



CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
THE LIVING DESERT ZOO AND GARDENS
Palm Desert, California



The Aspen Leadership Group is proud to partner with The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens in the search for a Chief Development Officer to create and manage fundraising programs and institutional advancement for the organization.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit, accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, ensuring the highest standards of all aspects of animal care, education, conservation, public service, and operations. The Living Desert is active in conservation research, habitat protection, breeding programs, and education initiatives around the world, as well as in its own community. The Living Desert has been a top attraction in the Palm Springs area for more than 50 years. Located in the heart of the Coachella Valley in Southern California, The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is regularly ranked in the Top 10 Zoos by *USA Today* and was named the best desert themed zoo by *Conde Nast Traveler*.

The Living Desert was established in 1970 by several trustees of the Palm Springs Desert Museum who foresaw the impact that resort development would have on their local desert ecosystem. This foresight led to an interpretive nature trail and preserve in Palm Desert. Among the trustees was Philip L. Boyd who also founded the Riverside campus of the University of California and the Deep Canyon Research Station in Palm Desert. The vision that built The Living Desert and the love of the desert shared by Phillip Boyd, its members, volunteers, staff, trustees, and friends has been carried forward by President and CEO, Allen Monroe.

For nearly five decades, The Living Desert has been engaged in the important work of preserving, conserving, and interpreting the desert and all its varied plant and animal life. Consistent with its mission of desert conservation through preservation, education, and appreciation, the organization welcomes more than 650,000 visitors annually to the zoo and botanical gardens. The role of zoos has transformed dramatically in the last several decades from being menageries for human entertainment to leaders in global conservation efforts. The Living Desert is actively envisioning how the *zoo of the future* will operate and aiming for that goal. The Living Desert operates with a budget of more than \$23 million and is governed by a highly engaged Board of Directors.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens has been aggressively building its endowment over the last several years to join gate revenue and philanthropy as the third leg of their financial stool. Between shrewd investing, estate gifts, ardent donor support, and operational surplus, this endowment fund has had annual growth of 30 percent for the last five years and now exceeds \$60 million, making it one of the largest in the zoo community. An ongoing capital campaign, [*The Pride of the Desert*](#), has raised \$10 million for a new visitor entrance and gift shop in 2018, \$20 million for a new habitat for endangered black rhinoceros in 2021, and is currently working on a \$60 million goal for the zoo of the future, including a new Lion Habitat that includes the habitat itself, a multipurpose special event center, and a new restaurant.

REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

The Chief Development Officer will report to the President and CEO, Allen Monroe, and serve on the Park Leadership Team, alongside seven senior leader colleagues. The Chief Development Officer will oversee a team of currently seven development professionals.

FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Over the past decade, The Living Desert's development department has been transformed into a fundraising juggernaut on a spectrum ranging from annual gifts and adoptions to multi-million-dollar capital gifts and estate bequests.

There is an adage that if you want to catch fish, you go where the fish are. We are blessed in the Coachella Valley that we have some of the highest per capita net wealth in the country. Combine that with an extensive culture of philanthropy and you have the recipe for success. As we work to build the zoo of the future, the multi-generational community support we have had for the last 50 years will provide a foundation upon which to grow our conservation impact and educational influence.

I came to The Living Desert nine years ago knowing that it was a diamond in the rough. My goal was to assemble a team that with the right mission, strategy, and resources could propel us to be a leader in the field of plant and animal conservation. Since then, we have had consecutive year over year records in attendance, revenue, and fundraising.

My personal mission statement is that life is too short to do mediocre work. If you are passionate about fundraising and would like to join a team of like-minded individuals, I encourage you to raise your hand, shout "I'm in" and become an Agent of Conservation.

–Allen Monroe, President and CEO

THE LIVING DESERT ZOO AND GARDENS' COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The Living Desert is deeply committed to enriching diversity and inclusion through on-going efforts to cultivate a welcoming climate for all members of The Living Desert community. It strives to provide an inclusive workplace, promote equity and access in recruitment and retention, and develop meaningful outreach programs and partnerships with its diverse local communities. It values diversity and inclusion in the work environment and believes it is vital to the fulfillment of The Living Desert mission. It is The Living Desert's conviction that an inclusive work environment facilitates complex, critical, and creative thinking and that differences in identities, values, beliefs, and perspectives are fundamental to the success of the organization.

At The Living Desert the term *diversity* implies a respect for all and an understanding of individual differences including race, religion (including religious dress and grooming practices), color, sex/gender (including pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding or related medical conditions), sex stereotype, gender identity/gender expression/transgender (including whether or not you are transitioning or have transitioned), sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information/characteristics, marital status/registered domestic partner status, age, military or veteran status and any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law or ordinance or regulation, so that all members of the community are treated at all times with dignity and respect.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief Development Officer will

- lead the strategy, implementation, and execution of The Living Desert Zoo and Garden's fundraising programs;
- in collaboration with colleagues institution-wide, generate effective special events, donor cultivation and communications, and outreach efforts that serve the fundraising goals of the The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens;
- manage and grow annual giving, planned giving, and capital campaign programs;
- manage and mentor a team of talented fundraising professionals, and collaborate with other division heads and department managers on advancement opportunities;
- build upon The Living Desert Zoo and Garden's culture of philanthropy both internally and among the organization's supporters; and
- serve as a critical member of the Park Leadership Team and support the President and CEO in advancement activities.

