Meeting Title: Zoonomics Working Group – Kickoff Meeting

Date & Time: April 29th, 2025, 12-2pm EST

Location/Platform: Virtual meeting over Zoom

Facilitator/Chairperson: Danica Wolfe (Project Coordinator, Center for Zoonomics)

Note-taker: Tahlia Perry

Attendees: Eric Baitchman, Megan Brown, Rachel Burns, Asako Chaille, Jennifer D'Agostino, Marietta Danforth, Alex Garretson, John Griffioen, Shelly Grow, Adrienne Horrigan, Debbie Johnson, Jenny Kropf, Paula Mackie, Carla Madelaire, Anna Mekarska, Piper Mullins, Andrea Putnam, Tanya Salvey, Rachel Thompson, Andy Richardson, Kameron Roth, Cynthia Steiner, Gregory Watkins-Colwell, Michelle White, Tahlia Perry, Rachel Johnston, Danica Wolfe

Welcome & Introductions (12:00–12:25):

- **Rachel Johnston** welcomed participants.
- **Danica** introduced the working group; brief overview of the Center for Zoonomics.
- **Eric Baitchman (Co-founder of Center for Zoonomics)** provided additional context, covering:
    o The foundation of the Center and intro of **Dr. Elinor Karlsson**, Co-Founder of Center
    o An update on the termination of the IMLS grant and current efforts to appeal the decision
    o Assurance of ongoing support from Zoo New England (ZNE)
- Group round of introductions

Main Updates & Discussion led by Rachel Johnston (12:25–2:00):

Current Status of Metadata Working Group:

- Originally funded by a 3-year IMLS grant that was terminated April 1 with shuttering of IMLS.
- Bridge funding is now provided by Zoo New England.

New Opportunities:
- One-on-one meetings with several Working Group members had surfaced an interest to step back and map out the broader goal of a **coordinated biobank network.**
- The AZA Biobanking Grant (due May 1) aligns with this; Rachel planned to put in a grant proposal to support this broader aim.

Rachel proposed the Working Group adjust their efforts to step back and:

- **Define a shared vision** for a collaborative biobank network.
- **Conduct a gap analysis** to identify needs and opportunities.
- **Create a roadmap** document to prioritize future work.

Next Steps & Involvement: Rachel emphasized that while the group's scope is expanding, the input and expertise of all members remain critical. Rachel let group members know that it's understandable if they want

to reconsider their level of involvement as the group's direction evolves—please email
zoonomics@zoonewengland.org if you

<u>Open Discussion & Thematic Summary</u>

Rachel opened the meeting to discussion of the Working Group's new potential scope, to roadmap an AZA biobank network.

Defining 'Biobank' and Infrastructure Needs:

- There's a current need to define "biobank" vs. "sample collection." Defining this will be a good place for the group to start, as well as defining scope of the network (only AZA vs broader).
- Need for:
    - ο A comprehensive directory of existing biobanks
    - ο Consistent definitions and protocols

Model Organizations to Learn From:

- **EAZA Biobank**: Centralized zoo hubs for biospecimens and federated approval system.
- **ZooMu**: Museum-zoo collaboration model. Museums have more structures and protocols in place for biobanking infrastructure.
- **GA4GH / Human Biobanks**: Globally shared standards, governance, policies, and frameworks established for human data but could be adapted for animal data.
- **IUCN / Other Animal Biobanking for Conservation:** Katie Heineman (SDZWA and IUCN Center for Species Survival – Biodiversity Banking) is involved and is a member of the Working Group.

The AZA community could use guidance on legal, ethical, and ownership considerations:

- Concerns around intellectual property, sample usage rights, and sample use transparency.
- Zoos need protection from third-party for profit / commercialization of their samples.
- Broad Institute's former Head of Intellectual Property could provide guidance.
- Group supports moving toward a **"stewardship"** model over ownership—this reflects collaborative, ethical use of samples, including respect for Indigenous perspectives.

Logistical and Cyberinfrastructure Needs:

- Sample request and approval processes are burdensome and inconsistent.
- Possibility of adapting tools like **ZIMS** and **GBIF** to streamline requests. Need to consider how we would incorporate institutions who do not use ZIMS (e.g. TRACKS).
- Discussion of centralized vs. decentralized frameworks:
    - ο EAZA's model shows success with centralization.
    - ο The Center for Zoonomics cannot act as a biobank hub, could we make a system like EAZA work in a decentralized framework?
- Define a framework that allows for a balance of zoos feeling supported in making decisions about samples but also allowing them to be easily mobilized. **How can we move this forward?**

Funding and Participation Equity:

- Smaller zoos face barriers in funding, staff, and capacity.
- The group emphasized the need for inclusive solutions that do not increase burdens for zoo employees or smaller institutions.

Strategic Direction:

- Strong consensus to develop a **strategic action plan** with short- and medium-term **actionable goals**
- Avoid paralysis from over-planning; identify "low-hanging fruit" to implement quickly.

Next Steps & Strategic Planning

- Develop an **action plan** with flexibility, including:
  - SMART goals, defined timelines, and assigned leads for task execution
- Consider hiring an **external facilitator** to help define:
  - Short-, medium-, and long-term objectives
  - Allows for participation across group vs. just those comfortable sharing in whole group setting

Actionable Tasks Identified:

- The AZA biobanking grant will reflect that the group will develop and implement an **action plan for a biobank network**, followed by implementation of the high-priority, concrete actions.
- Conduct an **action plan** across current institutions (with professional facilitator, pending funding)
- Define short-term and actionable tasks that can be implemented soon
- Depending on identified priorities, begin building out metadata standardization and MTA
- Define and delegate tasks that can be worked on as a group, by individuals, or subgroups to optimize productivity and allow quick implementation
- A letter of support listing group members will be circulated for approval.
  - *Post-meeting edit:* Following feedback after the meeting, Rachel e-mailed the working group stating that given the evolving nature of the working group membership, the working group would be discussed in the grant proposal, but a set list of members would not be included.

Summary and Wrap Up:

- Group prefers a **strategy-focused action plan** which could be written soon, rather than a vague, long-term "vision."
- Members are committed to near-term **implementation** of priority items to maintain momentum.
- Emphasis on continued communication, transparency, and support across institutional sizes and capacities.
- Project coordination by **Danica** will ensure adherence to deadlines and ongoing process.