

AAI 2008/09 STRATEGIC PLAN

Submitted by Stuart Bechman, Chair, AAI Strategic Planning Committee, Sept. 24, 2008

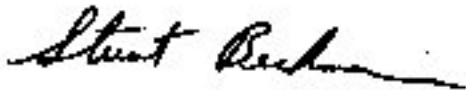
OVERVIEW

As this is the first year for AAI to attempt to develop a comprehensive strategic plan, the 2008/09 Strategic Plan takes an internal focus: Reviewing the fundamentals of the organization, looking at the programs that have evolved since AAI's inception, and matching those programs and goals with the mission of AAI as stated in its Purpose Statement in the first paragraph of the AAI Bylaws.

With this first-year review of fundamentals, the emphasis is in evaluating the programs to the values they provide; identifying omissions and misdirections that diverge from the AAI Purpose; and proposing new programs that bring AAI's efforts and activities back in alignment with that stated Purpose. It is believed that once those fundamentals are realigned with the Purpose, the organization can look outward again and consider ways to increase its size and effectiveness in meeting its Purpose and supporting our community and movement.

Because AAI is a democratic organization, it necessarily depends on the resources and common goals of its members more so than a more hierarchical or autocratic organization needs to survive. This requires the majority of its affiliates and board members to have a higher awareness and buy-in of the goals and operations of the organization, and to provide resources as needed to fulfill the organization's charges. Democracy is a two-edged sword: On the one hand, the member groups have a greater degree of autonomy and say in the direction and structure of the umbrella organization. On the other hand, the member groups have a greater degree of responsibility and investment to ensure that the umbrella organization functions effectively.

In many nonprofit organizations, the actions of the president and its governing council are delineated by the Strategic Plan adopted each year by the board of the organization. This document is an attempt to provide a focused and detailed framing of AAI's mission and how it is to fulfill that mission. To be effective, it is vital that the majority of AAI's affiliates and board members understand and share the vision that underlies whatever plan is adopted by the organization. It is quite possible that this plan may not be the plan that the 2008/09 AAI Board ultimately agrees to; and in that case, the most important outcome for this report will be to start a conversation among us of what we think AAI should look like and how it should function, now and into the future.



Stuart Bechman
AAI Strategic Planning Committee Chair
2007/2008

MISSION FOCUS

The Strategic Planning Committee started its analysis with a review of the Purpose Statement stated in the first paragraph of the AAI Bylaws:

AAI Purpose: *"The Alliance is organized to promote the formation of strong atheist groups and to democratically coordinate the activities of autonomous self-governing democratic Atheist societies, each of which is organized to: 1) Education its members and the general public about: a) The nature and vital importance of the separation of government and religion; and b) The intellectual validity and the individual and social values of Atheism, and the rejection of all forms of supernaturalism. 2) Protect the constitutional and civil rights of Atheists as members of a free and open society. 3) Foster friendly relations with atheist groups in countries around the world to broaden the scope, meaning, and understanding and influence of Atheism."* -- AAI Bylaws, 2008

The committee separated the above purpose of AAI into four main categories, each with some further breakdown:

I SUPPORTING OUR MEMBER SOCIETIES

Supporting our Member Societies involves providing tools that they can use to better meet the challenges of:

A. Membership Development

- 1 Recruiting
- 2 Retention
- 3 Activation

B. Family Support

C. Educational Support

II STRENGTHENING THE ATHEIST VOICE

A. National Issues Advocacy (Possible Issues: Church/State Separation; Child Abuse; Women's Rights; Right to Die; Stem Cell Research; etc.)

National Issues Advocacy would be identifying and speaking out on issues relevant to freethought in each country where AAI has affiliates

B. Annual National Campaigns

At least one prominent national issue would be identified each year, around which a year-long campaign involving all AAI Member Societies would be built

C. Secular Coalition for America

Active participation with SCA to work on national policy issues affecting atheists

D. United Nations

Active participation with UN Committees to work on international policy issues affecting atheists

III STRENGTHENING THE ATHEIST IDENTITY/CULTURE

A. *Secular Nation* Magazine

B. AAI Annual Conference

C. Heritage / History Projects / Programs

Heritage / History Projects / Programs includes projects and programs that recover, recognize, and promote our secular heritage, values, and history.

