

# Welcome

AZA Learn - Welcoming and  
Accessible Virtual Workshop  
Series: Communication

March 11, 2026 2 PM - 3 PM

# Agenda

Community Agreements  
Overview of Q&A  
Upcoming Webinars  
Why Communication Matters  
Panelists  
Q&A (time permitting)

# Community Agreements

- Stay present and engaged by participating through the Q&A and chat features.
- Practice active listening by reading and listening to others' contributions with respect and curiosity.
- Assume positive intent while acknowledging the impact of words shared in the chat.
- Expect and accept non-closure, recognizing that all questions or topics may not be fully resolved today.
- Remain open to perspectives and ideas that may be new, challenging, or different from your own.

Note: This meeting will be recorded for the purpose of sharing with the AZA community. This meeting is not confidential. Further, many of our participants are employed by public sector/governmental entities. As a result, the recording of this meeting may be subject to freedom of information requests. Please keep that in mind as you share information about your institution and/or personal experiences.

# Questions & Answers

Time permitting, we will address questions submitted in the Q&A chat. If we are unable to answer all questions, a separate document with responses will be sent out.

# Upcoming Webinars

AZA's Diversity Committee is pleased to host this webinar series! What does it look like to embed values of welcoming and accessibility for all into an organization's culture? How do AZA accredited organizations around the globe navigate evolving geopolitical landscapes while adhering to these core values?

This is the first of a three-part series delving into real world processes, practices, ideas, and lessons-learned co-presented by AZA committees from across the varied perspectives and expertise found within our field.

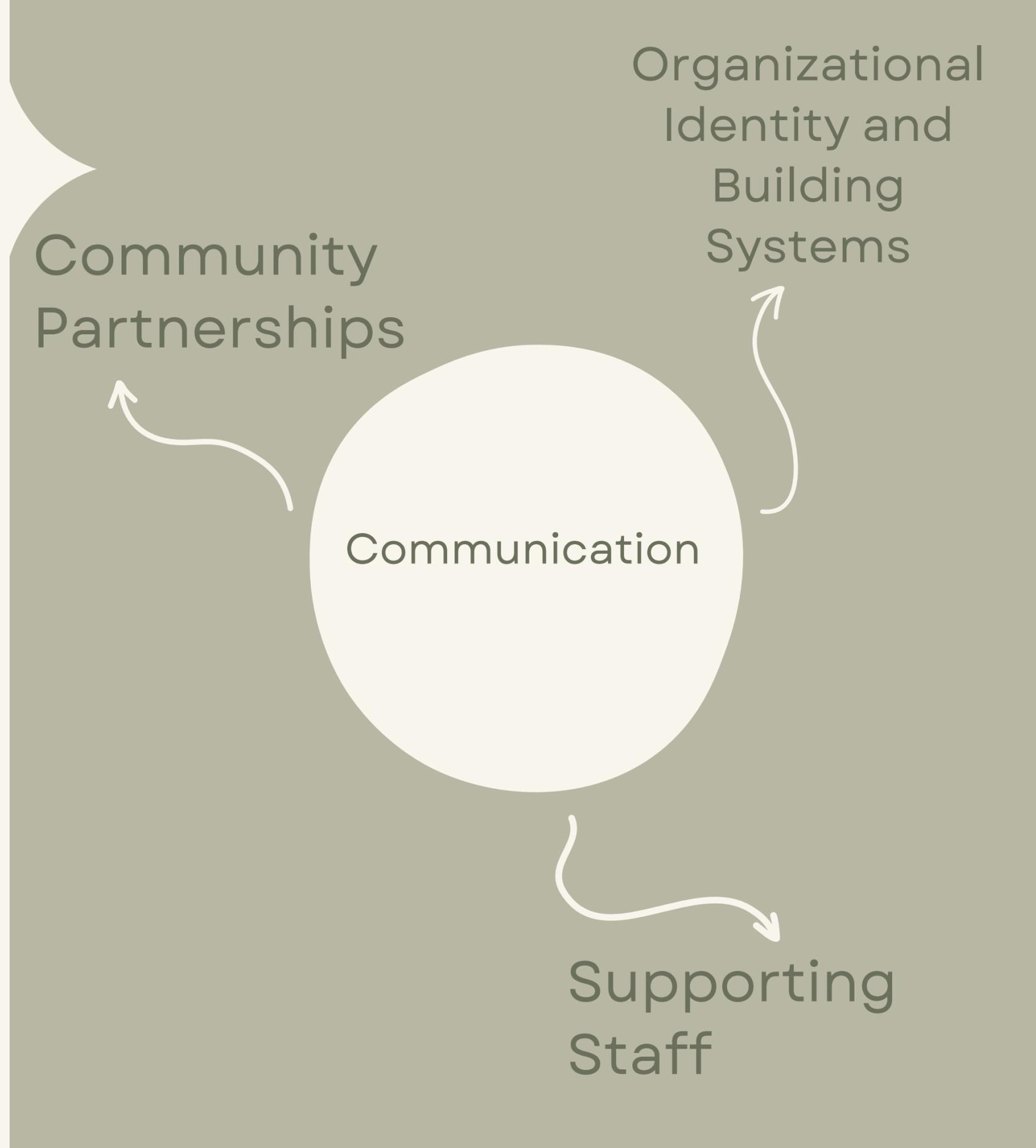
Upcoming dates and themes:

May 20, 2026 - Staff and Volunteer Engagement

July 15, 2026 - Process Based Design & Delivery

# Why Communication?

Communication shapes how we understand one another, how we build trust, and how we move shared work forward. In inclusion efforts, it's not just about what we say—it's about how we listen, how we create space for different perspectives, and how we foster shared responsibility across roles and institutions. When communication is clear, intentional, and inclusive, it strengthens collaboration, deepens community engagement, and turns values into action.





Chief Human Resources Officer  
Oklahoma City Zoo & Botanical Garden  
[tburnett@okczoo.org](mailto:tburnett@okczoo.org)

# Tammy Burnett

SHRM-SCP

Tammy leads strategic human capital initiatives that align workforce strategy with mission impact. With more than two decades of experience in public-sector and nonprofit leadership, Tammy specializes in translating complex employment law and organizational challenges into practical, business-focused solutions. She is known for her data-driven approach to culture, performance, and employee engagement, and for positioning HR as a strategic driver of operational excellence.

# Organizational Identity

## Who Do We Say We Are?

Organization Identity = Alignment Between:

- Mission
- Vision
- Core Values
- Strategy
- Systems

# Organizational Identity

## OKC Zoo

Mission – We connect people with our world’s vanishing wildlife and wild places to inspire conservation action.

Vision – We envision a world where all people take action to conserve wildlife and wild places.

