



World Association of Zoos
and Aquariums | **WAZA**
United for Conservation

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World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) Approach to Zoos in Need of Help

From time to time the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) as well as its regional associations and individual institution members are asked for assistance by zoos in need of help. This is usually to improve standards of animal husbandry and welfare, and of presentation. In many cases, consideration of assistance follows a specific complaint made either by a visiting member of the public or occasionally by another zoological institution. In some of these cases, the criticism and need relates to one specific exhibit or area of their collection, but more frequently it relates to the overall poor standards across the whole institution. WAZA is often able to help in these situations providing there is a clear willingness on the part of the zoo receiving help to accept it and where member organizations of WAZA are willing and able to find the necessary resources to begin the process of improvement. In the experience of those WAZA members who have already played a significant role in the rehabilitation and improvement of such institutions, there are a number of key factors that must be in place before a degree of success is attainable. There are always elements of risk in being able to achieve the goals of such a project given the large number of local factors that will influence it. The key elements required are these.

- 1) Willingness on the part of the Institution and particularly its Directorate and Governance body to accept assistance.
- 2) Indication that if they are provided with assistance, including inspection, comprehensive reports, planning, training and both operational and capital plans that the governance organization is then willing and able to build on that advice using their own resources, accepting that further external advice provided both gratis or through paid consultancy will also be needed.
- 3) That there is a prospect of sound long-term management of the institution backed up by training both on-site and probably at other assisting institutions.
- 4) Continued monitoring by the sponsoring institution(s) or their nominees over a period of several years following the initial input

Those WAZA members who have experience in this field know that it is rarely unwillingness on the part of an institution to accept help that leads to failure. Often the institution in question has people who are committed to and passionate about their jobs but have to work in critically resource-limited environments. At other times it may be the inability of the institution and its management to get through to higher authorities who have a final say about resource allocation and longer term institutional positioning. In some situations it may be the case that they do not know where to start, especially where institutional decline has been taking place over a long period, hence making problems to be intractable or seemingly too big to solve. Other contributing factors may be that skills levels are low, governance is slack, and there is no established capital program. Although one-off visits by skilled external advisors can provide a governance and management team with some indicators as to where to go, sponsoring WAZA institutions or others must be prepared to put significant resources including time and energy into the project. This

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will vary from a few hundred dollars up to \$50,000 USD per institution. The great value of doing this is that not only are the target institution provided with a blueprint around which to continue to the next stage, but a level of trust and relationship are built up which gives the assisted institution confidence in the advice. It also gives the sponsoring institution better access to those individuals who ultimately have to take the decisions to progress the resultant planning to reality.

Relatively large institutions such as Baghdad, Kabul, and now Cairo (Giza) have been subject to such an approach in recent years. In the case of, Baghdad and Kabul, although the standards and facilities reached are still not comparable with a major western institution, the difference between their situations now and six to eight years ago is very marked and was well worth all the considerable effort and measures that went into these programs. Currently WAZA members, largely acting through the African Association of Zoos and Aquaria (PAAZAB), are assisting the Cairo (Giza) Zoo through the same process. In this particular case, a PAAZAB team funded largely by one WAZA member has been going through the processes outlined in the criteria listed above. These early efforts, which resulted in a detailed report and recommendations, will be continued with further sponsorship covering more specialist areas with a view to ultimately launching the zoo and the Ministry of Agriculture into a major planning exercise for their long-term future. What this project has already achieved is to establish a level of confidence on the part of all the participants and enabled direct access into the top levels of the Egyptian government. This would never have been achieved simply through criticism or by paying a brief inspection visit, then expecting everything to follow from that without additional detailed input. One of the results of having a significant team of experts on site for an extended period of time, as has been the case here, is also that the receiving institution learns exactly what standards are going to be applied to them as a result of the exercise. Whilst all facets of zoo operation are covered, especial attention is given to animal husbandry and welfare and also to professional ethics associated with animal acquisition and disposition. Through these growing relationships, due diligence monitoring and ongoing scrutiny, the staff becomes acquainted with what the expectations are in terms of anything that WAZA or regional associations would find unacceptable. In the case of PAAZAB, where Cairo is already a 'preliminary' member, the Zoo will be expected to host a rigorous and comprehensive audit for compliance against a compulsory PAAZAB operational standard within the next two years. Cairo has already indicated their willingness to cooperate with this.

WAZA and its regional associations, although voluntary, are professional entities with an inherent interest in developing and enhancing the capacity of their membership. It is in this spirit that institutions requiring assistance are approached and assisted.

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