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Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium Case Study

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium by the Numbers:

Annual Visitors: 1.7 M
Annual energy costs: $2.4 M
Energy avoided annual costs: $100,000
Water avoided annual costs: $85,000
Recycling annual increase: 32%
Grants dollars secured: $50,000
Pledge Participation rate: 64%

How We Are Helping:

Energy & Sustainability Action Plan
Staff & Visitor Engagement
Online Pledge Tool
Online Dashboard Tool
Revolving Loan Fund Design
Facilitating Implementation
Grant Writing

Getting Started

Our work with the state of Nebraska's largest tourist destination started in early 2012 with the development of their Energy and Sustainability Master Plan. The Zoo's Master Plan spells out a clear vision for the next five years and builds on the Zoo's conservation-oriented mission.

The Master Plan incorporates input from a plethora of sources, including Zoo staff from all levels, best practices at other zoos, surveys of both staff and the public, site visits, and loads and loads of data. Naturally, working with a zoo presented a whole new batch of unique challenges and opportunities to consider that don't necessarily apply to a traditional office setting, but through our extensive and in-depth approach, we were able to identify the most relevant opportunities.

The breadth of the plan is considerable and includes, but is not limited to: a greenhouse gas inventory, establishment of baselines and five-year goals, and identification of dozens of short- and long-term strategies in the areas of energy, water, waste and recycling, and employee and visitor engagement. With the Master Plan now in place, the Zoo is charging forward with implementation activities.

Green Revolving Fund

While we worked on the Energy and Sustainability Master Plan, it became clear that implementation funding was one of the most critical barriers and needed to be immediately addressed. As such, we worked closely with the Zoo's leadership and finance team to develop a Green Revolving Fund model that established a mechanism by which an ongoing, reliable and growing stream of funding will be available for future sustainability projects.

The Zoo's Green Revolving Fund allows for projects that both focus on short-term payback and those that are intended to build an engaged campus community. This hybrid approach ensures that all opportunities, big and small, are seriously considered.

Engagement & Implementation

Once the Energy and Sustainability Master Plan wrapped up in the middle of 2012, we turned our attention to engagement and implementation. We worked closely with Zoo staff on both fronts and have achieved pretty exceptional results thus far. Energy and water costs are down, recycling has increased dramatically, and improvements in all four employee engagement categories have occurred.

Several noteworthy projects have produced the results. On the engagement front, Pledge participation rates were extremely high and the green team's renewed focus paid great dividends. Other successes: creation of an Energy + Water Management Team, several lighting upgrades, expansion to the recycling program, operational improvements to building management and mechanical systems, and optimization of aquarium dump and fill schedules. Another big victory: grant funding. We wrote four grant applications that were subsequently awarded to ramp up the Zoo's recycling infrastructure and conduct a composting study.

Left: One of the most important opportunities identified through the master planning process was ramping up the Zoo's recycling process and infrastructure. It's a massive campus at 260 acres, so we worked with Zoo staff to strategically nail down all facets of the expansion: signage, receptacle design, placement, collection plan, etc.

There was a clear need for more containers. As such, we wrote two grant applications that resulted in the Zoo securing dozens of new recycling containers (pictured at left).

Signage for recycling containers is never easy, but there are a few key strategies to ensure the Zoo's visitors use them appropriately. We worked closely with the Zoo's graphic design team to ensure the signage worked perfectly.

Sustainability in the Zoo and Aquarium World

The connection between sustainability and the mission of zoos and aquariums across the globe is strong. Climate change is impacting wildlife and wildlife habitats, and it is in the best interest of every zoo and aquarium to conserve and protect the precious habitats of its animals.

More and more zoos and aquariums are recognizing and acting upon this connection. In 2011, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums introduced the AZA Green Award to recognize programs that implement outstanding and/or innovative methods to reduce their business operation's environmental impact.

The case for greening a zoo is strong and the benefits are many. Simply put, it goes back to the triple-bottom line: people, planet and profits, only for zoos, their mission is often to protect the planet.

> "We wanted to take an organized, well-thought-out approach to improving sustainability, and Verdis fit the bill perfectly. They brought multiple disciplines together to create our plan, implement action steps, and change the way our entire organization thinks on an individual level about the wise use of precious resources."

Dennis Pate
Executive Director and CEO
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium