

A conversation with The Good Food Institute, March 27, 2017

Participants

- Bruce Friedrich – Executive Director, The Good Food Institute (GFI)
- Clare Bland – Development Director, GFI
- Lewis Bollard – Program Officer, Farm Animal Welfare, Open Philanthropy Project

Note: These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Friedrich and Ms. Bland.

Summary

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Friedrich and Ms. Bland of GFI to get an update on our 2016 grant. Conversation topics included GFI's recent hires, plans for scale-up, accomplishments and mistakes.

Organizational growth and hiring

At the time of Open Philanthropy's 2016 grant, GFI had eight staff, most of whom were fairly new. GFI now has 15 staff and has sketched out 39 total staff positions that it would ideally like to fill by the end of the year. Whether GFI fills all these roles this year will depend somewhat on how its development goes (e.g., the full 39 staff includes seven positions for GFI's planned international engagement team, which it is still fundraising for). Mr. Friedrich thinks it is quite likely that GFI will grow to at least 33 staff by the end of the year.

At the time of Open Phil's grant, GFI was looking to make hires for five positions (Director of Corporate Engagement, Corporate Engagement Specialist, Innovation Manager, Business Analyst, and Scientific Foundations Liaison). GFI has now hired for three of these positions:

- Scientific Foundations Liaison Dr. Erin Rees Clayton. This role has proven particularly useful and Dr. Clayton has been an excellent fit.
- Business Analyst Brianna Cameron, who is working on compiling databases for use by both GFI and the plant-based meat companies it supports.
- Director of Corporate Engagement Alison Rabschnuk, who has 25 years of experience in the corporate world.

GFI is prioritizing hiring for director-level positions in all of its departments so that those hires can then help build out their teams.

GFI makes a practice of not hiring for a position until it finds a candidate who is an excellent fit (rather than, e.g., hiring the best available candidates in a particular hiring round). GFI has a full-time recruitment staff member who has been effective at actively seeking out and identifying potential recruits (e.g. via LinkedIn, etc.) and reaching out to them.

Since our conversation, GFI completed its first six-month update to its strategic plan, which is available on request (please contact Clare Bland at clareb@gfi.org).

GFI also published its 2016 Annual Review, [available here](#).

Budget

At the time of Open Phil's grant, GFI had raised about \$1.1 million in pledges and gifts (including monthly pledges through end-of-year 2016). By the end of 2016, GFI had raised just over \$2.9 million, which included a seed grant from Mercy for Animals. Each year, GFI tries to spend roughly the amount that it raised during the previous year, so it plans to spend around \$2.9 million in 2017 and has set a target budget for 2018 of \$4.66 million (its fundraising goal for 2017), which would support all 39 planned staff roles.

GFI also aims to keep at least 20% of its expense budget each year as an operating reserve. It currently has an adequate operating reserve and will continue to have one into 2018 if it reaches its fundraising goal.

Accomplishments

Research by GFI's science team

GFI thinks the work of its science and technology team to get a good understanding of the state of knowledge on plant-based products and "clean" (i.e. cultured) meat has been particularly valuable. Becoming well informed on the existing scientific foundation that GFI can build upon going forward has informed GFI's research and strategic focus.

Launching new plant-based food companies

GFI's innovation department has two prongs: 1) finding innovators to start and join companies, and 2) maintaining a list of "white space" companies that GFI would like to see started. GFI has prompted innovators to start two new food companies in white spaces that it identified: a plant-based seafood company, which had a soft launch at Natural Products Expo West, and a plant-based meat company in India, which has already raised millions of dollars in funding. GFI anticipates both of these companies will be fully launched later this year. The idea of creating plant-based meat intended to compete directly with animal meat is fairly new; until the last few years, plant-based meat companies were mainly competing for the small vegetarian consumer market.

Other work

GFI has begun gathering information on various plant proteins and their potential uses and plans to make this information publicly available.

GFI has been collaborating with UC Berkeley to offer the first-ever college courses on plant-based meat and plant-based fish.

Possible mistakes

Potential mistakes GFI thinks it may have made include:

- GFI launched somewhat more quickly and less methodically than it might have. When Open Philanthropy made its 2016 grant, GFI had a goal of scaling up to 16 staff but did not have an organized plan in place to reach that size while ensuring that all staff did not report directly to Mr. Friedrich.
- While GFI's innovation department is running well, its work might have benefitted if GFI had prioritized recruiting a Director of Innovation and innovation specialists sooner. Chris Kerr (GFI Entrepreneur in Residence) and the leadership team of SeaCo have done most of the work to launch the plant-based seafood company, and the co-founders of the Indian plant-based meat company have done most of the work to launch that.
- Similarly, it might have been beneficial to prioritize recruiting a Director of International Engagement sooner. GFI thinks it has not been able to fully take advantage of some promising opportunities in, e.g., China, India, and Europe, due to lack of international engagement staff.
- GFI underestimated how challenging and time-consuming recruiting would be, and, in retrospect, might have hired a dedicated recruiting person sooner.

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