinations for learning about nature and connecting with wildlife. Sitting on 125 acres in the heart of Calgary, it is a leading authority in fighting the extinction of plants and animals worldwide. As a globally recognized wildlife conservation organization, the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo guides, innovates, and applies scientific solutions to restore some of the world's most endangered species. Locally and globally, WICZ takes action in the wild daily to yield powerful benefits for nature and people.



WICZ's unique structure includes a [world-class zoo](#) and a [renowned conservation organization](#) that operates as one organization focused on a singular goal. The Zoo and Wilder Institute function to support each other in the mutual purpose of taking and inspiring action to sustain wildlife and wild places. Wilder Institute leads with a vision and strategy for conservation, acts globally to reintroduce threatened species to the wild, and empowers communities to conserve their own natural resources to positively impact both nature and people. The Calgary Zoo allows humans to experience conservation firsthand, provides a refuge for at-risk species, and brings in important funding to support the conservation efforts of Wilder. WICZ is on a bold conservation-forward mission. The two arms of the organization are working in tandem on a transformational journey that will redefine the impact of zoos globally and ultimately position WICZ as a pinnacle of global conservation work.

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As part of its ambition to become Canada's leader in wildlife conservation, WICZ was re-defined in 2021, and The Wilder Institute emerged. WICZ is a new kind of conservation organization- one dedicated to research-based, collaborative work that engages local people and governments to influence policy and advance global conservation practices, undergirded by a world-class zoo with a reputation for excellent animal welfare, a track record of transformational conservation work, and engaging and inspiring exhibits. By evolving from a zoo that engages in conservation to a conservation organization that operates a zoo, a unique ability continues to emerge to educate generations of visitors about the need for conservation. This is currently done with the help of animal ambassadors locally while also pursuing innovative conservation action that goes beyond the Zoo's gates, throughout Canada, and worldwide. The creation of the [Wilder Institute](#) and the [Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo](#) was a pivotal moment in the organization's trajectory of conservation work and impact.

Today, the internationally accredited WICZ is a leading authority in wildlife conservation, reintroducing threatened species to the wild and empowering communities to conserve natural resources to positively impact both the environment and local inhabitants. The staff and volunteers of WICZ are passionate about restoring balance to wildlife and human life, together. Using innovative science, teams are working to save threatened and endangered species and return them to the wild, conserve threatened communities and populations, and better understand the impact of threats and conservation interventions through scientific investigations.



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There are many facets to the impactful work already underway. The organization's conservation expertise is focused on two areas – [Community Conservation](#) and [Conservation Translocations](#). WICZ works with collaborators in government to recommend policies to protect wildlife and wild places, including advising the UK government to develop and refine the [English Code for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations](#). WICZ participates in [46 different Species Survival Plans](#) for threatened and endangered species, and conservation advocacy is at the heart of the work across the institution. The Zoo's conservation programs, including the [Chevron Open Minds Zoo School](#), have welcomed over 20,000 students into a living classroom focused on wildlife and conservation since 1993.

## Wilder Institute

[The Wilder Institute](#) is a science-based conservation organization focused on real-world impact through its dedication to research-based conservation approaches, engaging local people, and collaborating with organizations large and small. Community Conservation Specialists and Population Ecologists conduct research as part of every program or initiative the organization leads, co-leads, or collaborates on. This approach ensures that conservation action plans are always guided by scientific decision-making and follow best practices in the field. It also allows the sharing of the outcomes of this research with the global scientific community. Scientists work with diverse stakeholders to weave established scientific best practices with new insights and local and traditional ecological knowledge to create innovative conservation approaches. Continuous data collection and analysis ensure that approaches can be evaluated for success and adjusted for improvement. The team shares their learnings via peer-reviewed publications in scientific journals, presenting at international conferences, and speaking with local community leaders.



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Research conducted by the Wilder Institute serves to either inform conservation actions for specific species or, more broadly, advance conservation practice. Species-specific outcomes include learning how to increase the breeding success of greater sage-grouse. Advances and insights of a broader scope include investigating how inbreeding depression in extinct-in-the-wild species affects fitness traits and, thus, population viability, which has significant relevance in conservation decision-making for such species. The Wilder Institute works with collaborators in government to recommend policies that will protect wildlife and wild places for current and future generations. Recently the Wilder Institute advised the UK government in developing and refining the English Code for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations. This policy will ensure that all groups are applying the latest scientifically validated approaches to any conservation translocations they undertake, significantly amplifying their success.

