Animal Charity Evaluators
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Type of Meeting: Standard Monthly Meeting
Date: June 22, 2014

In attendance:
Chairperson: Simon Knutsson
Treasurer: Brian Tomasik
Secretary: Rob Wiblin
Executive Director: Jon Bockman
Guest: S. Greenberg
Guest: S. B. F.
Guest: Allison Smith

Absent:

Quorum established: Yes

1. Call to order: SK called the meeting to order at 10:05 am PST

2. Approval of minutes: Request for approval of minutes from the Board of Directors Meeting held on May 25, 2014, and publishing them on the ACE site.

>   In Favor: 2
>   Opposed: 0
>   Recused: 0

    RW absent for vote; joined meeting shortly afterward. The motion has passed.

3. Items considered:
1. Previous board meeting (SK)
   a. SG to send links to tutorial that shows how Twitter and the like steer website visitors. [completed]
   b. Advisory board: On JB's long-term list of things to potentially do. No concrete action planned.
   c. Tracking money moved. Two methods in place:
      i. Unique URLs
      ii. Staff recently created a donation register where donors can record their donations to our recommended charities. (Incl. method to not double count them if they give using the unique URLs).
2. Brief financial update (JB)
   a. Updated financials
   b. May:

     i. Liquid unrestricted assets: $14,851.32 (as of 5/31/14)

     ii. This would cover 2 months operating expenses from June 1

     iii. May income: $2,000

     iv. May expenses: $6,596.45

     v. May net income: $(4,596.45)

     vi. May budgeted income: $7,800

  c. June:

     i. Liquid unrestricted assets: $17,609.83 (as of 6/18/14)

     ii. This would cover 2.5 months operating expenses from June 13

     iii. Donations (6/1/14 – 6/22/14): $6,050

3. Progress update (progress in relation to strategic plan) (JB)

  a. Humane education study results published

  b. Pay-per-view study: April 2014–Mar 2015 (preparation to publication time)

     i. Pilot is planned before spending resources on a full study

  c. Homepage redesign mockup

     i. Desired actions are more obvious

     ii. Easier to look at

     iii. Asking for a last name reduces mailing list signups and has no clear benefit (so likely shouldn't ask for it). Asking for first name reduces signups as well but could be compensated because we can address subscribers by name.

     iv. While much clearer, the page could still have even more obvious call to action

     v. The main button should not be "donate" but something indicating that people are going to learn more about them. Could be "donate to top charities." [Edit after meeting: GiveWell uses "see our top charities"].

  d. Learning from other social movements

     i. Potentially publish the results in a research journal or a post from Slate etc. It would be a more digestible summary and would require a volunteer already familiar with the writing requirements.

     ii. AS: The project will initially result in a couple of case studies incl. on the Fat Acceptance movement. The movement has similarities with animal advocacy: ask people to make a behavioral change, small following, modern struggle. The staff/volunteer working on it is already familiar with the movement. Will also look at environment, anti-smoking and other movements.

4. Website traffic report (JB)

  a. Key takeaways

     i. Steady growth

     ii. Bump from release of recommendations and mention of ACE in MFA's newsletter

     iii. People are spending more time on pages

5. W. Hsiung's feedback on Facebook from June 14 (link here and text pasted at the bottom of this agenda). (SK)
   a. Feedback can be considered to have five parts:
      i. Feedback 1: ACE has too much focus on some interventions. Look broader and deeper. (ACE's link to list of interventions.)
         1. RW: Yes, the justification to start with pamphleting is not that strong, but you have to start somewhere. I am open to the idea of looking elsewhere now.
         2. BT: The strategy was that we first want to do something concrete to produce something actionable. It's good that we're contributing a first step. We can go into more speculative areas when we have this foundation.
      ii. Feedback 2: ACE recommends charities based on a shallow narrow look at data despite unpromising results
         1. RW: Used to be true, less convinced it's the case now.
      iii. Feedback 3: ACE should do less own research
         1. RW: Our own studies don't seem to have led to much. Seems we either have to "go hard or go home" - enormous study with very high quality, or not bother.
            a. Important to do it in the same way as actual interventions.
            b. A form of cheaper experiments is pure online experiments, but use might be more limited for organizations because it is not the setting in which the intervention is carried out
               i. Might be able to glean answers to more generic questions though
            c. Academics could get into psychological backgrounds etc. and they could tie it into other research to understand psychological states.
         2. AS: It's a lot easier to get others (charities/academics) to take the lead on studies that investigate what small changes a charity can do to make its programs more effective, e.g. what type of leaflets work best. It is more difficult with the kind of studies we have done about whether something works or not, which ask whether the charity should entirely change it's approach.
         3. RW: Perhaps if we combine all the leaflet studies we will have one study with sufficient power?
         4. Humane League Labs study on why people became veg: is this an easier way to learn? Start from understanding how much money/time go into promoting things. Instead of why people went veg, one can ask what caused people to become dedicated activists.
         5. Could consider going from qualitative to quantitative: start with qualitative, then categorize the points, then conduct a quantitative

follow-up study, and finally look at the % of people that go veg using those points.

    iv. Feedback 4: ACE does not ask experts on social/institutional change, psychology, marketing

        1. RW: Fair criticism.

        2. JB: This is something we're doing in the social movements project, we'd also like to do it more but can't do everything at once.

    v. Feedback 5: Focus more on spreading insights.

