



# Education Liaison Handbook

*A Handbook for Serving as an SSP/TAG/CAP Education Liaison*

## The Role of the Education Liaison

The primary objective of the education liaison working with SSPs, TAGs, and CAPs is to assist with developing, distributing, and/or enhancing the environmental awareness programs that provide the foundation for the attitudinal changes needed for conservation and stewardship practices. Many conservation education programs specifically target audiences to foster changes in behavior that promote sustainable resource use and habitat improvement that will ultimately benefit those communities. Other roles of the education liaison include fundraising, public relations, and cultivation of partnerships with other organizations, providing valuable linkages with *in-situ* conservation as well as activities at AZA zoos and aquariums.

## The Role of SSP/TAG/CAP Programs

A **Species Survival Plan**® (SSP) goal is to preserve, in zoos and aquariums, species that are threatened or endangered in the wild. It is based on the belief that healthy animal populations managed at zoos and aquariums can help prevent extinction through reintroduction of animals, supportive breeding, and research. The SSP is designed to be a supplement, not an alternative, to preservation in nature.

Serving as committees of expert advisors, **Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs)** assist in the selection of appropriate species for AZA conservation programs and provide a forum for discussing husbandry, veterinary, ethical, and other issues that apply to entire taxa. Through regional collection planning they recommend species for new AZA studbooks, SSPs, and other zoo- and aquarium-based programs; establish priorities for management, research, and conservation; and recruit qualified individuals to carry out these activities. In addition, TAGs examine animal management techniques based on scientific studies and assist SSP coordinators in developing animal care and husbandry guidelines. TAGs also promote cooperation and sharing of information between AZA and other regional and international conservation programs.

AZA **Conservation Action Partnerships (CAPs)**, established in 1991, are special committees designed to help coordinate the conservation and scientific activities of AZA institutions working in specific geographical regions of the world. Attention is focused on regions abundant in unique wildlife and habitat. Because these so-called "hot spots" of biodiversity are subject to increasing pressure and degradation from human activities, more and more of their endemic species are becoming threatened with extinction.

Many SSP, TAG, and CAP-linked conservation education programs tackle the difficult challenge of degraded habitat while keeping in mind that long-term, sustainable protection begins with ecosystem awareness.

## The Role of AZA in Education Liaison Work

The AZA Conservation Education office has established a Liaison Committee which serves as a clearinghouse so that interested educators and SSP, TAG, and CAP Chairs can locate each other. The AZA Vice President of Conservation Education works with the Head of the Committee to keep a current database. The Education Liaison listserv is maintained by the Committee as a forum for the exchange of ideas about involvement in SSP, TAG, and CAP education projects. It is the responsibility of every education liaison to keep their affiliations current by contacting the Committee and AZA Conservation Education Office whenever a change occurs.

## The History of the Education Liaison Role

In the early 1990's, just a handful of educators were working in an advisory capacity with a few AZA conservation committees. In September of 1994 at the AZA Annual Conference in Atlanta, the first formal meeting took place between interested educators and members of SSP/TAG/CAP committees. In 1997, a survey of all SSP/TAG/CAP Chairs and all Education Liaisons was completed. Ultimately, this produced a database of Education Liaisons, which is still maintained at the AZA offices, and a booklet called *The Educator's Role on an SSP, TAG or FIG (now CAP)*.

## Tasks of an Educator

An educator will work with an SSP, TAG, or CAP to ensure that all species/habitat projects have an education component and make a real, long-term impact by generating positive action.

### 1) Educators provide education expertise by:

- Developing plans (regional, national, international) for appropriate target audiences by identifying meaningful, doable projects involving the education components of conservation initiatives (See <http://www.aza.org/ConEd/Documents/BeginInSituGuidelines.pdf>, for example).
- Determining the education goals for the program, devising a plan to implement them, assisting achievement of those goals by following through with development of education initiatives, and serving as a clearinghouse for educational materials related to the SSP/TAG/CAP.
- Identifying/reviewing what cooperators do for conservation; assessing what they feel the SSP lacks in terms of education solutions.

