The Inspector’s Handbook

2020 Edition
# 2020 INSPECTOR’S HANDBOOK

**SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONS & CHANGES 2016-2020**

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NOTE: For the purposes of this Handbook, the terms “institution” and “facility” are interchangeably used to refer to both Accredited Institutions and Certified Related Facilities. Unless otherwise noted, all references to accreditation are interchangeable with AZA’s certification program. For further clarification please contact AZA accreditation staff.

I. REQUIREMENTS AND RULES OF INSPECTION TEAM SERVICE

A. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a member of an accreditation or certification inspection team. Your role in AZA’s accreditation/certification process is extremely important, and we want to provide you with the tools you need to understand and fulfill your responsibilities to the best of your ability, regardless of whether you’ve served in this capacity before or are doing so for the first time.

Service as an AZA inspector is a huge responsibility and requires a tremendous amount of work. AZA, and every facility it has accredited and certified, are counting on you to do a thorough job and make an unbiased evaluation based upon accreditation standards and modern zoological practices and philosophies (not on your personal opinion). In addition to having professional expertise and significant experience in your particular field, you must be willing to follow instructions, study hard in advance, allow sufficient time and patience to inspect, be capable of making tough decisions if necessary, remain impartial, and maintain complete confidentiality. The report and recommendation you and your team provide to the Accreditation Commission are an integral part of the process, and the list of concerns that your team generates provides a facility with a clear outline of items that must be successfully addressed before accreditation or certification can be considered. Regardless of whether a facility is ultimately accredited/certified or not, your service as an inspector sets an example and creates a guide for professional improvement.

AZA sincerely appreciates your service and dedication to this extremely important endeavor.

Key Contacts

As a member of the team, your main AZA contacts regarding this assignment are:

Accreditation Commission

Primary Reviewer: The Primary Reviewer is a member of the Accreditation Commission, or a Commission Advisor, assigned to serve as the chief examiner for the Commission and who, like you, receives a complete set of the institution’s application materials. The Primary Reviewer works in conjunction with the Visiting Committee and, as a Commissioner or Commission Advisor, is present at the institution’s hearing before the Commission. Sometimes the Primary Reviewer also serves as a member of the team or it's
Chair.

AZA Staff
The AZA accreditation staff is available to help you whenever you need assistance. The Handbook contains most of the information you will need, but accreditation staff members are happy to answer any questions or provide help as needed. Don’t hesitate to reach out. Accreditation staff members include:

   Senior Vice President, Accreditation Programs
   Director, Accreditation Programs
   Coordinator, Accreditation Programs
   Program Assistant, Accreditation Programs

B. ASSEMBLING A VISITING COMMITTEE (HOW YOU WERE SELECTED)

The assembly process begins several weeks before a facility submits an application for accreditation or certification, and takes place as follows:
1. Depending on the size and scope of the applicant institution, three to five inspectors are selected from the Commission’s database of qualified individuals, based on the criteria listed below.
2. That list is then sent to the applicant for review and approval.
3. The institution reviews the list, is given an opportunity to eliminate individuals on the list if desired, and sends the list back to AZA. If any individuals were eliminated, AZA places additional inspectors in their place.
4. AZA assigns a team by considering established selection criteria and the needs of the particular team.

Other factors also considered in the selection process are:
   • frequency of service (how long since an inspector was last assigned)
   • experience as Chair (could a particular inspector now begin serving as Chair)
   • participation on the prior inspection (the need to include a member of the facility’s previous inspection team whenever possible)
   • scope and depth of knowledge (special knowledge and/or experience)
   • the need to continue to add new individuals to the process (to place a new inspector on a team whenever possible)

An institution may not select the members of its Visiting Committee.

C. VISITING COMMITTEE CRITERIA

[NOTE: While rare, exceptions to criteria listed below may be made under special circumstances by the Senior Vice President, Accreditation Programs, unless otherwise indicated.]

Individuals selected to serve as inspectors must meet the following criteria:

Basic Criteria For Service As An Inspector
   • Must have support of current employer and supervisor
   • Must hold Individual membership in AZA at the Professional Fellow or Professional Affiliate level
• Must be employed at (or retired from) an AZA-accredited institution or certified related facility
• Must have a minimum of 7 years’ experience in a mid to high level position in the profession
• Must be actively involved in the profession and in AZA
• Prior involvement in accreditation process of own institution
• Must thoroughly review Inspector’s Handbook annually
• Must have served as a “Shadow” on an accreditation team
• Must stay current regarding AZA standards and policies, and attend the AZA annual conference accreditation session at minimum once every 3 years
• Must complete AZA’s online Animal Welfare training module
• Must participate on teams at least once every three years
• Must be able to maintain impartiality
• Must be able to maintain confidentiality
• Must have good written and oral communication skills
• Must be responsive to email and phone messages
• Ability to meet required deadlines
• Must be physically capable of walking several miles daily and withstanding harsh weather conditions
• Must be able to stick to the standards and put personal opinions to the side
• Must have expertise and experience to fulfill responsibilities in one of the three roles on the inspection team: Operations, Animal Management, or Veterinary Medicine
• Current position held must fall under one of the three primary roles noted above as follows:

**Description of Primary Roles:**
The three primary roles, and the areas they cover are as follows:
**Operations:** (Director, Deputy or Assistant Director, COO, or similar) Zoo or aquarium operations, governing authority, staff, facilities, finance, guest experience, safety/security, conservation, education, scientific advancement, and support organization.
**Curatorial/Animal Management:** (Curator, Director of Animal Operations, or similar) The animals, husbandry, facilities, safety/security, staff, conservation, education, scientific advancement.
**Veterinary Medicine:** (Veterinarian) Veterinary care, the animals, nutrition, staff, facilities, safety/security, scientific advancement.

*[NOTE: prior experience or expertise in areas other than those reflected in current job titles may also be considered.]*

**Criteria For Retired Fellows’ Service As An Inspector**
*[no exceptions may be made]*:
• Basic criteria for service as an inspector [except for employment status] (see above)
• Be retired, or in transition, from an AZA-accredited institution or certified related facility
• Must be approved by the Accreditation Commission prior to service
• Must attend AZA annual conferences at least every two years
• Must remain current with AZA policies and practices
• Must stay abreast of current practices within the profession

**Criteria for Selection of Team Chair**
• Basic criteria for service as an inspector (see above)
• Participation as member of an inspection team at a minimum of two different facilities
• Strong leadership, organizational, and interpersonal skills
• Willingness to read and follow written instructions
• Ability to write and organize reports
• Willingness to organize visit and facilitate discussion with team members and with staff of the host institution
• Ability to meet required deadlines and follow instructions for compiling the final report to the Commission

Criteria for Determination of Team Size
• Size of the institution and complexity of operations (larger, very complex institutions would likely be assigned a four-person team)

Criteria for Determination of Team Composition
• One team member should be from the institution’s previous inspection team, if available
• Team members’ experience and expertise should parallel the general scope of the institution to be inspected (i.e., an aquarium should have a team with strong aquatic experience)
• Institutions holding elephants shall have an inspector assigned solely for the purpose of evaluating the elephant program
• Teams should include at least one member from an institution similar in size and budget to the institution to be inspected

Three Person Teams should include one member with extensive experience in operations, one with extensive experience in husbandry and animal management, and one with extensive experience in veterinary medicine

Four Person Teams should include one member with extensive experience in operations, one with extensive experience in husbandry and animal management, one with extensive experience in veterinary medicine, and one with experience particularly relevant to the facility being inspected (such as aquatics, cetaceans, elephants, birds, etc.)

Team Tools
Available resources to the team include:
• The Inspector’s Handbook which fully explains the parameters for a facility to be considered accredited/certified, and also provides guidance on evaluating programs and writing the inspection report
• The Accreditation Standards and Related Policies containing standards and policies related to the accreditation and certification processes
• The Primary Reviewer (a member of the Commission or a Commission Advisor who serves as the Visiting Committee’s direct line to the Commission)
• The Senior Vice President, Accreditation Programs, who can answer questions or concerns about standards and policies, and consult with the Commission and team regarding issues that may surface during the inspection
• The Director, Accreditation Programs, who can answer questions about procedures, your assignment, scheduling, reimbursement of expenses, and the team’s report
• The Coordinator, Accreditation Programs, who can answer questions about procedures, your assignment, expenses, and all aspects of the inspection and/or application process
• The Accreditation Resource Center is available on the AZA website (https://www.aza.org/accred-resource-center) and includes examples of various documents and policies required for AZA Accreditation and Certification. Documents posted on the Resource Center are considered by the Accreditation Commission as being good examples. Guidelines and other information that may be useful in reviewing institutional programs and policies are also available.
• The Accreditation Training Session covers the standards, best practices, practical inspection techniques, evaluations of past inspections, report preparation, and the opportunity to discuss experiences with other inspectors. The session is presented yearly at AZA’s annual conference, and topics covered vary from year to year.

• The Accreditation Inspector's Electronic Community is a “closed” community available on the AZA Network consisting of individuals who either actively participate in accreditation inspections or have expressed an interest in doing so. This community is utilized for educational and information sharing purposes.

D. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEAM:
Preparation, Timing, Standards, Confidentiality

Important Note: It is important to adhere to the requirements and responsibilities of the team, as outlined below in this handbook. Most important among these are being adequately prepared through study, allowing sufficient time to conduct a thorough inspection containing all components, sticking to the standards when citing a concern (evaluating without bias), and maintaining strict confidentiality. Failure to follow these and other requirements noted below may disqualify you from serving as an inspector in the future.

[NOTE: all inspectors are required to sign an Oath of Impartiality and Confidentiality prior to participation on a team in order to ensure the integrity of the accreditation/certification process.]

1. Preparation: Institution’s Materials. Begin studying the institution’s materials as soon as they arrive. There is a tremendous amount of material and you must be fully familiar with all of it well before the actual inspection. When the assignment is finished, the institution’s materials should be destroyed. Alternatively, you may leave them with the institution before you depart from the inspection.

2. Preparation: Review the Previous Inspection Report. Make certain to thoroughly review the previous team’s inspection report and list of concerns (included in your materials) to ensure that all items of concern that were listed at that time are no longer an issue. If you find any items that still exist, make sure to list them under the heading “Concerns Remaining From Previous Inspection” located at the top of the official List of Concerns, at the beginning of the narrative report (see Narrative Report, pages 58 – 60).

3. Timing: Interview Staff At All Levels. Be sure to meet with staff at all levels. It is important to interview senior staff as well as members of the front-line staff, such as junior curators, animal care specialists, etc. Encourage staff to talk freely, in confidence, with the team. Staff interviews should be conducted in private, without the presence of other staff and/or supervisors, when possible. However, at larger institutions with sizeable staffs it may be necessary to conduct group sessions instead of private interviews. Group sessions should be held without supervisory staff present. For group interviews, members of the inspection team should provide contact information (phone and/or e-mail) and encourage anyone who wishes to discuss an issue privately to make contact following the inspection, if they prefer that to speaking in a group. The team should also post this information in a general staff location.

4. Timing: Planning and Travel. Allow sufficient time to cover everything. The team Chair will determine the dates of the inspection in consultation with team members and the institution’s CEO/Director. Once dates have been agreed upon, the team Chair will consult
with the institution’s CEO/Director and then communicate with the team regarding the institution’s preference for hotel and travel arrangements.

**Schedule Enough Time!** It is *extremely important* to the integrity of the accreditation/certification process that the inspection and exit interview process *not be rushed*. When scheduling the inspection each team should add a half day or more to the time recommended by the prior team. Contact the institution’s Director to hear their thoughts and speak with the prior team chair (or a member of that team) if able. Another good resource in determining the correct number of days to inspect is the Primary Reviewer assigned to the case. He or she receives the same materials you do and may have some insight. In addition to an increase in accreditation requirements, it is probable that a lot has changed at the institution in the five years since the previous team made their recommendation. If a team expects to be finished by 2pm on the third day, *do not book your flight for that afternoon*. Wait until the following morning. Rushing through an inspection, or an exit interview, is unacceptable and highly detrimental to the process. Should you not be able to fully commit to the length of time needed for the inspection, we ask that you withdraw from participation on the team (see #6, pages 15 – 16). *Do not schedule arrival and/or departure times that could potentially conflict with your availability to participate fully in the process from beginning to end.* Doing so may affect your eligibility to participate as an inspector again in the future.

5. **Standards:** *Cite the Standard.* When compiling the list of concerns, identify which standard(s) the concern is linked to, and cite that standard(s) at the end of the concern. If a concern cannot be linked directly to a standard or the Preamble, it should not be placed on the List of Concerns. Instead, it should be included in the Narrative Report as a recommended *suggestion* for the institution *to consider*. For example, say something like “The Visiting Committee recommends that the institution consider XXXXXXXXXX”. It should not be underscored.

6. **Standards:** *Evaluate Without Bias.* When conducting the inspection do not allow your personal opinion of a practice, methodology, institution, individual, etc., to affect your decisions positively or negatively. Base opinions on the standards and commonly accepted best practices you are measuring against.

7. **Confidentiality:** As a member of the Visiting Committee you are required to maintain confidentiality and sign an *Oath of Impartiality and Confidentiality* (supplied by the accreditation department) regarding information contained in the application materials, the Visiting Committee Report, and discovered during the course of the inspection. You must keep this information strictly confidential, including the recommendation your team makes to the Accreditation Commission. This procedural guarantee of confidentiality allows accrediting organizations access to restricted materials and creates a safe platform for communication between the Commission and the inspection team with: the facility, the staff, and the public.

**E. KEY POINTERS ON INSPECTING**

1. **Base Judgment On Existing Operation.** While future plans should be considered in a general sense, you must judge each institution on what exists *at the time of your visit*—*not* on what is planned for the future.
2. **Inspecting As A Team, And Solo.** The team should inspect the facility as a unit and remain together as much as possible during the initial inspection. However, after the initial tour of the facility takes place, team members may arrange to spend additional time in the area(s) of the institution corresponding to their particular area of expertise or interest if time allows and the team chair agrees.

3. **See All Areas.** Schedule adequate time to see everything, ask questions, and make notes as you go. Institutions have been preparing for months for the inspection, and the team must make every effort to see all areas of the operation while visiting the institution.

4. **Communicate Lesser Concerns As You Go.** The team is expected to inform the institution of any lesser concerns at the time the team notes them, rather than waiting until the entire List of Concerns is reviewed during the exit interview. In this way, it may be possible for the institution to address some of the lesser concerns during your visit. If these items are satisfactorily completed, they may be eliminated from the final List of Concerns during the exit interview.

5. **Avoid Recommending Solutions.** Identify problems in accordance with accreditation standards and policies. Avoid recommending specific solutions to those problems. For example, recommend that the fence be painted, not that the fence be painted white. If the applicant asks for your ideas on fixing an identified problem, you may offer your opinion. However, you should clearly state that it is your opinion based on your knowledge and experience and should not be considered as a recommendation of the Accreditation Commission. [NOTE: you may make a recommendation in the narrative report regarding a possible solution to an identified issue, however, you must phrase your recommendation as follows: “the team recommends that the institution consider XXXXX as one possible way to address the issue.”]

6. **Complete The Report Questionnaire As You Go.** It is recommended that the team meet each evening to complete the report questionnaire to determine which items are “Questionable” or “Unacceptable”, and to begin compiling the List of Concerns (NOTE: this should be done daily, as applicable).

7. **List of Concerns.** After completing the report questionnaire, the team should discuss overall impressions, and determine which items should be placed on the List of Concerns and Points of Particular Achievement. “Points of Particular Achievement” should include examples of areas in which the facility is excelling, and acknowledgements of noteworthy things the applicant has accomplished. Items noted as “Q” (questionable) should be carefully considered for inclusion on the list of concerns, but there may be some cases where the team believes the issue is being resolved or may not rise to the level of inclusion on the list of concerns. In those cases, the item may be included in the narrative only. Items noted as “U” (unacceptable) must be included on the list of concerns. If multiple questions relating to the same area of concern are marked “U”, that item should only be listed one time on the list of concerns. A form for this purpose appears at the end of the Visiting Committee Report. The team should complete the form during the post-inspection meeting and photocopy it prior to the exit interview. Be sure to provide a copy to the institution’s Director. NOTE: Forms may be hand-written on-site for presentation during the exit interview but should later be typed exactly as written into the electronic edition of the Visiting Committee Report Form (see pages 60 – 63 for more information and an example).

8. **Exit Interview.** The purpose of the exit interview is to provide the institution’s staff with the
List of Concerns and the Points of Particular Achievement your team noted during the inspection. If the CEO/Director can present evidence satisfactory to the inspection team that an item on the List of Concerns has been addressed, that item may be eliminated from the list during the exit interview. If the CEO/Director believes an item on the list is incorrect, encourage them to make their case regarding this when preparing their “Response to the List of Concerns”. Assure them that the Accreditation Commission will consider their position and documentation, and will determine whether the item is to remain on the list or not. Do not indicate what your team’s recommendation to the Commission will be. The final decision regarding accreditation/certification is made by the Commission, and it is possible that the Commission may not follow the recommendation your team makes. The Commission may believe that the institution has made sufficient progress between the time of your visit and the hearing before the Commission, or the Commission may have access to information not available to you at the time of your inspection.

