Sustainability Partner Policy & Application

Information & Application to Become an Approved Sustainability Partner in an AZA Species Survival Plan® Program

Approved by the AZA Board of Directors 1 December 2009, Revised March 2014, Revised July 2018

*The digitized Full Application to become an Approved Sustainability Partner can be obtained on the AZA website at [https://www.aza.org/templates-and-applications](https://www.aza.org/templates-and-applications).*

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a professional organization representing accredited zoological parks and aquariums and certified related facilities (CRFs). Among its objectives, AZA strives to raise professional standards that foster the continued development of superior zoos and aquariums and best practices in animal population management that uphold high standards of animal welfare.

AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums serve as centers of excellence in animal welfare, wildlife conservation, and public education and create animal exhibits that provide society the opportunity to develop personal connections with the animals and nature. As such, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums are concerned about ecosystem health, take responsibility for species survival, contribute to research, and promote the highest standards of animal care and welfare in the management of small populations of earth’s precious wildlife species.

**Expectations for Approved Sustainability Partners in an AZA Species Survival Plan® (SSP) Program**

AZA SSP Programs focus on the conservation of select and typically threatened or endangered species through the cooperative management of small populations at AZA-Accredited Zoos and Aquariums and Certified Related Facilities. These institutions undergo a thorough accreditation review process that includes the submission of an extensive application as well as an intensive, on-site inspection by a team of experts to assure the highest standards of animal care and management are met.

A **Sustainability Partner** is defined as an organization that regularly exchanges animals with AZA-accredited facilities, typically as part of the SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan or other SSP Program management process.

- A Sustainability Partner’s species/animal(s) is regularly included in the SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan.
- Recommendations are made for individuals of that species in the Sustainability Partner’s collection through the SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan process. This would include documented interim SSP Program recommendations.

AZA believes that the highest standards of animal care, welfare, and population management are of paramount importance, and Approved Sustainability Partners are expected to agree and abide by AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics, SSP Full Participation Policy, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and Accreditation Standards related to animal care and welfare.

Sustainability Partners in SSP Programs are not considered accredited or certified and may not display the AZA logo or the AZA SSP logo. Like AZA accreditations and certifications, approvals for a Sustainability Partner’s continued participation in an SSP Program must be renewed every five years.
Who is Eligible to Apply for Approval as a Sustainability Partner?

If an AZA SSP Program determines that a potential Sustainability Partner cares for animals that can provide genetic, demographic, conservation, husbandry, population management, and/or animal welfare benefits to the SSP Program, the following are eligible to apply for approval as Sustainability Partners:

**Category 1. Zoos/aquariums located outside the U.S. that are accredited members of a World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) Recognized Super-Regional Zoological Association**

Note: Recognized Super-Regional Zoological Associations that have a formal accreditation program include: Asociación Latinoamericana de Parques Zoológicos y Acuarios (ALPZA), Zoo and Aquarium Association - Australasia (ZAA), Asociación de Zoológicos Criaderos y Acuarios de México (AZCARM), Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), and Pan African Association of Zoos and Aquaria (PAAZA)

Note: Members of the Asociación Mesoamericana y del Caribe de Zoológicos y Acuarios (AMACZOOA), the Eurasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (EARAZA), the Japanese Association of Zoos and Aquariums (JAZA), South East Asian Zoos Association (SEAZA), South Asian Zoo Association for Regional Cooperation (SAZARC), and unaccredited members of a qualifying recognized super-regional association must apply under Category 2.

**Submission Requirements**
A. A Letter of Invitation & Justification from an AZA SSP Program for the applicant to participate in their SSP Program;
B. A completed and signed Sustainability Partner Application; and
C. A Letter affirming their accreditation from a WAZA recognized Super-Regional Zoological Association.

