

Historic Lincoln Park Zoo Builds a Sustainable Future with Smarter HR



Zero

paperwork
with digital
onboarding

Boosts

morale
with better
performance
management

Instant

insight
into HR
data



LINCOLN PARK ZOO.

FOR WILDLIFE. FOR ALL.

www.lpzoo.org

Nonprofit

400 employees (830 including
seasonal employees and volunteers)

Chicago, Illinois

Growing up in a single-parent household where money was often tight, one of Genevieve Gonnigan's favorite activities as a child was visiting Lincoln Park Zoo—often known as the “Pride of Chicago”.

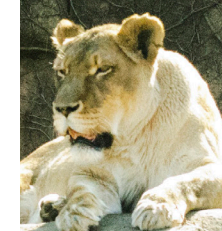
Today, as the Zoo's Vice President of HR, People and Culture, she recalls: “There's always been a commitment to keeping the Zoo free and accessible for everyone in the city. The gates are always open. And even now, when I'm walking the grounds and I see all the field trips and families and hear the laughter, I know that those kids will never forget it. It's such a magical place.”

The Zoo's employees and volunteers are passionate about the animals in their care—and the HR team is passionate about taking care of its people, too. As visitor numbers fluctuate seasonally throughout the year, the Zoo needs to onboard and train new staff and volunteers regularly to ensure visitors always enjoy a great experience.

“A lot of the people we hire are just starting their careers,” says Genevieve. “That younger generation is used to being able to do everything digitally. While the HR team had already moved away from a manual process for onboarding, many of our other HR processes were still paper-based, especially performance management. We may be a 150-year-old institution with a lot of historic value, but it's important that we move with the times. And as a conservation-minded organization, we wanted a more sustainable approach.”

“Paylocity makes it seamless to get candidates onboarded and onto our payroll. It speeds up the initial process of bringing someone into the system, and it sets expectations that their experience with HR is going to be smooth and efficient.”

Genevieve Gonnigan, Vice President of HR, People and Culture, Lincoln Park Zoo



The Challenge

Putting Paperwork in the Trash

Manual, paper-based processes for onboarding and performance management created inefficiencies and put Lincoln Park Zoo in an unsustainable position.

Moving Past Cumbersome, Inefficient Onboarding

When Genevieve joined the Zoo in 2023, the HR team had recently and successfully transitioned away from a highly manual onboarding process, utilizing Paylocity's [Onboarding](#) module. This eliminated the need to print out copies of the employee handbook and enabled the online completion of all necessary forms, including I-9s, for each new hire.

“Our peak season is the summer and a lot of kids who have just finished high school want to come and work with us,” explains Genevieve. “For Gen Z, they want to do everything in the palm of their hand—they don’t want to fill out paperwork. If you don’t have a solid onboarding system, you can lose good candidates, because people will just not show up for the first day of work if the onboarding experience is too cumbersome.”

Planning More Valuable Performance Management

It was a different story with performance management, which was previously a manual process done at inconsistent intervals for the various departments. Each year, managers and employees would print out stacks of paper to run appraisals and record employee progress, which was then scanned and uploaded into the HR team’s document management system. The process was time-consuming, which meant that performance-related activities were often only done once per year, and there was no formal connection between goals, performance, and compensation.

“Typically, by the time people sat down for their appraisals, the budget for next year had already been finalized,” says Genevieve. “Folks had already gotten their raises, and neither the employees nor the management team got much real value out of the appraisal process.”

In addition, printing out reams of paper was far from meeting the sustainability goals of the Zoo.

“Service is key, and Paylocity really delivers. I can reach out any time and the Paylocity team is so responsive. And to me, that means everything. With Paylocity, we’ve seen some great return on our investment, and we can definitely see even more value in the future.”

Genevieve Gonnigan, Vice President of HR,
People and Culture



The Solution

Building an On-Ramp for Modern, Centralized HR

Starting with a new fully digital onboarding process, Lincoln Park Zoo is now transforming almost every aspect of its HR processes with Paylocity.

Achieving Seamless Payroll and Onboarding

The Zoo had been using Paylocity's [Payroll](#) functionality for well over a decade, and when Genevieve joined the organization, she recognized the potential to leverage the wider platform more effectively and build upon the successful implementation of the Onboarding module. "What we loved about Onboarding is that it sped up that initial process of bringing somebody into the system," says Genevieve. "There's no paperwork, and it's seamless to get them from onboarding onto our payroll. We wanted to see those same efficiencies realized in our other processes."

Building a Culture of Learning and Engagement

By going through the onboarding process, new employees start using the Paylocity platform from day one, so they already know where to go for HR information, pay stubs, and paid time off requests. In addition, the Zoo now uses Paylocity's [Learning](#) module to give new hires, volunteers, and existing employees access to a wide range of training courses, and [Community](#) to provide a central hub for communication and interaction, with specific groups for interns and other employees.

"The Learning module is incredible," says Genevieve. "It gives our people the autonomy to watch videos and learn whenever it is convenient for them, on their mobiles. And whether we're welcoming a new set of interns or informing employees about open enrollment for benefits, Community makes it really easy to push out information."

