

Senior Advisor - Life Sciences Funding

The Open Philanthropy Project is looking for Senior Advisors to help us set funding priorities for life sciences research. We are looking for outstanding senior scientists who can commit at least 20 hours per week. We are especially interested in working with scientists who may eventually be interested in a Program Officer role, leading strategy development and funding decisions and managing a significant part of our portfolio. (However, previous experience with philanthropy is not required.)

We are currently exploring a wide range of possible approaches to funding life sciences research. These possible approaches include supporting [breakthrough fundamental science](#), funding work on [neglected diseases and conditions](#), and working to improve [science policy and infrastructure](#). Senior Advisors will initially focus on helping with these investigations.

The ideal Senior Advisor has the confidence, creativity and open-mindedness to support unconventional and/or "moonshot" science with a high risk of failure, while also assessing such work critically and skeptically.

About the Open Philanthropy Project

The Open Philanthropy Project is a collaboration between Good Ventures and GiveWell in which we identify outstanding giving opportunities, make grants, follow the results, and publish our findings.

Good Ventures is a philanthropic foundation whose mission is to help humanity thrive. Good Ventures was created by Dustin Moskovitz (co-founder of Facebook and Asana) and Cari Tuna, who have pledged to give the majority of their wealth to charity. GiveWell is a nonprofit that finds outstanding giving opportunities and publishes the full details of its analysis to help donors decide where to give.

Supporting scientific research

Our goal is to accomplish as much good as possible with the resources we have. We believe that scientific progress has been, and will continue to be, one of the major contributors to improvements in human well-being, and we hope to play a part in accelerating it.

Our interests are not limited to any particular field, disease, biological condition, or population. We seek to broadly consider and identify the approaches that are most (a) promising and (b) under-invested in by other funders. We hope to find opportunities that are potentially transformative, and appear after substantial scrutiny (by world-class scientists) to represent intelligent (if sometimes risky) philanthropic investments. We are committed to identifying the most promising science, regardless of how unconventional it may be.

We're currently in an exploratory phase with regard to scientific research, and the Advisor's initial role will be to help us evaluate different possible approaches in this space. Preliminarily, early interests include:

- Supporting research toward goals that are undervalued by the biggest government and commercial funders. For example, research targeting diseases and conditions of the global poor; pursuing the possibility of in vitro meat in order to reduce abuse of animals; developing biological interventions that enhance people's abilities rather than simply counteract diseases. More at <http://blog.givewell.org/2015/03/26/investigating-neglected-goals-in-scientific-research/>
- Supporting attempts at "breakthrough fundamental science": research that achieves important, broadly applicable insights about biological processes, such that the insights bring on many new promising directions for research, even if it is difficult to anticipate all the specific ways in which they will be applied and thus difficult to be assured of "results" in the sense of new clinical applications. More at <http://blog.givewell.org/2015/04/14/breakthrough-fundamental-science/>
- Supporting attempts to change the culture, policy and infrastructure around scientific research, in order to improve scientists' abilities to pursue breakthroughs and address systemic issues that are holding progress in biomedical research. More at <http://blog.givewell.org/2015/04/21/science-policy-and-infrastructure/>

However, these are only preliminary interests, and we are very open to revising them or pursuing other approaches instead.

The role

We are a small and dynamic organization; responsibilities will be fluid.

Initial duties

Advisors will initially focus on helping to investigate possible scientific focus areas. Such focus areas could range from "R&D focusing on improving malaria control and treatment options" to "Development of better tools and techniques for fundamental neuroscience." For any given investigation, Advisors will review relevant literature, talk to key people in the field, and communicate with other staff at the Open Philanthropy Project, in order to get a basic sense for questions such as:

- How much good could we accomplish via more scientific progress in this area?
- What are the most promising scientific paths forward? Which of these are not getting enough attention at the moment?

- How might a funder accelerate progress? Possibilities could include policy work, provision of public goods, etc. as well as directly supporting research.

Over time, Senior Advisors will likely lead deeper investigations of the most promising areas.

Senior Advisors will also be involved in preliminary conversations around what we might fund to [improve science policy and infrastructure](#).

Senior Advisors will not necessarily investigate only fields that they have expertise in. They will be scientific generalists with broad interests and the ability to efficiently investigate an unfamiliar field.

Program Officer

When we select our focus areas, we will consider Senior Advisors whom we have worked productively with for Program Officer roles.

Program Officers are responsible for developing our grantmaking strategy and priorities, making grants, and forming and maintaining relationships with grantees. This might include work such as:

- Assembling an advisory board of top scientists in a field of interest in order to run a request for proposals and grantmaking process for that field
- Designing a fellowship or Investigator program designed to support scientists who can have outsized impact
- Making grants aimed at improving science policy and infrastructure, which could include founding grants (for new organizations looking to work on these issues) or project grants to universities, scientific societies, etc.

Required Skills and Experience

- Strong track record of producing excellent research in life sciences.
- Ability to get up to speed quickly on unfamiliar fields in life sciences.
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills.
- Commitment of at least 20 hours per week.
- We are not specifically seeking previous experience working on philanthropy or policy.

We are located in San Francisco but will consider remote Senior Advisors. We will offer competitive compensation, commensurate with experience.

Personal Characteristics We Look For

- Alignment with the Open Philanthropy Project's core values of openness and impact maximization.
- Strong desire to make a real-world difference, while recognizing that the best impact may be via fundamental science whose applications are hard to predict.
- Confidence, creativity and open-mindedness to support unconventional and/or "moonshot" science with a high risk of failure, while also assessing such work critically and skeptically.
- Excitement about working with a relatively new organization whose processes are under development and subject to change.
- Strong self-direction coupled with eagerness for discussion and feedback.
- Directness and openness in giving and receiving feedback.
- Comfort with intense discussion and debate, including challenging the organization's leadership.
- Quantitative mindset and comfort evaluating giving opportunities in terms of expected value.

To apply

Please send resume and cover letter to senioradvisor1@openphilanthropy.org.

Position Filled