**Category 2. Wildlife facilities that are not accredited by a WAZA recognized Regional Zoological Association**

Wildlife facilities include, but are not limited to zoos and aquariums not accredited by a WAZA recognized regional zoological association (including zoos and aquariums that are members of such associations but not accredited by them), ranches, refuges, rehabilitation centers, research facilities, sanctuaries, survival centers, breeding facilities, private individuals, and educational outreach organizations. These facilities can be within or outside the U.S., and do not need to be open to the public.

**Submission Requirements**
A. A Letter of Invitation & Justification from an AZA SSP Program for the applicant to participate in their SSP Program;
B. A completed and signed Sustainability Partner Application;
C. Letters of Sponsorship from the Directors of two different AZA-accredited facilities; and
D. If within the United States, submission of the most recent USDA licenses and inspection report(s), if applicable.

**Application Processes**

**Submission Process**
The SSP Coordinator must work with the applicant to assure all application materials are complete. The SSP Coordinator may fill out the application through a phone call to the applicant facility. The SSP Coordinator must submit the completed application, required letters, and attachments to the AZA Conservation & Science Department (conservation@aza.org), and
assure that the applicant does not participate, or continue to participate, in the SSP Program until they are formally approved as a Sustainability Partner.

The AZA Conservation & Science Department will review the application materials, and forward applications deemed to be complete and appropriate for review to the WCMC Vice Chair for Partnerships who will act as the coordinator of the Sustainability Partner's application. The Vice Chair of Partnerships will review application materials to identify potential needs for clarification. The Vice Chair of Partnerships will notify the AZA Conservation & Science Department when the application is ready for WCMC review, and distribute the application to the committee for review.

**Review Process**

Applications are reviewed by AZA’s Wildlife Conservation and Management Committee (WCMC) throughout the year via committee conference calls, as well as twice each year – during the AZA Annual Conference and the AZA Mid-Year Meeting. No fees are charged for the Sustainability Partner application.

WCMC will evaluate the benefits of the applicant being approved as an SSP Program Participant in the context of the entire AZA ex-situ population which includes all SSP Program animals at AZA-Accredited zoos and aquariums, Certified Related Facilities, and Sustainability Partners.

Reviews are held either by conference call or in closed sessions, and are attended by WCMC members and advisors and AZA staff; in addition, members of the AZA Board of Directors, the SSP Coordinator, and/or the corresponding Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) Chair may attend as well. Approval decisions are based on the information that exists at the time of the application review, not on future plans. Crucial elements in WCMC’s consideration include:

- Completion of application
- Application support letters, documents, and photographs
- Whether there is sufficient evidence that the applicant follows the tenets of AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics, SSP Full Participation Policy, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and Accreditation Standards related to animal care and welfare.
- Whether the participation of the proposed partner in the SSP will significantly enhance the SSP program population's sustainability, while supporting high standards of animal welfare.

WCMC may take one of the following actions:

- **Approval:** WCMC will grant approval when it determines that the applicant facility meets the requirements of an approved Sustainability Partner.
- **Table Approval:** WCMC may table a facility's application if it determines that certain conditions must be met or additional information submitted before the facility can be considered as a Sustainability Partner. If the facility is able to meet those requirements within one year, and if the SSP Program still wishes, the WCMC will re-review the application.
- **Deny Approval:** WCMC will deny approval when a facility does not meet the minimum requirements (see “expectations”) to be recognized as an approved Sustainability Partner at the present time and, in its opinion, would require in excess of one year to successfully do so. Applicants may work with the SSP Program and reapply to be a Sustainability Partner after the WCMC’s concerns have been addressed.

Once a decision is reached, the WCMC Vice Chair for Partnerships will inform the SSP Coordinator and the facility's Owner/CEO/Director of the outcome. An official letter noting the decision and points of discussion will be sent from the AZA Conservation & Science Department to the SSP Coordinator and the facility Director within 30 days of the application review.

**Sustainability Partner Responsibilities**

Once approval has been granted the Sustainability Partner will:

- Agree to adhere to AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics, SSP Full Participation Policy, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and relevant Accreditation Standards, especially those related to animal care and welfare.
Appoint an Institutional Liaison (IL) to serve as the primary point of contact for SSP communications.

