



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-252972-OMS-23
Project Category: Diversity and Inclusion

Wildlife Conservation Society

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$250,000
Amount of cost share:	\$250,000

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) will create a new training program for supervisors of internship programs in the five New York City wildlife parks operated by WCS — the Bronx, Central Park, Prospect Park, and Queens Zoos, and the New York Aquarium. The professional development training program will focus on positive youth development, cultural competence, supervising young adults, and mentoring and career support to help the intern supervisors develop the necessary skills to succeed in this important role. Project activities include hosting listening sessions with current intern supervisors to understand their needs, gathering existing training resources, developing a training curriculum, delivering supervisor training, and conducting training follow-up. The new training program will ensure the internship program is effective, inclusive, and supportive, transforming the zoo into a more welcoming place resulting in a broader representation of youth participating in the internship program.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Narrative

A. Project Justification

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) respectfully requests funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums Empowered program in the Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff category. We will implement an equity-focused professional development program for internship supervisors who support hundreds of diverse youth who participate in WCS internships each year.

Needs Addressed

Internships remain the primary pathway to employment in STEM fields. Internships allow youth to build science skills, enhance leadership and core competencies, increase social capital, and gain the experiential advantage needed to secure a job (Duncan et al, 2017; Matrai et al, 2022). Informal science institutions including museums, botanic gardens, zoos, and aquariums, have a long history of connecting youth to STEM careers through internships, however, these opportunities are not always distributed equitably. For example, 87% of zoo and aquarium internships are unpaid (Colton, 2022) and others require connections to secure. These gatekeeping practices deter youth who cannot work for free or do not have the social capital to access opportunities; these youth are also disproportionately people of color. With even entry-level animal care positions requiring one to three internships, systemic barriers at the internship level have prevented efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity across the zoo and aquarium workforce. A 2021 survey of Association of Zoos and Aquariums institutions found that 70% of staff identified as white, compared to 60% of US residents.

Building internship equity requires breaking down access barriers, however, these changes alone are not sufficient; an organization must also undergo cultural change to create an environment that is supportive of diverse young learners. Internship supervisors, in particular, play a critical role in shaping youths' early perceptions of the workplace and careers (D'Abate et al, 2009; Lewis 2016; Rogers et al, 2021). Supervisor support is especially important for engaging and retaining youth of color and those from high-needs communities who are at higher risk of feeling 'otherized' in STEM (Beauchamp et al, 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Not only do supervisors support emotional aspects of learning that can build young people's interest and retention (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), they can also provide a personal connection to foster belonging and reduce feelings of isolation (Braun et al, 2017; Trujillo et al, 2015).

To do this work well, internship supervisors need to be strong mentors, approach internships with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens, and appreciate that an internship is a learning opportunity that is meaningfully different from a job. These qualities require training as part of a larger shift in organizational culture and yet, more often than not, non-profits do not provide internship supervisors with formal training (Lewis, 2016). This is a missed opportunity to break cultural norms and provide supervisors with new approaches that differ from how they were trained. This project will allow WCS to deliver on our commitment to increase internship equity at our zoos and aquarium by making these early professional experiences welcoming and supportive for all.

Project Context

WCS operates five New York City wildlife parks – the flagship Bronx Zoo, Central Park, Prospect Park, and Queens Zoos, and the New York Aquarium – which collectively host 300 interns each year. In 2021, we received IMLS funding (ME-249355-OMS-21) for the WCS Internship Initiative, which allowed us to overhaul our internship systems to increase access and implement equity-focused practices. These changes were

profound. We inventoried internships, standardized experiences – including adding learning outcomes and compensation to all positions – and created an internal review process for departments seeking to host interns. We built a public website linked to our Careers page to increase access to information about available internships. We streamlined recruitment, onboarding, evaluation, and offboarding to ensure alignment with DEI best practices and reduce burden on supervisors. So far in 2022, WCS has hosted 293 interns, all of whom have benefitted from the increased transparency and systems built through the Initiative.

