

# Comprehensive Review Questions for Open Cages (2017)

**If your organization receives any restricted donations, approximately how much did it receive in the past year?**

In addition to one major donor, who is mostly interested in sponsoring fur campaign related expenses, and donated \$6,939 last year, there is a group of people who donate to salaries. There are about 14 people who decided to donate to salaries of 2 people. Basically, we were able to hire a fundraiser only because a group of volunteers (myself included) decided to cover the cost of a new position that we considered necessary to ensure our further growth and development.

We are also receiving donations from Anima (Denmark) for one full-time salary.

NOTE: We have outlined all of our restricted donations in our programs document which we attached to the message.

**If your organization has any revenue-generating programs, it would be helpful for us to know what those programs are and how much revenue they generated in the past year.**

Our revenue generating programs are VegFests and our merchandise. In the past year these generated \$13,350.

**How much time is allocated for the professional development of staff?**

My feeling while answering this question is that it seems like something written with organizations much bigger than ours in mind. I am confident that by the time we start hiring significantly more people, we would have also developed more policies and procedures about hiring, professional development, and many other areas of our work. At this moment 90% of the work done by us and 90% of our successes come from the work of our activists who are volunteers. I myself have been a volunteer for over 5 years, and only started working full time in the organization (which I co-founded) 2 months ago. At this moment we have a significant number of volunteers with at least 3 years of experience in Open Cages, who have enough experience in campaigning and other type of work that they are able to give advice to other organizations and often do so.

We are a volunteer based organization and we mostly hire our volunteers. Therefore the opportunities for development begin even before people become staff, and all our development opportunities are open for both staff members and volunteers. The time spent on education and development depends on how long a certain person has been volunteering with us and the position this person has. It is impossible for us to track time spent on development, because all development options are open to all volunteers and many of the people we eventually hired started participating in them long before they became hired by Open Cages.

We inform activists where the skill gaps are that the organization needs to fill and that we will be happy to cover or participate in the costs if someone decided to learn it.

- All volunteers participate in initial training where we teach about how we work.
- Volunteers and staff participate in yearly 3-day-long training retreat, with lectures and workshops. We invite people from other organizations to give talks or teach skills.
- We organize additional trainings with professionals depending on the needs of our teams (e.g., legal interventions on factory farms, media, PR, web writing).
- We connect both our key volunteers and staff members with people from other organizations that work in similar campaigns, so that they can learn from each other and exchange information.
- We invite people from other organizations and organize trainings for both volunteers and staff.
- We cover the costs of any commercial trainings for both staff and volunteers if they are connected to skills that are important for the organization and even encourage people to participate in them.
- Learning new skills connected to the position is one of the elements of evaluation of every staff member.
- Allocation of time is decided on needs basis, because there is little overlap between our paid positions (we only have a small staff team).
- We strongly believe that people are our best asset and we give all support and help in personal and professional development.
- Many of our volunteers got jobs in other NGOs or commercial companies because of the skills and experience gathered in Open Cages.

**How do you integrate and encourage diversity practices within your recruitment and hiring process?**

As an organization we are not only ethically committed to diversity, but we also strongly believe that diversity of experiences and opinions makes us more effective.

Our hiring strategy is based in the big number of volunteers that are involved in all types of campaigns and activities that the organization is involved in: lobbying, corporate outreach, vegan festivals, investigations, media work, IT, graphic design, etc. We are strongly constrained by funding, but not by potential talent. We are constantly looking for ways to attract volunteers with diverse backgrounds and skillsets, because this enriches our perspectives.

At this moment we are looking into ways to include more activists that are:

- Immigrants from Ukraine/Belarus/Russia
- 40+ (which is probably more difficult than in the USA or Western Europe, because the AR movement itself is quite young here)
- Religious (since animal rights is mostly connected to left-wing and secular communities in Poland, and we feel the need to improve our communication with religious people, who are the majority of the population in Poland)

In our opinion those are 3 major areas where we could improve.

In Open Cages we offer paid positions to people who have already proven to be hard-working and who show leadership skills when they are volunteers. We believe that if a campaign or a team is run by a volunteer, then this person is probably the best option we have, because they already understand our values and rules, and they have experience in the field. We also believe that it would be extremely demotivating to our activists if we would show that we only value their work when it's "free" but when we can start paying for it, we start looking elsewhere for people to hire. By offering positions to best volunteers we are also making sure that we are hiring people who are passionate about animal protection, and for whom it's not just another job that they can quit when they get another offer.

Our approach to diversity in hiring is mostly based on trying to achieve the most diverse pool of volunteer-activists possible and on a strong focus on internal transparency. We always announce that there are new campaigns or projects that need coordination, and we try to motivate skilled but shy activists to try their hand at more demanding tasks.

Since before joining the animal rights movement I was an active participant of the feminist movement. I am trying to do my best not to overlook potential female activists that tend to have more doubts and need more encouragement, even when they are really skilled and talented. I

am aware that it is easy to fall into the trap of the illusion of meritocracy, when you only wait for the most outspoken people to apply for challenging but exciting projects. I spent a lot of time researching the issue of female leadership and work-related discrimination and inside Open Cages we use all the science-based ideas that are proven to mitigate the risk of discrimination (e.g., transparency of salaries).

I also believe that another factor that influences our stance on diversity and discrimination is the fact that most of the people who were founders of Open Cages, or who later joined the board, have backgrounds in organizations connected to other social movements (feminist, LGBTQ, workers rights, anti-racist, human rights, development aid).

One thing to know about Poland is that after the tragedy of WW2, it became a nearly ethnically homogeneous country—because of the Nazi Holocaust, altered borders, and deportations ordered by Soviet authorities.

### **Does Open Cages provide employees with a workplace that has policies and serious protocols to address harassment and discrimination?**

Before addressing the organization-specific policies regarding discrimination and harassment let me state that as a registered nonprofit and a public benefit organization, Open Cages has to comply with Polish legislation, including the labor law.

Both the European Union and Polish law strongly prohibit any discrimination in employment. Specifically, article 11 (3) of the Polish Labor Code provides for the obligation to treat all employees equally with respect to employment conditions, promotion and access to professional training, and conclusion and termination of employment, irrespective of: sex, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political views, trade union membership, ethnic background, religious creed, sexual orientation, full-time or part-time employment, and employment for indefinite or fixed time.

Victims of discrimination can enforce their rights in special labor courts and are also entitled to notify the National Labor Inspectorate, which can conduct inspections and may impose a fine on the employer. All employers operating in Poland, irrespective of their legal form, are required by law to instruct their newly hired employees about their rights and the ways in which they are enforced.

In 2017 Open Cages received the special status of a public benefit organization. Registered nonprofits which have this status are allowed to receive 1% of income tax from individual taxpayers. However, to retain it, they are required by law to publish a detailed yearly report on their activities, governance, and finance. These reports are publicly available and have to include information on all the workers employed by the organization, their employment status, and highest and median salaries. Non-compliance with this rule can result in losing the status of a public benefit organization and can have severe financial consequences.

As an organization which was founded by people who had been involved in various anti-discriminatory causes, Open Cages treats all these rules very seriously.

To evade the possibility of discrimination we make all processes connected to hiring transparent for all activists: from salaries, to daily plans of hired staff, and results of evaluation. When making decisions about hiring volunteers we take into account the opinions of many people who have been working with them previously—not just board members, but mostly other volunteers from their local teams.