



Saint Louis Zoo

Animals Always®

Director, Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park

Position Specification

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AND ASSOCIATES

Saint Louis Zoo

A frontrunner in conservation and visitor experience, [Saint Louis Zoo](#) draws approximately 2.5 million attendees annually and is the most-visited attraction in the region. As the world's first municipally supported zoo, Saint Louis Zoo is also one of the few remaining that offers free admission to the public. Guests love their time at the Zoo, with 94% of them 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 10 best zoos in the nation by USA Today in their Readers' Choice Awards and took the top spot in 2018. Always Pets has twice selected the Saint Louis Zoo as the best zoo in America, including 2023; it is ranked number four in the world by TourScanner; and TripAdvisor's most recent list put the Zoo among the top six.

Already one of the world's most important zoological parks and conservation organizations, the Zoo is on the path to further enhance public understanding, support wildlife conservation through education and advocacy, and effect inspired and lasting change on a global level. The organization continues to think bigger and bolder for its animals, for conservation, for its people and communities, and for its 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 for the future. 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. 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. The creation of the [WildCare Park](#) will be transformational to the Zoo as an organization, the North County community, and the St. Louis region.



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.

Vision for the WildCare Park

- MOVE THE NEEDLE ON ENDANGERED SPECIES BY SUPPORTING SPECIES RECOVERY AND POPULATION SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS.
- BE A DESTINATION THAT CREATES LASTING GUEST EXPERIENCES THAT MOTIVATE GUESTS TO ACT FOR WILDLIFE.
- INTENTIONALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE VITALITY AND RESILIENCY OF THE COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WILDCARE PARK.



Three Keys

Animals Always

The care and protection of the Zoo's animals, the conservation of their species, and the preservation of the wild places where they exist are the driving forces of all organizational activities.

People Matter

The Saint Louis Zoo cares for and about people: staff, volunteers, visitors, and partners.

Operational Excellence

The Zoo's success as a mission-driven organization depends on their ability to achieve and sustain business excellence.

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Presently, the Zoo's [Better Wild Better World](#) fundraising campaign focuses on securing gifts to support the Saint Louis Zoo, the Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park, and the endowment. More than \$320 million in total investment will translate into lifelong memories and life changing experiences for families, as well as allow the Zoo to expand sustainability and conservation programs for animals. 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 hired CCS Fundraising, leading experts in campaign and development strategy to complete a feasibility study and development readiness audit, and the campaign has launched in earnest with the support of a dynamic campaign leadership committee. Currently in a quiet phase, tremendous progress has already been made with more than half of the overall campaign goal now secured. Three of the largest gifts in the organization's history are among the dollars already received. The fundraising work will continue to align with the timing of the WildCare Park opening, slated for 2027.

The Opportunity

At the start of 2022, the Saint Louis Zoo welcomed a new Dana Brown President & CEO, [Dwight Scott](#). The Director will report to and partner with Dwight, who has ambitious plans to continue the Saint Louis Zoo's long tradition of conservation leadership and global impact. Working very closely with the Director of the Saint Louis Zoo to ensure the organization's overall goals are achieved, this executive is a senior member of the Zoo's Strategic Operations Group. As such, the Director will help lead, create, and execute a strategy that supports the Zoo's mission, goals, and general operations, while ensuring best-in-class operations and visitor experiences for their sites. In conjunction with the President & Chief Executive Officer and the Zoo's Vice President, Philanthropy, the Director, Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park will play a leadership role fundraising for the game changing new campus.