Allow sufficient time to conduct a thorough exit interview with the Director or a designated representative. The exit interview is a critical piece of the process, and it is detrimental for the exit interview to be conducted in a hurried manner, or “on the way to the airport”.

9. **Report All Potential Problems.** Everything that you believe does not follow accreditation standards and/or related policies, best practices, or AZA philosophy should be discussed with the institution and noted in the final report. Items or issues that may seem insignificant could be indicative of bigger problems. If you are uncertain about whether a particular situation is acceptable or not, discuss it with the team and call the Primary Reviewer or the accreditation department to make the determination.

10. **Documentation is Critical.** Documentation must be present or the standard cannot be counted as having been met. For example, if an institution has done a drill but does not have documentation of that drill, the drill cannot be counted.

11. **Consistency.** All facilities undergoing the accreditation/certification process are entitled to a consistent visiting team approach to their evaluation. Training sessions, the Visiting Committee Report Form, the Inspector’s Handbook, and the Accreditation Standards form a basis for such an approach. Inspectors must be knowledgeable of AZA accreditation standards and related policies, and base judgments on those standards. The Inspector’s Handbook and a copy of the Accreditation Standards & Policies should be carried with you during the inspection for easy reference. If uncertainty exists regarding the interpretation of a standard, an attempt should be made to contact the team’s assigned Primary Reviewer or the accreditation department for assistance.

12. **Instructions for Photographs.** Assign someone on your team to take photographs, and make sure the individual assigned follows these instructions. The photographs your team takes are an extremely important part of your inspection and serve as a photo record of how the institution appeared at that time. It is essential that you:
   - take a large enough quantity of photographs to present an accurate impression of the physical institution as it exists, and as seen through the eyes of its daily visitors, from start to finish. *Note: it is better to submit too many photos than not enough.* **75-150 photos are recommended.** If you find it necessary to include more than 200 photographs, contact AZA staff.
   - “walk the Commission” through the institution as it appeared during your visit. Be sure that the photographs show both the good and the challenged areas.
   - Label each photograph in some manner, explaining what the photograph depicts. This
may be done by adding text directly to the photographs, creating a Power Point presentation with the photographs labeled, creating a PDF of the labeled photographs, or changing the file name for each individual photograph.

● Eliminate all duplicate photos prior to sending.
● Submit photographs either as separate JPEG files or as a labeled Power Point presentation. If submitting in JPEG format, limit size to 450 – 800 KB (or smaller). If you are unable to reduce the size of your photos, submit them as is (AZA staff will reduce). Note: cell phone photos are acceptable as long as they are converted to an appropriate file type and are of appropriate file size.
● Submit photos by email, flash drive, or compact disc. [Note: photographs should not be imbedded into the narrative report.]

13. **Disposal of Institution’s Materials.** Once you no longer need them, the institution’s materials should be destroyed or returned directly to the applicant at the time of the inspection, or by trackable delivery thereafter.

14. **Your Team’s Recommendation:** The final decision your team will make is your recommendation to the Accreditation Commission to accredit/certify, table, or deny. Your decision must be based on the facility as it exists at the time of the inspection. Once your team determines which option to recommend, that decision will be included in the cover letter forwarding the finished inspection report (see Cover Letter, pages 56 – 57). As an AZA inspector, it is important to understand that the final decision to grant, table, or deny accreditation/certification rests solely with the Accreditation Commission—not with the inspection team. The inspection team makes a recommendation which is based on what is learned and observed at the time of the inspection. The inspection team does not bear responsibility for the final decision regarding a case. That responsibility rests solely with the Accreditation Commission and the institution itself. It is important to recognize that much is likely to change between your inspection and the date of the applicant’s hearing before the Accreditation Commission. When the Commission makes a decision that differs from a team’s recommendation, it does not mean that the Commission considers the team to have been incorrect. It simply means that changes occurred between the inspector’s conclusion and the applicant’s hearing that affected the outcome of the case, positively or negatively.

**F. GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. **Travel Benefits:** As an AZA volunteer, if you need to rent a vehicle for use during the inspection, note that rental cars are covered by AZA’s automobile insurance policy. You should decline coverage offered by the rental agency. When filling out paperwork for your rental car, include the name “Association of Zoos & Aquariums” so it is clear that the rental is related to AZA business. Prior to your trip make certain to download and print the AZA auto insurance card from the Accreditation Inspector’s community on the AZA Network and carry it with you at all times to guarantee proof of insurance. Coverage purchased from the rental agency will not be reimbursed by AZA.

Also available to AZA volunteers is emergency travel and medical assistance for use while travelling for AZA-related business. If you are insured and need to locate medical care while travelling for an inspection, this service is available for timely help anywhere around the world. You may download the Travel and Medical Assistance Card from the library of the Accreditation Inspectors Network community. We encourage you to keep the card with you while travelling.
2. **Attire:** Wear appropriate attire for meetings with governing authority members, and society officials (i.e., coats/ties, dress slacks, business attire). For the grounds inspection, consideration may be given to the temperature and humidity at the time (clothing should be, at minimum, “business casual”). Inappropriate attire may affect your eligibility to participate as an inspector again in the future.

2. **Reimbursement of Team Member Expenses:** Each team member must individually submit electronically to AZA scanned itemized receipts for all expenses, and the “Inspector Expense Report” form sent to each inspector via e-mail by the accreditation department. This must occur within 30 days of the inspection. Detailed instructions for submittal of reimbursement requests are provided on the “Inspector Expense Report” form. For those who use a personal automobile to travel to an inspection, AZA will reimburse using the current optional standard mileage rate for business-related travel as determined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), or for the cost of gas—but not both. Reimbursable expenses include transportation, parking, lodging, meals, postage, and any other reasonable cost associated with the inspection. If you are uncertain about an expense, check with the accreditation department. Upon submission of expenses, allow 4 weeks for receipt of reimbursement checks.

The following items are *not* reimbursed as part of inspection expenses: alcoholic beverages, movies, first or *business class airfare (airfare will be reimbursed at coach rates), and expenses for a traveling companion. Those expenses should be removed prior to submission of the receipts. The institution’s materials should *not* be returned to the Accreditation Department, and shipping costs associated with doing so will not be reimbursed. (*Business class airfare may be acceptable on extremely long flights, but it must be approved in advance of purchase by the institution being inspected. Contact the accreditation department before purchasing tickets. Failure to obtain advance approval may result in reimbursement at coach rates only.*)

3. **Gifts.** Members of the Visiting Committee may not accept any gifts or privileges offered by the applicant.

4. **Social Events.** While it is helpful for the applicant institution to arrange for a luncheon or dinner so that the Visiting Committee can meet staff members and members of the governing authority, the Visiting Committee should not participate in social functions beyond those required for the orderly discharge of its duties and responsibilities.

5. **Media Coverage.** It is inappropriate for the applicant institution to schedule media coverage during the inspection. However, this may be unavoidable in some cases. If media are present, select a team member to serve as spokesperson and schedule a convenient time to meet with media representatives. Because of the potential for distraction, and the confidentiality of the process, do *not* permit media to accompany you on the inspection. You may speak to the media, but you may not make any comments specific to the case, or reveal anything about the recommendations your team may be considering. You may speak only about AZA and the accreditation/certification process, i.e., who we are, what we represent, how accreditation/certification works, what it covers, why it is important, etc. Encourage media to obtain copies of AZA’s accreditation standards and the “Guide To Accreditation of Zoological Parks and Aquariums”, available for download on AZA’s website.

6. **Withdrawing From A Team.** In the case of an emergency that requires you to withdraw
from participation on a team, please notify the team chair and the AZA office immediately. Withdrawing from a team within three weeks (or less) of a pending inspection may result in postponement of the inspection unless a suitable and willing substitute can be located and sufficiently prepared to meet the originally scheduled inspection dates. Inspectors should withdraw only in the case of an extreme emergency.

7. **Inspectors In Training (Shadowing A Team).** As AZA constantly strives to improve the accreditation process new inspectors are continuously being brought into the program. Completion of an inspector-in-training program is required for all new potential inspectors. This “boots on the ground” training opportunity provides insight into the inspection process prior to being assigned as an official team member by allowing individuals to “shadow” inspection teams. Shadows are invited to accompany the team throughout the entire inspection, including the exit interview. Shadows are encouraged to participate in all discussions that take place among the team or with staff at the facility. They may also be included in discussions related to the final Visiting Committee Report, but they must not participate in the actual writing of the report. Nor should they be listed on the report as a member of the team. Before an inspector-in-training is assigned to an inspection team, permission must be obtained from the applicant institution. All expenses incurred by the trainee are the sole responsibility of the trainee or his/her employer.

**G. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAIR**

1. **The Role of Chair.** As Chair of the Visiting Committee you are expected to act as its leader, and to ensure that goals are set and accomplished in accordance with the instructions of the Commission as outlined in this handbook. You are responsible for scheduling the inspection, coordinating the team, communicating with the Primary Reviewer, and ensuring that the report is written and formatted according to Commission instructions (included in this handbook), and delivered to accreditation staff and the Primary Reviewer by the established deadline. The team Chair is also responsible for ensuring that proper procedures are followed throughout the inspection.

2. **Schedule the Trip.** Your first responsibility as team Chair is to promptly contact all members of the Visiting Committee and the institution’s CEO/Director to determine mutually agreeable inspection dates for as soon as can be arranged. A deadline for the completion of all inspections will be established by the accreditation department. Although inspections can take place any time before the established deadline, the sooner the inspection takes place, the more time the facility will have to make corrections prior to its hearing before the Accreditation Commission, and the more time the Chair will have to compile the report. Once inspection dates are set, promptly inform the accreditation department and the Primary Reviewer of those dates.

3. **Allow Sufficient Time.** It is extremely important when scheduling the inspection to allow sufficient time to conduct a thorough and professional inspection and exit interview. The amount of time required to inspect a small institution may be as little as 1½-2 days. A larger institution may take 3 days, and a very large institution 4-5 days. If the Chair has not previously visited the institution to be inspected, the number of inspection days recommended by the previous team is noted on the cover page of that team’s report. In addition, it is recommended that a member of the previous Visiting Committee, or the institution’s CEO/Director, be contacted to aid in determining how many days will be sufficient. Rushing through an inspection, or an exit interview, is unacceptable and highly
detrimental to the process. This cannot be emphasized strongly enough. Travel arrangements should be made with this in mind.

4. **Determine Hotel Arrangements.** Once inspection dates have been determined, ask the applicant’s CEO/Director about the facility’s preference for accommodations at a nearby hotel. Individual team members may contact the recommended hotel to make reservations directly, or the institution may choose to make these arrangements for the team. That decision is left to the preference of the applicant, and the team Chair should determine that preference and communicate it to team members.

5. **Contact the Primary Reviewer Before You Go.** Prior to departing for the inspection, the team Chair should contact the Primary Reviewer to discuss any concerns or issues the Primary Reviewer or team Chair may have. *(Note: in the case of new applicants [see page 64 for a definition], the Primary Reviewer automatically serves as team Chair.)*

6. **Request Additional Materials if Necessary.** If the team Chair and Primary Reviewer believe materials are missing from the institution’s submission, it is appropriate for one or the other to define the missing materials for the facility’s CEO/Director and request that those materials be submitted via email prior to the inspection.

7. **Provide Advance Notice to Staff and Others With Whom You Wish To Meet.** Review the materials you have received and determine with whom you wish to meet while there. Contact the institution’s CEO/Director and provide him or her with a list of those people well in advance of the scheduled trip. You may add to that list once you are actually on site.

8. **Assign Primary Areas of Responsibility.** Review each team member’s primary area(s) of responsibility via email or phone in advance of the trip. Establish roles and responsibilities for each Visiting Committee member prior to the inspection trip, using the “Description of Primary Roles” found on page 8. Remember to assign someone to take photographs.

9. **Pre-inspection Team Meeting.** Schedule sufficient time for the inspection team to meet privately with each other before the inspection. A dinner meeting the night before, or a breakfast meeting the morning of the inspection are two possible methods that work well. A conference call a few days prior to the inspection is another good option. Talk about the materials received from the institution and determine what concerns, if any, other team members have. It is also helpful to develop a tentative “agenda” for the inspection *(see page 28 for an example).*

10. **Consider Policies and Documents For Accreditation Resource Center.** During review of the application materials and while on site for the inspection, make note of any policies or documents the team believes to be particularly well done, and call these to the attention of AZA accreditation staff after the inspection has concluded. The Accreditation Commission will consider any documents identified by the team for inclusion in the online Accreditation Resource Center.

11. **Plan Sufficient Time For Meetings.** Schedule sufficient time for your meetings with staff, members of the governing authority, members of the support organization, and/or volunteers. Let them know that the interview is confidential and that they may speak freely.

12. **Inspection Team Signatures.** It is important to obtain the signatures of the Visiting
Committee members on the Report Form prior to departing from the inspection.

13. **Provide Copy of List of Concerns.** The Chair should provide a copy of the list of concerns to the accreditation department and Primary Reviewer as soon as possible after returning from the inspection.

14. **Cover Letter, Report Form, and Narrative Report.** It is the Chair’s responsibility to ensure that these documents are prepared correctly, appropriately edited for spelling, grammar, format and accuracy, and submitted on time. See the individual sections in this handbook on these documents for specific instructions.

15. **Submitting the Finished Report On Time.** Email your completed report to accreditation staff, and the Primary Reviewer, by the established deadline. If additional time is needed, contact the accreditation department to advise and arrange an extension.

The finished, emailed report should consist of three separate documents: (1) cover letter, (2) report form (including the list of concerns), and (3) narrative report. Immediately after emailing these three components by the established deadline, send the following items to the accreditation department by traceable mail (Fed-Ex, UPS, Registered Mail, etc.): •Cover letter on AZA letterhead with original signature, •signature page from report with signatures of all inspectors, and •photographs.
II. TUTORIAL GUIDELINES AND AIDS

A. PREAMBLE

When evaluating an institution, do so under the Preamble to the accreditation standards:

AZA Accreditation - PURPOSE
AZA accredited zoos and aquariums are complicated operations with important goals. The highest goals of AZA accreditation include exemplary animal care and welfare, and inspiring guest engagement through effective education and conservation. AZA accreditation standards and requirements represent decades of modernization utilizing science, experience, and an unrelenting resolve to create a positive and lasting impact on guests, and to conserve our world’s wild animals and wild places.

The AZA Accreditation Program provides all zoos and aquariums the opportunity to examine, meet, or exceed the highest standards in the profession. The accreditation process combines internal (stakeholder) and external (peer-review) top to bottom assessment, resulting in the most scrutinized, specialized and dynamic organizations in the world dedicated to animal care, welfare and well-being, public engagement, education, and conservation and science. Institutions successfully accredited by AZA must continuously demonstrate excellence in all areas of operations and regularly adapt to new and evolving standards.

AZA Accreditation - PROCESS
To achieve AZA accreditation, an institution requires extraordinary vision and leadership, and a comprehensive team effort to attain excellence in all areas of operations and management. The accreditation process begins when institutional stakeholders study and commit to the gold-level standards available under the accreditation tab at AZA.org. AZA accreditation requires full adherence to all standards on a daily basis. The core areas of self and peer evaluation include:

- Animal Care, Welfare, & Well-Being (Excellence in Animal Care and Welfare)
- Veterinary Care (Excellence in Animal Health Care)
- Education & Interpretation (Innovation in Science and Conservation Education)
- Conservation & Scientific Advancement (Measureable Impact in Science)
- Vision, Mission & Master Plan (Values, Goals, Plans, and Outcomes)
- Governance (Oversight, Ethics, and Community Leadership)
- Finance (Business Management and Accountability)
- Staff (Professional Team Development and Management)
- Guest Services (Quality Visitor Amenities and Attraction Services)
- Safety & Security (Public and Animal Safety, Staff Training, and Preparedness)
- Physical Facilities (Quality Construction, Maintenance, and Design of all Facilities)
- Support Organizations (Internal Support and Partnerships)

(continued next page)
Understanding, engaging, and committing to the advancement of standards, practices, related policies and philosophies in all areas assessed by AZA through accreditation constitutes “modern zoological practices and philosophies”. These accepted best practices and philosophies define excellence in our profession, and are what distinguish AZA-accredited institutions from other institutions that have animals for guests to see and appreciate. The word “practices” represents the tangible while “philosophies” refers to an overall perspective.

Because of the many variations among institutions, the majority of AZA standards are carefully designed to be performance standards (i.e., assessing the level of achievement considered acceptable to fulfill a performance characteristic, and choice in method for meeting the goal). This differs from engineering standards, where exact and precisely prescribed steps are required to fulfill an engineering characteristic, with little or no variation in method for meeting the goal. AZA institutions may achieve performance standards in a variety of ways, but all standards must be met.

