GiveWell

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[Draft] Progress in 2018

This page provides details on our progress toward our stated goals for 2018. For a brief overview, please see this blog post.

Research

We wrote about our 2018 research goals here.

When assessing our progress toward each goal and its component parts, we asked two questions:

1. Did we meet the *definition* of the goal?
2. Did we meet the *spirit* of the goal?

We indicate in the table below which goals were met in spirit, rather than in definition.

1. Explore areas that may be more cost-effective than our current recommendations but don't fit neatly into our current criteria

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Explore areas that may be more cost-effective than our current recommendations but don't fit neatly into our current criteria	investigating (i) interventions aimed at influencing policy in low- and middle-income countries and (ii) opportunities to influence major aid agencies.	(i) No (ii) Yes (in spirit)

On goal (i), we spent some time investigating causes within policy-oriented philanthropy in the first part of 2018, and made progress in our understanding of tobacco taxation and lead paint regulation. We also completed an investigation of J-PAL's Innovation in Government Initiative and recommended a grant in support of its work.

By June 2018, however, we decided to reallocate how the researcher leading our policy work, James Snowden, spent his time, and he shifted his focus to our current top charities. We did not meet our goal for progress in this area in 2018.

On goal (ii), we made progress toward better understanding how governments allocate aid and had several preliminary conversations to explore ways in which GiveWell could be helpful.

2. Find new top charities that meet our current criteria

2018	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we

post: goal		achieve this goal?
Find new top charities that meet our current criteria	(i) completing intervention reports for at least two interventions we think are likely to result in GiveWell top charities by the end of 2019, (ii) considering renewal of GiveWell Incubation Grants to current grantee organizations that may become top charities in the future and making new Incubation Grants, and (iii) developing and maintaining high-quality relationships with charities, funders, and influencers in the global health and development community; on (iii), we set specific goals of: • having at least one call or meeting with at least 60 different charities that we have not recommended or made an Incubation Grant to and at least 100 such calls or meetings in total. • having at least five multi-program organizations with budgets of more than $50 million annually express interest in being considered for our top charity recommendation for a specific, promising program, if we invite them to apply • prioritizing research work beyond an initial, brief evidence assessment on at least five interventions that we became aware of through professional networks.	(i) Yes (in spirit) (ii) Yes (iii) No

In the case of (i), we evaluated and published reports on five new programs: community-based management of acute malnutrition, syphilis screening and treatment during pregnancy, breastfeeding promotion, Alive & Thrive, and intermittent preventive treatment of malaria during pregnancy. We also named Georgetown University Initiative on Innovation, Development, and Evaluation's Zusha! Road Safety Campaign as a standout charity.

In the case of (ii), we made five new Incubation Grants: Evidence Action Beta's work on iron and folic acid supplementation, Nick Otis's forecasting research, Fortify Health, Evidence Action Beta's incubator, and J-PAL's Innovation in Government Initiative. We also completed renewals for two Incubation Grants: IDinsight's embedded team and phase 2 of Evidence Action Beta's work on iron and folic acid supplementation.

In the case of (iii), we decided to deprioritize this goal. We are no longer pursuing this as an independent goal, and plan to develop relationships in service of other major goals.

3. Improve our internal processes to support the above goals

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Improve our internal processes to support the above goals	We plan to continue to [(i)] delegate significant parts of our top charity update process to non-management staff and [(ii)] to improve our year-end process for making recommendations.	(i) Partially (ii) Yes (in spirit)

Related to goal (i), we significantly reduced the amount of senior staff time spent on work related to top charity updates. Newer and more junior staff took on a large amount of work related to <u>top charity updates</u>, <u>cost-effectiveness analyses</u>, tracking new academic evidence, updating our <u>intervention reports</u>, and managing <u>conversation notes</u>.

Related to goal (ii), we made significant improvements to our year-end process for making charity recommendations. We failed to meet two internal deadlines we set for completing intervention-related work and top charity work, though we did publish many of our top charity reviews well in advance of our external deadline, which left more time for staff engagement with our recommendations this year. This enabled us to better vet and communicate about our conclusions.

