

A Conversation with Ivan Barkhorn and Brent Harris on October 30, 2013

Participants

- Ivan Barkhorn — Managing Director, Redstone Strategy Group
- Brent Harris — Associate Principal & Bay Area Office Lead, Redstone Strategy Group
- Holden Karnofsky — Co-Founder, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Ivan Barkhorn and Brent Harris.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Redstone Strategy Group about philanthropic success stories, philanthropic failures, and how to find good giving opportunities.

Philanthropic success stories

Vaccines

The Gates Foundation's work to scale up vaccine delivery is a major philanthropic success story.

Fuel economy standards

Philanthropy has played a key role in raising fuel economy standards around the world. Raising fuel economy standards is a proven, cost-effective, and replicable climate intervention, analogous to vaccines in global health.

To raise fuel economy standards, philanthropic actors have typically funded “technical advocacy”—technical support and advocacy aimed at technocrats in influential roles. Examples include:

- The Energy Foundation worked with the California Air Resources Board to establish improved fuel economy standards in California, which was an important first step to raising fuel economy standards in the rest of the U.S.
- The Hewlett Foundation and the Energy Foundation created the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT). ICCT's technical analyses demonstrated to the US Environmental Protection Agency that fuel efficient cars could be developed and produced at low costs, contrary to auto companies' claims.
- The Energy Foundation funded political advocacy work that helped convince the United Automobile Workers (UAW) that raising fuel economy standards would benefit the American automotive industry and American autoworkers. The UAW's support was important to the White House's support for raising fuel economy standards in the U.S.

Raising the U.S. national fuel economy standards cost something in the range of \$5 million per year over 10 years.

Education

- KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) was scaled by philanthropic funders. The Doris & Donald Fisher Fund was a key supporter.
- Philanthropy played a role in establishing and expanding Teach for America.
- Foundations gave substantial support for education reform in DC - particularly regarding a new evaluation system and performance incentives. While controversial, DC was the proving ground for recentering what was possible with teachers under union contracts. Funding from the Walton, Broad, and Arnold foundations helped make that possible.

Conservation

Philanthropists have supported successful large-scale conservation projects in places such as the Brazilian Amazon. Philanthropists have largely succeeded by funding expert dealmakers to mediate and negotiate large conservation deals. Redstone Strategy Group wrote a Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) paper about these projects.

Family planning

- The Hewlett Foundation's work with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has been effective. IPPF has been able to substantially increase its service delivery capability (resulting in a 30-40% increase in services provided) with support from its donors.
- Marie Stopes International (MSI) is a particularly successful grantee in reproductive health. MSI's work in developing countries has been innovative; it distinguishes itself by being particularly results-focused and explicit about its intended results.

Open education

The Hewlett Foundation's work to expand "open education" offerings has been very successful. "Open education" was previously considered a "wacky idea," but it is now a growing field. The Mellon Foundation has also contributed to success on this front.

Social entrepreneurship

The Skoll Foundation played a key role in creating and growing the field of social entrepreneurship. It has spent something in the range of \$15 million a year on this.

Renewable energy in India

A philanthropically funded study showed that India has substantially more potential for producing renewable energy than previously expected, leading to major growth in the renewable energy sector in India. This study – which cost somewhere on the order of \$100,000 – may have helped change a significant share of the power sector – perhaps 20% – of the 5th largest economy in the world.

How to find promising giving opportunities

- Find areas where a new philanthropist could provide substantially more money than existing funders in the space. These opportunities may be more likely to exist in policy advocacy—or, in influencing the private sector.
- Become deeply involved in a cause that seems promising, and then search for underfunded areas within the cause or areas in the cause where a philanthropist could fill in gaps or provide valuable technical analysis.
- Find issues where regulators have a large amount of control but are missing data that a philanthropist could provide. One example of this type of cause may be offshore drilling.

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