### 2) Educators can build awareness by:

- Marshalling support within the SSP/TAG/CAP for established education projects.
- Using national/international successes to contribute to environmental awareness.
- Assisting other educators with program/material development as well as recruiting and networking with other educators on a regional, national, and international basis (where appropriate).
- Working with news media when appropriate. Writing, reviewing, and encouraging articles in the group's newsletter. Providing/producing an information packet to respond to public inquiries.

### 3) Educators can produce education programs and materials such as:

- Assist with grant and fundraising proposal writing
- Education packets/kits for school teachers and zoos and assembling materials for outreach education (See <http://www.aza.org/ConEd/EdLiaisons> Activity Guides for examples)
- Publications, interpretive graphics, interactive displays, multi-media programs, brochures, fact sheets, reading lists.
- Cataloguing or creating a library of education materials to make available to zoos & aquariums.

## **Types of Education Projects**

A partial list of projects undertaken by education liaisons includes:

1. Curriculum for schools teacher training
2. *In-situ* projects, on-site public programs, zoo/aquarium graphics
3. Grant proposal writing and other fundraising for education
4. Web site newsletter publication(s) image library
5. Artifact kits

## **Minimum Requirements for an Educator on an SSP, TAG, or CAP**

Although full education participation in all SSP, TAG, and CAP activities is the ideal, there are **minimum requirements** that an educator needs to consider to be to be effective as a liaison:

1. Attendance at the AZA Annual Conference and attendance at the Mid-year Meeting when needed.
2. Identify where effective education can be implemented, review and respond to education-related issues as they arise, and initiate and assist in the development of educational materials and projects.
3. Meet with education committee annually to review/report on goals/objectives and identify problems.
4. Suggest action items based on developing action plan, assist in the process; offer suggestions, be proactive.

## **Additional Considerations**

Educators need to ask themselves the following questions before deciding to work with an SSP, TAG, or CAP:

1. Do you have enough time? Will it fit into your normal work program? The commitment can be considerable and involve work on your own time.
2. Will your institution support it (re: time, internet access, travel) and do you have the approval of your Director and immediate supervisor?
3. Do you have an interest, enthusiasm, and curiosity regarding the species involved?
4. Is the group relevant or important to your institution?

## **Benefits to Educators**

1. Contribute to wildlife conservation
2. Collaborate with colleagues at other institutions
3. To learn more about conservation practices in general and of species, taxa, or areas in specific
4. Have the opportunity to work on an conservation project
5. Professional development
6. Develop education materials that can be used at any AZA institution
7. Have an opportunity to travel
8. Make new friends in surprising places

## Getting Started: Recommendations for Educators

The following are recommendations for educators considering becoming involved in working with an SSP, TAG, or CAP:

- Assess your available time as realistically as possible.
- What are your special interests, experiences, and skills that you can offer to the SSP, TAG, or CAP in which you are interested?
- Research the work of the group. Attend a meeting at the AZA Annual Conference and/or check AZA's web site at [www.aza.org](http://www.aza.org) to learn more about the issues and priorities of the group. Contact the CEC Liaison Committee and express your interest.
- Once you are in contact with the coordinator or chair of the SSP, TAG, or CAP, ask about the education priorities, requirements, and any expectations for the educator.
- Assess the support you'll need from your institution and create an agreement. This part can be very ambiguous. In weighing your decision to make the commitment, consider that the support you receive from your institution may increase over time as your involvement grows. Use the Institutional Support letter template to show to your facility's administration.
- If the SSP, TAG, or CAP already has an education liaison and you have a strong interest in that group, contact the educator or committee to determine if you can join the team.
- Work with your group to establish clear goals and a realistic time-line (but be open to new opportunities).
- Communication is the key; keep members of your group informed on your progress.

