



Giving What We Can

6 Month Review

July - December 2014

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1. Key metrics

227 members this period so far (Jul-Dec), taking us to 763. First half of this year we got 147. Over the last and first 6 months of 2013 we gained 90 and 48 respectively.

Reserves: around 13 months (~£190,000, with our budget increasing to around £15,000 per month in March)

Cost per member: ~£250 per member. (£54,000 budgeted spending divided by 227 members. Conservative – used ‘budgeted spending’ rather than actual expenditure. Spending is a little lower.)

2. Overall thoughts

Progress in terms of membership was very good this period. It’s difficult to know what the biggest causes of this were. We think it’s to do with an increasingly active and enthusiastic community (including, for example, certain chapters doing really well (e.g. see current Cambridge pledge event!), articles like the one in SlateStarCodex, more engagement with Effective Altruism) combined with a more careful pathway to membership – both making it easier/more convenient to join and donate, and following people up at every stage.

3. Main events over the period

Good Done Right conference (July). This went well – there was a good range of talks, and engaged discussion among participants. It’s difficult to know what the impact was. We hoped to get a book out of it, which didn’t happen. It hopefully built up the academic credibility of effective altruism, and links between Giving What We Can/CEA and leading academics in the relevant areas. Some indications: Rachel Glennerster (ED of JPAL) wrote an article about the conference – particularly on economists and philosophers working together. Jeremy Lauer (runs WHO-CHOICE) was very enthusiastic about the conference, and said he would want to come to one of these even if he wasn’t speaking at it.

Michelle was on sabbatical (mid Jul-Oct). Left Andreas Mogensen as Acting ED. This meant that the review, pledge change and strategy were on hold for this period.

Interns joined us for approx a couple of months each. Two interns carried out research over the summer, which was useful. Interns also worked on: making presentations which could be given by others, social media (updating Facebook and Twitter). One intern did research into the psychology of giving and also into TB. They found a promising charity working on TB, and produced two good presentations which can be given to chapters.

Overall, long-term interns have been useful – they have produced good work, and even more valuable is their longer term involvement. Our webmaster originally joined us for a summer, and one intern continued to volunteer as our social media manager (updating our social media daily) since the end of their internship. Having someone work with us for a few months seems to be a good way to get them feeling properly part of the team, and then they're happy to help out long-term. This indicates we should focus in particular on having people come who are likely to really care about our mission, rather than people who are highly skilled but not particularly ethically motivated.

Two week internship (Sep): Approx 20 people joined us. All seemed pretty dedicated and skilled. Good work was done. Approximately 5 of them became members of Giving What We Can. If we do it again next year, Jon Courtney, Director of Community, will manage it, since he's now observed how one works. It seems likely to be worth doing again, although it may depend on what we're doing over the summer (e.g. how the book launches go) and therefore whether this is the best use of Jon's time in September.

Two member parties. One in London and one in Ox, both dinners. Seemed to go well, and be liked. Got about 20 people to the London one and 30 to Oxford one. We think in general it is valuable to do more of this kind of facilitation of member interaction and trying to enthuse members and interested people more about effective giving and Giving What We Can, in order to encourage them to speak more to others about the organisation, effective giving and the pledge.

Pledge change (November): over June to October we consulted both members and non-members about changing our pledge to take out explicit reference to the developing world. We wanted to know how existing members felt about this, how likely it would be to change the existing community atmosphere, how useful others thought this would be in terms of bringing together people who identify as effective altruists to take concrete action and what alternatives could achieve the same objectives. While various members had reservations about the change, most of those were not worried by the change after discussing it with us in more depth.

The various alternatives we considered did not seem to be nearly as good as changing the Giving What We Can pledge. A significant but not large number of people said that they would join if the pledge changed. Our decision was to change the pledge, but not to publicise the change widely, in order that the community did not change tone – that is, we are still an organisation focusing on poverty alleviation. We have had essentially no objections to the change so far.

In order to monitor the change, we added a question about where people planned to give to our joining form, and are trying extra hard to talk to all new members via skype. We seem to have had in the region of 5 to 10 people join due to the change so far. Later in the new year we may do more of a push to encourage all serious effective altruist-minded people to join, once we are more sure that the increase of people not giving to poverty alleviation charities does not detract from the community feeling of the organisation.

Charity recommendations: Remained the same as last year. Our biggest question mark last year was AMF's room for more funding. It secured a number of distributions over the last year, so we are very happy recommending them this year.

Events for young professionals: We aimed to put on good quality research presentations for young professionals in London, hoping to get a core following who came each month, learned what to expect and therefore increasingly brought friends and hosted presentations in their work places. This did not go as well as hoped. It has continued to be very difficult to attract attendees to events, and even harder to get people to have events in their workplaces. The difficulty is compounded by our not being in London. We may try to put on events for young professionals in Oxford over the next 6 months. We will be focussing less on events for young professionals.

Review of Giving What We Can's impact: Michelle worked on this in November, but has a lot of work left to do on it. Two major factors which delayed it were that many people hadn't yet filled in their dashboards, so we put quite a lot of work into following up with individual members, and taking time off to work on her DPhil.

Recruitment round: We put out adverts for a Director of Communications, Director of Research and Chief Operations Officer for CEA in November. Applications closed in mid December, and we are currently scoring applicants. The round got 70 applicants, seemingly of high quality, so we are hopeful of finding talented people for each of these positions. One of the things we'll be weighting highly is likelihood to stay in each of these roles. We've had many talented people work for us in the past, and learned a lot from each. But we think that right now it is important that we recruit a team who will remain constant for a few years, rather than changing every year.