Not display the SSP logo.

Agree to allow the sponsoring AZA-accredited zoo or aquarium, staff, Board, WCMC, TAG, and/or SSP representatives to visit and view the applicant facility, upon request, to assure adherence to AZA policies and animal care and welfare practices. Such visitors will provide feedback to the SSP, TAG, and the WCMC.

Submit a new, complete application for Sustainability Partner before the end of the five-year approval period in order to continue participation in the SSP Program.

Loss of Approval Status

A Sustainability Partner may have its approved status revoked by the WCMC if it fails to meet any of the Sustainability Partner responsibilities identified above and in the application.

If AZA/WCMC deems it appropriate, the SSP Program may work with a Sustainability Partner that loses its approved status for up to two years to help manage the population, facilitate transfer of animals owned by AZA zoos and aquariums and, when possible, mentor re-approval of Sustainability Partner status. In such instances, the Sustainability Partner will not be an active participant in the SSP but still may be considered during the planning processes. During this time the SSP will not move SSP animals to the former Sustainability Partner facility.

For reinstatement as a Sustainability Partner, the potential Sustainability Partner’s benefit to the SSP population’s sustainability and adherence to AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and Animal Care and Welfare Standards must be reassessed.
Sustainability Partner Application

Part A: To be completed by applicants in Categories 1 & 2

Facility Information

1. Applicant Facility Name:
2. Mailing Address (street, city, state, zip code, country):
3. Physical Address (if different than mailing address):
4. Telephone Number:
5. Website:
6. Is this organization open to the public on a regularly scheduled and predictable basis?
   Yes, Hours:                      No
7. If located outside of the United States, is the organization **accredited by a**
   WAZA recognized Super-Regional Zoological Association: Yes       No
   Name of Accrediting Zoological Association:
   □ ALPZA
   □ AZCARM
   □ CAZA
   □ EAZA
   □ PAAZA
   □ ZAA - Australasia
8. If located outside of the United States, is the organization a **member of a**
   WAZA recognized Super-Regional Zoological Association: Yes       No
   Name of Zoological Association:
   □ AMACZOOA
   □ EARAZA
   □ JAZA
   □ SAZARC
   □ SEAZA
9. Who has ultimate responsibility for decisions relating to animal care, welfare, and
   management at the facility?
   □ Owner
   □ Director
   □ Board of Directors
   □ Animal Care Manager/Curator
   □ Veterinarian
   □ Other (name):
10. The organization is (check all that apply):
    □ owned/operated by municipality, city, county, state, or federal government
    □ not for profit
☐ part of a larger corporation
☐ privately funded
☐ privately owned
☐ Other/more information:

11. Type of organization (check all that apply):
   ☐ Zoo
   ☐ Aquarium
   ☐ Rescue facility
   ☐ Research facility
   ☐ Sanctuary/refuge
   ☐ Open to the general public
   ☐ Guided tours only
   ☐ Drive-thru park
   ☐ Ranching operation that manages non-domestic/domesticated wildlife species
   ☐ Private breeder (not open to the public)
   ☐ Other/more information:

Facility's Representative Information
1. Name of the Applicant Facility's Director/CEO:
   a. Applicant Director/CEO Telephone Number:
   b. Applicant Director/CEO E-mail:

2. Name of the Applicant Facility's Institutional Liaison (IL):
   a. Applicant IL's Telephone Number:
   b. Applicant IL's E-mail Address:

SSP Program Information
1. Name of SSP Program being applied for:
2. Number of SSP Program animals owned by/at your facility that are to be included in the SSP Program:
3. Does the facility currently house this species?
4. Describe any breeding of this species at the organization (e.g., have you bred this species previously? How many times? When?)
5. List all other AZA SSP Programs in which the organization participates.