## In Closing

Every SSP, TAG, and CAP is different. Personalities, personal experiences, and visions often drive each and every committee at different speeds and in slightly different directions. Every species, taxon, and conservation action group has different issues and different needs. No one handbook can explain the intricacies necessary to be an effective education liaison. The qualifications for an education liaison vary widely from group to group but there seem to be some higher priority credentials. The candidate must have an enthusiastic interest in the Committee's species of concern and be knowledgeable in regards to its natural history and issues of concern. The candidate must be able to attend at least some of the Committee's meetings, and preferably all of them. These would include the AZA Annual Conference and the Committee's mid-year meeting. The candidate should have the full support of their institution in this endeavor and must be willing to dedicate a minimum of one hour per week to the Committee's projects, and often times many hours per week when a particular project dictates that need. And finally, the candidate must be a strong self-starter, able to generate ideas, initiate education projects and see them through to completion.

We are all deeply committed to the same overall goal, the preservation of wildlife and wild places. Together we can help each other discover the best way to reach that goal. Keep connected to your fellow education liaisons and you'll always be in good company.

## **Appendix A - Proposed Letter of Support from Your Institution**

Dear (SSP, TAG, or CAP Coordinator):

My institution is pleased to offer support to (applicant name) in (his/her) bid to become the education liaison to the (SSP, CAP or TAG) conservation committee. It is my understanding that this commitment may entail providing travel time and funds, the ability to send and receive faxes, e-mails, and other communications to and from the committee during regular working hours, and limited release time to work on occasional projects as assigned by the committee. We may also be offered the opportunity to provide financial support as an institution to future or on-going conservation projects of this committee.

I believe (applicant name) will be an asset to the (SSP, TAG, or CAP) and look forward to hearing of your committee's progress and successes.

Sincerely,  
Your Zoo or Aquarium Director

## **Appendix B - A Handy Guide for Sorting Out Some of Those Acronyms**

A more extensive list can be found at <http://www.aza.org/ConScience/acronyms/>

<b>AAZK</b>	American Association of Zoo Keepers
<b>AAZPA</b>	American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (legal name of AZA)
<b>AAZV</b>	American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
<b>ADISC</b>	Animal Data Information Systems Committee
<b>ARCS</b>	Annual Report on Conservation and Science
<b>ARKS</b>	Animal Records Keeping System
<b>AZA</b>	American Zoo and Aquarium Association (formerly AAZPA)
<b>AZH</b>	Association of Zoological Horticulture
<b>BCTF</b>	Bushmeat Crisis Task Force
<b>BFCI</b>	Butterfly Conservation Initiative
<b>CAP</b>	Conservation Action Partnership (formerly FIG)
<b>CEC</b>	Conservation Education Committee
<b>CEF</b>	Conservation Endowment Fund
<b>FCC</b>	Field Conservation Committee
<b>FCRG</b>	Field Conservation Resource Guide
<b>FIG</b>	Fauna Interest Group (now CAP)
<b>IMLS</b>	Institute of Museum and Library Services
<b>IACUC</b>	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
<b>ICP</b>	Institutional Collection Plan
<b>IADISC</b>	International Animal Data Information Systems Committee
<b>IMBD</b>	International Migratory Bird Day
<b>ISIS</b>	International Species Information System
<b>IZE</b>	International Zoo Educators
<b>MIRP</b>	Multi-Institutional Research Project
<b>NAAEE</b>	North American Association for Environmental Education
<b>NAI</b>	National Association for Interpretation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NSF-ISE</b>	National Science Foundation - Informal Science Education
<b>PMC</b>	Population Management Center
<b>PMP</b>	Population Management Plan
<b>RCP</b>	Regional Collection Plan
<b>SAG</b>	Scientific Advisory Group
<b>SPMAG</b>	Small Population Management Advisory Group
<b>SSP</b>	Species Survival Plan
<b>TAG</b>	Taxon Advisory Group
<b>TOP</b>	The Ocean Project
<b>WAZA</b>	World Association of Zoos and Aquariums
<b>WCMC</b>	Wildlife Conservation and Management Committee
<b>ZIMS</b>	Zoological Information Management System
<b>ZRA</b>	Zoo Registrar Association