With the [Performance](#) module, managers and employees now set goals at the start of the year and use journals to keep track of issues and accomplishments. Towards the end of the year, employees meet managers for appraisals, with the results informing the budgeting process for the next year.

"We are moving forward with aligning performance management with compensation planning, and this has done so much for morale," says Genevieve. "With this new model, we anticipate increased employee retention, greater process transparency, and more equitable pay. We wouldn't have been able to do that without Paylocity."



Onboarding improves the new employee experience.



Learning enables professional development anytime, anywhere.



Community creates a central hub for employee communication.



Performance provides feedback to help every employee and volunteer improve.



Payroll ensures everyone gets paid accurately and on time.



Paylocity Mobile App helps employees handle HR admin on the move.



Data Insights helps HR answer queries instantly and make better decisions.



The Results

Building a Modern Workplace That Puts Employees First

With Paylocity, Lincoln Park Zoo has the platform it needs to support employees operationally, psychologically, and emotionally throughout their careers.

Setting Standards from Day One

Looking back on what the Zoo has achieved with Paylocity, Genevieve identifies a key theme: “From the moment people join, Paylocity sets the expectation that we’re an organization that cares about efficiency, with good systems in place to support our work and our operations. It’s clear that as an employee, you have autonomy. You don’t have to come to the HR or payroll department; you have the power in the palm of your hand.”

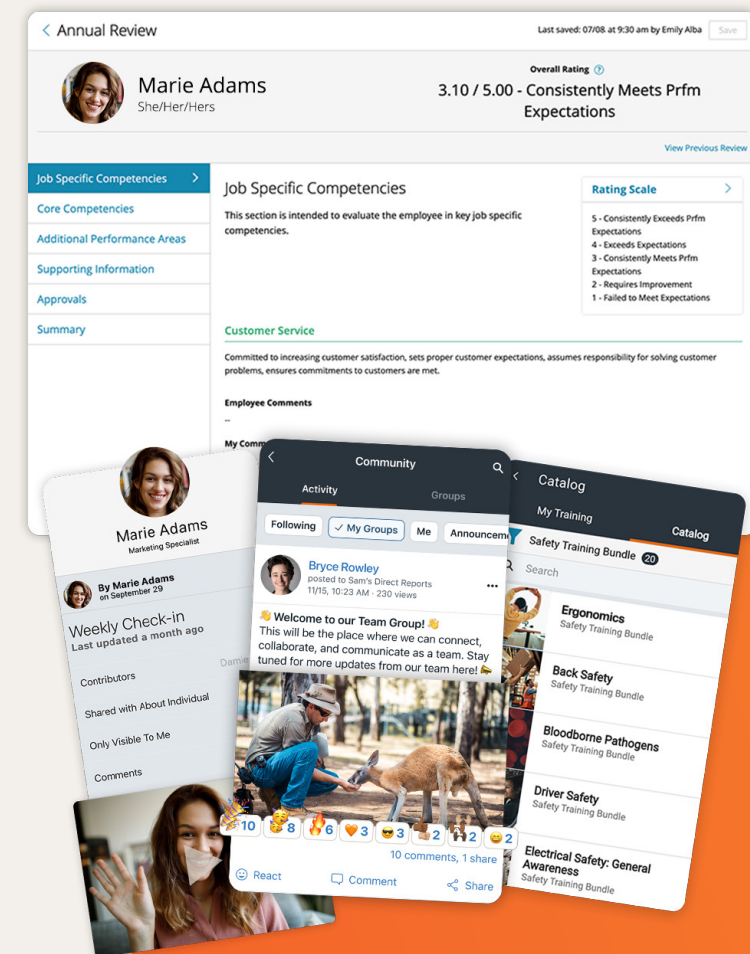
For the HR team, it’s a similar story: Paylocity empowers them to work efficiently. “I love the [Data Insights](#) module,” says Genevieve. “It’s literally one click and I can see my entire headcount and demographic trends. It gives us everything we need for regulatory reporting, and we’re continually creating custom reports—whether that’s for volunteer services, benefits eligibility, or payroll exceptions.”

Enhancing Wellness in the Workplace

Genevieve also sees Paylocity as a key tool for strengthening the Zoo’s culture. “We put a lot of effort into mental health and wellness,” she explains. “I really think that the Learning module can help us create a culture of psychological safety by promoting a more regular cadence of training to support our employees. Plus, we can post information on mental health through Community.”

Supporting More Eco-Friendly HR Operations

By moving from paper-based onboarding and performance management to streamlined digital processes, the Zoo has also improved its environmental performance. “Naturally, we are an environmentally conscious organization,” adds Genevieve. “Paylocity is helping us to get rid of paper and filing cabinets and implement more sustainable digital workflows. Everyone that has joined in the last two years only has a digital record, and we’re digitizing our older paper records too.”



“The Paylocity team genuinely loves the Zoo. They always want to learn more about our business. They’ve been so incredible and just so accessible. It’s like they’ve brought us into the family, and that just feels so great. We recently had a great day at Paylocity headquarters.”

Genevieve Gonnigan, Vice President of HR, People and Culture

