

Enhancing effective giving: a research, collaboration, and information sharing project; summary for Gates foundation

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Our research, communication, and impact program aims to provide practical methods to increase the level and impact of “*effective altruistic*” private giving. We are building a database of evidence on *what works*, with a particular focus on the questions below. We will assess, evaluate, and present this in several ways, including an interactive database, a wiki, and a meta-analysis and survey paper. Each of these will be carefully linked and integrated. For example, the analysis and discussion in the survey paper will be mirrored on the wiki, providing a platform for discussion and continuous updating. Each element of the surveyed evidence will be provided as a database entry, cross-referencing relevant papers, theories, use-cases, and available raw data. The meta-analysis will be presented in the database and wiki, as well as in an web app (e.g., R Shiny Rstudio). This will permit users to consider alternate statistical assumptions and focus on particular domains and outcomes, as relevant to their own practice. All material will be provided in multiple formats (without confusing overlap), allowing users to choose a more or less technical version, and to choose the level of detail they want to see.

Partial and preliminary work can be found on the [Innovations in Fundraising wiki](#); further work is stored in relational database format.

Key practical questions

- Who is giving to effective charities, and can we predict who is likely to be convinced to do so?
- Is it effective to ask people to *re-target* their giving towards more impactful charities? If so, when and how is this effective? Underlying this: are charities in competition and do people “rob Peter to pay Paul”?

Overcoming important practical and psychological barriers...

- How to presenting effectiveness information in an effective way, without switching off emotional motivations to give?
- Will de-biasing and correcting misconceptions lead to more effective giving? How can we avoid self-interested motivated reasoning?
- How can we reduce the empathic distance to international recipients and make the geographically-distant feel local?
- How can we best apply standard emotional and behavioral approaches (evidenced fundraising tools like “gift exchange”) to *effective* charities. In applying these tools, what superpowers and weaknesses do the most effective charities have?
- How can we incorporate psychological and social *rewards for donors* without overly sacrificing mission efficiency? What is the tradeoff between promoting the purest, best-evidenced charities (e.g., GiveWell’s list) and increasing the overall donation amounts?
- How to best target High-Net-Worth individuals and get them to give more effectively/give more to effective charities?

Policy issues:

- Will the same tools that boost effective giving also increase support for foreign aid and pro-poor policies?
- What is the interaction between private giving and (support for) government policies, and how can we boost the *net* effect?

A program and key principles for future research, and the evaluation of previous work

- Building platforms to observe relevant giving behavior, and systematic experimentation to observe the impact of approaches across several relevant contexts
- Open science framework: Research integrity, collaboration and data-sharing, enabling re-analysis and meta-analysis
- Robust and validated evidence: Pre-registration and pre-analysis plans, experimentation and independent replication across a range of relevant environment and frames
- Present research for *users* in an effective way, using modern information systems. Avoid “old-school” academic journal presentation formats and “frozen PDFs” in favor of living, continually-validated and re-assessed research. Open access in a web framework.
- Collaboration with and among relevant charities/fundraisers (e.g., International Fundraising Leadership Forum)
- Use wiki and other collaboration tools to organize open communication and sharing
 - of research results and insights, data, and methods,
 - of informal (non-academic, non-systematic) trials and experiences, and
 - of critical insider knowledge and intuition

Why will this be helpful and who will use it and how?

1. Effective charities, fundraisers for these charities, and groups of these organizations will use this directly. As noted, the results will be presented in interactive accessible ways, including more and less technical presentations, allowing users to select a tailored analysis.
 - We will provide personal support and communication to qualified effective charities.
2. Academic, professional, and applied researchers interested in this area (both “effective charitable giving” directly, and as an input into understanding human behavior)

Our project will encourage and foster future work by...

- providing an accessible “evidence baseline”, a shared database of raw and meta-data,
- providing collaborative tools and platforms to facilitate further analysis (e.g., working with e-commerce and social fundraising sites to establish a continuous opportunity to test charitable messaging in a stable context)
- building an interactive community of researchers and practitioners, and
- providing a pathway to disseminate results to users and see and measure a clear practical impact.
- In the longer-term, we aim to build a low-overhead, straightforward application process and network to evaluate and disperse grants to fund promising research. All funded projects will be required to follow the principles of open, robust, and collaborative research alluded to above.

3. Government policymakers: in enabling and enhancing effective private giving, and providing public programs that are compatible with this
4. Foundations (Gates, etc), in targeting and communicating interventions, considering interactions and feedback on the wider society of givers.
5. Advocates and activists for globally sympathetic and pro-poor policies; since research is likely to unlock both factors that encourage effective giving and factors that drive cross-cultural sympathy, empathy, and action.

The existing team and resources

David Reinstein, University of Exeter, Economics

Lucius Caviola, University of Oxford, Psychology

Nick Fitz, Center for Advanced Hindsight

Ari Kagan, Center for Advanced Hindsight

Support and guidance (past, current, and promised) from:

- Paul Smeets (Sustainable Finance, Maastricht)
- Omar Parbhoo, Ideas42 and BHub
- The Charity Science Foundation
- Giving for Impact
- the Centre for Effective Altruism (Oxford)

Seeking support from: BITSS for meta-analysis projects, and from X-Econ.org for data sharing