

**GiveWell New York Research Event, June 11, 2015 –
Open Philanthropy Project**

This transcript was compiled by an outside contractor, and GiveWell did not review it in full before publishing, so it is possible that parts of the audio were inaccurately transcribed. If you have questions about any part of this transcript, please review the original audio recording that was posted along with these notes.

00:00 Holden Karnofsky: Okay, so I've started the recording again, and this is going to be session 2. This is the Open Philanthropy Project. A little bit of background. Again, I'm Holden, I'm co-founder of GiveWell. For years, GiveWell was focused on finding proven evidence-backed charities that we could confidently recommend, and I think we've done interesting work there. But a few years ago, we ran into Cari Tuna and Dustin Moskovitz. Dustin is one of the co-founders of Facebook, and we found they were struggling with kind of a different flavor of the same problem. Instead of saying, "I am trying to give away money this year, and I don't have time to do all the research myself", they were saying, "We're trying to give away potentially billions of dollars, we have decades to do it, we have all the time... We have tons of time to do research, but where do we start? What do we do?"

00:50 HK: And kind of having similar frustrations to what we had at GiveWell. What we had before we started GiveWell which is that they would go around asking for advice, and "What do I read? What do I look at?" And there's kind of nothing, or very little, and so they talked to other foundations and hear their thoughts but really felt like starting from scratch and reinventing the wheel, and when we heard this problem, we said, "This sounds like a problem we would love to work on." It's got a lot in common. It's figuring out how to do as much good as you can and trying to break that non-profit culture of being quiet and of not discussing things in public and instead saying, "We're going to turn this into an intellectual conversation." Giving is important, it's hard, it's something people should debate, and it's not something where all the decision making should happen behind closed doors.

01:35 HK: So that's the genesis of the Open Philanthropy Project. And that's the ways in which it's similar to GiveWell. So what we do is... It's a partnership between us and Good Ventures, and this is what I spend my time on, and what we try and do is we try to figure out where would we give money of that scale, and we try to write up why it is we would give there and try to put our reasoning down. It doesn't mean prove everything we're saying, 'cause as you'll hear, a lot of the things we're doing require a lot of guesswork and a lot of judgment calls. But it's about explaining why we're thinking the way we are. Those are the similarities.

02:08 HK: The differences are really huge. I think as a philanthropist of that size, you can create organizations, you can transform the path of organizations, you have a lot of options that other people don't have. And it's been argued to us by a lot of people, and I think there's something to this, that it's important to be able to take big, risky, long-term bets. The kind of thing that when you make the investment today, it's not something everyone can agree on. It's not something that looks good to everyone. But in 20 years, you've had a huge impact because you funded what no one else would. You did something governments couldn't do, other philanthropists wouldn't do, and that only you really had the context and information to fully understand and to go ahead and do.

02:53 HK: So that's why things look really different with Open Philanthropy. The GiveWell criteria are: We look for charities that are proven, and cost-effective, and scalable. With Open Philanthropy, the part about proven is gone, and the part about organizations is gone. Instead, we look for causes, like areas to work in, problems to work on, that are important, tractable, and uncrowded. In other words, we're looking for things where there's something that matters a lot and isn't getting enough attention for how much it matters, and there's something we can do about it.

03:28 HK: And we generally look for causes instead of charities because a lot of the way that we think... And there's reasons we think this, and we've kind of written up the timeline of our thinking, but we think a lot of the time good philanthropy looks like picking an area to get to know, hiring the people who are going to have the time and the background to understand that area, getting to know all the people in the area and then kind of causing giving opportunities to come into existence based on your interest. So one of the things we found is that once we say "We want to fund X", all these opportunities come up that we never could have found just by running around saying "We want to fund something good, what do you got?" And I'm happy to explain that more if people want, but that is why a lot of what we do is think about causes and then try to put ourselves in a position to understand causes really well by understanding all the people, all the arguments. Understand them in a qualitative way because there's not going to be the same kind of evidence base you see for top charities. So that's the basic MO.

04:28 HK: I'm going to start off with policy. I think policy is a good starting point for getting a feel for what Open Philanthropy is all about. I'll probably pause after that for a bit, but I have three more sections. One of the areas that we have decided to spend a lot of time on is what we call "policy oriented philanthropy" and that is when you're giving with the aim of ultimately causing us to have better laws or policy. And the basic idea here is there's a reasonably good

history of non-profits or philanthropic funders having a major role to play in some of these political battles that happen. And when you can spend a relatively small amount of money on a campaign or on a think tank, and influence national legislation, you've influenced a player that is really massive. Much more massive than even a major philanthropist.

05:23 HK: And so that's a potential way to take a big risk, but get a huge return that can make up for a lot of the times you've failed. So what we tried to do in policy, we spent basically last year looking at the different policy areas we could get involved in. And we looked for areas where we thought the issue was important, where we thought that it was clear-ish or at least we thought we'd be able to get to a conclusion on what kind of policy change is needed from a humanitarian perspective. 'Cause a lot of times the people blocking policy change are not humanitarians.

06:00 HK: And then we also looked for issues where there was political opportunity, and we looked for issues where there wasn't already a million groups working on them, and we didn't find a single one that had all three, so that's an important thing to keep in mind. I think in general it can be dicey to try and predict how politically tractable an issue is, 'cause it can just be very... It can be much harder to predict than it seems. There's a lot of issues that seem impossible, and then quickly move a lot faster than anyone thought, and so we haven't seen a lot of issues where we've been willing to make a bet, "Okay this issue is going to be unusually full of political opportunity for the kind of time frame we're operating on" which is years. We've seen a few, but not a lot, and so we spent last year making priorities and saying, "What are the issues we most want to work on?"

