

Sinergia Animal's Reporting of Leadership, Strategy, and Culture (2020)

This document contains responses written by the charity. ACE has made no content changes other than the removal of confidential information.

Workplace Culture

How would you describe your organization's culture?

We want to be a compassionate, innovative, and empowering working place. We want people to feel happy and to feel they fully belong and are valued and respected by Sinergia Animal.

We want our staff to understand the importance of working professionally and effectively to help animals, but we also want them to do it in a way that is healthy and balanced mentally. We want to encourage all to recognize the need for self-care and self-compassion.

Do you regularly conduct surveys to learn about staff morale and work climate?

Yes, we conducted our first one some months ago and were really pleased with the experience. We want to improve our assessment methods with the help of a lawyer specialized in safe work environments and a nonviolent communication expert and keep doing feedback surveys every three or four months.

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

Our CEO and communications director have participated in workshops led by Encompass. During this year's retreat, the whole team will participate in an inspirational talk about this topic, followed by brainstorming about how we can be better at DEI. We are committed to encouraging and increasing diversity in our recruitment, too. In Brazil, we are working with an agency called Indique Uma Preta (Recommend a Black Woman) to fulfill two international management roles we have, one being the international Human Resources Manager position. Indique Uma Preta will also carry out awareness events with our whole team about diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are very passionate about DEI and are committed to improving in this area.

What areas of your organizational culture have room for improvement?

We are raising awareness with our donors about the need for multi-year grants and/or funds for reserves for us to be able to register in more countries and to have more formal work relations to increase job security. We also expect to have more clear and professional HR policies and procedures with the help of a HR manager.

Do you have a workplace code of ethics or a similar document that clearly outlines expectations for employee behavior?

Team members have job descriptions that clearly states what their tasks and responsibilities are. We also have welcoming meetings where they are informed about the need to electronically sign our anti-harassment policy, our expectations in terms of sending invoices regularly, keeping receipts of work-related expenses, being punctual and productive, participating in weekly and monthly meetings, meeting deadlines, informing supervisors about sick days, and informing supervisors in advance about holidays and days off.

Recently, we also started circulating notices about our commitments in terms of being an organization that cares about the well-being of our team members. The commitments are:

- Please don't work more than 8 hours a day.
- If you work extra hours, you have the right to rest after. Ask your director to give you free time to compensate.
- Please tell your director if you are stressed, if work is making you anxious, or if you have too much on your plate. Negotiate workload and deadlines to make your daily work more manageable and balanced.
- Everybody has 3 working days per year to use for meditation, or yoga retreats, or other methods to develop self-awareness and help with stress reduction.
- You can ask for it. The methods have to be scientifically proven, and you will be asked to show your enrollment in these courses to get the days off.
- Sinergia Animal will offer online yoga classes in Spanish and English every week, followed by tea times for us to talk and connect with each other.
- You don't need to be perfect; everybody makes mistakes. We will admire you when you are open about mistakes, and we will make the corrections needed together.
- If campaign actions make you feel insecure or scared, you should tell your director so we can talk about adjustments. Lawyers must be consulted for every new strategy and will always be paid when needed to evaluate campaign strategies.
- Leadership is being trained in Nonviolent Communication and compassionate leadership. Please tell us if we are doing something wrong. We don't have a lot of experience, but we are committed to improving.

When we have an HR manager, we want to develop better and more formalized guidelines and employee handbooks.

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

Times vary a bit, depending on the role. In 2020, we estimate that we will spend around USD 10,000.00 in external training (without considering the time and remuneration given to internal training given by directors and peers).

When new staff joins the team, they receive one-to-one training from their directors and peers about all of the tools they will need to use and all of the details they need to know well before they start working. They are also encouraged to ask directors for continued support—daily if needed—and training until they feel confident in performing their tasks. Usually, the first week or the first two weeks are only for training and reading materials, such as the anti-harassment policy, our strategic plan, and all existing campaign materials.

