



zoowise

A GLOBAL RESEARCH PROJECT
FOR ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

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WHITE PAPER

TAKE ACTION.

1. OPPORTUNITIES

2. COLLABORATION

3. IMPACT

“Exhibits, interpretive programs and other education programs should be evaluated on a regular basis for effectiveness and content. These programs should assess more than participant satisfaction, looking also at program impact (ideally including impact on conservation-related knowledge, attitudes/affect, and behavior). Results from evaluations should be used to improve the existing programs and to create new programs.”

**AZA Accreditation Standards
& Related Policies, 2016**

PREFACE

ZooWise is a collaborative research project developing a broad understanding of visitor experience and impacts across zoos and aquariums globally. Guided by world-leading experts, this benchmarking project's data collection and real-time analysis system enables participating zoos and aquariums to improve their visitor experience, engagement and learning. The audience intelligence generated by the project benefits the wider sector by revealing key trends and improving practice, as each participating zoo and aquarium is able to see and address its strengths, challenges and opportunities.

This white paper highlights the value of audience benchmarking research for zoos and aquariums. It explains how key benchmark areas have been selected, drawing on zoo association guidelines and prior research, to establish meaningful comparisons within the broader zoo sector. The white paper introduces the ZooWise mission, which is placed within a flexible, technology-enabled framework for impact evaluation.

OPPORTUNITIES.



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COLLABORATION.



ABOUT ZOOWISE

ZooWise is a global research project for zoos and aquariums that designs, delivers and analyzes standard measures for benchmarking within the sector in multiple languages. This benchmarking is initially focused on experiences and impacts for adult zoo and aquarium visitors around the world.

PROJECT MISSION

The ZooWise research project supports zoos and aquariums by enabling them to better evaluate and identify areas for improvement in the delivery of services, quality of experience and short- and long-term impact. ZooWise raises standards of evaluation for visitor experiences, conservation & biodiversity awareness and impacts of zoos and aquariums by giving every zoo access to world-class research expertise and analysis. Continuous and collective evaluation is enabled by automated data collection and real-time analysis, which gives participating zoos and aquariums a clear daily view of their visitors and their needs.

The research project establishes high quality, standard measures that support best practice in the global community of zoos and aquariums. For the first time, zoos and aquariums will have an ongoing, long-term understanding of the audience profile, experiences, retention patterns and educational impacts for their visitors, with real-time comparisons to sector benchmarks.

The ZooWise research project promotes and facilitates the effective use of benchmarking standards to share useful comparisons in support of best practice. Later stages of the research project will include disseminating sector-level trend analyses and recommendations for the benefit of the zoo and aquarium community, as well as offering a community space that allows practitioners to help each other learn and share best practices. In short, the project provides an effective and sustainable visitor research and evaluation solution to inform practice within zoos and aquariums drawing on the best available methods and expertise worldwide.

PROJECT FEATURES

Participating institutions will gain a more valid insight into visitor experience through automated impact evaluation for their zoo or aquarium.



Survey Design



Data Collection



Data Analysis



Data Management



Data Reporting

OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance Social & Environmental Impact

To both support and raise standards of zoo and aquarium educational provision, awareness of conservation and overall quality of zoo and aquarium experience.

To deliver such enhanced impacts requires better knowledge of audiences and their needs (Dawson & Jensen 2011), which will be a key focus in this project.

2. Improve Practice

To enable zoo and aquarium stakeholders to target improvement initiatives, while gaining real-time insights about the effectiveness of these initiatives. The project aims to ensure zoos and aquariums are empowered by strong evidence delivered efficiently and to ensure a global community committed to sharing good knowledge and best practice with each other.

