

2026 Zoo Crew Lead Conservation Mentor Position Description

GENERAL SUMMARY

The Lead Conservation Mentor is an unpaid leadership position in support of the overall Zoo Crew Program, in which you will be responsible for assisting Teen Program staff with various aspects of the Zoo Crew Program focusing mostly on the Zoo Crew Explorers Conservation and Career Weeks activities.

They will have an active role in helping Zoo Crew Explorers to understand the Zoo's culture of conservation and inspiring them to take action to save animals in the wild. The Lead Conservation Mentor will play an important role in igniting a passion for learning, conservation, and an understanding of the natural world in order to cultivate the next generation of conservation heroes.

The Lead Camp Mentor will have the opportunity to strengthen their teaching and mentoring abilities while building leadership skills through active participation on our Leadership Council. They will also help shape the future of the Zoo Crew program by providing valuable feedback and insights. This role requires high energy, enthusiasm, creativity, and flexibility, as well as the ability to work effectively with groups of all ages in both indoor and outdoor settings.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Zoo Crew Lead Conservation Mentor is a leadership position within the Zoo Crew program.

Responsibilities include:

- Serving as a member of the leadership council and participating in meetings and activities throughout the year to prepare for the summer program
- Leading activities for Zoo Crew Explorers during Conservation and Career Weeks including presentations about the Houston Zoo's conservation initiatives, local and global conservation partners, and animals
- Planning and facilitating daily morning teambuilding activities
- Providing constructive feedback and guidance to help teens improve their communication skills.
- Researching and presenting conservation hot topics to Zoo Crew Explorers during Conservation and Career Weeks
- Completing a project to improve an aspect of the Zoo Crew Explorers program
- May be asked to act as a fill-in in other Zoo Crew sections as needed
- Will act as a go-to if questions arise for first year Zoo Crew Explorers

SCHEDULE

Spring 2026 (Pre-Summer Planning)

These meetings are mandatory training to prepare for your role in the summer. The meetings are also an opportunity for the Teen Leadership Council to get to know each other and your session partners.

Mandatory Meeting Dates:

- Sunday, March 1, 2026: 9am-4pm
- Saturday, April 11, 2026: 9am-4pm
- Sunday, May 3, 2026: 9am-4pm

Summer 2026

The following outline provides a general overview of the Summer 2026 schedule. Dates and tasks may shift before the program begins, and some minor duties are not listed. The schedule runs consecutively during **Session 1 (June 1–July 3)** or **Session 2 (June 29–July 31)**. (Note that based on Conservation and

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Career Weeks Schedules, Session 2 dates overlap one week with the end of Session 1 and are therefore different than Session 2 dates for other TLC positions).

- **Daily Tasks:**
 - Lead team building activities with Zoo Crew Explorers.
 - Taking daily attendance of all Zoo Crew Explorers
 - Assist Teen Programs staff with leading presentations and activities during the Zoo Crew Explorers Career Weeks.
 - Assist with introducing speakers to the Zoo Crew Explorers.
 - Research and create a presentation about conservation hot topics of your choice.
 - Lead discussions about conservation hot topics.
 - Mentor Zoo Crew Explorers on their interpretation skills and share animals' stories with them.
- **Weekly Tasks:**
 - Week 1: Career & Conservation Weeks with Session 1 Explorers
 - Week 2: C&C Weeks with Session 1 Explorers; Beach Cleanup
 - Week 3: C&C Weeks with Session 2 Explorers
 - Week 4: C&C Weeks with Session 2 Explorers; Beach Cleanup
 - Week 5: Identify focus for your Conservation Project, discuss with Teen Programs staff, complete once approved.

Year-Round Zoo Crew

After the summer, Teen Leadership Council will have monthly mandatory meetings in the Fall and Spring. At these meetings TLC will be debriefing from the summer, planning for future events such as World Lemur Festival, and discussing future Zoo Crew projects.

Tentative Fall 2026 meeting schedule:

- September 12, 2026: 9am-4pm
- October 11, 2026: 9am-4pm
- November 8, 2026: 9am-4pm
- December 12, 2026: 9am-4pm

Beyond the monthly meetings, TLC members are expected to participate in Year-Round Zoo Crew events, either in a leadership capacity or as Zoo Crew. The minimum requirements are:

Fall (October – January)

- Three shifts of Naturalist or Camp Mentor

Spring (January – May)

- Three shifts of Naturalist

QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Have one year of Zoo Crew completed
- Be in good standing in the Zoo Crew program
- Be 15 years old by May 31, 2026
- Be between the ages of 15 and 17 *through* the end of your summer session
- Be able and committed to attend **3 mandatory training meetings** in the Spring 2026

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- Be able to commit to **ALL** 5 weeks of one of the Zoo Crew Explorers sessions in the Summer 2026
- Be able to continue through the Year-Round Zoo Crew program and attend monthly meetings in the Fall 2026/Spring 2027

PREFERRED SKILLS

- A high level of energy and enthusiasm, creativity, and flexibility.
- Flexibility with day-to-day routines.
- A high level of honesty.
- Works well with Zoo Crew and Zoo Staff, regardless of personality, age difference, etc.
- An understanding of the Houston Zoo's wildlife conservation initiatives and conservation partners.
- Comfortable speaking and presenting information in front of others and an interest in teaching and mentoring their peers.

TO APPLY

Submit application by **Saturday, January 17th at 11:59pm.** Interviews will occur between January 31st - February 8th, 2026. Applicants will be chosen based on their application, interview, and previous evaluations.

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN AGREEMENT

Being part of the Teen Leadership Council is a significant commitment. We want to ensure that all TLC members and their parents/guardians understand and agree to commit to all required meetings/participation dates as outlined above.

FAQ

Can I participate in more than five weeks of TLC or Zoo Crew?

TLC members are scheduled for one five-week session. You may participate in additional weeks only if you are serving as a Naturalist, Camp Mentor, or Junior Zookeeper. In some cases, Teen Programs Staff may invite you to assist with Zoo Crew activities or allow you to work on a designated project or committee (e.g., the Bird or Snake Saving Campaign). To prevent burnout, total participation is limited to a maximum of eight weeks during the summer.

What if I can't attend a Spring mandatory meeting?

Spring training meetings are required, as they prepare you for the summer program and cover essential information and skills. Please make every effort to adjust your schedule so you can attend. Spring training dates are listed above.

If you are unable to attend a mandatory meeting, please notify Teen Programs Staff as soon as possible. We understand that emergencies or special circumstances may arise and appreciate your timely communication. The best way to reach us is by email at teenprograms@houstonzoo.org.

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What is the attendance expectation for monthly meetings?

TLC is a collaborative leadership program, and every member's presence helps the group succeed. Members are expected to attend monthly meetings as regular participation is key to leadership growth and teamwork. While we understand that occasional conflicts may happen, members should aim to attend at least 75% of meetings to remain in good standing. Members who consistently miss meetings may be asked to meet with Teen Programs Staff to discuss their commitment to the program.