### Calgary Zoo



Located east of Calgary's downtown core, on beautiful St. George's Island, the Calgary Zoo is internationally recognized as one of the top zoos in the world for conservation. The Zoo is instrumental in connecting people to wildlife and educating them about the impactful role accredited zoos play in conservation work. The Calgary Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums

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(AZA), the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and recently obtained the highest level of accreditation offered by the Alberta Museums Association (AMA) as a Recognized Museum Program (RMP) with 4,000 different biological artifacts. A 116-acre wildlife park, the Calgary Zoo is Canada's most visited zoo and attracted more than 1.5 million visitors in 2023, the highest attendance in its 90+ history. The Calgary Zoo is home to over 4,000 animals across more than 100 species, which are organized by distinct zones: [Wild Canada](#), [Destination Africa](#), [Exploration Asia](#), [Penguin Plunge](#), [Dorothy Harvie Gardens](#), [ENMAX Conservatory](#), and [Prehistoric Park](#).

Among its notable exhibits is the newly redeveloped Wild Canada. Wild Canada takes visitors on a journey through seven of Canada's ecological zones, celebrating the wonder and diversity of a world where people, animals, and the land are connected. Guests are immersed in beautiful habitats while experiencing engaging activities and storytelling to inspire and educate about the importance of biodiversity, the impacts of climate change, and the complex survival challenges facing iconic Canadian wildlife and wild places. The zone features [more than 15 extraordinary Canadian species](#) in expansive habitats and includes six newly renovated habitats for muskox, bighorn sheep, woodland caribou, North American river otter, whooping crane, the Jihad Shibley Rocky Mountain Aviary, and a [brand-new world-class polar bear habitat](#).

## Archibald Biodiversity Centre

Since 1985, the Calgary Zoo has operated an off-site conservation facility located south of Calgary, Alberta, to support the activities of conservation translocation programs. Some of Canada's most endangered species, such as greater sage-grouse, Vancouver Island marmots, and whooping cranes, continue existing in the wild because of the team's skills in animal husbandry, research, and welfare. The Calgary Zoo takes great care to encourage natural behaviors amongst conservation species, including limiting their exposure to humans and urban sights and sounds. However, accelerating development in and around the once-remote oasis for conservation breeding was beginning to compromise those efforts.





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In 2021, the Wilder Institute broke ground on the much-anticipated [Archibald Biodiversity Centre \(ABC\)](#) with a new location remote enough to afford the level of seclusion necessary for successful conservation and research programs yet close enough to be easily serviced from the main Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo property. The adjacent lands present minimal opportunity for future development, ensuring the appropriate ‘buffer’ and seclusion necessary to keep the animals in their natural state, an essential element of successful reintroduction programs. This one-of-a-kind facility located on 333 acres of land in Wheatland County represents the best of what conservation charities are capable of. The new campus not only enables the organization to improve breeding facilities for current programs such as whooping cranes, burrowing owls, greater sage-grouse, and Vancouver Island marmots, but also sets the stage to dramatically increase the ability to add wildlife and plant breeding programs to the Institute’s portfolio.

## Organizational Structure and Governance

The Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo is led by a [group of passionate individuals](#) who bring deep experience from a range of fields, including science, law, policy, business, industry, education, and more, all of whom are strongly committed to the mission of conservation. Governance consists of four Officers of the Board comprised of community leaders who help guide the mission and vision and a twelve-member Board of Trustees, who work together to create a policy framework for the Zoo. Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer has four direct reports, including the Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Conservation Officer, and Chief Development Officer, all of whom comprise the executive leadership team. A dedicated and highly talented team of more than 1000 professionals works within each of these units. The team works both in Calgary and in situ.