06:50 HK: And then this year what we're going to try to do is take that priority list and build the capacity to work on it, and the framework we're using is we'll say, our official goal since February has been to make a big bet, within six months of when we established the goal, and a big bet can mean a major grant or it can mean a specialized hire, in other words a person like for a cause like criminal justice reform, a person whose entire job is going to be criminal justice reform. Either way whether you make a big grant or a hire in criminal justice reform what you've done is you've made a substantial bet and so you want to put a lot of time into that, and get it right, and so that's pretty much where we've been.

07:32 HK: Quick overview of our priorities, it's a long list and it's complex, and one of the things we do is we don't have iron-clad priorities. We have a list, they're in order, but if we see an opportunity to make a great hire, or make a great grant on priority number five, that becomes priority number one until we've resolved it, so it's not... We have our kind of in a vacuum what are our top priorities and then we have what's moving, where do we see a good opportunity to spend some money. So our top priorities, criminal justice reform is really high on our list because it is a source of a lot of suffering and it is an area where we think there's unusual political opportunity, so the tough on crime kind of mentality I think has been on the decline as crime has been on the decline and this is one of the few areas where you can really say, "We are going to help some of the worst off and lowest income Americans by cutting the size of government, and by cutting government spending."

08:31 HK: That is an area where you can form unusual alliances. There's been some unusual movement from the right over the last five to 10 years. There's been a lot of state level legislation passed that we think is really encouraging. So between tight state budgets, crowded prisons and the fact that you can go to any state to pick your battles, and the opportunity we see to make those coalitions, we think this is going to be an area that is unusually got opportunity for the next few years. So that's like an example of how we chose a cause. Another cause on our list that's also very high is labor mobility, so that's the idea that the best anti poverty intervention we're aware of is when someone crosses the border from a poor country to a rich country and you know immigration policy is a pretty crowded space, but a lot of it has to do with what do we do with people who are already here? A lot of it has to do with high skill tech worker visas.

09:32 HK: The question of should we be letting in more people who are coming from really low incomes and can make massively more if they were only allowed to take a job here? That does not get a lot of attention, and we think even a small increase in immigration could be a huge win in terms of the humanitarian benefit we think about. Very different profile from criminal justice. Criminal justice is not the world's most important issue, but we see a lot of opportunity. Labor mobility is like arguably the world's most important issue, and we see no opportunity. We think they're both, we think they're both interesting causes but in very different ways, and an illustration of this is that we have very different goals.

10:10 HK: So for criminal justice we've said, "This is a big space, there's a lot to states. There's a lot to do, and there's a lot of players, we need a specialized hire." We're not going to run around ourselves me and Alexander and figure out where to give grants. We want someone who knows this field, knows the people in it, is senior, gets it inside and out, and so we've been trying for the last several months to make a hire. Whereas in labor mobility no one works on it and there's like nothing to do, and so we don't want to make a full time hire for labor mobility. I don't even know who we

would hire, and I frankly am not sure what they would do all the time, but what we are doing is keeping an eye out for grant opportunities. So those are examples. We have a whole list online. I've already talked for a long time and it's in our politics update that came out a few months ago that kind of lists everything what we would do, what the priority is.

11:00 HK: What I want to give an update on now is what actual progress we've made. So our top priority has been... We've had three causes where we've said we'd be really happy if we could hire someone to specialize in one of these three, and criminal justice is the one we've put the most effort into, and this is super private, don't tell people, but we decided it's okay to say at this meeting, but last week we made an offer and the offer was accepted, and so we are going to have someone coming on to lead our work in criminal justice who is really a specialist, and not really... Actually a very broad person who knows about a lot of different things, but really specializes in criminal justice which itself is very broad.

11:41 HK: This is very new for us. We have not hired someone like this before. We've put a ton of work into figuring out whether this was the right fit, and we're going to find out. So that's the update there and we're going to announce this Tuesday, so that's why I... This is a field we've discovered that people talk to each other. If we fly someone out for an interview people find out and we hear back about it. So that's just why I've asked people not to... But since we're only a few days away and I haven't said who it is, we think it's fine, just keep it to yourself. And we expect to announce that on Tuesday. We'll announce who it is, we'll announce when the person is starting. And that's something we're really excited about, that was our number one goal. That was... If you'd ask me if we accomplished one thing on policy in the next six months, what do you want? And that's what I wanted. And so, now the question is how is that going to go? And we will find out. And so, yeah that's most of what we've been doing. We've also done some funding work on labor mobility, we've looked for some candidates on a couple of other causes, factory farming, macro economic policy. There's a bunch of areas where we've kind of maybe looked at one giving opportunity that really popped out and done it, but that's been our main focus. That's been a lot, so I'm going to pause there and take questions for a while and then I'll talk about our work in other areas. Yup?

12:58 S?: So I guess on the GiveWell project it seems like you take this very expansive view of how can we invest in improving human welfare anywhere in the world? And what you're talking about now sounds kind of narrow was like, oh, we've been talking about the US centric, less focused on welfare... Your biggest bang for the buck in terms of human welfare as a key criteria, it seems like a different kind of a [13:29] ____ topic now.

13:29 HK: Sure. So is this narrower because I've been talking only about the US? No, I wouldn't say so. I mean, we made a practical decision to focus on the US for policy because I think it would be a nightmare to try to go figure out how to influence policy in another country that we're not from, we don't have connections in, it's harder to travel to. We may eventually go that direction but we made a practical decision for now. But that doesn't mean that that's... Even in that area, A, we look for things that we think could be as good as our top charities just in a very different way. Instead of delivering bed nets which is the cheapest thing you can do to help someone, instead we're looking at how to spend a little bit of money to change policy which then creates a massive change, affects a huge number of people and could ultimately be just as good a deal. Another thing to point out, labor mobility is really a global poverty issue and that's the frame that we've taken to it. And then finally, some of the other issues I'm going to talk about are just not US centric but for policy, that's where we focused.

14:27 S?: I would say that if you could make serious changes the way the governments operated in the poorest countries in the world, that would be a huge thing.

14:37 HK: Sure.

14:37 S?: I sort of don't think anybody works on that, so I agree with your heart but that's just not how with your...

14:44 HK: That's not the policy area. Yeah.

14:44 S?: [14:45] ____ It's not really a difficult thing that nobody else has worked on.

14:49 HK: Sure, that's something we may do at some point but that's not what the policy area is. The policy areas is understanding how to change policy in the kind of context we're talking of which I think is its own kind of good opportunity. Yeah, Tom?

15:02 S?: Can you talk about your definition of humanitarian?

15:06 HK: Sure. So when I say... So my definition of humanitarian, I repeat questions for the recorder. But when I say humanitarian, what I mean is focusing on doing as much good as possible for as many people as possible. And I think when you look at debates on policy, it's like most of the arguments being made don't have anything to do with that. The arguments being made have to do with like "Well, we're the Lawyers Association, we want what's good for lawyers or we're California, we want what's good for California." So I think one of the instinctive reactions people have to our work on policy is, "How do you know you're right?" Look, we never know we're right but I think sometimes it's not quite as fraught as it might initially seem. Because you look at an area and you look at the arguments and a lot of times, the people who are taking the perspective of "Let's do the best thing for the most people" and arguing that intellectually are lining up in one side. I think that is the case for criminal justice for example.

16:01 S?: Yeah. And the examples you just mentioned sounded like special interest groups issue and tragedy to commons, type problems.

16:08 HK: Yeah. Special interest group issues, tragedy to commons, I think that describes roughly every issue in US policy. You take an issue, you look at who's on each side and you're going to see a lot of interest groups and sometimes the interest groups will be philanthropically funded, non profit groups that are trying to represent the world. But it's hard to win in policy if you can't get an organized, focused loud voice. And so that is the dynamic and that's a lot of what we try to do is say, "Where is it the case that there's lots of people speaking up for the bad policy, no one's speaking up for the good policy" and we can kind of create that group on the second side. Yeah, in the back?

16:47 S?: Yeah, I have a question on labor mobility and migration. Because look into the impact it has on the sending country in terms of potential brain draining of skilled works and skilled migrants and have you concluded that among impacts substantially out of the way, potential negative?

17:06 HK: Sure. So on labor mobility, have we looked into the brain drain issue? I can say a few things. One, we have... The brain drain issue being that arguably it hurts a poor country if its more capable people leave to take a job in the US. I can say a few things. One, we have not done a formal evaluation and writeup. Two, we have looked very heavily at the literature, we just haven't finished the project and wrapped it all up and written it all up. Frankly, it might be a while before we do so. Three, one of our main contacts here is Michael, in this cause is Michael Clemens at the Center for Global Development which I would say is fairly called a humanitarian interest group, Center for Global Development. Their explicit mission is to help rich country policies be better for poor countries. And so, he's the person that we tend to talk to a lot about this and has been very adamant that brain drain is not the right... It's not a big enough consideration to overwhelm the benefits of migrants coming in.

18:09 HK: And our review of the literature has kind of preliminarily been consistent with that. I would say in these debates, people tend to talk about what happens to the country sending the person and what happens to the country receiving the person. But what gets left out of those conversations is what happens to the person, and that's a huge benefit. And so there's a big question of how much harm do you have to do to offset that? I think it's a lot and then we definitely don't believe that it does enough harm. Yeah?

18:35 S?: Do you believe it's net harmful to like... Again it's silly to ignore the person who's leaving, but do you actually believe that if you ignore that person, that it's net harmful to the country, after taking remittances, et cetera...

18:46 HK: Right. Do I believe it's net harmful when a person leaves a poor country, net harmful to the country? No, I think it's incredibly unclear. I think there's... We had a big list of considerations both ways and tried to look at the literature on them, and I think it was tough. One thing that happens is the person goes to the US and their earnings might go up by 3x, 10x and then they're sending a lot of that home. So it's like the sending country is getting a lot of the economic benefit here. So no, I don't think it's clear at all. I think it's incredibly uncertain. And that's part of the reason we haven't let it sort of push us out of the cause. Yeah?

19:18 S?: Do you view trade liberalization as any way akin to increasing labor mobility?

19:24 HK: Sure. Do we view trade liberalization as akin to increasing labor mobility? I think there are some things in common between the two. I would say that labor mobility in the current state of things is the much bigger issue in terms of where are the restrictions on economic exchange the greatest? There's much more... Effectively much more restriction on exchanging people than on exchanging things. And so I think there's a lot more room for improvement there. I think there's a lot more good to be done, and I also think the issue gets much less attention. So that's an example

of the kind of reasoning we do, is we don't know everything about either issue, but we say "This one seems more important, and this one seems like it's getting less attention. So let's go there." It doesn't mean... There could be all kinds of good opportunities we miss. This is a short cut, this is a guess, but that's where we are. Yeah, Jason?