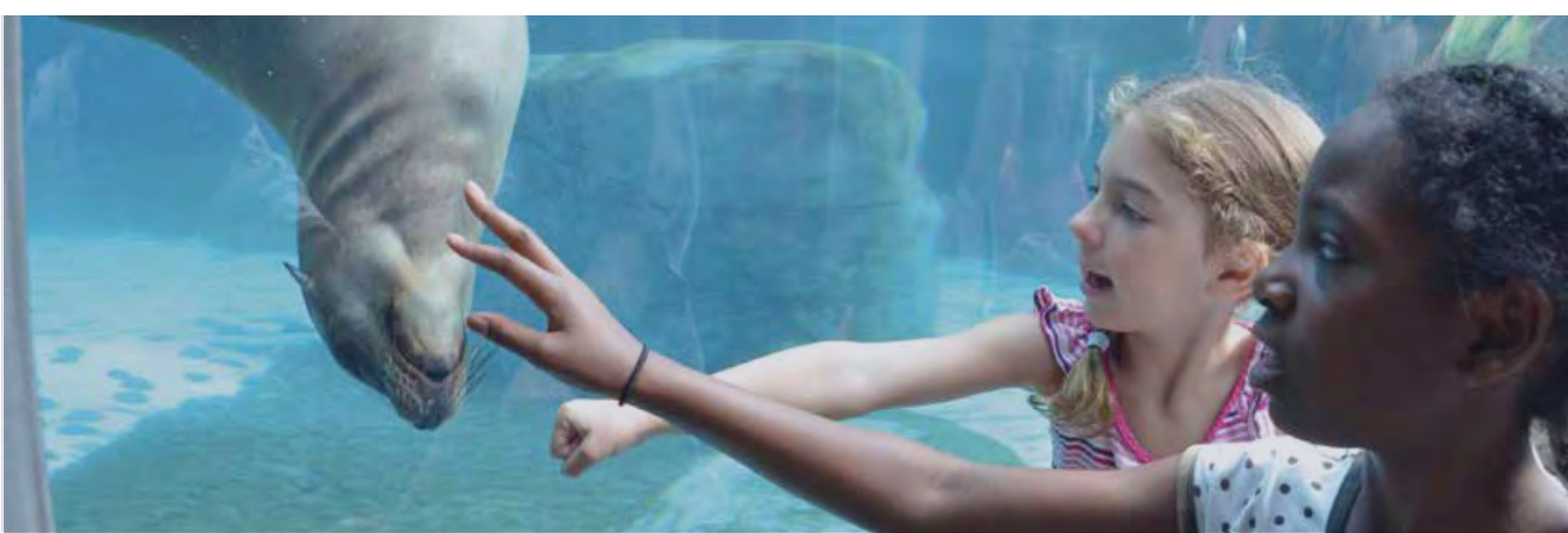
The realization of the WildCare Park will offer a new and exciting tourist attraction in St. Louis and will uplift the role the Zoo plays as an important conservation, economic, and social driver locally, nationally, and globally. It is at this exciting moment in its 113-year history that the Saint Louis Zoo seeks an experienced, results-oriented Director, Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park (Director) to spearhead the construction and opening of the WildCare Park and provide day-to-day operational leadership of the Park and the Zoo's 325-acre, Sears Lehman Wildlife Reserve in Franklin County. Success for the Director will be defined by the ability to complete the construction of the Park within budget and in time for the slated spring 2027 opening, operating in ways that reflect best practices and the Zoo's collaborative culture.

Providing tactical, operational, and creative leadership, the Director will oversee the growth and operation of the WildCare Park, as well as the management of the Sears Lehman Wildlife Reserve with its current habitats for the American Red Wolf. The Director will maintain the Zoo's tradition of ensuring world-class animal welfare, performing cutting-edge conservation science and research, and providing an exemplary guest experience through collaboration with teams at the Saint Louis Zoo. This position will oversee all aspects of the WildCare Park and will lead in a manner that is consistent with and that supports the Saint Louis Zoo's overall mission, vision, and core values of People Matter, Animals Always, and Operational Excellence. 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. Current direct reports to the WildCare Park Director are an Administrative Assistant, a General Curator, and the Director of WildCare Park Architecture and Construction; future positions will be approved in the coming years.