**AZA Accreditation - PRODUCT**

AZA accredited institutions are differentiated as exemplary facilities through the vigorous and voluntary commitment to shared high standards, achieving measurable goals, and continually pursuing outcomes that benefit animals, guests and communities. Distinguishing characteristics of an AZA-accredited institution include:

- Extraordinary focus on animal care, welfare, and well-being*
- Modern facilities and practices for comprehensive veterinary care
- Scientific advancement in animal care and conservation
- Focus and participation to support sustainable animal populations
- Exhibit aesthetics and habitat studies, planning, and design
- Innovative and inspirational educational programs and experiences
- Excellence in guest engagement and effective guest services
- Economic development and community partnerships
- Professional staff development and training
- Comprehensive preparedness in public and animal safety
- Sound business planning and financial management
- Dynamic and mission-driven strategic and master planning
- “Raising the bar” and regularly advancing operational standards

*AZA zoo and aquarium standards support the premise of five opportunities to thrive. These tenets propose that animals: (1) receive nutritionally complete diets that bring out the natural feeding response and behavior; (2) are afforded comfortable living experiences with choice and control to promote mentally and physically healthy behaviors; (3) experience good physical health; (4) are provided quality spaces to live in with appropriate social groupings that promote natural, species-appropriate and motivated behavior; and (5) develop natural coping skills and avoid chronic stress.

IMPORTANT NOTE: All AZA accredited institutions and certified related facilities must follow all local, state, and federal laws and/or regulations. Some AZA standards may be more stringent than existing laws and/or regulations. In such cases, the AZA standard(s) must be met.
B. ANIMAL WELFARE

1. RANKING ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS
Animal welfare concerns may be ranked in one of three ways:
Major concern – of an urgent nature where immediate action is required
Lesser concern – not urgent, but of a nature where action is required in a reasonably prompt manner (action could include assessment of the situation rather than physical action)
Discussed with the applicant institution – of a nature where improvements would be beneficial and are encouraged, but doesn’t rise to the level of an actual concern

2. ASSESSING ANIMAL WELFARE & WELL-BEING:
When observing the animals, please consider the following in assessing the overall welfare of the animals, both groups and individuals. While these questions are primarily intended to guide your assessment, consider asking some of these questions of staff during your visit. Please use these questions (in addition to the standards) as a guide when you are inspecting, and include related comments regarding your observations when writing the Narrative report about your impressions of the level of animal welfare at the institution.

1. Does the institution demonstrate a commitment to animal welfare? Do they communicate their commitment actively to their staff and to their visitors? If yes, what methods are used to do so and in which venues?

2. Does the institution regularly assess the welfare of the animals residing there?
   a. If yes, are welfare assessments recorded or noted in writing? Are they shared with staff and/or leaders?

3. Does the institution provide its staff with training in the concepts, discussions, and assessment of animal welfare?
   a. If yes, what type of animal welfare training is provided, and how often is it updated?

4. Find out what happens should a staff member observe a change in behavior of an animal. What methods/processes are in place to assure that the animal’s immediate welfare is assessed carefully and quickly, and that appropriate action to address the issue is taken?

5. Pay attention to how the animals appear. Look for signs that indicate positive welfare (overall condition, normal activity, coat, skin, scales, food consumption, play behavior, exploratory behavior, investigatory behavior, use of enrichment items, etc. Also see appendix 1). Note: the presence or absence of positive indicators can be the most valuable determinants of overall welfare.

6. Look for signs that could possibly indicate negative welfare (see appendix 1). If you note anything unusual, inquire about it (talk to the animal’s caretakers, the curator, the vet, etc.). Note: extreme indications of negative welfare should be discussed and addressed immediately.

7. Observe how the animals respond when in close proximity to their caretakers (calm, curious, interested, neutral, fearful, aggressive, etc.).
8. Note the size of exhibits in relation to the species and the number of animals within. Are they of sufficient size? Are they appropriately complex? Are the animals utilizing the space fully?

9. Note the features within the exhibit in relation to the species (furniture, plantings, rocks, corals, haul-outs, substrates, water features, climbing structures, etc.) Are they appropriate? Is there a sufficient amount of them? Does it appear that the animals are utilizing the items in the exhibit?

10. Ascertain whether the institution provides the animals with opportunity to thermo-regulate and protect themselves from the elements (both in exhibits and in holding areas), particularly for animals for which the institution’s natural climate is not comfortable during some or all seasons.

11. Look to see if exhibits contain a “safe spot” where the animals can retreat from public view, from a dominant conspecific, or from some other perceived threat should they wish to.

12. Determine if animals are given a choice to be indoors or outdoors, and whether that choice is 24/7 or limited. If some are not given a choice, ask why and consider whether choice should be given.

13. What does the animal’s indoor exhibit space look like and does it meet the animal’s needs? What percentage of the season (winter/summer) is the animal confined there?

14. What percentage of the animal’s day is spent in holding? Are they locked in/out or do they have a choice?

15. Note the size, condition, and design of the animal’s holding facilities. What does it look like? Does it meet the animal’s needs? Is it of sufficient size given the amount of time typically spent there by the animal? Is it safe and secure? Does it provide for species appropriate behaviors, and for animal management/husbandry needs?

16. Is the 24-hour environment (exhibit environment, holding environment, environmental factors such as light and sound, etc.) conducive to species appropriate restful and active periods over the course of the 24-hour day/night?

17. Check to see that fresh, clean water is available in all of the exhibits. Determine how often it is checked and changed throughout the day.

18. Is food presented in an appealing and manner and as appropriate for the species? If diet is presented in a stainless steel bowl, ask why. Could diet instead be presented in a manner so as to encourage typical species feeding?

**Ambassador Animals**

19. Determine how animals are selected to participate as ambassadors. Are there any animals in these programs that may not be suitable choices?

20. Are Ambassador Animals given a choice to participate?

21. Ascertain how the daily welfare of Ambassador Animals is assessed. Is it adequate? Do they
have the authority to say “no” if they believe that the animal shouldn’t be used that day? Are staff and volunteers provided with indicators of good welfare and indicators of poor welfare?

22. Are staff members who handle Ambassador Animals properly trained to handle them, and to detect changes in stress, health, and demeanor?

23. Find out what happens should a staff member observe a change in an Ambassador Animal’s behavior. What methods/processes are in place to assure that an Ambassador Animal is optimally utilized for programs (i.e., not used too frequently and so may rarely or never get to leave its enclosure).

### 3. Positive and Negative Indicators of Animal Welfare:

The following is a list of generic positive and negative indicators of welfare evaluated from the perspective of the animal (aka. output-based measures of welfare). The indicators are generic in the sense that they could be used across a wide range of taxa. Given that many of these indicators are subjective or descriptive, it is not appropriate to assign a “score” or “grade” to individual indicators. Rather, this list is meant to assist an observer(s) to develop an overall impression of welfare for a particular individual, exhibit/tank, or group of animals. The indicators below are based on Mellor and Beausoleil (2015). Extending the ‘Five Domains’ model for animal welfare assessment to incorporate positive welfare states. Animal Welfare 24: 241-253. The premise of the ‘five opportunities’, as contained in the Preamble to AZA’s accreditation standards, should also be considered.

#### Positive Indicators of Welfare

**Medical**
- Preventative health and wellness program; prompt management of pain, injury, or disease
- Species appropriate disease prevalence, mortality rates, and overall wellness
- Ability to demonstrate pain-free normal movement, ambulation, righting reflex
- Normal fecal consistency, urination, and voiding behavior
- Well-groomed or preened body surfaces, vibrant coloration
- Normal physiologic parameters
- Reproductive success as desired

**Nutritional**
- Well balanced diet, variety, choice
- Normal appetite and access to diet
- Good body condition
- Species and individual appropriate weight
- Normal fecal consistency

**Behavioral**
- Evidence of species appropriate behaviors
- Ability to demonstrate diversity of species-specific behaviors
- Absence of or minimization of stereotypic behavior
- Well-groomed and preened body surface, vibrant coloration
- Social interaction and breeding as appropriate
- Opportunity for sufficient sleep/rest
- Appropriate reaction to environmental stimuli or change
Environmental
- Access to safe space/habitat in excess of minimum standards that promotes species specific behaviors.
- Ability to exhibit choice and control in a variety of environmental situations to avoid chronic stress
- Thermally appropriate environment as indicated by a lack of compensatory behavior (i.e. shivering, chilling, panting, or overheating)
- Fresh air and sunlight/UVB exposure as appropriate

Affective/mental states
- Satiety, reward, playfulness, curiosity, contentment, calmness, affection

Negative Indicators of Welfare
Medical
- Unmanaged or uncontrolled pain, injury, or disease
- Patterns or trends of disease; high prevalence of morbidity or mortality
- Lack of mobility, inability to ambulate, lack of righting reflex
- Lack of fecal or urine control; Abnormal stool consistency
- Non-intact body surfaces; loss of skin, scales, feathers
- Altered physiological indicators of stress
- Lack of reproductive success when reproduction is desired

Nutritional
- Inability to consume species appropriate diet
- Reduced or absent appetite
- Nutritional inadequacy; poor body condition
- Over-conditioning or obesity
- Abnormal fecal consistency

Behavioral
- Evidence of abnormal behaviors
- Low levels or absence of species appropriate behavioral diversity
- Stereotypic behavior
- Evidence of inadequate grooming, preening, hygiene
- Lack of social interaction as appropriate to the species
- Limitations on sleep/rest
- Apathy or inability to react to environmental stimuli or change

Environmental
- Lack of space/habitat or lack of safe space/habitat to express species-specific behaviors
- Lack of choice or control to avoid negative environmental conditions/stimuli (heat, cold, precipitation, noise, etc.)
- Exposure to extremes of heat/cold as evidenced by common sense or observation of compensatory behaviors such as shivering, chilling, panting, or overheating
- Lack of exposure to fresh air or sunlight/UVB as appropriate

Affective/mental states
- Fear, distress, boredom, frustration, anger, malaise, apathy, anxiety
4. GUIDE TO CREATING AN ANIMAL WELFARE ASSESSMENT PROCESS UNDER 1.5.0

This document is intended to help both inspectors and institutions understand what elements—at minimum—must be included in the animal welfare assessment process required under standard 1.5.0.

**Standard 1.5.0:** The institution must follow a written process for assessing animal welfare and wellness.

**Explanation:** This process should be both proactive and reactive, transparent to stakeholders, and include staff or consultants knowledgeable in assessing quality of life for animals showing signs of physical or mental distress or decline. The process should also include a mechanism to identify and evaluate the welfare/wellness impacts of significant life events or changes in the animal’s environment as identified by the individual institution. Examples of life events/changes could include construction events, unusual weather events, noise intrusion, change in housing, or changes in animals exhibited with or nearby, etc. Animal welfare/wellness refers to an animal’s collective physical and mental states over a period of time, and is measured on a continuum from good to poor.

**Accreditation Requirements Explained**

1. Identify staff or consultants knowledgeable in animal welfare
   a. Employment of a dedicated welfare scientist is not required for compliance with the standard.
   b. Individuals developing or performing welfare assessment procedures must have at least a baseline knowledge of animal welfare science. There are numerous avenues to acquire this baseline knowledge of welfare science. Some possible examples include:
      i. Transfer of knowledge from institutional staff knowledgeable in welfare science (i.e. your veterinarian or other animal care professionals)
      ii. There is a free online course on “Animal Welfare” developed by the AZA Animal Welfare Committee that is available via San Diego Zoo Global online training (http://sdzglobalacademy.org).
      iii. There is an AZA professional development course entitled “Animal Welfare: Evidence Based Management” (http://www.aza.org/animal-welfare-evidence-based-management)
   c. The animal care staff should be the primary implementers of the welfare assessment process, but there may be circumstances where “non-animal” staff or volunteers can play a role in the assessment process with appropriate training.

**Plain language:** You do not have to hire a welfare scientist or send people to an expensive course to be in compliance with the standard, but you do need to make sure the staff that develop and implement your welfare monitoring process have at least a basic level of training in welfare science.
2. Criteria for identification of animals and timelines for welfare assessment
   a. It is not the intent of the standard to require a detailed welfare assessment of every individual animal in the zoo or aquarium collection.
   b. Institutions should consider an “event-based” approach to welfare assessment based on life events that institutions deem could significantly impact animal welfare. Examples include, but are not limited to: construction events, unusual weather events, noise intrusion, change in housing, or changes in exhibits or animals exhibited with or nearby, advanced life stages, etc.
      i. Assessments may be conducted in “triage” fashion, with triggers identified to indicate the need for a more in-depth assessment.
   b. It is the intent of the standard that a welfare assessment is performed at the holistic collection level at least annually. That holistic assessment may include group level assessments.
      i. Welfare is ideally assessed at the individual animal level, but the AZA recognizes that group assessment is often the most practical methodology.
      ii. “Groups” may be defined as groups of individuals, species, exhibits, tanks, geographic areas of the zoo/aquarium, herds, schools, colonies, or other appropriate measures.
   c. Each institution must clearly define and implement a strategy for how specific animals or groups are prioritized/selected for welfare assessment
      i. Assessment at the holistic collection level should be used to determine the institutional priorities for more detailed individual or group welfare assessment.
      ii. Individuals or groups identified/prioritized for detailed welfare assessment should be assessed according to a reasonable time schedule
      iii. Prioritized welfare assessments may be performed on a more regular basis (biannually, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily, etc.) based on the strategy/needs of the institution, individual animal, or group of animals.

Plain language: Annual welfare assessment of every individual in your collection is for most an impractical and unachievable goal. That being said, every animal should be represented as an individual or as part of a group during your holistic annual collection assessment. Your annual assessment process should result in identification of individual animals and groups that may need to be assessed more frequently and/or in greater detail than the collection-level assessment. It is also recommended that you develop criteria for more detailed assessments that are triggered by significant life events (such as introduction of a new exhibit mate or reaching a geriatric age milestone) or significant changes at your institution (such as construction or an unusual weather event).

3. Utilization of a welfare assessment tool or process
   a. Animal Welfare must be assessed according to a pre-defined framework identified by the institution. Two possible frameworks are listed below, but the use of other unique or custom frameworks is appropriate depending on the needs of the institution or unique nature of a collection.
      i. The “5-opportunities” model referenced in the preamble to the AZA accreditation standards (see Preamble, pages 19 – 20)
      ii. The “5-domains” model utilized by WAZA in their welfare framework (http://www.waza.org/en/site/conservation/animal-welfare-1471340294)
b. A welfare assessment framework should consider elements such as: *physical health, nutritional state, environmental utilization, behavior,* and *mental domains* (i.e. choice and control, freedom from fear and distress, and positive or negative affective states).

i. Welfare is best assessed as a combination of inputs and outputs. “Inputs” are the resources, facilities, processes and practices that contribute to the animal’s overall experience. “Outputs” are what the animal actually experiences and should be measured from the perspective of the animal itself (or the group’s perspective).

ii. Many welfare outputs have not yet been scientifically validated; thus, much of welfare assessments in zoos and aquariums will be more qualitative than quantitative. These are works in progress. As we, the AZA community, acquire and apply more scientific evidence for various welfare variables, we will continue to improve the quality of these assessments and ultimately the wellbeing of the animals in our care.

**Plain language:** Find an existing framework or develop your own framework/template for welfare assessment that makes sense for your collection. Your framework should be based on and evaluate a wide range of welfare criteria (i.e. health, nutrition, environment, behavior, and mental states). There are many philosophies and methodologies for welfare assessment, but two excellent frameworks have been adopted by AZA and WAZA (referenced above). Your welfare assessment should consider a combination of inputs and outputs. Many measurements of animal welfare in zoos/aquariums will be based on the expertise of your staff and good common sense as over time we continue to advance the science of animal welfare in the diverse species we care for.

4. Documentation of assessment strategy, implementation, and resultant action

   a. The following aspects of the welfare assessment process must be documented:

      i. The strategy for animal/group selection and timeline of assessments
      ii. The welfare assessment framework and process for implementation
      iii. The results of welfare assessments

         - Documentation should include the assessment itself and a summary of any resultant action(s) taken (if necessary based on the results of the assessment).

**Plain language:** Make sure you document how your overall welfare assessment strategy works. How do you assess your collection annually? How do you select animals for more individualized or detailed assessments and what are those timelines? What does your assessment framework look like? Keep records of the assessments themselves and [just as importantly] the actions you took as a result of the assessment, if any.
C. INSPECTION AGENDA

It is helpful for the Chair and/or the team to draft an informal inspection agenda, or plan, to help keep the inspection on schedule and ensure there is sufficient time to accomplish all goals. This agenda should be reviewed or created by the team during the pre-inspection meeting.

**Example of Inspection Agenda (for a 3-day inspection):**

**Day 1:**
1. Arrival meeting with team to discuss the agenda/plan for the inspection
2. Brief orientation meeting with director
3. Initial tour of facility
4. Private team meeting to discuss impressions and begin completion of report form

**Day 2:**
5. Meetings with governing authority representatives
6. Meetings with society representatives
7. Meetings with staff members (all levels should be interviewed)
8. Conduct second interviews with staff if clarification is needed or questions remain
9. Review of facility’s materials/records/departments

**Day 3:**
10. Individual team members revisit specific sections of the facility, records, staff
11. Private team meeting to prepare final list of concerns for exit interview
12. Exit interview, presentation and discussion of list of concerns/points of achievement

D. HOW TO WRITE THE NARRATIVE REPORT

The following are guidelines for compiling, organizing, and writing the narrative portion of the Visiting Committee report. Team chairs should point their inspectors to these guidelines to help them write the sections of the report to which they have been assigned. **Note:** All reports written by inspection teams are the property of AZA and will be edited by AZA to assure proper and consistent formatting and appropriate phrasing. Content will not be changed. AZA will clarify unclear statements found (if any) with the team chair prior to rewording.

