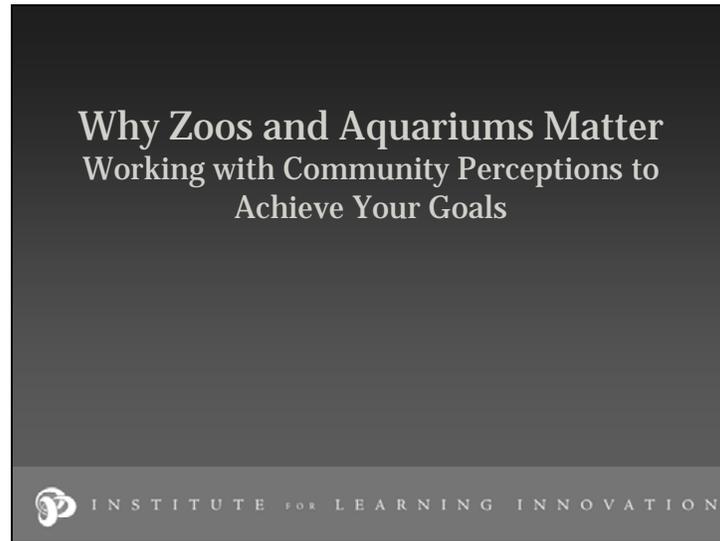


Slide 1



For years, Zoos and aquariums have been studying their audiences to see whether people are learning at our institutions. Since the turn of this century, members of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums have started to collaborate on research to learn more about what we're all doing together, a project effort to understand Why Zoos and Aquariums Matter. . In other words: what do our visitors value about our institutions and expect to gain from coming? And how can we shape or exceed their expectations in order to fulfill our educational missions?

Slide 2

A presentation on research conducted by
the Institute for Learning Innovation's
John Fraser & Jessica Sickler
on behalf of the
Association of Zoos and Aquariums
through funding provided by:

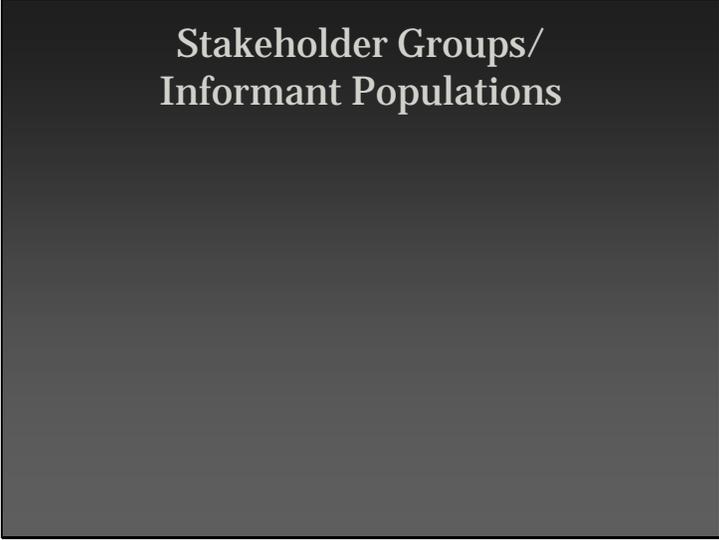
Institute of Museum & Library Services
and
Wildlife Conservation Society



The bottom of the slide features three logos. From left to right: the Association of Zoos & Aquariums logo in orange and black; the Wildlife Conservation Society logo in green and blue; and the Institute of Museum and Library Services logo in grey and black.

This presentation will give you an overview of new research by John Fraser and Jessica Sickler that was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Wildlife Conservation Society, that examined audience perceptions of zoos and aquariums and the many ways audiences value zoos and aquariums.

