the
guide to accreditation of
zoological parks and aquariums

2015 edition
# 2015
## GUIDE TO ACCREDITATION OF ZOOLOGICAL PARKS AND AQUARIUMS

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ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Mission Statement
The mission statement of the AZA Accreditation Commission is to establish, uphold, and raise the highest zoological and aquarium industry standards through self-evaluation, on-site inspection, and peer review.

Goals

Establish Standards For AZA Zoos And Aquariums
AZA standards will be a dynamic document of the current acceptable standards for zoos and aquariums. Through continual review and policy setting, it will remain contemporary.

Credential AZA's Standards As The Industry’s Standard
The Commission establishes criteria for AZA-accredited institutions through input from those in and outside our profession considered as recognized leaders; through continuing review to strengthen standards; through training for consistent inspection; and through guidance provided to the profession and those we serve. It is imperative that regulatory agencies, governing authorities, international allied groups, etc. have the trust and confidence in our efforts to establish high standards and be assured that those awarded AZA accreditation comply.

Encourage Member Institutions To Develop Superior Facilities
The holding of AZA-accreditation obligates institutions to continuously strive for superior facilities. On occasion, the Commission is called upon to use its professional clout to encourage improvements. Our objective, third party position has been an effective tool to lobby local authorities to support member facilities. We encourage development of superior facilities through enforcement of accreditation standards, publication of professional information highlighting current best practices, documenting trends, and raising professional expectations.

Support Nonmember Institutions To Achieve AZA-Accredited Status
AZA mentors interested organizations that are not AZA-accredited to aspire to improve their facilities, philosophies, and practices, in hope of achieving AZA-accreditation in future years, providing whatever professional assistance is available.
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM, OBJECTIVES, AND SCOPE

The Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) is a professional organization representing zoological parks and aquariums, the majority of which are located in the Americas. Among its objectives, the Association strives to raise professional standards and to influence continuing development of superior zoological parks and aquariums.

Throughout their history, zoological parks and aquariums in the Americas have been governed according to varying objectives. Nevertheless, AZA believes that institutions maintaining exotic wildlife must recognize and accept their common goals and seek to advance them by adhering to professional standards for maintaining quality and performance [See “Preamble” appearing on page 5 of the 2015 edition of the Accreditation Standards and Related Policies.]

SPECTRUM OF AZA-ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

To achieve AZA accreditation, each institution must, at minimum, meet AZA standards. Many institutions that receive AZA accreditation exceed AZA standards. Thus, there is a range in the level of achievement among institutions accredited by AZA.

ACCREDITATION DEFINED

Accreditation is 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 its own members, rather than an outside agency. In developing its accreditation program, AZA has been especially concerned with the need for assuring the highest standards of animal management and husbandry, while also focusing on animal management for conservation, education, scientific studies, and recreational purposes.

Performance Standards. Primarily, AZA standards are performance standards (i.e., measuring 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 measured steps are required to fulfill an engineering characteristic, with little or no variation in method for meeting the goal.

AZA maintains two credentialing programs: Accreditation (for Institutional members), and Certification (for Related Facility members).

THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

The Accreditation Commission consists of a Chairperson and eleven Commissioners who serve three-year terms. The terms are staggered to ensure continuity of service. The Chair and Commissioners are eligible to serve two consecutive full terms if appointed to do so. In addition to the Chair and Commissioners, several (usually three) Advisors are appointed to serve without vote. Advisors serve one three-year term and expand the overall body of expertise of the Commission. The AZA President-Elect makes appointments to the Accreditation Commission and selects the Chair and Vice-Chair. Only Professional Fellows are eligible for appointment to the Commission. Appointees must have actively served as accreditation inspectors on, at
minimum, three inspections, and must hold leadership roles at their institutions, and be
considered as experts in their fields. Appointees must hold positions that focus on operations,
animal management, or veterinary medicine.

The Commission and its programs are managed by the AZA Vice President of Accreditation
Programs. The Vice President, Accreditation Programs shall conduct all administrative business
of the Commission, provide guidance on policy, maintain accreditation records, advise and
consult with the Commission, Visiting Committees, and applicant institutions, and provide
training as required. The Vice President, Accreditation Programs may accompany the Visiting
Committee on inspections, and shall also assist the Commission Chair with Commission
meetings, which are conducted twice a year.

The Accreditation Commission relies upon volunteer inspectors who possess professional
expertise in zoo and aquarium operations, animal management, and veterinary medicine to
serve as members of Visiting Committees. The Visiting Committees are organized to provide for
appropriate representation and expertise according to the size and type of the applicant
institution.

HISTORY OF AZA ACCREDITATION

In 1966 the passage of the Animal Welfare Act reflected the nation’s growing concern for animal
care in the United States. State legislation was subsequently passed in several states which
included a system of inspection and licensing that embodied the public’s rightful concern for the
well-being of animals in zoos and aquariums.

There was strong encouragement from federal agencies that the zoological park and aquarium
profession, through AZA, should attempt self-evaluation through a program created for that
purpose. In September 1971 incoming AZA President Gary Clarke appointed a committee to
study methods of establishing best practices and collectively improving professional operations.
After three years of intense research and preparation, the first institution was accredited by AZA
in 1974—at that time a voluntary process. A decade later, in 1985, AZA made the decision to
place the importance of quality ahead of quantity, and made accreditation a mandatory
requirement for AZA membership. This decision resulted in a 75% decrease in membership by
the end of 1985 as most institutions were not yet able to meet all of AZA’s accreditation
standards. Despite the drop in membership, AZA held firm in its decision to make accreditation
mandatory as a means of encouraging continued improvement in animal care and management.
AZA’s willingness to take that step in 1985 led to a rise in animal husbandry and care among
serious zoological parks and aquariums in the U.S. as they began striving to reach the standards
required for AZA membership and accreditation. AZA believes just as strongly today that
assuring high standards of animal management and husbandry is paramount to the overall
welfare of living creatures, and good conscience permits no higher priority.

AZA is grateful to the American Association of Museums (AAM) for the permission it granted in
the early 1970s to allow AZA to model its accreditation program upon the copyrighted AAM
program, and for the helpful counsel and advice it provided.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation, no matter what field, is most important as an assurance to the public that an
organization, institution, or program meets or exceeds the standards established by its
profession.
In this manner, accreditation helps develop public confidence by means of a thorough, unbiased, measured, and documented audit that establishes whether an institution meets or exceeds current professional standards as established by AZA. This is accomplished by a periodic comprehensive review and site inspection conducted by zoological experts in operations, animal management, and veterinary medicine. Once granted, AZA accreditation 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 should lead to improvements in identified areas and a concurrent increase in cooperation and support from governing bodies and other organizations.

Accreditation is also important in guiding private and governmental agencies that frequently need expert opinion as a basis for qualitative judgment in connection with contributions, grants, and contracts, and other areas.

Other benefits include: eligibility for grants (makes institutions eligible for consideration for funding and grants from certain foundations, corporations and other sources); cuts red tape (exempts institutions from certain government requirements [primarily at the state level]); promotes professional recognition from the top zoological parks and aquariums in the U.S. that current industry standards are being met; provides impartial evaluation on a periodic basis by professional colleagues; promotes excellence within the institution by causing an institution to continuously evaluate itself in light of ever-rising zoological industry standards; helps distinguish institutions from “roadside zoos”; provides staff an invaluable opportunity to learn from other institutions and to better understand the importance of accreditation through training and subsequent participation as accreditation inspectors; fosters staff and community pride; significantly improves the ability to attract and retain a high quality, professional staff.

Another important benefit of accreditation is membership in AZA. Membership in AZA includes: animal exchange (access to animals from other AZA accredited facilities for loan and/or breeding); information/knowledge exchange (access to top experts and colleagues within the zoological and aquarium professions, for aid as needed and sharing of information); access to AZA’s resource center; reciprocity with membership of other AZA accredited institutions, and much more.

**POLICIES, RULES, AND GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR APPLYING**

**PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION**

1. Institutions are accredited based on what exists at the time of the inspection and review—not on future plans.

2. The accreditation process provides a format for the applicant institution to undertake a rigorous self-examination.

3. AZA-accreditation certifies that an institution is currently meeting accepted standards.
of the profession as established by AZA. The accreditation program notes, but does not evaluate or measure, the institution’s level of achievement beyond that of established standards.

4. Accreditation is based upon the informed collective judgment of highly experienced individuals within the professional fields of zoo/aquarium operations, animal management/husbandry, and veterinary medicine. Individuals are appointed by the incoming Chair of the AZA Board of Directors.

5. The accreditation program is conducted in strict confidence.

6. The principles and procedures of the accreditation program apply equally to all institutions.

7. The accreditation process is the same for all institutions, regardless of whether an institution holds accreditation at the time of application or is applying for the first time.

8. The granting of accreditation is for five years, and expires at the end of that period. To avoid a lapse in accreditation, institutions must successfully complete the full process again prior to the end of the five-year period.

9. When an institution’s application is tabled, a follow-up inspection must be conducted within one year, and prior to final consideration for accreditation. Upon final consideration, accreditation must be granted or denied—continued tabling is not an option. [Note: accredited institutions retain accreditation during the tabled year.]

