Saint Louis Zoo
Animals Always®

Vice President, Finance & Chief Financial Officer

Position Specification
The Organization: Saint Louis Zoo

A frontrunner in conservation and guest experience, Saint Louis Zoo draws more than 2.6 million attendees annually and is the most-visited attraction in the region. The world’s first municipally supported zoo, Saint Louis Zoo, is one of the few that still offers free public admission. Guests love their time at the Zoo, with 98% rating their experiences as excellent or very good. Acknowledged as one of the top 14 best zoos by Travel + Leisure, the Saint Louis Zoo is consistently and currently voted among the ten best zoos by USA Today in their Readers’ Choice Awards and took the top spot in 2018. Frequently in TripAdvisor’s Top 10 Best Zoos globally, it is currently ranked number four by TourScanner.

Already one of the most essential zoological parks and conservation organizations, the Saint Louis Zoo is on the path to enhancing public understanding further, increasing support of wildlife conservation through education and advocacy, and inspiring lasting global change. The organization continues to think bigger and bolder for its animals, conservation, people and communities, and the future. The Zoo’s financial and operational strength, as well as its support from the community and those who sustain it, has set the stage for new possibilities to connect people to wildlife and nature, to create world-class animal habitats, and to conserve animals locally and globally, as well as to assure sustainable populations looking ahead. Their efforts are now positioned to be amplified. The passing of Prop Z in 2018, which allocated 0.125% of the county’s sales tax to the Saint Louis Zoo, and the acquisition of 425 acres in north St. Louis County set the stage for new possibilities. Further ground was gained in 2022 when the Zoo completed the issuance of approximately $141 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds. Proceeds from this bond issuance resulted in a $120 million project fund and roughly $21 million to cover the first three years of interest payments. The project funds, which must be spent within three years of issuance, are being used to help fund capital improvements and construction on projects such as the Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park and Destination Discovery.

Mission

To conserve animals and their habitats through animal management, research, recreation, and educational programs that encourage the support and enrich the experience of the public.
Construction is still underway in north St. Louis County, but that has not deterred the animals already residing at the site’s extensive, natural space dedicated to breeding and conservation efforts—in April, the team welcomed the first animal born at the location, a female Grevy’s zebra foal. Projected to open in spring 2027 as the Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park, the new campus will be one destination where two journeys come together to move the needle on species conservation, merging public experiences at the wildlife adventure park with critical conservation and research at the Kent Family Conservation & Animal Science Center. Creating the WildCare Park will transform the Zoo as an organization, the North County community, and the St. Louis region.

This year, construction will commence to create the Henry A. Jubel Foundation Destination Discovery, providing dynamic educational experiences for children and families at the Zoo. Designed with the youngest guests in mind and accessible to people of all abilities, Destination Discovery will allow guests to learn and play in an immersive, hands-on environment that provides ample opportunity for close-up animal encounters. Development of the 2.8-acre area is projected at $40 million, which will be supported through a combination of philanthropy, including the $15 million lead gift from the Henry A. Jubel Foundation, bond financing, and Prop Z revenues. It is planned to open in 2026.

