

## Levels of Engagement for Autistic Individuals at Zoos and Aquariums

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The opportunity to be in

the physical space but **not** 

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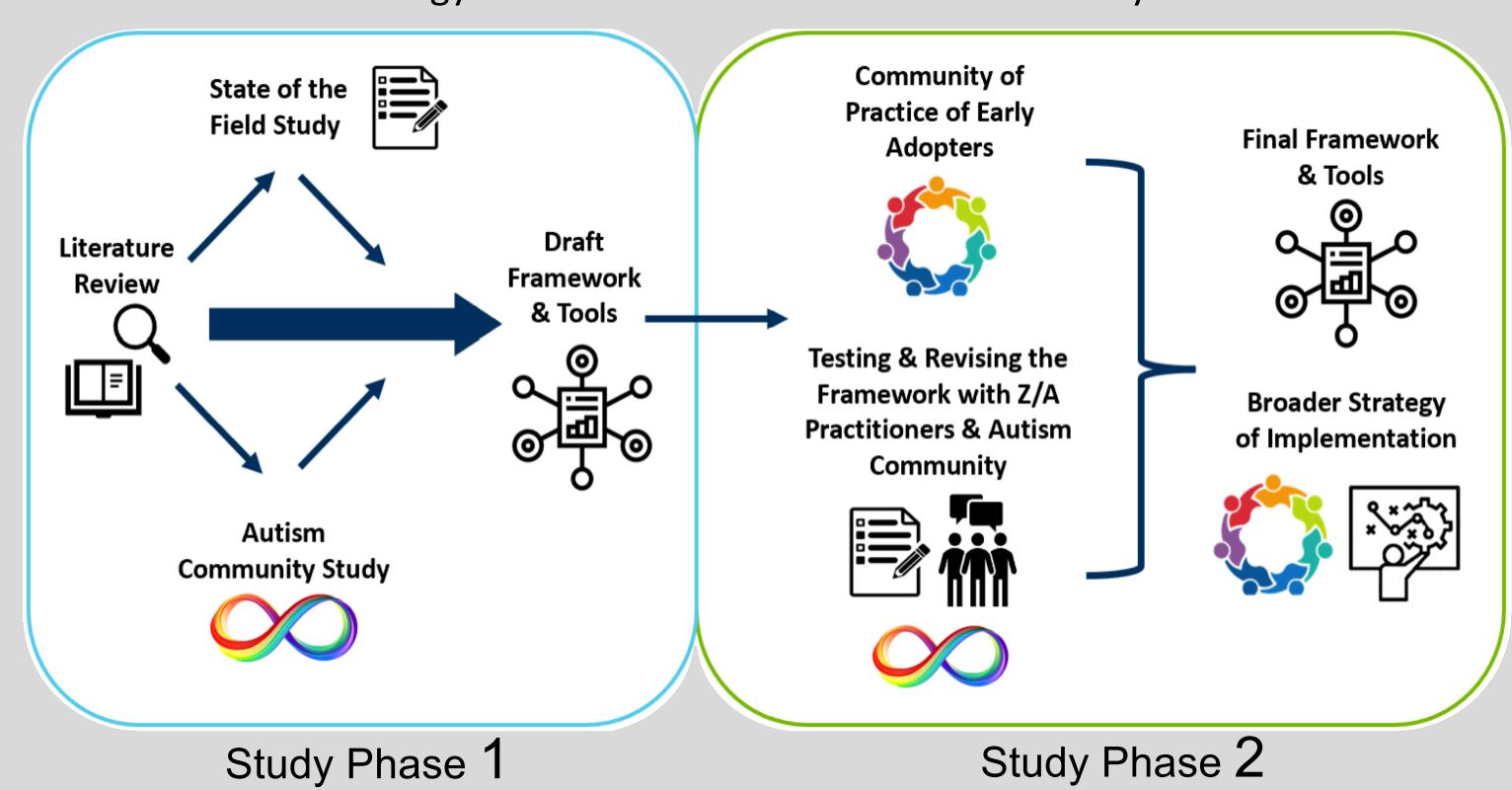
the experience of others.

°Inform Evaluation & Research

## PROJECT OVERVIEW:

The Oregon State University STEM Research Center, in collaboration with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) at Vanderbilt University Medical Center to support the *Modeling Zoos and Aquariums as Inclusive Communities of Science* (MoZAICS) project. MoZAICS focuses on:

- Developing an evidence-based toolkit of inclusive practices for zoos and aquariums to support science learning for autistic individuals across the full zoo/aquarium experience including the general visit, programs, exhibits, internships, volunteering and employment opportunities.
- The project will also support the building of a community of practice of zoo/aquarium practitioners dedicated to the comprehensive inclusion of autistic individuals; working toward an overall strategy of inclusion across the AZA community.



**EXERCISE:** In a perfect world, every zoo and aquarium would be fully accessible and inclusive. We'd see it reflected in...



The bubbles above reflect the themes that arose during our conversations internally and with advisors, when envisioning what a perfectly accessible and inclusive Z/A might look and feel like. The themes cut across arenas such as employment and work culture; organizational change; funding and resources; visitor experiences; evaluation and assessment; and structural issues.

## FRAMEWORK: Differences between accessibility and inclusion for autistic individuals at zoos & aquariums

## Definitions:

**Contribute:** The opportunity to physically and socially engage in a way that benefits others experiences, ideally carrying out the mission of the organization.

Participate: Physically or socially engaged in a way that primarily benefits your own experience but doesn't change the experience of others. You are primarily taking something away from the experience.

**Present:** In the physical space but not offered the opportunity to physically or socially engage in a way that benefits the individual or the experience of others.

	Sensory Tolerance / Not Accessible	Accessible	Inclusive
Contribute			The opportunity to physically and socially engage in a way that is valued and benefits others' experiences, ideally in alignment with the mission of the organization.

Ex: A Z/A has a recruitment strategy that specifically encourages neurodiverse applicants and then makes accommodations in the hiring process AND provides resources on the job.

The opportunity to **physically** or **socially** engage in a way that primarily benefits your own experience but doesn't change the experience of others. You are primarily taking something away from the experience.

Ex: An autistic individual visits a Z/A and has access to a quiet room in the aquarium, if needed. No other changes are made and no additional supports are offered for families visiting as part of the sensory friendly hours.

Our project team, including a group of self-advocate advisors, drafted this framework to outline our thinking about the differences between access and inclusion. Rows show levels of interaction, columns show points along the path to inclusion, and the intersections reflect the experiences of neurodiverse persons in those circumstances.

We want your feedback! Share your thoughts and reactions to this framework by scanning this QR code, and filling out the form at the link:

Ex: A Z/A hires an autistic

staff member. The hiring

practices and training for

staff remains the same. The

autistic staff member listens

at staff meetings but is not

contribute to the discussions.

invited or supported to