10. An accredited institution may be reviewed or inspected at any time within the five-year accreditation period, at the discretion of the Accreditation Commission or the AZA Board of Directors. (see Interim and Follow-up Inspections, page 27).

11. Once accredited, an institution is expected to continuously advance its professional operation and stay abreast of constantly rising standards in all areas. An AZA-accredited institution must incorporate modern zoological practices and philosophies as basic tenets, and maintain standards throughout the period of accreditation. The Accreditation Commission can rescind accreditation at any time if it concludes that standards are not being met.

12. AZA standards are primarily performance standards (i.e., measuring the level of achievement considered acceptable to fulfill a performance characteristic, and choice in method for meeting the goal).

**BASIC DEFINITION**

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 their primary mission the exhibition, conservation, and preservation of the earth’s fauna in an educational and scientific manner.

For clarification, the key words used in the definition are further defined as follows:

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

2. WILDLIFE: non-domesticated animal life.

3. PROFESSIONAL STAFF: at least one paid full-time employee who commands an appropriate body of husbandry knowledge, has a related professional degree or commensurate experience in the zoological and/or aquarium professions, has the ability to make 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.

4. AESTHETIC: pertaining to the beautiful.

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

**NOTE:** The Accreditation Commission, and its agents, shall determine if an institution is meeting standards, and incorporating modern zoological practices and philosophies. If in question, the Commission, and its agents, shall further determine whether an institution meets the definition of a zoological park or aquarium, as provided in this booklet.

**OTHER DEFINITIONS**

**Aquarium:** Usually one public building which contains aquatic animals. However, the animals are usually split into numerous exhibits.

**Currently Accredited Applicants:** Currently accredited applicants are those institutions that are accredited *at the time the application is submitted and processed.*

**New Applicants:** “New” applicants are those institutions applying for accreditation for the first time, or any institution that is *not currently accredited*, regardless of whether it has been accredited in the past. (Institutions applying for the first-time, see *Applying For The First Time*, pages 12-14).

**Mentor (Peer Consultant):** An individual deemed qualified by the Accreditation Commission to assist an institution in preparing for the AZA accreditation process. The individual is assigned by the Commission to help the institution 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 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 27-28).

**International Institutions:** Institutions located outside the United States may apply for accreditation under the same rules as those located within the United States. In some 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 (see Fees, page 12). All materials submitted must be in English. Brochures and other pre-printed materials must be accompanied by a translation.

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.

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

Zoological Park: Animals which are housed in many public exhibits, both indoors and outdoors [for full definition see Basic Definitions, see above.]

SUMMARY OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

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 an additional inspection is required, and it may take up to twelve months or more before the Commission makes a final decision.

The application process begins with the submission, at an established deadline, of a completed questionnaire/application. The completed questionnaire/application must be accompanied by a variety of supporting materials and is submitted in quintuplicate. A sixth copy of the completed questionnaire/application should be maintained indefinitely on site for the institution’s future reference and for the use of the Visiting Committee during the inspection. An on-site inspection will occur approximately three to five months after submission of the application. 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 and a determination made whether to grant, table, or deny accreditation. The Commission’s decision will be based on what exists at the time of the inspection and final review—not on future plans.

A detailed explanation of this process appears in the pages that follow.

BASIC INFORMATION

Application Deadlines. March 1 and September 1. The Commission meets twice yearly [in March and September] to consider pending cases. Institutions wishing to have their cases heard in March must submit application packages by September 1. Institutions wishing to have their cases heard in September must submit application packages by March 1. If the deadline falls on a weekend or holiday, the next regular business day immediately following shall be considered as the deadline. Please note that late applications will not be accepted. Contact AZA if a problem with a deadline exists. NOTE (currently accredited institutions): Missing an application deadline will not be considered an acceptable reason for extension of accreditation, and will result in a lapse of current accreditation and AZA membership.

Accredited institutions are expected to keep track of their own expiration dates (available on the AZA web site at https://www.aza.org/current-accreditation-list/ [aza.org ➔ accreditation ➔ institution status ➔ currently accredited zoos and aquariums], or by
contacting AZA). Institutions will be reminded six months in advance of the deadline for submission of materials (twelve months in advance of accreditation expiration), but should not rely on this reminder as a method of tracking an expiration date.

**Early Submittals.** Application packages may not be submitted any earlier than one month in advance of the deadline for which they are intended.

**Fees.** A filing fee and a Visiting Committee deposit are both due at the beginning of the process, and must be included with the application. **Filing Fee:** The accreditation Filing Fee is $1,750.00, and is non-refundable*. The Filing Fee helps defray a portion of the costs involved in accreditation processing. **Visiting Committee Deposit:** Applicants are responsible for all costs associated with the inspection. A deposit of $1,500.00 towards inspection expenses must be submitted. The deposit for international applicants located in countries other than Canada and Mexico is $2,500.00. Payment must be in U.S. dollars. If Visiting Committee expenses exceed the deposit, the institution will be invoiced for the balance; if less, a refund will be issued.  

*Filing fees are non-refundable once the official review process has started, and costs have been incurred. Specifically, the official review begins with initial reviews conducted by the Vice President, Accreditation Programs and the Primary Reviewer. If an institution withdraws its application before the official review has started, the fee may be refunded.*

**Confidentiality.** Information submitted to the Accreditation Commission by institutions as part of their accreditation application is held in strict confidence, and is made available to the following individuals only: •Accreditation Commissioners, •Commission Advisors, •Inspectors (Visiting Committee), •Vice President, Accreditation Programs (and accreditation staff), •AZA Executive Director. The following also have access, but typically do not view the materials: •AZA President & CEO, •AZA Board of Directors.

Conversely, the Commission will not disclose the names of any person(s) requesting confidentiality when providing information, verbally or in writing, about the institution. This includes staff, colleagues, and/or members of the public.

**Distribution of the Final Report.** The Final Report of the Visiting Committee to the Accreditation Commission shall be provided by the Accreditation Commission to the institution’s CEO/Director, and to the institution’s governing authority, only. Further distribution of that report is left to the sole discretion of the institution and/or its governing authority. The institution’s CEO/Director will receive a copy of the complete report at the conclusion of the institution’s hearing.

**APPLYING FOR THE FIRST-TIME**

It is advisable for first-time applicants (those institutions that have never gone through the accreditation process before) to be familiar with fundamental AZA philosophies before applying for accreditation, and to determine if an assessment of suitability by AZA is needed prior to submitting an application (see below).

**Assessment of Suitability.** A basic requirement for submitting an application for AZA accreditation is that the applicant institution must meet the definition of a zoological park or aquarium appearing on pages 9-10. If an applicant is unsure it meets this definition, it is advisable to contact AZA for an assessment in advance of submitting an application. Applications from organizations that do not meet this definition will not be accepted.
Request A Mentor. [NOTE: AZA is in the process of creating a formalized mentoring program to be called “Candidate for Membership”. The “Candidate for Membership” program is anticipated to launch in 2015. Please check with the AZA office for details.]

While not a requirement, first-time applicants are strongly encouraged to request an official mentor approved by the Accreditation Commission prior to submitting an application. Even those institutions that believe AZA standards are being met should consider obtaining a Commission-approved mentor for an independent opinion before applying. Commission-approved mentors should be requested at least one year prior to submitting an application. Mentors cannot be provided at the time of application or after an application is submitted. Mentors serve as guides for an institution as it works towards eventually applying for AZA accreditation. Mentors review agreements, contracts, procedures, physical facilities in light of accreditation standards, and identify areas and/or practices or policies that may not meet AZA standards and need to be addressed before an inspection takes place. Mentors provide an independent opinion as to whether an institution is ready to undergo an accreditation review, and can even advise an institution in preparing its application. There is no fee for mentoring. (See Mentoring Program, pages 27-28).

Some helpful things to remember, for first-time applicants:

• [Optional, but recommended] Contact the Accreditation Department for an official mentor approved by the Accreditation Commission at least a year in advance of submitting the application (mentors cannot be provided at the time of application or after an application is submitted).
• Thoroughly read the current edition of the “Accreditation Standards and Related Policies” booklet.
• Thoroughly read the current edition of the “Guide To Accreditation of Zoological Parks and Aquariums” booklet (most questions about the process are answered within).
• Make sure that the annual edition of the materials you use to make application matches the year in which you submit your application.
• Follow the instructions for assembling the application as contained in this booklet (pages 14-16).
• When completing the application be sure to answer every question and attach required items.
• If you have any questions about assembling the application or other related topics please contact us.
• The Commissioner (or Commission Advisor) assigned to your institution as Primary Reviewer will automatically serve as Chair of the inspection team.
• Participate in AZA through individual membership, attendance at conferences, training and/or professional development courses, and reading publications so as to thoroughly familiarize your institution with fundamental AZA philosophies, policies, and best practices. Added focus should be given to those pertaining to animal management, exhibits (size, habitat, furniture, and aesthetics), and safety.
• While future plans are important and are considered in the overall picture, the final decision to grant accreditation will be based on what exists at the time of the inspection and final review—not on future plans.
• Make sure to address all items on the List of Concerns received at the end of the inspection. Address as many as possible prior to the hearing, and be prepared to show timelines, contracts, etc. for those items that are not complete.
• If accreditation is denied, it should not be viewed as failure. In preparing for the process many improvements have been achieved, and your institution should continue on that path, though the goal has not yet been reached. Use the process as a map for moving forward. Keep working on the List of Concerns with your mentor. If you did not utilize a mentor the first time, request one. AZA wants your institution to succeed and will help as much as possible, but continuing
the positive forward momentum towards meeting all standards is up to you.
•Remember, all institutions that receive accreditation are expected to maintain accreditation standards every day throughout the five-year period of accreditation. While AZA inspections take place every five years, colleagues who visit (formally or informally), and members of the public do notify us if problems are perceived. If deemed appropriate, the Commission may conduct an interim inspection. Accreditation can be rescinded at any time if the Commission concludes that accreditation standards are not being consistently met and maintained. (See Complaints page 26, and Interim and Follow-up Inspections page 27)

ASSEMBLING THE APPLICATION PACKAGE

Please contact the AZA accreditation staff if unclear about any of these instructions.