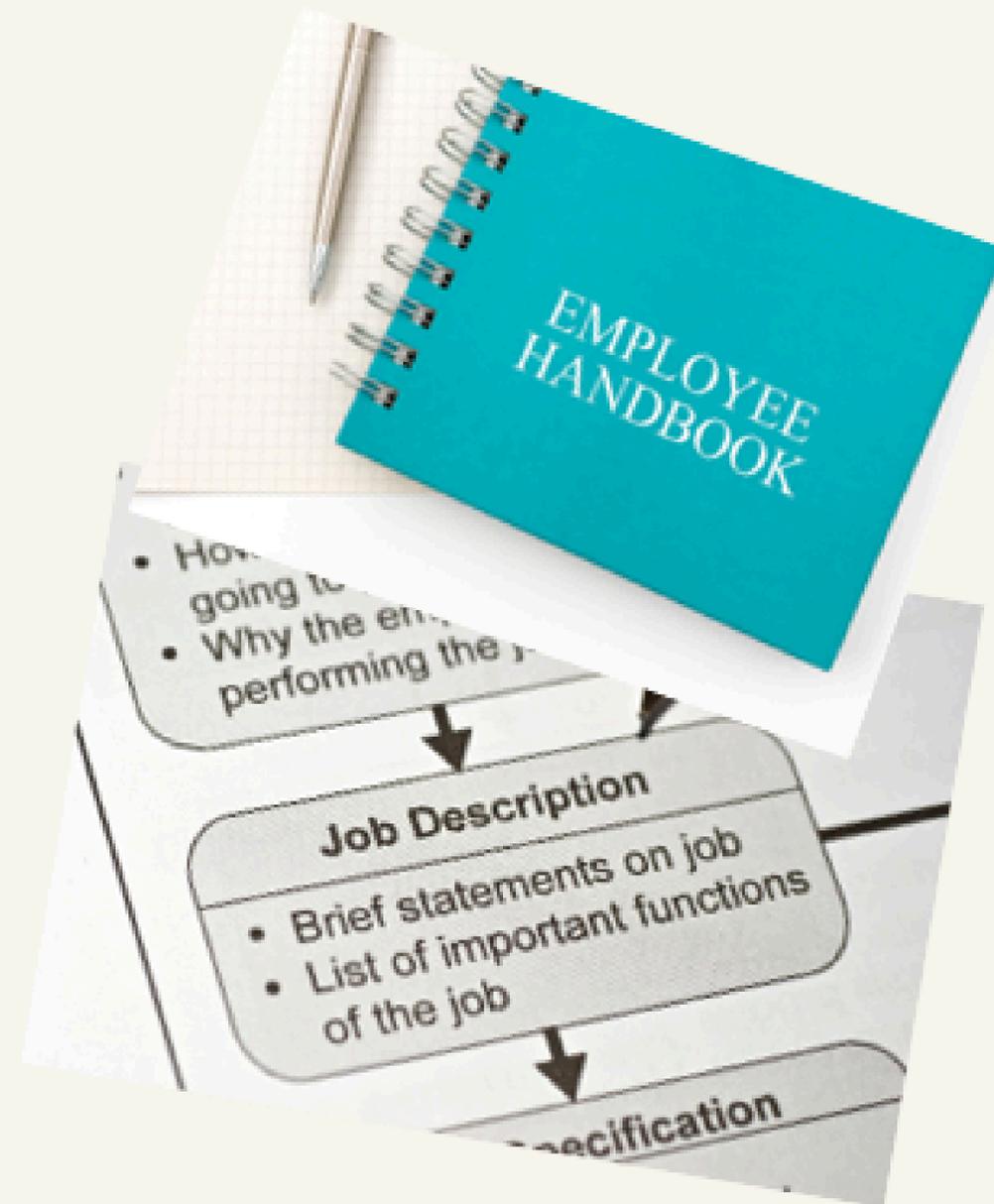
### Core Values – People:

People matter. We treat people with respect and foster a supportive culture for all employees, volunteers, guests, and community members. We collaborate by listening to different opinions and coming together as one. We appreciate the diversity of humans populating our planet and believe all people should be included and encouraged to help us fulfill our mission.

# Write It Down or It Won't Scale

## Embedding Identity Means:

- Policy Language
- Strategic Plans
- Job Descriptions
- Communication Standards
- Performance Expectations



# The Law is a Floor, Not a Ceiling

Compliance = “What do we have to do?”

Identity = “Who do we choose to be?”

- Laws set minimum standards
- Mission drives institutional standards
- There is nothing in current law preventing us from valuing diversity, accessibility, or inclusion.

# Programming vs. Systems

## Values-Based Programming

- One-time workshops
- Awareness events
- Speaker series
- Public statements

## Values-Based Systems

- Hiring Practices
- Parameters for decision making (like budgets)
- Communication standards
- Performance Reviews
- Physical Design
- Metrics & Accountability

# Systems Building

## **Hiring & Talent**

- Inclusive job language
- Structured interviews
- Accessibility expectations for supervisors

## **Communication**

- Plain language standards
- Captioning norms
- Defined message approval parameters
- Multi-channel outreach

# Systems Building

## **Performance & Accountability**

- Culture behaviors in evaluations
- Climate metrics tracked
- Engagement data reviewed alongside financial data

## **Guest Experience**

- Wayfinding accessibility review
- Sensory-friendly offerings
- Feedback loops from community partners

