

From: **Jon Bockman** <jon.bockman@animalcharityevaluators.org>
Date: Sat, Jun 3, 2017 at 12:11 PM
Subject: Re: Questions Regarding Animal Charity Evaluators
To: Steve Hindi <shindishark@gmail.com>

Hi Steve,

First, to address your concerns about ACE and my/our relationship with Nick Cooney:

We knew that Nick Cooney had a connection to each of the Top Charities that we decided to recommend in 2017, as that information is publicly available. While we considered the possibility that some may conjecture that our recommendations are based on this connection, we felt it was most important to select the charities that we found to be doing the very best work based on our recommendation criteria. So, we selected our current top three charities *despite the connection*, rather than because of the connection. While it is standard practice to avoid any appearance of impropriety, we cared more about sticking to our recommendation criteria than our appearance.

Suggesting that there is collusion between Nick and ACE *because of your accusation of plagiarism* doesn't make much sense. If there was a collusion, then why I would obviously flaunt it? You also neglected to mention that Bruce Friedrich also has a presentation where he shows a before and after picture of him with and without dreadlocks. Does that mean that there is collusion between me and Bruce Friedrich as well? I've seen many charities and advocates use graphics ACE created in their presentations, including people who are in no way affiliated with us or our recommended charities.

Regarding your claim about Cooney's ideologies and methods being a foundation of ACE's work:

As I'm sure you are aware, our organization was originally founded as part of the Centre for Effective Altruism. Given these facts—that we are an organization that applies the principles of effective altruism to animal activism—it's rather obvious why our organization was named *Effective Animal Activism*. While Cooney, along with many other advocates, may use the term "effective advocacy" or "effective activism," that is simply because they approach their activism in a similar way.

Regarding your claim, that we "must understand that the odds that of out of thousands of active animal protection organizations, only those where Mr. Cooney either directly profits from or is a board member are given Top Charity status is astronomical.":

First, your claim is inaccurate; Animal Equality—an organization in no way affiliated with Cooney—was a Top Charity for two years, thereby invalidating your entire premise. Second, Cooney has worked with other animal charities that have not received a recommendation, another fact that discredits your claim. Furthermore, those who follow our work closely understand that we use heuristics to narrow down our search for effective charities. We are not reviewing tens of thousands of animal charities; in fact, we only have comprehensive reviews for 21 different charities on our site, and exploratory reviews for 26 different charities.

Regarding your claim that we “have shown such a preference toward [Cooney], to the extent that you have copied his presentation to the point of plagiarism” and “that the appearance of favoritism and bias is overwhelming”:

Have you considered the possibility that Cooney, along with thousands of other advocates and philanthropists, is working in ways that adhere to the principles of effective altruism? You mention that Cooney is profiting from his charity work; but just like many other members of the effective altruist community, he publicly notes that he donates 50% of his salary to charity—it doesn’t seem like profit is a major drive for him.

You liken the fact that Cooney works primarily for farmed animal advocacy groups to ACE’s current recommendations of farmed animal advocacy as evidence of some sort of concerted effort between Cooney and ACE. All the while, you have completely disregarded evidence contrary to your claims. Animal advocacy is a very small space, with farmed animal advocacy occupying a small area with it. Taking these facts into consideration, it makes sense that an advocate who prioritizes effectiveness as much as Nick Cooney, and working in a cause area that is highly effective in and of itself, would be represented in top three charities that we recommend. I’m surprised you didn’t come across our discussion of cause prioritization, given your thorough investigation of our work.

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/charity-reviews/evaluating-charities/evaluation-criteria/#full-criteria-template>

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/charity-reviews/evaluating-charities/evaluation-process/>

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/advocacy-interventions/prioritizing-causes/#detailed>

Question:

In your previously mentioned video, you spoke about a consultant you used to rebrand ACE. Please identify that consultant, and give a detailed accounting of the financial arrangement with the consultant.

Answer:

Why is this relevant? The logo was designed by a freelancer from a company called HayNeedle. We paid them \$2,000. We received a discount for half price for being an animal charity.

Question:

In your 2015 990, it states that ACE, “*ACTED AS A CONSULTANT TO DOZENS OF SIGNIFICANT DONORS...*”

As you claim you want to avoid conflicts of interests by being transparent, please list all of the donors, how much each gave to ACE, and what ties they may have to any organization you have reviewed. For instance, has HSUS or anyone associated with HSUS donated to ACE? This would include any donors to HSUS who may have donated to ACE so HSUS could received a positive review and position as a “*stand out charity.*”

We must note that HSUS took in \$133,000,000 in 2015 with a quarter of a billion dollars in assets. It is unfathomable that any organization with that much money - and paying multiple employees hundreds of thousands of dollars year - has a positive dollar to animal saved ratio.

Answer:

We strive for the utmost transparency in our work. However, we do not disclose information about our donors, to you or any other member of the public, for obvious reasons. I'm sure you can understand this, considering you are the founder of a nonprofit yourself. Would your donors like their information to be made publicly available?

You reference a statement from our 2015 990 to justify your request for our donor list. We use "consultant" as defined by most every dictionary, "a person who provides expert advice professionally." We provide advice to donors, based on existing research, our established recommendation criteria, and the expert knowledge required to operate as a charity evaluator.

