



Wringing the Most Good Out of a FACEBOOK FORTUNE

GIVING

By MEGAN O'NEIL

SAN FRANCISCO

SITTING BEHIND A LAPTOP affixed with a decal of a child reaching for an apple, an illustration from Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, Cari Tuna quips about endowing a Tuna Room in the Bass Library at Yale University, her alma mater.

But it's unlikely any of the fortune that she and her husband, Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz, command — estimated by *Forbes* at more than \$9 billion — will ever be used to name a building.

Five years after they signed the Giving Pledge, the youngest on the list of billionaires promising to donate half of their wealth, the couple is embarking on what will start at double-digit millions of dollars in giving to an eclectic range of causes, from overhauling the criminal-justice system to minimizing the potential risks from advanced artificial intelligence.

To figure out where to give, they created the Open Philanthropy Project, which uses academic research, among other things, to identify high-potential, overlooked funding opportunities. Ms. Tuna, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter, hopes the approach will influence other wealthy donors in Silicon Valley and beyond who, like her, seek the biggest possible returns for their philanthropic dollars.

Already, a co-founder of Instagram and his spouse have made a \$750,000 commitment to support the project.

What's more, Ms. Tuna and those working alongside her at the Open Philanthropy Project are documenting every step online — sometimes in eyebrow-raising detail — for the world to follow along.

"We have the opportunity to significantly improve millions of lives if and only if we do this work exceptionally well," the 30-year-old Ms. Tuna said. "That is what really motivates me."

Search for Worthy Causes

With Mr. Moskovitz occupied as chief executive of the software company Asana — he left Facebook in 2008 — Ms. Tuna took up researching their philanthropy options full time. They should consider their passions, she was advised.

"That is not exactly the approach I was trying to take," she said.

In 2011 and 2012, she did find herself returning repeatedly to GiveWell, a charity evaluator founded by former hedge-fund analysts Holden Karnofsky and Elie Hassenfeld and a flagship of the effective-altruism movement. Eventually, Ms. Tuna and her spouse began to channel money from their personal foundation, Good Ventures, to GiveWell to build what is now called the Open Philanthropy Project.

Underpinning the work is a central question: What are the best causes?

"Best," Ms. Tuna said, means those in which "our marginal funding is going to do the most good in terms of improving others' lives."

Ten full-time staff members are in pursuit of answers. Another 20 con-

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The youngest signers of the Giving Pledge are diligently seeking overlooked causes.

FOLLOWING SUIT
Early on, Cari Tuna was drawn to GiveWell, founded by Elie Hassenfeld (standing) and Holden Karnofsky, and its view of philanthropy.

NOAH BERGER, FOR THE CHRONICLE



ERIC RISBERG/AP IMAGES

A COMMITMENT TO GIVE BIG

“As a result of Facebook’s success, I’ve earned financial capital beyond my wildest expectations. Today, I view that reward not as personal wealth but as a tool with which I hope to bring even more benefit to the world.”

“I’m especially thankful to have found a partner in Cari [his wife, Ms. Tuna], who shares my priorities and commitment to this humbling work.”

“We will donate and invest with both urgency and mindfulness, aiming to foster a safer, healthier, and more economically empowered global community.”

— Excerpts from Dustin Moskowitz’s Giving Pledge statement

Their project vows to be upfront about its stumbles and shortcomings.

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tribute part time. Most are in their 20s and 30s.

They have broken down their research into broad categories of U.S. policy, global catastrophic risk, scientific research, and global health and development.

Every grant-making opportunity within those categories is weighed based on three criteria:

- How many people are affected by a specific problem and by how much?
- How much attention and money are already going to the cause from other grant makers?
- What are the odds of actually catalyzing change?

So far, Open Philanthropy Project grant making totals \$15.4 million, according to Ms. Tuna. It will accelerate starting next year, eventually peaking at hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

The Moskowitz-Tuna money is being used to deal with criminal justice and possible risks from artificial intelligence but also to improve the welfare of farm animals, push for more efficient land use, overhaul immigration policies to allow for things including increased migration, support policies that create stable economies, and reduce threats of global disruption from natural and manufactured outbreaks and biological weapons. Research continues into additional areas of focus.