# Moving Forward





Utah's  
**HOGLE  
ZOO**

VP of People & Culture  
jvanek@hoglezoo.org

# Jeff Vanek

JD, MST

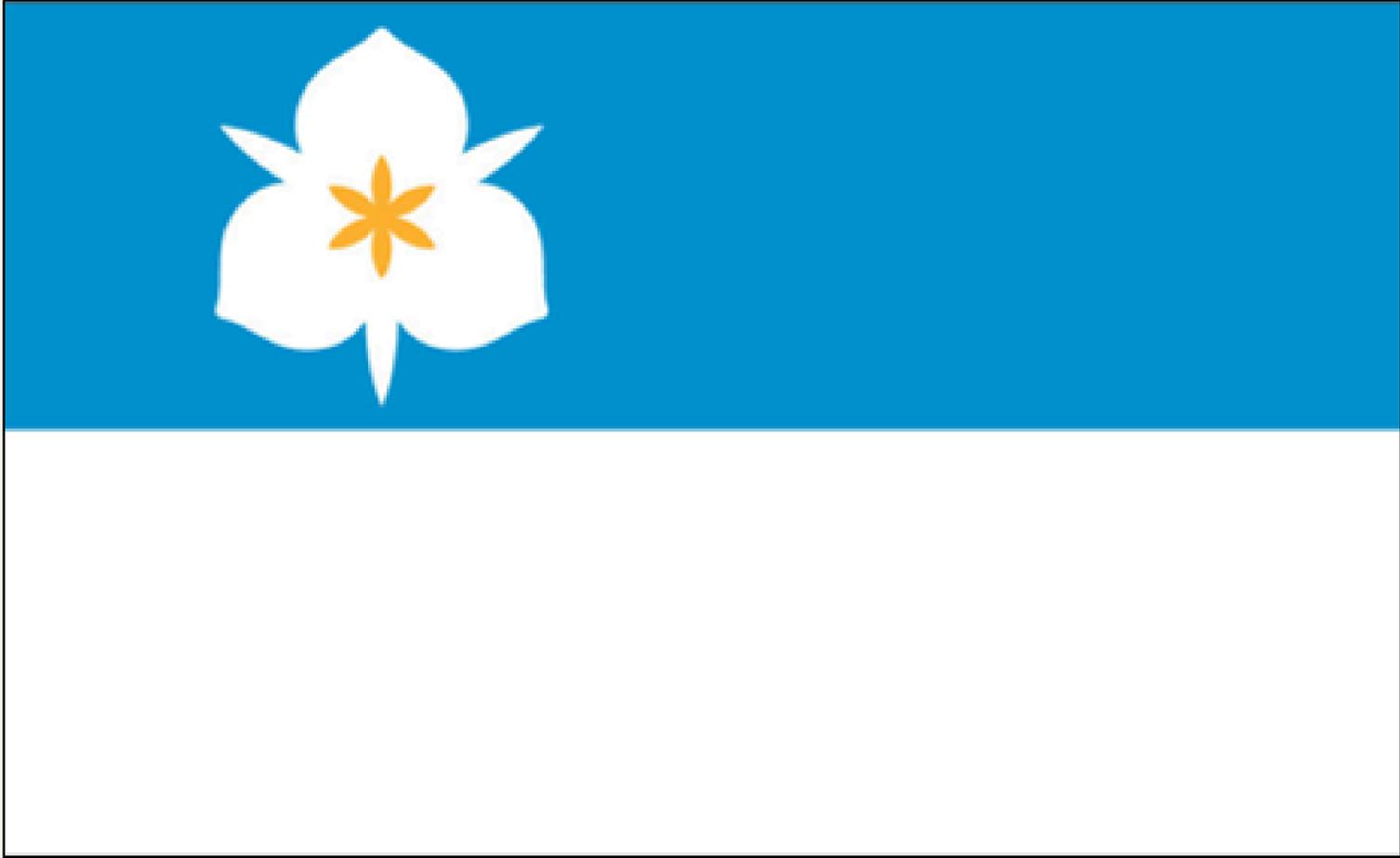
Jeff oversees the HR, Volunteer, and Training Departments. He currently Chairs the AZA HR Committee. With over 20 years of HR experience, his favorite aspect of the work is organizational culture. Jeff loves hiking with his dogs in Mill Creek Canyon, located in the Wasatch National Forest, only a few minutes from his home. His car is basically always muddy from the hikes, but neither he nor the dogs really mind.