**In General**
- Follow the formatting guidelines found on pages 58 – 60 of this Handbook
- Remember: the institution, its governing authority, and in some cases, the public will receive a copy of the narrative. Write professionally.
- Include all items placed on the list of concerns and underscore them. Include additional detail to inform the Accreditation Commission exactly what you observed and why it was cited.
- The Visiting Committee report form (questionnaire) may include some items marked as “Q” (questionable) that are not placed on the list of concerns. In the narrative report be sure to include all of them with a brief description of the observation and an explanation of why your team determined it didn’t need to be placed on the list of concerns. [Examples of reasons an issue might be listed as “Q” but not be placed on the list of concerns include: • the item was thereafter addressed by the institution during the inspection; • the item is scheduled to be demolished or renovated in the immediate future; • the item is not best practice but there is no standard to which it relates directly, etc. If unsure, discuss it with the team’s Primary Reviewer]
- Use spell check
• Refer to institution personnel formally [say “Mr. Brooks”, not “Bob”; or “Dr. Jones”, not “Jane”]
• Use of scientific terms is perfectly appropriate, but be sure that the overall statement and/or paragraph is written in a way that lay-persons can understand what is being said
• Stay clear of personal judgments and/or opinions such as “this is the best rhino exhibit in all of AZA”. Instead say “this is a top notch rhino exhibit”.
• To construct the content of each section, review the standards in that section and the questions from the Visiting Committee questionnaire for that section. Answer those questions as you write your narrative. Include anything else you have learned that may be relevant.
• **Do not include your team’s recommendation for granting, tabling, or denying accreditation/certification in the narrative report.** That recommendation should only appear in the cover letter.
• Do not include photographs in the narrative report.
• Address both the facility’s strong and weak points.
• If you wish to make a suggestion or recommendation, state it as follows: “the inspection team recommends that the institution consider XXXX…as one possible solution to addressing the issue”. Statements of this nature should not be underscored.
• If the team has an issue that is not directly related to a standard but believes it would be helpful to note the item for the institution’s benefit, at the appropriate spot in the narrative state your suggestion in the following manner: “The inspection team recommends that the institution consider XXXX which is current best practice”, or similar language.

**WRITING THE INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS IN THE REPORT:**

**General Information**
*This section need not be detailed. Don’t include things you expect to repeat later in the document. Comment on:*
• Information relevant to the institution based on its location
• Institutional history tidbits (if any)
• Mission statement
• Other pertinent info about the institution, its idiosyncrasies, community relationships, etc.

**Animal Welfare, Care, & Management**
*This section should be detailed, and should begin by commenting on the priority of animal welfare at the institution and the institution’s animal welfare assessment process (standard 1.5.0). Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*
• Animal welfare
  • Overall, how do the animals look? Evidence of animal welfare concerns?
  • Overview, compliance with 1.5.0
  • Method developed for evaluating inputs/outputs
  • Regularity of assessments and are changes made if needed?
  • Staff training in animal welfare
  • Animal welfare concern reporting process
  • How concerns are managed if identified
• Enrichment program
  • Adequacy
  • Documentation
  • Support
• Training program
  o Adequacy
  o Documentation
  o Support
• Ambassador policy
  o Types of animals, indications for use
  o Quality of housing, enrichment, training, etc.
  o Staff/volunteer training to manage
  o Use off site
  o Public contact
• Overview of animal inventory, species of particular note
  o How the facility is arranged, i.e., zoo-geographically
• Aquatic systems
  o Adequacy
  o Water quality monitoring
• Animal acquisition
  o Shipping mortalities
  o Permits, licenses
• ICP / ACMs / PRPM
• Recordkeeping
  o Recordkeeping system (ZIMS, Tracks, etc.)
  o Registrar
  o Up to date?

**Veterinary Care**
*This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*

• Full time / part time
  o Staffing vets, vet techs, other
  o Contract if part time
  o Veterinary care adequate?
• Veterinary facility
  o Adequate for nature of collection and other activities?
  o Protection for collection if animals removed to off-site veterinary facilities
  o Equipment adequate, access to diagnostic imaging?
• Preventive medicine program
  o Adequate?
  o Up to date with program?
• Quarantine facility/program
  o Adequate?
  o Appropriate infection control, lateral disease movement?
• Animal capture & restraint
  o Adequate for collection?
  o Staff training
• Controlled drugs
  o Compliance with DEA regulations
  o Safety with dangerous drugs
• Compliance with AMDUCA
• Medical records
  o What system used?
Records current?
Remote access to records by veterinarian if off site?
Nutrition program adequate?
Browse oversight

**Conservation**
*This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important, and cite a few examples. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*

- Conservation program, strategy
  - How evaluated
- Participation in AZA programs
- Field conservation
  - Appropriate collaborations & partners?
  - Cite a few examples
- Local conservation efforts
  - Appropriate collaborations & partners
  - Cite a few examples
- Natural resource conservation program
  - How monitor efficacy

**Education & Interpretation**
*This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*

- Adequate program oversight by professional educator
- Education program
  - Nature/description of program
  - How evaluated?
  - Does it/how does it meet the needs of the community
- Types of programs (cite a few examples), how many (if appropriate to include)
- Use of volunteers?
- Collaborative relationships with outside education-related institutions
- Public visitor-side education programs, graphics, animal care specialist talks, etc.

**Scientific Advancement**
*This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important, and cite a few examples. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*

- The protocol for evaluating potential scientific studies
- How scientific studies are coordinated
- How scientific studies are viewed by staff
- Whether results are shared and/or published in appropriate journals
- The level of involvement with local and regional academia

**Governing Authority**
*This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*
• Type of GA
• Relationship with facility
  o Any problems?
  o Bear in mind narrative will be seen by institution and the governing authority; also, public access for municipally owned/operated institutions
• Does director/CEO run zoo/aquarium? Animal related decision making?

Staff
This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:

• Adequate numbers, expertise, turnover rates?
• Pay compared to the profession and the local area
• Any problems with communication between management and/or peers? Peers and peers?
• Staff educational opportunities
  o Internal development
  o Outside the institution/corporation
  o Professional development within zoo/aquarium profession
• Diversity program
• Staff participation in AZA-related programs.

Support Organization
This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:

• Does the SO share the institution’s goals and objectives?
• Is there a good working relationship between the SO staff and the institution staff?
• Does the SO recognize the zoo director as the final authority?
• Is the written agreement between the SO and the institution clear regarding responsibilities and expectations?
• Is fund-raising part of the SO’s responsibilities?
• What else is the SO responsible for?

Finance
This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:

• Evidence of financial sustainability
• Problems with debt, reliance on governmental funds
• Any upcoming (within 5-10 years) voter-based tax/bond initiatives of importance?
• Financial contingency plan
• Capital improvements budget
• Maintenance / repair budget
• Continuing education / conference budget for staff

Physical Facilities
This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:
• Brief description of institution, size, type, etc.
• Is there an off-site facility
  o If so, describe
• Facilities in good repair?
  o Which areas need work, renovation, or demolition?
  o Evidence of deferred maintenance?
• Maintenance / repair plan
  o Work order system?
  o Written schedule for routine preventive maintenance
• Guest experience: heat, light, walkways, cleanliness
• Life support alarm systems
• Back up emergency generator
  o How long can the institution run on emergency power
  o Plans if duration exceeds stored fuel capacity?
• Fire, security, other safety alarms

**Safety / Security**
*This section should be detailed, and should include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:*

• Appropriate training: first aid, CPR, AED, fire extinguishers, zoonotic disease
• Safety program
  o Occupational health & safety
  o Safety audit/risk management
  o Ozone
  o Other hazardous material
  o Lock out / tag out
  o Confined space
• Safety with animals
  o Venomous: types, alarms, drills, antivenin
  o Dangerous: risk assessments (are they being done, free/protected contact, security, animal shifting, escape protocols)
  o Significant animal-related injury or escapes
• Emergency response plans
• Drills
  o Are they being done annually?
  o Are they being properly documented?
  o Are all four types being done annually?
• Dive safety
  o Types of diving
  o DSO – experience, formal training level
  o Identified safety-related non-compliances
  o Dive manual, dive control board
  o Emergency plans for each tank entered
  o Dive emergency drills
• Public access to dangerous animals
  o Risk assessments
  o Who has access, under what circumstances, and with which animals?
• Building security
• Barriers and fencing
Guest Services
This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:

- Amenities: rides, playground, restaurant, water fountains, restrooms
- Map or other way-finding
- GS staff: appearance, attitude, training
- General impression of the facility if you were a visitor

Strategic Planning
This section need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Check the standards and the VC questionnaire and write to answer those questions. At minimum, comment on:

- Strategic plan (status, how often reviewed)
- Master plan

Other
This section need not be included if there are no comments that fit here. If included, it need not be heavily detailed unless there are issues that require it. Include anything you believe to be important. Comment on:

- Any other noteworthy observations, comments. Again, remember who will be reading this.

E. PRIMARY FOCUS AREAS WHILE INSPECTING

Following are the areas of primary focus for evaluating an institution during the inspection. These are intended as examples and should not be considered as being definitive or complete. Issues are broken into the main section headings covered by the Accreditation Standards (see the 2020 “Accreditation Standards and Related Policies” booklet).

**Animal Welfare, Care, & Management:** An institution must comply with all wildlife laws. In developing its accreditation and certification programs, AZA has been especially concerned with the need for assuring the highest standards of animal care, welfare, and management. It is our belief that this objective is paramount to the overall welfare of living creatures and that good conscience permits no higher priority. Pay close attention to the size and nature of the living environments provided for the animals. Be sure to note whether the physical and psychological well-being of the animals is being met. The facility’s animal record-keeping system is of primary concern to the Accreditation Commission and should be carefully reviewed. Be sure to:

1. Observe all of the institution’s animals and their overall welfare and well-being
2. Ascertain that the institution has a sufficient Institutional Collection Plan
3. Examine all animal facilities, including those not located on site
4. View the animals used in off-premises programs
5. Select records at random to verify up-to-date status
6. Review records for animals not in a zoological records management system (i.e., fish, insects, etc.)
7. Examine animal diets, food coolers, freezers, etc.
8. Look for signs of pests and determine what kind of pest control solutions are being utilized
9. Check graphics for accuracy, clarity, consistency
10. Determine if staff is aware of the institution’s euthanasia policy
11. Make certain the animals are protected from excessive heat and cold
12. Make certain the animals are provided sufficient shade in outdoor exhibits
13. Make certain the animals have access to potable water both on and off exhibit.
14. Make sure that each animal is maintained in numbers sufficient to meet their social and behavioral needs (display of single animals should be avoided unless biologically correct for that species)
15. Make certain all the animals are being provided with appropriate enrichment on a regular and frequent basis, and the facility has a sufficient written enrichment program
16. Make certain that exhibit enclosures are of sufficient size and nature to provide for the psychological and physical well-being of each animal
17. Make certain that exhibit enclosures and holding areas are of sufficient design to prevent unintentional animal egress
18. If the institution has contact areas, review written policy for animal and public safety
19. View the animals used in public contact areas
20. View the animals used in education programs and the written policy for their use
21. Verify that the facility’s policy on responsible population management incorporates, at minimum, all requirements contained in AZA’s RPM policy
22. Verify the process utilized for acquisition, transfer, euthanasia, and reintroduction of animals with several members of the staff at all levels
23. Randomly pull RPM records for review
24. Make certain that, if the applicant surpluses animals to non-AZA facilities, appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the non-AZA facilities are willing and able to provide proper care for the animal(s) and that the transfer is done in accordance with AZA’s Policy on Responsible Population Management.
25. If the applicant is using unknown collectors of aquatic animals, determine how the institution is verifying that collection procedures used by the collector do not cause environmental abuse
26. If the applicant is dealing with commercial collectors, determine how the institution is verifying that the collectors are properly permitted to legally conduct collections of animals from the wild
27. If the institution holds elephants, make certain it is in compliance with the AZA Standards For Elephant Management And Care
28. Make certain that the applicant has a clear process for identifying and addressing animal welfare concerns

Institutions Maintaining Elephants:
2. Each institution maintaining elephants must have an individual who is designated as elephant manager. Verify that this person’s responsibilities include training staff, and developing and maintaining the elephant management program. It is desirable for this person to have completed the AZA Principals of Elephant Management training course. Inquire as to whether this is the case.
3. Make certain that the institution has a minimum of two qualified elephant care professionals present during any contact with elephants.
4. Determine if continuing education and training are supported by management staff.
5. Is there a written training protocol for training new elephant staff? If so, ask to see it.
6. Determine if elephant staff are aware of, or involved in, AZA, EMA, AAZK or the elephant TAG.
7. Have the elephant staff demonstrate various required behaviors. Have these performed by different qualified trainers.
8. Make sure the elephants have access to natural substrate for dusting.
9. Make sure the elephants have shade provided during the heat of the day in a sufficient amount to accommodate every animal.
10. Review the most recent incident report.

**Institutions Maintaining Cetaceans:**

1. In general, make sure that the institution has the funding and resources necessary (including personnel) to provide for the health and wellbeing of the animals, and that management of husbandry programs is guided by modern professional principles, plans, and procedures.
2. Review the behavior management program to be sure it enhances the care and welfare of the animals.
3. Programs for cetaceans should be under the supervision of a qualified managing curator with appropriate training and experience.
4. If interactive programs between guests and cetaceans are offered, make certain that the animals are given the choice to participate or not.
5. Observe an interactive program, and observe the training for cetaceans that participate in interactive programs.
6. Make sure the institution has an education program about cetaceans that is based on current scientific knowledge.
7. A written breeding plan must exist. Review that document.
8. Review the birth protocol and contingency plan that provides for the care of mother and calf.
9. Evaluate the habitats to make sure there is sufficient space for natural behaviors and social groups.
10. Make sure that water quality in the animal habitats meets or exceeds accepted standards.

**Veterinary Care:** The institution’s animal health care program must be under the direction of a licensed veterinarian; an appropriate number of persons must be employed in the animal health care program; and the extent of professional services provided the animals must be judged adequate for that particular institution. Institutions maintaining venomous animals must have an appropriate supply of sera available and policies/procedures in place for the safe handling of those animals. The alarm system and emergency procedures should be closely reviewed. The applicant’s animal record-keeping system is of primary concern to the Accreditation Commission and should be carefully reviewed. Be sure to:

1. Determine if the institution follows the guidelines of the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
   [http://www.aazv.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=839]
2. Check the animal record-keeping system: is it adequate?; is it kept current?; randomly pull medical records for review
3. Determine if the animal health care program is sufficiently staffed
4. Determine if the extent of veterinary services provided the animals is sufficient
5. Examine the emergency medical equipment bag
6. Carefully review USDA reports, if applicable (check areas of concern, and determine what is being done to correct them)
7. Evaluate quarantine procedures and their implementation
8. Evaluate quarantine, isolation, and hospital facilities
9. Check alarm systems and emergency procedures; ask random staff the procedure for retrieving an escaped animal
10. Review drug emergency protocol (locked areas, authorized staff, etc.)
11. Determine the veterinarian’s response time from home in an emergency
12. Confirm that policies and procedures for handling venomous animals are adequate, and that adequate sera is available
13. Determine if drugs used in aquariums or aquatic exhibits comply with FDA guidelines
14. Evaluate animal food prep facilities, procedures, and location
15. Determine if animal food, especially seafood products, are purchased from sustainable or well-managed sources
16. Determine how the institution ensures that the animals are not exposed to toxic plants from browse material and/or plants growing naturally on grounds

**Conservation:** Conservation must be an element in the mission statement of the institution, and all institutions must have a written conservation plan. The scope of the institution’s conservation programs should be closely reviewed. Each institution is required to participate in every SSP that pertains to an animal belonging to the institution, although it may decide at what level. Regarding participation in TAGs, CAPs, and other programs, consideration should be given to the size, budget, and other areas affecting these programs. Be sure to:

1. Determine if conservation is a key element in the institution’s mission
2. Determine if the facility is contributing their “fair share” to AZA conservation programs based upon budget and/or staff size
3. Review the number of staff dedicated to conservation programming
4. Determine if the institution has an adequate conservation plan/strategy
5. Review studbooks published by the institution
6. Determine if all SSP animals are registered with the appropriate SSP
7. Determine level of support of, or methods of participation in, wildlife conservation programs
8. Determine the level of involvement in resource conservation
9. Determine staff attendance at AZA conferences, SSP, and TAG meetings, etc.
10. Ask what efforts are undertaken for energy and natural resource conservation (i.e., recycling, water conservation initiatives, etc.)
11. Review local and national program literature
12. Review participation in conservation programs with colleges and universities
13. Determine whether conservation initiatives are regularly evaluated for effectiveness

**Education and Interpretation:** [Not required for certification applicants unless education is part of the applicant’s mission. Evaluate if a program exists.] Education must be an element in the mission statement of the institution, and all institutions must have a written education plan that matches current zoological and aquarium professional standards. Among the things to be closely examined are:

1. Determine if education is a key element in the institution’s mission
2. Review the number of staff dedicated to education programming
3. Determine that one paid staff member is dedicated to education on (at least) a part-time basis
4. Find out how the education message is conveyed to the casual visitor
5. Examine several publications, brochures, or other printed material
6. View the classrooms, teaching areas, etc.
7. Explore the availability of funds allocated for education programs
8. Check to see that exhibit signage and graphics contain appropriate information and are in good condition.
9. Determine what the level of education department contact is with appropriate local schools, colleges, and other academia
10. Review the volunteer and outreach programs
11. Determine what level of outreach programming exists and if appropriate animals are being used
12. If animals are being used in off-site situations, review the program to determine if it is appropriate
13. Determine who develops and designs the institution’s graphics
14. Determine whether educational programs are regularly evaluated for effectiveness

**Scientific Advancement:** The scope of the institution’s scientific advancement programs should be closely reviewed. Consideration should be given to the size, budget, and other areas affecting these
programs.  Be sure to:

1. Review the protocol for evaluating potential scientific studies
2. Determine how scientific studies are coordinated
3. Explore how scientific studies are viewed by staff
4. Verify if results are shared and/or published in appropriate journals
5. Determine the level of involvement with local and regional academia

**Governing Authority:** The governing authority must be supportive of the institution abiding by the AZA Code of Ethics and Charter & Bylaws, and must recognize and support the institution’s goals and objectives. Be sure to:

1. Ask the governing authority what the Director’s role is in the decision-making process
2. Explore the process of hiring and firing personnel
3. Determine the lines of authority for acquisition, transfer, euthanasia & reintroduction of animals (are these decisions made by the institution’s governing authority or its staff?)
4. Evaluate the relationship between the governing authority and the Director
5. Determine the levels of control on the part of the governing authority (appropriate or inappropriate)
6. Determine the governing authority’s role in the day-to-day management of the institution, including staff, animals, and programs

**Staff:** A key element of an institution’s successful operation is maintaining a staff sufficient in qualification and number. Effective communication, working relationships, and training are also important. Be sure to:

1. Become familiar with the qualifications of staff and review resumes and job descriptions
2. Randomly talk to staff about their responsibilities
3. Discuss with management its relationship with staff, including problems and proposed solutions
4. Discuss with individual staff their relationship with senior management, including problems (make certain to assure confidentiality of statements made)
5. Meet with animal care staff individually, if possible, but in cases of very large institutions, meet in one large group without management present, and discuss relationship with management, including problems (make certain to assure confidentiality of statements made)
6. Determine if lines of authority are clearly defined for staff
7. Evaluate staff training for detail, frequency, appropriateness, etc.
8. Investigate staff involvement with AZA, SSPs, TAGs, etc.
9. Determine if appropriate funds are available for staff travel and participation in meetings, and which staff members are eligible to participate
10. Review staff salaries to determine if levels are appropriate
11. Review the volunteer programs and training

**Support Organization:** A support organization which has goals inconsistent with those of the institution may jeopardize the institution’s work. Be sure to:

1. Ask society representatives their role at the facility
2. Evaluate the society’s support and fund-raising efforts
3. Review how funds are allocated and distributed
4. Review financial reports and how funds benefit the facility
5. Ask the society Director about the relationship between the society board and staff
6. If no support organization exists, consider whether having one might be helpful
Finance: An institution must provide sufficient evidence of its financial stability, including contingency plans, and funding for capital improvements and maintenance. Be sure to:

1. Determine if the facility will be solvent for the five-year accreditation/certification cycle, including reviewing the availability of long-term funding, contingency plans, emergency funds, etc.
2. Ask the Director if budget cuts or other financial problems are anticipated in the future
3. Review all financial records
4. Review the budgeting process, including who has control, how requests originate, the input of entrance and mid-level managers, the role of the governing authority in the process, in-house controls on spending, the auditing process, etc.

Physical Facilities: While the Commission is interested in an applicant’s future plans, accreditation/certification will be based upon its operations and physical facilities at the time of the inspection. Things to consider include:

1. Make your recommendation to accredit/certify, table, or deny based on what you see at the time you visit the facility, not on plans for the future
2. Are animal buildings in good condition?; do the animal facilities meet or exceed all relevant federal and state requirements?
3. Review the maintenance program, storage, and equipment. How do the overall grounds look? How much deferred maintenance does the institution have?
4. Consider the overall condition, suitability, and appearance of exhibits: are they in good condition?; are they attractive, and appropriate for the species contained?; do they represent modern zoological practices and philosophies?
5. Look at exhibit furniture: is it appropriate?; is there sufficient quantity?
6. Are the exhibit groupings appropriate?
7. Is there adequate ventilation and light in buildings and holding areas?
8. Check exhibits from the service areas (is space sufficient for safety?)
9. Check for regular program of water quality monitoring for all animals, including written records

Safety/Security: The security program employed by that particular institution should be judged sufficient to provide appropriate protection for the animals, its employees, and the visiting public. With respect to security, judgment should be based on the operation, location, size, and physical facilities. Procedures must be in place to reduce the risk of injury by potentially dangerous animals. The alarm system and emergency procedures should be closely reviewed. Be sure to:

1. Determine that drills are being conducted regularly and in accordance with standards
2. Determine when the most recent drills were conducted and what type of drills they were
3. Determine if escape procedures are posted in animal backup areas
4. Review the files on the most recent safety incidents (i.e., escapes, accidents, injuries, attacks, public problems)
5. Ask staff at random if they know the process of treating an injury to a visitor, or where the nearest first-aid station is
6. Determine if the exhibits are safe for the animals, the staff, and the public
7. Review the written risk management plan to ensure that it includes an assessment, and determination of those species and individual animals with which staff, volunteers, and visitors may, or must not, have direct or indirect contact
8. Observe public walkways, steps, and other public areas to determine if they are free of debris and in good repair
9. Check work areas to make sure they are free of clutter and safe areas in which to work
10. Make sure that Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are located in areas of easy access to employees
11. Make sure that flammables are stored properly
12. Make sure that electrical service in all wet environments, aquatic exhibits, and associated service
areas is equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFI)
13. Determine if appropriate safety procedures are in place for potentially dangerous animals
14. Check alarms systems and emergency procedures
15. If the institution is using underwater diving, determine if they are meeting minimal operational
safety standards for diving
16. Verify that adequate security is provided for the animals both day and night
17. Verify that security personnel are familiar with and trained to act in accordance with institution
procedure and policy
18. Check instructions to security personnel regarding nightly rounds, emergencies, etc.
19. Determine if incidents of vandalism have occurred and, if so, how prevalent the problem is and how
is it being addressed
20. View stored firearms, if applicable; who has access?
21. Determine that the perimeter fence is separate from all exhibit fencing, and is intact and in good
condition

**Guest Services:** [Not required for certification applicants, but evaluate if program exists.] While
the Commission is interested in an applicant’s future plans, *accreditation/certification will be based
upon its operations and facilities at the time of inspection and review*. Among the things to be closely
examined are:

1. Attempt to view the physical facilities from the public’s perspective, for example: enter from the public
entrance; inspect public restrooms, are they conveniently located?; inspect the drinking fountains, are there
enough of them?; are refreshment stations conveniently located?; are there enough rest stops and benches
throughout the facility?; taste the food being sold to the public; is the institution ADA compliant?; etc.
2. Way-finding: are maps and signs available, clear, and easy to locate?
3. Are the overall aesthetics and design of the exhibits appropriate and in step with modern zoological
practices?
4. Are the buildings and grounds well kept?
5. Are trash receptacles and trash collection sufficient?
6. Is ventilation adequate in public buildings?
7. Are “AZA Accredited/Certified” stickers and/or signs displayed throughout the institution? [Note:
applies to *currently accredited/certified facilities* only]

**Strategic Planning:** An institution should have a strategic and/or master plan to guide the
institution in its development. Be sure to:

1. Ask what other programs are being developed or are already in place
2. Ask to see the formal master plan and determine if it is on schedule, being followed, etc.
3. Ask to see the formal strategic plan, if applicable

**F. PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS OF THE INSPECTION TEAM**

**Animal Welfare (The Animals).** Welfare of the animals is of primary concern. The Visiting
Committee shall consider the size and nature of the living environments provided the animals, and
whether the physical and psychological well-being of the animals is being met. The scope of the
institution’s enrichment program will be closely reviewed. The Visiting Committee will also check to be
sure that the facility’s collection plan adheres, at minimum, to accreditation requirements. In addition,
the institution must have an in-house animal welfare assessment process that meets—at minimum—the requirements expected under standard 1.5.0. [See “Guide To 1.5.0” pages 25 – 27].

• **Animal Health Care.** A facility’s animal health care program must be under the direction of a licensed veterinarian, an appropriate number of persons must be employed in the animal health care program, and the extent of professional services provided the animals must be adequate.

• **Animal Security.** The security program employed by the applicant shall be sufficient to provide appropriate protection to the animals. The Commission shall base its judgment with respect to security on the operation, location, size, and physical facilities.

• **Conservation and Education.** The scope of conservation and education programs will be closely reviewed. Both of these programs require a written plan. Consideration is given by the inspectors and the Commission on the size, budget, and other areas affecting these programs. However, conservation and education must be key elements in the institution’s mission, and the institution must participate in every SSP program that pertains to an animal belonging to the applicant. Institutions may indicate at what level they desire to participate in each SSP. While not a requirement for accreditation or certification, the facility’s Annual Report on Conservation and Science (ARCS reports) will be reviewed for each of the five years since the applicant’s previous inspection.

• **Dangerous or Venomous Wildlife.** Facilities maintaining venomous animals must have an appropriate supply of sera available and policies/procedures in place for the safe handling of those animals. Likewise, procedures must be in place to reduce the risk of injury by potentially dangerous animals. The alarm system and emergency procedures will be closely reviewed by the Visiting Committee.

• **Finance.** The institution’s financial health will be reviewed and considered in terms of meeting the needs of the institution for the five-year period of accreditation/certification. Contingency plans will also be reviewed.

• **Master Plans, Policies, & Procedures.** Master plans, written policies, and procedures should be reviewed on a regular basis and updated as necessary, and should be of a quality on par with other accredited/certified facilities of similar size and nature.

• **Physical Facilities:** The physical condition of the institution will be closely observed in both public and restricted areas, and maintenance programs reviewed. Exhibits and holding areas will be considered in terms of modern zoological design, philosophy, and practices (see “Preamble” appearing on pages 19 – 20. Aesthetics are important, too. Antiquated facilities will be evaluated and may be considered below standard.

• **Policy on Responsible Population Management (RPM).** The Visiting Committee shall ascertain the institution’s policy covering acquisitions, transfers, reintroductions, etc. adheres, at minimum, to AZA’s Policy on Responsible Population Management (RPM), and that the policy is being followed, including transfers to non-AZA facilities (if any).

• **Record Keeping.** The facility’s animal record-keeping system is of primary concern to the Accreditation Commission and will be carefully reviewed by the Visiting Committee.
Safety. The Visiting Committee shall review the institution’s safety programs employed for the protection of its employees, the visiting public, and the animals. Written policies and training will be reviewed, and inspectors will look for potential safety hazards in both public and restricted areas.

G. COMMONLY FOUND CONCERNS

Following are concerns commonly found during inspections:

Examples of commonly found major concerns:
- Unresolved governance issues
- Unsigned/unconsummated agreements
- Low staffing levels
- Incomplete or lack of written safety procedures/manuals/protocols
- Inadequate policies, or failure to follow them
- Failure to conduct drills in accordance with standards
- Insufficient safety barriers
- No duplication of records or failure to store duplicate set in separate location
- GFI circuits in wet areas

Examples of commonly found lesser concerns:
- Peeling Paint
- Rusty doors and fencing
- "Permanent" extension cords
- Cluttered yards and storage areas
- Rotted (wet and dry) wood and fencing
- Potholes in asphalt
- Cracks in concrete visitor walkways
- Dark work areas
- Perimeter fence issues
- Missing or improperly mounted fire extinguishers
- Inaccessible SDS sheets

Of significant concern, if present:
- Issues affecting animal welfare
- Recurring issues from previous inspections
- Evidence of poor preparation
- Lack of modern zoological practices and philosophies
- Director does not have final authority over animals, staff, or programs
- Unstable or unclear governing structure
- Unstable or unclear financial support
- Lack of forward momentum or progress

H. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELEPHANT PROGRAM INSPECTOR

Following are instructions for individuals appointed to serve as the elephant program inspector on an AZA inspection team:
1. Elephant program inspectors are members of the inspection team, and should not function separately from the team.

2. Elephant program inspectors are expected to be at the institution for the entire inspection and participate fully in the exit interview. (Should not arrive late or leave early.)

3. When not “in the barn” or meeting with elephant staff, elephant program inspectors should be inspecting/interviewing with the rest of the team.

4. Every effort should be made to schedule the elephant inspection around the governing authority interview(s) so that the entire team meets with those individuals. The same effort should be made regarding any meetings with line staff.

5. Elephant program inspectors should dress appropriately (business casual) when not “working in the barn.”

6. Elephant program inspectors should have the opportunity to watch the normal opening and closing routines by elephant staff and should watch, at minimum, a routine training session and a foot care session.

7. Elephant program inspectors should individually interview each member of the elephant team to assess capabilities, uncover any issues, and determine strengths and weaknesses of the program.

8. At some point in the inspection, the entire inspection team should be scheduled to visit the barn, talk with the elephant team, and observe some of the animal care specialist/animal interactions (foot care, training session, etc.)

9. Elephant program inspectors should be encouraged to contribute fully, recognizing concerns and points of particular achievement throughout the institution, not just those related to the elephant program.

10. Elephant program inspectors should write a narrative for inclusion in the Animal Welfare, Care, & Management section of the overall narrative report. The elephant program inspector’s narrative should state whether the facility is, or is not, in compliance with AZA’s Standards For Elephant Management and Care, and the policy on Maximizing Occupational Safety of Elephant Care Professionals. In addition, the narrative should describe in detail the institution’s elephant management program and what the inspector observed (see example narratives below).

**Elephant Inspector Narrative Report**

Following are two examples of narrative reports written by the elephant program inspector on an AZA inspection team. These examples are provided as models of the sort of narrative an elephant program inspector should produce. The elephant program inspector’s narrative should be placed at the end of the Animal Welfare, Care, & Management section in the general narrative report. [Note: some details within the examples below have been changed to protect the identity of the institution to which they apply.]

**EXAMPLE 1**

A review of the Paradise Valley Zoo elephant program was conducted over a two-day period and consisted of direct observations, an examination of elephant management policies and procedures, and
personal interviews with elephant staff members. The collection consists of 2.5 African elephants ranging in age from 4.5 to 53 years of age, managed as a breeding group. The zoo is in compliance with the AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care and the AZA Policy for Maximizing the Occupational Safety of Elephant Care Professionals. The elephant program, facilities, and staff serve as a model for excellence in elephant management.

Elephant care staff members are dedicated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable about their animals. The team reported that present staffing levels are adequate for the needs of the program. A structured, multi-tiered staff development program is in place that safely integrates the experience level and skills of individual trainers into progressively more responsible roles within the program. All animal care specialists were aware of their standing within the program, what they are allowed and not allowed to do with the elephants, and what they need to demonstrate to advance to the next level. Most of the animal care specialists have completed PEM-I; those that have not are scheduled to do so within the mandated timeframe. The animal care specialists' commitment to conservation education messaging is exemplary and is evident in the daily demonstrations and behind-the-scenes guest experiences.

Indoor and outdoor facilities are spacious, well maintained, and reflective of current best housing practices. The facilities offer space and complexity that provides the elephants with ample opportunities for exercising, swimming, foraging, and socializing as desired. The layout of the barn and yards allows for flexibility in managing, grouping, and separating elephants as needed. The barn features two elephant restraint devices (ERDs) that allow for both staff and elephant safety during husbandry procedures. There were no facility issues noted during the inspection.

Elephants are worked with barriers or restraints in place, although the sharing of either restricted or unrestricted space remains a program option in very well defined circumstances and with the permission of senior leadership. It was clear during the inspection that a culture of safety is well-established with the staff. Animal care specialists were observed working safely around the elephants, following a two-person rule, and communicating effectively with one another when training or shifting elephants. All appropriate staff and elephant safety protocols are in place and being followed. The safety proficiency of staff members is regularly assessed on at least a monthly basis. Program and facility assessments are occurring informally but semi-annual safety audits are not being recorded twice a year as required.

Elephants are visually inspected each day and records of the physical condition and behavior of the elephants are maintained. Staff has the experience level necessary to evaluate the health and welfare of the animals. All elephants appear to be in good physical condition, with no or only minor issues with the one older animal. There are proactive geriatric plans in place for 53 year-old Cheyenne. The elephants are receiving quality veterinary care, with all exams, vaccinations, and trunk washes up to date. The veterinarians have the skills and knowledge to provide routine, clinical, and emergency care. Quarantine, preventive medicine, and immobilization protocols are all in place. In order to facilitate husbandry and medical care, all elephants are trained for all AZA standard elephant behavioral components. In sessions observed, the elephants were responsive to training cues and commands. Camaraderie within the team is such that animal care specialists are comfortable both giving and receiving feedback about training sessions. Footwork, exercise sessions, enrichment, and other animal care activities are occurring regularly.

**EXAMPLE 2**

The program is in compliance with the AZA Policy for Maximizing the Occupational Safety of Elephant Care Professionals but is deficient in meeting some of the AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (see below). This review was conducted over a two-day period and consisted of direct
observations, an examination of the elephant management policies and procedures, and personal interviews with elephant staff members.

Elephants are worked with barriers or restraints in place, although the sharing of either restricted or unrestricted space remains a program option in very well defined circumstances. Staff was observed working safely around the elephants. It is standard practice that two staff members must be present when working the elephants. Two-way radios are used for staff communication while shifting elephants and as part of the zoo-wide emergency communication system. The safety proficiency of staff members is assessed with periodic performance evaluations. Regular program and facility assessments are occurring twice a year, including both elephant staff and non-animal care personnel, in order to incorporate wide perspectives on the safety audits. Written inspection reports are produced according to AZA guidelines.

The configuration of the facilities is in accordance with the AZA Policy for Maximizing the Occupational Safety of Elephant Care Professionals in that it allows for the management of elephants with barriers and/or restraints in place. The exhibit space is not consistent with current best practices but plans are in place to expand the yard. The layout of the barn, ancillary yards and exhibit allow for flexibility in managing, grouping and separating elephants as needed. The elephants would benefit from more frequent tilling or turning of the substrate in the exhibit in order to enhance foot and joint health, as they spend the majority of their time on hard surfaces. The barn features a fully operational elephant restraint device (ERD) that allows for both staff and elephant safety during husbandry procedures. Lighting in the ERD area needs to be improved. Peeling paint and rust on some of the metal caging was also noted. There is not adequate shade in the elephant exhibit. There are two small thatched shade structures present but much of the thatch is missing.

The elephant care staff are dedicated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable about their animals. Present staffing levels appear to be only minimally adequate for the needs of the program. Elephant section animal care specialists are also responsible for the care of a number of other species and the time available for training and exercising of the elephants is limited. There is a structured, multi-tiered staff training system that safely integrates the experience level and skills of individual trainers into progressively more responsible roles within the program. The Curator has completed Principles of Elephant Management I & II. Animal care specialists that have not completed PEM-I are scheduled to do so in the required timeframe.

Elephants are visually inspected each day and staff has the experience level necessary to evaluate the health and welfare (feet, skin, behavior, abnormal physical changes, etc.) of the animals. However, the cows are significantly overweight. Consideration should be given to consulting with an exotic animal nutritionist in order to develop a safe, effective weight loss plan for these animals. In addition, staff should challenge themselves to overcome staffing obstacles in order to come up with more robust exercise options for the elephants.

In order to facilitate husbandry and medical care, the cows are trained for most, but not all, of the AZA Standard Elephant Behavioral Components. Those not yet trained should be prioritized and plans developed for their completion, particularly ear and eye exams and the acceptance of oral medications. The elephants’ feet appear to be in good condition and there is a plan in place for regular foot care maintenance.

Quarantine, preventive medicine, and immobilization protocols are in place. Medical records with regards to the elephants are not complete and up-to-date.

The elephants were generally responsive to behavioral commands during the training sessions that were
observed. However, if there is a consistent, zoo-wide philosophy and framework for animal training, it was not evident and should be encouraged. As noted above, the cows are reliably trained for most, but not all, of the required behavioral components. Staff indicated that time to train the elephants is very limited due to other responsibilities. Enrichment is occurring regularly. A list of approved enrichment items is kept in the barn and there is a well-defined process for approving new enrichment.

Daily logs of the behavior and physical condition of the elephants are maintained. AZA annual program reports are being submitted as required.

A number of pieces of documentation required in the AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care were not in place. These include:
- The safety of elephant care professionals addressed in the institutional risk management plan.
- Guidelines for transport of elephants addressed in the elephant management policies.
- Plans to separate elephants from each other, to safely move elephants from one location to another, and to safely manage aggressive elephants addressed in the elephant management policies.

1. DETERMINING FINANCIAL STABILITY

The purpose of reviewing financial information is to make certain that the institution is sufficiently financially stable to maintain the institution and care for the animals in accordance with AZA standards for, at minimum, the length of the accreditation cycle being considered (typically, five years). A healthy, stable financial condition is critical to assuring the institution’s ability to continuously provide good animal welfare. An inadequate financial position and/or contingency plan have a direct and negative affect on the quality of animal welfare and continued modernization of the institution. Reviewing and determining the adequacy of financial reports is one method of assessing financial stability. AZA standards also require competitive wages for staff. Having the ability to fund competitive wages is another indicator of financial stability. It must be noted, however, that some operations may not choose to spend their money that way, or may not have the option to do so due to regulations/factors beyond the simple control of money distribution.

Inspectors should look for indicators of reasonable work product in operations. Low salaries can be evidenced by poor operations. High salaried but inadequate employees can also be evidenced by poor operations.

Additional indicators to consider include:

- success of operation
- data to show how the institution supports the wages paid
- turnover rates
- accident rates for both staff and animals
- proof of plan/progressive improvement in working conditions (financial compensation being one)
- the process the operation must go through to improve or change pay scales
- proof that maintenance is occurring in a timely manner
- proof of continuous improvement and forward momentum of the institution as a whole

J. EVALUATING A DIVE PROGRAM

This information is intended to help inspectors properly evaluate dive programs at institutions located within the United States. For institutions outside of the U.S., the document can be used for general
guidance.

**Begin by reviewing the following items on the application questionnaire (2020 edition):**

1. **SS-38. Does your institution utilize underwater diving as part of regular operations and/or maintenance?**

   If the facility states that it does not utilize underwater diving (including breath-hold diving) as part of its regular operations or maintenance, then simply confirm this while doing the on-site inspection. The next two questions (SS-39 & SS-40) can be considered together for a facility with a diving program. For institutions located in the United States, diving types are generally governed by the following OSHA rules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diving type</th>
<th>OSHA governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit diving for routine cleaning/feeding/husbandry</td>
<td>Commercial diving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit/physical facility/life support maintenance</td>
<td>Commercial diving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In situ specimen collections</td>
<td>Scientific diving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bona fide underwater studies</td>
<td>Scientific diving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest/visitor underwater diving programs</td>
<td>Recreational diving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   A dive program doesn’t have to choose just one OSHA governance category. For example, a facility that uses all the diving types described in the table above could claim the corresponding governance for each diving type. However, the dive itself cannot mix the governing rules, e.g., a dive cannot be both a commercial dive and a scientific dive.

   Note: should breath-hold diving be added to the SS-39 list, federal OSHA regulations do not specifically address this type of diving (although California OSHA does). The OSHA general duty clause that states an employer is required to provide a safe work environment would apply in this case. Breath-hold diving occurs when a diver does not breathe from any air source while underwater. A snorkel may be used to assist breathing while the diver is at the surface.

2. **SS-41. Provide the name, title, and CV of your institution’s Dive Safety Officer (DSO).** Review the CV. Having a DSO who is at least certified at the instructor level is considered a best practice, but is not an AZA standard. However, more scrutiny during the on-site inspection may be warranted if the DSO is not at least certified at the instructor level. NOTE: membership in AAUS (American Academy of Underwater Sciences) and subsequent use of the scientific exemption mandates an instructor-certified DSO.

3. **SS-42. Submit a copy of your institution’s dive manual.**

   The safe practices manual must provide a written operational procedure for each diving mode used by the institution. It should include a copy of the regulatory standards (e.g., commercial diving, scientific diving, etc.) under which it operates. It should also include criteria for diver training and certification, and emergency action plans. Do not be intimidated by a 200 page or more dive manual. Many of the thick manuals are cut-and-paste from the OSHA regulations and AAUS Dive Manual. Look for information that is specific to the facility’s operation.

4. **SS-43. Submit copies of records and evaluation reports for live-action safety drills conducted at the institution for the last five years.**

   When reviewing the institution’s records, note if everyone in the dive program is receiving the training and if the location of the training varies.
5. **SS-44. Provide a copy of your institution’s dive emergency plan for each tank into which divers enter.**
This is often included in the dive manual. Does this plan cover every tank?

6. **SS-46. Does your institution have an in-house diving control board?**
Although not an AZA standard, this is considered a best practice. If a facility claims the scientific exemption, then a DSB is required. Not having a DSB might merit a recommendation to create one in the **Narrative** section of the Visiting Committee Report.

7. **SS-47. Does your institution provide appropriate training and testing opportunities (including regular CPR, first-aid, and oxygen administration) to those persons involved in diving?**
This is an OSHA requirement. During the on-site inspection, ask the divers what type of training they receive.

8. **SS-48. Do your institution’s divers maintain up-to-date diving logs?**
During the on-site inspection, ask to see the diving logs for the previous week (or any time period). A proper diving log should list (at minimum) the date, location, divers involved, length of time of the dive and air consumption for each diver, and depth.

9. **SS-49. Does your institution provide appropriate workman’s compensation...for divers (including volunteers)?**
Ask the dollar limits of the policy and why that amount was chosen. If there is any doubt that volunteers are covered, ask to see a copy of the policy.

**During the on-site inspection:**

10. **Is the dive equipment in good working order?**
• On each scuba cylinder, hydrostatic inspection dates are stamped in the metal around the neck of the cylinder. The date is represented by the number of the month, a code representing who did the inspection, and the year of the inspection. The latest date must be within five years of the present time. In addition, an annual visual inspection must be done. This is most often represented by a sticker on the side of the tank with the inspection date.

• Regulators (the mechanism which attached to the tank and provides a mouthpiece from which to breathe) should be inspected annually. This inspection is not always marked on the regulator, but should be documented in the equipment maintenance records.

• The air quality delivered by the diving air compressor must be tested quarterly. Ask to see the air quality certificate. OHSA requires an air quality test every six months, but quarterly testing is considered a best practice.

• If you don’t feel comfortable hunting for these items, ask the DSO to show you the inspection dates or other documentation of equipment you select at random.

11. **Is the DSO clear on OSHA standards?**
Although having the DSO instructor-level certified isn’t an AZA standard, if the facility has a large diving operation, this is worth recommending in the **Narrative** section of the Visiting Committee Report as a best practice.

12. **Observe a dive operation if possible.**
• A scuba dive is required to have a DPIC (Diver Person in Charge) and a stand-by diver, in addition to
the scuba diver. The stand-by diver does not have to be dressed, but their gear must be assembled and ready to use in an emergency.

• A surface-supplied dive must have a DPIC and line tender. The tender and diver must be able to talk and hear each other through a communications system. NOTE: Hookah diving (air from the surface is supplied to the diver who uses a simple regulator mouthpiece and scuba mask) is not permitted under OSHA commercial diving regulations (except in California). Hookah diving is permitted under the Scientific Diving exemption. Hookah does not use a voice/audio communications system.

K. EVALUATING AN AMBASSADOR ANIMAL PROGRAM: **HOUSING & HANDLING**

Ambassador animal departments are unique in the zoo community in that many or most of the animals are handled on a daily basis.

**HOUSING.** AZA standard 1.5.4 states that animals in education programs must be maintained and cared for by paid and/or unpaid trained staff, and housing conditions must meet standards required for the remainder of the animals in the institution. Although the housing conditions for ambassador animals may look different at times to those provided to exhibit animals, institutions must provide similar social, physical, behavioral and nutritional opportunities to ambassador animals. Regular holding enclosures (this does not include short-term holding for programs or transport) for any given species must provide sufficient space for comfort, exercise, shelter, and have sufficient complexity. Ambassador animals should be housed socially when appropriate for the species.

When evaluating holding areas, be sure to pay attention to the size and complexity of the enclosure in which the animal lives. Although ambassador animals receive enrichment by participating in programs outside of their holding habitats, other forms of enrichment should be provided within their holding spaces. The enclosures in which they live should be large and complex enough to encourage natural behavior, to provide comfort and shelter, and contain appropriate elements that the species would likely seek in nature (substrates, soaking pools, climbing structures, rock formations, etc.). Do the animals have access to outdoor areas? Is there sufficient exposure to UV light, proper ventilation, temperature, and water quality monitoring? Speak with the paid and/or unpaid staff who care for the animals daily to determine training levels and reporting structure.

**HANDLING.** Handling often involves some form of restraint including collars and leashes, jesses, harnesses, crates, or just holding an animal in a presenter’s hands. AZA accredited institutions should be using the most positive, least intrusive animal training and handling methods. Providing animals with choice and control in their environment should also be a high priority.

It is important that, in addition to the above goals, animal welfare always be given high priority when evaluating an ambassador animal program and the individual animals in its collection. Animal welfare, as defined by The AZA Animal Welfare Committee is as follows: “Animal welfare refers to an animal’s collective physical, mental, and emotional states over a period of time, and is measured on a continuum from good to poor.” Because physical, mental, and emotional states may be dependent on one another and can vary from day to day, it is important to consider these states in combination with one another over time to provide an assessment of an animal’s overall welfare status.
When reviewing an ambassador animal program, begin by reviewing the following items on the application questionnaire:

1. **AC-40.** Does your facility use ambassador animals (animals that are used outside their normal exhibit or holding areas or are intended to have regular, physical contact with the public within their normal exhibits, e.g., contact area with domestic animals, browse feeding programs with giraffes, lorikeet feeding, etc.)? And **AC-40a.** If yes, submit a copy of your institution’s ambassador animal policy (including ambassador animal philosophy and contact policy) detailing recommended exposure times, animal handling policy (pick up, touch only, etc.), training for animal handlers, and animal rotation and/or replacement policy. This policy should clearly adhere to the AZA approved Recommendations For Developing an Institutional Ambassador Animal Policy.

**Recommended Action:** Review the information submitted in the application and be sure that it aligns with what is observed during the inspection process. Review recent animal usage documentation at the facility to assure these records are in line with the policies that were submitted during the application process. During the inspection, ask handlers about the training/checkoff processes for handling animals to assure that they are in line with documentation provided in the application.

2. **AC-41.** Provide a detailed description of how your institution maintains ambassador animals. If they are housed separately from the rest of the animals describe their housing (include photographs) and the social, physical, behavioral, and nutritional opportunities provided for the ambassador animals.

**Recommended Action:** Review the information in the application and assure that housing conditions are adequate for meeting the requirements of this section. Request to view records relating to diet and training/enrichment opportunities. For species that are typically housed socially, request further information if individuals are housed on their own.

3. **AC-42.** Does your institution utilize ambassador animals in off-premises situations (i.e. shopping malls, sporting events, school programs, theatrical productions and/or television appearances, etc.)?

And **AC-42a.** If yes, submit a detailed explanation, including list of animals used, a description of who handles the animals and how they are trained, (including the experience of the person training the handlers), and your institution’s operations and safety protocols, and institutional procedures to protect the rest of the animals from exposure to infectious agents.

**Recommended Action:** During the inspection, ask handlers about how their training was conducted. Who trained them? Did this trainer have the expertise to adequately share handling and safety protocols, as well as information on recognizing signs of stress? Review their protocols to assure that they are adequate and in line with documentation provided in the application. Ask to see some of the handlers demonstrate how they pick up, crate, or otherwise prepare an animal for transport and presentation in a program. Ask how the animals are housed during offsite programs (i.e., do they stay in their transport crates, move to temporary caging, etc.).
Background Ahead of the Ambassador Animal Program Evaluation:

To help promote and ensure the highest level of welfare for ambassador animals, below are items to look for when evaluating choice, control, and welfare.

1. Voluntary Approach Behavior. Does the animal voluntarily approach the handler when being taken out of an enclosure? Since caretaker-animal relationships have been shown to be a valid measure of welfare. Voluntarily approaching a handler could be an indication of welfare toward the “good” end of the continuum. Positive reinforcement does not always need to involve food. A reinforcer for approach behavior can be an opportunity to perform a favored behavior, to access a desirable location, or could be a result of a strong relationship with a handler or handlers in general.

An animal’s reaction when asked to approach a handler can be an important indicator of the animal’s current preferences and state. If the response is reluctance or resistance, the animal should not be forced into participation. Instead a new plan should be developed to problem solve the reason for that animal’s choice, implement strategies to increase trust, and improve voluntary performance of the desired behaviors. If an animal consistently responds poorly for a caretaker, that relationship should be evaluated.

It is important to note that not all animals need to voluntarily approach the handler to exhibit good welfare. In the case of invertebrates, some reptiles, and other animals, welfare may be evaluated by observing behavior while being handled. The appearance of comfort when handled would indicate welfare toward the “good” end of the continuum. Struggling, tugging on leashes, or other species and individual-appropriate indicators of stress would indicate welfare toward the “poor” end of the continuum.

2. Use of Leads and Jesses. Leads (leashes, harnesses, or other equipment that tethers an animal to handlers) and jesses (short straps designed to be used in conjunction with grommeted anklets on raptors) should be used as tools to ensure the safety of animals and not to control or restrain an animal. If leads are used, note whether the animals accept them voluntarily or strain to get away. Leashes should be slack as the animal chooses to maintain proximity to handler(s). Any equipment used for this purpose should be in good condition and free from fraying, cracks, and other signs of wear. The facility should have appropriate protocols in place to determine the use (or not) of any type of jess, harness, or lead for each individual animal based on individual and natural history as well as the anatomy and physiology of the species. The use of jesses with non-raptorial species is generally not ideal because of the risk of injury.

3. Choice. Choice is the mechanism by which animals control their outcomes, and is a critical part of welfare. When possible, ambassador animal programs should offer their animals the ability to choose whether or not they participate in a program. Handlers should be trained to recognize signs of stress or reluctance, and should be trained to problem solve the situation, including implementing strategies to improve voluntary participation. Handlers take away choice when they force an animal to step onto a glove or go into a crate.

