

# Modeling Zoos and Aquariums as Inclusive Communities of Science (MoZAICS) for Autistic Individuals

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Community Partners: zoo/aquarium early adopter community, autistic self-advocates

<https://www.aza.org/MoZAICS>

## Project Description

MoZAICS focuses on developing an evidence-based framework of inclusive practices for zoos and aquariums to support science learning for autistic individuals across the full aquarium and zoo experience including the general visit, programs, exhibits, internships, volunteering, and employment opportunities.

## | AWARD #2116026

### Audience & Settings

**Audience:** Autistic Individuals

**Disciplinary area:** General STEM

**Learning environment:** Zoos/Aquariums

### Access and Inclusion

The project's focus is on promoting access and inclusion for autistic individuals across the full zoo/aquarium experience through engaging autistic self-advocates and zoo/aquarium practitioners.



# TITLE OF PROJECT GOES HERE | AWARD #

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## Key Achievements

- Completed literature review and zoo/aquarium state of the field study.
- Currently gathering insights and input from autistic individuals through an autism community study to guide the toolkit development.
- Based on research findings, the team is in the process of developing an initial prototype of a toolkit for zoo/aquarium practitioners to prompt reflection, discussion and curating resources that support access/ inclusion for autistic individuals.

### TheMoZAICS Project

#### A Model for Engaging Autistic Individuals at Zoos and Aquariums

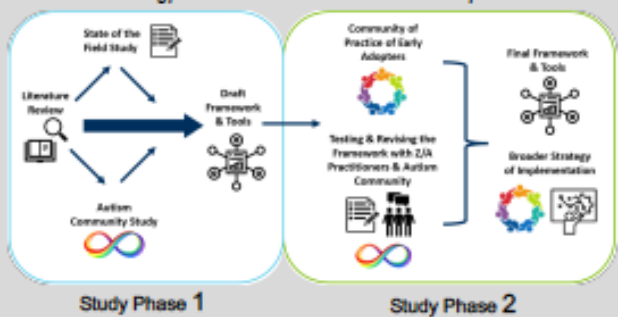
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**PROJECT OVERVIEW:**

The Oregon State University STEM Research Center, in collaboration with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) at Vanderbilt University Medical Center to support the Modeling Zoos and Aquariums as Inclusive Communities of Science (MoZAICS) project. MoZAICS focuses on:

- Developing an evidence-based toolkit of inclusive practices for zoos and aquariums to support science learning for autistic individuals across the full zoo/aquarium experience including the general visit, programs, exhibits, internships, volunteering and employment opportunities.
- The project will also support the building of a community of practice of zoo/aquarium practitioners dedicated to the comprehensive inclusion of autistic individuals; working toward an overall strategy of inclusion across the AZA community.



**EXERCISE: In a perfect world, every zoo and aquarium would be fully accessible and inclusive. We'd see it reflected in...**




The bubbles above reflect the themes that arose during our conversations internally and with advisors, when envisioning what a perfectly accessible and inclusive Z/A might look and feel like. The themes cut across arenas such as employment and work culture; organizational change; funding and resources; visitor experiences; evaluation and assessment; and structural issues.

**YEAR 1 ACTIVITIES:**

Some highlights include:

- Creating a draft framework for our thinking around access and inclusion in Z/A;
- Starting the literature review; and
- Launching the state of the field study.


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**FRAMEWORK: Differences between accessibility and inclusion**

	Sensory Tolerance / Not Accessible	Accessible	Inclusive
Contribute			The opportunity to physically and socially engage in a way that is valued and benefits others' experiences, ideally in alignment with the mission of the organization.
Participate		The opportunity to physically or socially engage in a way that primarily benefits your own experience but doesn't change the experience of others. You are primarily taking something away from the experience.	Eg: A Z/A hires an autistic staff member. The hiring practices and training for staff remains the same. The autistic staff member listens at staff meetings but is not invited or supported to contribute to the discussions.
Present	The opportunity to be in the physical space but just offered the opportunity to physically or socially engage in a way that benefits the individual or the experience of others.		Eg: An autistic individual visits a Z/A and has access to a quiet room in the aquarium, if needed. No other changes are made and no additional supports are offered for families visiting as part of the sensory friendly hours.

We want your feedback! Share your thoughts and reactions to this framework by scanning this QR code, and filling out the form at the link:



Our project team, including a group of self-advocate advisors, drafted this framework to outline our thinking about the differences between access and inclusion. Rows show levels of interaction, columns show points along the path to inclusion, and the intersections reflect the experiences of neurodiverse persons in those circumstances.

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