“It is important to clarify that we don’t think there is an objectively best cause,” Ms. Tuna said. “But we are trying to make the best bets that we can make.”

In some ways, the Open Philanthropy Project echoes the work Mr. Karnofsky and Mr. Hassenfeld started with GiveWell in 2007. Ruffling the feathers of other charity evaluators, whom the pair felt were doing an insufficient job, they set out to identify outstanding groups that can prove impact and cost-effectiveness with data and other means. Their endorsements have driven tens of millions of dollars in donations to groups like Give Directly, which provides cash to destitute households in Africa.

But the Open Philanthropy Project diverges from GiveWell in at least one profound way. While GiveWell seeks to identify virtually foolproof charitable investments, the Open Philanthropy

Project is filled with forward-looking calculations, unknown variables, and judgment calls, according to Ms. Tuna, Mr. Karnofsky, and others.

In short, they are knowingly setting out to make a lot of big swings and misses with an eye to hitting one or more home runs.

“We are trying to do something really ambitious,” said Alexander Berger, a GiveWell staff member since 2011 who worked extensively on the early-stage Open Philanthropy Project research. “We’re really cognizant

of the risks. But we think this is an effort worth trying.”

A Blow-by-Blow Account

In a September blog post, Mr. Karnofsky introduced a new program officer. Lewis Bollard had impressed those at the Open Philanthropy Project with his thinking and communication style and would lead grant making related to farm-animal welfare.

Mr. Karnofsky didn’t stop there. Mr. Bollard had only three years of work experience and lacked the professional connections of a more

senior candidate. He faced a steep learning curve, and because he is not a U.S. citizen, he had to await a visa.

“We recognize that this is a risky proposition,” Mr. Karnofsky wrote of the hire, adding that he and his colleagues were comfortable with the risk because the job did not require the same level of expertise as, say, that of a program officer focusing on criminal-justice reform.

Airing incoming staff members’ shortcomings is unorthodox in any sector, radically so in the nonprofit world where a fog of niceness hovers in a semipermanent state.

But just like GiveWell, which has a tab on its website titled “Mistakes,” the Open Philanthropy Project staff pledges to air stumbles. And the post was just one example of efforts to publicly document the work, a sort of philanthropy playbook to be made use of by others. It allows the Open Philanthropy Project staff to revisit thinking years after decisions are made, Ms. Tuna and Mr. Karnofsky said. They expect it will help mitigate the loss of institutional knowledge when people leave.

Detailed explanation of hires — another post explaining the hiring of Chloe Cockburn, a criminal-justice program officer, ran to 2,800 words — goes a long way toward explaining grant-making decisions thereafter, they added.

“You are not going to be able to understand the reasoning behind any of these grants we make in criminal justice, really, until you understand why it is that we decided out of all the people in the world who we could have trusted as our agent for criminal justice, we chose Chloe,” Mr. Karnofsky said.

While Ms. Tuna is committed to openness about grant making, she wouldn’t disclose to *The Chronicle* how much money she and her husband are putting into the foundation, Good Ventures, and the Open Philanthropy Project, both of which are housed at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

To date, Ms. Tuna and Mr. Moskowitz have made \$77 million in grants from Good Ventures. The largest was \$25 million in August to the direct-cash transfer group, GiveDirectly.

Effective Altruism

With the Open Philanthropy Project, Ms. Tuna, Mr. Moskowitz, and GiveWell’s Mr. Karnofsky and Mr. Hassenfeld solidify their position as standard bearers for the effective-altruism movement.

“They are making the best effort yet made, ever, to find answers to the questions of, ‘Where can I get the best value for my resources — whether those resources are my money or time or skills — in trying to make the world a better place,’” said Peter Singer, the preeminent bioethicist whose scholarly work and activism have advanced the idea that the wealthy should be giving more to the needy and not to elite causes.