# I Read The News Today, Oh Boy

“Utah Passes A Bill Banning Diversity Programs In Government  
And On Campuses.” The Associated Press, NBC News, January 26, 2024

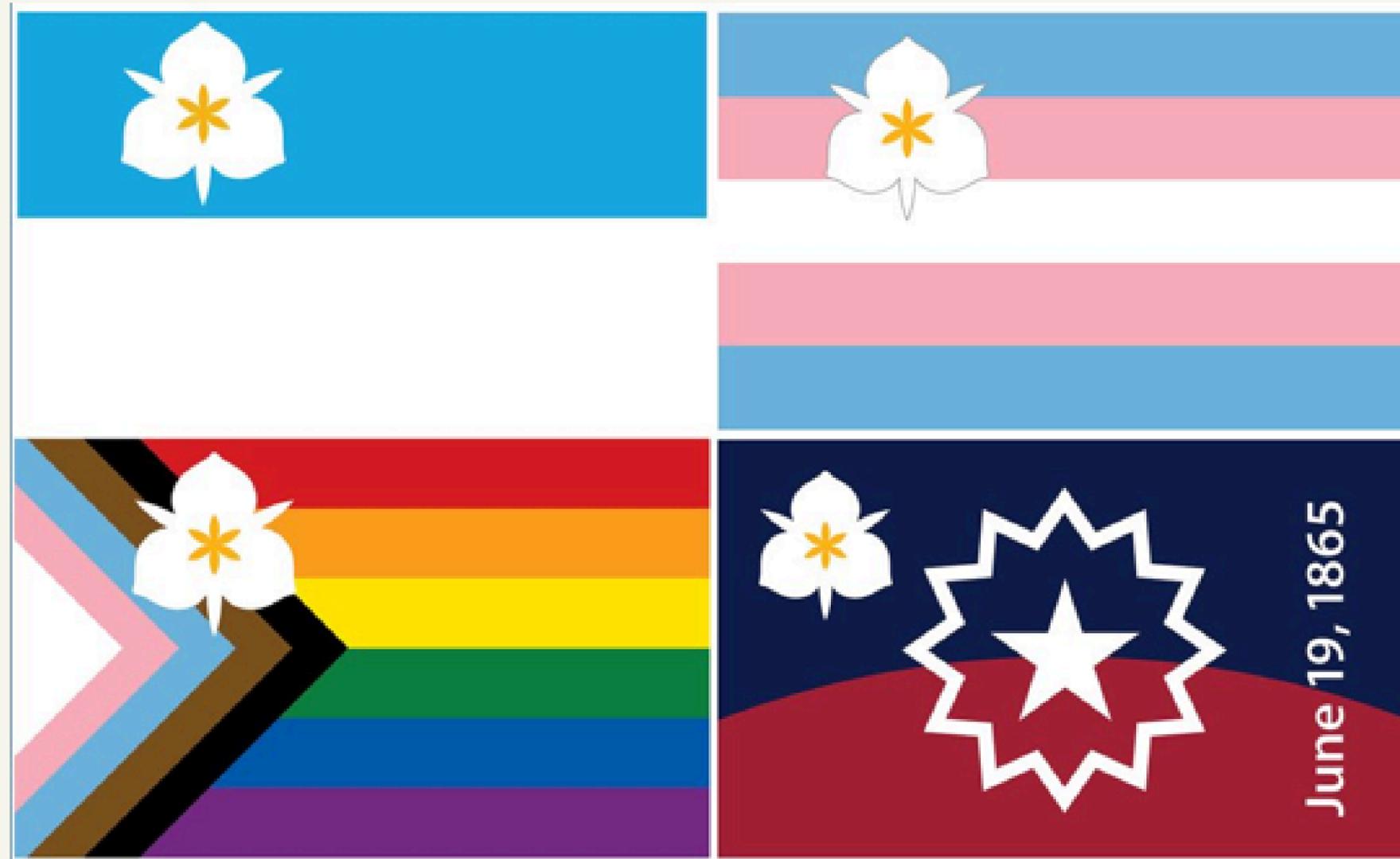
“Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And  
Preferencing.” Whitehouse Web Page, January 20, 2025