        1. RW: Maybe, but I'm content trying to collect more insights first, at least for the rest of the year. Can reconsider at the end of the year.

  b. Related:

    i. What has been the value of the results from our leafleting and humane education studies (despite learning how to do studies)?

        1. AS has increased her knowledge supporting that leafleting is a promising intervention but that humane education is less promising

6. Driving Engagement (JB)

  a. Posting discussions – try to release as many new pieces of info via ACE's site instead of Facebook groups such as EAA Discussion, and encourage discussion on our site instead of on Facebook.

    i. J. Kaufman auto moves the conversations from Facebook and the like back to his website. Should we consider cross-posting?

        1. Perhaps ask him for his code for this. But can get pushback because people assume that Facebook is somewhat private and not searchable.

    ii. Might not be able to avoid that discussions take place mostly on Facebook.

    iii. Action item: Post on our site first whenever possible.

7. Fundraising (JB)

  a. Trifold, Guide

  b. Grants

    i. Three applications submitted, more in process

    ii. Greenbaum

        1. RW: Will try to organise a dinner with JB in early August.

    iii. Good Ventures – does not accept unsolicited proposals

        1. RW: W. MacAskill has met Cari but not much. Obviously GiveWell knows Good Ventures but not sure they would do an introduction yet (probably want the research to mature).

        2. SK has met Cari

        3. JB to reach out to GiveWell

    iv. P. Gruissem (http://reg-charity.org/)

        1. Organising an event in Las Vegas with poker players to meet more people.

        2. REG recommends SCI and GiveWell-type charities. BT to ask if they consider ACE/animals.

        3. JB to stay in touch with BT.

   c. TAFA/AR surveys

   d. ED Webinar

      i. Good idea, don't know that it should be exclusive, could be taped and put on YouTube.

      ii. Google Hangouts On Air is an option. Will auto-upload to YouTube when finished, but we probably don't want to auto upload without a chance to edit.

        1. RW: Would have it open to start with

        2. People should like that it's open since they support transparency

        3. Even if no one is interested, it would be good that we offered the opportunity

        4. Could have people sign up for it, or at least as a Facebook event

8. Recommendations: Should the board have to approve our recommended charities before they are announced? (The board currently doesn't have to.)

   a. We might get better feedback from board if their names would be behind the recommendations.

   b. In the past, we had concerns about bringing in board members affiliated with charities because it could create a conflict of interest. And we said that it was less of an issue since the recommendations were made by the staff.

   c. Postpone discussion until next meeting

9. Board recruitment (SK)

   a. Publish job ad type blog post after this meeting.

   b. SG: Concerned that there isn't a big enough target market, that ACE is too niched. The intersection of effective altruists who also care enough about animals might be too small. Even if we do an amazing job, we might not move enough money.

   c. SBF: Ready to join. Needs approval from employer first.

4. New business:

5. Closed session (optional: excludes ED or other invited guests): [N/A if the session was not closed]

6. Next scheduled meeting: Sunday July 20, 2014 10:00 am PST

7. Meeting adjourned at 11.30 am by SK

Submitted by:

_____, Board Secretary

Minutes

_____, Board Chair

Appendix:
W. Hsiung feedback via Facebook:
Animal Charity Evaluators is promising and has very smart people involved. But I would strongly suggest some refinements to their evaluation/recommendation process. It's a little strange, for example, that they:

- Look only at the three interventions that are most consistent with their, and the EA community',s (non-evidence-based) prior;
- Recommend charities on the basis of this shallow, narrow look at the data, despite unpromising preliminary results (I don't see how you could plausibly recommend charities on the basis of the very weak and tentative data collected. This is Elie's criticism too, I believe.);
- AFAIK, do not ask experts on the questions they are researching (social/institutional change, psychology, even marketing) where *they* would donate their dollars;
- Spend money/time to do studies that even the relatively non-expert EA community recognizes as seriously deficient.

We've gone through similar struggles with Direct Action Everywhere. So we have gone out of our way to debias by affirmatively inviting folks with completely contrasting approaches to come talk with us (and sent our activists go work with them), utilize and write about research from experts and top research journals, spend time/energy only on original research in the very narrow areas where we think we can plausibly make a real contribution (e.g. graphic images), and make it a point to use creative methods (blogs, podcasts, videos, interviews with third parties) to spread the insights we've developed on activism to the broader AR community.

In short, my view is that ACE should be:

- Sampling a broader and deeper array of research;
- Making better distinctions based on quality of research;
- Focusing less on executing its own research (payoffs are generally low for extraordinary time/money/effort, in my experience; only those already convinced will believe your results) and more on interpreting/encouraging research by independent experts;
- Focusing more on spreading insights developed, or even more importantly the IDEA of impatc-and-evidence based thinking, in the activist community. (Who cares about any of this, after all, if we don't manage to change activists?)