Effective altruism lays out a moral obligation for using one’s resources where they can generate the most good. Its disciples live out effective altruism to varying degrees in diverse ways. Some give large percentages of annual incomes to projects proven to help the world’s most destitute people. In 2011, Open Philanthropy Project’s Mr. Berger anonymously donated a kidney, setting off a chain of six organ donations.

Ms. Tuna emphasized that she and her colleagues do not agree with everything that everyone in the effective-altruism movement says. Still, that will do little to shield the Open Philanthropy Project from effective altruism’s fiercest critics.

"It's a total crock," William Schambra, director of the Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal at the Hudson Institute, said of trying to calculate how many future lives could be saved by investing in things like mitigating catastrophic events. "The likelihood of anyone being compelled by that vision of philanthropy, other than someone who is unilaterally focused on calculation and numbers and crunching figures, is almost infinitesimal."

Even those who herald the Open Philanthropy Project identify hurdles. For starters, some things, like the efficacy of advocacy work, are hard to measure.

"They need to develop expertise in everything from asteroids to criminal justice in the U.S. to global health," said Ted Miguel, director of the Center for Effective Global Action at the University of California at Berkeley. "Those are really disparate areas. It sounds really intellectually exciting to do what they are doing, but it is really hard to develop expertise or really understand where the research is in that wide-ranging space."

Influence on Others

Among other things to watch is what influence Ms. Tuna and Mr. Moskovitz have on other big donors in the Bay Area, say those familiar with the work. It may already be having an effect.

In April, Mike Krieger, co-founder of Instagram, and his now wife, Kaitlyn Trigger, announced a two-year, \$750,000 commitment to the Open Philanthropy Project.

"I imagine some people might see how ambi-

tious Open Philanthropy is and think that these folks must have really giant egos. But that is really not true," Ms. Trigger said. "They have giant brains, for sure, but not giant egos."

Phil Buchanan, president of the Center for Effective Philanthropy, said he is heartened by Ms. Tuna's study of the history of philanthropy, a process that included meeting with a few hundred people in all parts of the nonprofit world.

"I have not heard a lot of bluster from them," Mr. Buchanan said of those behind Open Philanthropy Project. "Contrast them with Sean Parker, who writes an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* trashing any foundation that has been around any more than five minutes as bureaucratic and wasteful and out for their own careers."

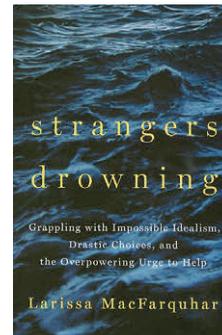
Jacob Harold, chief executive at GuideStar, said he has been following the work of GiveWell since he was a program officer at the Hewlett Foundation and has hosted Ms. Tuna for dinner at his house. Hers is what will remain a small but increasingly prevalent way of giving.

"We are in no danger of being able to shift to a philanthropic culture that is deeply rational and data driven," Mr. Harold said. "But what can happen is we can have a large minority of donors who are deeply intentional, analytical, and data driven in their giving."

That influence is, in part, why Ms. Tuna and Mr. Moskovitz decided to do their giving publicly.

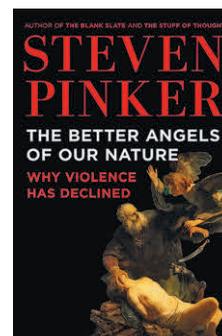
"All else equal, we would like to keep a relatively low profile," Ms. Tuna said. "But being public about our giving feels like a great way to inspire others." ■

CARI TUNA'S BOOK LIST: WHAT SHE'S READING NOW



Strangers Drowning,
by Larissa MacFarquhar

"I find the people she profiles to be so inspiring. Giving the majority of our wealth away feels relatively easy compared to the selflessness that those people that she profiles demonstrate. It is really cool."



**Better Angels
of Our Nature,**
by Steven Pinker

It is "probably the best nonfiction book I have ever read. It is taking me a long time to get through because it's a very long book, but it is just so fascinating. Even surprising, the dramatic decline in many, many kinds of violence over the course of human history. It is something you wouldn't necessarily realize reading the news. But it makes me feel really lucky to be alive now."

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