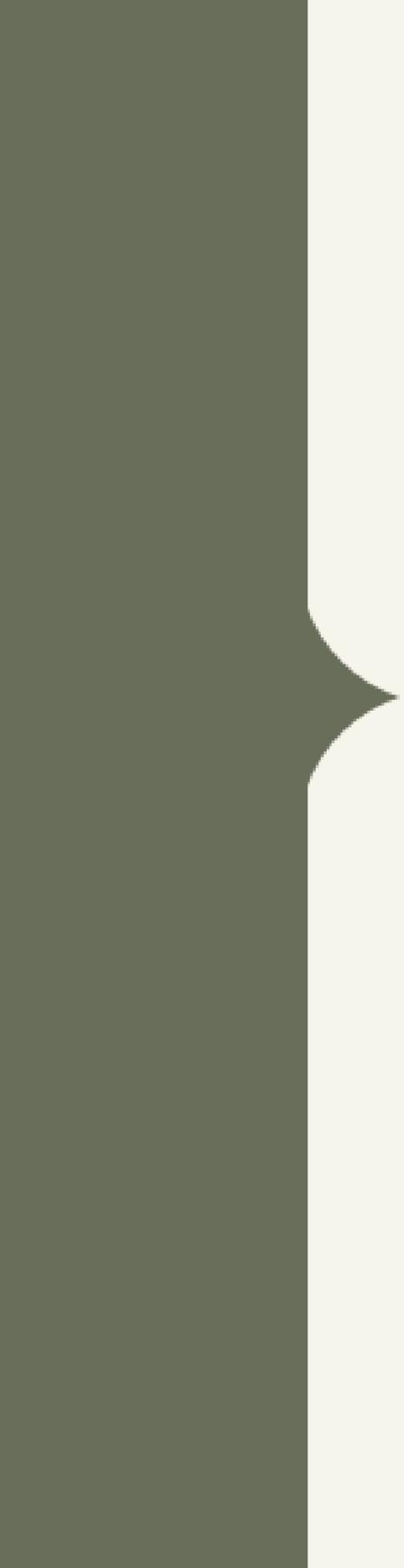
“Utah Becomes First State To Ban LGBTQ+ Pride Flags In  
Government Buildings And Schools.” Los Angeles Times March 28, 2025



# “Salt Lake City Adopts New Banners, Sidestepping Pride Flag Ban.”

Utah News Dispatch, May 6, 2025



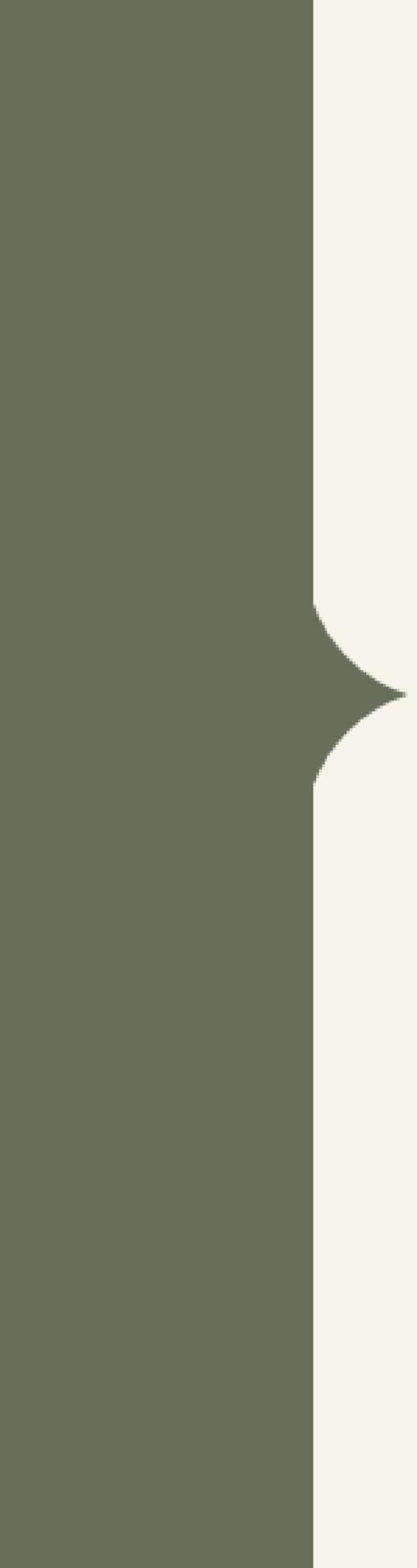


Issues of:

Law

*and*

Culture



A Story

Have you no Pride?

