

# 18-20



# Strategic Plan

Animal Charity Evaluators

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# 01 **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this strategic plan is to establish the strategy of Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE) through 2020. The plan aims not to be an exhaustive strategic guide but rather to provide general guidance by describing (i) our philosophical commitments, (ii) our mission and vision, (iii) key aspects of our work, (iv) select reflections on our work thus far, and (v) core objectives and general methods for reaching those objectives. It was created by key ACE staff, and has been approved by the ACE Board of Directors.

We have decided against composing a longer-term strategic plan of 5 or 10 years. This is because we are working in a quickly-evolving field where substantial changes may occur rapidly. We believe that we need to remain agile in our strategy to ensure that we are continually adhering to and fulfilling our mission of finding and promoting the most effective ways to help animals.

We will refer to this strategic plan when setting yearly goals and making decisions about the direction of our organization, or when considering specific projects. This is to ensure that we are maintaining focus on our core mission. We anticipate that this plan will guide our work through 2020, though we may choose to update it at some point during the next three years if we deem it necessary.

We have a series of objectives that will enable us to promote, sustain, and grow our activities. These are captured by the following five core statements (roughly prioritized in order of importance):

***OBJECTIVE A:***

Produce high quality research and recommendations.

***OBJECTIVE B:***

Promote an effective altruist mindset among animal advocates.

***OBJECTIVE C:***

Establish ACE as a key credible source on effective advocacy.

***OBJECTIVE D:***

Fundraise for recommended charities and for ACE.

***OBJECTIVE E:***

Ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency at ACE.

In striving to achieve these objectives, we will ensure that we provide animal advocates with the best available information on effective animal advocacy.

## 02 Introduction

For millennia humans have advocated for nonhuman animals. Some people help by rescuing animals in need, providing food and shelter. Others focus on conservation efforts. Still others campaign for animals used in science, or advocate for plant-based diets. All of these efforts can help animals, but how do we know which ones make the biggest difference?

It is this question that drives our team at Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE). There has been relatively little research regarding how animal advocates can achieve the greatest good with their resources. Such research is critical, as one may be remarkably more impactful by engaging in some actions over others.

Better understanding impact is especially important for animal advocates, given the limited resources currently allocated towards helping animals. In the United States in 2016, animal charities received roughly 1.5% of all donations to charity. Less than 1% of those donations went to charities that specifically focus on farmed animals, despite the fact that over 99% of all land animals killed or used by humans for consumption in the United States are farmed animals (over 9.2 billion animals in 2015 alone). This shows that as a group, animal advocates would benefit from guidance on how they can accomplish the greatest good.

ACE researches interventions and charities to determine the most effective ways to help animals. We use our findings to inform the public about how to invest their time and money. By encouraging critical thinking about how to help animals, we seek to maximize the amount of good that we can do for animals.

## 03 **Our Philosophy**

Animal Charity Evaluators works to identify the most effective ways to help nonhuman animals. We think our research is valuable to anyone who shares the following three philosophical commitments:

### **1. WE ARE COMMITTED TO ANTI-SPECIESISM.**

Species membership is a morally irrelevant feature of identity—much like race, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, and so on. Nobody should be given less than full moral consideration on the basis of any of these features. We consider any individual’s capacity for suffering sufficient to make them worthy of moral consideration.

### **2. WE ARE COMMITTED TO PROMOTING WELFARE.**

All other morally relevant factors being equal, the best (most morally good) action is the one that results in the highest net welfare.

### **3. WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE VALUE OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.**

Empirical research can help us determine which action is best. We explain each of the claims above and some of the reasons we endorse them on our [website](#). We do not aim to provide rigorous philosophical arguments in support of any of the claims; we simply describe them so as to be explicit about our philosophical commitments.

## 04 **Mission and Vision**

Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in the United States dedicated to finding and advocating for highly effective opportunities to improve the lives of animals. ACE aids compassionate givers, professionals, and volunteers in making informed decisions about how to help animals as effectively as possible. We strive to identify ways to alleviate suffering and improve the lives of animals on a wide scale, while continuously updating our recommendations based on new evidence. We oppose all systems of oppression and recognize that they are connected and mutually reinforcing.