20:14 S?: How much of the problem in the criminal justice system is related to the war on drugs? And focus on trying to get a policy change in that direction...

20:23 HK: Sure. How much of the prison problem is a result of the war on drugs? I think it's a good chunk, but I think it's not so much that that's the only thing we want to deal with. So I would say I don't remember, but I would guess that when you look at prison populations, you're looking at... I may get this totally wrong, something in the range of 10% to 20% on these kind of drug crimes, which means you could do a lot of good by reforming the way that's treated. But I think there's also a lot of other stuff to be done as well on crime. I think there's... I don't know, there's a litany of things you can do about people who are sitting around in jail because they didn't have money to make bail, even though they're not really a flight risk. There's people who are in prison for like decades, even though they've past the age where there's a realistic reason to think they're an elevated crime risk. And the deterrent effect of the last 10 years of a 30-year sentence is pretty questionable when people often are doing these things because of like not making the best present-versus-future tradeoffs anyway.

21:25 HK: So I think there's a lot... Then there's issues of like someone gets out on parole and they flunk parole in a very technical way, like they missed a meeting or they fail a drug test. And they then go back in for the duration of the sentence. So I think there's all kinds of stuff to do on crime and it's not just drugs, but I think drugs is part of it.

21:44 S?: So you're saying that most criminals will do the same thing that you and Ellie would do, putting like variables on a spreadsheet and optimizing for the...

21:51 HK: What I'm saying is that most criminals don't do the same thing me and Ellie do, that's what I'm... That is my official position, yes.

[laughter]

21:58 HK: Yes, yeah... Yeah?

22:03 S?: Any progress on the more general question of what things can affect national policy in the first place?

22:08 HK: Any progress on the more general question of what things affect national policy? Yeah I think we've made a lot of progress understanding the basics of that. I don't think... I'm not going to say that I have some incredibly novel understanding of how to change policy, what I will say is I have an incredibly basic understanding of how to change policy, which can be really useful to donors. And the novel thing we offer in many ways is having a very basic understanding of a lot of things and using it to help make decisions about how to give for people who are in this position of power because they have money, not because they're an expert. And that in some ways includes our whole project. So what affects policy? There's a post we wrote that I think is called "The Role of Philanthropic Funding in Policy" or something like that. If you can't Google it, just email me and I'll get it to you. And that lists I think some of the ways in which a philanthropist or a funder more generally can do things that have an impact on policy. And I think it's definitely...

23:05 HK: When I listen to someone who's not familiar with this area at all, they jump to election spending and they say... And this is actually something we, as a nonprofit, we cannot do. But someone will jump to election spending and they'll say "Why don't I fund a candidate in this election?" And there's just a lot more than that. There's a lot of things you can do. And a lot of what you can do in policy is you can lay the groundwork for political opportunities that arise. So a lot of times what happens is something happens in the news or some politician decides something and you have an opportunity to do something, but it really matters whether people have been thinking about this for the last 10 years and they have their best proposal on the table, or whether people are scrambling to figure out what to do. And there's cases of both, and I think you can see the differences. So that's an example of where philanthropy can make very long-term bets to say, "Nothing is happening on labor mobility, but let's make sure people are thinking about it because one day that might have a giant payoff."

24:02 S?: On the topic of hiring...

24:04 HK: Yeah.

24:04 S?: I think one of the corporate funds of the GiveWell mindset is [24:08] ____? Does that make it... Is that like when you're... If you're hiring somebody who's like an expert on the particular area, are they less likely to have a cause mutual approach is that something you think about the...

24:21 HK: Sure, the challenges of hiring someone who's kind of really about one cause and how do they fit in to an organization whose goal is to be cause agnostic and pick the best causes, this is... It's new for us since so were going to have to see how it goes but I would say the basic model we have made sense to me which is that, our job the generalist at GiveWell, my job and sort of the people on the Open Philanthropy team's job is to pick good causes, but picking good causes is not enough and so once you pick good causes, now let's say we've identified criminal justice reform is a great area, now we're going to work with someone who is really good in my opinion on criminal justice reform and it's not going to be that person's job to decide how much money we spend on that versus labor mobility, that's going to be our job. But that person's job is going to be to decide how to do criminal justice well, and that's something that we've made the judgment call and could turn out to be wrong, made the judgment call this person is going to do a much better job of than we could.

25:16 HK: So, it's just kind of a hierarchical approach to doing it like that, and of course this person is going to give grants to organizations that know a lot about their own issue but don't have nearly as much insight about the whole field of criminal justice, so it keeps getting more and more specialized but eventually, hopefully something good happens. I'm going to take one more and then, actually I should move to the next sorry, I'm going to move to the next topic but when I take a break feel free to ask questions about anything. This just getting a little tight on time and I've got more to cover. So, global catastrophic risks is another area that kind of we've been thinking about a lot and again, it's a broad category of philanthropy where we think there's a case that you can get good bang for your buck here. So, the basic idea is that there are disasters that could kind of threaten global civilization, climate change is the easiest one to kind of think of and understand probably or at least in terms of what you would've already heard of, and these things it's like the worst possible cases, the cases where really civilization as a whole is threatened, it's hard to think of someone who really has the right incentives to think about how to anticipate that.