“Utah’s Hogle Zoo removes mention of ‘Pride’ from what used to be a Pride month event.”

“The zoo said it’s trying to focus on bringing people together with its ‘Colors of Conservation’ event.”

The Salt Lake Tribune, May 14, 2025



**ZOO BREW  
PRIDE WITH OUR PRIDE**

**Wednesday, June 7 | 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.**  
Don't miss out. Buy your tickets on [hoglezoo.org](http://hoglezoo.org)

Sip a drink, savor a bite, dance, experience wildlife connections, and toast to saving animals and wild habitats at our adults-only Zoo Brew events. Proceeds from Zoo Brew: Pride with the Pride benefit the Masasa Carnivore Project that protects lions and prevents human-wildlife conflict.



**Colors**  
**OF**  
*Conservation*

Utah's  
**HOGLEZOO**



**JUNE 11**

# Colors of Conversation

- We made the news for removing the word pride from our June ZooBrew
- We upset employees, donors, and some members of the board
- We were accused of backing away from our values
- We were getting caught up in a “whose side are you on?” debate

# What we did...



- Emergency all-staff meeting to explain the what and the why of the name change
- Individual conversations with employees, donors, board members
- A focus on welcoming and inclusion for all (every side of the issue)
- Provided Pride celebration symbols for employees to wear and display
- A focused on our mission (animal conservation)

# Quick take aways...

- Compliance is easy, Culture is complicated
- External/Internal audiences (the demands of each)
- Messaging can be a bomb or a balm (language matters, to both sides)
- Funding does matter
- Mission is paramount
- Social change is hard but worth the struggle

# Do this for me...

- Let me know you care, talk with me not at me
- Let me know I still matter
- Tell me the "why" (give trust, receive loyalty)
- Let me know what is okay (flags in office, wearing pins)
- Help me understand how to move forward
- Do what you can (employee Pride lunch, pins, stickers for employees to use and display, etc.)
- Remind me of our organization's mission and my contribution to it



Chief Human Resources Officer  
Toronto Zoo  
vpeticca@torontozoo.ca

# Valerie Peticca

Valerie Peticca is the Chief Human Resources Officer at the Toronto Zoo, where she leads human resources, health and wellness and compliance and standards portfolios across the Zoo. With over 20 years of experience in human resources and organizational development, she has worked extensively in higher education, helping teams navigate change, build inclusive cultures, and align people practices with organizational strategy. Valerie holds a master's degree in human resources management and advanced training in conflict resolution, workplace mental health, and is a PROSCI certified change management practitioner. She is passionate about creating workplaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is empowered to thrive. She is also an active volunteer in her community, supporting social service organizations that work with equity-deserving groups.



# Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility

## A Zoo for All

### OUR VALUES: THE 4 CARES



ANIMALS



TEAM



GUESTS &  
COMMUNITY



CLIMATE

Your Toronto Zoo is committed to fostering an environment of **belonging** in which everyone is accepted for who they are as their authentic selves.

Staff  
Volunteers  
→ **Guests/Community  
Partnerships**

# Career Pathways Program

Toronto Zoo's

# CAREER PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Let's help shape future careers

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# Climate Action Learning & Leadership CALL Program



**CLIMATE ACTION LEARNING & LEADERSHIP PROGRAM!**

**Introducing the CALL Program:  
Empowering Change through Action**

# Breaking Barriers Program



## BREAKING BARRIERS, OVERVIEW

- ▶ Events like Breaking Barriers helps create opportunities to work at our Zoo.
- ▶ Breaking Barriers provided job readiness skill development, as well as the opportunity to interview for one of our seasonal positions to those living with Disability.