We also started working with leading specialists who give a two-hour training session to our global team on topics that empower and make them feel more confident in talking to institutions, companies, journalists, and other stakeholders. We already did that with a leading specialist in antibiotic resistance and animal welfare certification schemes. In the coming months, the plan is to invite leading experts on the relationship between intensive livestock and future pandemics, the ethology and animal welfare science of all farmed animal species, and effective and reliable messaging about the environmental impacts of livestock. The team will also be invited to suggest what other themes they would like to have covered to meet their learning needs.

The cage-free campaign team will start an in-depth, 9-month course on digital campaigning and creating social change with www.socialmovementtechnologies.org. They recently also had training with experts from www.change.org about how to excel in online petitions and updates and are encouraged to attend all summits and training events of the Open Wing Alliance. The Food Policy team is encouraged to follow all ProVeg Accelerator webinars to get inspired and learn from other leading organizations.

All team members are encouraged to learn about effective vegan advocacy with Beyond Carnism and are informed about and encouraged to attend webinars carried out by our partner organizations.

The CEO and Communications director have participated in workshops led by Encompass about DEI. The whole team has recently been trained on how to identify and report cases of harassment, discrimination, bullying, and/or retaliation.

The CEO and directors are being trained in nonviolent communication and compassionate leadership. To boost confidence to speak out on equal terms, in our global retreat, the whole team will receive 10 hours of training in nonviolent communication and 10 more hours of training/inspirational talks from leading peer organizations.

In our feedback assessment, all team members were asked if they felt they had enough resources and received enough training to perform their duties, and responses were very positive. We will keep asking that and will always be willing to provide team members with training and support.

When we have an HR manager, we want to be more organized and excel in personal and professional development.

Do you offer a health care plan or a healthcare reimbursement account?

No. But we pay well above national average and more than the average in the third sector. We estimate salaries in a way that they are 30% higher than they would normally be, so all team members can pay for healthcare plans and compensate for other benefits that formal workers are entitled to receive in their countries.

How many days of paid time off, sick days, and personal leave do you offer full-time employees per year?

We have 25 days of paid time off (five of them are during special celebrations such as Ramadan, Christmas, or Thai New Year, so everybody can relax completely). On top of that, everybody gets a day off for their birthday celebrations. Sick days and personal leave are not restricted. No one has ever been denied taking sick days or personal leave.

List of Policies

Please indicate which of the following policies your organization is committed to, in writing.

Please note: while we think it is generally better to have more of these policies rather than fewer, we do not expect every organization to have all or even most of these policies in place. We do not currently require organizations to have a certain number of these policies in order to receive a recommendation from us.

Checklist:

- ✓ Regularly scheduled performance evaluations
- ✓ All positions have clearly defined essential functions with written job descriptions
- ✗ Staff salaries are determined by a formal compensation plan
- ✓ A written statement that your organization does not discriminate on the basis of race, sexual orientation, disability status, or other characteristics
- ✓ A written statement supporting gender equity and/or discouraging sexual harassment

- ✓ A simple and transparent written procedure for filing complaints
- ✓ An optional anonymous reporting system
- ✓ Mandatory reporting of harassment or discrimination through all levels of the managerial chain, up to and including the board of directors
- ✓ Explicit protocols for addressing concerns or allegations of harassment or discrimination
- ✓ All reported instances of harassment or discrimination are documented, along with the outcomes of each case
- ✓ Regular, mandatory trainings on topics such as harassment and discrimination in the workplace
- ✓ An anti-retaliation policy protecting whistleblowers and those who report grievances
- ✓ Flexible work hours
- ✓ Internships are paid (if your organization has interns; leave blank if it does not)
- ✓ Paid family and medical leave
- ✗ Simple and transparent written procedure for submitting reasonable accommodation requests
- ✓ Remote work option is available
- ✗ Audited financial documents (e.g. for U.S. organizations the most recently filed IRS form 990) are available on the charity's website
- ✓ Formal orientation is provided to all new employees
- ✗ Funding for training and development is consistently available to each employee
- ✗ Funding is provided for books or other educational materials related to each employee's work
- ✓ Paid trainings are available on topics such as: diversity, equal employment opportunity, leadership, and conflict resolution
- ✗ Paid trainings in intercultural competence (for multinational organizations only)
- ✓ Simple and transparent written procedure for employees to request further training or support

Does your organization have any other important or unusual policies you'd like us to know about?