4. Continue following our top charities and address priority questions

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Continue following our top charities and address priority questions	We are devoting fewer resources than we have in the past to top charity updates. We plan to continue gathering up-to-date information to allow us to make high-quality allocation decisions for giving season, and to answer a small number of high-priority questions.	Yes

We made important updates to our understanding of our top charities and the interventions they implement. These included:

- Making a major change to how we <u>calculate worm intensity</u> in the areas where our top charities that implement deworming programs work.
- Beginning to account for the <u>potential long-term development benefits</u> of vitamin A supplementation in our cost-effectiveness model, in order to be more consistent with the approach we take for our other priority programs.
- Assessing new research on the <u>potential spillover effects of cash transfers</u>.
- Updating our views on how successful several top charities have been in collecting information about the reach and effectiveness of their programs (their monitoring data). For Helen Keller International's vitamin A supplementation program, Malaria Consortium's seasonal malaria chemoprevention program, and Sightsavers' deworming program, our confidence in their monitoring data increased. For the Against Malaria Foundation and Evidence Action's Deworm the World Initiative, our confidence in the consistency with which they collect and share monitoring data decreased somewhat.
- Incorporating new information from our top charities on their past spending, results achieved, and future plans to model how best to allocate additional funding among our top charities to maximize cost-effectiveness.

5. Secondary: Improve the quality of our decisions and transparency about our decision-making process

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary: Improve the quality of our decisions and transparency about our decision-making process.	Not specified.	Yes

We made progress on this goal (potentially at the expense of our primary goals) by:

- Creating a <u>more detailed explanation of our funding recommendations to Good Ventures</u> and other donors.
- Adding additional clarity about our decision-making process by <u>attempting to quantify</u> potential benefits and downside not included in our cost-effectiveness analysis.
- Adding a <u>country selection tab</u> to our cost-effectiveness analysis so that users can toggle between overall and country-specific cost-effectiveness estimates.

6. Secondary: Hire more flexible research capacity to increase our output

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary: Hire more flexible research capacity to increase our output.	Not specified.	Yes

We hired a Senior Research Analyst, a Senior Fellow, and three Content Editors. In addition, two Research Analysts accepted offers to work at GiveWell. However, three research staff left GiveWell in 2018.

7. Secondary: Complete reviews of two new potential top charities

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary: Complete reviews of two new potential top charities.	Not specified.	No

We did not publish reviews of any new potential top charities in 2018, outside of GiveWell Incubation Grant recipients, which may be potential future top charities, but are outside of the scope of what this goal was intended to capture.

Outreach

We wrote about our 2018 outreach goals <u>here</u>.

1. Hire a Head of Growth

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Hire a Head of Growth.	Hire a Head of Growth	Yes

We hired Ben Bateman as GiveWell's Head of Growth. He <u>joined GiveWell</u> in June 2018.

2. Improve the post-donation experience

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?

| Improve the post-donation experience. | Significantly improve our process for post-donation follow-up before giving season 2018.

At this point, we're still in the earliest stages of figuring out how we'll do this, so we don't have concrete goals for the year beyond finalizing our plan in the next few months. Our stretch goal for the year is to succeed in achieving measured improvement in our dollar retention rate/lifetime value of each donor. | No |

We made significant progress on developing our framework for donor retention, including by cleaning up the data we have so we can more reliably send mass emails and considering our outreach strategies. We also completed an email flow to encourage donors to give by year-end. However, we have yet to figure out how to best serve most of our donors, and we don't believe the work we did in 2018 will significantly change our donor retention.

3. Secondary: Continue advertising on podcasts

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary goal: Continue advertising on podcasts.	Advertise on new podcasts and measure results to decide how much to spend in 2019.	Yes

In 2018, we spent ~$245,000 on podcast advertising, up from ~$90,000 in 2017, on podcast ads. We spent more in part due to higher prices to advertise on the same podcasts as last year, and also because we were experimenting with new podcasts that targeted wider audiences. We advertised on The Ezra Klein Show, The Weeds, FiveThirtyEight Politics, Very Bad Wizards, Science Vs., Radiolab, and Rationally Speaking.

