Scoping study questions for an existential risk fellowship programme

See this post for background: https://www.jcransom.com/posts/risk-fellowships/

Summary: A scoping study to explore what a fellowship scheme to address existential risks might look like: scheme design and delivery, possible fellowship models, and lessons from other programmes to increase effectiveness and impact. Develop a theory of change for achieving long-term, large-scale impact.

Models

- What models are used by other programmes? Why?
- Different routes: open calls, headhunting for specific needs identified by expert panels, targeting of influential people (e.g. policymakers, philanthropist organisations and government officials in emerging economies)
- Based on my previous research on universities solving local challenges: what role for secondments, supporting 'boundary spanners', joint appointment across sectors, etc.?

Long-term influence, including in emerging economies

- Following from my PhD research on flagship universities in Africa: what lessons for achieving long-term influence can we draw from the phenomenon of 'staff circulation' between top universities, government and parastatals? How can we reach the key decision-makers of the next 5 to 10 (or more) years?
- What about reaching decision-makers in India, China, and elsewhere? Where else should we be looking (eg. influential nation states, key international bodies)? Where are emerging university strengths in key x-risk areas in the Global South? Where are the pipelines of talent? What are the risks?
- What is the theory of change for long-term impact? For example, what is the balance between solving specific technical needs (for example funding an expert to focus on an identified problem for six months, perhaps at their own university) vs. aiming for awareness raising (sending a promising official from an emerging economy government to work with a research team in another country)? How to balance specific risk reduction with promoting longtermism?
- How to measure long-term impact: disasters averted, awareness raised, national policies,

international agreements or organisations, UN votes?

Programme management

- How to best promote fellowship opportunities? How to recruit promising (i.e. talented, 'unaligned') fellows and motivate them to apply? How to then ensure adequate mentorship and support?
- How to identify hosts, and how to support them (including financially)?
- What role for x-risk, and EA, experts? To form panels to score applications, to advise on strategy, to identify gaps and needs, and support cause prioritisation?
- Who should be on advisory boards? How are they selected?
- What should the selection criteria be for fellows?
- How should the administrative organisation arranging fellowships be structured?
- How to design a light-touch application process that nonetheless provides sufficient information for assessors?
- How should the welfare of fellows be supported?
- What would staff who have worked on existing programmes do differently? What lessons would they share? What do they wish they'd known earlier? If they were to start a new scheme, what would they prioritise first?

Alumni

- Is there a role for an alumni community, and how might this serve to advance x-risk and EA research and advocacy?
- Could alumni help mentor new fellows?
- How might this be aligned with existing communities?

Impact and evaluation

- How can we best capture the impact of fellowships to address x-risks? How might this differ from conventional fellowship programmes?
- How best to assess return on investment?
- What are good practices in evaluating impact? What new or experimental methods may be worth trialling? What's exciting?
- How can learning from the programme be effectively and transparently shared? How can we ensure these learnings are useful to the community, and to other programmes?

Next steps

- How can feedback be gathered and incorporated?
- What would a pilot look like? What needs to be in place, and over what timescale, to make a pilot effective and useful?
- What funding is needed? If the programme was to scale, how much would this cost?

- What about regulatory, logistical, and legal obstacles?
- What are the risks (e.g. reputational to the EA movement, to individual fellows, to hosts) and how might these be managed?

People to speak to

I know the following:

- Director of two major scholarship and fellowship programmes funded by UK Government
- Advisor on medical fellowships
- Manager of application system for fellowships
- Former administrator of scholarships, with expertise in travel logistics, visas, etc
- Manager of grants programme at a national academy
- Former Chair of major scholarship programme
- Head of scholars programme at large international foundation
- Assistant Professor of public policy, IIT Delhi (to test ideas in a different context)
- Advisor to Government, Rwanda (and well-networked in East Africa) (as above)
- Fellows who have had six month placements at UK universities, hospitals, charities etc.

And I would seek to speak to others, including:

- Leads for previous Open Philanthropy policy fellowship programmes, Century Fellowships, the Global Challenges Project etc.
- Members of EA community, especially working on meta topics and community building
- Experts in evaluation and monitoring.