LEADERSHIP AND KEY COLLEAGUES

Allen Monroe President and CEO

Allen Monroe received his B.S. in Wildlife Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University and a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Texas.

After college, he started working for zoos and public aquariums around the country including the National Aquarium in Baltimore, the Oklahoma City Zoo, the Indianapolis Zoo, and most recently the North Carolina Aquarium. He currently is the President and CEO of The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens. In addition, he has worked as a research scientist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service where he studied the effects of climate change on endangered species.

He is married with his wife working for a pharmaceutical company and has two daughters, one who directs New York theatrical productions and the other who works on women's rights issues in third world countries.

James Danoff-Burg Director of Conservation

James Danoff-Burg is a global leader in conservation, education, and strategy. He is a field-based researcher dedicated to finding science-based conservation and education solutions. In addition to his role as Director of Conservation at The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, he also directs Helping Rhinos USA, is a conservation psychologist teacher at California State University San Marcos, and co-director of Pathways Collaborative with Nette Pletcher.

James helps conservation programs expand to enhance pro-environmental action and ecological harmony. He is dedicated to finding creative science-based conservation and education solutions for conservation programs committed to improving and safeguarding our world.

Integral to all of his efforts is his deep commitment to inspiring hope for the future. His 20 years of experience in strategic planning, evaluation, community-based conservation education, biodiversity research, curriculum creation, and public outreach have positioned him as a global leader in conservation, education, and strategy. He has advised conservation and education strategy in projects for the governments of countries as diverse as Cambodia, Mexico, Japan, the Dominican Republic, and India.

James earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master's and Ph.D. in biology from the University of Kansas. He accepted postdoctoral positions at the University of Vermont and at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Subsequently, he was a researcher and educator at Columbia University for 14 years, director of the Conservation Education Division at the San Diego Zoo for 3 years, and a consultant for six years before joining The Living Desert. James is fluent in Spanish, conversant in Portuguese, and has functional speaking abilities in German and French.

Dwight Middendorf

Director of Finance

Dwight Middendorf is the Director of Finance for the Living Desert. Before working here, Dwight held positions of Vice President of Finance and Administration; Chief Financial Officer; Divisional Controller and Audit Manager. He has worked in Fortune 500 companies, private, non-profit and government entities. He brings over 40 years of knowledge of financial, operational, tax and budget management to The Living Desert. Dwight has a Bachelor of Science in accounting from Arizona State University. He is a member of the AICPA.

RoxAnna Breitigan

Director of Animal Programs

RoxAnna Breitigan joined The Living Desert as Director of Animal Programs in June of 2015. In this role, RoxAnna oversees all aspects of the animal and veterinary departments at The Living Desert including animals, zookeeper staff, hospital staff, exhibits, enclosures, diets, enrichment, training, and zoo culture. She also is involved in the overall continuing master planning at The Living Desert.

RoxAnna has over 20 years of experience in the industry. Prior to joining The Living Desert, she worked for the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, CO. After beginning as a volunteer, she was quickly hired as a zookeeper before working her way up to lead keeper, area supervisor, and eventually named animal care manager.

RoxAnna, a native of Southern California, also worked as a zookeeper at the Santa Ana Zoo (Santa Ana, CA). She holds a bachelor's degree in Animal Science from Cal Poly Pomona.

PREFERRED COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens seeks a Chief Development Officer with

- a commitment to The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens' mission of conservation through preservation, education, and appreciation;
- experience as a strategic planner for donor program development and implementation, including results in engagement and stewardship;
- experience in capital campaign management, planned and annual giving;
- experience in donor cultivation with success acquiring gifts with significant institutional impact;
- an ability to manage and motivate volunteers;
- excellent organizational abilities, particularly related to donor records and special events coordination;
- knowledge of management and business best practices;
- excellent leadership and interpersonal relations abilities;
- excellent written and verbal communication and public presentation skills; and
- experience in donor management software and an ability to adapt to and operate park-specific POS, CRM, and donor management systems.

A bachelor's degree or an equivalent combination of education and experience is preferred for this position as is at least 10 years of relevant experience.

SALARY AND BENEFITS

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens offers a competitive salary and benefits package.

LOCATION

This position is located in Palm Desert, California.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

All applications must be accompanied by a cover letter and résumé. ***Cover letters should be responsive to the mission of The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens as well as the responsibilities and qualifications presented in the prospectus.*** Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the successful candidate has been selected.

To apply for this position, visit:

[*Chief Development Officer, The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens.*](#)

To nominate a candidate, please contact Gregory Leet:

[*gregoryleet@aspenleadershipgroup.com.*](mailto:gregoryleet@aspenleadershipgroup.com)

All inquiries will be held in confidence.