Slide 3



Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

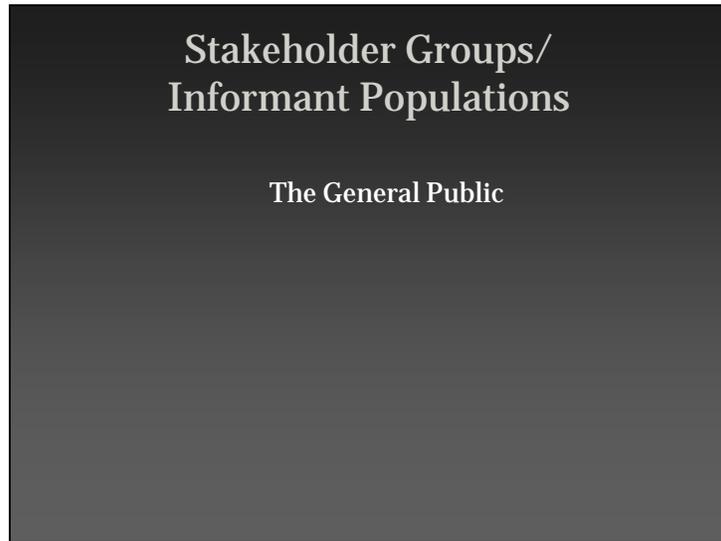
During this three-year study Fraser and Sickler worked with internal and external audiences to understand why and how zoos and aquariums are perceived as valuable to society. They reached out to the groups zoos and aquariums have all been talking to:

(click through slides)

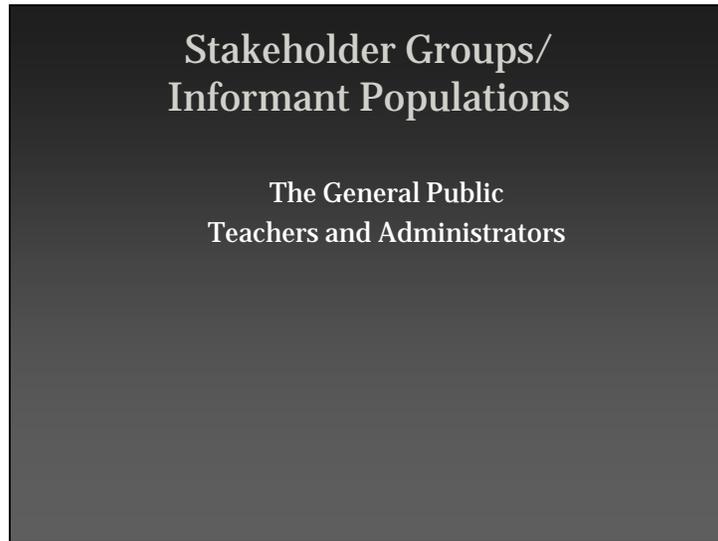
The General Public

Teachers and Administrators

Slide 4



The General public and...



Teachers and Administrators

But they also interviewed people that we tend not to think about as traditional audiences. They focused attention here because they felt these people can influence those who use or fund our institutions.

Slide 6

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders

Political Leaders

Slide 7

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders
Media

Media

Slide 8

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders
Media
Spiritual Leaders

Spiritual Leaders

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders
Media
Spiritual Leaders
Conservation Biologists

And **Conservation Biologists**. And they also talked with internal stakeholders to learn about zoos and aquariums from the inside out.

Slide 10

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

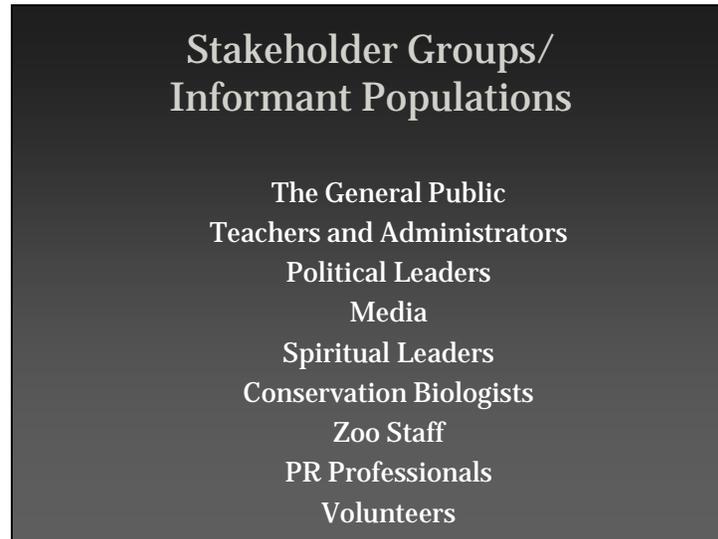
The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders
Media
Spiritual Leaders
Conservation Biologists
Zoo Staff

Zoo Staff

Stakeholder Groups/ Informant Populations

The General Public
Teachers and Administrators
Political Leaders
Media
Spiritual Leaders
Conservation Biologists
Zoo Staff
PR Professionals

Public Relations Professionals



And **Zoo/Aquarium Volunteers**.