Improperly Assembled Applications: Please read these instructions and follow them carefully. Improperly assembled or incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant and may result in an inability to continue on the processing schedule needed to avoid a lapse in accreditation and AZA membership.

Preparing The Application On Flash Drive Or Compact Disc. All applications must be submitted in electronic format on a USB flash drive or compact disc in accordance with instructions contained in this section of the booklet.

Five sets of the completed application must be submitted to AZA by the required deadline. It is recommended that an additional copy of the completed compact disc or flash drive be maintained by the institution for reference in coming years.

Assembly. When finished, each institution should submit five copies of the CD or flash drive in small three-ring binders, or report covers labeled with the institution’s name. Each folder should contain the following: (1) a paper or plastic sleeve into which is placed the CD or flash drive; (2) a printed hardcopy of the completed and signed application questionnaire without attachments; (3) samples of a few brochures, newsletters, etc. (if unavailable electronically); and (4) a sealed envelope containing salary information in hardcopy, if desired (note: this option is available if an institution does not wish to place salary information on the electronic flash drive or CD.)

In addition to including a hardcopy of the 27 page application questionnaire inside the report covers as described above, the application questionnaire must also be contained in electronic form on the flash drive or CD, and must be linked to attachments in accordance with instructions below. (NOTE: if you are unable to link the questionnaire to attachments after following the instructions below, please contact accreditation staff.)

Answering Questions On The Application Questionnaire. When completing the application questionnaire, applicants are required to include carefully considered statements of purpose to provide the Commission with a clear understanding of each institution’s objectives. For example, the mere statement that an institution was established to exhibit animals to the general public will not be sufficient. It is also helpful to the Commission to know the reason(s) a new applicant institution is seeking accreditation.

Naming Files. All required attachments must be included. Materials must be provided electronically, and linked to the application questionnaire. Files should be named according to the question to which they pertain, for example, the electronic file of an institution’s Institutional Collection Plan should be named “AC-3 ICP”. Other examples include “VC-6.a.”
Restraint Protocol”, “C-2 Conservation Plan”, and “EI-10 Interpretive Program”.

Acceptable Formats. Acceptable formats for submittals on CD or flash drive are Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Adobe Acrobat (PDF), Power Point, and JPEG. If you desire to use a format not listed here, please check with AZA accreditation staff first to be certain it is acceptable.

Instructions For Creating Hyperlinks Within Your Application Questionnaire Using Windows Explorer. [NOTE: if you are unable to link the questionnaire to attachments after following these instructions, please contact accreditation staff.] The flash drive or CD must contain the application questionnaire and all attachments. Institutions must link each attachment to the “See CD or flash drive” box appearing on the application questionnaire itself. Instructions for doing so follow.

[NOTE: It is recommended that the questionnaire be filled out in its entirety before adding the hyperlinks. The check boxes within the questionnaire can only be filled out when the document is protected/locked, whereas hyperlinks can only be added when the document is unprotected/unlocked (see step 3 below for instructions to do so). Therefore it is easiest to fill in all check boxes and then go back and create all hyperlinks.]

1. Create a folder on your computer that contains the completed application questionnaire and all attachments (named according to the question to which they pertain; see “Naming Files” above).
2. Open the completed application questionnaire.
3. Unprotect/unlock the document using the word: Tornado (case sensitive)
   a. Microsoft Word 2003: Click on the Tools tab at the top of the page. Scroll down to “Unprotect Document.” Enter password. Click OK. Document is now unlocked and hyperlinks can be added.
   b. Microsoft Word 2007, 2010: Click on the Review tab at the top of the page. Click on Restrict Editing. Click Stop Protection, located at the bottom of the shaded box. Enter password. Click OK. Document is now unlocked and hyperlinks can be added.
4. When you come to the first question in which you need to create a hyperlink (for example GI-5), highlight the words See CD or flash drive at the appropriate question, then right click and choose Hyperlink.
5. Choose the attachment that corresponds to the question.
   a. Microsoft Word 2003: Choose File on the right hand side of the dialogue box. A second box should open that shows the files available on your computer. Double click on the file that you would like to link.
   b. Microsoft Word 2007, 2010: Use the Look In box to find the file that you would like to link. Once found, highlight the file and click OK.
6. Once linked the item should be underlined and in a different color. Click on the link to be sure it works. You may need to hold down the Control button on your keyboard as you click the link.
7. You can also link an entire folder that contains several individual documents, which are needed to answer a single question. For example, F-9 under the Finance section asks for information regarding capital improvement projects that have taken place over the past 5 years. Perhaps you have one folder titled Improvement Projects and within that folder you have separate documents for each year. In this situation, rather than selecting a single file to link, highlight the entire folder and click OK.
8. After testing the hyperlink you can choose to either leave the language associated with the link on the questionnaire as “See CD or Flash Drive” or rename the link. To rename the link simply highlight the words “See CD or Flash Drive” and type the new name (for instance Institutional Collection Plan).
9. Once you have gone through the entire application questionnaire, linked all the necessary documentation, and checked that the links open, be sure to save the document. You can then close the document.
10. Now it is time to copy and paste the entire application folder (including questionnaire and all attachments) to a CD or flash drive. We recommend trying out the burned CD or flash drive on a different computer from the one you tested it on to be sure that all of the links still open, before proceeding with making the four other copies.

11. See “Assembly” (page 14) for final compilation of application binders.

Photos. Please include on the flash drive or CD with your application at least 10 photos that best depict your institution on a typical day of operation, and at least 3 photos that depict your institution in winter or cold-weather, if applicable.

Shipping. Upon completion, five copies of the fully assembled application should be sent to AZA, addressed as follows: Accreditation Programs, AZA, 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 710, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

ACCREDITATION PROCESSING [listed in order of occurrence following receipt of application; times of occurrence are approximate]

AT A GLANCE

Weeks 1 & 2:

- **Visiting Committee Selection Process Begins.** The institution’s CEO/Director will receive a list of 8-12 potential Visiting Committee members for review and approval from accreditation staff. The CEO/Director is expected to review the list and may eliminate the names of any individuals. The list must then be signed and faxed to AZA within 15 days of its receipt. If a significant number of names are eliminated by the CEO/Director, additional names will be substituted until there is a viable list of at least 8 potential inspectors. Team members will then be assigned by the Commission from the names remaining on the list. An institution may not select the members of its Visiting Committee.

- **Primary Reviewer Is Assigned.** The Primary Reviewer is a member of the Accreditation Commission, or a Commission Advisor, who is assigned to the case and receives a complete set of the institution’s application materials. This individual serves as chief examiner on behalf of the Commission and also works in conjunction with the Visiting Committee. As a member of the Accreditation Commission the Primary Reviewer is present at the institution’s hearing. In the case of new applicants the Primary Reviewer automatically serves as Chair of the Visiting Committee, and may occasionally do so for currently accredited institutions as well.

Weeks 2-4:

- **The Visiting Committee Is Assembled.** Assembling the inspection team may take 10 or more working days to complete, depending upon how quickly we receive the selection sheet back from the institution’s CEO/Director, and how quickly the selected individuals respond when contacted. If all team members cannot be confirmed from the initial list, a second list will be provided. For institutions that have been inspected in the past, an inspector from a previous team will be selected, if available. For new applicants the Primary Reviewer automatically serves as Chair of the Visiting Committee. As soon as a complete team is confirmed, the institution’s CEO/Director will be notified by email. [NOTE: for more information on how inspectors are selected see Criteria For Selection Of The Visiting Committee, pages 29-30.]
● The Inspection Is Scheduled. Upon confirmation of the team, the inspection will be scheduled by the Chair of the inspection team in consultation with the institution’s CEO/Director and the members of the inspection team. Once dates are selected, the institution should provide the team Chair with information for accommodations at a nearby hotel. Team members may then contact the hotel to make reservations, or the institution may choose to make these arrangements for the team. That decision is left to the preference of the institution, and the CEO/Director should inform the team Chair as to the institution’s preference at the time the dates are finalized.

Months 2 & 3:

● Application and Materials are Reviewed. Accreditation staff will distribute application materials from the institution to individual inspection team members and to the Primary Reviewer. These individuals will begin a thorough study of the application in preparation for the inspection and as part of the overall evaluation of the institution.