4. Control. An animal has control in its environment whenever it has the opportunity to use its behavior for desired outcomes. Giving ambassador animals control during training and handling sessions can dramatically increase desired behavior. Of course, an animal should not be given complete control. When a handler locks the door of a crate or restrains an animal, positive reinforcement should be used as compensation for the loss of control in order to encourage future voluntary participation in the desired behavior.
5. **Use of Positive Reinforcement.** At the most basic level, all animals are either going toward something they like or going away from something they dislike. The goal of the ambassador animal program should be to work with animals using the most positive, least intrusive effective strategies. If the normal training and handling of any of the facility’s ambassador animals involves negative reinforcement or aversive stimuli, this would not be acceptable under AZA standards, and plans should be made immediately to either develop alternative training and/or handling strategies, or to cease that animal’s participation in future programming. In the event that an animal does cease participation in programming, a plan should be in place to ensure that good welfare is maintained.

6. **Loading/Transport Sensitivity.** Since most ambassador animals need to be transported from their regular housing in order to participate in programs, it is important to consider what the process of loading and transporting looks like from a welfare point of view. Choice should again be considered here. For animals that will take food from their handlers (e.g., most mammals, birds, and some reptiles), observe if they voluntarily approach their handlers for removal from their habitats, or shy away. During transport, crates and carriers should be handled with care since this is an important aspect of good welfare.

**During the on-site inspection:**

1. Determine how animals are selected to participate as ambassadors, and learn how handlers assess their welfare both in and out of programs. Does the institution have presentations or programs with animals that may not be suitable choices? If so, ask why that particular animal is used and how its welfare is assessed.

2. Are ambassador animals given a choice to participate? What methods/processes are in place to assure that an animal is not used too frequently or too infrequently (meaning that it rarely gets the opportunity to leave its enclosure)? Review how the scheduling of animal participants is determined.

3. Ascertain how the daily welfare of ambassador animals is assessed. In doing so, make sure paid and unpaid staff members have received proper training in assessing animal welfare. Review the steps taken by staff when a behavioral change is observed in an animal. Determine who has the authority to decide which animals participate each day and how the decision process is handled. Review a few examples of the animal welfare assessments required under standard 1.5.0, including examples that resulted in a change being made.

4. Ascertain that paid and unpaid staff members who handle ambassador animals have been properly trained to handle them, and to detect changes in stress, health, and demeanor. Review training protocols and frequency, and speak with the individual in charge of providing training and oversight.
III. DEFINITIONS

A. DEFINITIONS OF ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

Accreditation:
The accreditation program is based on a fundamental definition of a zoological park or aquarium. To apply for accreditation, institutions must: (1) operate based on philosophies and practices considered by AZA as being modern best zoological practices of the profession, (2) meet or exceed all AZA accreditation standards and adhere to all AZA policies, and (3) meet all aspects of the definition of a zoological park or aquarium.

For the purposes of AZA’s accreditation program, a zoological park or aquarium is defined as: a permanent institution which owns and maintains wildlife, under the direction of a professional staff, provides its animals with appropriate care and exhibits them in an aesthetic manner to the public on a regular basis. The institution, division, or section shall further be defined as having as a core mission the exhibition, conservation, and preservation of the earth’s fauna in an educational and scientific manner.

Certification:
The certification program is intended for those facilities that hold wildlife, but do not meet the definition of a zoological park or aquarium above. Only facilities meeting or exceeding the definition of a related facility (see below) should apply for certification.

For the purposes of AZA’s certification program, the Related Facility membership category is defined as: organizations holding wildlife that are not commercial entities, and are not open to the public on a regularly scheduled, predictable basis. The facility shall be under the direction of a professional staff trained in animal husbandry, and shall be further defined as having conservation and preservation as part of its mission—a mission that shall have a beneficial, tangible, supportive impact on the zoological and aquarium professions. This includes wildlife ranches, wildlife refuges or rehab centers, research facilities, survival centers, conservation support facilities, and/or similar organizations.

B. BASIC DEFINITIONS

ACCREDITATION: the establishment and maintenance of professional standards and the qualitative evaluation of organizations in the light of those standards. Through this process a profession is judged based on criteria selected by experts in that field, rather than by outside agencies and/or individuals that are not actively employed in that field.

ADJACENT: Next to, close to, adjoining.

AESTHETIC: Pertaining to the beautiful.

ANIMAL WELFARE/WELLNESS: an animal’s (or group of animals) collective physical and mental states over a period of time, and measured on a continuum from good to poor.
AQUARIUM: Usually at least one public building which contains aquatic animals. However, the animals are usually split into numerous exhibits. [For full definition see Basic Definition, see above.]

CEO/DIRECTOR: The person with the authority and responsibility for the operation of the institution. Other titles may include president, chief executive officer, superintendent, supervisor, manager, etc.

CERTIFICATION: A process similar to accreditation (see “Accreditation” above). In AZA’s case, certification involves review and assessment of facilities that operate in support of zoos and aquariums, but are typically not open to the public on a regular basis.

CONSERVATION: Conservation is understood to be active stewardship of the natural environment, including wildlife, plants, energy and other natural resources.

CURRENTLY ACCREDITED/CERTIFIED APPLICANTS: Currently accredited/certified applicants are those facilities that are AZA-accredited/certified at the time the application is submitted and processed.

ENGINEERING STANDARDS: Standards that require exact and precisely measured steps to fulfill an engineering characteristic, with little or no variation in method for meeting the goal.

ENRICHMENT: A process to ensure that the behavioral and physical needs of an animal are being met by providing opportunities for species-appropriate behaviors and choices.

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: The agency with authority to govern the operations of the institution (such as the city, county/provincial, or federal government body, private corporation, foundation, society, board of directors, or other similar entities).

INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTION PLAN (ICP): An ICP is a document designed to thoughtfully assess the reasons for having each taxon in the collection. The ICP should be updated on a regular basis (minimally every 5 years). The ICP should include a statement of justification for all species and individuals in the institution’s planned collection. The ICP should consider such criteria as status in the wild, status in zoos and aquariums, existence and priorities of cooperative management programs, ability to maintain the species in a physically, psychologically and socially healthy environment, exhibit value, exhibit suitability, need for husbandry and other research, recommendations stated in AZA TAG’s Regional Collection Plans and any other issues specific to the institution’s mission and vision.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: Institutions located outside the United States may apply for accreditation or certification under the same rules as those located within the United States. In some rare cases, processing of applications for international institutions may not be possible within the standard six-month time frame, and may require a year or more before the Commission hearing can be scheduled. In addition, the amount of the Visiting Committee deposit may be higher due to increased travel costs associated with inspecting facilities located outside of the United States. If possible, AZA will assign an individual who is fluent in the applicant’s native language to the inspection team for all international institutions, but the questionnaire and all primary materials submitted must be in English (see Translation of Documents, pages 23 – 24 of the 2020 Guide to Accreditation of Zoological Parks and Aquariums). If AZA is unable to assign individuals who speak the native language, the institution is responsible for providing an interpreter. Brochures and other pre-printed materials must be accompanied by a translation. If you have any questions about this please contact AZA.

MASTER PLAN: A written long-range plan that provides an organization with direction to develop or improve land, facilities, a building complex, etc.
MENTOR (PEER CONSULTANT): An individual deemed qualified by the Accreditation Commission to assist an institution in preparing for the AZA accreditation or certification process. The individual is assigned by the Commission to help the facility identify areas that need to be addressed, to review and help update policies and procedures, internal documents, record keeping, and all areas involved in the accreditation/certification process. The mentor can advise as to the institution’s readiness, and can also provide guidance on assembling the application, if desired (see Mentoring Program pages 48 – 49 of the 2020 Guide to Accreditation of Zoological Parks and Aquariums).

MODERN ZOOLOGICAL PRACTICES AND PHILOSOPHIES: Understanding, engaging, and committing to the advancement of standards, practices, related policies and philosophies in all areas assessed by AZA through accreditation constitutes “modern zoological practices and philosophies”. These accepted best practices and philosophies define excellence in our profession, and are what distinguish AZA-accredited institutions from other institutions that have animals for guests to see and appreciate. The word “practices” represents the tangible while “philosophies” refers to an overall perspective.

NEW APPLICANTS: “New” applicants are those institutions applying for accreditation or certification for the first time, or any institution that is not currently AZA-accredited or certified, regardless of whether it has been AZA-accredited or certified in the past.

OCEANARIUM: Usually aquatic animals housed in several public buildings contained in a park setting. The exhibit scale is very large with other attractions/services scattered among the exhibits.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS: standards that measure the level of achievement considered acceptable to fulfill a performance characteristic, and choice in method for meeting the goal.

PERMANENT (cultural institution): an institution founded by an authority which intends it to continue indefinitely.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF: a paid full-time employee who commands an appropriate body of special knowledge and has the professional training, experience and ability to reach zoological park or aquarium management decisions consonant with the experience of peers, and who has access to and knowledge of the literature of the field.

REGULAR BASIS: regular hours, so that access is reasonably convenient to the public.

RELATED FACILITY: For the purpose of AZA’s accreditation programs, a related facility is defined as: organizations holding wildlife that are not commercial entities, and are not open to the public on a regularly scheduled, predictable basis. The facility shall be under the direction of a professional staff trained in animal husbandry, and shall be further defined as having conservation and preservation as part of its mission—a mission that shall have a beneficial, tangible, supportive impact on the zoological and aquarium professions. This includes wildlife refuges or rehab centers, non-invasive research facilities, survival centers, breeding farms, and/or similar organizations.” The Accreditation Commission, and its agents, shall determine whether a facility meets the definition of a related facility.

STRATEGIC PLAN: A written plan defining an organization’s strategy or direction, including making decisions on sources of funding and allocation of resources needed to pursue this strategy.

WELFARE: (see “animal welfare/wellness” above).
WILDLIFE: non-domesticated animal life.

WILDLIFE PARK: Animals maintained in a public park setting, usually in very large exhibits that include animals which are free-ranging within the exhibit.

ZOOGICAL PARK: A collection of animals which are housed in many public exhibits, both indoors and outdoors [for full definition see Definitions, page 53.]

IV.
THE WRITTEN REPORT

The accreditation/certification inspection written report is the property of AZA. Inspection teams serve as the “eyes and ears” of the AZA Accreditation Commission, and inspectors are agents of AZA. Each inspection report will be checked thoroughly by AZA and edited as necessary for format, spelling, grammar, clarity, and content (as related to standards). Narrative reports that do not adhere to the instructions in this section will be restructured by AZA to fit the format. If any statements are unclear, the team chair will be contacted to ensure that content is correct.

Following are examples of the four components comprising the Visiting Committee Report: the cover letter, report form, narrative report, and list of concerns/points of achievement. These examples demonstrate how the complete report is to be prepared.

A. COVER LETTER (LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION)

The cover letter forwarding your final report should state your Committee’s recommendation for granting, tabling, or denying accreditation/certification, and anything else you believe the Commission should know, both positive and/or negative. This letter is not shared with the applicant. It is the document in which you have an opportunity to inform the Commission of your team’s personal opinions, observations, and insights. Please be sure to use Accreditation Commission letterhead (supplied with your original package of materials) for the cover letter.

Possible Recommendations: In addition to a straight recommendation of accreditation/certification, tabling, or denial, other appropriate recommendations include: **tabling unless a significant portion of the listed concerns are completed; **denial unless a significant portion of the listed concerns are completed.

Example 1:
The Visiting Committee inspected this facility on xxxxx. The Director has been given the list of concerns noted by the Committee during the exit interview. A copy of that list is included with this report. Please see the narrative portion of this report for details regarding these concerns. The Visiting Committee recommends continuation of accreditation.

Example 2:
The Visiting Committee inspected this facility on xxxxx. The Director has been given a list of concerns noted by the Committee during the exit interview. A copy of that list is included with this report. Many
of the concerns were of a sufficient nature that this Committee recommends tabling of this institution’s accreditation until or unless the majority of these concerns have been sufficiently addressed. Please see the narrative portion of the attached report for details regarding these concerns.

Example 3:
The Visiting Committee inspected this facility on xxxx. The Director has been given a list of concerns noted by the Committee during the exit interview. A copy of that list is included with this report. There were numerous concerns, including some of a fairly significant nature. It is the opinion of this Committee that the institution cannot address the majority of these concerns within a year’s time, and therefore recommends denial of accreditation. Please see the narrative portion of the attached report for details regarding these concerns.

B. VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT FORM QUESTIONNAIRE

It is important that all team members participate in completing the report form, and in the recommendation the team will make to the Accreditation Commission. It is suggested that the team complete the report form before compiling the List of Concerns (required prior to the exit interview). The List of Concerns must contain the items marked “U” from the report form. It may be helpful for the team to meet nightly during the inspection to discuss and complete the questions on the form.

Correct Edition. Before proceeding, first make sure you have the correct edition of the report form – accreditation or certification. You must have the edition matching the year in which you received the assignment, and it must match the edition year of the institution’s application (a 2020 application requires a 2020 Visiting Committee Report Form questionnaire, etc.). The edition year you are using may not necessarily be the year in which you are writing the report (for example, a team assigned in October may not perform the inspection and write the report until January or February). Also verify that you are using the correct “A”, “Q”, “U” Designations. All questions must be answered with “Yes”, “No”, or “N/A” and “A”, “Q”, or “U” (Acceptable, Questionable, or Unacceptable). If “Q” or “U”, you must provide a brief explanation in the “Comments” area at the end of that section, and again in greater detail in the narrative report. “U’s must also be included on the list of concerns given to the CEO/Director during the exit interview. If multiple questions relating to the same area of concern are marked “U”, that item should only be listed one time on the list of concerns.

Question Aids (<A> and <A+>). Answers to some questions in the Visiting Committee Report form can be found in the supporting materials alone. These questions are identified by the symbol < A > appearing at the end of the question. Other questions require two sources to determine an answer: the supporting materials and additional investigation (i.e., questioning and/or observing during the inspection). Those questions are identified by the symbol < A+ > appearing at the end of the question. Questions with no symbol can be answered only by questioning appropriate staff, or from information obtained or observed during the actual inspection.

Electronic Format. A hardcopy of the Report Form is supplied for use on site in case access to a laptop is not available. However, the final report must be submitted using the electronic version, which is emailed to you by the accreditation department. When you have finished compiling the full report, email it to AZA accreditation staff and the Primary Reviewer. The finished emailed report should consist of three separate documents: (1) cover letter, (2) report form (including the list of concerns), and (3) narrative report. Immediately after emailing these three components by the established deadline, send the following items to the accreditation department, by traceable mail (Fed-Ex, UPS, Registered Mail, etc.): • Cover letter on AZA
letterhead with original signature, •signature page from report with signatures of all inspectors, and •photographs.

Example of Report Form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINANCE (F)</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>A/Q/U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F-1/F-2. <strong>Appearing on Institution Questionnaire only.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-3. Does the institution meet all state and federal laws regarding financial reporting and auditing?</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-4. Does the institution have continuing financial support? [9.1] &lt; A &gt;</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-5. Is the total financial support adequate to meet the needs of the institution? [9.1]</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-6. Is financial support the recognized responsibility of the governing authority? &lt; A &gt;</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-7. Is the institution’s written contingency plan adequate should significant decreases in operating income occur? [9.5] &lt; A &gt;</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-8. Does the insurance protection appear to be adequate for visitors, governing authority, staff, society, volunteers, animals, and physical facilities? [9.3] &lt; A+ &gt;</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-10. Are sufficient amounts allocated for capital improvements and major repairs/replacements? [9.4, 10.1.2] &lt; A &gt;</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-11. Are sufficient amounts allocated for conferences, continuing education, training/seminars, etc.? [7.5] &lt; A &gt;</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-12. Are sufficient amounts allocated for maintenance and supplies? [9.4, 10.1.2]</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENTS: F-4/5: Total financial support has decreased and is not at a level sufficient to meet the institution’s needs (9.1). F-7: The contingency plan is weak and needs improvement (9.5). F-10: The amount allocated for capital improvements is insufficient to meet the needs of an institution this size (9.4, 10.1.2). F-12: The amount allocated is minimal for an institution this size (9.4, 10.1.2).

C. HOW TO FORMAT THE NARRATIVE REPORT

*For “How To Write The Narrative Report” see Tutorial Pages 28 – 34*

NOTE: Inspection team reports are the property of AZA. Upon receipt, each report will be checked by AZA for clarity, content (as related to standards), and for proper formatting in accordance with these instructions. Narrative reports that do not follow these instructions will be restructured by AZA to fit the format. The team chair will be contacted if there are issues of clarity or content.
**Formatting:**

All team members should take part in writing the narrative report (see “How To Write The Narrative Report”, pages 28 – 34). The team chair should assign portions of the narrative to each team member, and each team member should send their finished section to the team chair for integration into a single final document. The team chair should submit the final document to AZA as instructed. Important rules to remember are:

a. Begin the report by listing your name and title, and the names and titles of your team (see example below).
b. Follow this by affirming that your team reviewed the report of the previous team (if applicable), noting whether any items of concern indicated by the previous team remain at issue.
c. If there are items from the previous report that still remain an issue, list them after affirming that this is the case, and underscore them.
d. Next, include a list of staff interviewed while on site (include full names and titles).
e. Begin the main body of the report with a section called “General Overview”, briefly sharing your overall impressions of the zoo and a light overview of its history.
f. Follow by organizing the report in the same order as the sections appearing in the Standards (i.e., Animal Welfare, Care, & Management, Veterinary Care, Conservation, Education and Interpretation, Scientific Advancement, etc.)
g. Do not include photos in the body of the report.