ACE believes in helping nonhuman animals as much as possible. We focus on research because we believe that individuals and organizations need research findings to maximize the value of their work. We strive to be transparent so that all can learn from and critique our work.

ACE practices effective altruism, the application of evidence and reason to the pursuit of effectively improving the world. Careful consideration of where you work, donate your money, or volunteer your time can significantly increase philanthropic impact, so ACE works to promote our best understanding of the most impactful ways to help animals.

Our vision is a world in which no individual is given less than full moral consideration on the basis of any morally irrelevant feature of their identity, including species membership.

## 05 **Our Work**

To accomplish our mission, we engage in the following areas. This brief synopsis of our work is not meant to be comprehensive.

### *CHARITY EVALUATIONS:*

Using our seven evaluation criteria, we rigorously examine animal charities in order to identify those that are doing especially impactful work. As an outcome of this process, we provide annual charity recommendations to the public.

### *FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH:*

We conduct foundational research in any areas that can inform our evaluations of interventions and charities. Foundational research includes cause prioritization work, quantifying the impact of plant-based diets, and more.

### *INTERVENTION RESEARCH:*

Using our intervention evaluation template, we use academic literature, animal advocacy research, conversations with experts, case study research, and cost-effectiveness estimates to compose informative reports. These reports inform our charity evaluations and provide guidance for all animal advocates seeking to better understand the results of an intervention.

### *FUNDRAISING FOR RECOMMENDED CHARITIES:*

We engage in fundraising campaigns to support the charities that we have identified as being most impactful. We compose “room for more funding” estimates to help us direct optimal amounts of funding to each recommended charity.



***PUBLIC PROMOTION:***

We promote our findings through a variety of channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. We also conduct advertising campaigns on Facebook and Google AdWords.

***EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH:***

We identify areas where further information could result in the greatest gains for animals, and conduct original research to find answers to the most pressing questions in effective animal advocacy.

***ANIMAL ADVOCACY RESEARCH FUND:***

The Research Fund supports research that contributes to an understanding of effective animal advocacy. It does this by providing grants to academics and advocates to conduct relevant research studies.

***HOST EDUCATIONAL EVENTS:***

We held a Research Symposium in 2016 and a Research Workshop in 2017, and we plan to hold additional events in the future. These events facilitate conversations about the current state of research, and they help identify needs while providing a venue for stakeholders to engage.

***MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:***

We maintain and create relationships with journalists in order to disseminate our findings to as large of an audience as possible. We seek opportunities to communicate our findings directly, as well as to serve as references for relevant stories.

***DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:***

We value promoting solidarity between the animal advocacy movement and consonant movements, and recognize that we as an organization (and as a movement) need to improve in this area. We think that it is important to consider diverse perspectives and to be inclusive in our efforts to ensure that we reach as many people as possible with an actionable message.

***SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS:***

We participate in speaking engagements so as to disseminate our message to a diverse set of audiences. These can vary from international conferences to in-class Skype calls with college classrooms.

***MARKETING AND DESIGN:***

We create videos and comics to communicate our findings in a more digestible manner for audiences that are especially new to these topics. We create a Guide to Giving that is distributed at conferences, and we provide materials that recommended charities can use for their own marketing, such as our Top and Standout Charity badges.

***PROVISION OF RESOURCES:***

We create a variety of resources on our site designed to assist individual advocates and charities to be as effective as possible. This includes interviews with experts, career and volunteering advice, and our survey guidelines project—which provides guidance to charities and advocates on how to conduct a high-quality survey.

## 06 **Reflections**

ACE was originally founded as an intern project in late 2012, and was formed as a resource for effective altruists interested in helping animals. Over the past five years, we have grown from a single staff member in 2013 to a team of 17 at the start of 2018, increasing our revenue from \$41K in 2013 to just over \$1m in 2017.

We are pleased with this amount of growth, and we have learned a great deal of valuable information along the way. Here are some examples of what has worked well and some areas where we can improve.

### **Some areas that have worked well**

#### *CHARITY EVALUATIONS*

Our process for selecting charities for review, deciding which ones to investigate more thoroughly, and using our criteria for evaluation has produced strong charity recommendations. Our core evaluation process remains intact while annual scrutiny from our team has led to improvements to the process and to increasingly high-quality reviews.

#### *FUNDRAISING FOR RECOMMENDED CHARITIES*

In 2017, we influenced over \$6 million in donations to our recommended charities, and influenced over 1,915 donors to give to our recommended charities. This has consistently increased each year: in 2014, we influenced \$141,000 in donations from 125 donors; in 2015, we influenced \$1.16 million from 424 donors; in 2016, we influenced \$3.5 million from 1,550 donors.

### ***CREDIBLE, TRUSTWORTHY BRAND***

Our communications team has succeeded in creating a strong, professional image which showcases our commitment to finding the most effective ways to help animals. The design and structure of our materials, alongside our measured interactions with the public, have helped establish trust in ACE's recommendations.

### ***ANIMAL ADVOCACY RESEARCH FUND***

The majority of our funded projects are still ongoing and too early for final evaluation, but we are pleased with our funded projects thus far. We continue to see promising proposals submitted through the application process.

### ***INTERNSHIP MODEL***

Originally conceived as a necessary means to accomplishing our goals, our internship program quickly evolved into a productive component of the ACE team. At least seven of our former interns have gone on to work at animal charities, including five former interns who currently reside on ACE's core staff.

### ***HOSTING EVENTS***

Both our Research Symposium and Research Workshop have attracted many key stakeholders interested in using research to understand the most effective ways to help animals. While we are still waiting to see the results of the collaborations that resulted from these events, we think that both of these events went well and seemed to produce valuable outcomes.

## Some areas that could be improved

### *RESEARCH PROTOCOLS*

Until 2017, our small staff only featured three staff members on the core research team, and as such we were not able to thoroughly critique our own research as much as we would have liked. We identified this as an area for improvement in early 2017, and instituted protocols to ensure more thorough review (both internal and external) before publication. We think this initiative has helped us improve the quality of our research and we aim to continue to improve.

### *INTERVENTION REPORTS*

It is especially challenging to evaluate interventions in animal advocacy given the dearth of data about outcomes of various interventions. Our original evaluation template was somewhat successful in creating a framework for analyzing interventions, but we updated our template in mid-2017 in an attempt to provide more meaningful and useful analysis. We intend to continue thinking about how to maximize value from the time we spend on intervention reports.

### *SOCIAL MOVEMENTS PROJECT*

It has become clear to us that our previous research on social movements was of variable quality and that we would have needed to invest more heavily in this work in order to improve it. We chose to terminate this project, though we still seek to promote solidarity between social movements and to incorporate relevant lessons from other movements in our other areas of research.

### ***MEDIA ENGAGEMENT***

We have not succeeded in garnering widespread media attention. We have a unique and important message, and we need to do better in this regard—not only in attracting stories about our work, but in establishing ACE as a credible source for relevant articles. Additionally, we did not have a cogent strategy for promoting our work on social media until late 2017, and until then, we had produced inconsistent styles of posting and engagement. We conducted a social media audit in mid-2017 and intend to use the information we learned to guide our strategy moving forward.

### ***WEBSITE ORGANIZATION***

In late 2016 we completed an overhaul of our website, which currently includes well over 600 pages. We were fairly happy with the reorganization and restructure, but we have received feedback that tells us there is still room for improvement. We hope to engage in more A/B testing in the future to optimize our arrangement.

