Phone conversation between National Academy Foundation (Colleen Devery, Assistant Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & Administration) and GiveWell (Elie Hassenfeld and Simon Knutsson) on October 26, 2010

GiveWell: What is your room for more funding? I.e. what specifically would you do if you got additional funds? We read your i3 application but we are unclear about what specific programs you intended to implement.

National Academy Foundation (NAF): I'll describe the work we hoped to do, have undertaken to some degree, and would do at an increased pace with more funding.

The first is to test out the technical assistance and service delivery model. For the last seven or eight years, we've had the country divided into regions, each with a director who act as the sole technical assistance provider. Although, if the issue is outside the director's particular realm of experience, the director helps the academy get the appropriate assistance.

In a pilot starting this summer we moved to a four or five person team in two regions of the country. A team includes

- the Director, which is a similar role to old regional director and they are responsible for deploying the team;
- a Partnership Manager who works with academies on involving the community, their advisory boards, connecting to businesses for volunteers and internships;
- a Academy Development Manager who is an expert in the structure of NAF academes, for example they could work with the school on scheduling;
- a Curriculum Specialist who can work with the teachers on implementing the NAF curriculum, creating integrated projects across subject areas, etc.;
- and a part-time Network Liaison who handles the administrative needs of the team

Second, as we're doing this, we're also improving the evaluation system.

Third, another component in the i3 application was to improve the programmatic support for internships and advisory board members. We've developed some programs for schools to help prepare students for internships, but they aren't as structured or defined as our curriculum is, so we're proposing to work with a person who's an expert in that field, Sue Bloom. She has also worked with MDRC on the Career Academies Project (CAP) study. And, although the i3 application wasn't approved, we're starting to move ahead with this work.

GiveWell: Regarding the first part of your answer, the positions in the four or five person teams. Is that staff you'd like to hire if you got additional funding?

NAF: We've hired them in the Northeast and California, and we've engaged with an evaluator to evaluate the success. More funding would let us roll it out to the rest of the country.

GiveWell: Do you know what that would cost?

NAF: I can send you information on that.

GiveWell: For the programmatic support for internships and advisory board members, you just mentioned, what is your funding need for that activity? And have you already implemented it in some regions?

NAF: We haven't implemented it yet. A large part of that work is professional development for educators responsible for cultivating relationships with businesses. I can send you the cost of implementation.

GiveWell: A randomized controlled trial (RCT) by MDRC of the career academies model found long-term impacts on participants' earnings. Why try to change or improve a model that's showed such good results?

NAF: We're not trying to change the model; it's more about quality assurance. We're trying to make sure we understand what's happening at each academy and can deploy the resources they need to achieve the results.

GiveWell: Is a key goal of the new approach to offer more intensive services to make sure the NAF career academy model is being implemented consistently across all areas?

NAF: Yes, and we track its affect on improving outcomes.

GiveWell: Do you want to roll out the pilot technical assistance and service delivery model before you have the results from the evaluation of the pilot project? If so, why not wait for the evaluation results?

NAF: Our plan is to wait for results from the evaluation, which is planned to release an interim report in April 2011. We'll decide then if we should roll out the technical assistance and service delivery model with the four to five person teams to all regions, some modified version or just pause and wait for the full findings.

GiveWell: Is your evaluation plan for this pilot project similar to the evaluations of NAF career academies that what you've sent us before? [I.e. the academies assess themselves.]

NAF: The self-assessments that academies complete aren't due until November 2011, so the first interim evaluation report will be more qualitative than quantitative. We'll have to take that into account to decide what to put in place for the 2010-2011 school year. In the

fall of 2011, we'll have another report to try to tie activities and results in the pilot areas to the academy self-assessment data.

GiveWell: You sent us the article Orr et al. 2004. The National Academy Foundation's Career Academies: Shaping Postsecondary Transitions. IEE Working Paper 17. We are aware of two other studies of NAF academies:

- Academy for Educational Development. 1990. Employment and educational experiences of Academy of Finance graduates. New York: Academy for Educational Development. Probably written by Margaret Terry Orr.

- Orr et al. 1987. An evaluation of the Academy of Finance: Impact and effectiveness. New York: Academy for Educational Development.

We have been unable to access these two, can you share them with us or do you know of a way to access them?

NAF: I looked into this matter but couldn't find the actual studies. The author, Margaret Terry Orr, is a professor at Bank Street College, and she would perhaps have access to them. You may want to contact her. I can give you her contact details.

GiveWell: Are you aware of other studies of NAF academies?

NAF: There are two papers related to the IEE Working Paper you mentioned. One is about effects on teachers and one is about effects on alumni. I can send them to you. Those are the only studies that I'm aware of.

I also contacted MDRC and I can give you the contact information of the person running the CAP study. Feel free to contact her about the study methodology or if you have any other questions.

GiveWell: We have information from your 2008 annual report on how NAF allocates its spending among its different types of academies (Academy of Hospitality and Tourism, Academy of Finance, Academy of Information Technology, and Academy of Engineering). But we still wonder how NAF allocates its spending among e.g. professional development, curriculum development, technical assistance, certification, and evaluation.

NAF: I can send you approximate information on this, which is not for publication. It's more along department lines of what budgets are for. For example, in the budget for the President's office, there are substantial program expenses.

The research budget is in reality a bit more than what's reflected in this information because the research department is new and wasn't a department in 2010, so earlier, some of the costs were spread across different departments.

GiveWell: What is the total cost per student served in NAF career academies (including the cost to NAF, the school, the government, and any other relevant actors)?

NAF: We currently don't have data on this but it's something we may try to put together next year. We don't collect data from the schools on their exact budgets. We've heard back from districts that NAF is cost-effective for them.

A person in Florida has been working with one of the districts there on the cost-effectiveness of the NAF model, but the paper from that work won't be published until December 2010.

GiveWell: Do you have a preliminary version of the paper that you could share?

NAF: I'm not sure, but I can get you the person's contact information.

GiveWell: Can you share more recent audited financials?

NAF: I'll send you our 2009 audited financials.

GiveWell: Do you have specific plans for outcomes and activities in the coming year that donors could hold you accountable to?

NAF: We're currently wrapping up our last plan. In 8 months, we'll have a new plan. I can send you cost of field services rollout, cost of the development of the internships supports, and cost of the health services theme that we're developing.

GiveWell: If you don't receive extra funding, would you still do these activities?

NAF: We're expecting a close to flat budget for next year, so we're thinking about how we can add staff depending on interim evaluation reports. And we're trying to engage funders in supporting us above our continued needs for next year so we can respond to those funding needs.

GiveWell: Do you have a priority among field services rollout, internship support, and developing the health services theme?

NAF: Different funders support each of these activities, so the priority depends on the funders agreeing to support the activity. In most cases the funders we are approaching for each of these initiatives are specifically interested in that work.

GiveWell: What would you do with unrestricted funding?

NAF: For the most part, we're raising restricted funding. Of course, we are trying to increase unrestricted funding but it's more difficult to raise. Most of our technical assistance support (the field teams) is paid for using unrestricted funds.

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GiveWell: Do you think about allocating resources to creating more NAF career academies?

NAF: That's not as much of an issue for us because the bottleneck to creating more NAF career academies is not our capacity but rather, in our view, the academies readiness to implement the model. There were about 57 academies that applied last year and we chose about 47 for implementing the NAF career academy model (these are approximate figures off the top of my head). And we have the ability to serve 40-60 academies per year, so we're not nearing the limit of our capacity. We work with the academies that we didn't accept to assist them in putting the right team in place and reapplying next year if that's what's right for them.