26:27 HK: And the damage done by catastrophe may scale in kind of a like power law way such that the biggest catastrophes are just enormously bigger than anything else and so we think there's a case to be made here that as a philanthropist if you choose to focus on the kind of what we call tail risks or the least likely but very worst events, again by spending a little bit of money and taking a big risk and having a long time horizon you may end up with an enormous impact and you should think of this as a portfolio approach. I mean for the investing analogy, GiveWell top charities is kind of like blue chip companies, companies that we think are... We understand them well, we know where they're doing next and a lot of this stuff is more maybe something like VC or Angel, where you say "We're going to do a lot of things, all of them might fail but hopefully one of them will succeed and it'll make up for all the failures".

27:16 HK: So, global catastrophic risks, same basic outline of the story as policy. Last year our focus was choosing which risks to work on. We thought of all the things or went around talking to people about all the things that we thought could threaten global civilization, we ranked them in terms of their, how scary is this, how likely is this that it could be a major disruption, what can we do about it and who else works on it and again looking for risks that don't get enough attention for how important they are. Again our priorities are on the web but the big top ones, one of them is bio-security, so this is the idea of trying to be in better shape to respond to the pandemics that arise. There was a pandemic immediately after World War I that killed more people than World War I, if that kind of thing happens today we're a lot more interconnected, it could be a lot worse and then there's this idea that as biology advances, as the sciences advance it may become possible to design a pandemic that's just far worse than anything we've ever seen before.

28:14 Speaker 2: There are some interventions you can imagine to prepare for these things, just having a good plan in place for early detection, containment, logistical response. I think these things can make a huge difference, I think Ebola could've been contained really fast if it had happened in countries with better basic surveillance capacity, and I think those countries do exist, I mean these differences are real. Bio-security is an area where our goal is to hire someone, it's a big complicated space, there's a lot of people who specialize in it, that's what we're trying to do we haven't done it yet and we're trying. Another risk for us is artificial intelligence and just kind of the broad question of "Are we on track to get incredibly powerful artificial intelligence this century", and if so, what are some bad things that could happen because of that and what are some things we could do today to prevent that from happening.

29:03 HK: This is a pretty complicated and technical and highly debated topic, so I'm going to be careful with how

much I say about it, I will say that there was a conference in Puerto Rico earlier this year where a lot of top computer scientists got together as well as a lot of like futurists and people who think about risks. To discuss this they put out an open letter at the end of it, that said "We believe this is a real risk, this could happen soon, artificial intelligence is advancing rapidly, it's very hard to say where it's going, there are ways in which it could result in massive danger and there are things we could do today to mitigate that danger". Prior to that conference our position on this had been watch and wait, because we knew the conference was happening, so we had artificial intelligence designated as a like... We don't really know what other, what people... We don't really what the arguments are here, we originally started trying to collect them ourselves, then we found out about the conference we decided to wait for it.

30:00 HK: And then in the wake of the conference, there was a request for proposals for computer science research that can reduce risks. Things like building an artificial intelligence that's easier for humans to understand, more transparent. So you have a system, it tells you to do X, you want to know why it told you to do X and where it might be going wrong. That's an example of the kind of research people are doing. Or an artificial intelligence that can watch human behavior and learn about their values from it, so that it doesn't end up catastrophically failing 'cause it had the wrong values programmed into it.

30:34 HK: So these are things that we... We are paying a lot of attention to the RFP, that's the request for scientific proposals. And there was a big donation from Elon Musk to pay for some of this. And we are paying close attention to whether there's enough money to get what we would call, "The field of AI safety," off on to a good footing. And so our major priority has been following that and asking, "We want to make sure the good proposals get funded. We want to make sure that the field of AI safety has a good birth." This is exactly the example of something where it's a weird issue. It took us a long time to understand, and now we are basically... I mean, we are the only other funder talking about potentially expanding the pool of money available for this proposal.

31:20 HK: And so, we think that that's something that could obviously be just a very silly grant that does not nothing or could be like the most important grant we ever make. Deciding whether to make this grant and how has been our major priority in global catastrophic risk over the last few months. And we're not done yet, deciding. So those are global catastrophic risks. Another area of philanthropy in scientific research, the basic argument here is, if you fund innovation, new ideas, those ideas can be copied freely. Philanthropy has a really good track record of funding science. I just think there's been a lot of... Including things like the pill and the green revolution, which I would list as maybe the two most important humanitarian events of the century or everish. Both kind of got off the ground with philanthropic funds. So I think there's definitely some interesting precedent in here. Also, those both happened in another age when there was less government funding in science, so it's not simple. But that's something we want to get into. Science, we're much less far along. Our goal is to get somewhere in science that's comparable to where we've already gotten on policy and global catastrophic risks. So our goal is to know what we want to do, what our priorities are, who we want to hire.

32:31 HK: And right now, we're trying to hire basically science PhDs. And we are already working with a couple who we think can fit into this process. But there's a lot to say about that, and we've written a lot about it. That's all I'm going to say about it for this moment just to save on time. Those are our priorities. Other stuff, we have a history of philanthropy project where we work with historians to try to understand alleged cases where philanthropy made a big difference in the past. That's so we can learn from them, and try to understand the basic contours of the very big evidence base here. You're not going to be able to look at randomized control trials of trying to create a field of AI safety research. But you can at least look at whether there's precedent for philanthropy getting some big wins that will like it. Tamara, who's here actually is someone who works on this, so would be a great person to ask about that. You want to wave or something?

33:21 HK: So and then finally, there's... Global health and development is something where we do... We do want to do more. But we are not working on it at the moment. So we have our top charities. We think those are excellent giving opportunities for people who are interested in global health and development. And at some point, we would love to look into questions like, "Is there a good case for trying to put mental health more on the map of global aid players?" It's not what we're working on right now. I do not know when we'll go it. It could be years. I think we have plenty on our plate right now.