Collaborating with peers and cultivating a strong team orientation, the Director will work with a broad range of diverse individuals and groups to achieve shared goals. The Director will contribute meaningful input on the full range of organizational concerns; a nuanced and contemporary understanding of conservation issues is desired. To achieve their aims, the next Director must embrace their role as an integral member of the Zoo community and be involved in the economic, political, and cultural fabric of St. Louis. 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.

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 Director 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 visitor, the Saint Louis Zoo community strives to promote a fairer and more just world. The Director 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 around the world 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 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, as well as the 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 who reside in the county. Nominations come from within the Commission and are subject to 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, dedicating more funds to operations year over year while simultaneously building financial reserves from the endowment and portfolio. Despite continuing to operate with limited capacity and timed-entry through May of 2022, annual revenue that year was more than \$97.6 million, with just under \$96 million in expenses. In 2022, the ZMD tax generated more than \$26 million and the Proposition Z sales tax provided in excess of \$25 million in funding. Operating revenue accounted for more than \$55.7 million, this includes retail, parking lot, attractions, membership, and fundraising. Further detail may be found in the Zoo's [audited financial reports](#).

Operational expenses for the WildCare Park in 2023 are currently budgeted at \$2.68 million; the 2024 WildCare Park budget is initially projected at \$3.13 million. As the WildCare Park campus is developed, the budget will grow substantially in the next few years and general operations, business operations, and events and membership expenses for the campus once fully operational in 2027 are anticipated to be in excess of \$16.3 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 in support of the Zoo's mission. The Association is a private, nonprofit organization whose volunteer, more than 80-person Board is made up of 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 of the campaign. The Association's portfolio through July 2023 totals \$187.5 million (endowed funds account for \$104 million and non-endowed for \$83.5 million). The Association cash surplus available for strategic capital projects is \$26 million.



Location

St. Louis boasts big city amenities with the family-orientation, easy access, and 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 and decades of intentional renewal and revitalization have created a historic city in the heart of the Midwest that is still on the rise. It has a population of approximately 300,000 and is part of a bi-state metropolitan area with more than 2.8 million. As such, Illinois and its closest cities are just minutes away.

Core Values

Community

They create a healthy work community through their actions, attitudes, values, and ethics.

Creativity

The Saint Louis Zoo supports the power of new, creative, and innovative ideas.

Openness

They share information freely and proactively.

Integrity

Members of the Zoo community are truthful; they accept responsibility for their actions and hold each other accountable.

Life-Work Balance

The Saint Louis Zoo supports wellness, stability, fulfillment, and enjoyment in their community's professional and personal lives.



Essential Functions

Under the direction of the Dana Brown President & CEO and working closely with the Strategic Operations Group, the Director is responsible for the following essential functions:

- Serve as a member of the Saint Louis Zoo's Strategic Operations Group, the Zoo's senior management team. This team meets on a weekly basis, developing and directing the strategic vision of the organization and helping coordinate the daily operations of the Zoo. Work with this leadership team and outside consultants on short-, intermediate- and long-term Zoo plans and strategies, functioning as a key resource in determining the Zoo's direction through strategic planning and plan implementation.
 - Help drive and define institutional programming. Ensure that the Zoo's stature as a vibrant and influential cultural destination is constantly enhanced. Develop nationally recognized exhibits, innovative education programs, and conservation and research initiatives that make a genuine difference for wildlife in areas of critical need. Maintain the highest standards of care for the institution's plant and animal collection. Promote and facilitate the Zoo's tradition of cutting-edge conservation and scientific leadership.
- Direct and collaborate with external design and construction partners to complete the design and construction of the WildCare Park campus, delivering the project within the \$230 million capital budget for a spring 2027 opening. Ensure the design and construction meets the expectations set forth by the Saint Louis Zoo and exceeds applicable standards, rules, and regulations in regard to animal wellbeing, animal health, safety, and established priorities.
- Develop and implement overall business and operational plans currently projected at \$16.3 million. This includes general operating expenses for the Zoo and the Association of \$10.4 million and business operations expenses of \$5.9 million.
- Envision and execute a strategic, cohesive, and systematic approach that ensures the WildCare Park is poised to fulfill its promise by cultivating a team with the right people in the right functions supported by optimal systems and practices to facilitate future success.
 - Grow the park to increase its ability to have a net positive impact on the Zoo's overall budget while being sensitive to access for those with economic challenges.
 - Create, review, and approve WildCare Park policies and procedures that are consistent with the Zoo's enterprise policies and procedures. Team oversight includes animal care, revenue operations, facilities management.