Creating more equitable internships requires not just building new systems, but also building a new culture around how WCS views and supports interns. Internship supervisors are a key audience for advancing this culture change. The WCS Intern Supervisor Training Program seeks to build two new organizational norms:

(1) **Today’s career pathways are different from the pathways that have worked for previous generations of zoo and aquarium employees.** Historically, pathways to zoo and aquarium careers have been standardized, with most young people completing one or more unpaid internships before obtaining an entry-level full-time position. WCS’s integrated youth development program – the WCS Career Lattice (<https://bronxzoo.com/learn/youth>) – is built on the idea that more variation in career pathways will increase the diversity of people entering these professions, which will ultimately strengthen the industry.

Our Internship Initiative increased access to information and changed minimum requirements for interns. As a result, more applicants have non-traditional experiences on their resumes. Supervisors have often dismissed these applicants, who do not fit the historical intern mold. Training that supports supervisors in understanding contemporary career pathways and how applicants with diverse skill sets and experiences can be assets to their teams will help to upend practices that maintain the status quo.

(2) **Successful internships depend on strong supervision. Strong supervision requires training.** Intern supervisors come with a variety of management experience – at WCS, many have never been in a supervisory role before and those that have, often do not have experience working with young adult learners. Despite this range of experiences, most departments do not train intern supervisors. Without formal training, supervisors are more likely to use approaches that are similar to how they were trained, possibly perpetuating existing inequities. Training that centers cultural competency and positive youth development can lead to more effective supervision styles that ensures that interns from all backgrounds have positive experiences and grow their interest in zoo and aquarium careers.

To date, our supervisor support has been focused on logistics, onboarding supervisors onto the new systems put in place through in the Internship Initiative (e.g., how to write an internship description). We’ve realized that while necessary, this logistics-focused support is not sufficient to advance culture change and embed these new organizational norms. Intern supervisors also need formal training in a variety of skills relevant to supporting WCS youth, including cultural competency, providing feedback, and mentoring early career professionals.

We also need to reconsider our method of delivering supervisor support. Through the Internship Initiative, we developed online resources for supervisors, but soon realized that the resources were used infrequently. We attribute this lack of use to supervisors not being able to prioritize self-directed professional development. We also provided one-on-one coaching for supervisors, however, realize that this type of intensive support is not sustainable at scale. We need a new model: one that is responsive and requires accountability, but also able to be delivered to multiple supervisors at a time and sets everyone up for success. The Intern Supervisor Training Program will forge a new collaboration between the Human Resources and Education Departments to bring

together their expertise in staff professional development and youth development. We will apply a successful model used at WCS for leadership and management training delivered to staff in a variety of roles across our parks. This model uses small group in-person training spread over several weeks to deliver content, provide support as staff develop strategies to apply new strategies to their jobs, and form a peer support network.

Target Group

The target group for this project is WCS's internship supervisors. Each year, approximately 30 staff members supervise 300 interns, with some supervisor turnover each year. Many staff who manage interns are early in their careers themselves and this is the first time they have been in a supervisory role. Others more commonly supervise employees, which requires a different approach than supervising youth in time-limited learning-focused internships. Supervisors span departments including animal care, education, human resources, and wildlife health, and have a variety of position types, including part-time and full-time, union and non-union.

Project Beneficiaries

This project will primarily benefit the supervisors who work with WCS interns. Supervisors will receive training and develop a transferable skill set that will allow them to become stronger leaders. This group includes approximately 30 supervisors per year. We expect 5 to 10 new supervisors each year and the possibility of an overall increase in the number of supervisors as the Internship Initiative continues. During this two-year grant, we expect to train 40 to 45 supervisors, whose skills will affect their work for years to come.

The secondary beneficiaries are hundreds of interns who will feel a stronger sense of belonging at WCS, engage more deeply with their projects, and have support to advance into elevated roles more easily. WCS hosts 300 interns per year and during this grant, we expect that 600 interns will benefit from their supervisors' training.