The Zoo’s Better Wild Better World fundraising campaign currently focuses on securing gifts to support the Saint Louis Zoo, including building Destination Discovery and continued development of the Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park. More than $320 million in total investment will translate into lifelong memories and life-changing experiences for families, allowing the Zoo to expand animal sustainability and conservation programs. To achieve this vision, the Zoo is seeking $160 million in philanthropic support through outright gifts and pledges, including cash, securities, and realized bequests toward the approximately $327 million in identified needs; $80 million, half of the amount sought, will be allocated to the WildCare Park. The Zoo partnered with CCS Fundraising, leading experts in campaign and development strategy, to complete a feasibility study and development readiness audit, and the campaign is successfully underway with the support of a dynamic campaign leadership committee. Launched in 2021, tremendous progress has already been made, with $108.5 million secured through documented and verbal commitments. Three of the most significant gifts in the organization’s history are among the dollars already received. The fundraising work will continue through the completion of Destination Discovery and conclude aligned with the timing of the WildCare Park opening, slated for 2027. The realization of these plans will uplift the Zoo’s role as a vital conservation, economic, and social driver locally, nationally, and globally.
The Saint Louis Zoo seeks a strategic Vice President, Finance & Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who will report to and partner with Dwight Scott, providing active leadership for all aspects of the Zoo’s finances, focused on uplifting overall organizational operations. At the start of 2022, the Saint Louis Zoo welcomed Dwight as the Dana Brown President & CEO. He brings ambitious plans to continue the Saint Louis Zoo’s long tradition of conservation leadership and global impact. As a senior member of the Strategic Operations Group, the Zoo’s senior leadership team, the CFO helps lead, create, and execute strategies that support the Zoo’s mission, goals, and general operations while facilitating the financial strength of the organization, assuring fiscal soundness, workplace effectiveness, and the provision of mission-centric services.

The CFO will work as a collaborative partner who is highly engaged and well-versed in managing all aspects of accounting and financial functions through others to ensure the organization’s overall goals are achieved. This dedicated team leader will have a track record of maximizing, leveraging, recruiting, retaining, and advocating for a talented team while setting and achieving goals annually and in the long term. Finance houses 14 full-time and five part-time professional staff who report to the CFO through a Director of Finance, a Director of Procurement and Supplier Diversity, and a Manager of Revenue Operations; an Administrative Assistant additionally supports the CFO. Providing direction, mentorship, and support to this team, the incoming CFO will evaluate all processes with an eye on efficiency and the broad use of technology to streamline and enhance work across the organization. Once on board, the successful candidate will be expected to assess the enterprise to ensure optimal efficiency, the use of best practices, and overall operational excellence that allows the Saint Louis Zoo to surpass mission-specific objectives.
As the strategic leader of the finance organization, broad work outputs include budget preparation and evaluation against actuals, financial projections and modeling, financial statement development, tax preparation and supervision of the annual audit in conjunction with the Zoo’s auditors, and oversight of the accounting team in collecting, summarizing, and interpreting financial data for the use of Zoo management, regulatory agencies, and taxing authorities. Through these activities, the CFO will work with diverse individuals and groups to achieve shared goals and grow impact while maintaining the Zoo’s tradition of world-class animal welfare, cutting-edge conservation science and research, and exemplary guest experience. This position will lead in a manner that is consistent with and supports the Saint Louis Zoo’s overall mission, vision, and core values of People Matter, Animals Always, and Operational Excellence. This ambassador for the Zoo will demonstrate and live the values of the Saint Louis Zoo, showing respect for people and the natural world, community-mindedness, integrity, warmth, and humility in their interactions.

The Chief Financial Officer will be an engaging leader who can inspire, motivate, teach, and empower team members toward their individual and collective goals and serve as a resource to the organization’s leadership on all financial matters. The successful CFO will have an entrepreneurial approach to challenges and will be someone who asks why when thinking about current processes and intended outcomes. A significant portion of revenues, 28.7% in 2023, derives from taxes. Last year alone, property tax revenue from the Metropolitan Zoological Park & Museum District provided more than $27.5 million, and the Proposition Z sales tax generated almost $26 million. Dedicated and transparent oversight of these tax-generated revenues and familiarity with revenue bonds, significant capital campaigns, and public-private partnerships are optimal experiences leading up to this position.