4. Ongoing activities

Giving What We Can Trust: Has been very popular, and attracted a large number of donations. Unfortunately, that caused the bookkeeping to fall significantly behind, and therefore delayed pay out. In December, we paid out the around £250,000 which had built up in it over around 7 months. In the future, we plan to prevent this from happening by outsourcing the bookkeeping, ideally to Amber Morgan, who has helped with getting the bookkeeping up to date over the last few weeks.

Member engagement: Talking to new members via Skype when they join is going well. We talk to probably around 2/3rds of members. The membership process administration is easier with the increased amount of it being done online. 'My giving' for 2013, which shows how much people donated over that year, has been filled in by 72% of members who joined by the start of 2013, and 52% of people who joined by the end of 2013. We are very pleased with this level of engagement, since tracking your giving and income for the year is not trivial. This year, we will start emailing people in the US in

January asking them to fill in their giving dashboards, so that people do it as close as possible to when they actually gave.

Online/email outreach: Social media engagement levels are as high as we hoped for – we aimed for 1200 new media connections in 6 months, and have had 1000 over 5 months (for all these numbers, I am not counting December since we aren't at the end of it yet). On the other hand, we haven't managed to reach out to as many people as we hoped – messages to individuals have been 1200 over the last 5 months, compared to 1800 we wanted to send out over 6 months. The response rate to these has also been less than we hoped – nearer 10% than the 25% we aimed for. We think a large part of that is to do with the kinds of messages that were sent – we did more email outreach than Facebook, and Facebook tends to get more responses. Facebook is also more time-consuming, and overall we didn't spend as much time on this as we aimed to. We will do more of it in the new year. This continues to seem a valuable activity for getting people closer to joining, although it is difficult to know the impact since the only tangible is people actually joining, which is infrequent. We definitely think it is worth continuing with, and continuing to monitor.

Website: We have had 164,000 website sessions so far since the start of July, which is higher than the 150,000 we expected over this 6 months. This is due to increases when specific media events happened (for example, Will writing about the ice bucket challenge). We have continued to tweak the website – for example, making the My Giving pages capable of having repeat donations put in, making the My Giving dashboards capable of being public if people want to share them, and having a live up-to-date aggregate of the amount pledged on the homepage.

Try Giving: We aimed to get 60 new try givers over this 6 month period. We've had 67 in the first 5 months. It seems to be a popular scheme, and we've had a few people start on Try Giving now and end up joining, so we continue to be hopeful that this is part of a pathway to membership, rather than an easy way out which leads to people avoiding ever joining. We will continue to monitor it. We got fewer dashboard sign-ups than we aimed for – 92 over 5 months, rather than 120 over 6. We were very uncertain how many we would get, so we are not particularly disappointed with this. The most important question in our mind about this is whether any of those will go on to get more involved, and will increase their giving or give more effectively, having initially started engaging with us by using the dashboards.

Research: Has not been a large focus over this period. We did research into ways to reduce incidence of child marriage, which produced an interesting presentation but no promising charities (due to difficulty in quantifying and lack of charities, rather than it not being an effective area). We did some research into TB, which produced a promising charity – Target TB – which we are currently looking into, and a couple of others we might evaluate later on. We did some smaller projects in other areas, which produced interesting research and blog content but no promising charities. We hope to increase our research with a full time director of research. We hope that person would have a very good grasp of the landscape of charitable interventions, allowing them to answer member

questions about where to donate, notice new promising giving opportunities, and evaluate other work being done in the area, particularly by GiveWell. In particular, we would like them to continue a feeling that the Giving What We Can community is one which thinks seriously about and is deeply informed on the most effective places to donate to alleviate poverty, making it an exciting and useful community to join. It is likely that the most useful research for this person to do themselves is somewhat abstract – evaluating assumptions made in other charity evaluations, and considering the more methodological questions facing donors. We will be looking for a candidate who will stay with us long-term since there is a lot of important information for them to absorb and use. We would also like someone who deeply cares about effective giving, and has good people skills – both of which will be necessary since the role involves more outreach than a traditional research role (perhaps giving talks, definitely answering questions from members and others). Having discussed the position with people who have a development economics background and who know our research team well, we've been advised that while it would be valuable for them to have economics training, it is not crucial, as long as they are able to demonstrate an aptitude for the right kind of thinking, that they learn quickly, and that they will be happy and able to ask for help when needed.

5. Finances

Over the last 6 months, we budgeted approximately £9,000 per month, weighted towards the end of the year because Michelle was away early on and went up to full time in November, and because we slightly increased salaries. We spent a little under our budget. Over the next year, we would like to hire a new Director of Communications and also a Director of Research. Therefore, we expect our budget to increase. We think we may have to pay more than our standard starting salary (£20,000 a year) in order to get a sufficiently good researcher. Therefore we have budgeted an extra £2,500 per month for a researcher. This makes our budget going forward around £15,000 per month (from when we've hired staff so probably not until around March-April).

We have approximately £190,000 in reserves, giving us a runway of around 13 months. Over the next year we expect to spend around £170,000. We aim to always have 12 months of reserves. We have approximately £120,000 in very likely donations for the year, leaving a shortfall of around £50,000. We will be making concerted efforts at fundraising from the start of 2015. We will start by producing a thorough impact report for Giving What We Can over the last 2 years based on our giving surveys. Given that member growth has been going very well, we hope that this impact report will make a compelling case for donating to Giving What We Can.