IV OTHER INTERNATIONAL

2008/09 BREAKDOWN OF GOALS / ISSUES

Within each of these prior categories, a breakdown of goals and issues are described below:

I SUPPORTING OUR MEMBER SOCIETIES

Supporting our member societies – our affiliates – is potentially the most unique and significant mission AAI can fulfill. AAI is in the best position and has the widest diversity of skills and resources that it can marshal to develop and strengthen new atheist groups around the world. And developing and strengthening our member societies is perhaps the most important service we can provide to build our global community.

However, AAI has failed to effectively develop this mission focus. Not only does AAI effectively have no support programs currently in place for our member societies, but the communication between AAI and its affiliates is so deteriorated that AAI has little to no information about who its affiliates are.

There is also some sense that AAI has focused on growing its affiliate base simply for the sake of growth, without considering how AAI and the new affiliate can benefit from the relationship. Many affiliates accepted into AAI in past years have not continued to maintain the standards established for AAI membership, and may not even be aware of what those standards are. This muddy confusion makes it quite difficult for AAI to develop a comprehensive program of support for our affiliates.

Goals for 2009 include:

- Developing a set of metrics to be used to measure the success of AAI, and to begin tracking those metrics from year to year.
- Developing a set of metrics to be used to measure the success of our affiliates, and to begin tracking those metrics from our affiliates from year to year.
- Improving record-keeping and building a database of our affiliate groups, including contact information and affiliate metrics that can assist AAI in understanding the strengths and the needs of each affiliate.
- Developing a regular communication channel between AAI's officers and its affiliates that keeps both parties better informed of the other's goals, activities, and needs throughout the year.
- Developing a suite of 'best-of' practices, made available to our affiliates, to provide guidance in membership recruitment, including membership recruitment, retention, and activation ("volunteerism").
- Developing a suite of 'best-of' practices, made available to our affiliates, to provide guidance in specific issues and themes of interest to our affiliate's membership base, such as raising atheist families and providing a base of educational programs on atheist and freethought heritage.
- Better promoting and encouraging affiliate use of the Cision Media database leased by AAI
- Creating and appointing a "Czar of Affiliate-Building" position responsible to develop and oversee AAI programs that provide tangible help and assistance to young and struggling atheist groups looking to grow and thrive.
- Reviewing the standards of affiliate membership, and developing an annual review program that ensures that AAI affiliates understand and maintain the standards and requirements of AAI membership expected of them as AAI members.
- Developing a new-affiliate orientation programs to educate new (and existing!) affiliates on the special relationship AAI provides, and how the affiliates can best utilize that to help their own organization.
- Redefining the two levels of AAI affiliate membership, Full and Associate, to segregate AAI affiliates between those that can provide resources to AAI and those that need resources from AAI; and to develop relationship parameters and benefits that provide value for both levels of affiliate membership.

- Reconfiguring AAI's individual membership program to:
 - Channel /convert AAI members living near AAI affiliates into affiliate members, and to encourage new individual supporters to become affiliate members;
 - Encourage the creation of new affiliate groups in areas where AAI individual members do not have a local affiliate group to support; and
 - Provide tangible value for individuals to be AAI affiliate members, such as discounts at AAI conventions and for AAI merchandise.
- Upgrading the AAI website to provide members-only access areas that allow affiliates to access the organizational, educational and other tools that developed by AAI to support its affiliates.
- Providing versions of AAI's *Secular Nation* magazine, through its Atheos Media publishing arm, that serve affiliates with no newsletters; and an article service for those affiliates that do have their own newsletters
- Regularly harvesting e-mail and other contact information from the Secular Coalition of America and making that information available to AAI affiliates, and advising them on the most productive ways to use those lists
- Developing a suite of on-line affiliate education programs on: Developing interactive, member- and project-based websites; Developing an effective outreach program; Developing an effective funding campaign; and Mounting educational conferences.