Commitment to Diversity

Understanding that an organization cannot advocate for the preservation of the Earth’s biodiversity without championing and cherishing social diversity, the Saint Louis Zoo is deeply committed to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. The CFO will contribute continuing leadership for the Zoo’s commitment to a culture of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in its community life and across its offerings. From ensuring a supportive and equitable experience for the roughly 33% of the workforce (both full-time and part-time) that belongs to a minoritized group to creating a welcoming experience for every guest, the Saint Louis Zoo community strives to promote a fairer and more just world. The CFO will be a leader in both word and action by promoting the values of equity and inclusion in all areas in their purview while embracing this priority and helping advance programs and initiatives to build on this legacy for sustainable and long-term impact. The strategic plan confirms an organization-wide commitment to championing diversity beyond the Zoo’s campus, celebrating friendship with communities worldwide that coexist with wildlife.
Governance and Financial Health

The Saint Louis Zoo is a tax-supported political subdistrict of the State of Missouri. As such, the Zoo is a government agency and has restrictions on how it raises and spends money. In the late 1960s, a group of civic leaders combatted a diminished city tax base by proposing the establishment of a new Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District (Zoo-Museum District or ZMD), whereby the citizens of St. Louis County would join the citizens of the City of St. Louis in supporting three cultural institutions—Saint Louis Zoo, Saint Louis Art Museum, and Saint Louis Science Center (Missouri Botanical Garden and Missouri History Museum were later added)—through a property tax. Voters in the city and county overwhelmingly approved the establishment of the ZMD in 1971. Through the Zoo-Museum District, the community thus supports the Saint Louis Zoo as a world-renowned attraction, free and accessible to all, in this unique public-private partnership. The Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District is governed by an eight-member Board of Directors, four appointed by the Mayor of St. Louis and four appointed by the County Executive. Appointments are on a four-year rotation; each January 1st, the terms of one County Board member and one City Board member expire. Fifty-nine citizens have served on the Zoo-Museum District Board of Directors. The ZMD Board members act as stewards of the tax dollars collected for the ZMD and distributed to member organizations.

The institutions funded through the ZMD are independently governed. The Missouri State Legislature established the St. Louis Zoological Park Subdistrict Commission as the Zoo’s governing authority. As such, the Commission provides fiduciary and management responsibility for the well-being of the Zoo and has ultimate responsibility for fulfilling the Zoo’s mission. The St. Louis Zoological Park Subdistrict Commission has ten members, five of whom reside in the city and five living in the county. Nominations come from within the Commission and are subject to the approval of the Mayor and County Executive.

The Zoo operates from a healthy financial position and is poised for future growth and success. Saint Louis Zoo’s annual revenues have been increasing, and more funds have been dedicated to operations year over year while simultaneously building financial reserves from the endowment and portfolio. 2023 was the first year since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that the Zoo operated with no capacity limitations and without the use of free, timed ticket reservations to enter the Zoo. Annual revenue for 2023 was more than $186 million, with just over $113 million in expenses. The audited financial reports provide further detail.

2023 Total Revenue:

- Contributions: $70.9 million
- Investment earnings: $26.1 million
- Taxes: $53.5 million
- Visitor Spend: $35.8 million

2023 Total Expenses:

- Salaries and fringes: $57.8 million
- Conservation and research: $1.1 million
- Other Operating: $36.7 million
- Animal food and care: $1.5 million
- Depreciation: $16.2 million

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The Zoo's projected revenue for 2024 is almost $133 million, with expenses of $93 million.

The Zoo has ambitious plans for the $230 million WildCare Park. The operational expenses for 2024 are currently budgeted at $3.53 million. As the WildCare Park campus takes shape, a substantial increase in the operating budget over the next few years is anticipated. Once fully operational in 2027, projected expenses for the campus will exceed $17.6 million.

The Association, Philanthropy, and Fundraising

The Saint Louis Zoo also has a partner, the Saint Louis Zoo Association, which is dedicated to raising funds to support the Zoo’s mission. The Association is a private, nonprofit organization whose volunteer board is more than 70 people and comprises business and community leaders. They work with the Zoo to provide leadership for membership, annual, partnership, major, planned, and capital gifts, as well as fundraising, public and donor events, and public affairs. The Association boasts more than 57,000 members, and annual fundraising consistently exceeds $19 million in years outside the campaign. Assets through December 2023 total $202.6 million (the endowment’s restricted funds account for $105.6 million and the Association portfolio for $97 million). The Association's current cash surplus earmarked for strategic capital projects is $50 million.
Location