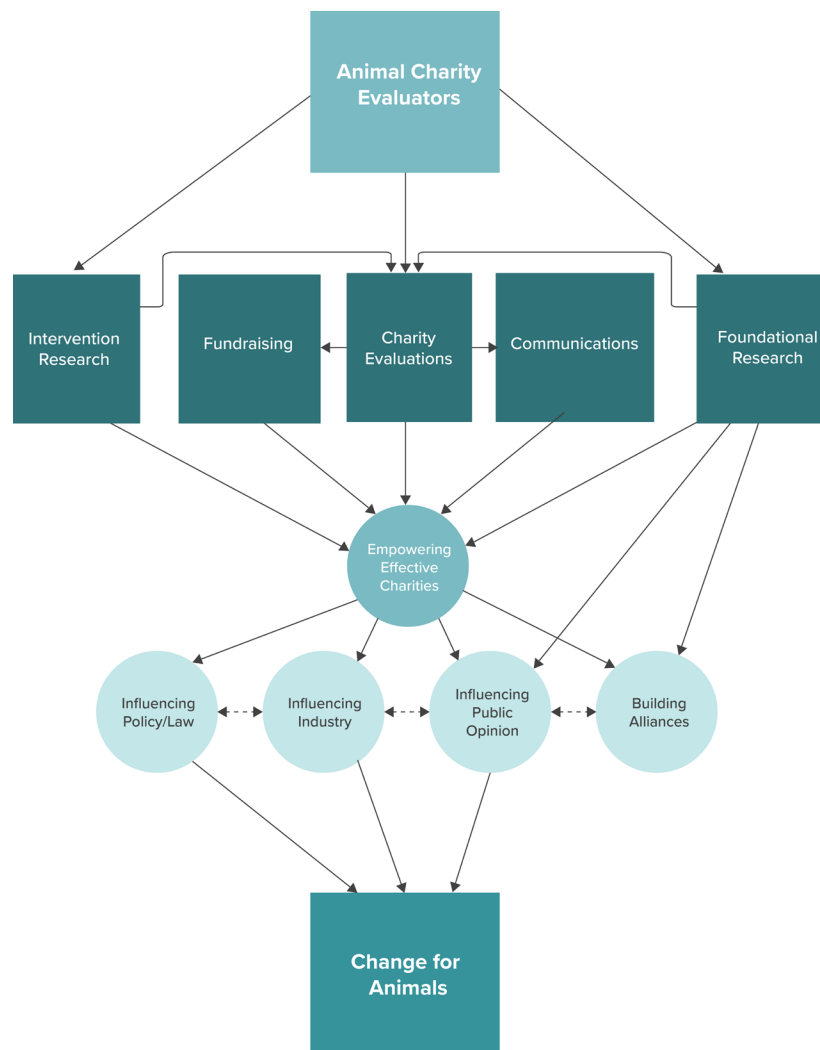
### ***OVERCOMMITTING***

Over the last few years, we have sometimes undertaken too many projects at once, which has compromised our ability to do our work well. When planning our projects for the year, we filled our schedules without allowing for unforeseen complications, leading to extended staff work hours and sometimes a lower quality product. We have intentionally left gaps in our planning for 2018 to ensure that we have the additional capacity to address new challenges as they arise.

# 07 Objectives

Below we list our theory of change and key objectives for the three-year duration of this strategic plan. We offer our reasoning and plans for implementation for each objective, roughly prioritized in order of importance.

## ACE Theory of Change



## Objective A: Produce high quality research and recommendations

### *REASONING:*

Research is a valuable tool that enables advocates to optimize their efforts. By understanding the impact of different interventions used to help animals, we can provide recommendations on the most impactful interventions. By understanding the impact of different animal charities, we can provide recommendations on the most impactful charities.

We prioritize high-quality research because better research will lead to more informed recommendations and possibly increase our ability to fundraise for our recommended charities. Features of the high-quality research that we strive for include but are not limited to: few mistakes identified post-publication, highly useful for making accurate and important predictions relevant to effective animal advocacy, clearly communicates what factors most importantly influence key conclusions, and clearly articulates confidence levels in important claims.

