

## A Modest Proposal for a Process for Making Choices for

- ✓ AEU Support of Ethical Action Projects and
- ✓ AEU Endorsements and Memberships in Ethical Action Coalitions and Organizations

### Description (summary):

Ethical Action is an essential element in the Ethical movement, yet as a national movement, we've been either inconsistent, ineffective, inactive, unfocused, or understaffed on Ethical Action too much of our recent history. While much Ethical Action needs to be done at the local level, and part of the AEU's mission is to help Societies become more effective in local Ethical Action, there is also a need for unified efforts on a national scale in order to achieve what our Societies want to achieve.

Thus, this proposal, to make support of national Ethical Action projects and endorsement and membership in coalitions by the AEU more effective and more responsive to the needs of the AEU's member organizations.

The proposal, in brief, establishes a process for approving projects and a parallel process for approving endorsements or memberships, putting such decisions in the hands of the Assembly delegates who represent Ethical Societies and which, at the same time, specifies criteria which make effectiveness of such projects much more likely.

This proposal, to be clear, is to have the 2006 Assembly approve a process which will be implemented at the 2007 Assembly, giving individuals and Societies a year to organize, plan, and propose specific projects in 2007, using this procedure. The process needs to be approved in advance of the first Assembly to implement it, if it is to succeed.

### Needs Assessment:

- 1) The AEU needs to make choices on which Ethical Action projects to support and which coalitions to join or endorse.
- 2) The AEU needs to determine whether such projects and endorsements have widespread support among Societies.
- 3) Ethical Action projects need to be well-thought-through and planned, both in accord with our movement's principles and past positions taken by the Assembly, and including clear goals, objectives, and effectiveness evaluation criteria.
- 4) For Ethical Action projects to succeed, there must be willing and able volunteers to work on such projects, and the costs for such projects must be included in budgets.
- 5) Endorsements and memberships, to be valuable to the AEU, require continuing contact between the AEU and the organization or coalition.
- 6) The AEU needs a way to re-evaluate whether projects, endorsements, and memberships remain on the "approved" list, based on current interest and support, continuing plans, and past effectiveness.

### Expected Outcomes:

- 1) More national Ethical Actions projects successfully, effectively implemented

- 2) More visibility of the Ethical movement on Ethical Action issues
- 3) Achievement of better discipline in planning, executing, and evaluating Ethical Action projects
- 4) Less frustration by Societies and individuals with lack of Ethical Action initiatives at the AEU level
- 5) Less frustration by Societies and individuals with ineffective Ethical Action initiatives at the AEU level

### **Resources/Budget:**

- 1) The key resource involved in implementation will be time at the Assembly to discuss and vote on the issue, and at the Board and among Societies before the Assembly.
- 2) Additional resources to implement the particular projects and endorsements chosen if this is approved, are separately approved.
- 3) Resources currently being spent on Ethical Action projects and memberships may be redirected under this proposal, in budget years following implementation.

### **Evaluation:**

- 1) Basic evaluation is built into the plan. If the Assembly delegates from Societies believe that a project or membership or endorsement is effective, the delegates can vote to continue their support. If Society delegates determine that projects, memberships, or endorsements are ineffective or counter-productive, or are otherwise negatively impacting the AEU or their Societies, then they have the power under this procedure to vote against particular projects or endorsements or all of them.
- 2) In addition, the Board needs to evaluate after one year, and periodically thereafter, whether the process is achieving the overall goal of increased effective Ethical Action activity at the AEU level, and to either adjust the process, or replace it. To do this, the Board needs to add to its agenda about mid-year (between Assemblies) an item directing the office whether and how to disseminate information to Societies about how to petition the upcoming Assembly.

### **Appendix:**

The proposals for process are attached. These are parallel but there are differences between approval for projects (a major investment of time, money, and energy) and endorsements or memberships (far less investment but still having risks and costs), so the proposals are separate.

### **Authors:**

Jone Johnson Lewis, with credit to Richard Gilbert's *Prophetic Imperative* and the process he helped craft to increase focus, democratic process, and effectiveness at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester (NY). For more information on Gilbert's project, see <http://www.luminguild.com/uu/SRChistory.pdf>

## An Ethical Action Coalition Endorsement/Membership Structure for the AEU

Ethical Action is an essential element of a successful Ethical movement, and yet we cannot achieve all of what we want to achieve alone. When the AEU endorses or becomes a member of a coalition or other organization, the following criteria should be met:

- ✓ The organization's values are generally consistent with core values of Ethical Culture.
- ✓ The organization's positions are generally consistent with positions taken by the AEU Assembly.
- ✓ The organization is effective and has clear goals and objectives.
- ✓ The endorsement or membership will help the Ethical movement to increase its own voice and effectiveness on the issue by joining with others.
- ✓ The endorsement or membership is consistent with legal requirements on activity by the AEU.
- ✓ There are at least two persons (each a member of an Ethical Society) willing to maintain contact with the organization on behalf of the AEU.
- ✓ The endorsement or membership has widespread current support among Societies.

