



Education Advisors & Animal Programs: Collaborating to Save Species

A Guide for Education Advisors, Education Specialists, and AZA Animal and Conservation Program Leaders

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As the famous quote by Baba Dioum goes, “In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught.” It is undeniable that strategic and effective conservation education and community engagement is critical to species conservation. Within the AZA community exist professionals with expertise across the spectrum. Among them are educators, evaluators, social scientists, biologists, zoologists, and field conservationists; the stage is set for formidable collaboration. To this end, Conservation Education Committee (CEC) Education Advisors partner with AZA Animal and Conservation Programs (Taxon Advisory Groups, SAFE programs, and Species Survival Plans) to advance the mission of the program through education and community engagement.

The Role of Education Advisors and Specialists

Education Advisors and Specialists are passionate about saving species through community engagement and education. Through collaboration with AZA Animal and Conservation Programs, Education Advisors can have a profound impact on species conservation around the world and across AZA institutions. While AZA Animal and Conservation Program leaders are committed to and supportive of education, Education Advisors bring professional expertise to the planning, implementation and evaluation of both project-based and ongoing education initiatives.

There are two opportunities for individuals interested in working with AZA Animal and Conservation Program leaders to advance species conservation through public engagement – becoming an Education Advisor or project-based Education Specialist.

Education Specialists:

Education Specialists contribute to the goals of AZA Animal and Conservation Programs by helping to develop educational materials and projects. Becoming an Education Specialist is a great way to network and develop skills while contributing to the conservation of species. Education Specialists within an Animal or Conservation Program work collaboratively with each other and are supported by the program’s Education Advisor. Key responsibilities include:

- Participate in setting goals and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) objectives and outcomes, led by the Education Advisor.
- Undertake project-based work in alignment with the identified goals and objectives.
- Work collaboratively with other Education Specialists to achieve project goals and objectives.
- Communicate regularly and effectively with other members of the team.

Education Advisors:

Education Advisors are professional educators that work alongside Animal and Conservation Program leaders to advance the conservation and understanding of species by providing direction to and coordination of the project-based Education Specialists. Key responsibilities of an Education Advisor include:

- Collaborate with ACP leaders and project-based Education Specialists in setting public engagement goals and SMART objectives and outcomes.
- Establish and maintain partnerships with Animal and Conservation Program leaders.
- Provide guidance to project-based Education Specialists in work aligned with public engagement goals, objectives, and outcomes. Regularly monitor the status of projects and undertake project work as needed.
- Maintain contact information for all Education Specialists and ensure the CEC (Conservation Education Committee) is kept up to date. Support the CEC in recruitment of Education Specialists to fill open positions for species and/or project work.
- Ensure regular communication among Education Specialists.
- Participate in regular communications with the CEC, including an annual survey and conference call.

- Facilitate dissemination of work of Education Specialists.
- Attend at least one program meeting per year, including closed sessions. Timing and location is program dependent. At this meeting:
 - Present on work of the Education Advisor and Education Specialists
 - Solicit feedback and suggestions
 - Provide Education Specialists with updates following meetings

The Collaborative Role of Animal and Conservation Program Leaders

A successful partnership between Education Advisors and Animal and Conservation Program Leaders requires commitment from both parties. Education Advisors will assume the lead on education and community engagement projects; however, they will need the support of the Animal or Conservation Program to be productive and effective. Key contributions of Animal and Conservation Program leaders include:

- Support of the CEC in recruitment and selection of Education Advisors.
- Establishing and cultivating a relationship with the program's Education Advisor.
- Collaboration with the Education Advisor in setting education and community engagement goals, objectives, and outcomes.
- Inviting Education Advisors to attend meetings, including closed sessions.
- Including time in meeting agendas for Education Advisors to present on education and community engagement work and solicit feedback and suggestions from Animal and Conservation Program representatives.
- Being a resource for educators in providing species information, conservation stories, and establishing connections with other colleagues working with target species.