33:52 HK: Final comment is, we do want to spin off Open Philanthropy Project into a separate organization. We just haven't done it yet. It's going to be a process. It's going to take a while. But I think it's pretty clear why. I think they're very different organizations and we don't want one to interfere with the other. They have different attitudes. We want different brands for the two of them. GiveWell is very thorough, very reliable. Open Philanthropy is very bold, very

risky. Both of them are thoughtful and transparent, but they need to be separate. Yup.

34:29 S?: To your last comment, I'm answering your question that you posed before, except, do you have any sense of a timeframe for the split?

34:36 HK: Yeah. Timeframe for splitting, the two organizations, I'm hoping it happens in the next year. It's actually not... It's not our top priority right now. And if we felt the two... If we felt the lack of the split was causing us more problems, it would become a higher priority. But it's... Yeah, I think it's... I hope it happens next year, but it's not the thing that we're going to measure ourselves against. Yup?

35:00 S?: So it seems like a cross basically kind of focus areas you have, there is a pretty strong relationship between going to your government [35:07] _____ policy making, so you can actually improve those things in the work that you're doing. So how do you think about the relationship of policy more broadly in particular with global catastrophic risk, particularly whether there's short-term and long-term tradeoffs, things like buying out securities, you'll have things like [35:24] _____ very short-term, they're not going to wipe out humanity, but it's a lot of utility for the people whose lives you'd be able to save?

35:37 HK: Do you mind just repeating? So...

35:39 S?: Yeah, so basically how are you thinking about relationships between policy and across your portfolio, and this is [35:44] _____ for an Open Philanthropy Project? It seems like there's a very narrow set of things you've been trying to do in the US, but then there's a great big goal for governments in everything that you just mentioned?

35:55 HK: Sure. I mean, policy... How do we think about the role of policy in everything we're doing? Yeah, I think policy applies... There's a lot of intersections between these categories. We've kind of divided them up to try to be practical, but I think, they do run back into each other sometimes. I think there's some interesting questions around science policy that we've written about on our blog. So, it's... I think the way we've done it is, we just run separate processes. I think in US policy, we tend to look... We tend to judge things more on like, how much value we think can be created, especially for less privileged, lower income people. And in GCRs, global catastrophic risk, we tend to look for how much we can reduce the very most extreme civilization threatening risks. And so, yeah, we've definitely been talking about bio-security and saying, "One of the interventions here is policy advocacy, to improve our bio-security preparedness." And that falls under bio-security, but the work we do is able to kind of... We're able to go to the policy side and say, "What can you help us with here? What have you learned here?" Yeah, that's about all we've got on that. The intersections are not enormous, but they're definitely there. Yup?

37:05 S?: I know in the past, you mentioned upzoning as a possible policy issue, is that still on the table?

37:11 HK: Sure, is upzoning still an issue? It is still on the table. It's still pretty high on our list. This is the cause we call land use reform, so this is another one where, basically, the cause is that, you have a lot of the cities where a lot of the most economic growth is happening and values being created have very strict regulations against building higher or building more. And generally, the politics comes down to, you have the people who want to build one building, are trying to get their building, and then there people are standing up against them saying, "I live in this city. I want my home price to be good. I want my view to stay good. I don't want anything to change," and all this stuff, and we think there's almost no presence of a public interest group saying, "Housing affordability is not something we're going to get just by spending more and more government money to outbid people for the tiny supply of houses. If we want housing affordability, and if we want this city to not be a bottleneck to economic growth, we're going to need to build more." And in some ways, there's some intersections with immigration. I think one of the reasons the policy is suboptimal, is because, everyone with a voice is on one side of the benefit.

38:22 HK: So, it's like, it's... The people who would benefit from upzoning are the people who don't live in the city, and so they can't vote. So, this is something that we think is interesting. A lot of our interest... We think it's a pretty important issue. We've estimated the importance. We think it... We don't really know how tractable it is, but we know that no one works on it, so it's kind of like labor mobility, in that, we're looking for things to fund, we would not hire somebody to work on this full-time, because it's just too empty of a space right now.

38:52 S?: But in some ways, it's like, criminal justice reform that you can do lots of different experiments in different cities and see how [38:57] _____?

39:00 HK: Yeah, no, definitely. One of the nice things about land use, there is an important thing, and it's marked as this in our spreadsheet that, there are policy issues where you have to win in DC or do nothing. And there is policy issues, where you can go to any state, any jurisdiction, you can pick your battles, and that is a component of tractability, and that is one nice thing about land use sort of, although most of the damage of these policies is coming from four or five cities. And so, it's more like, we could take opportunities in any of four or five cities. I think in criminal justice, you can really... You can go to almost any state. Some states are a lot more valuable to get reform in than others, but if you can get a win anywhere, you can do some good. Yeah?

39:43 S?: To what extent are you considering creating entirely new charities from scratch in areas where there's just aren't enough people doing such things?

