

Research meeting
July 18, 2013

GiveWell Labs: Scientific research (Holden)

Holden has been focused on getting grounded in science so that we can form a plan to find and assess possible giving opportunities. He's been getting better grounded in the terminology of basic biology and having a series of basic, overview conversations (notes of which are online at <http://givewell.org/conversations> when they've been approved).

Holden's next steps here are to conduct more "landscaping" calls to cover a broad scope of people, including scientists who have worked for pharmaceutical companies and in academia, in addition to more funders, hoping to continue to flesh out his picture about the different perspectives regarding where a new funder can best add value.

Another topic related to scientific research that we plan to assess is the question of "returns to general basic science research." Calculating a "cost per life saved" or "return on investment" type figure for a particular scientific investment seems unrealistic, but it may be more tractable to do such a calculation for a very large pool of science funding such as NIH funding. We have had some conversations and started reading a book written on this topic, *Measuring Gains from Medical Research: an Economic Approach*, by Kevin Murphy and Robert Topel.

Staff discussed how we should prioritize work on scientific research, as well as the difficulties of comparing potential giving opportunities in scientific research with developing world aid.

GiveWell Labs: Medium-depth investigations (Alexander)

We currently have 4 open medium-depth investigations, proceeding at different paces, and one completed investigation (open science -- see <http://blog.givewell.org/2013/07/11/our-landscape-of-the-open-science-community/>)

- Meta-research
- Malaria
- Immigration/labor mobility
- Climate change, particularly focused on geoengineering research

Making progress on medium-depths is a priority over the next several months.

Climate change/geoengineering research: Alexander is attending a conference about geonengineering in Boston at the beginning of August, and will continue to look for a consultant for this medium-depth at that point. Some people who work on climate change have also pointed us towards carbon capture and storage, nuclear and advanced nuclear energy, and liquid fuels as potentially underfunded approaches to addressing climate change.

Immigration: We've had many conversations with experts; in addition to a few more conversations, we're hoping to make progress on our main research questions, which we think our best handled by GiveWell staff.

We didn't discuss malaria or meta-research at the meeting.

All research meeting notes available at <http://www.givewell.org/research-meetings>