**St. Louis** boasts big city amenities such as family orientation, easy access, friendliness of a small town, and a low cost of living. Residents enjoy St. Louis’ many free attractions, fine cuisine, blues music, sports, and nightlife. Community engagement is ingrained in the culture—St. Louis has been named America’s Most Charitable City by Charity Navigator and has since appeared on their list of most charitable cities. St. Louis provides a wealth of job opportunities. Decades of intentional renewal and revitalization have created a historic town in the heart of the Midwest that is still on the rise. Its population is just under 300,000 and part of a bi-state metropolitan area with 2.8 million. As such, Illinois and its closest cities are just minutes away.
Under the direction of the Dana Brown President & CEO and working closely with the Strategic Operations Group and volunteer leadership, the CFO is responsible for the following essential functions:

**Leadership and Strategy**

- Serves as a Saint Louis Zoo’s Strategic Operations Group member, meeting weekly to develop and direct the organization’s strategic vision and help coordinate daily operations. Works with this collegial and high-performing team to create and drive organizational initiatives, functioning as a critical resource in determining the Zoo’s course through strategic planning and execution.
  - Provides ongoing operational and strategic leadership input across institutional concerns while offering a comprehensive view of the organization’s business affairs through relevant financial and management reporting.
  - Advises on long-term business and financial planning. Serves as a strategic business partner and advisor to the CEO, volunteer leaders, and colleagues to develop short- and long-term goals and plans for the Zoo.
- Based on financial data, delivers tactical and operational decision-making recommendations to the CEO, the St. Louis Zoological Park Subdistrict Commission, the Association Board of Directors, and members of the Strategic Operations Group. Prepares and presents straightforward, informative financial reports to management, volunteer leaders, and relevant Commission and Board committees. Serves as the key financial staff member for the Commission Audit and Finance Committees and the Association Investment Committee, reporting on organizational finances, project progress, and operations.
- Responsible for strategically and operationally managing and safeguarding the organization’s assets, the CFO ensures that all Saint Louis Zoo financial functions perform optimally.
- Serves as a steadfast, active leader and manager who is a collaborative, team-oriented, self-motivated consensus builder and can affect change.
- Leads organization-wide transformational initiatives aimed at improving the guest and employee experience.
- Translates detailed information into clear, concise, and accessible messaging; this includes monthly reports to Zoo staff at all levels of management.
- Directs and analyzes studies of general economic, business, and financial conditions and their impact on the Zoo’s policies and operations.
Financial Management

- Provides strategic, high-level oversight, management, and analysis of all financial functions to advance the Zoo’s mission and ensure ongoing operational health. Supervises developing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive accounting and financial record systems in compliance with governing regulations and policies.
- Partnering with leadership, the CFO identifies opportunities for top-line growth and drives financial improvement through traditional cost control methods and examples such as profitability analyses for proposed programs and benchmarking against industry peers.
- Manages the processes for financial forecasting, capital projects, and budgets and oversees the preparation of all financial reporting. Leads and oversees the creation and ongoing management of the Zoo’s annual budget and provides continual budget-to-actual analysis to the CEO. Collaborates with individual divisions on departmental budgets.
- Directs the planning and preparation of interim and annual financial statements and reports and assures that all federal, state, and charitable filings are completed accurately and efficiently. Ensures appropriate management, compliance, and reporting for the Zoo’s Series 2022 bond financing, property tax revenues from the ZMD, and Prop Z St. Louis County sales tax funds.
- In addition to membership in the municipally managed Employees Retirement System of the City of St. Louis, which is fully funded by the Zoo for all regular, full-time employees, the Zoo offers a deferred compensation plan. The CFO supports the Association Investment Committee and the Internal Relations Division in its oversight of the Zoo’s 457b, which is managed by The Standard.
- Continually improves the timeliness and correctness of Zoo leadership’s decision-making and aids in accurately posting revenue and expenses, assets, and liabilities. This includes budgeting and variance reporting, review of point-of-sale processes, grant processing, fixed asset review, and all related follow-up. Optimizes operations, upgrading systems and processes as needed. The organization’s current enterprise resource planning system is SageERP300.
Controls