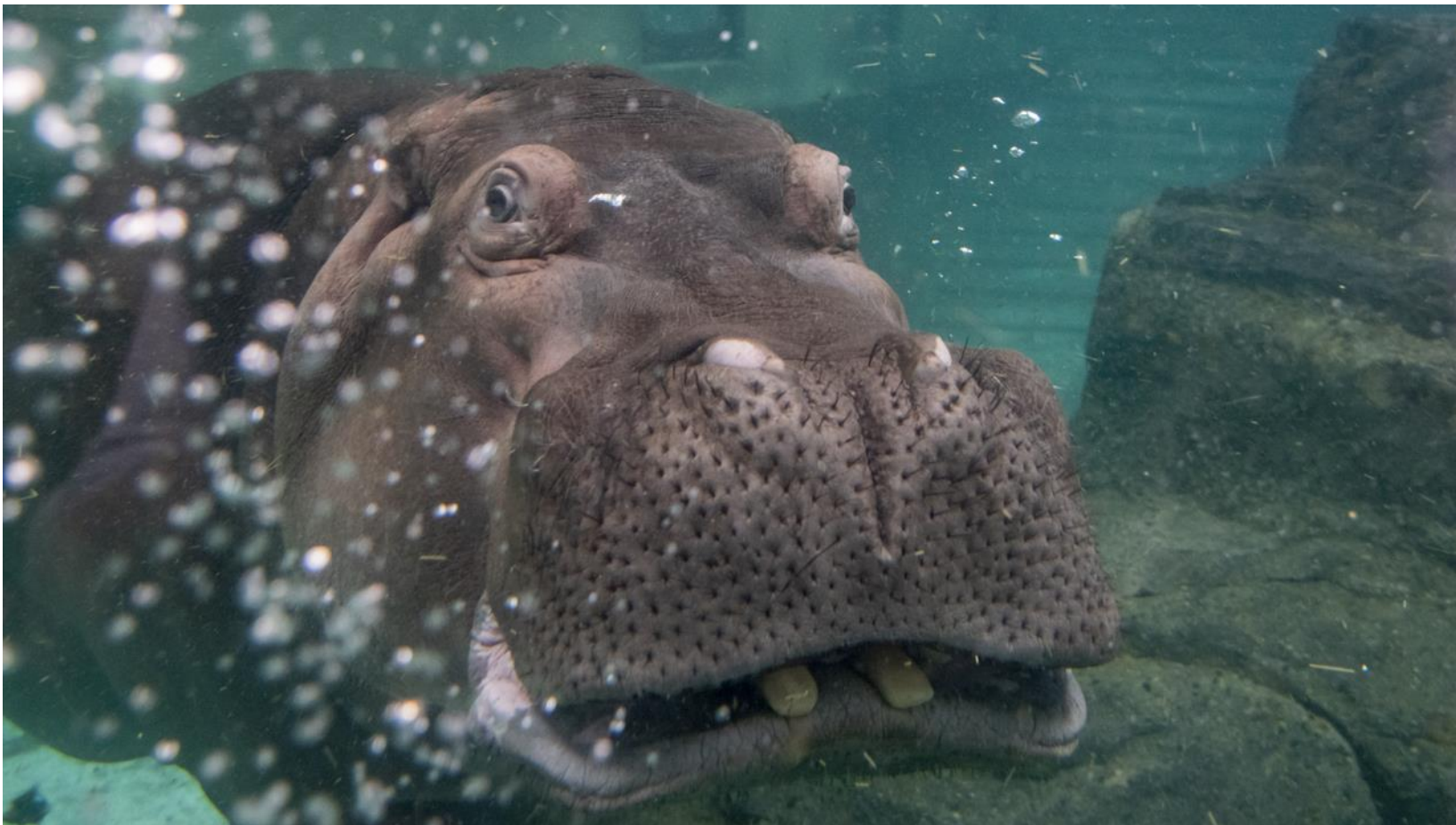
## Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo Today

WICZ is a thriving, vibrant, and well-funded organization. Overall, WICZ operates from a very healthy financial position. In the fiscal year 2022, revenue totaled \$66.2 million, with \$50 million in expenses, including facilities maintenance, staff compensation, and various services. The City of Calgary provided \$8.5 million via an operating fund, which was combined with other sources of revenue and used to pay expenses. Fundraising in the last year included \$21,384,815 in total giving. A draft strategic plan is underway, framed by three interconnected cornerstones: Conservation and Sustainability, Engaging Others and Inspiring Change, and Care for Endangered and At-Risk Species. The new Master Plan identifies projects designed to enhance the guest experience, bolster animal welfare, and grow conservation efforts. Projects include making the Zoo more of a year-round attraction via a large indoor rainforest, a significant opportunity to maximize the typical off-season. Work and plans are underway for the next accreditation visit in the Fall of 2024, with all eyes on making sure it is a successful process. Additionally, preparations are underway to host the next AZA Annual Conference in September, which will spotlight WICZ amongst leading zoo and conservation organizations worldwide. Finally, WICZ will celebrate its centennial in 2029, with plans underway to maximize this exciting milestone.

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This is a significant moment for WICZ in its trajectory of influence and impact as a global authority on wildlife conservation. In 2022, Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo undertook conservation efforts for 27 species at risk in Canada and around the world through 18 collaborative projects. 2022 also saw the launch of the [Cross River Gorilla Initiative](#), a new community-based conservation program that supports the next generation of conservation leaders in West Africa by supporting graduate students who will conduct research relevant to the conservation of the Cross River gorilla. In the same year, the [Kenya Mountain Bongo Partnership](#) celebrated the opening of the Eburu Natural Forest Honey Cooperative in Kenya to generate sustainable income through honey harvesting and product development while easing human pressure on forest resources and Critically Endangered mountain bongo.

