ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH **EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE®**

MEET THE FIRST COHORT OF EMPATHY CHAMPIONS



Alejandra Medina

Community Engagement and Partnerships Specialist at the Minnesota Zoo

Alejandra's project focused on centering community boices and learning how Black, Somali, or African American community members in the Twin Cities Metro Area experience anda view wildlife-focused spaces like the Minnesota Zoo to inform future outreach, programming, and partnership opportunities. She hopes her project will help the zoo better understand how trust, feelings of belonging, and representation impact connection to empathy for wildlife.



Cher Vatalaro

Director of Conservation Education at the Lehigh Valley Zoo

Cher's project focuses on a lecture series at a local university to introduce undergraduate students to empathy and the role that it can play in conservation work. By demonstrating how empathy enhances conservation messaging, improves stakeholder relationships, and can deepen public connections with wildlife, Cher's project aims to not only inspire students to become more impactful conservation leaders but provide them with opportunities to practice critical skills that will help them become successful science communicators.

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Chris Berg

Learning Specialist at Shedd Aquarium

Chris utilized his connections to the Pangolin Conservation and Research Foundation to establish a collaborative partnership that focused on expanding empathy-based conservation messaging for pangolins. His project aims to explore how diverse messaging strategies can strengthen community partnerships, expand educational reach, and support PCRF's engagement and education goals.



Courtney Cordova

Interpretation Coordinator at Henry Vilas Zoo

Courtney's project focuses on creating empathy-based professional development for environmental educators in southern Wisconsin who collaborate with the Nature Everywhere Initiative. Courtney hopes that by centering empathy, curiosity, and relationship-building that this project will strengthen the impact of environmental education across organizations and deepen participant's connections with the natural world.



Erin Tone

Conservation Education Manager at the Lake Superior Zoo

Erin's project focuses on partnering with a local hospital to bring empathy informed animal programming to patients. In recognizing that empathy is a core tenet of the zoo and hospital's work, Erin hopes this collaboration can bring joy and a sense of community through meaningful connections to animals and the natural world.

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Jessica Schellhorn

Education Manager at Blank Park Zoo

Jessica's project targets naturalists working at county conservation boards and other environmental organizations throughout Iowa, starting with leading a workshop at the Iowa Association of Naturalists Spring Workshop. By starting this outreach, Jessica hopes that she can bring seemingly disparate groups together to highlight shared missions and amplify impact.



Natalie Stier

School Outreach Coordinator at Utah's Hogle Zoo

Natalie's project focuses on a collaboration with Utah State Parks to adapt ACE for Wildlife Network resources for use park interpretation and outdoor education programs. By working directly with park interpretation and education staff, Natalie aims to identify how effective empathy practices translate across contexts to help visitors develop stronger emotional connections to wildlife and ecosystems.



Nicole Hennigan

Naturalist - Online Wildlife Academy at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park

Nicole's project establishes a partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Communication and Public Engagement Team, starting with an empathy focused workshop at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park. Nicole hopes that this workshop increases recognition of Trek's conservation leadership and provides workshop attendees with tangible techniques for using empathy practices to their contexts.

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Shana Kent

Learning Engagement Manager at the Alaska SeaLife Center

Shana's project focuses on developing empathy training tools and resources for wildlife tour operators in Seward, AK to enhance how they interpret about wildlife with an empathy lens. Alaska Native language, values, and stories that emphasize the connectedness between people and nature will be woven throughout the materials. Shana hopes this project will help tourists better understand and experience Alaska's ecosystems and the shared connection and responsibility we all have to making the world a better place.



Sharon Spencer

Adult Education Specialist at Jacksonville Zoo and Botanical Gardens

Sharon's project focuses on a collaboration with the Florida Wildlife Commission and other local organizations that will utilize empathy informed messaging in messages about coexisting with manatees. Sharon hopes that empathy-informed messaging across organizations will help foster a stronger conservation mindset in the community and move the needle in wildlife coexistence initiatives.