Part B: To be completed by applicants in Category 2
Animal Housing, Animal Care, Safety, and Records
1. If an AZA Animal Care Manual (ACM) exists for the SSP Program species, has your facility reviewed the ACM and does your facility meet the guidelines identified in the ACM?

1 Sanctuaries being distinct from zoos by housing only non-breeding animals and only receiving animals (e.g., does not send animals to facilities or individuals)
2. Describe the spaces available for this SSP Program species (indoor and outdoor facilities; holding areas; shifting doors; locks and pins for all doors; public barriers and containment). Attach photos of exhibit and holding areas. Approximate the size of the animals’ space.

3. Describe the staff experience in care and management of the SSP Program species.

4. Describe the facility’s veterinarian’s experience with the SSP Program species (or similar or closely related species). If the veterinarian does not have experience with the SSP Program species, is there a consulting veterinarian that does have experience with the species?

5. Describe the typical diet of the SSP Program species at the organization and how this diet was or will be created to meet the nutritional needs of the animal(s).

6. Describe the organization’s internal procedures for reviewing animal welfare of this SSP Program species.

7. Describe the standard operating procedure (SOP) for daily husbandry and/or exhibition of the SSP Program species. The SOP typically includes a list of daily staff duties required for safe care and exhibition of the species with assigned or rough estimates of sequence and time allocation.

8. What type of contact will staff have with the SSP Program species?
   - Unprotected contact – staff will intentionally make physical contact with the species and will share space with the animal(s) regularly.
   - Incidental – staff will regularly share space with the animal(s) and may occasionally make physical contact with the animals.
   - Protected – Physical contact with the animal(s) by staff will always be across or through a protective barrier; staff will share space with the animals only in emergency situations.
   - None – no physical contact with this species is ever permitted at this facility regardless of whether staff shares space with the animal(s) or interacts with them across a barrier. Exceptions regarding physical contact are only made in the event of emergencies.

9. What type of contact will visitors have with the SSP Program species?
   - Unprotected contact – visitors will share space with the animal(s) and they will be granted the ability to make physical contact with the animal(s).
   - Incidental – visitors will share space with the animals, the ability to touch the animals will be incidental and contingent on animal(s) seeking contact with visitors.
   - Protected – visitors will not share space with the animals; physical contact with the animal(s) will always be across or through a protective barrier
   - None – visitors will not be permitted to have physical contact with the animal(s) under any circumstances.

10. If the facility houses dangerous animals (including, but not limited to large felids, large canids, bears, any great ape species, large crocodilians, large snakes, large ratites, venomous or toxic species), attach the risk management plan describing escape protocols, contingency plans for disasters/emergencies, and immobilizations/lethal weapons protocols. Please also describe any additional safety measures taken at the facility when working with these species (e.g., animal shifting protocols, lock checking protocols, communication protocols, and delivery of feed).
a. For venomous species, does your facility maintain a stock of the appropriate anti-
venin, if available? Are health practitioners in your area aware that you are
housing venomous species?

11. Has the facility had any permits and/or licenses related to wildlife suspended or revoked?
   If yes, please explain the reasons for suspension or revocation. If permits or licenses
   were revoked or suspended, when were they re-instated?

12. Has the facility received any fines from local, state or federal wildlife regulatory agencies?
   If yes, please explain by providing dates of fining and circumstances that lead to the fine.

13. Is the facility in compliance with all local, state, and federal ordinances, laws, regulations,
   permits, etc. related to wildlife? If no, please explain how the organization is working
   towards becoming compliant.

14. Submit the facility’s USDA license and the last 5 years of the USDA inspection reports, if
   applicable.

15. Submit any applicable (local, state, federal) wildlife permits.

16. What animal recordkeeping system does the facility use?

17. What method(s) will be used to permanently identify animals born/hatched at this facility
   in accordance with SSP Breeding and Transfer recommendations?

