

Call for Abstracts - Submission Guidelines

Under the theme **Stewards of Tomorrow: Purpose, Direction, and Global Responsibility**, the 81st WAZA Annual Conference presents us a chance to take a pause and have a collective moment to discuss topics that will shape shared direction with purpose, future proofing our industry and drive global conservation impact.

WAZA is now accepting abstracts for presentations and posters. Please review these submission guidelines before submitting your proposal. Each submitter may submit up to two abstracts.

Should you have any questions, please write to conference@waza.org.

Proposal Submission Deadline – Friday 17th April at 23:59 CEST (Central European Summer Time)

Submission Tracks

To facilitate scheduling, please select the category that best fits your proposal. We are specifically seeking proposals that address the 2026 theme: "Stewards of Tomorrow" within these areas. Submissions solely for commercial purposes will not be accepted.

1. Animal Welfare and Management

How modern zoos responsibly balance ethics, science and social expectations as guardians of future animal populations. 2026 priorities include:

- Navigating complex ethical challenges (euthanasia, management of highly intelligent species, mixed-species social structures).
- Advancing evidence-based welfare through data and measurable indicators.
- Preparing for the WAZA 2027 Population Management Goal.
- Designing population strategies that uphold welfare while sustaining resilient, diverse assurance populations.

2. Conservation

How zoos and aquariums are/evolve into catalytic conservation institutions capable of safeguarding species and ecosystems through the next century. 2026 priorities include:

- Demonstrating measurable conservation impact.
- Operationalising the One Plan Approach.
- Advancing the WAZA 2030 Conservation Goal outcomes.
- Strengthening bio-banking and future genetic resilience infrastructure.

3. Business and Leadership

Leadership for institutions that are/must be inspirational, transparent, accountable and economically future-ready. 2026 priorities include:

- ‘Purpose’ and the evolving social contract between zoos, aquariums and society.
- Maintaining and rebuilding public trust in a rapidly changing world.
- Redefining institutional excellence under ethical, social and environmental expectations.

4. Education and Community Engagement

How zoos and aquariums maintain/become trusted knowledge ecosystems that bridge science, emotion and community. 2026 priorities include:

- Authentic storytelling that empowers and mobilises action.
- Understanding and shaping public perception with evidence.
- Reaching diverse generations and cultural contexts.
- Demonstrating education impact through measurable outcomes.

5. Advanced Technology and AI

A forward-looking exploration of how technology reshapes institutional capability, efficiency and global impact. 2026 priorities include:

- Strategic application of AI.
- Enhancing visitor engagement through personalised, adaptive technologies.
- Optimising operations through predictive systems and automation.
- Using digital tools to enhance welfare, conservation and safety.

6. Sustainability

Future-proofing zoos and aquariums as models of environmental responsibility and regenerative practice. 2026 priorities include:

- Carbon reduction strategies tied to measurable baselines.
- Implementing green operations and circularity across facilities.
- Balancing operational needs with planetary limits.
- Addressing trade-offs and difficult decisions required of true environmental stewards.

7. Visitor Experience

Creating visitor experiences that inspire stewardship and defend the social license of zoos and aquariums. 2026 priorities include:

- Redesigning the guest journey to reflect modern welfare and ethical expectations.
- Translating conservation narratives into emotionally resonant, action-driving experiences.
- Eliminating outdated practices and creating ‘purpose-forward’ visitor interactions.
- Building trust and transparency through immersive storytelling.

8. Crisis Management

Equipping zoos and aquariums to anticipate, adapt, and lead through crisis and uncertainty. 2026 priorities include:

- Preparing for escalating climate emergencies and extreme weather events.
- Responding to rapid shifts in societal sentiment.
- Addressing emerging narratives such as de-extinction, rewilding risks, and misinformation.
- Building organisational resilience and decision-readiness.

9. Aquarium Affairs

10. Community and Purpose

11. Zoo and Aquarium Design

12. Any other themes impacting the global zoo and aquarium community

Presentation Formats

i. **Short Presentation** – 15 mins

- 15 mins presentation with 5 mins Q&A
- Accepted short presentations might be combined into a session with other presentations

ii. **Standard Presentation** – 30 mins

- 30 mins presentation with 5 mins Q&A
- Accepted standard presentations might be combined into a session with other presentations

iii. **Panel – 45 mins**

- 40 mins panel with 5 mins Q&A
- Submission should include profile of moderator and multiple speakers with diverse views, background, and regional representations. Submissions meeting these requirements will be given preference.

iv. **Workshop – 90 mins**

- Workshops should be hands-on sessions designed to provide attendees with practical skills, methodologies, or problem-solving exercises. Active audience participation should be included.

v. **Poster**

- Posters should be related to recent scientific contributions in the fields of conservation, animal welfare, sustainability, education, and further areas related to progressive zoos and aquariums.
- Accepted poster presentations will be displayed at the Poster Reception on Tuesday 27 October at around 16:00. Authors must be registered attendees and must be present at the Poster Reception to share their findings with other attendees.
- Poster specifications:
 - o Dimension should be A0 (119.2cm height x 84.4cm width)
 - o Portrait (vertical) layout
 - o Size the title and the text so it can be easily read, avoid large sections of text, and use images, charts, figures, and bulleted lists when possible
 - o Printed posters must be in English
- Option to submit a 1-minute video in addition to the printed poster, if selected, the video may be shown during the break time in the plenary room.
- Video poster specifications:
 - o Maximum 1 minute
 - o In high resolution (1280x720 pixels or above) and widescreen (16:9)
 - o In .mp4 or .mov
 - o Video posters can be in presenters' native language. English subtitles must be added regardless of the language the video poster is in

Submission Process

- All proposals must be submitted via the Whova platform by 17 April 23:59 CEST. Submissions by any other means will not be accepted.
- Presentation and poster proposals must be submitted by the main presenter; panel and workshop proposals must be submitted by the moderator/facilitator
- Each submitter may submit up to two proposals
- Accepted presenters will be notified by mid-May
- Presenters must be registered attendees

Evaluation Criteria

The submissions will be reviewed by the 2026 WAZA Conference Programme Task Force and WAZA Executive Office, the evaluation criteria include but not limited to:

- **Relevance** – Alignment to the conference theme and significance to the global zoo and aquarium community
- **Global and diverse perspective** – Encouraging inclusivity and representation of different regions and viewpoints
- **Originality and innovation** – Presenting groundbreaking ideas, research, etc.
- **Forward-thinking** – Addressing future challenges and opportunities in zoos and aquariums
- **Clarity and organisation of the proposal**

Conference Registration

Accepted presenters are required to register for the conference. Registration is now open <https://www.waza2026.org/registration/>.

For questions or more information, please contact conference@waza.org

We look forward to receiving your proposals.