39:49 HK: Sure, to what extent are we considering creating entirely new charities from scratch? We're definitely considering it. We wrote a post on our blog called 'Funder-initiated Startups', where we kind of observed that... I think when we started this work, I would've guessed that that's not a very good path. I think in the for-profit world, this like kind of an unusual model for the funder to create a company. It happens, but it's pretty unusual. And I think for various good reasons, and I just ran into way more cases than I expected. A lot of the most impressive organizations I ran into, I was like, "How was this organization started?" And the answer was, "Well, this funder started it." I thought that was weird, looked into it a little more, we wrote about it. I think I've kind of come to terms with why that is and how that works. And so, I've become more positive in idea of saying, "If we wish an organization existed and it doesn't exist, we as a funder can try to create it." That said, creating an organization would just be such a massive undertaking that... It's not... We can't do five of those. That would be an example of a big bet. That would be an example of, "This is what we are doing for the next while..." And so, we have to feel like the opportunity is really good.

40:57 HK: And also, we can't do it ourselves. You need the right leader to fund. We've kind of taken inspiration from the Sandler Foundation, who I think has done this more than once, created a really strong organization. They're the ones that created ProPublica, so their foundation is like a five minute walk from us. And they said, "There should be a nonprofit newsroom," and they kind of interviewed person after person to run it, and until they found someone that they liked, they didn't do anything. And then, they found someone and they said, "Oh, you would be great to run this," and then it became a huge project for them and they launched it. I think ProPublica is great and an interesting example of funder impact. So, it's something we can do, but it's also something we're mindful of how big of a commitment that would be. It's not... We don't have anything like that on our current priority list. We do have some things like that where we would say, "If we found the right person, we would consider this."

41:49 S?: You can start in a certain point, like for [41:53] ____ taking best ideas and find them and act when we're there. Are you concerned at a certain point that you just won't find that, and you're going to have to spend on making that then, how do you think about ultimately finding the right things to commit to.

42:09 HK: Sure. How do we think about finding the right things to commit to and what do we do if we just can't find the thing we want to fund? A lot of what we try to do is thing about not having a fixed priority list, so having options, and I think that's been good. We went into global catastrophic risk at the beginning of the year and we said, "Bio-security we would like to make a hire, AI, let's see what happens in Puerto Rico. Geoengineering, we don't really know what to fund." That's something I haven't talked about today but... And we had all these options and a lot of stuff, nothing really happened but then with Puerto Rico, we felt like we had something at least worth following and worth considering; that's what we're doing. So that's been a lot of the answer. I think you don't...

42:52 HK: That's one of the things we've tried to engineer and at one point we had a different model and we kind of evolved toward this as we said, "We don't want to be stuck saying, "We're hiring a person in this cause, because if we don't find the right person, we don't want to hire them." And so we'd much rather be looking across a bunch of causes and saying, "We're looking for a great giving opportunity with the right team, the right organization, the right person that we're willing to take a bet on instead of locking ourselves in to some thing where we're like, "Oh we said we'd fund something like this, so we're going to fund kind of a crappy version of it". That's the way we try to get around it. It feels like it's working so far in that, we try to make two big... Our goal is to make one big bet in policy and one big bet in GCRs that we were happy about and I think that's what we're doing and I think we're even a little ahead of schedule on it. Yup?

43:39 S?: Are you guys thinking about issues [43:43] ____ that are potentially controversial philosophically, and I mean issues of [43:47] ____ especially what are the issues in terms of... Or how do you try and figure out...

43:53 HK: Sure. So some of these issues really, it matters a lot what you think about some very hairy ancient, philosophical question like, whether you want to work on factory farming, really depends on how you weigh in the suffering of animals versus the suffering of humans. Some people think, I'm not sure I'm convinced about this, but some people think the case for work on global catastrophic risk has a lot with how you value future generations. The thing again in standard GiveWell fashion, the thing we don't do is try to debate them to the end of the line and get the answer. We think there's a certain... On a given intellectual question, there's a certain amount of work that's worth doing and then you hit massively diminishing returns, we try to be well informed, we try to know the arguments. We have people who are either in our network or on our staff who have pretty serious philosophical backgrounds, know these issues really well, we're as up on them as I think we ought to be, but we also don't want our whole model and our whole set of bets to hinge... To only make sense under certain debatable, philosophical presumptions.

44:56 HK: I think, it's not that we have a 100% systematic way of doing this, but I would say that when there's something that would be amazingly good, according a reasonable and defensible set, but not obviously correct set of philosophical beliefs, we consider that good, but we wouldn't want to put all our resources into it. So for example, I mean... The obvious example of this is like, there are people who think that we should only work on factory farming because they think animals should count as much as humans and there's way more animals than humans and that's what we should work on. It's not even close. And there's people who think, "All we should work on is global catastrophic risks because there's massively more future people than present people and the global catastrophic risks are the main thing that affect future people, that's where all the numbers are, that's where we should be.

45:43 HK: That's not our approach. Our approach is, look, there's a defensible case that global catastrophic risks are a big deal. There's a defensible case that factory farming is a big deal. Therefore they win the big deal. Mark. There's other things they have to win too. They have to be tractable, they have to be uncrowded and we have multiple priorities and I think that's the right way to be going, because we're not a year from the end of our lives trying to get the money out the door and never look back, we're a growing, learning organization. We don't want to be stuck in one set of philosophical beliefs.

46:18 S?: The funny model for the Open Philanthropy Project is where you have a couple of really wealthy donors. How does that work in practice? Do you literally have one person saying, "I'm really interested in cause X", and that would be where the funding happens? . How much is determined by that and how does a small donor potentially fit in, if that's what we're interested in?

46:40 HK: How much is the Open Philanthropy Project driven by large donor preferences? I would honestly say not at all. I would say that we are very explicit and very adamant that we're not a consulting service. We've had lots of philanthropists ask us, "Could you help me work on this cause?". We say, "No". We say, "We try to find the causes that we think are going to do the most good and if you think that's exciting and you like the way we're thinking, then we would love to work with you in the sense of making recommendations to you, talking with you, helping explain things, having to go back and forth, listening to your arguments on the merits but we don't do consulting."