In order to assure that such endorsements have widespread support, and to allow the Societies through their Assembly delegates to determine whether the endorsement or membership meets the other criteria in a democratic process, the following process shall be used in conjunction with the annual AEU Assembly:

- ✓ The Assembly will include on its business agenda
  - A vote on each proposed endorsement or membership. Each must be approved by consensus, and failing to gain consensus, by approval of at least 60% of the delegates present and voting. Costs of such endorsement or membership also must be approved with the budget considered by delegates at the Assembly.
- ✓ To propose an endorsement or membership, a member of any Ethical Society may submit to the AEU Board in writing at least four months prior to the Assembly a petition which includes
  - A proposal, using the AEU's planning template, which includes the needs being addressed by the endorsement or membership, resources required, and evaluation criteria.
  - A description of the organization and its positions and plans.
  - A statement showing how the organization's goals are in general accord with AEU values and positions.

- A statement of support of the Board of each of at least three Societies.
- The names of at least 2 volunteers who are willing to maintain contact with the organization and report regularly to the AEU through its Board and the following Assembly on activities of the organization.
- A budget proposal for any financial commitment by the AEU that is required to endorse or join the organization.

The AEU Board is permitted to make such endorsements or join coalitions between Assemblies when

- The criteria listed are met, especially the consistency with past actions of the Assembly.
- The need to make a decision is imminent and will be considerably more effective if made before the following Assembly.
- The current budget and financial position of the AEU makes the financial commitment possible.

When the Board makes such an endorsement or membership decision, it is up to the next Assembly to consider whether to carry such endorsement or membership forward after this point.

## An Ethical Action Project Structure for the AEU

Ethical Action is an essential element of a successful Ethical movement. Ethical Action projects which are to be endorsed by the AEU and/or supported by funds, staff, and/or volunteers of the AEU need to meet the following criteria:

- ✓ The project addresses core values of Ethical Culture.
- ✓ The project is consistent with positions taken by the AEU Assembly.
- ✓ The project is well-organized and has clear goals, objectives, plans, budget, and effectiveness evaluation criteria.
- ✓ The project is consistent with legal requirements on activity by the AEU, including that the project is non-partisan, endorses or opposes no candidates or parties, and is not designed in alignment with party or candidate platforms. Lobbying (directly and indirectly) may be only a minor portion of the project's activity.
- ✓ The project has volunteers able and willing to carry out the plans.
- ✓ The project has widespread support among Societies.

In order to assure that project have widespread support, and to allow the Societies through their Assembly delegates to determine whether the project meets the other criteria in a democratic process, the following process shall be used in conjunction with the annual AEU Assembly:

- ✓ The Assembly will include on its business agenda
  - Reports from projects selected at the previous Assembly through this process, to inform the delegates of the achievements of the project and how well it met its evaluation criteria;
  - An item to vote on how many projects will be selected for the coming year, with consensus, or failing consensus a majority vote, determining the number of projects to be selected that year;
  - Brief presentations by proponents of each proposed project, summarizing the vision and plan.
  - A vote on each proposed project. If there are more projects proposed than the Assembly has decided to select, then a weighted vote will be held, with the projects getting the most votes selected up to the maximum determined in the previous vote, providing the project selected has been included on at least 60% of the ballots of delegates casting votes on this matter. If there are as many or fewer projects proposed than the Assembly has decided to select, then each projects is approved by consensus, and failing to gain consensus, by approval of at least 60% of the delegates present and voting.

- ✓ To propose a project, the project must submit to the AEU Board in writing at least four months prior to the Assembly:
  - An interim report on achievements, progress, and evaluation if the project was approved in the past and wants to be approved for continued support (a final report is presented at the Assembly whether the project is requesting continued support or not);
  - A petition which includes
    - § Preliminary plans, including goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria. The final plans for distribution to Assembly delegates need to be received by the AEU office at least 45 days before the Assembly. This plan would use the AEU's planning template, and would include detailed goals and objectives.
    - § A statement of support of the Board of each of at least three Societies.
    - § The names of at least 5 volunteers who are willing to plan, organize, and be the key oversight committee for the project; among these volunteers need to be members of at least three different Societies. They need not meet face-to-face in order to carry out their organizing and oversight activities.
    - § The names of at least 20 other individuals who are willing to actively support and help carry out work of the project; among these volunteers need to be members of at least five different Societies (these may include the same Societies as the oversight committee members represent).
    - § A budget proposal for financial and staff (including clerical) support.