18. Submit a current inventory list and census of the animal collection at the facility.
Part C: To be completed by applicants in Categories 1 & 2

Applicant Agreement to Accept All Sustainability Partner Responsibilities

By signing below, I, (Name__________________________) (this must be the Applicant Director or CEO) of the ______________________ (Applicant Organization Name), fully agree to meet the responsibilities listed below if approved as a Sustainability Partner in the ______________________ (species name) SSP Program and further acknowledge that failure to do so may result in a revocation of this approved status:

- I and my staff will adhere to AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics, SSP Full Participation Policy, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and Animal Care and Welfare Standards.
- I will provide the AZA SSP Program with complete studbook histories for all animals proposed for inclusion in the SSP managed population within 30 days of approval.
- I will not display the SSP logo.
- I will complete the full application process before the end of the five-year approval period ends in order to continue my Organization’s participation in the SSP Program.
- I will assure that the sponsoring AZA-accredited facility, staff, Board, WCMC, TAG, and/or SSP representatives can schedule a visit to the applicant institution/zoo upon request to view the facilities and assure adherence to AZA policies and animal care and welfare practices.

Applicant Director/CEO Signature: ________________________ Date: ________________
Checklist of Supporting Materials and Attachments for each Sustainability Partner Category

1. Zoos/aquariums located outside the U.S. that are accredited members of a World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) Recognized Super-Regional Zoological Association
   □ Does this application include a completed Letter of Invitation and Justification from the SSP Program Coordinator?
   □ Does this application include a completed Letter Affirming the applicant’s accreditation from a WAZA Super-Regional Zoological Association?

2. Wildlife facilities that are not accredited by a WAZA recognized Regional Zoological Association
   □ Does this application include a completed Letter of Invitation and Justification from the SSP Program Coordinator?
   □ Does this application include completed letters of sponsorship from two Directors of two different AZA-accredited facilities?

Photographs of SSP Program species’:
   □ Indoor facilities
   □ Outdoor facilities
   □ Holding areas
   □ Animal shifting doors
   □ Locks and pins for all doors, including keeper to exhibit/holding, animal to exhibit, animal to animal
   □ Public barriers and containment

Documents:
   □ Standard operating procedure for daily husbandry of the species
   □ Risk management plan
   □ Copies of USDA License and applicable permits, if applicable
   □ Last 5 years of USDA inspection reports, if applicable
   □ Current inventory list and census of the animal collection
Guidelines for Letters of Invitation and Justification, Accreditation, and Sponsorship

Required for applicants in Categories 1 & 2:

Letter of Invitation and Justification from an AZA SSP Program for a Sustainability Partner to Participate in their Program

The letter from an SSP Coordinator should:

1. Clearly identify the SSP Program for which the potential Sustainability Partner participant’s involvement is being requested, as well as the SSP Coordinator’s identity, telephone number and e-mail address;

2. Indicate that the TAG Chair has reviewed the Sustainability Partner application and the TAG supports the approval of the potential Sustainability Partner;

3. Make a clear formal request for approval of the potential Sustainability Partner;

4. Describe the challenges that the population faces and how this partner could alleviate some of those challenges. Identify specifically why the potential Sustainability Partner’s participation would benefit the SSP Program and describe how the Sustainability Partner applicant’s animals and/or holding/breeding spaces are critical to the success of the SSP Program. How would the approval of the potential Sustainability Partner for participation in the SSP Program provide genetic, demographic, population management, husbandry, welfare, conservation or other benefits to the SSP Program? Identify any additional factors that substantiate how approval of the potential Sustainability Partner’s participation will benefit the SSP Program and conservation of the species (e.g., reference to the SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan, Global Species Management Plans, Population Viability Analysis results suggesting a need for additional holding space, unique genetics, additional demographics, TAG Regional Collection Plan goals, etc.). Present facts and accurate data. Indicate if the facility is currently working successfully with the TAG in other ways or with other SSP Programs, and include examples of when/how the facility effectively communicated with the SSP, other AZA SSP Programs, and/or other facilities. Describe any animal transfers that have occurred between the applicant and the SSP Program;

5. Provide confirmation that the SSP Coordinator has discussed in detail with the potential Sustainability Partner the responsibilities that the organization will assume upon approval as an SSP participant including assurance that the Sustainability Partner applicant has fully read and understood:
   - AZA’s Code of Professional Ethics,
   - the Full Participation in the SSP Policy,
   - the Policy on Responsible Population Management, and
   - the AZA Accreditation Standards related to animal care and welfare.