The Role of the Conservation Education Committee

Members of the CEC Education Advisors to Animal and Conservation Programs Initiative are committed to supporting the Education Advisor program through:

- Recruiting to fill vacant positions.
- Fielding and vetting all initial applications for the role of Education Advisor and Education Specialists.
- Facilitating initial introductions and onboarding of new Education Advisors and Education Specialists.
- Attending Animal and Conservation Program meetings at conferences.
- Supporting Education Advisors & Education Specialists through:
 - Maintaining a database of active Education Advisors & Education Specialists
 - Moderating the Education Advisor AZA Network Group
 - Facilitating quarterly conference calls with Education Advisors
 - Hosting meetings of Education Advisors & Education Specialists at Mid Year and Annual conferences
 - Being accessible to Education Advisors for brainstorming and strategizing as needed

The Work of Education Advisors and Education Specialists

After teams collaborate to set education and community engagement goals and SMART objectives and outcomes, operational strategies are identified to meet those goals at the regional, national, and international levels. Examples of team projects include:

1. Developing curriculum and teaching kits for Zoo/Aquarium programs
2. Identifying interpretive themes to support messaging across institutions
3. Identifying potential community engagement partners
4. Developing animal fact sheets

5. Developing and maintaining websites and a social media presence for both public and professional audiences
6. Seeking and writing grant proposals to support project work
7. Developing fundraising toolkits for use across institutions – i.e. Margaritas for Vaquitas.
8. Facilitating trainings/workshops for colleagues
9. Writing newsletters, children’s books, articles, and other publications
10. Creating and/or hosting special events, such as World “Insert Animal Here” Day events
11. Supporting/seeking opportunities for community-based conservation projects

Best Practices in Collaboration

- Start by working together to set education and community engagement goals and SMART objectives and outcomes.
 - If project work has already begun without this step, hit pause and take time for this exercise. Time is limited and having outlined clear goals, objectives, and outcomes will allow the team to prioritize projects that align with these goals.
 - Remember that awareness does not equal behavior change.
 - See Appendix 1 for a logic model template that can help with this process.
- Bring a mutual respect for the expertise and experience of all involved parties.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Establish a mechanism for checking in regularly, such as a periodic conference call to keep in touch, exchange information, and report on progress. Even if there are project delays or down time due to lack of funding, keep a regular meeting on the calendar. It is important to build a relationship. Communication is everyone’s responsibility.
- Set realistic timelines. Everyone wishes for more time to spend on Animal and Conservation Program work. Recruit additional help for large projects and be patient with one another.
- Take time to celebrate small successes; you’re making a difference!

Filling the Role of Education Advisor/Education Specialist

Educators:

1. Research vacant positions by visiting <http://www.aza.org/education-advisors/> or contact the CEC Education Advisors to Animal and Conservation Programs Initiative directly. See contact information below.
2. Download the application for the position of interest (Education Advisor or Education Specialist) from <http://www.aza.org/education-advisors/>.
3. Send completed applications and required support materials to: CEC Education Advisors to Animal & Conservation Programs Initiative, ceceducationadvisors@gmail.com.

Animal and Conservation Program Leaders:

All applications for Education Specialists should be reviewed by the CEC Education Advisors to Animal and Conservation Programs Initiative. The CEC maintains a database of Education Advisors and works with Education Advisors to ensure that they are supported and effective in their roles. Animal and Conservation Program leaders or current Education Advisors and Specialists who receive expressions of interest directly or would like to recommend an individual to support their program should direct these inquiries to the CEC.

The Selection Process:

Upon receipt of an application for Education Advisor, the Conservation Education Committee will review the application for completeness and qualifications. If qualified, the application will be forwarded to the Animal or Conservation Program leader with the CEC’s recommendation.

In Closing:

Every relationship is different. Personalities, personal experiences, and visions often drive each committee at different speeds and in slightly different directions. Every species and taxon has different issues and different needs. No one handbook can explain the intricacies of the partnership between Education Advisors and Animal and Conservation Programs. We are all deeply committed to the same overall goal, the preservation of wildlife and wild places. Together we can save species.

CEC Education Advisors to Animal and Conservation Programs Initiative Contact Information

ceceducationadvisors@gmail.com