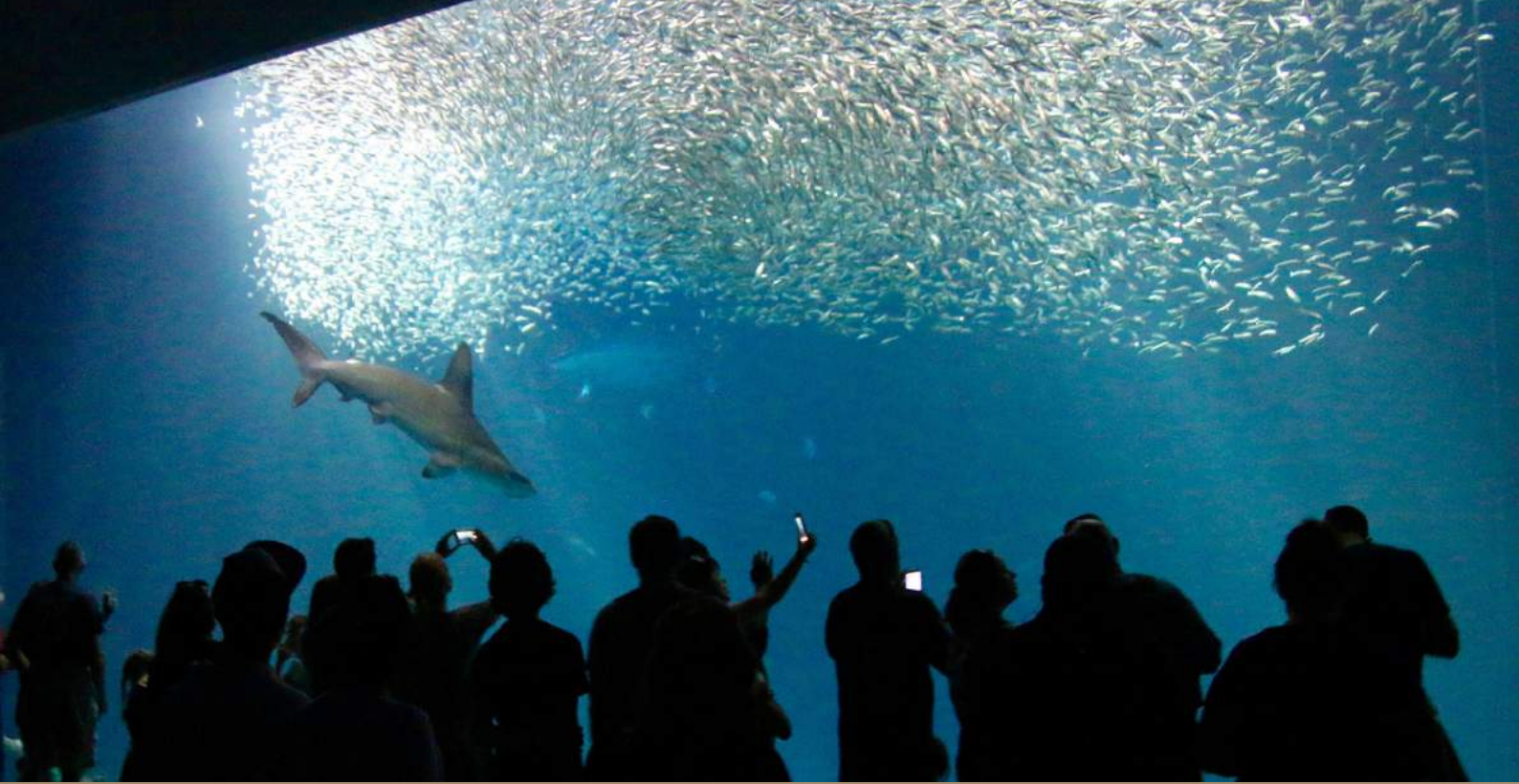
3. Improve Research & Evaluation Quality

Audience research and evaluation in the zoo sector is of variable quality, sometimes facing acute limitations in questionnaire design and analysis (Jensen 2014). This project uses survey questions and methods that have been used in world-leading research on zoo audiences and educational impacts (Moss, Jensen & Gusset 2015) and developed by leading experts in zoo audience research and evaluation design.