The ads we ran in 2018 had significantly lower directly-measured returns than the ads in 2017 (~45% vs. ~100% in 2017). Some loss of ROI may be due to large donors migrating to our check and wire transfer forms (which is how we recommend larger donors give), which don't include the question "where did you hear about GiveWell?" (and so thus would not be credited to podcast advertising); we would guess this doesn't account for the full picture. Podcast ad prices were also higher this year overall and podcasts may have been running more ads in general, which may have contributed to worse ROI overall if each individual ad was less effective.

4. Secondary: Receive coverage in major news outlets

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary goal: Receive coverage in major news outlets.	Pitch major news outlets on at least five stories in total and get at least one story covered.	No

We did not prioritize pitching major media on coverage of GiveWell, although we did receive coverage in major news outlets, including The New York Times, Vox, and The Economist.

5. Secondary: Deepen relationships with the effective altruism community

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary goal: Deepen relationships with the effective altruism community.	Not specified.	Yes

Catherine Hollander, a research analyst focused on outreach at GiveWell, spoke at three effective altruism (EA) conferences in 2018: in San Francisco, Melbourne, and London. She also attended two EA retreats, and deepened her relationships with her counterparts at EA organizations. Additional GiveWell staff attended the EA conferences in San Francisco and London, and had contact with EA organizations at various points in the year.

Operations

We wrote about our 2018 operations goals here.

1. Appoint a new Director of Operations (complete)

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Appoint a new Director of Operations (complete). In April 2018, we hired Whitney Shinkle as our new Director of Operations. Between January and April 2018, Natalie Crispin served as our interim Director of Operations.	Appoint a new Director of Operations.	Yes

Whitney Shinkle joined GiveWell as Director of Operations in April 2018.

2. Prepare our systems for major growth in outreach

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Prepare our systems for major growth in outreach, which we expect to lead to increases in spending, staff, and donations.	Not specified.	Partially

Spending (finance). We made several major improvements to our finance work in 2018, including consolidating our schedule and accounting processes with our bookkeeping firm and setting a more aggressive timeline for major annual financial milestones with our tax and audit partners; initiating production of new metrics to track our accounting processes and organizational financial health; and executing the first draft of a financial policy and procedures guide to codify and record our finance practices (this provides clarity, protection, and consistency across vendors, personnel, and regulatory changes).

Donations. We continue to explore options to increase donations-processing efficiency, but we didn't identify a comprehensive approach that we're confident would support 4-10x growth in volume of donations. We made or are testing individual improvements to our data entry and donations-processing systems, which have anecdotally had positive results.

3. Maintain critical operations across domains

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Maintain critical operations across domains: donations, finance, HR, office, website, recruiting, and staff cohesion.	Not specified.	Yes

We maintained our critical operations in 2018. These include, but aren't limited to:

- Processing donations we receive from donors and responding to questions related to donations in a timely manner.
- Addressing legal and governance issues to stay in compliance with nonprofit laws and satisfy internal due diligence questions.
- Maintaining a clean, efficient professional workspace.
- Hiring and onboarding new staff to serve key roles at GiveWell.
- Hosting events to encourage staff cohesion.

4. Major operations projects we aim to complete in the first half of 2018: Significant improvement in our approach to budgeting

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
A significant improvement in our approach to budgeting making it significantly easier for us to share updated actual spending versus budget.	Not specified.	Partially

We completed programming of our financial management software to enable us to track revenue and expenses in close to real time and run multiple levels of reports on up-to-a-daily basis.

5. Major operations projects we aim to complete in the first half of 2018: Compensation consultant

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
We retained a compensation consultant to help us benchmark GiveWell staff compensation to comparable organizations.	Not specified.	Yes

We retained this consultant and adjusted staff compensation based on this project.

6. Major operations projects we aim to complete in the first half of 2018: 2017 money moved report

2018 post: goal	2018 post: What does success look like?	Did we achieve this goal?
Secondary: We published our 2016 metrics report and plan to publish our 2017 money moved report by the end of June.	Publish our 2017 metrics report by end of June.	Yes

We published our 2017 metrics report on June 29, 2018. You can view the report <u>here</u>.

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