- Establish a culture of cohesion and unity between the employees and volunteers of the WildCare Park and those of the Zoo. Work collaboratively with the Saint Louis Zoo Director, the President & CEO, and their direct reports to ensure effective use of Zoo resources, complimentary experiences for guests, positive working climates for staff, and appropriate modeling of Zoo values. Regularly communicate, set goals, and plan with key collaborators, including Finance, the Saint Louis Zoo's Animal Health and Animal Care leadership, Internal Relations (HR, Security, Safety, IT), External Relations, Development, Public Relations and Marketing, CARE, Education and Business Operations, the WildCare Institute, Research, and the Institute for Conservation Medicine.
- Recruit, retain, develop, and supervise team members and create a safe, supportive, and goal-oriented culture based on the Zoo's Three Keys and CCOIL values. Leadership includes supporting and mentoring staff, promoting a culture of excellence, collaboration, and professional growth. Provide professional development such that staff that is well prepared to meet the ongoing challenges and opportunities of a leading zoo and conservation research program.
- Understanding that inspiring people to become advocates for wildlife is at the heart of the mission, work with the Zoo's Education Department to create and deliver world-class educational programs at the WildCare Park and in neighboring communities.
- Together with the Zoo's development team, as well as Zoo leadership, serve as a key fundraiser, both capital and programmatic, for the WildCare Park, providing direct donor engagement, assisting with engagement strategy, requesting support, and providing proposal content and necessary reports.
- Serve as the public face for both campuses and, along with other senior Zoo leaders, a Saint Louis Zoo ambassador to the St. Louis community, neighbors, elected officials, and media. Represent the Saint Louis Zoo and WildCare Park in a wide variety of settings and meetings. Participate as an engaged and immersed citizen involved with community events and organizations.
- Provide proactive leadership, guidance, and staff support for the Zoo's volunteer Boards. May be asked to oversee meeting preparation, direct implementation of Board recommendations, and coordinate Board activities. Attend volunteer leadership meetings, such as the Board of Commissioners meetings, the Zoo Association Board meetings, and other meetings as required. Report on the progress of any WildCare Park related news as requested.
- Actively participate in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums committees and initiatives, as well as other industry-specific organizations that would further professional development and help support the Zoo.

Candidate Qualifications

The Director, Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park will share the organization's unwavering commitment to quality of service and innovation. This hands-on operator 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 philanthropic community.

The successful candidate will have a minimum of five to 10 years of senior leadership experience gained in an organization that is known for world-class operational acuity. This seasoned professional will have demonstrated experience in providing quantifiable results in a complex organization with a high growth trajectory; past success in a mission-driven, multi-site organization is preferred. Our client is open to candidates with experience gained from a variety of environments including but not limited to a zoo, aquarium, or theme park, as well as executives within the hospitality industry, healthcare, higher education, or the private sector where operations and capital expansion has been a focus.