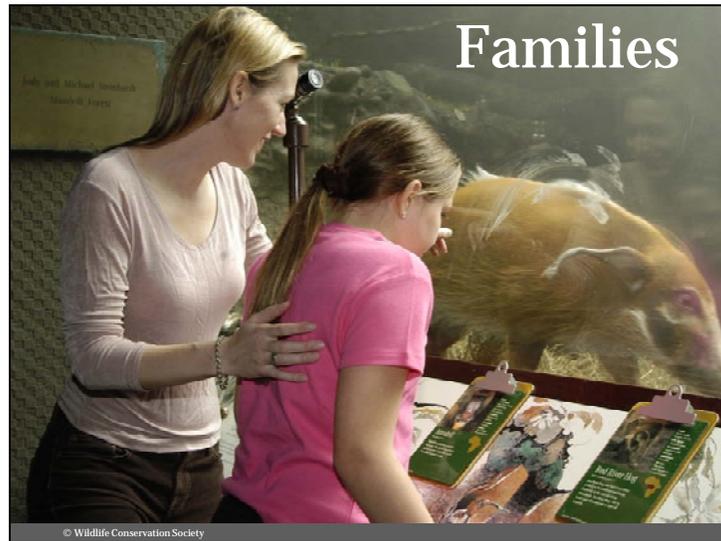
All of these groups characterized zoos and aquariums as educational, in one way or another. But how these stakeholders understand and define other values of zoos and aquariums was not quite what they imagined it would be.



Educators especially valued zoos and aquariums as a resource for teaching about animals and habitats, as well as providing information on endangered animals and wildlife conservation that supported their instructional aims. They were focused on the importance of seeing living animals as the context for learning, as a way to make abstract ideas taught in the classroom concrete and real. Their perception of the educational value, however, only related to what the zoo/aquarium provided students. Few showed any interest in the curricula or professional development workshops for teachers.



Parents, on the other hand, were more concerned about making their family ties stronger, sharing their moral values, and having a nature experience. A majority of parents agreed that “nature experiences” are a crucial part of childhood and that zoos and aquariums are places to teach their children to respect and appreciate nature and animals.



Parents also indicated that this appreciation and respect for animals and nature was a start to developing the social skill of empathy. And the second most important reason they wanted to visit the zoo was to spend time as a family, with the opportunity to build stronger ties. The researchers have suggested that zoos and aquariums can highlight the alignment of their conservation mission with the values of strong families and caring for others, presenting the mission in a way that fits better with most parents' underlying reasons for visiting.



I'm sure we all know that our volunteers have a life-long love for animals, but often we think of volunteers as part of our inside team, rather than an inside audience that changes and grows with us. Volunteers may join for their love of animals, but they come back for the social networking with like-minded action oriented people.



Not only do they provide services, such as increasing the reach of visitor education programs; these researchers found that the longer someone volunteers, the more likely they are to increase their pro-environmental behaviors and to try to change the behaviors of their friends and family. The implication here is that zoos and aquariums might do well to consider new ways that their volunteer corps can advance the conservation mission.



When it comes to zoos and aquariums, the media primarily relegates zoos and aquariums to the lifestyle and events sections of reporting, focusing on the events, exhibits, and happenings at the zoo. In the news section, the zoo or aquarium is primarily useful as a backdrop to a story, or for consulting an animal expert who can provide accessible commentary on news events involving wildlife. The conservation mission of zoos and aquariums is quite often missing from all of these stories, and the zoo or aquarium is not seen as a resource for conservation-focused news because editors don't believe zoos or aquariums generate original research. The other type of news story that involves zoos and aquariums is, of course, if a zoo or aquarium is embroiled in an institutional controversy. Again, however, the conservation component is culled.