II STRENGTHENING THE ATHEIST VOICE

This mission focus looks at political and ethical issues of import to the AAI community and develops approaches and campaigns to help our community get our opinions and preferences known in the general society.

Goals for 2009 include:

- Identifying the top 5-10 issues of import to the AAI community in 2008/09;
- Develop and send out a set of AAI press releases on these issues of import to the AAI community;
- Developing a library of opinion papers, action plans, and sample press releases, statements, phrases and letters to allow affiliates to launch an effective campaign on any of the issues of import
- Identifying at least one of the issues of import as the most important in the US and develop and launch a national AAI campaign in the US organized across all AAI affiliates
- Identifying at least one of the issues of import as the most important internationally and develop and launch an international AAI campaign to address that issue.
- Continuing to maintain our presence and participation on the board of the Secular Coalition for America.
- Identifying best ways and places to develop a voice and presence with organizations that promote human rights and social justice, such as the United States or other extra-national organizations, and pursuing a relationship with those organizations.

III STRENGTHENING THE ATHEIST IDENTITY/CULTURE

This mission focus looks at the heritage, values, and history of atheism and freethought and develops programs and campaigns that can strengthen and enrich the culture of the AAI community around those programs and values.

Goals for 2009 include:

- Evaluating *Secular Nation* magazine to determine how well it has aligned with and supports the AAI Purpose, and how it serves a need that complements and augments the publications of our affiliates; and to develop themes, articles, columns, campaigns, etc., that match that purpose and unique niche.
- Evaluating the history and trends of the annual AAI conference to determine how well it has aligned with and supports the AAI Purpose, and how well it complements and fills a unique niche in the freethought convention circuit; and to develop programs and workshops and present speakers that match AAI's purpose while emphasizing a complementary and unique position in the freethought convention circuit.
- Resurrecting the *Atheos Media* label as an AAI trademark; and identify ways that the trademark can be used by AAI to promote itself and its *Atheos Media* label.
- Improving the coverage and depth of information contained in the AAI Freethought Directory database and CD.
- Creating an AAI Merchandise committee to use the AAI and *Atheos Media* trademarks to identify and develop merchandise that promotes AAI and its affiliates.
- Creating an AAI Marketing committee to develop ways in which AAI and its affiliates can promote their affiliations and create common and recognizable AAI themes that can be distributed across all affiliates.
- Identifying and promoting extraorganizational secular-based community service programs, campaigns, and projects that benefit the AAI community and fall under its mission.
- Identifying at least one US community service or heritage program, campaign, or project and develop and launch a national AAI campaign in the US organized across all AAI affiliates
- Identifying at least one international community service or heritage program, campaign, or project and develop and launch an international AAI campaign to address that issue.
- Developing a set of promotional campaigns around each of the holidays and celebrations identified in the Secular Seasons project website for use by local affiliates.
- Developing a set of promotional campaigns around each of the holidays and celebrations identified in the Secular Seasons project website for use by local affiliates.
- Developing or adopting at least 3 educational programs that promote the atheist identity / culture and make it available via web download to affiliates and individual members.
- Laying the foundations for an AAI youth leadership program to develop the next generation of atheist leaders.

IV OTHER INTERNATIONAL

This mission focus addresses the non-US, or "International" aspect of AAI, and looks at building and supporting the atheist and freethought movement and values across the globe.

Goals for 2009 include:

- Creating a new office of Vice-President of International Affairs, responsible for developing this mission focus for AAI in the following ways:
 - Overseeing the AAI International Planning committee to identify issues of atheist import in each AAI country outside the United States and the challenges the international affiliates face;
 - Developing an AAI International Strategic Plan to fulfill AAI's international mission;
 - Establishing a letter-writing committee charged with developing contacts with other national and international atheist and freethought organizations across the globe.
 - Planing, proposing budgets and coordinating the international projects identified in mission foci II and III of this 2008/09 Strategic Plan.