WICZ reinforced its commitment to conservation with the addition of its [inaugural Chief Conservation Officer](#) in 2023. The addition of this role elevates Wilder Institute's global impact through strategic leadership on conservation work across the six countries in which it operates and coordinates research initiatives on a variety of international programs to save at-risk species and more. With Alberta's unique flora and fauna in mind, a partnership between the WICZ and the Government of Alberta's Inglewood facility, Bow Habitat Station, led to the inaugural Alberta Biodiversity Festival in 2023, which hosted over 6,000 visitors.



Additional recent highlights include:

- Completed construction on the biggest project in its history, [Wild Canada](#): 26 capital projects, \$41 million, 26 months, and over 1,000 people were involved in the project.
- Released the 100th burrowing owl in its head-starting program.
- Welcomed the births and hatches of new arrivals – two Humboldt penguin chicks, a king penguin chick, two Hartmann’s mountain zebra foals, a Critically Endangered black-and-white ruffed lemur pup, two red panda cubs, and a western lowland gorilla.
- 17 Vancouver Island Marmots were born at the Archibald Biodiversity Centre.
- Over 1.5 million guests visited in 2023, a new attendance record.
- Launched [WildScapes](#), the only topiary festival of its kind in Alberta.
- Welcomed 38,000 youth through school programs and 2,250 youth for camps.
- Overall per capita engagement in Calgary is significant, reaching about 100%.

## ROLE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Chief Executive Officer provides leadership for the entire WICZ organization and reports to the Board of Directors. The CEO will set and affirm strategic direction, ensure that the institution has the appropriate organizational structure and staff in place to meet its goals, and delegate authority. Because WICZ is at once an esteemed conservation institution, a destination attraction, and a source of recreation, it is an enterprise of considerable diversity and complexity. The CEO will collaboratively define its path forward at this pivotal moment and drive its continued growth and success.



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The broad objectives for the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo's new Chief Executive Officer are as follows:

## Lead the transformation of Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo into a preeminent national and international conservation organization

Wilder Institute and the Calgary Zoo are already making a significant impact on the mission of restoring a balance between wildlife and human life. Together, direct action is being taken to save endangered species while inspiring people across the world to focus on conservation and their role in this important endeavor. This already strong reputation provides a solid foundation on which to elevate its scope and influence and for this organization to achieve its full potential of reach and impact. The new CEO will leverage current strengths and future potential in advancing Wilder Institute on a trajectory toward national and global reach for its work and programs in conservation, supported by a world-class zoo. This will require keen attention to government relations, both across Canada and internationally, and significant advocacy work on behalf of the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo, its mission, and global conservation work. The result will be an ever-stronger public identity for the institution that captures the rich breadth and depth of its work and underscores its impact in conservation.



## Strategically build and grow alignment across the organization on the vision and strategy of Wilder Institute

The launch of Wilder Institute in 2021 set the stage for a novel paradigm shift whereby two entities across one organization work in concert together on the critical issue of conservation. The Wilder Institute is the

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framework for an elevated effect in global conservation work. The Calgary Zoo's track record as a world-class zoo with strong animal care, conservation success, and effective messaging serves as a solid foundation to further leverage and expand WICZ's unique conservation programs and global advocacy. There is great enthusiasm for this vision across the organization. As it is still in its nascency, there is work to be done to align the various organizational stakeholders in how their specific roles fit into the larger vision for Wilder. The new CEO will work across the organization to reinforce a sense of shared purpose and cohesion regarding Wilder's vision and how each role contributes to that purpose.

## Leverage existing and create new opportunities to generate revenue while ensuring a strong overall financial position

Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo enjoys a solid financial position, achieved through successful fundraising, strong visitation, and other revenue-generating activities. The organization has historically benefited from the engaged community of donors in Calgary, who have provided significant support. This includes the recent successful raising of over \$42 million in support of the Wild Canada exhibit. The new CEO will build on this momentum as an eager and able part of the advancement operation. The new CEO will contribute to the expansion of philanthropic engagement beyond Calgary to support the national and global aspirations of the Wilder Institute and ensure that fundraising efforts are aligned to support the organization's planned trajectory of growth.