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

- Proven management expertise gained in an organization celebrated for providing an exemplary guest experience would be of interest. The Director will serve as a role model for staff and lead in a hands-on manner, utilizing a shared leadership approach. Additionally, an appreciation for and proven understanding of the nuances of profitable recreational facility operation is fundamental to achievement in this position. This executive will also have a demonstrated record of success with capital projects and construction.
- 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. Tied to this, the Director will demonstrate proven skill leading teams of extremely talented, highly skilled professionals to outstanding, value-added performance while creating a departmental culture that is hard-working, mission-focused, innovative, and fun. This executive must be able to train, mentor/develop, and motivate a diverse and highly capable staff.
- A high level of multicultural sensitivity is required and experience with a diverse workforce is fundamental. The successful Director 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 visitors, staff, and volunteers, reflecting the demographics of the region. Actions and decision-making will demonstrate emotional intelligence, transparency, compassion, and authenticity, understanding that the Zoo serves and is supported by the St. Louis community.





- This leader will bring a clear focus on enhancing and strengthening existing programs in order to ensure and advance the WildCare Park's brand and mission, while possessing the creativity, vision, and business acumen to augment and develop revenue streams. This includes a commitment to leveraging the organization's position as the leading tourist attraction in the region and to advancing community presence to maximize impact. While principally responsible for the WildCare Park and the Sears Lehman Wildlife Reserve, the Director will serve as a thought leader across the organization on this topic.
- Excellent organizational, administrative, and project management skills are paramount. This executive will be a decisive, "roll-up-the-sleeves," results-oriented manager who is able to 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. The Director will conduct business with candor and sincerity to maintain the highest ethical and moral standards.
- Actively creating connections that encourage open and honest communication with all, this leader must excel at developing and sustaining close, effective working relationships with senior staff and Board members on matters of interdisciplinary, institutional concern. This includes ensuring proactive communication and delegation that builds confidence, promotes diversity of thought, and celebrates achievements. The Director will lead by example and embrace their role as a steward of culture across the organization.
- Capable of effectively developing, administering, and monitoring budgets, the Director will have a track record of organizing operations to achieve financial and mission objectives while consistently balancing budgets.
- An enjoyment of and demonstrated skill in fundraising, business development, and external affairs is vital. The WildCare Park's next leader must be a talented public communicator capable of instilling passion for a cause and relating to a wide range of equally important audiences.
- The Director will be able to contribute to the broader organization's approach to marketing, events, and promotions to allow the Saint Louis Zoo to continually energize and capture the attention and loyalty of longtime patrons and benefactors as well as attract new supporters and enhance Zoo membership.
- Exceptional collaborative, interpersonal, written, and oral communication skills, including negotiation skills; comfort with public speaking; and the ability to make cogent and compelling presentations are fundamental. This organizational champion must be able to clearly communicate the mission of the Zoo and be able to generate energy, enthusiasm, and support for that mission by the team and the community.
- Possesses the aptitude to organize work, provide clear direction, delegate accountability when appropriate, and manage performance for a broad range of important organizational functions. This executive will have an enthusiastic, community-minded, and team-centered approach focused on achieving results.
- The ideal candidate for this position will have held all prior positions for a meaningful period, thereby 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 biology, animal sciences, business administration, hospitality, or a related field or equivalent, specialized training and experience.

Compensation

The annual salary for this role is targeted to be between \$250,000 and \$275,000 with a competitive benefits package. The specific factors that Saint Louis Zoo will consider when offering a salary to any candidate will include educational credentials, training, years of experience, and performance in all prior roles.

Process

As an Equal Opportunity Employer, it is our client's policy not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, familial status, marital status, predisposing genetic characteristics, actual or perceived domestic violence victim status, unemployment status, caregiver status, or any other category protected by law. Our client considers the diversity of its workforce to be vital to the organization's success in meeting its mission. We strongly encourage applicants from all cultures, races, educational backgrounds, life experiences, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, ages, genders and gender expressions, and physical abilities to apply.



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.

A review of applications will commence immediately. Applications received before November 15, 2023, will be given priority. Interested individuals should submit their credentials as soon as possible for full consideration. Complete applications may be submitted electronically via email and should include: a cover letter that articulates a commitment to the mission and outlines relevant experience tied to the job description, and a current resume reflecting all work experience. Expeditious application is encouraged.

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

Contact

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