

From: Fotis Frangopoulos <secretary@atheistalliance.org>

Subject: Annual General Meeting 2021 Invitation - Atheist Alliance International

Date: 5 May 2021 at 19:58:23 IST

To: [redacted]

Greetings from AAI,

I am writing to you because [redacted] was an AAI affiliate in 2016. In 2017, AAI was in crisis—costs were far exceeding income, our website was broken and memberships (both individual and affiliate) had fallen to an alarmingly low level. To save the organization, the board took some decisions that included changing the bylaws.

Our affiliates voted on, and passed the new bylaws by a super-majority, at an AGM in May 2018. However, the way this was done may have resulted in your organization not being invited to the 2018 AGM. If this is the case, we sincerely apologise and we wish to put that right.

We would like to take this opportunity to explain what went wrong and how we will put it right.

THE PROBLEM

AAI memberships peaked in 2013 and then declined steadily and more rapidly in 2016 and 2017. We had a complex membership system that was expensive to run and difficult to use. In fact by mid-2017, the cost of running the membership system exceeded our income from members. Other costs, such as bank charges, were also unacceptably high. Furthermore, our website had been hacked, it had not been updated for two years, it did not work on mobiles, and people with the skills to update it had long departed, so an important tool for recruiting new members was actually worse than useless.

There was another fundamental problem, the board itself had become ineffective. It was focussing on minor issues whilst ignoring the big, existential issues and it lacked a work ethic, so goals were routinely not being achieved.

Finally, affiliates had, in most cases, lost interest in AAI. AAI was designed to be an organization of affiliates but most affiliates had opted out either by not paying fees or by ignoring correspondence or both. The bylaws required affiliates to pay their fees within 60 days of receiving an invoice. However

they remained members until the board voted to revoke their membership or until they resigned in writing. The problem was, the board routinely failed to revoke delinquent memberships, so many of the presumed affiliates were, in reality, ex-affiliates.

THE SOLUTION

The board decided that radical action was required to save AAI. We had to cut our costs. Amongst other things that meant changing our membership system. We desperately needed a new website that would be secure, easy to maintain, cheap to run and responsive.

We needed to make individual board members deliver on their promises—we needed to manage the board in a much more professional and less ad hoc way. We needed to implement work management systems and update our administrative processes. We needed a way to remove board members who did not pull their weight. Whilst all this was happening, we needed to run campaigns to raise our profile and recruit new members. There was a huge amount to be done.

Finally, in mid-2017, there were only three board members who were fully active, so driving through these big changes fell to a handful of extremely hard-pressed board members. Remember, all AAI board members were, and still are, unpaid volunteers.

The board concluded that changing the bylaws, at least temporarily, would be essential in order to turn the organization around. So we drafted new bylaws that suspended routine AGMs, made it easier to remove ineffective board members and gave the board the power to change the bylaws.

WHAT WENT WRONG

The original, 2013, bylaws require AGMs to be held no more than 18 months apart and for there to be an AGM in every calendar year. Given the critical need to make major changes and the very small number of active board members, we failed to hold an AGM in 2017. We apologise for that. We did, however, try to hold an AGM within 18 months of the 2016 AGM—in the event, we missed the 18 month deadline by some days.

We migrated from the old membership system to the new one in November 2017. The old system gave a list of affiliates and we invited to the 2018 AGM all the affiliates that were shown as active on the old system and who had

paid any fees due since then. We have come to realise this may have excluded some affiliates from the 2018 AGM who might have wished to attend—for example, affiliates who had not paid fees after receiving an invoice but whose membership had not been formally revoked by the board and affiliates who had not been sent an invoice.

We apologise for that and will try to put that right.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

Most importantly, AAI is now thriving. It has more affiliates than it has ever had and individual membership has exceeded the 2013 peak. It is saving some \$6,000 per year on its membership system and several thousand more on other economies the board has made. Processes, work management and security have been improved beyond recognition. The board is now very much more active and effective than it was in 2017.

We have a website that works and has achieved 450,000+ annual page views versus ~20,000 in 2017.

We have become much more transparent. We now publish itemised expenditure on all except very minor campaigns. We are unaware of any other organisation that takes transparency to this level. We have also achieved a GuideStar Platinum rating for transparency—the highest available.

Once we had made the necessary operational changes to guarantee AAI's future, we reinstated AGMs by revising our bylaws in December 2019. In some areas, the 2019 bylaws strengthened affiliate control of the organization versus the 2013 bylaws. The 2019 bylaws also introduced Regional Directors to give every affiliate a director who is responsible for supporting them.

HOW TO PUT THINGS RIGHT

We now invite all affiliates who were invited to the 2016 AGM (except those who have formally resigned), to rejoin as AAI affiliates. This can be done with, or without, paying fees. To rejoin, please complete the form here: <https://www.atheistalliance.org/affiliates/>

All applications from 2016 affiliates will automatically be accepted by the AAI board and all affiliated formal organizations who have paid any fees due will be entitled to submit motions for the next AGM which will be on July 25, 2021.

They will also be permitted to nominate candidates for board roles, send a delegate to the AGM and to vote. To submit a motion, you must be an affiliate by the deadline for receipt of motions—May 31, 2021. To nominate candidates for board roles, you must be an affiliate and submit your nomination by the deadline for the receipt of nominations—June 25. To attend the AGM and vote, you must be an affiliate by July 16.

At this AGM, we will ask all affiliates to vote on how they wish to see AAI operate in the future. We will also set up a working group of affiliates representatives and board members to review the bylaws to ensure they reflect affiliates' wishes and we will ask affiliates to vote on possible bylaw revisions. But you must be an affiliate to participate in this process, so we urge you to rejoin ASAP.

This process will ensure that any affiliates who were disenfranchised by the 2018 AGM invitation process are able to have their say on how AAI will operate.

Prior to the next AGM, we will hold board elections at which affiliates can nominate and vote for directors. In advance of these elections, Howard Burman and Bill Flavell (currently the President and Vice President) will voluntarily either resign from the board or offer their roles for re-election. Howard and Bill are the only remaining board members who were board members in 2017 when there was a missed AGM and subsequently, when some affiliates may have been disenfranchised at the 2018 AGM. Including Bill and Howard's roles, eight board roles will be up for election, which accounts for 60% of board roles.

The first step is for all lapsed 2016 affiliates to rejoin us. Please consider this proposal as soon as you can. We look forward to welcoming you back.

Thank you.

on behalf of the AAI Board

--

Fotis Frangopoulos
Secretary/Treasurer

Atheist Alliance International
UN consultative status - Council of Europe status
Charity Registered 1991 - Platinum rated by Guide Star