There is some good news with the media, however. Most reporters and editors give little credence to the arguments and protests of anti-zoo activists, and cover such news events for the purpose of being fair and balanced. They expect these reports have little effect on the public, since they feel most of the public already believes that zoos are focused on helping animals and teaching people to be more responsible to the environment.

Religious Leaders



Zoos and aquariums appear to share many of their core values with the core values expressed by many religious communities— respect for living things, stewardship of the earth, inspirational power of nature. Further, there were seen to be very few areas of potential conflict. Even discussions of evolution were not as controversial as many might believe because, for many religious leaders, the zoo or aquarium’s role was not perceived as teaching about evolution, but about showing the diversity and amazing breadth of life on Earth. Disagreements about specific mechanics of evolution seemed more of a sideline than a substantial point of conflict to many of these communities.



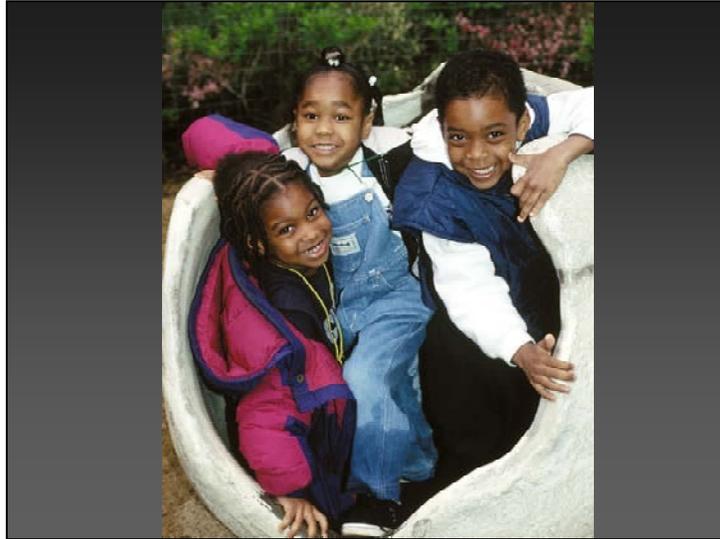
When it came to political leaders, zoos and aquariums were basically good (but expensive) service providers to the community. This value was recognizable, but generally undefined. Great trust was given to the zoo or aquarium. Some politicians found the environmental advocacy aspect of zoos' and aquariums' mission challenging if it conflicted with their own decisions, but generally they thought the environmental education and support of local families were the most important reasons for having zoos or aquariums. Spending funds on conservation outside the local community, however, seemed to create the impression that zoos and aquariums may have less need of local funding, since they may appear to have access to a great deal of funding that other social services do not.



One interesting group that these researchers talked to was conservation biologists, that is, the front-line people who do research in the field. Most had good experiences as kids in zoos or aquariums, but have seen some awful zoos around the world. For these folks, zoos are a bit challenging. On the positive side, those who have worked with the curatorial and keeper staff respect their unique body of knowledge, and all want to believe that the public education for conservation is working. However, they weigh that against zoo animals that just don't show the same degree of fitness and passion as their wild counterparts and a concern that the conservation message is not being learned by the public.

Enjoyment

And lastly, visitors frequently describe visits to the zoo as fun and enjoyable experiences, but what does that really mean and how does it affect our development of exhibits and programs? These researchers actually did learn why adults enjoy visiting zoos, and found several categories of how people define enjoyment. While one group of visitors derives enjoyment primarily from the experience of seeing and encountering animals, a large number of visitors are looking for experiences that incorporate a broader range of experiences.



Many parents, for instance, put the experience and enjoyment of their children front-and-center in the day. And while one group of these parents equally derives enjoyment from their children's fun and from seeing the animal exhibits and shows, the other group of parents does not cite the animals as part of their enjoyment. This second group, however, feels more of a connection with the nature and conservation emphasis of the zoo setting.



In conclusion – It is clear that zoos and aquariums will continue to be important cultural institutions in America. By focusing on these audience perspectives, it may be possible to increase buy-in and support for our conservation work, be more effective at targeting our education programs, and more importantly, increase the perceived relevance of our programs to those in our community.