Months 3 – 5:

● The Inspection Occurs. Typically, most inspections take place during the third, fourth, or fifth month of the process.

● The List of Concerns is Generated. At the conclusion of the inspection the inspection team generates the List of Concerns and delivers it to the institution’s CEO/Director during the exit interview at the conclusion of the inspection.

● The Institution Begins Addressing the List. The institution should begin addressing the List of Concerns as soon as it is delivered.

Months 5 & 6:

● The Inspection Report Is Submitted. As soon as the inspection team finishes its inspection, it begins writing its full report to the Accreditation Commission. That report is submitted to accreditation staff for initial review, and then distributed to the Accreditation Commission.

● The Institution’s Progress Report Is Submitted. The institution must submit a report informing the Accreditation Commission of progress made addressing the List of Concerns, including documentation. That report is submitted to accreditation staff and is then distributed to the Accreditation Commission.

● The Accreditation Commission Conducts Initial Review and Evaluation. The Commission evaluates all information received from the inspection teams, the institutions, and accreditation staff.

Month 7:

● The Institution’s Hearing Takes Place. The institution appears at its scheduled hearing before the Accreditation Commission to discuss further progress made addressing the
List of Concerns and to provide the Commission an opportunity to ask any questions it may have. Following the hearing the Commission makes its decision and the institution is informed.

- **The Institution Receives A Copy Of Inspection Report.** The institution will receive a copy of the inspection report following the hearing when it meets with the Chair of the Accreditation Commission to discuss the Commission’s decision.

**Month 8:**

- **The Institution Receives An Official Letter Reiterating Outcome.** AZA will provide a letter, as quickly as possible after the hearing, reiterating the outcome, and outlining additional action required, if any.

- **Accredited Institutions Receive Plaque.** A plaque denoting the institution’s accreditation is delivered, and presentations are made or scheduled if requested by the institution.

**THE INSPECTION**

**Overview:** During the inspection, the Visiting Committee is acting on behalf of the Accreditation Commission and the Board of Directors. Inspectors will usually tour the grounds and facilities as a group, and individually return to areas of particular interest or expertise thereafter. During this time they interview staff members, view records, and make note of positive and negative impressions. During the site visit, the team will also meet with members of the governing authority and key personnel. The full cooperation of the institution’s staff will greatly assist the process. Inspections are generally conducted in two to five days.

**NOTE, currently or previously accredited applicants:** it is important to understand that any concerns identified in past AZA inspections that remain present will be considered particularly serious and indicative of potential issues such as lack of progress, slippage, failure to maintain standards, and/or lack of commitment and/or funding to address concerns. The outcome of the case may be affected.

**NOTE, all applicants:** should the inspection team have a concern regarding the comfort or welfare of any animal at the institution, it will be considered a *major* issue.

**Advance Notice:** Ask the inspection team chair to communicate any concerns noted during the inspection that could potentially be addressed while the team is still on grounds. Address those concerns if possible, and present documentation at the exit interview.

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

**Inspectors’ Expenses.** The applicant institution bears the expenses of the Visiting Committee. Every effort will be made to hold expenses to a reasonable minimum. AZA reimburses the inspectors directly and, as soon as all inspectors have submitted expense reports, the applicant institution will either be invoiced by AZA for the total amount due, or refunded the unused balance from the $1,500 deposit. Reimbursable expenses are food, lodging, transportation, parking, postage, film, film processing, and any reasonable expense directly associated with the inspection.
Interviews. An opportunity for the Visiting Committee to interview staff in confidence, without supervisors or management present, should be provided. The Committee will also interview members of the institution’s governing authority at some point during the visit.

Media Coverage. It is inappropriate to schedule media coverage during the inspection. If local media wishes to interview inspectors, the institution should arrange an appropriate time outside of the scheduled inspection process for a member of the team to serve as spokesperson. Inspectors may speak only of the accreditation process in general, and not about the specific case.

Private Work Area. A dedicated workspace should be made available to the Committee while it is on site. The Visiting Committee members need ample time and space to discuss, in private, various aspects of the institution’s operation, review their reports, and to compile the final List of Concerns prior to the exit interview with the CEO/Director.

Records. All records of the institution must be readily available and staff members must be on hand to answer any questions posed by the inspectors.

Social Events. While it is helpful for the applicant 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 be expected to participate in social functions beyond those required for the orderly discharge of its duties and responsibilities.

Visiting Committee’s Written Report to the Commission. In the weeks following the inspection, the Visiting Committee (inspection team), under the direction of the Chair, shall prepare a full written report for the Commission. That report, as well as the List of Concerns presented to the institution during the exit interview, shall be submitted to the Commission for review and formal action at the institution’s scheduled hearing. The report provides insight regarding the Visiting Committee’s impression of the facility, its operations, and the care provided its animals. Applicant institutions shall receive a copy of the full Visiting Committee Report at the conclusion of the scheduled hearing before the Commission (see also The Hearing, page 21).

CONCLUSION OF INSPECTION

Exit Interview. The inspection shall conclude in an exit interview with the institution’s Director or CEO. [NOTE: It is strongly recommended that the institution’s Director or CEO be present for the exit interview. However, should unavoidable circumstances dictate, the CEO/Director may designate a representative to meet with the Visiting Committee.] The CEO/Director may have staff present at the exit interview. During the exit interview, the Visiting Committee will discuss the general impressions (positive and negative) formed by the team during the inspection. The institution’s accomplishments will be discussed along with the list of major and lesser concerns that must be addressed for the institution to be considered in compliance with standards.

List of Concerns. During the exit interview, the Committee shall provide the CEO/Director with a written list of any items found to be of concern (this list shall also be provided to the Commission as part of the written report). The list will include both major concerns and lesser concerns, and those carrying forward from previous inspections (if any). [NOTE: It is important to understand that should there be items carrying forward from previous inspections, these will be of
An institution should strive to address as many items on the list of concerns as possible prior to the hearing before the Commission. However, consideration will be given to the amount of time an institution has between the exit interview and the hearing, and the amount of time believed reasonable to complete each concern. Items that cannot be completed prior to the hearing should be covered by an action plan with estimated completion dates.

NOTE: The Visiting Committee (inspection team) is an arm of the Accreditation Commission. However, the Accreditation Commission is the final authority. The Accreditation Commission may have concerns that do not appear on the List of Concerns and, if so, may ask questions accordingly during the hearing.

Appealing A Concern. If an institution disagrees with any of the items cited by inspectors on the List of Concerns, the CEO/Director should discuss this with the Visiting Committee (inspection team) during the inspection and/or exit interview. If the matter is resolved at that time to the satisfaction of the Committee 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, the CEO/Director should address the issue in the written Response to the List of Concerns (see “Written Response to the List of Concerns” below) 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, being sure to include documentation. The Accreditation Commission will thoroughly review the institution’s Response to the List of Concerns prior to the institution’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.

Written Response To the List of Concerns. Upon receipt, the institution should begin immediately addressing the List of Concerns. In addition, the institution must supply the Accreditation Commission with a written response to the List of Concerns prior to the hearing. The response must be submitted by the deadline set by (typically 4-6 weeks before the hearing). The purpose of the written response to the list of concerns is to provide information to the Commission in advance so that, at the hearing, the institution’s CEO/Director need only report on additional progress made since the response was submitted. The response should list each concern, followed by a description of how that concern is being addressed. The response must include documentation (photos, copies of contracts, agreements, policies, etc.). The response should be submitted by e-mail in electronic format, including all attachments and photographs, and followed-up thereafter with a signed hardcopy sent by regular mail. Photos may be submitted on flash drive or CD if too numerous to submit by e-mail. NOTE: Failure to have taken corrective measures, or to present solid plans for doing so, will affect the outcome of the case.

Updates to the Written Response To the List of Concerns. It is not necessary to send updates to the written response once it has been submitted to AZA. As the members of the Accreditation Commission prepare for upcoming hearings, they will likely not have time to read updates. Instead, when the institution’s hearing begins, the Commission Chair will ask the CEO/Director to provide verbal updates on additional progress made since the written response was submitted. If he/she wishes to bring photographs documenting the additional progress, these should be limited to essential only (bring two copies: one for each side of the table). Please do not bring notebooks or large numbers of reports, photographs, and other documents to the hearing. Written updates and documentation should be mailed or emailed to AZA staff and will be placed into the institution’s file once the hearings are completed.
Inspection Evaluation Form. Each applicant is provided an opportunity to evaluate the overall process and the Visiting Committee’s effectiveness immediately after the inspection. The Accreditation Department will provide the institution’s CEO/Director a short e-mail evaluation form requesting input regarding the overall process and the performance of the Visiting Committee. Returning the form is optional, but helps the Commission to better evaluate the effectiveness of the overall process. Information contained in the form shall be shared with the Commission and may be shared with the Visiting Committee to assist them in enhancing their performance in future inspections.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ACCREDITATION HEARING

Preparing For The Hearing. Approximately eight weeks prior to the Commission’s meeting, the institution’s CEO/Director will be notified regarding the exact date, time, and location of the institution’s hearing. The CEO/Director should be prepared to verbally update the Commission on any additional progress made since the written response to the List of Concerns was submitted. The collective information from both the written and verbal reports will be considered, along with application materials, the inspection report, and other current information, in determining the outcome. Failure to have taken corrective measures, or to present solid plans for doing so, will affect the outcome of the case.