**Example of Proper Narrative Report Formatting:**

**NARRATIVE REPORT**
**PLEASANT ZOO & AQUARIUM**
**JUNE 2018**

An inspection team consisting of inspection team Chair John Smith (General Curator, XYZ Zoo), Bill Jones (Director, Conservation Wildlife Park), Jane Doe (General Curator, Reef Aquarium), and Jill Joyce, DVM (Adventure Zoo) inspected the Pleasant Zoo & Aquarium on June 21, 22, and 23, 2018.

The team thoroughly reviewed the previous inspection report of the Pleasant Zoo & Aquarium and found that none of the items that were noted of concern at that time are of issue at present.

As part of this inspection, the inspection team met with the following individuals, and all were encouraged to speak freely and in complete confidence:

Hon. Elizabeth Bowie, Mayor
Eric Franklin, Director of Parks & Rec
Debra Ivy, Zoo Director
Bonnie Anderson, Lead Animal Care Specialist
Tom Miller, Accountant
Gale Patrick, Vet Tech & Registrar
Adam Constant, Animal Care Specialist
Evan Crow, Assistant Zoo Director
Charles Easter, President, Zoo Society
General Overview
A “General Overview” section is not a requirement of this report, but if you want to provide your team’s general impressions of the institution, do that here. If there are issues you feel are important to note that do not fit into any of the categories that follow, include them here.

Animal Welfare, Care, and Management
The animals appear well cared for by a dedicated staff. Exhibits and holding areas were clean and in good repair. Behavioral enrichment and animal training programs are well documented and meet AZA standards.

Animal records are very well-kept by the newly-hired registrar. The inspection team’s requests for further records were promptly and easily addressed. Daily animal care specialist reports are entered onto computers in animal care specialist areas with no paper involved, and are immediately accessible for review by staff including the curator, registrar and veterinarian. With computer-based efficiency comes a problem however; if electricity is not functional, a computer is not working, or it is an emergency animal escape situation, there could be gaps of several months of information that would not be easily retrievable, because those data might not yet have been printed out for inclusion in hard copy records.

Animal care staff and maintenance staff must work together on water quality maintenance.

[NOTE: Next would follow “Veterinary Care”, “Conservation”, etc., in the order in which they appear in the Standards. The example above is written based on a fictional institution. The section on “Finance” below is an example of what might appear in the report of an institution that is privately operated.]

Example of Narrative (Finance Section):

Finance
The financial base of the institution appears stable. However, there has been decreasing support in recent years. Although the current operations do not seem to be affected, it will soon begin to take a toll. The governing authority needs to review ways to increase funding so the current trend does not begin to affect maintenance, education programs, or other functions within the institution. Also, the contingency plan in the event of financial downturn is weak. The plan is to borrow necessary funds from a local lending institution; however, this is only an immediate fix. The plan should include potential long-term solutions. The capital improvements budget is insufficient as it currently stands. Because of the downturn in overall funding, monies previously slated for capital improvements have been reallocated to other areas to cover the day-to-day needs of the facility.

IMPORTANT: For “How To Write the Narrative” see pages 28 – 34.

D. POINTS OF ACHIEVEMENT/LIST OF CONCERNS

A crucial part of the inspection process is compiling and presenting the List of Concerns/Points of Achievement. A copy of the list of concerns must be provided and discussed with the institution’s CEO/Director during the exit interview.
Removing items from the list: If the institution can address a concern to the satisfaction of the inspection team during the inspection, the item may be removed from the list by the team prior to or during the exit interview (also see “Appealing A Concern” below).

Appealing A Concern (Items in Dispute). If an institution disagrees with any of the items cited by inspectors on the List of Concerns (believes the institution is meeting the standard at issue), the CEO/Director should discuss this with the inspection team during the inspection and/or exit interview. If the matter is resolved at that time to the satisfaction of the team the concern may be modified or removed altogether.

If the matter cannot be resolved at that time, or if the CEO/Director decides later to question an item on the List of Concerns, please inform the CEO/Director that he/she should address the issue in the written Response to the List of Concerns as follows: under the item in question, the CEO/Director should explain in detail why the item is being questioned and how the institution is meeting the standard at issue, including documentation. The Accreditation Commission will thoroughly review the institution’s Response to the List of Concerns prior to the applicant’s hearing, and will make a decision as to whether the item may be removed from the List of Concerns or must remain a concern to be addressed by the institution. The Commission will make its final determination at the time of the hearing.

Cite the standard (or standards) with each concern: When creating the list of concerns, you must cite the standard or standards to which each concern relates [for example: The team found XXXX (11.3.4., 11.3.5.)]. If there is a concern that does not fall directly under a specific standard but the team believes is clearly outside what AZA considers to be “modern zoological practices and philosophies”, place this into the narrative report as a recommendation based on best practices (for example, state “the Visiting Committee recommends that the institution consider doing XX which is a current best practice.” See also “Citing the Preamble” below.). In some instances it may be appropriate to cite the Preamble and a standard. In those cases, cite the standard first, then the Preamble [for example: The team found XXXX (11.3.4., 11.3.5., Preamble)].

Citing the Preamble (Modern Zoological Practices and Philosophies): Citing the Preamble should not be considered as a “catch all” under which concerns may be cited if a standard does not exist. It should only be used when the team agrees unanimously that the issue genuinely falls within the definition of “modern zoological practices and philosophies” as provided in the Preamble (see definition below). If the team does not agree unanimously, or if unsure, then the issue should be included only in the narrative report as a recommendation, in accordance with item 2.l. under “Formatting & Narrative Requirements” above, which states: if the team has an issue that is not directly related to a standard or the Preamble, but believes it would be helpful to note the item for the benefit of the institution, do so in the narrative, not on the list of concerns. Include a concern of this nature at the appropriate spot in the narrative in the following manner: state your observation followed by “The inspection team recommends that the institution consider XXXX which is current best practice”, or similar language.

Definition: For the purposes of accreditation and certification, the Preamble defines “modern zoological practices and philosophies” as: practices and philosophies that are commonly accepted as the norm by the profession. The word “practices” represents the tangible while “philosophies” refers to an overall perspective.

If your team is unsure of a standard when compiling your list of concerns, contact your Primary Reviewer who, as a member of the Accreditation Commission, will provide guidance. Be sure to obtain your Primary Reviewer’s cell phone number before the inspection so it will be easier to reach him or her should the need to do so arise during the creation of the list of concerns.
List of Concerns “Check List”:

When compiling the list, be sure to:

☐ List each concern only once, regardless of whether it is a remaining concern or a new concern.

☐ Any concern regarding the welfare of an animal or group of animals may be ranked in one of three ways:

- Major concern – of an urgent nature where immediate action is required
- Lesser concern – not urgent, but of a nature where action is required in a reasonable prompt manner (action could include assessment of the situation rather than physical action)
- Discussed with the applicant institution – of a nature where improvements would be beneficial and are encouraged, but doesn’t rise to the level of an actual concern

☐ Be sure to cite the standard or standards to which each concern relates.

☐ If there is a concern that does not fall directly under a specific standard but is clearly outside what the team considers to be “modern zoological practices and philosophies”, cite the Preamble [for example: The team found XXXXX (Preamble)]. In some instances it may be appropriate to cite the Preamble in addition to a standard.

☐ If the team has an item or concern that is not related to a standard or the Preamble, do not include it on the list of concerns. Instead, include it in the narrative as a recommendation for the institution’s consideration, stated as follows (generally): “The Visiting Committee recommends that the institution consider XXXXXXXXXX.” See the 2020 Inspector’s Handbook for more details.

☐ Concerns may be removed during the exit interview if the team receives documentation that the concern has been addressed.

☐ Email a copy of the List of Concerns/Accomplishments to the Primary Reviewer and appropriate AZA staff as soon as you return from the inspection.

☐ Include on the List of Concerns all items that are designated as “U” in the Visiting Committee Report Form. The team should determine on a case-by-case basis whether items designated as “Q” belong on the list, or only in the narrative.

☐ Be certain to list any concerns remaining from the previous inspection under “Concerns Remaining From Previous Inspection”.

☐ The List of Concerns need not be typed for the purpose of presenting it to the institution’s Director. However, please type it exactly as written before submitting it to the Commission with this report.

☐ Leave a copy with the institution’s Director at the time of the exit interview.
Example List of Concerns:

PART I:
Points of Particular Achievement

INSTITUTION DIRECTOR: During the inspection the Visiting Committee was particularly impressed with the items listed below, which are especially well done and of notable mention.

1 – The grounds are very well kept. Routine maintenance in public areas is also good.
2 – Newer graphics are attractive and effective.
3 – The Director has assembled an enthusiastic, knowledgeable, competent, and committed staff.
4 – New African exhibit expansion is aggressive and will enhance the visitor’s experience and increase the zoo’s opportunity to contribute to conservation.
5 – The new giraffe facility is especially well designed.

PART II:
Items of Concern

INSTITUTION DIRECTOR: •IMPORTANT• The items listed below were of noted concern during the inspection. Please address as many of these concerns as possible prior to the Commission’s meeting. For items that are still in progress at the time of the hearing, please provide documentation and a timeline for completion. [NOTE: any concerns that remain unaddressed from a previous inspection are considered extremely serious, and may affect the outcome of this process.] Having proper documentation is essential to meeting these standards; lack of documentation must be considered as not being in compliance (for example, having determined that collectors have the necessary permits, but having no documentation of this). Also, please note that it is possible that, after reviewing all supporting materials (including the Visiting Committee’s written report), the Commission may have issues or concerns that are not listed below. If so, these will be discussed at the hearing.

A written report to the Commission on how you are responding to the concerns listed below must be submitted by the established deadline (usually six-seven weeks before the hearing—check with AZA if uncertain of the date). The written report is for informational purposes only. At the hearing, the Commission will ask for a verbal update on additional progress made after the written report was submitted.

CONCERNS REMAINING FROM PREVIOUS INSPECTION

1 – Inadequate quarantine space (2.7.1., 2.7.3).
2 – The institution does not have a written conservation plan (3.2.1).
3 – Enrichment program is not being documented (1.6.1).

MAJOR CONCERNS FROM CURRENT INSPECTION

1 – Water bowls in several small mammal exhibits contained algae (1.5.1, 1.5.2, Preamble).
2 – Animal waste holding/disposal should be done in a more sanitary manner (10.1.1).
3 – The main-doors to the bear holding area need more substantial locking system (11.3.2).
4 – The Committee felt that the primary barriers in the bison/elk and zebra exhibits are inadequate
and may expose visitors to danger (11.3.1, 11.3.6).

5 – Animal escape and injury plans are insufficient in specificity and responsibility (11.2.4, 11.2.5).

6 – Drills are not being conducted in accordance with standards (11.2.5).

7 – The issue of inadequate financial support needs to be addressed, including the capital improvements budget (9.1, 9.4).

8 – The financial contingency plan needs to be strengthened (9.5).

LESSER CONCERNS FROM CURRENT INSPECTION

1 – Human water bottle found in animal food storage freezer (2.6.4).

2 – Guard rail in walk-through aviary needs painting (10.1.2).

3 – “Permanent” extension cords abound in several back-of-house areas (rhino barn, reptile house, small mammal house) (10.1.1).

4 – A broken concrete sill over door in wall to otter area should be repaired (10.1.2).

V.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF ACCREDITATION

A. DEFINITION OF APPLICANTS

Currently Accredited/Certified Applicants Defined. Currently accredited/certified applicants are those facilities that are accredited/certified at the time the application is submitted and processed.

New Applicants Defined. “New” applicants are those institutions applying for accreditation or certification for the first time, or any institution that is not currently accredited/certified, regardless of whether it has been accredited/certified in the past.

International Institutions. Institutions located outside the United States may apply for accreditation or certification under the same rules as those located within the United States. In some rare cases, processing of applications for international institutions may not be possible within the standard six-month time frame, and may require a year or more before the Commission hearing can be scheduled. In addition, the amount of the Visiting Committee deposit may be higher due to increased travel costs associated with inspecting institutions located outside of the United States. AZA will make every effort to assign an individual who is fluent in the applicant’s native language to the inspection team for all international institutions, but the questionnaire and all primary materials submitted must be in English. Brochures and other pre-printed materials must be accompanied by a complete translation. International applicants must provide an onsite interpreter to answer questions and translate animal records as needed by the Visiting Committee. If you have any questions about this please contact AZA.
B. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Summary. To apply for accreditation or certification, a facility must meet the definition of a zoological park or aquarium, or related facility, as provided in this booklet (see pages 53 – 56). In addition, it must be operating under modern zoological practices and philosophies, and meet or exceed current AZA professional standards.

It takes approximately six months from the time an application is submitted until the Commission holds a hearing and makes its decision. If an application is tabled, it could take up to twelve additional months before the Commission takes final action, and an additional inspection is required.

The application process begins with the submission, at an established deadline, of a completed questionnaire/application. The questionnaire/application is accompanied by a variety of supporting materials and is submitted in quintuplicate. An on-site inspection will occur approximately one to three months after submission of materials. At the conclusion of the inspection, the institution will be presented with a list of items that must be addressed to be considered in compliance with standards. The inspection is followed by a hearing before the Accreditation Commission, scheduled at its next meeting. At that time, the institution’s case will be discussed. In making its determination whether to grant, table, or deny accreditation or certification, the Commission will consider information contained in the application materials, the inspection and complete report and recommendation of the Visiting Committee, the response by the institution to the List of Concerns, the interview with the facility’s senior management at the hearing, and any additional verified information it has received from sources. The Commission’s decision will be based on what exists at the time of the inspection and final review—not on future plans.

The Commission will then take one of the following actions:

A. **Grant Accreditation/Certification:** The Commission will grant accreditation/certification when it is reasonably satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements of an accredited institution or certified related facility. The Commission may, however, request progress reports on any items it wishes the institution to address, require an interim or special inspection, and revisit the decision as often as necessary to assure itself that the institution continues to meet all conditions and requirements of accreditation/certification during the five-year accreditation/certification period.

B. **Table Accreditation/Certification:** The Commission may table an applicant’s materials and accreditation/certification if it determines that certain conditions must be met, or additional information submitted, before the facility can be considered as meeting AZA standards. The institution is given one year to continue to address the concerns and, in addition, the Commission must believe that the institution is capable of addressing the concerns within one year. A follow-up inspection is required prior to the institution’s final hearing which takes place in one year. At that hearing, tabling is no longer an option; the Accreditation Commission must vote to grant or deny accreditation/certification.

C. **Deny Accreditation/Certification:** The Commission will deny accreditation/certification when an institution does not meet the standards and, in its opinion, would require in excess of one year to successfully do so. Institutions denied accreditation/certification may reapply one year after the date of denial. Submission of a new application and materials shall be necessary.
C. LONG TERM EXPECTATIONS

Accreditation or certification is mandatory for an institution to maintain membership in AZA. Similarly, membership and participation in AZA must be maintained as a condition of accreditation and certification. All institutions must process at least once every five years and are subject to any new or higher standards, policies, guidelines, or resolutions adopted by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums as they are adopted. Even though a facility may have been accredited/certified previously, there is no guarantee that accreditation/certification will be granted during subsequent inspections. Standards are subject to continuous review and enhancement. Once accredited/certified, a facility is expected to continuously advance its professional operation and constantly maintain, or surpass, all professional standards. [See also “Preamble” pages 19 – 20.]

D. BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION/CERTIFICATION

AZA accreditation/certification is a publicly recognized badge signifying excellence in, and commitment to, animal management and welfare, veterinary care, ethics, physical facilities, staffing, conservation, education, safety and security, finance, and supportive bodies. Conversely, denial of accreditation/certification should lead to improvements in identified areas and increased cooperation from supportive bodies.

Accreditation and certification, no matter what field, are most important as an assurance to the public that an organization, institution, or program meets or exceeds the standards established by its profession. Overall, benefits include:

- Development of public confidence by means of a thorough, impartial, measured, and documented audit that establishes whether an institution meets or exceeds the current professional standards and best practices established by AZA
- Publicly recognized badge signifying excellence in, and commitment to, animal welfare and husbandry, veterinary care, ethics, physical facilities, staffing, conservation, education, safety and security, finance, and supportive bodies
- Improvements in identified areas and a concurrent increase in cooperation and support from governing bodies and other organizations
- An indicator to private organizations, foundations, and governmental agencies in connection with contributions, grants, contracts, funding, permitting, and other areas
- Exempts institutions from certain government requirements [primarily at the state level];
- Promotes professional recognition by the top zoological parks and aquariums that current professional standards are being met
- Promotes excellence within the institution by setting in motion continuous self-evaluation in light of ever-rising zoological and aquarium standards and best practices
- Helps distinguish institutions from “roadside collections” and the like
- Provides staff an invaluable opportunity to learn from other institutions and professional experts
- Fosters staff and community pride
- Significantly improves the ability to attract and retain a high quality, professional staff
- Membership in AZA
  - Access to animals from other AZA-accredited/certified facilities for loan and/or breeding
  - Participation in all Species Survival Plans
  - Information and knowledge exchange (access to top experts and colleagues within the zoological and aquarium professions)
  - Access to AZA’s resource center
  - Reciprocity with public membership of other AZA-accredited/certified facilities