No

If your organization has an employee handbook or written list of policies, please provide a link here or email it to us.

Anti-harassment policy:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S4X1SpNwnYt_B0miEleekho6-naBdoEXrfTwjHdSEDk/

We also have an anonymous complaint form:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1uF8hNdbYBg3b6-KpiAcjb-mecu6nKAMnXyLvrSbMdL4/>

Is there anything else you'd like us to know about your organization's human resources policies?

No

Leadership and Strategy

Please identify 1–5 key members of your organization's leadership team.

Leader 1

Please list this leader's: (1) name, (2) role, (3) the number of years they've been with your organization.

Carolina Galvani

Chief Executive Officer

3 years (since its founding)

Leader 2

Please list this leader's: (1) name, (2) role, (3) the number of years they've been with your organization.

Lucia Gomes

Global Campaigns Director (Corporate campaigns)

1 year and 2 months

Leader 3

Please list this leader's: (1) name, (2) role, (3) the number of years they've been with your organization.

Aline Baroni
Global Communications Director
One year and 2 months

Leader 4

Please list this leader's: (1) name, (2) role, (3) the number of years they've been with your organization.

Diamela Covarrubias
Global Corporate Engagement Director
Three years (since founding)

Leader 5

Please list this leader's: (1) name, (2) role, (3) the number of years they've been with your organization.

Fernanda Vieira
Global Director - Food Policy and Animal Welfare
Nine months

Questions for Primary Leader:**What do you consider to be your organization's major strengths?**

- Our experienced, talented, and committed staff
- Leadership is highly experienced in sensitive issues such as lobbying, campaigns directed at big companies, investigative work, and legal risks.
- Sinergia doesn't rely solely on consumer behavior to create meaningful change. Its theory of change uses a wide selection of stakeholders and decision-makers who can create faster change for animals than consumer campaigns and behavioral changes would on their own.
- Having worked extensively in Global South countries, leadership fully understands the practical, on-the-ground realities of the regions involved.
- A globally-minded leadership capable of understanding local issues and needs and adapting accordingly
- A strong focus on the well-being and fair treatment of team members
- Plans to develop, implement, and excel in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and initiatives

- Leadership is trained to be attentive, kind, and supportive of individual needs and personalities.
- Initiatives to prevent harassment, such as training and the use of nonviolent communications
- Remuneration is higher than the sector's average.
- The satisfaction level of team members is assessed and has proven to be high.
- The ability to develop and implement strategies that address all aspects of advocacy, including professional communications, lobbying, market campaigning, investigations, effective media outreach, and movement building
- Experience and expertise in effective communications in both traditional and social media
- We are increasing the capacity to fundraise with large international donors.
- Programs chosen have already been tested by other organizations and delivered measurable outcomes.
- A very positive public reputation among donors and peer organizations
- A strong commitment to seeing campaigns and programs succeed and a clear understanding of the differences between output, outcome, and impact
- Capacity to generate results in a very cost-effective way
- Carrying our projects and campaigns in neglected areas in the Global South, which has the distinct potential to create meaningful impacts that would not occur in the present moment otherwise

What do you consider to be your organization's major weaknesses?

- We combat the stigma of animal rights campaigns and campaigners in challenging countries.
- Being seen as a young organization without many years of experience
- The stigma of being led and represented by non-native English speakers, who can face challenges in fully expressing themselves
- Finding talented individuals quickly, while also implementing DEI policies, can be especially challenging in countries where the animal rights movement is still very young and small.
- Although the organization has succeeded in this matter, rapid growth can sometimes be challenging to manage.
- It may be difficult to raise funds with small donors because we work in low- and middle-income countries where a donating culture is not well established and currencies are relatively weak.
- Funding is still too strongly dependent on large donors, and foundations are relatively limited. Therefore, funding doesn't necessarily facilitate the development of long-term and novel innovations that might become the most effective strategies in the future.
- We are still in the process of developing a large base of online supporters who could generate a steady income for many years.

- It was only very recently that we started working with reserves. Only in mid-2020, Sinergia was able to build a six-month reserve. We have to raise awareness with large donors about this need because we lack individual donors' funds.

What's the best decision you've made as a leader?

