

Conversation with Gara LaMarche on October 31, 2013

Participants

- Gara LaMarche — President, Democracy Alliance; former President and CEO, The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Holden Karnofsky — Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Mr. LaMarche.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Gara LaMarche about funding 501(c)(3) organizations vs. other vehicles.

Major points

- A key advantage of The Atlantic Philanthropies was its offshore status, which reduced barriers to funding 501(c)(4)s in the US relative to other foundations. Something in the ballpark of 10% of The Atlantic Philanthropies' total grantmaking went to 501(c)(4)s.
- Major funders of 501(c)(4)s are less organized than major foundations that primarily fund 501(c)(3)s (such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, etc.). 501(c)(4) funders do not have as much infrastructure for sharing strategies, consulting with each other, being transparent about giving, and networking. In his position at Atlantic Philanthropies, Mr. LaMarche tried to improve the infrastructure for 501(c)(4) funders. Mr. LaMarche may continue to work on this issue in his current role as President of the Democracy Alliance.
- Generally, foundations could engage in more Advocacy funding than they currently do, but choose not to because of cautiousness about the legal rules. The 501(c)(4) space is generally underfunded.
- George Soros created a 501(c)(4), called the Open Society Policy Center, to make policy-related donations. Mr. Soros gave \$27 million to a PAC to directly fund referendum campaigns. However, Mr. Soros's philanthropic funding has typically been weighted toward 501(c)(3)s.
- Mr. LaMarche agrees with GiveWell's view that criminal justice reform is a promising area with unusual potential for bipartisan coalitions.

All GiveWell conversations available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations/>