Who May Attend. The CEO/Director is encouraged to bring to the hearing any staff, governing authority representatives, governmental officials, or individuals considered pertinent to the anticipated discussion, or as observers.

CEO/Director’s Attendance At The Hearing. It is important that the institution’s CEO/Director attend the hearing to answer questions, authorize action, and to make any statements desired. If the institution’s CEO/Director cannot attend, a written notification must be provided to AZA as soon as possible. The notification must include an explanation, and provide the name of who will attend in place of the CEO/Director. The written notification must also give full authority to the CEO/Director’s selected representative to act on behalf of the institution.

The Hearing. A waiting room (the “pre-hearing room”) will be provided near the hearing room. Immediately prior to the hearing, the Commission will conduct its final review of the case. When the Commission is ready to begin the hearing, a Commission member will come to the pre-hearing room to notify the institution’s representatives. The hearing portion of the review typically lasts 15-20 minutes. Hearings are closed sessions, and are attended by all Commissioners, Commission Advisors, the Vice President, Accreditation Programs, the Manager, Accreditation Programs, and the AZA Executive Director. Hearings may also be attended, on occasion, by members of the AZA Board of Directors, the AZA President & CEO, and members of the Visiting Committee.

After the hearing, the applicant’s representatives will retire to a second waiting room (the “post-hearing room”), and the Commission will resume in private session to deliberate and make a decision. Once a decision is reached, the institution’s representatives will be joined in the post-hearing room by the Commission Chair, the institution’s Primary Reviewer, AZA’s Executive Director, and the Vice President of Accreditation Programs to discuss the Commission’s decision and to provide the institution with a copy of the full Visiting Committee Report. An official letter noting the decision and points of discussion will be sent to the institution in the weeks following the hearing.
Final Decision of the Commission. The Commission’s decision will be based on what exists at the time of the inspection and the review at the hearing—not on future plans. In reaching its decision, the Accreditation Commission also considers the following:

- Six months of reviewing and evaluating the documents, records, policies, and practices of the institution
- The previous inspection report (if one exists)
- The 2-5 day on-site inspection
- The current inspection report
- The recommendation of the inspection team
- The investigation of comments from colleagues and outside sources (if any)
- The number and nature of concerns
- The institution’s response in addressing the identified concerns
- The institution’s hearing
- The state of the institution, its facilities, its management, and its overall operations at present

The Commission may take one of the following actions:

A. Grant Accreditation: The Commission will grant accreditation when it is reasonably satisfied that the applicant institution meets the requirements of an accredited institution. 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 during the five-year accreditation period.

B. Table Accreditation: The Commission may table an institution’s application if it determines that certain conditions must be met or additional information submitted before the institution can be considered as meeting accreditation standards. In addition, the Commission must believe that the institution is capable of meeting those standards within one year, and a follow-up inspection is required at the end of that year. If an accredited institution is tabled, it remains accredited during the period of tabling, although tabling indicates that concerns exist. The Chair shall write the institution’s CEO/Director, providing a copy to the principal officer of the institution’s governing authority, advising of the Commission’s action and concerns. The institution is then given one year to meet the standards, undergo a follow-up inspection (a new application is not required), and return for a second hearing to demonstrate how the concerns of the Visiting Committee and Commission have been addressed. At the conclusion of one year, the Commission must act to accredit or deny (continuing to table is not an option). Processing shall terminate for applicants not responding in the time allotted, and it shall become necessary to submit a new application and materials should accreditation be desired again in the future.

If an institution is tabled, the year of tabling shall be deducted from the institution’s subsequent five-year accreditation cycle should the institution receive accreditation at the end of the tabled year. Institutions that are successfully accredited following the year of tabling must undergo a follow-up inspection at the halfway point of the four years of accreditation remaining in the accreditation cycle (an application and related fees are not required, but the cost of the mid-cycle inspection shall be borne by the institution).

C. Deny Accreditation: The Commission will deny accreditation when an institution does not meet accreditation standards at the time and, in its opinion, requires in excess of one year to successfully do so. The Chair shall write the institution’s CEO/Director, providing
Receiving Accreditation. Once accreditation is achieved, the institution’s CEO/Director will receive, at the hearing, a certificate acknowledging the institution’s accreditation (for use in applying for permits, grants, exemptions, etc.) In addition, within approximately four weeks, the institution will receive an official letter from the Commission acknowledging the accreditation, and outlining any requirements specific to the case. The institution will also receive an engraved wall plaque within a few months of receiving accreditation. New institutions will additionally receive from the AZA Membership Department a pro-rated invoice for AZA annual dues and a welcome package containing useful membership information, “Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums” window decals, and access to the AZA logo for use on letterhead and in publications, in addition to other membership items.

Appeals. If accreditation is denied, a request for appeal may be made in writing to the AZA Executive Committee within thirty (30) days of the date of the written notification of denial. The AZA Executive Committee must decide in forty-five (45) days whether to grant an appeal hearing. If the AZA Executive Committee grants an appeal hearing, it will be conducted by the AZA Board of Directors at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The determination of the Board is final. Institutions whose appeals are denied may reapply one year after the date of the Commission’s original denial (assuming all identified concerns have been sufficiently addressed). Submission of a new application and materials will be necessary. Denial of accreditation also results in loss of AZA membership for institutions that are accredited at the time denial is imposed. Appeals should be mailed to: AZA Executive Committee, Appeals Process, AZA, 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 710, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

WHEN IT’S TIME TO PROCESS AGAIN

The granting of accreditation is for five years, and expires at the end of that period. Accredited institutions must successfully complete the entire process again before the end of that period to avoid a lapse in accreditation and AZA membership (see Long Term Expectations immediately following). Accredited institutions are expected to keep track of their own expiration dates (available on the AZA web site at http://www.aza.org/current-accreditation-list/, or by contacting AZA.) Institutions will be reminded six months in advance of the deadline for submission of materials (twelve months in advance of accreditation expiration), but should not rely on this reminder as a method of tracking an expiration date. It is important that the yearly edition of the accreditation materials being used by an institution match the year in which the application is to be submitted.

LONG TERM EXPECTATIONS

Accreditation is mandatory for Institutional membership in AZA. Similarly, membership and participation in AZA must be maintained as a condition of accreditation. 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. Even though an institution may have been accredited previously, there is no guarantee that accreditation will be granted during subsequent inspections. Standards are subject to continuous review and enhancement. Once accredited, an institution is expected to continuously advance its
professional operation and constantly maintain, or surpass, all professional standards. [See also “Preamble” appearing on page 5 of the 2015 edition of the Accreditation Standards and Related Policies.]

GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

**Accidents Involving Injury or Welfare.** Should an accident occur at an accredited institution involving serious injury or affecting the welfare of a visitor, staff, or institution animal, a written report must be submitted to the Accreditation Commission within thirty (30) days explaining what happened and noting what actions are being taken by the institution as a result. The Commission will determine if a special inspection or other action is necessary and will notify the institution in writing once a decision has been made.

Considerations for submitting such reports include:  
**Staff Injuries** – site and/or animal-related injury to staff, causing death or significant trauma resulting in extended hospital stay and/or sustained disability.  
**Public Injuries** – site and/or animal-related injury to people other than staff, causing death or significant trauma resulting in extended hospital stay and/or sustained disability.  
**Animal Incidents** – these include unusual circumstances involving a single animal or group of animals, and/or incidents of mass mortality; escape of a dangerous animal or mass escapes of any species within the zoo or during transport; or death/grievous trauma to individuals of an endangered or other notable species within the zoo or during transport.

**Accidents Resulting In Human Fatality:** An on-site inspection shall be automatic after any accident involving an animal that results in a human fatality. The inspection shall focus on the incident and shall be scheduled to take place as soon after the incident as can be reasonably scheduled. Site related human fatalities not involving an animal shall be immediately assessed by AZA relative to the AZA Accreditation Standards. The Commission shall determine if a special inspection is necessary in those cases and will notify the institution in writing once a decision has been made. Institutions are responsible for submitting a written report to the Accreditation Commission as noted under “Accidents Involving Injury or Welfare”, above.

**Accreditation Cycle:** The cycle of accreditation shall be five years, after which an institution must undergo the full accreditation process again. *Exceptions:*  
• In cases where an applicant processes and is granted accreditation on a cycle in conflict with the geographic rule, its initial accreditation cycle will be shortened to four and a half years to place it on the proper seasonal cycle for future inspections (see Geographic Location, pages 26-27).  
• If an extension is granted, the year of extension shall be deducted from the institution’s subsequent five-year accreditation cycle if the institution receives accreditation at the end of the year of extension (see Extensions of Accreditation, page 26).  
• If an institution is tabled, the year of tabling shall be deducted from the institution’s subsequent five-year accreditation cycle if the institution receives accreditation at the end of the tabled year (see Table Accreditation, page 22).

**Addition of an Elephant Inspector.** For institutions with elephants, an inspector who specializes in elephants will be added to the regular team and will focus on the institution’s elephant program.

**Addition of a Specialist Inspector.** It is occasionally necessary for a specialist inspector to be added to an inspection team. The Commission will determine, on a case by case basis, when this is justified and will notify the institution. Examples would be zoological parks with aquarium facilities of a sufficient size and nature to require an inspection team member
specializing in aquatics. The same would be true of aquariums with exhibits containing land-based animals, etc.

**Attendance At The Hearing (Who Should Be There).** The institution’s CEO/Director must attend the hearing to answer questions, authorize action, and to make any statements desired. The CEO/Director may bring to the hearing any individual(s) he or she would like to have present. This may include members of the institution’s staff, governing authority, support organization, or local government officials. If the CEO/Director cannot attend, a written notification must be provided to AZA as soon as possible. The notification must include an explanation, and give full authority to an individual selected by the CEO/Director to represent the institution in place of the CEO/Director.

**CEO/Director Requirement For Applicants Not Currently Accredited.** Any institution not currently accredited may not apply for accreditation if it is without a permanent, full-time CEO/Director. Materials may not be submitted under the leadership of an Interim or Acting Director.

**CEO/Director Vacancy.** When a vacancy occurs in the position of CEO/Director an accredited institution must notify the Accreditation Commission in writing, and a follow-up letter must be submitted to the Commission every six months thereafter reporting the status of the search until such time as the position is filled. An accredited institution that is without the services of a permanent, full-time, compensated CEO/Director for longer than one year may be subject to loss of accreditation and membership.

**CEO/Director Vacancy Occurring Immediately After Receiving Accreditation.** If a CEO/Director vacates his or her position at the institution within ninety days of receiving accreditation, the Commission may, in its discretion, require written biannual progress reports, or may require that the institution reprocess again at the earliest opportunity to do so once a new CEO/Director is in place.

**Change of Governance.** A change in governance refers to a change of the governing authority, such as from a governmental agency to society or vice versa. If a change in governance occurs, a letter or affidavit from the CEO or chairperson of the new governing authority is required pledging to uphold and abide by accreditation standards, including the AZA Charter & Bylaws, Code of Ethics, Acquisitions, Transfers, and Transitions Policy, and other related policies. The letter must be sent to the Commission within 30 days of the governance change.

**Change of Location.** In the event of a relocation of an accredited institution, the institution must reprocess for accreditation as soon as the new location is officially open. An application must be received by the submission deadline that falls immediately prior to, or following, the opening.

**Change of Ownership.** A change in ownership refers to the sale or formal transfer of ownership of an institution. In the event of a change in ownership of an accredited institution, the institution must reprocess for accreditation within 12 months, regardless of when its accreditation is scheduled to expire. A letter or affidavit from the CEO or chairperson of the purchasing or receiving organization is also required pledging to uphold and abide by accreditation standards, including the AZA Charter & Bylaws, Code of Ethics, Acquisitions, Transfers, and Transitions Policy, and other related policies. The letter must also indicate the new owner’s intent to submit materials applying for accreditation within the required time period. The letter must be sent to the Commission within 30 days of final sale or transfer.
Change of Scope. Accredited institutions must notify the Commission in writing in the event that a change in the scope of its facility occurs (for example, the opening of a new exhibit of significant proportions, or an exhibit that changes the overall scope of the institution, such as an aquarium in a zoo, or land-based animals in an aquarium, etc.). The Commission may assign a team, or individual, to conduct an inspection. Cost of such inspection shall be borne by the accredited institution concerned. (See Interim and Follow-up Inspections, page 27.)

Complaints. If a documented, written complaint is received from a member of the general public, the institution’s staff, or a professional colleague regarding an AZA-accredited institution, the Commission will take steps to determine the situation and, based upon its findings, will make recommendations to the institution, or take appropriate action. In some cases the Commission may assign a team to conduct an inspection. (See Interim and Follow-up Inspections, page 27.)

Elephant Management and Care – Requesting A Temporary Variance Under the AZA Standards. Institutions requesting a temporary variance under the AZA Standards For Elephant Management and Care should submit that request to the Accreditation Commission at the time it becomes apparent that a temporary variance may be needed. The request should be in the form of a letter detailing the temporary variance being requested, and should include all necessary documentation. The Commission will consider the requested temporary variance and will thereafter notify the institution of its decision. Variances may be granted for one-year, and must be re-applied for annually. NOTE: institutions not currently AZA-accredited must be in full compliance with AZA standards at the time application is made.

Extensions of Accreditation. Under extenuating or special circumstances extensions of accreditation may be granted to extend current accreditation by one year. An institution desiring an extension must submit a request in writing to the Accreditation Commission, including a full explanation as to why the extension is being requested, as soon as possible to avoid a potential lapse in accreditation and AZA membership. Before considering the request, the Commission may require a site visit to assess the institution’s ability to maintain accreditation standards during the period of extension. If a site visit is deemed necessary, it must take place prior to any decision being made by the Commission. The Commission will thereafter make a determination, and the institution will be notified. A second extension will be considered only in extreme cases, and will require a site visit. If an extension is granted, the year of extension shall be deducted from the institution’s subsequent five-year accreditation cycle should the institution receive accreditation at the end of the year of extension. [NOTE: Missing a deadline will not be considered an acceptable reason for extension of accreditation. Extenuating or special circumstances shall not include a vacancy in the position of CEO/Director.]

Geographic Location and Accreditation Cycle. To optimize weather conditions for inspectors and to create a more even distribution of the case load for the Commission, institutions located in geographic areas that typically experience a mild winter season will be placed on a five-year accreditation cycle that affords a fall-winter inspection (i.e., will have their accreditation expire in March). Institutions located in geographic areas that typically experience a harsh winter season will be placed on a five-year accreditation cycle that affords a spring-summer inspection (i.e., will have their accreditation expire in September). In cases where an applicant processes and is granted accreditation on a cycle in conflict with the geographic rule, its initial accreditation cycle will be shortened to four and a half years to place it on the proper seasonal cycle for future inspections. NOTE: Because aquariums, by their nature, are primarily indoor facilities, they will be placed on a five-year accreditation cycle that affords a fall-winter inspection (i.e., will have their accreditation expire in March).
Institutional Membership In AZA: Institutional membership and participation in AZA must be maintained as a condition of accreditation.

Institutions Under Construction. Institutions currently being constructed may apply for accreditation prior to the opening date; however, the on-site inspection will not take place until the institution is officially open to the general public and a permanent, full-time CEO/Director has been on board for at least six months. (See Deadlines and Early Submittals pages 11-12).

Institutions Within Institutions. In order to be accredited, a zoological park or aquarium which is a part of a larger institution (such as a university, museum, or botanical garden) must be distinct enough to be separately identified and must adequately fulfill the definition of a zoological park or aquarium as earlier defined. When accreditation is granted in such cases, it will apply only to the zoological park or aquarium concerned and not to the non-zoological activities of the larger organization in fields in which AZA has no expertise.

Interim and Follow-up Inspections. The Accreditation Commission or AZA Board of Directors may, at its discretion, assign a team to conduct an interim or follow-up inspection of any AZA-accredited institution at any time during the five-year accreditation period. A follow-up inspection shall be conducted for all tabled institutions at the end of the tabled period, as a condition of proceeding forward in the process. While on site, the individual or team may, at their discretion, inspect all or portions of the institution. Cost of such inspection shall be borne by the institution as a requirement of maintaining and/or achieving accreditation. (See Mid-Cycle Inspections, page 28).

**Mentoring Program.** The Commission, itself, does not conduct “pre-accreditation” inspections. Although it is not a requirement, the Commission strongly encourages institutions that are not AZA-accredited to have their operations evaluated by an official mentor approved and assigned by the Accreditation Commission prior to submitting an application. The Commission recommends that currently-accredited institutions consider doing the same prior to undergoing the process again when accreditation expires at the end of five-years (see Long Term Expectations page 24). To request assignment of a Commission-approved mentor, the institution should contact AZA accreditation staff. A Commission-approved mentor is a professional from an accredited institution who serves regularly as an inspector, is a past or present member of the Accreditation Commission, or an Accreditation Commission Advisor. The Commission-approved mentor is considered by the Accreditation Commission as being particularly well versed in current accreditation standards, expectations, and fundamental AZA philosophies and best practices, and can be consulted throughout the preparation phase. The mentor will be available to the institution by phone throughout the preparation process to provide guidance regarding policies, procedures, agreements, situations, philosophies, and the assembly of the application materials as needed. In addition, it is considered important that the mentor visit the applicant institution for an unofficial inspection at least once, and thereafter as desired by the institution. Following the inspection, the mentor will provide a list identifying all things (including physical facilities and related issues, as well as practices and/or documents) that need work prior to making application, or before the official inspection, as the case may be. Additionally, in the case of first-time applicants, the mentor will provide a professional opinion as to whether the institution is best advised to make application later rather than sooner and, if later, may continue to work with the institution long-term in guiding it to full readiness. Any costs incurred by the mentor (including related travel, accommodations, and meals) are to be reimbursed directly to the mentor by the applicant institution.