### ▶ Session Topics Included:

- ▶ Creating Memorable First Impressions
- ▶ Elevator Pitch
- ▶ Personal Branding
- ▶ Accommodation & Disclosures
- ▶ Interview Skills
- ▶ Guide to Retaining a Job
- ▶ Mock Interview Practice

# Job Readiness & Recruitment Partnerships



# Pride Celebration



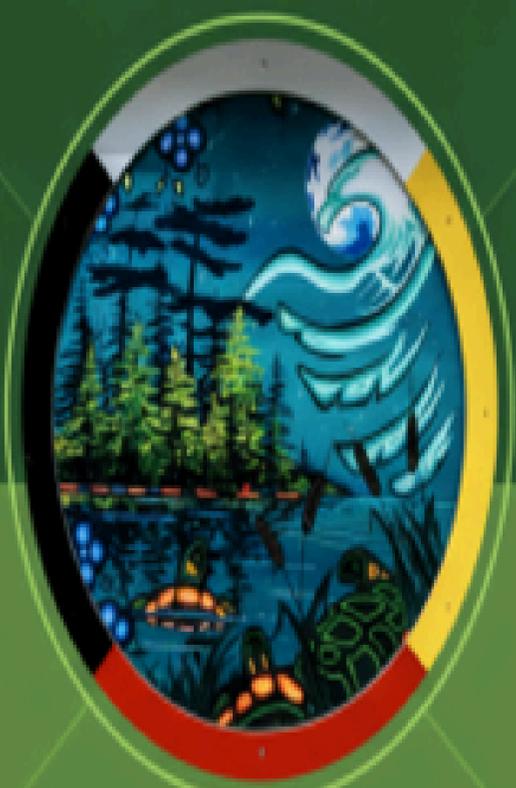
# Community Partnerships



# Traditional Knowledge Indigenous Relations



Building Bridges, Fostering Understanding,  
Stewarding Nature Together



### OUR COMMITMENT

- Partnerships
- Education
- Conservation
- Dialogue



ways of knowing partnership  
**TURTLE ISLAND**  
conservation

# Kulture City



# Accessible Zoo Site



EARN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT IN BIOLOGY AT THE ZOO!



The Toronto Zoo says its latest boardwalk, named in honour of former lieutenant-governor David. C. Onley, is meant to help people of all abilities navigate the zoo. (Alexis Raymon/CBC)



Toronto Zoo was the first zoo in Canada to participate in **PaRx** which is an initiative of the BC Parks Foundation, driven by health-care professionals who want to improve their patients' health by connecting them to nature.



# Bringing the Community Together

Together, let us build a stronger, more connected community!

Warm Regards,  
Dolf DeJong, CEO, Toronto Zoo



**genwell**<sup>o</sup>  
HUMAN CONNECTION MOVEMENT

## Growing a Stronger Community Together Through Connection, Belonging and Nature



Dear Community Leaders and Partners,

Your Toronto Zoo is pleased to invite you to our upcoming social health workshop hosted by **Genwell**, "Growing a Stronger Community Together Through Connection, Belonging, and Nature."

This workshop is an incredible opportunity to connect, share ideas, and strengthen our collective community impact. Together we will explore how fostering social health, and leadership can drive meaningful impact, both for our organizations and across the communities we serve.

# Canadian National Institute for the Blind



We're committed to ensuring we remain a place where everyone feels welcome, included, and connected to nature in a way that resonates personally.



# A Zoo for All

Remove all financial barriers for classes from the local School Boards to attend education programming at your Toronto Zoo starting in the Fall of 2026.



# Going Forward Community Conservation Centre



# Key Takeaways

Centering your organization on value-based systems—rather than just value-based programming—strengthens the experience for staff, volunteers, and guests alike.

Transparent communication about organizational changes helps staff understand the direction of the organization while reinforcing that their contributions remain valued.

Actively involving the community helps foster a more inclusive culture for both staff and guests.

# Questions & Answers

Time permitting, we will address questions submitted in the Q&A chat. If we are unable to answer all questions, a separate document with responses will be sent out.

Thank you  
for attending!

Next webinar:  
May 20, 2026 - Staff and  
Volunteer Engagement