My best decision was to focus on results and effective programs (reducing suffering) from the very beginning. My decision to focus exclusively on the Global South and neglected countries also became a significant differential and something that our team admires a lot. This created a strong and motivated organization that gained international recognition in a short period. Our team felt happy and proud, and we were able to grow quickly. The bold mission and bold and focused working culture were my best decisions, in my opinion.

What's the biggest mistake (or maybe hardest decision) you've made as a leader?

My biggest mistakes were:

1) Not sharing the organization's goals and strategic view with the team earlier

Why: Although we invited all team members to read our strategic plan when they joined the organization, not many did, and we were not aware of that. Consequently, we had to spend much more time this year sharing this knowledge with the team and ensuring they are aware of the mission and respect it even if everybody does not fully admire/ agree with it. Additionally, by not sharing the mission and the goals clearly and systematically, our teams often felt confused, and directors didn't have enough autonomy. We have changed that dramatically and now teams are gaining more independence, and hopefully, they will feel more motivated and respected.

2) Not investing in bonding and professional development with leaders sooner

Why: Sinergia grew fast, and while we invested enough time and resources in training new campaigners and campaign managers, we didn't offer any training, bonding, and professional development opportunities for new directors. We started training in nonviolent communication and compassionate leadership with directors only a month ago. That should have been done before to ensure more self-awareness when dealing with subordinates and more self-care to prevent anxiety, stress, and fatigue. We failed to identify that leadership also needs training and support, which jeopardized our unity and satisfaction levels for some months.

3) We took too long to start working with formal feedback.

Sinergia's first feedback process with all team members was concluded recently. We learned and grew much as a team after this. I should have taken the time to do this before. Now we have plans to do it more often. We consider doing it every three or four months.

What changes have you made to your organization as a result of past successes?

In terms of programs, we decided to diversify and increase the number of programs. We felt that was the right decision because it attracted the interest of many more large donors. We think this was a wise strategy and our future is safer now.

What changes have you made to your organization as a result of past failures?

Some changes were already mentioned above.

- We increased our capacity to communicate and review goals. We are working to make teams more autonomous in achieving their goals.
- We identified the need to support and train directors as well.
- We understood the need to work on feedback more regularly.
- It was only recently that we started taking more seriously the need to build reserves and talk more openly with donors about it. If we had done this before, things would have been less stressful for some of us.
- In terms of programs, we also started drafting more realistic goals based on past successes. Before, our goals were too ambitious and not very achievable. Teams felt stressed out and unmotivated on some occasions because of that.

What does your organization do differently from other animal organizations? How does your organization stand out?

We believe we stand out by being a bold organization that works exclusively on neglected areas in the global south. While many organizations focus more on territories where they can secure fundraising or where they can identify great leaders, we take more risks by working where resources are scarce but direly needed and where we have to build teams from scratch. We also believe we stand out in terms of cost-efficiency.

Have you had a leadership transition since the beginning of 2019? If yes, please describe the transition process.

No

Please provide a list of board members and brief descriptions of their occupations or backgrounds.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y0QJYMggCeyruBZx2QqZKbLTM4mA_Mw8/view?usp=sharing

What does your organization do to create or revise your strategic plan? How often do you revise strategy?

The strategic plan was created by the leadership according to our vision, mission, and theory of change. It also takes into consideration our ability to fundraise with large donors, who are more likely to fund specific priorities or types of programs.

How are the board and staff involved in the strategic planning process?

The strategic plan is later reviewed by all team members and by the Advisory Board. Both are encouraged to provide feedback on clarity, feasibility, how realistic the goals are, and what other types of interventions could be used. All suggestions are considered and most have been incorporated.

How do you set goals and monitor progress towards those goals?

Goals are set according to previous progress or by our proven ability to meet them. For new programs and goals, we try to be ambitious but also realistic and flexible to adapt. This overall review for the 10-year strategic plan will be done early. Progress towards goals is reviewed and plans are adapted as needed in monthly meetings between directors and the CEO.

Has your organization engaged in any formal self-assessments? How, when, and how regularly?