- Oversees a robust control environment for the organization, including regulatory, legal, and contract compliance; ensures proper controls are in place and enforced; develops and updates critical policies and procedures; and ensures Zoo staff are trained to adhere to such controls. Maintains a focus on continuous review and improvement of appropriate policies, internal controls, accounting standards, and procedural systems.
- Partners with the Zoo’s external audit firm, CliftonLarsonAllen, to complete the annual audit and tax filings. Serves as the lead finance staff coordinating monthly finance activity in compliance with auditor requests.
- Maintains knowledge and application of current GAAP standards, updates, new FASBs, and other relevant pronouncements.
- Manages the Zoo’s banking relationships, meeting quarterly. Oversees and reports on the performance of investments, which CAPTRUST manages.

Other

- Participates in ongoing technology reviews and assists in initiatives designed to make work more efficient, engaging, and positive for the Zoo team, including implementing automated processes.
- Actively participates in Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) committees, initiatives, and other industry-specific organizations that would further professional development and help support the Zoo.
- Other duties as assigned by the CEO that are deemed necessary to elevate the Saint Louis Zoo’s mission.
Candidate Qualifications

The Chief Financial Officer will share the organization’s unwavering commitment to quality of service and innovation. This hands-on strategist will be comfortable in a high-growth environment that is diverse, inclusive, and dynamic, where everyone plays a part in maintaining and fostering the culture. This leader must possess and project the utmost integrity and highest standards of professional conduct and must be qualified by accomplishment and experience to garner the trust of a committed and motivated community.

The successful candidate will have at least 10 to 15 years of senior leadership experience gained in a large organization, having led finance, accounting, and reporting functions. This collaborative professional will have demonstrated experience providing quantifiable results in a complex organization with a high growth trajectory; past success in a mission-driven organization is preferred. Familiarity with public-private partnerships and bond financing would be highly beneficial. Our client is open to candidates with experience gained from various environments, including but not limited to AZA organizations, healthcare, higher education, or the private sector.

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

- This team player must be a driven and goal-oriented professional who is a champion for and embodies the Zoo’s Three Keys (Animals Always, People Matter, and Operational Excellence), the Zoo’s CCOIL values of Community, Creativity, Openness, Integrity, and Life-Work Balance, and the Zoo’s diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility culture. The CFO will lead by example and embrace their role as a steward of culture across the organization.
- The CFO should be a hands-on and innovative leader, experienced in managing change and maximizing efficiency. This professional will be low-ego, highly energetic, and forward-thinking, with an enthusiastic and passionate approach to work. This leader will appreciate and have a proven understanding of the nuances of profitable, multi-site recreational facilities. Ideally, this executive will have a demonstrated success record in supporting finance tied to capital projects and construction.
- The ideal candidate will be an accessible leader with proven management proficiency. The CFO will function as a catalyst, coach, and doer, using solid people skills to guide staff at all levels of the organization. Tied to this, the CFO will demonstrate proven aptitude for leading teams of skilled professionals to outstanding, efficiency-focused performance while creating a departmental culture that is hard-working, mission-focused, innovative, and fun. The CFO must be able to train, mentor/develop, and motivate staff to embrace best practices and consider creative ways of doing the work.
- Must be a strategic thinker who can understand the vital issues affecting the Zoo and provide unbiased analysis to all stakeholders. Excellent financial, analytical, and administrative skills are paramount. The CFO will be a business partner who ensures the finance function is integrated into all aspects of the organization, including deep engagement with the Zoo’s programs and fundraising. They will exhibit a deep internal and external customer service orientation with the willingness to find solutions to problems and work with a mindset of getting to “yes” regarding their financial outlook.
A high level of multicultural sensitivity is required, and experience with a diverse workforce is fundamental. The successful CFO will be an advocate for diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion with a history of impactful action that creates an inclusive environment and promotes diversity in guests, staff, and volunteers, reflecting the demographics of the region. Actions and decision-making will demonstrate emotional intelligence, transparency, compassion, authenticity, and the understanding that the Zoo serves and is supported by the St. Louis community.