### *IMPLEMENTATION:*

We will produce research and recommendations while regularly seeking ways to improve, so that the quality of our research remains paramount. We will do this in the following ways:

1. **Conduct annual charity evaluations**
  - Gather a list of charities for consideration and select promising charities for review



- Produce comprehensive reviews and possibly produce exploratory reviews
  - Announce and promote recommended charities
2. **Assess our annual charity evaluations, including writing about**
    - Our evaluation process for that specific year
    - Things that surprised us during the evaluation process
    - Changes that we intend to make to the current year's evaluation process
  3. **Focus on quality of research over quantity of research**
    - Thoroughly consult existing literature before conducting our own research projects
    - Provide an adequate amount of time to ensure that each researcher is able to thoroughly investigate each project
    - Assign a primary critic to guide and critique each piece prior to publication
    - Enlist external reviewers to critique our work prior to publication
    - Utilize our board as a sub-committee to question our charity recommendation decisions prior to finalizing them
    - Conduct calls with relevant policy and industry experts
  4. **Proactively research interventions and foundational topics that enhance our understanding of charity effectiveness**
  5. **Design and produce experimental studies to answer important questions that will guide animal advocacy efforts**
    - Triage research opportunities to identify areas of greatest impact
    - Build relationships with academics and advocates

- Execute high-quality research projects while practicing transparency and submitting all results to the Open Science Framework
- 6. Provide funding to academics and advocates to conduct research through the Animal Advocacy Research Fund through February 2019, and evaluate continuing to do so at that point in time
- 7. Build our core research team while working to attract more diverse team members to avoid homogeneous thinking
- 8. Give our research staff the freedom to decide how to allocate 10% of their time, to enable deeper or novel research where needed
- 9. Explore offering consultations to charities and advocates
- 10. Assess our research goals and protocols annually and adjust them such that we think the quality of our research will improve

## **Objective B: Promote an effective altruist mindset among animal advocates**

### ***REASONING:***

Farmed animal advocacy remains a neglected cause area. Our research has shown that the distribution of funding in animal advocacy hasn't changed in a substantial way since we started our work. Of all donations to animal charities, less than 1% go directly to

charities that specifically focus on farmed animals—despite the fact that farmed animals comprise about 99% of the animals that are killed or used by humans in the United States.

We believe that effective altruism—seeking to accomplish the greatest good with our time and money—should be a guiding principle when advocating for animals. We currently prioritize advocacy for farmed animals because (i) there are especially large numbers of farmed animals suffering in extreme ways, (ii) we have at least some understanding of how to deal with this problem, and (iii) there is not as much work being done in this area as we think there should be, given (i) and (ii). We think that spreading the message to prioritize farmed animals as a way to accomplish the greatest good for animals is a particularly impactful aspect of our work.

We also believe that animals suffering in the wild deserve more attention, as they represent the largest category of animals and are also neglected. However, we don't feel that efforts in that area are tractable enough at this point in time for us to recommend them. If efforts to help animals in the wild do become more tractable, then we will promote that message as well.

***IMPLEMENTATION:***

We will work to promote an effective altruist mindset among animal advocates in a number of ways:

1. **Create updated and shareable content about our latest research findings on the most impactful ways to help animals**
  - Produce additional content explaining our thinking and processes

in more detail

- Craft videos, gifs, and other digital media content to communicate our message in ways that make it quick and easy to understand
  - Share content about effective animal advocacy from a variety of sources
2. **Segment our messages to different audiences to address their differing motivations for taking action**
    - Focus on email and advertising campaigns
    - Include sub-lists for specific types of content
  3. **Gain greater media coverage through interviews, speaking opportunities, and press releases**
    - Develop relationships with relevant outlets
    - Hire additional communications staff to provide support for media outreach
    - Produce printed materials about effective ways to help animals
  4. **Explore ways to offer support or encourage younger charities working in impactful areas**
    - Regrant donations to such charities through our Effective Animal Advocacy Fund
    - Invite guests to write for the ACE blog or participate in a roundtable discussion
  5. **Invest in online advertising to reach a broader audience**
  6. **Attend, table, and speak at relevant conferences and events**

7. Regularly evaluate our messaging strategy to ensure that we are communicating about effective animal advocacy in a way that is precise and accurate, yet easy-to-understand
  - Conduct user-testing sessions to understand user experience
  - Conduct A/B tests to identify effective organization of materials

### **Objective C: Establish ACE as a key credible source on effective advocacy**

#### ***REASONING:***

In order for ACE to succeed in influencing the public to take action, it is paramount that we be seen as a credible source on these issues. We have taken great care to craft our brand and maintain an image of authority, and we need to continue building this reputation.