## Ensure that Calgary Zoo remains vibrant and influential and continues its trajectory of growth and operational excellence

The Zoo is already a beloved institution in the Calgary community and has experienced growth in visitorship, recognition, and influence in recent years. Its reputation for world-class animal welfare, as well as its role as an integral community cultural institution, provide a stable foundation for which all growth and reach will build. The CEO will capitalize on this foundation, strategically and diligently supporting the talented leadership and staff in delivering on these expectations. The CEO will ensure that the Calgary Zoo maintains its record as a world-class facility whose infrastructure, staff, exhibits, programs, and services are efficiently and effectively run. The CEO will lead the talented team and Board of Directors with transparent communication and visionary ideas, serving as a resource and advocate as appropriate. Ultimately, the CEO will maintain the Calgary Zoo as a place that appeals to visitors, volunteers, students, and collaborators as exciting sources of education, inspiration, and joy.

## Proactively build and support a culture of inclusivity both within the organization and as a key element in external initiatives

It is vital that the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo leadership and staff be supported in an environment that honors their unique backgrounds through an intentional culture of equity and inclusion. It is equally

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important that the idea of inclusive conservation be at the forefront of the organization's work. The new CEO will exemplify these values and work to ensure internal and external initiatives are designed to support inclusion. This consists of recognizing the importance of First Nations, on whose land the organization operates, and engaging with indigenous populations in building and unfolding conservation initiatives worldwide. The CEO will also work with the WICZ leadership to ensure that there is an alignment between the future strategy and the culture needed to achieve that strategy.



### QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

For this pivotal role, the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo seeks a leader who embraces the organization's bold mission and believes firmly in its distinctive purpose of conservation locally, nationally, and across the globe. While proven leadership and management experience in a renowned, accredited zoo or aquarium would be an asset, it is not required. The successful CEO will be equally visionary, strategic, tactical, and be fluent in the work and issues of conservation.

A deep appreciation of the importance of conservation and the value of zoos in this space is critical. A strong appetite and well-developed aptitude for fundraising, marketing, and public relations are essential.

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The CEO must be a gifted public communicator with infectious enthusiasm and the ability to relate to a wide range of audiences. An understanding of global conservation dynamics and the ability to represent the institution locally, nationally, and globally is critical. The CEO must be an agile leader, adept at working within a complex organizational structure.

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 and innovative leadership and effective management of a complex and sizable organization, preferably one with keen conservation interests.
- Experience with non-profit governance, including success leading in an organization governed by a Board of Directors.
- Track record of building and sustaining innovative partnerships and working with diverse stakeholders, including community members, public officials, and professional colleagues.
- Political savvy and experience working with public officials at the local, province/state, and national levels.
- Outstanding demonstrated skills in team building and staff development.
- Fundraising and marketing ability, including experience raising funds from a variety of sources.
- Strong team-building skills with an ability to mentor and motivate as well as to delegate, inspire, and empower others to succeed.
- Proven track record building and supporting diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive organizations.

## Attributes

- Passion for conservation and for the leadership role of zoos worldwide in its pursuit.
- Public presence, exceptional communication skills, and the ability to be a persuasive spokesperson and ambassador for WICZ.

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- Strong emotional intelligence and communication skills to work effectively with the full range of constituents.
- Imagination, intelligence, gracious self-confidence, good humor, caring attitude, and a high level of energy. Unquestionable integrity.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, and NOMINATIONS

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

Natalie Leonhard, Partner  
Sharon Hansen, Senior Associate  
Alexandra Lolavar, Associate  
Kendra Moleé, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/wilder-institutecalgary-zoo/chief-executive-officer>

The Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo strives to cultivate a workplace in which everyone feels welcome and empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. As a conservation organization, we respect and value the diversity of all life and come together as individuals and teammates to achieve the zoo's mission and vision. We recognize the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion and work to advance our culture to ensure diverse viewpoints are heard and everyone has an equitable chance to succeed and thrive.

## About Calgary

Calgary is a vibrant metropolis in Canada's Prairie Provinces, nestled in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies and situated on the western edge of the Great Plains. A relatively young Canadian city, it is the administrative and financial headquarters of the country's petroleum industry. Also known as "Cowtown" to the rest of Canada, Calgary is rooted in its wild Western heritage and celebrates its history as a cattle ranching capital. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Calgary is one of the world's top 10 most livable cities, with top marks in culture, environment, and education. Calgary is the third most diverse major city in Canada, home to more than 240 different ethnic origins and over 165 spoken languages, and has the highest labor force participation rate of major cities in Canada – making the city one of the best places to build a life and a career.



## Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo

As one of the world's most affordable cities for housing, young professionals and families can afford to purchase a home in Calgary. Compared to over 90 housing markets surveyed from Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, New Zealand, Singapore, the UK, and the US, Calgary is among the top 25 most affordable cities in the world. A city designed with families in mind, Calgary is ranked third out of 51 Canadian cities on Clever Canadian's '2022 Most Family-friendly Cities in Canada' list. More information can be [found here](#).