WCS will benefit through the creation of a stronger, more effective work environment that supports the retention and promotion of interns into jobs. The cultural institution community will benefit as interns' diverse voices and experiences enter the museum career pipeline and contribute to a more representative workforce.

Links to Strategic Plan

This project addresses two WCS priorities. From our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, we are committed to attracting, hiring, and developing diverse employees. From our 2030 Strategic Plan, we will create a more diverse New York City-wide conservation career pipeline. Our world is facing complex conservation challenges that are directly intertwined with issues of social justice. Solving these issues requires broad representation and diverse voices. Youth who are just starting their career journeys are a critical part of this strategy.

B. Project Work Plan

Specific Activities

1. Host Listening Sessions with Internship Supervisors

We will facilitate listening sessions with 15 to 20 internship supervisors representing a variety of WCS departments. The listening sessions aim to identify high-needs topics for training and understand how these needs vary across departments and internship types. This information will inform training structure and content. Additionally, these early conversations will build buy-in from individuals who will participate in the training program, ensuring that their perspectives are taken into account during program development.

2. *Gather Existing Training Resources*

There are many valuable, vetted training resources that already exist. We will compile select resources and identify content that can be used directly or modified for our Intern Supervisor Training Curriculum. Some examples include WCS's Mentor Training Toolkit (<https://bronxzoo.com/learn/youth/mentoring>), which contains modules for supervisors who work with youth. Second, our internal professional development program, WCS U, includes management and leadership development courses with content that can be adapted to apply to intern supervision. These two resources were developed by the Education and Human Resources Departments and members of these teams are project leads, bringing together their complementary expertise.

Additionally, WCS leads SCI Network NYC, a group of eight science-based cultural institutions in New York City that collectively host 1,000 interns annually. Partners have produced a variety of intern supervisor training materials that they have fine-tuned over the years. We will use one of our monthly meetings to compile these resources and discuss what worked and potential modifications for WCS's intern supervisor audience.

3. *Develop Training Curriculum*

We will develop a comprehensive training curriculum for WCS staff who supervise interns. The curriculum will help supervisors create a safe and welcoming environment for diverse learners, supporting interns as they develop skills and experience needed for the next step of their career journeys. The curriculum will cover:

- **Positive Youth Development (PYD):** PYD is an intentional approach to youth engagement that recognizes youths' individual strengths and provides opportunities, relationships, and support to enhance those strengths. Applying PYD requires a deep understanding of WCS youth, many of whom live in high-needs communities and represent many different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. WCS youth experience various barriers to engagement – from lack of transportation to unstable internet connectivity – many of which may not be part of supervisors' lived experience. Training in PYD can help supervisors identify their interns' unique circumstances to better understand and support their professional growth.
- **Cultural Competence:** Training in cultural competence typically includes self-assessment to understand one's own biases, and building skills in active listening, empathy, and communication to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. We anticipate that some of this training will focus on common pathways into zoo and aquarium careers and the role that privilege plays in navigating these pathways.
- **Supervising Young Adults:** Supervisors' have an important role to play in setting expectations, holding interns' accountable for their learning, and providing feedback on performance. Adolescents' brains work differently than adults' brains and providing effective support to interns requires insight into this key developmental stage. Also, internships are often young adults' first professional experiences, meaning that they are unfamiliar with workplace norms that are easy to take for granted when supervising staff. This section of the training will provide actionable strategies for communication, establishing accountability, and addressing common challenges that arise when working with a young adult audience.
- **Mentoring and Career Support:** Effective supervisors may become mentors, providing professional advice and coaching to support interns' growth even after their internship is over. This training will prepare supervisors to build strong mentoring relationships with interns. In the zoo and aquarium field, where social capital still plays an important role in securing entry-level positions, we will train supervisors to recognize

their own social capital and how they can share it with interns. The training will also cover best practices when serving as a reference and connecting alumni with new opportunities, including those at WCS.