47:20 HK: So the way that our relationship with our partners works is, Carrie is the main partner here at this time. She's president of Good Ventures and we have known her for a long time, and we didn't start a partnership until we'd know each other for years. And she started off with a blank slate, we started off with a blank slate, we didn't know what to work on and we kind of have evolved on this together and influenced each other's thinking and we feel comfortable enough with her that we're happy to make this a partnership. She's comfortable enough with us, that she hasn't hired her own staff. There are some causes that Carrie and Dustin are interested in, that we aren't and in those cases, we separate those out and we say, because it's good for our mission, "Because we want to be helpful, because we don't want you to have to hire your own staff, we will help you with these causes." But it's separately accounted for time and there's a limit to how much we can do, and we don't do much of it, it's a very small percentage of our time.

48:13 HK: So we really do try and maintain that and the way that this works is that we do what we think is right and then we make a recommendation. And it's ultimately Carrie's choice whether to follow that recommendation to make a grant and, in general, she has. But I think, in general, we think very similarly, we have very similar values and beliefs. We've kind of worked on this issue together, when we come apart that's it, we come apart, we don't then transform our mission to suit her.

48:40 HK: We have another partner now that's a more recent one. So Mike Krieger, one of the co-founders of Instagram and his fiancée, Caitlyn Trigger, have a funding partnership with us. It's not as intense, it's a set amount of money, and Caitlyn is coming into the office two days a week. But it's the same relationship, it's like we're having conversations,

we're helping her understand what we're doing, we're making recommendations, and we haven't offered anything approaching consulting. So I think... I can definitely say with great conviction that what you hear me saying as our causes, that's what I believe are the right causes to work on and then we offer that to donors, it's not something that the agenda was set by big donors. Stephanie.

49:24 S?: Do you expect [49:24] ____?

49:41 HK: Do we expect that this is going to be all about big donors or is it going to include smaller donors? I hope to include smaller donors. I think the way we would do it is we would... A, there are going to be times where we say, "We gave..." We decided to provide a certain amount of funding to this organization but actually they could use a lot more, it's just bad when organizations get too much of their funding from one source and maybe if we didn't have the comfort level to make a bigger grant 'cause we're already making a big one. But we'll say, "Hey, here's a great organization, you should give there". And we can also say... We can offer people to donate to us and put it into the general pool for these grants. So those are two things that we can offer, it just hasn't been our focus so far. The situation with Open Philanthropy Project is that Carrie and Dustin have a lot of money to give away and we have not found where to put that money yet. And that is something we're working on and I think we could do it... We could do a bad job of it in one year but I think to do a good job of it is going to take a long time.

50:36 HK: The first, there's process of choosing the framework, and just the whole fact that we look at causes, all that stuff, that took a long time. Then there's the process of choosing the causes, then there's the process of hiring the people to work on the causes. Then there's the process of choosing the grants and investing in the grants. So to really get there I think most philanthropists skip the first step. They say, "I'm passionate about causes A and B and I'm done". For us, picking the causes is maybe the most important thing. So right now our belief is that we have a lotta work to do before we can even make enough recommendations for all the money that our two current partners have. But where we want to be in 20 years is that we have massively more recommendations than that and we're just kind of running around to all the biggest and smallest donors we can and saying, "This needs more money, that needs more money", and moving a tremendous amount. See how much time we have. Alright, I'll take one more... Or not. Okay, yeah. Spencer. Hand up first...

51:36 S?: Is it your impression that the order of the variation in the outcome will be good [51:37] ____ if it's driven by the public or by the individual? Carrie you [51:44] ____.

51:45 HK: Do I think more of the variation in how good results someone gets is driven by the charity or the cause? I think there's a lot of different ways to ask that question and I think they'd have different answers. So I think there's a lot of... I think there's, in general, if you make a grant to an organization that's not good or to people who aren't good to start an organization, I think you're going to get zero from that grant. And I can already say we've made grants, they're exploratory grants, they're early grants, we've made grants for Open Philanthropy Project where I can point to that grant and say, "That was zero, we got zero out of that". And I think that's a risk and it's hard to tell who's going to be good and it's something that we expect to pick up over experience. So like I said, we try to have some failures, we try to have some successes that make up for the failures. So I think that's one way to answer that question but another way to answer that question is that there's a tremendous amount of variation from causes and... So you pick the best cause in the world and you fund the wrong person or the wrong team, you're going to get a zero.

52:50 HK: On the other hand, if you pick a decent team in a really good cause, you might be getting 100X as much impact as the best team in kind of a mediocre cause. So I think that's definitely true and there's a lotta causes that are emotionally appealing but not very important. And so, even a massive win is not worth as much as a small win somewhere else. So I don't know, I think it depends how you slice it but to us they're both extremely important and we don't want to take either one anything less than incredibly seriously. And that's why we have this slow build toward the point where we're actually giving out a lotta money. Alright. Well, that's all I'm going to take from sitting here but I'm happy to stay around and chat, so yeah, please do. And thanks everyone for coming, we really appreciate it. This is... Obviously, you folks are... We just, we really appreciate the support and I think, usually when we tell people about GiveWell the biggest point of skepticism is, "No one actually gives that way". So thanks for proving that wrong, at least a lot of the time. Alright, thanks.

[applause]