6. Provide a clearly stated description of how the Sustainability Partner applicant provides a level of animal care and welfare in keeping with AZA’s standards and identify how the SSP Coordinator has attained this understanding. Describe the Sustainability Partner applicant’s history of experience with the SSP Program species or similar species, and identify staff qualifications in caring for the species, related expertise, and resources at the facility. This section should also include any forms of information (such as photographs, veterinary statements, USDA inspection reports, etc.) that corroborate the applicant’s adherence to AZA standards of animal care and welfare;

7. Indicate whether the SSP Coordinator or any current participating facility in the SSP Program has conducted a site visit of the proposed Sustainability Partner in the last 3 years. Provide copies of site visit reports, if available;
8. End with the signature of the SSP Coordinator and the date.
9. Submit the completed application, required letters, and attachments to the AZA Conservation & Science Department (conservation@aza.org) for WCMC approval.

*The WCMC Vice Chair for Partnerships is a valuable resource to use when the SSP is beginning to gather the application materials. The current WCMC Vice Chair for Partnerships is listed on the AZA website (https://www.aza.org/wildlife-conservation-and-management-committee).
Required for applicants in Category 1:

Letter Affirming Accreditation by a WAZA Recognized Zoological Association for Organizations which are Applying for Approval in an AZA SSP Program

The letter from the appropriate association should:
1. Clearly identify the name of the organization / entity applying for approval as a participant in an AZA SSP Program;
2. Clearly identify the name of the Association and the Association Director’s name and contact information;
3. Affirm that the applicant organization/entity is a currently accredited member in good standing of the Association providing this letter;
4. Provide clearly stated assurance that the applicant organization/entity provides a level of animal care and welfare in keeping with the standards of the Association providing this letter and identify how this information is known;
5. End with the signature of the Association Director and the date.

Required for Category 2:

Letters From the Directors of Two AZA-accredited Facilities Sponsoring the Approval of a Non-Member Wildlife Facility as an SSP Sustainability Partner

The letters from two, separate AZA-accredited Facility Directors must:
1. Identify the SSP for which the potential Sustainability Partner participant's involvement is being sponsored;
2. Provide a description articulating why it is believed that the potential Sustainability Partner applicant will provide a benefit to the SSP Program, and identify any additional sources that substantiate how approval of the potential Sustainability Partner applicant's participation will benefit the SSP Program and conservation of the species (e.g., reference to the SSP Breeding and Transfer Plan, Population Viability Analysis results suggesting a need for additional holding space, unique genetics, additional demographics, TAG Regional Collection Plan goals, etc.);
3. Provide a statement that it is understood that the signature on the letter of sponsorship serves as assurance that the applicant facility provides a level of animal care and welfare equivalent to or above that of the AZA Accreditation Standards. When referencing the site, please describe when the Director (or identify who on senior staff) visited the applicant's facility and outline the observations / experiences that substantiate why it is believed the applicant adheres, or will adhere, to AZA's Code of Professional Ethics, SSP Full Participation Policy, Policy on Responsible Population Management, and Accreditation Standards related to animal care and welfare.
   For wildlife facilities in North America both sponsoring letters must be written by a Director (or designate) of two different AZA facilities. For wildlife facilities outside of North America, one of the two required letters may be written by the Director of a zoo or aquarium accredited by another WAZA recognized regional zoological association.
4. End with the signature of the Director and the date.