We have a Conflict of Interest policy on our site. We clearly state that we cannot consider a charity for three years if key leadership donate to ACE. In fact you'll see that we have removed DxE from consideration for the past three years due to a donation we received in 2014 (though we will be considering reviewing them this year, since it has been three years).
<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/transparency/policies/#COI>

If you look closely, you'll notice that we recommend the *Farm Animal Protection Campaign* of the HSUS, and not HSUS as a whole. This is another example of your using evidence to support your premise, when in fact it is evidence to the contrary. Not only that, but we have strict conditions for when we recommend a restricted donation to that campaign.
<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/charity-review/humane-society-of-the-united-states-farm-animal-protection-campaign/>

Question:

In the Board Minutes from November 24, 2013,
[<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/November-2013-24.11.13Boardmeetingminutespublic-1.pdf>] at which you were present, it states "*ACE Advisors Facebook group created.*"

Please tell us who were the advisors to ACE at that time (before ACE was the official name and you were still operating under a previous group name) and a complete list of advisors from then until the present, and the URL of this page.

In those same minutes, it states, regarding your website, "*i.Potentially very high leverage, which is a prima facie reason to offer them.*"

Answer:

I honestly don't remember who was in that group, but it was a group we created with the intention of getting feedback from the community on content that we were planning to post on our site. It didn't have

much participation, so we stopped using it very soon after it was created. It's been closed for years. I'm guessing it did have Nick as a member, and probably a few other people from our recommended charities as well. Again, the field of effective animal advocacy is small so this is not surprising.

Currently, we do have people who have signed up to be external evaluators of our work (which is the same function as this FB group). We have a few names listed on our site, as we only started this recently.

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/about/contributors/external-reviewers/>

Question:

What were you offering this "very high leverage" for, and to whom?

Answer:

I don't know what your point is about the "potentially high leverage" language. We were talking about whether or not to continue giving career advice, particularly in the form of career advice "sessions." We decided against it, despite there being high potential value for those people who we gave the advice sessions to, because it wasn't in keeping with our brand and we had limited resources.

Finally from those minutes, there was this:

"Transparency: Sharing meeting minutes

i. Good thing to do but be careful what to record in writing for legal reasons, no quotes, be aware of sensitive information"

Question:

For a group that claims to value transparency, this is very disturbing. What exactly were you hiding?

Answer:

We are not hiding anything, that's why we publish our board meeting minutes. It's simply a statement that we need to be careful about what we write in case someone misinterprets it at a later date. Without thorough note taking, statements can be taken out of context, as we have seen in this particular case.

From the Board meeting minutes, nov. 30, 2014, it states that you reviewed a group called the "*Humane Slaughter Association*,"

[<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/30.11.14BoardMeetingMinutesforpublication.pdf>]

Review Humane Slaughter Association

1. ACE already looked into them for a shallow review, but were not allowed to publish it.

Question:

How can you claim to be an objective evaluation company if you allow companies you evaluate to censor the publication of those evaluations? Clearly there is a public interest in finding out what a group called

the "*Humane Slaughter Association*" is up to, but by burying such information, you give the appearance that you are not held to the truth, but the whims of those you evaluate.

Answer:

As stated in our charity evaluation process, we don't require groups to allow us to publish our reviews so that they will be open and transparent with us. Our reviews are based on much more than publicly available information, and require groups to be involved in the evaluation process. If we required publication, then many groups would decide to not have a conversation with us at all. Our goal is not to be a watchdog organization, or to identify the "bad" groups, but instead to identify the very best groups. This policy is in keeping with that goal. That is not incongruent with being an objective evaluation organization. We do not "bury" information, we just respect the organization's preference for us not to publish the information they voluntarily provided us.

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/charity-reviews/evaluating-charities/>

Since forming in 2013, ACE has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars mostly on research and some on advocacy.

Question:

Can you prove that this money saved tens of thousands of animal lives, and if you cannot, then doesn't ACE fail it's own standards of being an organization that is worth donating to because of your poor dollar to animal ratio?

Answer:

We have influenced almost \$10 in donations to our recommended charities for every \$1 that we spent in 2016. We think that is evidence of our work saving animal lives, but you are open to your own view. We strive to understand our donor behavior each year so that we can maximize our impact.

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/blog/lessons-from-aces-2016-donor-survey/>

Finally, I want to point you to two essays written about ACE by Harrison Nathan. Mr. Nathan goes into great detail about his criticisms of ACE, and he does so using science as his method. I do not believe you ever responded to Mr. Nathan's well-thought out essays in specifics, and I am asking you to do so now.

To quote from his second post, "*Earlier this month, I released an extensive critique of the current Effective Altruist work on animal welfare, which in particular accused Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE) of using pseudoscience, fabricating figures, ignoring scientific literature, using unrealistic metrics which promote co-optation, and suspending its own formal criteria in its evaluation of the Good Food Institute (GFI).*"

The Actual Number is Almost Surely Higher - An Evaluation of Effective Animal Activism

<https://medium.com/@harrisonnathan/the-actual-number-is-almost-surely-higher-92c908f36517>

Re-evaluating Animal Charity Evaluators

<https://medium.com/@harrisonnathan/re-evaluating-animal-charity-evaluators-c164231406f7>

Answer:

We have written some blog posts that provide information about the arguments that Harrison made that we thought were worth addressing.

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/blog/responses-to-common-critiques/>

<https://animalcharityevaluators.org/blog/our-recommendations-of-good-food-institute-and-new-harvest/>

Best,

Jon