



QUARTERS FOR CONSERVATION

Key Findings from the Formative Evaluation Report

STUDY GOALS, BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The goal of this formative study was to assess how the new *Quarters for Conservation* (Q4C) program is being implemented at Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ). The program was launched in the fall of 2011, with the goal of providing zoo visitors with the opportunity to directly contribute to wildlife conservation by choosing where to allocate a portion of their zoo admission. Q4C kiosks were installed at both of the zoo entrance gates with each kiosk highlighting six WPZ-supported field conservation projects. During the study period, tokens were primarily distributed to visitors in the course of the admission process.

WPZ's Education Research conducted a formative evaluation of QFC over the summer of 2012 to assess two categories of research questions:

1) How are zoo visitors engaging with this new program? For instance, how much time is spent at the kiosk and to what extent are they reading the information? What kinds of conversations are visitors engaging in while at the kiosk?

2) Among visitors who do participate, what are they taking away in terms of understanding? Are visitors aware they are taking an action to help wildlife? Do they understand that WPZ supports conservation projects locally and around the world? What motivates visitors to select a specific project?

To answer these questions, the Education Research team conducted a mixed-methods study that included interviews and focused observations at the Q4C kiosks, as well as timing and tracking of visitor movements in both entry plazas. Questions about Q4C were also incorporated into the visitor exit surveys. Data was collected from over 900 visitor groups between the months of July and September of 2012.



KEY FINDINGS

PART ONE: HOW ARE ZOO VISITORS PARTICIPATING IN THIS NEW PROGRAM?

Most visitors spend roughly 1 minute at the Q4C kiosk.

On average, visitor groups spent 1 minute, 17 seconds at the Q4C kiosk, with a median of 1 minute, 5 seconds. Family groups with children under 18 spent significantly more time engaging with the kiosk than adult only groups (1:23 compared to :56). Compared to similar unfacilitated interpretive elements studied at the zoo this is a relatively long visitor engagement.

Approximately a quarter of visitor groups read information on the end panels.

Information about the Q4C program and each of the six conservation projects is provided on the end panels of each kiosk. Of 127 groups observed, just under a quarter (24%) read at least some of this information; this included visitors who read the information to themselves, and visitors (often parents) who read info aloud or synthesized material for other group members.

There were two predominant topics of conversation at the kiosks.

Unobtrusive observations found that just over half (57%) of the recorded visitor conversations discussed what they saw as the purpose of the Q4C kiosk (e.g. *“It’s to help animals,”* *“This zoo wants to know which project you want them to spend money on.”*) Another 35% talked about which animal they were going to select (e.g. *“I’m going to vote for the tiger”*).

PART TWO: WHAT UNDERSTANDING DO VISITORS TAKE AWAY ABOUT Q4C?

Participating visitors are aware that their vote supports conservation.

It is clear from the data collected that most visitors who participate in Q4C do understand that the program involves supporting conservation, and that they are able to choose which animal or project to support. Visitors surveyed as they were leaving the zoo this summer, for instance, were asked if they had seen or heard anything about what they could do to help wildlife; Quarters for Conservation was the most common response, accounting for 39% of the messages mentioned.¹

Visitors have limited understanding of how their vote supports conservation.

The vast majority of visitors had little to no understanding of how the Q4C program was benefiting wildlife conservation. For example, when asked to describe how their participation in Q4C helps wildlife, over half (61%) said they weren’t sure; another 10% thought it was about helping improve conditions for that animal at the zoo. Among the remaining 29% who were able to offer a description of how their participation helped support wildlife conservation, some thought it was to protect habitat in the wild for the highlighted animals; others thought they were ‘voting’ on which project would receive support. For example, *“Whichever animal wins it helps their habitats in the wild.”*

In addition, participation had little impact on visitor awareness of the zoo’s role or efforts in field conservation. Of seventy visitors interviewed after depositing their token, two were able to discuss specific characteristics of the project they supported. Also, just over one third of those interviewed had an idea of where in the world their supported project is located.

Visitors’ votes are based largely on existing affinity or knowledge they have about the animal.

Almost three-quarters (71%) of those interviewed said they made their selection because it was a favorite animal or because of a personal connection to the animal, such as having a memorable experience seeing that animal in the wild. Another 21% said they made their choice based on perceived need or awareness that the animal is facing threats to their survival. For instance, a grandmother voted for the tiger project, saying, *“I know that tigers are becoming extinct; that’s really why I voted.”*

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study findings show a high level of visitor engagement with the Q4C kiosk and while the amount of detail that visitors retained varied considerably, most did come away with the understanding that they were being given the opportunity to show their support for a particular animal or project by ‘voting.’ To strengthen visitors’ understanding of how their Q4C vote supports wildlife consider shortening the project descriptions on the end panels and including these next to the animal photo and token slot. Also, incorporating messages about the Q4C supported project into public programs or keeper talks can provide a greater connection between the Q4C program and the rest of the visitor’s zoo experience.

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¹ Other personal action messages frequently seen by visitors at the zoo included sustainable consumer choices (10%), recycling (8%), reduction of resource use (7%) and backyard habitat actions (7%).