Mentors should be requested at least one year prior to submitting an application, and no earlier than five years prior to submitting an application. Mentors cannot be provided at the time of application or after an application is submitted. Having a mentor does not guarantee
that an institution will be granted accreditation. Accreditation can only be achieved by a judgment from the AZA Accreditation Commission that the applicant institution meets or exceeds all AZA standards, and supports and employs AZA practices and philosophies.

**[NOTE: AZA is in the process of creating a formalized mentoring program to be called “Candidate for Membership”. The “Candidate for Membership” program is anticipated to launch in 2015. Please check with the AZA office for details.]**

**Mid-Cycle Inspections.** The Accreditation Commission may, at its discretion, require a mid-cycle inspection as a condition of maintaining accreditation. When such an inspection is required, the visiting team will focus on key areas identified when accreditation was issued, and will also review the institution as a whole. Cost of such inspection shall be borne by the institution as a condition of maintaining accreditation. An application and application fees are not required.

Mid-cycle inspections may apply to the following:

- Institutions that are tabled and receive accreditation one year later.
- Institutions that meet minimum standards when accreditation is granted but that the Commission believes may be challenged in successfully maintaining AZA standards throughout the full five-year cycle of accreditation.

**Multiple Facilities Under One Authority.** If two or more institutions are under the same ownership and governing authority, administration, or control, are located adjacent to each other, and public admittance for all institutions is covered by a single entrance fee, they will be considered as a single institution. In such cases, the institution(s) should first submit a request in writing for the consideration of the Commission. All facilities are subject to inspection. Should the Commission determine that the institutions do not meet the above criteria, processing as separate facilities will be necessary.

**Offsite Facilities.** The inspection will include an institution’s offsite facilities. An offsite facility is one that is owned and operated by the institution, is not open to the public, and operates in support of the institution. Institutions must list all offsite facilities. Examples of offsite facilities include, but are not limited to: food storage areas, maintenance, quarantine, and animal holding areas. The Primary Reviewer, in consultation with the inspection team chair, will determine which of these areas need to be inspected.

**Rescinding Accreditation.** The Commission may rescind accreditation at any time if it concludes that accreditation standards are not being consistently met and maintained.

**Temporary Closings.** Institutions temporarily closed to the public will retain their accreditation and their AZA membership. Should an institution’s cycle of accreditation review fall within the period of temporary closure, an extension must be requested in writing prior to the institution’s regular deadline for submission of accreditation materials. During the period of closure, a written Progress Report must be submitted every six months until such time as the institution has re-opened. Upon re-opening, the institution must submit materials for full accreditation review by the first deadline that falls after re-opening. In the case of institutions closed for less than six (6) months, a waiver may be requested in writing.
CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

In conjunction with the initial review, each institution will be provided with a list of potential Visiting Committee inspectors, listing qualified persons with expertise in three primary categories: • operations, • curatorial/husbandry (animal management), and • veterinary medicine. The institution’s CEO/Director is expected to review the list and may eliminate the names of any individuals. If a large number of eliminations are made, additional names will be substituted by AZA until there is a viable list of at least 8 potential inspectors. Team members will then be assigned by AZA from the names remaining on the list. An institution may not select the members of its Visiting Committee. For new applicants the Primary Reviewer automatically serves as Chair of the Visiting Committee. Once the team is selected and confirmed, the team Chair will consult with the applicant institution’s CEO/Director and with team members to determine the dates of the inspection (see also Visiting Committee Selection Process Begins and The Inspection Is Scheduled, page 16-17).

[NOTE: exceptions to criteria listed below may be made occasionally on an individual basis by the Accreditation Commission Chair, Vice Chair, or by the Vice President, Accreditation Programs, unless otherwise indicated.]

Basic Criteria For Service As An Accreditation Inspector
• Individual membership in AZA (Professional Fellow or Professional Affiliate members preferred)
• Current employment at an AZA-accredited institution
• Minimum of 5 years of high level experience at an AZA-accredited institution
• Support of current supervisor
• Must stay current with AZA accreditation training and standards
• Ability to maintain complete impartiality
• Good communication and writing skills
• Must have relevant professional experience (previous and/or current position) and expertise sufficient to fulfill responsibilities in one of the three primary roles on the inspection team (Operations, Animal Management, Veterinary Medicine)

Criteria for Service As Team Chair
• Basic criteria for service as an accreditation inspector (see above)
• Participation as member of an inspection team at a minimum of two different institutions
• Involvement in AZA accreditation process at own institution (preferred, not required)
• Strong leadership, organizational, and interpersonal skills
• 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 Retired Fellows’ Service As An Accreditation Inspector
[no exceptions may be made]:
• Basic criteria for service as an accreditation inspector [except for employment status] (see above)
• Be retired, or in transition, from an AZA-accredited institution
• Must be approved by the Accreditation Commission prior to service
• Must attend AZA annual conferences
• Must remain current with AZA policies and practices
• Must thoroughly review the inspector’s handbook and the accreditation standards annually
• Must stay abreast of current practices within the profession
Criteria for Determination of Team Size
• Size of the institution and complexity of operations; teams range from two to five

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)
• Teams should include at least one member from an institution similar in size and budget to the institution to be inspected
• Two Person Teams should include one member with extensive experience in both operations and animal management, and one with extensive experience in veterinary medicine
• 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 or more with expertise particularly relevant to the institution being inspected (such as aquatics, elephants, birds, etc.)

Team Tools
Resources available to the team include:
• The Visiting Committee Inspector’s Handbook which fully explains the parameters for an institution to be considered accredited and also provides information regarding an inspector’s participation in the process.
• The Accreditation Standards and Related Policies containing standards and policies related to the accreditation process.
• The Primary Reviewer (a member of the Commission or a Commission Advisor) who serves as the Visiting Committee’s direct line to the Commission.
• AZA Accreditation Staff who can answer policy questions and concerns, provide support, and consult with the team regarding issues that may surface during the inspection.
• Inspector Training sessions are offered annually at AZA’s annual conference. Inspectors should attend the general session at least once every 3 years, and specific-topic sessions as offered. The general session covers best management practices, safety requirements, related specialty concerns or specialty areas of knowledge, practical inspection techniques, evaluations of past inspections, and the opportunity to ask members of the Accreditation Commission questions, and to discuss experiences with other inspectors.

COMMONLY FOUND CONCERNS & PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

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

Primary considerations include:

• Acquisitions, Transfers, and Transitions (ATT). The Visiting Committee shall ascertain the institution’s acquisitions, transfers, and transitions policy (ATT policy) adheres, at minimum, to AZA’s Acquisitions, Transfers, and Transitions Policy, and that the policy is being followed.

• The Animals. The Visiting Committee shall consider the size and nature of the living environments provided for 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 institution’s collection plan adheres, at minimum, to accreditation requirements.

• Animal Health Care. An 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 to the animals must be considered adequate for the number and nature of the species at the institution.

• Animal Security. The security program employed by the applicant institution 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.
\textbf{Conservation and Education.} The scope of the institution's 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, an institution must participate in every SSP program that pertains to an animal belonging to the institution. Institutions may indicate at what level they desire to participate in each SSP. The institution’s Annual Report on Conservation and Science (ARCS reports) will be reviewed for each of the five years since the institution’s previous inspection.

\textbf{Potentially Dangerous or Venomous Wildlife.} Institutions 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.

\textbf{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. Contingency plans will also be reviewed.

\textbf{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 institutions of similar size and nature.

\textbf{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” to accreditation standards”).

\textbf{Record Keeping.} The institution’s animal record-keeping system is of primary concern to the Accreditation Commission and will be carefully reviewed by the Visiting Committee.

\textbf{Safety.} The Visiting Committee shall review the institution’s safety programs employed for the protection of its employees, the visiting public, and the animals. Inspectors will look for potential safety hazards in both public and restricted areas.

\textbf{AREAS OF PRIMARY FOCUS}

Following are some of the areas of primary focus for the inspection team and the Accreditation Commission when evaluating an institution. Issues are broken into the main section headings covered by the Accreditation Standards. Institutions are encouraged to go beyond these focus areas.