Central to this effort are our objectives of creating and maintaining high-quality research, a key focus of Objective A. In order to establish trust, we need to ensure that we not only carefully vet our research before publication, but also communicate that research in a way that showcases our credibility. We also want to maintain a high level of transparency so that our findings are verifiable and so that people understand our reasoning. This enables people to critique our work and also helps us identify areas for our own improvement. Additionally, it will reduce the likelihood that people will be able to dispute our conclusions, since our thinking will be covered in detail.

An important element to establishing ourselves as a key source of information is widespread media coverage. By having our work featured in more outlets, and by having journalists and reporters

come to ACE as an authority on relevant issues, we will be able to spread our message and findings to a much wider audience.

We need to identify opportunities to engage with relevant stakeholders, including academics, animal advocates, and philanthropists. Building these relationships in a spirit of open and honest communication will help increase trust in ACE's brand, research findings, and charity recommendations.

***IMPLEMENTATION:***

We will ensure that we thoroughly examine our research findings prior to publication, and work to communicate our findings in a professional and accessible manner. We will do this in the following ways:

1. Improve and maintain research quality (see Objective A)
2. Communicate our research review process to elicit confidence in our work
3. Exercise transparency with our research methods and findings
  - Provide sources for relevant information that we publish
  - Acknowledge our own errors publicly on our website
  - Regularly communicate our uncertainties
4. Engage with journalists in the media to produce more coverage of our work
  - Connect with relevant outlets to establish ACE as a credible source

- Pitch op-eds on relevant topics
5. **Align with the academic community to build credibility**
    - Build relationships through research collaboration
    - Offer funding through the Animal Advocacy Research Fund
    - Consider publishing peer-reviewed research
  6. **Promote our work through external channels**
    - Engage with our audience through social media and events like Reddit’s “Ask Me Anything”
    - Advertise our research findings using Facebook and Google AdGrants
    - Speak and table at conferences to provide opportunities for open dialogue

## **Objective D: Fundraise for recommended charities and for ACE**

### ***REASONING:***

Unlike a conventional charity, ACE does not simply focus on fundraising for ourselves; instead, we devote considerable resources to influencing donations to our recommended charities. We view this as a crucial activity, as we want our recommended charities to have the resources that they need to accomplish their goals. We also want farmed animal advocacy to receive more philanthropic funding than it currently does.

It’s clear that strategic philanthropists are eager for advice on where to give, especially within animal advocacy. We work to provide

them with the information they need to be as effective with their donations as possible. We also work to give them confidence in our recommended charities so that they feel more comfortable supporting those charities in a significant way.

***IMPLEMENTATION:***

We will engage in a number of programs to assist donors, while exploring new opportunities to address their needs in the following ways:

1. Use our charity evaluations and charity recommendations to promote the work of effective animal charities
  
2. Provide new options for donors who wish to support our recommended charities directly through our website, possibly including:
  - Accepting donations for our Standout Charities
  - Offering an ongoing “Recommended Charity Fund” giving option that would allow donors to let ACE decide how to distribute their donations to our recommended charities
  - Offering an ongoing “Effective Animal Advocacy Fund” option that would allow donors to let ACE determine the best way to spend marginal resources to help animals
  
3. Conduct research so that we can better understand the needs of donors to ACE and our recommended charities
  - Execute an annual survey of donors
  - Conduct a study to examine the reasons people donate to animal charities



4. Hire a Philanthropic Officer to work with our Director of Philanthropy to increase our reach and provide more comprehensive support to donors and charities
5. Develop stronger relationships with existing donors while working to cultivate new donors
6. Offer additional options for international donations
  - Work with with non-U.S. charities to provide tax-deductible international giving options to U.S. donors
  - Work with meta-charities to accept donations for U.S. recommended charities from donors in international countries
  - Register ACE as a charity in the U.K. and Australia to offer our full slate of giving options in those regions
7. Implement and regularly update our recommended charity quiz to enable donors to find the ACE-recommended charity that best matches their philanthropic goals
8. Identify and participate in speaking opportunities to major philanthropists
9. Evaluate our fundraising strategy for ACE each year so that we can focus more time and energy on fundraising for our recommended charities
10. Engage with recommended charities to solicit their feedback on how we can better support their funding goals

