A conversation with Nicholas Fusso, January 22, 2019

Participants

- Nicholas Fusso – Co-Founder and Director, D-Prize
- Andrew Martin – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Nicholas Fusso.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Mr. Fusso of D-Prize to get an update on its progress. Conversation topics included D-Prize's collaboration with GiveWell, its plans for the future, and its room for more funding.

D-Prize and GiveWell

D-Prize conducts "Distribution Challenges," in which applicants submit proposals for programs that could increase access to evidence-based poverty interventions. The winners of these competitions then receive funding to launch their proposed programs.

In June of 2017, GiveWell and Paul Youn, Co-Founder of D-Prize, discussed the possibility of creating challenges related to GiveWell priority programs. Following this conversation, GiveWell and D-Prize jointly narrowed down the list of potential interventions to four: Sayana Press, voluntary medical male circumcision, expansion of immunization coverage for children, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. GiveWell and D-Prize then worked together to draft language for the challenges related to these programs.

The four challenges have been posted online, and a group of winners have been selected.

Objectives of the collaboration

Attracting interest in challenge areas

The first main objective of D-Prize's collaboration with GiveWell was to attract interest in the four challenge areas from skilled problem-solvers and entrepreneurs. D-Prize believes this objective has been achieved, as it has received a significant number of applications.

Creating top charities

Effective charities tend to be organizations that are able to successfully scale up an intervention while achieving a high level of cost-effectiveness. The core objective of D-Prize's collaboration with GiveWell is to facilitate the creation of effective organizations that could eventually become GiveWell top charities.

It would likely take significant time for D-Prize's challenges to result in the creation of a GiveWell top charity. Currently, most of the pilot programs D-Prize has funded are at early stages of development.

Indicators of success

A simple method of determining whether pilot programs are successful would be to measure the output of programs against a target goal, in addition to ensuring that the program model appears to be replicable, scalable, and cost-effective. However, during initial stages of implementation, pilot programs often learn of new information or encounter unanticipated challenges that require altering the program model—making it difficult for programs to achieve a target goal. Therefore, D-Prize utilizes the following three metrics to measure the success of pilot programs:

- Continuing to operate three months after launching
- Actively growing or pivoting the program model based on challenges and context
- Securing additional funding

Organizations are considered initially successful if they meet these criteria, although only approximately 50% of D-Prize grantees have been able to achieve these three goals.

Another potential metric of program success could be whether or not GiveWell decides to conduct a deeper investigation of a grantee or provide a grantee with a GiveWell Incubation Grant.

Plans for the future

Updating challenge areas

D-Prize holds two competitions every year and plans to continue offering challenges related to GiveWell's priority programs for its 2019 competitions. GiveWell and D-Prize may later decide to add or remove specific challenges related to GiveWell's priority programs.

Improving the language of challenges based on evidence

If it exists, additional evidence for the best intervention delivery mechanisms may be included in the language of challenges prior to D-Prize's Autumn competition. Ensuring that applicants have as much information as possible may result in stronger programs. For example, some research suggests that distributing Sayana Press through a community health network could be more effective than distributing through pharmacies, which would be useful knowledge for applicants to the Sayana Press challenge.

Room for more funding

D-Prize intends to significantly grow its core program of social venture competitions, with the long-term goal of creating numerous impactful and cost-

effective charities. Its primary growth constraints are the number of applications it is able to generate and the amount of funding it is able to raise. However, the number of applicants to D-Prize's Distribution Challenges has been significantly increasing since 2017, making funding its most immediate constraint.

Use of additional funding

D-Prize would primarily use additional funding to award more grants. However, it would also be interested in funding operational improvements to its program that could lead to faster growth rates for pilot programs as well as a higher percentage of pilot programs developing into effective charities.

All GiveWell conversations are available at
http://www.givewell.org/research/conversations