



How to Start a Sanctuary

NAPSA and its member sanctuaries are approached often by people seeking advice on how to start their own sanctuary. Although there is no precise formula for the successful founding and maintenance of a sanctuary, here are some of the most important things to keep in mind:

1. **Species:** Clarify what types of animals you want to care for. Do you have experience caring for the species in mind? Most importantly, is there a need for more sanctuaries to house this species?
2. **Land:** You will need to find property that has appropriate zoning, with proper permits, in a climate that is suitable for the species you wish to rescue. Local communities are not always supportive of introducing non-native animals to an area.
3. **Nonprofit Status:** Even if you are independently wealthy, your sanctuary will need to obtain both state and 501(c)(3) federal nonprofit status in order to reduce taxes, provide legitimacy, and accept tax deductible donations. This will require that you form a board of directors, create a mission statement, and write bylaws. As a nonprofit, the organization does not belong to you, rather you are an employee of the organization.
4. **Fundraising:** Prepare to spend much time and energy fundraising for your sanctuary, both before it opens and constantly once it has opened. Animal care, payroll, expansions and maintenance are expensive.
5. **Develop policies and procedures:** Your sanctuary will need a manual of policies that dictates how the organization functions. This provides assurance and protection to you, the organization, its donors and its employees. This is also key to ensuring animals are safe when and if the sanctuary faces natural disasters and other emergencies.
6. **Finances:** You will need professional guidance from accountants to prepare your financial statements, submit your taxes and guide your organization forward. As founder, be sure to never invest more of your own money than you would be comfortable walking away from.
7. **Licensing and accreditation:** You will need the outside approval of state, county, and industry animal care experts in order to permit volunteers on site, and to prove to your donors, foundations and those placing animals with you that you are reputable.
8. **People skills:** You got into this for a love of primates, but know that you will spend most of your time managing and interacting with people, whether that is employees, volunteers, donors, contractors, the sanctuary's board, etc. Running a sanctuary is no different than running any other business – you need HR skills, practical knowledge, confidence, and the ability to seek help when needed.
9. **Know how to say no:** You will not be able to save every animal. In order for your sanctuary to be sustainable and run responsibly, you will need to say “no” if the sanctuary does not have the capacity to take in new animals.
10. **Learn from experts:** Network with multiple people experienced in founding and running sanctuaries. Learn from their mistakes and take their advice seriously. They will know the answers to any of the questions listed here – and more!

For more information:

[“Running a Sanctuary,”](#) Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary

[A Guide for Modern Sanctuaries with Examples from a Captive Chimpanzee Sanctuary,](#) Amy Fultz