\textbf{Animal Care, Welfare, & Management:} An institution must comply with all wildlife laws. In developing its accreditation program, 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. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The animals
2. Institutional Collection Plan
3. *All* animal facilities, including those that may be located off-site
4. Whether the animals are protected from excessive heat and cold
5. Whether the animals are provided sufficient shade in outdoor exhibits
6. Whether the animals have access to potable water both on and off exhibit
7. Whether 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)
8. Whether the institution has a sufficient *written* enrichment program
9. Whether all of the institution’s animals are being provided with appropriate enrichment on a regular and frequent basis
10. Whether exhibit enclosures are of sufficient size and nature to provide for the psychological and physical well-being of each animal
11. The written policy for animal and public safety in animal contact areas
12. The animals used in public contact areas
13. The animals used in education programs
14. The animals used in off-premises programs
15. Whether animal records are current and accurate
16. Records for animals *not* on ISIS (i.e., fish, insects, etc.)
17. Animal diets, food coolers, freezers, etc.
18. Whether there are noticeable signs of pests, and pest control solutions being utilized
19. SSP and endangered species designations on graphics and signs
20. Whether staff is aware of the institution’s euthanasia policy
21. Whether the facility’s ATT policy incorporates, at minimum, *all* requirements contained in AZA’s ATT Policy
22. Whether acquisition, transfer, and transition records are up-to-date
23. How verification is made that collection procedures used by the collector do not cause environmental abuse [for institutions utilizing aquatic collectors and dealers]
24. How verification is made that commercial collectors are properly permitted to legally collect animals from the wild [for institutions dealing with commercial collectors taking animals from the wild]

**Institutions Maintaining Elephants:** Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Whether there is compliance with the AZA Standards For Elephant Management And Care
2. The written elephant management protocol, which must include: · management policies, · staff responsibilities, · proper training techniques if in a protected contact style of management or proper use of an ankus if in a free contact system, · behavioral profiles on each elephant, · incident reports, · acceptable discipline methods, · chaining practices, · staff training protocols for new elephant handlers, · foot care schedules, etc.
3. The responsibilities of the Elephant Manager
4. Whether the Elephant Manager has completed the AZA Principals of Elephant Management training course
5. Whether there are a minimum of two *qualified* elephant keepers present during any contact with elephants.
6. Whether continuing education and training are supported by management
7. Whether elephant staff are aware of, or involved in, AZA, EMA, AAZK or the elephant TAG
8. Whether the elephants have access to natural substrate for dusting
9. Whether the elephants have shade provided during the heat of the day in a sufficient amount to accommodate *every* animal
10. The most recent incident report
Veterinary Care: The institution’s animal health care program must be under the direction of a licensed veterinarian. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Whether the institution follows the Guidelines For Zoo and Aquarium Veterinary Medical Programs and Veterinary Hospitals of the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
2. The animal record-keeping system
3. Whether medical records are up-to-date
4. Whether an adequate number of persons are employed in the animal health care program
5. Whether the extent of veterinary services provided to the animals is adequate
6. USDA reports, and what is being done to correct concerns
7. Quarantine procedures and their implementation
8. The alarm system and emergency procedures
9. Drug emergency protocols
10. Whether the veterinarian’s response time from home is adequate in an emergency
11. Whether adequate policies and procedures are in place for the safe handling of venomous animals
12. Whether adequate sera is available
13. Whether drugs used in aquariums or aquatic exhibits comply with FDA guidelines
14. Whether animal food, especially seafood products, are purchased from sustainable or well managed sources
15. How the institution ensures that the animals are not exposed to toxic plants from browse material and/or plants growing naturally on the grounds of the institution

Conservation: The scope of the institution’s participation in conservation programs is important. Consideration will be given to the size, budget, and other areas affecting these programs. 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. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The number of staff dedicated to conservation programming
2. Whether the facility is contributing sufficiently to AZA conservation programs based upon budget and/or staff size
3. Whether there are any Studbooks published by the institution
4. Whether all SSP animals are registered with the appropriate SSP
5. Participation in field conservation programs
6. Staff attendance at AZA conferences, SSP, and TAG meetings, etc.
7. Efforts undertaken for energy and natural resource conservation (i.e., recycling, water conservation initiatives, etc.)
8. Local and national program literature
9. Level of participation in conservation programs with colleges and universities
10. The institution’s Annual Report on Conservation and Science (ARCS reports) for the previous five years.

Education and Interpretation: Education must be an element in the mission statement of the institution, and all institutions must have a written education plan that matches current industry standards. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The number of staff dedicated to education programming
2. That one paid staff member is dedicated to education on (at least) a part-time basis
3. How the education message is conveyed to the casual visitor
4. Publications, brochures, or other printed material
5. Classrooms and teaching areas
6. The availability of funds allocated for education programs
7. Whether exhibit signage contains appropriate information
8. The level of education department contact with local schools, colleges, and other academia
9. The volunteer, docent, and outreach programs
10. The level of outreach programming and whether appropriate animals are being used
11. How graphics are developed and designed

Research: Consideration will be given to the size, budget, and other areas affecting these programs. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The protocol for evaluating potential research projects
2. How research projects are coordinated
3. How research is viewed by staff
4. Whether research information is published in appropriate journals
5. The level of involvement with local and regional academia

Governing Authority: The governing authority must be supportive of the institution’s decision to abide by the AZA Code of Ethics, Acquisitions, Transfers, and Transitions Policy, Accreditation Standards, and Charter & Bylaws, and must recognize and support the institution’s goals and objectives. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The governing authority’s perception of what the Director’s role is in the decision making process
2. The process of hiring and firing personnel
3. The lines of authority for acquisition, transfer, and transition of animals
4. The relationship between the governing authority and the Director
5. The levels of control on the part of the governing authority, and whether they are appropriate or inappropriate
6. The governing authority’s role in the day-to-day management of the institution, including animals, staff and programs

Staff: A key element of an institution’s successful operation is maintaining a staff sufficient in qualification and number. Effective communication, working relationship, and training are also important. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Job descriptions and the qualifications of staff in those positions
2. How familiar staff are with their responsibilities
3. Management’s relationship with staff, including problems and proposed solutions
4. Staff’s relationship with management, including problems and proposed solutions
5. Keeper’s roles and responsibilities, and relationship with management, including problems and proposed solutions
6. Clarity of lines of authority for staff
7. Staff training frequency, appropriateness, detail, etc.
8. Staff involvement with AZA, SSPs, TAGs, etc.
9. Funding for staff travel and participation in meetings, and which staff members are eligible to participate
10. Staff salaries to determine if levels are appropriate
Support Organization: A support organization must share an institution’s goals and objectives, and have a good working relationship with the institution. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The society representatives’ roles at the zoo or aquarium
2. The society’s support and fund-raising efforts
3. How funds are allocated and distributed
4. Financial reports and how funds benefit the zoo or aquarium
5. The relationship between the society board and staff
6. Whether having a support organization might be helpful, if one does not exist

Finance: An institution must provide sufficient evidence of its financial stability, including contingency plans, and funding for capital improvements and maintenance. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Whether the facility will be solvent for the five-year accreditation cycle, including long-term funding, contingency plans, emergency funds, etc.
2. Whether budget cuts or other financial problems are anticipated in the future
3. All financial records
4. The budgeting process, including who has control, how do requests originate, what is the role of the governing authority in the process, what are your in-house controls on spending, and is there an audit process, etc.

Physical Facilities: While the Commission is interested in an institution’s future plans, **accreditation will be based upon its operations and facilities at the time of inspection and review.** Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Facilities and conditions that exist at the time of the inspection and review
2. Appearance and condition of the buildings and grounds
3. Adequacy of maintenance program
4. Adequacy, appropriateness, and condition of exhibits and holding areas
5. Adequacy of furniture in exhibits
6. Appropriateness of exhibit groupings
7. Adequacy of ventilation in buildings and holding areas
8. Whether the animal facilities meet or exceed all relevant federal and state requirements
9. Whether all service areas have sufficient space for safety
10. Program of water quality monitoring for all animals, including written records

Safety/Security: The security program employed by an institution should be sufficient to provide appropriate protection for the animals, its employees, and the visiting public. Adequacy will be based on the operation, location, size, and physical facilities. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Whether the institution is conducting required drills in accordance with standards
2. Location of escape procedures throughout the institution
3. Files on safety incidents over the past five years (i.e., escapes, accidents, injuries, attacks, public problems)
4. Whether staff knows the process of treating an injury to a visitor, and where the nearest first-aid station is located
5. Whether exhibits are safe for the animals, the staff, and the public
6. Whether walkways, steps, and other public areas are free of debris and in good repair
7. Whether work areas are free of clutter and safe work environments for employees
8. How flammables and other hazardous solutions are stored
9. Whether adequate safety procedures are in place for potentially dangerous animals
10. The alarm systems and emergency procedures
11. Whether minimum operational safety standards for diving are being met [for institutions using underwater diving with compressed air]
12. Whether adequate security is provided for the animals both day and night
13. Whether incidents of vandalism have occurred, how prevalent the problem is, and how it is being addressed
14. Security personnel routines for nightly rounds, emergencies, etc.
15. Firearms storage
16. Whether the perimeter fence is of sufficient height and construction, and is separate from all exhibit fencing

**Guest Services:** While the Commission is interested in an institution’s future plans, **accreditation will be based upon its operations and facilities at the time of inspection and review.** Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. Facilities and conditions that exist at the time of the inspection and review
2. The public’s overall experience [examples: the entrance; parking; the restrooms (cleanliness and convenience); drinking fountains (cleanliness and convenience); refreshment stations (number and convenience); quality of food being sold; benches and rest areas (number and convenience); ADA compliance; etc.]
3. Way-finding: availability of maps and signs
4. Overall aesthetics of the exhibits, buildings, and grounds
5. Adequacy of maintenance and trash collection
6. Adequacy of ventilation in public buildings

**Other Programs/Activities:** An institution should have a strategic and/or master plan to guide the institution in its development. Among the things we will closely examine are:

1. The master plan and whether it is on schedule
2. The strategic plan
3. Other programs being developed or already in place

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE:**

*The criteria and procedures of the accreditation program are under continuous review by the Commission and Board of Directors. Constructive comments and suggestions are welcome and will receive careful attention.*

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