We will draw on the listening sessions with supervisors to shape the details of the training within these four topics. In Y1, we will develop a full version of the training to deliver to all internship supervisors. In Y2, we will develop a shorter refresher course for supervisors who completed the full training in Y1. This refresher course will draw on supervisors' specific experiences working with interns in Y1 to increase personal relevance.

4. *Deliver Supervisor Training*

Our supervisor training will be an in-person course delivered by a staff trainer with support from project leads in the Human Resources and Education Departments. We will use the same model as WCS's leadership and management courses, grouping trainees into cohorts to build in opportunities for peer support. While timing and location will be determined in partnership with internship hosting departments, we expect the training to be two full-day or four half-day sessions (approximately 16 hours total) spaced over two weeks or up to two months.

The first part of the training will establish a set of norms to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for discussion and begin to build a peer network among trainees. The bulk of the training will cover topics around equity and privilege, which may be new for some participants, and we want everyone to feel comfortable growing together. Establishing this network will serve a secondary purpose as the training cohorts will be communities of practice for supervisors to share experiences and problem solve, even after the training is over.

5. *Conduct Follow-Up*

We will supplement in-person training with optional micro-training videos, two- to five-minute skill-focused videos that will address skills learned during the sessions. We will share videos via email after training is completed and include prompts for supervisors to reflect how they have used the skills with interns. Optional one-on-one coaching will continue to play an important role in supervisor support, as it has throughout the Internship Initiative. Coaching will focus on intern support, training, and professional development. Both videos and coaching will serve as resources for supervisors who are seeking to learn and engage more deeply, but will not be required, as we recognize that supervisors need different levels of ongoing support.

Project Risks and Monitoring

One potential risk is that our training is not accessible or used by only certain teams. We will mitigate this risk by conducting listening sessions with supervisors and forming an Advisory Group (see below) to ensure that supervisors' and interns' perspectives are incorporated throughout the project. We have established buy-in from across WCS, but also recognize that many departments are short-staffed and some teams are more likely to experience last-minute emergencies (e.g., animal health issues) that they may have to prioritize over training. We will post training resources on our internal WCS U network for asynchronous access.

Staff turnover could pose a risk to the sustainability of internal capacity. We assume a small level of staff turnover and have mitigated this risk by developing multiple types of trainings – a full course and a refresher. We will integrate the annual trainings into our regular internship support systems beyond the life of the grant.

Planning, Implementation, and Management

Our project will be led by WCS Education, Human Resources, and Zoo and Aquarium Administration, by staff who specialize in youth development, career development, and zoo and aquarium oversight. The team includes:

- **Emily Stoeth**, *Manager, Youth Development and Internships*. Ensure all project activities are completed and supervise the staff trainer.
- **TBD**, *Professional Development Coordinator*. Develop training plan, lead the supervisor listening sessions, develop curriculum, and conduct training and coaching sessions at all five parks.
- **Erin Prada**, *Assistant Director, Youth Development*. Oversee project implementation, lead external dissemination, budgeting, and reporting.
- **Su-Jen Roberts, PhD**, *Director, Educational Research and Evaluation*. Lead evaluation, collect data, update leadership team, and contribute to dissemination and reporting.
- **Karen Tingley**, *Director of Education, Zoos and Aquarium*. Ensure that the project has exposure and support at the highest levels of WCS and the wider museum community.
- **Lisa Marie Avendaño**, *Deputy Director, Bronx Zoo*. Provide strategic guidance on project implementation and connections to zoo and aquarium department leadership.
- **Caryn Carman**, *Assistant Director, Learning and Talent Management*. Provide feedback on curriculum and methods, integrate into WCS's professional development assets.
- **Zulma Rivera**, *Director of Human Resources*. Provide strategic guidance on training design, maintain partnership with HR team, support working with union staff.

We will form an Advisory Council to provide insight into training needs and feedback on the curriculum. The Advisory Council will include six to eight internship supervisors, current interns, and recent WCS alumni recruited from the Intern Advisory Council, a group created to advise the WCS Internship Initiative.