11. Offer philanthropic portfolio consulting to major donors

## **Objective E: Ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency at ACE**

### ***REASONING:***

As ACE's team grows in size each year, it becomes more important to set aside time to instill systems to maintain quality and efficiency in our operations. To date, this has included creating workflows for specific projects and utilizing task management platforms to organize and interact with fellow team members.

Maintaining efficiency in our work is extremely important to ACE. It is so important that, beginning in 2017, we started setting a cap on the amount of donations that ACE would accept for ourselves each year. This ensures that we do not grow too quickly and outpace our ability to implement effective systems.

### ***IMPLEMENTATION:***

We will regularly evaluate our current systems along with new processes to identify areas for improvement:

1. **Maintain an environment of openness so that staff always feel empowered to suggest changes to our systems**
  - Encourage open communication between team members and supervisors so that issues are brought to our attention before they become more significant problems
  - Create improved harassment and discrimination policies with clear channels for reporting issues

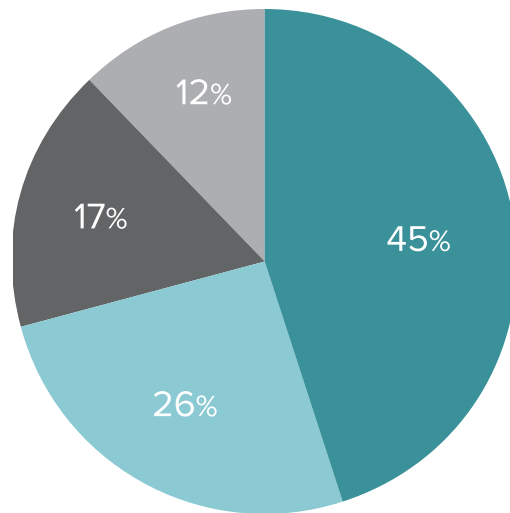
- Provide a clear chain of command to hold relevant parties accountable in cases of harassment or discrimination
  - Evaluate staff morale through surveys and make adjustments as needed
2. **Consider diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work**
    - Work with experts to guide our efforts in this area
    - Modify our recruitment efforts to widen our appeal
    - Craft inclusive messaging
    - Provide paid internships to attract applicants from diverse backgrounds
    - Conduct research and evaluations with consideration of DEI
  3. **Evaluate all staff members annually so that they have a platform to identify opportunities for growth as well as to express concerns**
  4. **Maintain an efficient budget that still provides livable salaries and benefits**
  5. **Attract and retain high performers**
    - Increase salaries to provide a more sustainable environment
    - Provide greater autonomy to staff, including opportunities for furthering education outside of ACE
    - Offer paid time off to part-time employees
    - Create additional opportunities for staff to bond, such as water cooler calls, happy hours calls, Slack channels, and in-person retreats and conferences

6. Build departmental teams and create an internal structure where multiple staff members are able to fill in to avoid over-reliance on any one individual
7. Evaluate internal team structures to ensure that we are dividing tasks in an optimal manner
8. Offer opportunities for further education through the provision of a stipend, where staff members can pursue their own educational initiatives that they feel will best strengthen their work at the organization
9. Calculate our room for more funding annually so that we know when to shift all of our fundraising efforts to raising money for our recommended charities

## 08 Financials

### 2018 Budget

(\$1,073,225.45)



For any changes based on updated information subsequent to printing, please visit our website at:

[animalcharityevaluators.org/financials](http://animalcharityevaluators.org/financials)



“Many people tell me that they want to change the way we treat animals, but don’t know to which organization they should give. I’m very pleased that now I can point them to Animal Charity Evaluators, where they can find the best available research and thoughtful discussion to answer that difficult and very important question.”

–Peter Singer, Professor at Princeton University; Author of *Animal Liberation*