Actively creating connections that encourage open and honest communication with all, this leader must excel at developing and sustaining close, effective working relationships with all levels of staff, volunteer leaders, and numerous representatives of public and private organizations, including government entities.

This executive will be a decisive, “roll-up-the-sleeves,” results-oriented manager who can keep projects moving forward within a consistent strategic framework, working with a sense of urgency and purpose and be able to both enact and manage change. This includes ensuring proactive communication and delegation that builds confidence, promotes diversity of thought, and celebrates achievements.

This individual must be firm and decisive, able to act and implement strategy within appropriate deadlines. A pragmatic facilitator who clears paths to solutions while upholding the highest standards of excellence. The CFO must organize and coordinate multiple tasks and establish and re-establish priorities as changing circumstances dictate.

This adept communicator will have to translate financial data so that it can be utilized effectively by those who do not possess a business orientation. The CFO must be able to step outside of finance and speak to mission and values in earnest. This must include the capacity to articulate and explain complex financial issues to staff, volunteer leaders, and all other stakeholders clearly and non-technically.

A nuanced understanding of government and nonprofit regulations and ideal operating principles about staff, programs, standards, and practices is desirable. This will include extensive experience with budget and financial analysis and detailed comprehension of GAAP. The successful candidate will have current knowledge and a commitment to keep abreast of the latest laws, policies, regulations, and rulings relating to the organization’s administrative and financial matters.

A strong financial leader who stands up to scrutiny and models consistent and ethical behavior. The CFO will have an innate ability to exercise tact in dealing with sensitive, nuanced, and confidential issues and situations.

The ideal candidate for this position will have held all prior positions for a meaningful period, establishing their ability to be successful and make a verifiable impact in each environment.
Education

The successful candidate will hold a bachelor’s degree in business administration, finance, accounting, or a related field or equivalent, as well as specialized training and experience. An advanced degree in business administration is preferred.

Work Environment

This executive leadership position is expected to be primarily an on-site leader and resource, but task-specific remote work is allowed and expected within the role’s responsibilities.

Anticipated Compensation

The Saint Louis Zoo offers an annual salary of $275,000 to $300,000, augmented by a comprehensive benefits package. The salary offer will depend on several factors, including educational qualifications, training, years of experience, and performance in previous positions. As a regular, full-time employee, the CFO will become a member of the Employees Retirement System of St. Louis; this pension is fully funded by the Saint Louis Zoo and based on average compensation prior to retirement and years of service.
The Saint Louis Zoo believes in providing equal opportunities to all job applicants and is an equal opportunity employer. It does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetics, or any other characteristic protected by law. Moreover, the Zoo considers diversity essential for successfully fulfilling its mission. Therefore, we encourage people from various backgrounds, cultures, races, educational qualifications, life experiences, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, ages, genders, gender expressions, and physical abilities to apply for employment at the Zoo.

The St. Louis Zoological Park Subdistrict Commission has retained Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc., an executive search firm, to assist in this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the search firm; all contact will be held in the strictest confidence.

We will begin reviewing applications immediately, and those submitted before the June 24, 2024, deadline will be given priority. If you’re interested in the opportunity, please submit your complete credentials as soon as possible for full consideration. To apply, email your cover letter and resume reflecting all work experience. Please explain your commitment to the Zoo’s mission in your cover letter and how your experience aligns with the job description.

Please read your resume for accuracy before submitting it for this position. Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc. verifies academic credentials for candidates, and our clients frequently conduct background checks before finalizing an offer.

Contact

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