This collaboration relies on ongoing communication within the Project Leadership Team and with internship supervisors. The following systems will ensure that communication is effective and efficient: (1) monthly Project Leadership meetings; (2) quarterly check-ins between the Staff Trainer and internship supervisors; (3) quarterly check-ins with the Advisory Council; and (4) a project management system on Basecamp.

Resources Needed

This project requires staff time and the commitment of the full organization. The WCS Internship Initiative allowed us to establish organization-wide buy-in, with members of the project leadership team (many of whom are also leads on this proposal) working across departments to solicit feedback, set expectations, and provide ongoing support. Given the size of our organization, that work was time-intensive, but productive, and we can see evidence of a cultural shift around internship equity. This project will build on that foundational work.

Evaluation

The evaluation will be conducted in-house by Dr. Su-Jen Roberts, Director of Educational Research and Evaluation. Dr. Roberts has experience evaluating DEI-focused efforts at WCS, including the Internship Initiative. The evaluation is structured around the following questions.

- **Implementation:** How does implementation correspond with design? What are challenges and resolutions?
- **Supervisors:** How has training affected supervisors' self-efficacy? How do supervisors apply the training?
- **Interns:** How does supervisor support affect interns' sense of belonging and interest in careers in the field?

We will use a mixed-methods approach, which will include:

- Participation in leadership meetings to understand implementation and encourage reflection on progress.
- A post-training survey of supervisors ($N = 30/\text{year}$) to gather feedback on training topics and format, the impact of training on self-efficacy, and how supervisors anticipate training will impact their practice.
- Interviews with supervisors ($N = 6/\text{year}$) after they hosted interns to reflect on the supervisor experience, including challenges that arose and if and how the training topics were helpful in addressing challenges.
- A post-internship survey of interns (min $N = 200/\text{year}$) to measure youth outcomes, including perceptions of supervisor support, sense of belonging, and career interests.

Dr. Roberts will produce an annual written summary of findings and recommendations. Project leads will discuss findings with the Advisory Council and prioritize changes to implementation.

C. Project Results

Intended Results

WCS aims to inspire a diverse and inclusive movement of conservation advocates and STEM professionals. One critical step in that process is to ensure that foundational work experiences like internships are effective, inclusive, and supportive for WCS's diverse youth audience. This project will support internship supervisors in making WCS a more welcoming place, which will result in a broader representation of youth participating in WCS internships and building experience and interest in zoo and aquarium careers. Supporting Documents includes a logic model which shows how the activities are linked to our intended outcomes and results.

Anticipated Change

This project is focused on changing WCS culture around internships. We recognize that the systems that have supported zoo and aquarium staff as they enter and advance in the field are disproportionately accessible to those with privilege. While the Internship Initiative allowed us to change operations to increase internship access and equity, we've realized that shifting mindsets and approaches takes more time and dedicated training. We're focusing on training for internship supervisors, as they are the key support staff for hundreds of diverse youth who enter our internships each year and who we want to continue into jobs in the zoo and aquarium field. We anticipate that this project will allow WCS's internship supervisors to develop and practice transferrable skills related to positive youth development, cultural competency, and supervision that will strengthen their practice at WCS and ultimately contribute to a more welcoming and diverse zoo and aquarium workforce.

Products

The project will generate five products: (1) inventory of intern supervisor training resources used by WCS and other New York City cultural institutions; (2) intern supervisor training curriculum covering positive youth development, cultural competence, supervising young adults, and mentoring; (3) refresher course on the same topics; (4) micro-training videos on key skills; and (5) evaluation reports describing implementation and impact.

Sustainability of Project Benefits

WCS is committed to integrating this training into our operations. The Internship Initiative is an integral part of our education strategic plan and the WCS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan. Intern supervisor training is a need identified through the Internship Initiative and one that will forever impact our career pipeline.