Yes, we just concluded our first formal feedback process with the whole team. We did a survey to measure satisfaction with the process and all participants said they were satisfied or very satisfied. We are planning to do it every three months, but first, we want the process to be reviewed by a lawyer specialized in anti-harassment and discrimination law and by a nonviolent communication expert. We want to be sure we are being respectful and compassionate when carrying out feedback assessments.

Does your organization have retrospective or “post-mortem” meetings following major projects?

No, we don't have formal post-mortem meetings. But we use weekly meetings to discuss how things are working and how we can improve.

International Operations

Do you operate in more than one country?

Yes

In which countries do you operate?

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Thailand and Indonesia.

How long have you operated in each country?

Since September 2017: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia

Since May 2019: Thailand and Indonesia

Have you stopped operating (or closed a subsidiary) in any country? If yes, when and why?

No

What is your approach to deciding which countries to expand into?

Countries of the Global South, relatively 'neglected', and preferably with a large number of farmed animals.

Are your subsidiaries financially independent?

No. Sinergia Animal is only three years old. We currently have a model of expansion that is somewhat challenging. We are getting more and more funding, but most of it is restricted and has to be spent in one or two years. We work only in low- and middle-income countries, and although we have been trying to build a base of individual donors to have a safer future and allow more national approaches and innovations, progress is very limited and slow. That is why everything is centralized, and the organization is registered only in Austria and Brazil currently.

In the future, we will consider working with international donors to direct funds to subsidiaries and help pave the way for more independence in the coming years.

Do your subsidiaries have independent boards?

No, we currently have only one international Advisory Board. We know we need to improve diversity on our Board, and that is something we are planning to do in early 2021, with a bit more

experience and guidance from the HR manager we are recruiting. We want our HR person to be or become an expert in DEI . All team members are invited and have been active participants in our Advisory Board meetings. Some have been confident enough to express that we should have more national strategies, and we are taking that into consideration.

What do you do to understand the local context of the countries in which you operate?

We have weekly meetings with national teams. In these meetings, our teams are encouraged to tell us what is happening in their countries, and we discuss campaigning and communications strategies that they think suit and respect their local cultures. We respect local challenges; for example, we have stopped campaigns and street actions in times of economic and political crisis. It is also important to note that our CEO spent five months in Asia getting to know local activists and learning about the local cultures, challenges, legislation, and rule of law before we started running campaigns and programs.

We are a Global South organization, and the vast majority of us come from countries that have been colonized. We know that disrespecting local cultures is hurtful, and we want our organization to be anti-imperialist. Therefore, we are also investing in nonviolent communication tools. Our leadership is currently doing an intensive course on nonviolent communication and compassionate leadership.

During our global retreat scheduled for the first two weeks of October, all team members will be trained in nonviolent communication. We want to build a culture of open, transparent, honest, and courageous dialogue. Nonviolent communication is not only about speaking without causing harm but also about developing the skills to communicate effectively and on equal terms. Furthermore, it is a tool for supporting our self-esteem and confidence. We want all team members to be empowered and to feel that they can speak out for themselves and their cultures, and they will be heard, considered, and admired when they do so. We want our leadership to be flexible and compassionate in terms of national ideas and needs.

Now that our teams are getting more experienced, we are also looking for ways to reduce the need for approval. We know everybody values independence and autonomy, and this is something we will try to be better at.

Who is responsible for decision-making for local programs carried out by the subsidiaries?

Sinergia Animal's strategy is to use programs and interventions that have already been tested and proven to be effective in terms of real change and measurable results for the animals. We have clear goals and objectives that are defined in our grant proposals to major donors. Teams are focused on achieving them. All team members know about these objectives and goals, and they were invited to review and comment on our 10-year strategic plan.

Each program has one or two international directors and one to two national managers who make decisions together during weekly meetings on how to implement and run programs with locally adapted messaging and culturally sound strategies. The international CEO also helps review progress and makes recommendations, especially when more challenging decisions have to be taken.

All national teams work with lawyers who are very experienced with freedom of speech and civil rights. These lawyers also guide and help us understand the local context and fully respect national legislation. Our teams are asked to consult national lawyers for every new strategy that we consider implementing.

Who is responsible for the strategy and direction of the subsidiaries?

There are no subsidiaries.