Dawson & Jensen, E. (2011) Towards A Contextual Turn in Visitor Studies: Evaluating Visitor Segmentation and Identity-Related Motivations, 14(2): <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10645578.2011.608001>

Jensen, E. (2014) The Problems with Science Communication Evaluation. *Journal of Science Communication*, 13(01): http://jcom.sissa.it/archive/13/01/JCOM_1301_2014_C04

Moss, A., Jensen, E. & Gusset, M. (2014) A Global Evaluation of Biodiversity Literacy in Zoo and Aquarium Visitors. WAZA Executive Office, 37 pp. www.waza.org/en/site/conservation/environmental-education/impact-evaluation



GOAL OF BENCHMARKING IN PRACTICE

An underlying goal of benchmarking is the pursuit and discovery of good practice. The ZooWise research project aims to bring cooperative and supportive institutions towards common goals into a growth-oriented ecosystem. This will help identify, understand and share good practice from leading institutions.

Benchmarking in the ZooWise research project aims to provide an indication of how individual zoos and aquariums are doing relative to national and international averages in Key Benchmarking Areas.

As well as self-monitoring performance over time and assisting in goal setting, this research project envisions that collaboration and sharing among zoos and aquariums will encourage institutions to collectively improve in order to meet or raise the overall quality of zoo and aquarium visitor experiences globally.

KEY BENCHMARKING AREAS

1

BENCHMARK ONE: VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding the demographics of each zoo or aquarium is important for targeting improvements and contextualising survey responses. Audiences need to be understood in order to target education provision and meet the needs of their visitors.

2

BENCHMARK TWO: VISITOR EXPERIENCES

The experiences visitors have at zoos and aquariums can facilitate public understanding of scientific concepts that can lead to towards animals, conservation and educational impacts. This will investigate whether visitors are aware of the role zoos and aquariums play in conservation as part of their experiences.

3

BENCHMARK THREE: INCREASED BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS

Increasing public understanding of biodiversity, the impact of its loss and an awareness of the interdependence of all living things is a major component highlighted throughout zoo and aquarium policy and guidelines. Measuring public awareness of biodiversity over time allows general trends to be established.

4

BENCHMARK FOUR: UNDERSTANDING OF CONSERVATION

Policy emphasises that visitors should both be aware of the threats to biodiversity and of personal actions that can be taken to aid conservation. This research investigates the extent that visitors see conservation actions displayed in zoos and the understanding of actions that can be taken to lower environmental impacts.



“Each zoo should have a ‘thorough understanding’ of their visitor audience, and understand the needs of different target groups.”

EAZA Education Standards

“Exhibits, interpretive programs and other education programs should be evaluated on a regular basis for effectiveness and content. These programs should assess more than participant satisfaction, looking also at program impact (ideally including impact on conservation-related knowledge, attitudes/affect, and behavior).”



AZA Accreditation Standards & Related Policies, 2016



“Zoos and aquariums are uniquely placed to inspire and educate people to understand the interdependence of all living things, and to make changes in people’s behaviour which will have a positive impact on wildlife’. They should ‘highlight biodiversity loss, through a range of activities and learning opportunities.”

BIAZA Education Policy 2014

“Zoos and aquariums need to ensure the visiting public are aware of the threats faced by species’ and ‘understand realisable actions which they can undertake in order to reduce these threats.”



WAZA Education Guidelines 2005



RESEARCH AUDIENCE

ZooWise research and evaluation is aimed in the first stage at providing zoo and aquarium managers, evaluation and impact officers, marketing managers and education providers with information to evaluate the effectiveness of existing provisions for public education.

Practitioners can target their education provision, signage and marketing to respond to gaps in visitor awareness. Findings can be used as evidence for or against whether department, institution, or association level objectives are being met in public education regarding biodiversity awareness and actions that each visitor can take personally to positively impact change.

Managers can compare their institution against the national benchmark for each area and decide how to improve provision accordingly. Equally, where institutions are meeting or exceeding the benchmark, marketing managers can use this information to publicise their success.

Benchmarking scores will be available to view graphically for each institution and will update automatically as responses from visitors are completed.

PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS

The ZooWise data collection and real-time analysis system produces results that can be used by staff in participating zoos and aquariums and the broader sector:

Individual zoos and aquariums participating in the project.

The project tools will give individual institutions the ability to monitor visitor experience and impacts in real-time, with relevant benchmarks based on aggregate results from other participating institutions and prior research. The ongoing evaluation results will provide insights of immediate value across zoo and aquarium operations including:



Education



Public Events



Retail



Marketing



Catering



Visitor Services



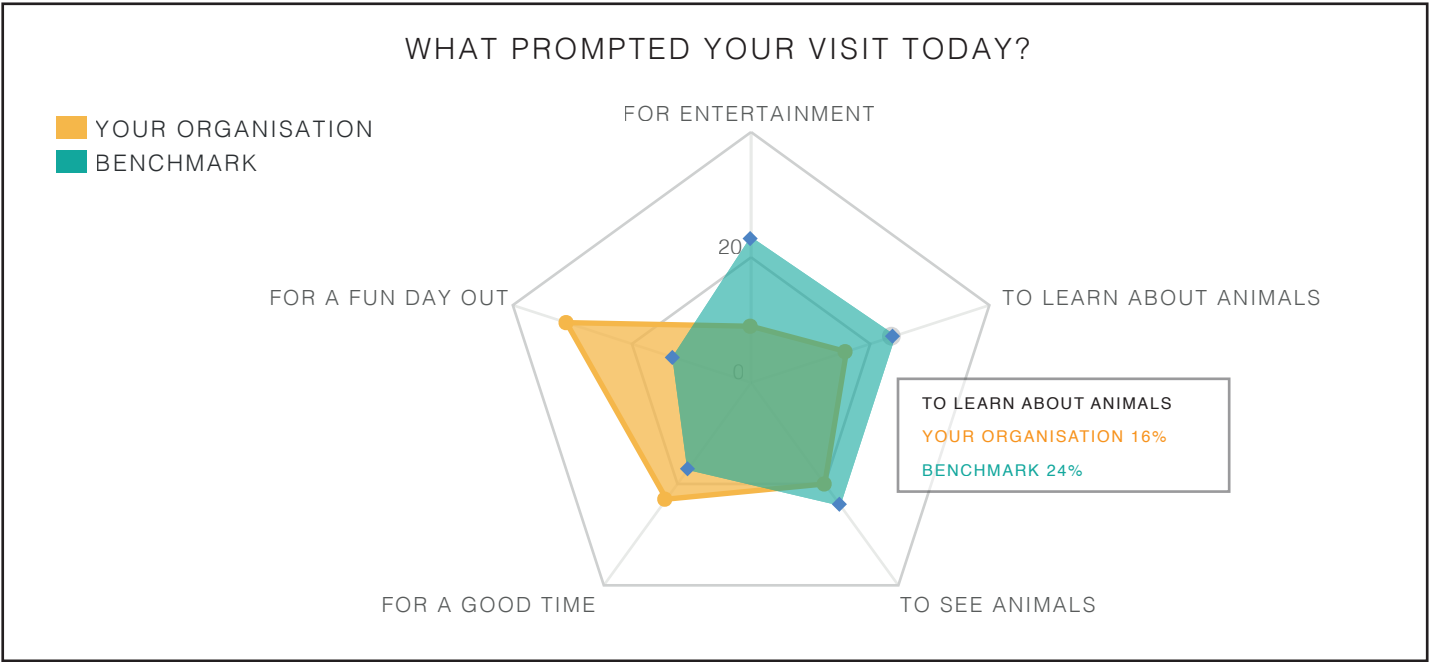
Fundraising

The zoo and aquarium sector worldwide

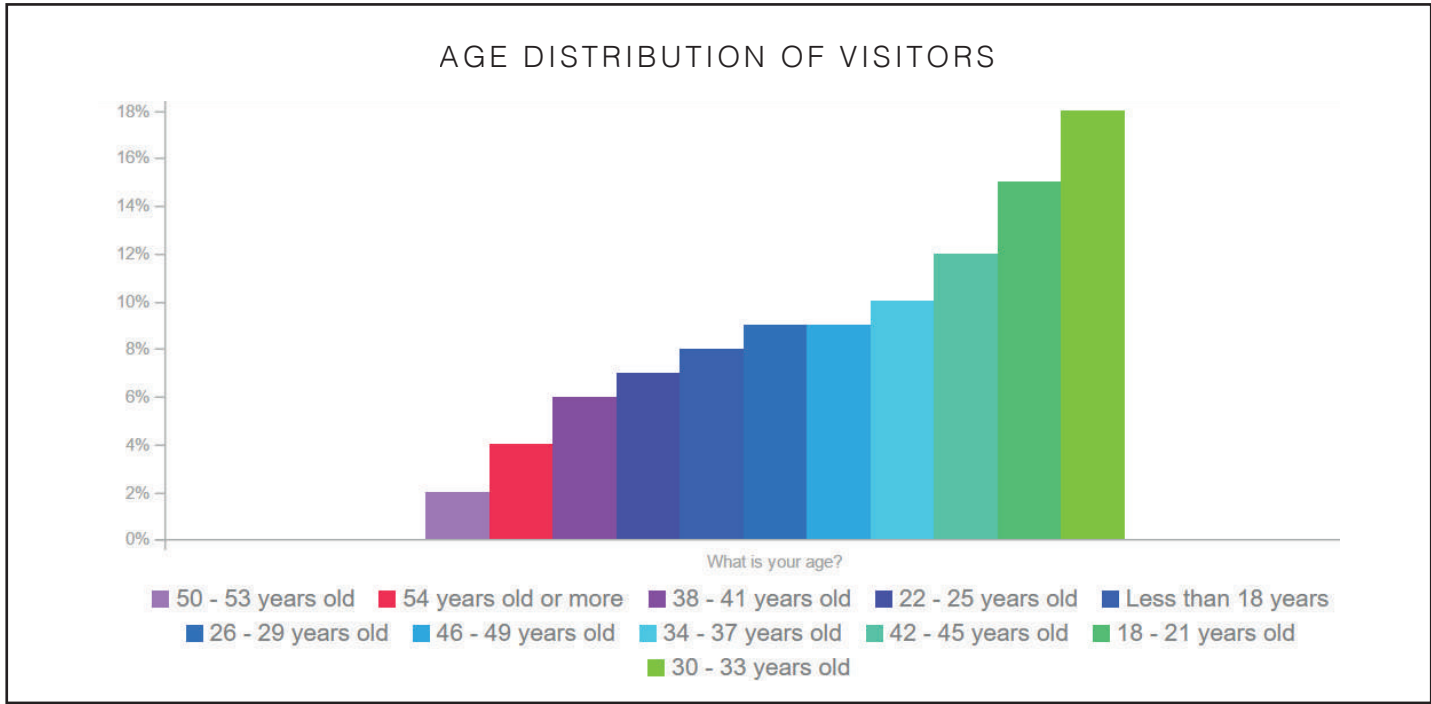
The project will produce insights that will regularly be shared through journal articles and practice-oriented publications.

ANALYSING QUESTIONS

Information provided by visitors will be analysed automatically in dashboards provided to each institution participating in this research project. Below are two examples of chart visualisations available from the project dashboard.



Each zoo and aquarium will be provided with benchmark scores within their comparison groups. This information is available for individual organisations within the zoo and aquarium sector globally.



IMPACT.



PROJECT ENGAGEMENT



INTERESTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM ZOO OR AQUARIUM INSTITUTIONS &
ASSOCIATIONS CAN JOIN THE PROJECT. "SOFT LAUNCH" BEGINS NOW.

INQUIRIES ABOUT ZOOWISE PARTICIPATION CAN BE SENT TO

RESEARCH@ZOOWISE.ORG



INTERESTED ZOO & AQUARIUM INSTITUTIONS CAN REGISTER FOR
THE ZOOWISE RESEARCH PROJECT AT

WWW.ZOOWISE.ORG



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