

Conversation between Rebecca Daou (Divisions Manager, Lions Club International Foundation) and Stephanie Wykstra and Natalie Stone (GiveWell) on September 25, 2012.

Summary:

GiveWell spoke to Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF) to learn more about how it decides which charities to fund, and in particular, how it decided to fund the Measles and Rubella Initiative.

LCIF told us:

- It has raised about \$8.5 million of the \$10 million that it aims to raise for the Measles and Rubella Initiative. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is giving a matching grant of US\$5 million (50% of the total that LCIF raises).
- LCIF has four major areas that it gives grants in: sight-related projects, disaster relief, supporting youth and humanitarian projects.
- The main criteria that LCIF uses in deciding where to fund include: the program falls under LCIF'S four areas of service, members of Lions are interested in volunteering for and funding the project, LCIF has historically worked on funding the cause, the funding will be leveraged, there is low overhead, and the intervention has been shown to be effective.

This is a set of notes compiled by GiveWell in order to give an overview of the major points made by Rebecca Daou in conversation.

Background information about LCI

Lions Club International (LCI) is an international organization of volunteers who engage in charitable activities. The organization has about 46,000 clubs worldwide.

LCI's foundation has four main areas of service:

1. Maintaining and restoring sight
2. Providing disaster relief
3. Supporting youth
4. Humanitarian needs

The distribution of funding among the four categories is fluid i.e., LCIF has no set breakdown of how funding must be distributed within the categories. A significant amount of current funding is

currently directed to sight-related projects, on account of LCI aiming to meet specific targets in that domain in connection with its involvement with WHO's VISION 2020 program.

LCIF's funding of the Measles and Rubella Initiative

LCIF aims to raise \$10 million for the Measles and Rubella Initiative, and so far has raised about \$8.5 million toward that goal, \$5.1 million of which was raised last year. In addition to the \$5.1 million, LCIF contributed grant funds of \$300,000 from its unrestricted funding for Lions activities in the countries where vaccination campaigns are taking place. LCIF's work with the Measles and Rubella Initiative falls under its "humanitarian needs" service area.

LCIF decided to fundraise for a grant to Measles and Rubella Initiative because:

- Measles is linked with child blindness, and LCI was already focused on blindness in the past.
- There were members of LCI who were already doing work in measles vaccination (for example, in India).
- There was interest from LCI members (feasibility study conducted)
- LCIF felt that the organization is very effective
- The organization and the intervention generally has very low overhead requirements.
- LCIF felt that there was a strong possibility that it would get a challenge grant from the Gates Foundation if it were to raise funds for the Measles Initiative.

Before deciding to fund the grant, LCIF ran pilot activities in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mali and Madagascar to test whether there were members of LCI who were interested in doing volunteer work and/or contributing funding to measles vaccination. LCIF also conducted a feasibility study among its members to gauge interest.

How LCI volunteers help with measles vaccination

The work that LCI volunteers do on measles vaccination varies from country to country. In some cases, they engage in advocacy by meeting with government officials. Many LCI volunteers have networking connections with government officials, which facilitates this advocacy. In other instances, LCI volunteers work in the communities doing social mobilization, for example, informing parents of the time and place when vaccination will occur and encouraging parents to bring their children to health clinics to get vaccinated. In other instances, LCI volunteers work at the vaccination sites themselves, for example, by helping people register at the health centers and performing crowd control.

Process of deciding what to fund

Most frequently, charities come to LCIF with proposals rather than being approached by LCI. Whenever LCIF is considering doing a fundraising campaign for \$10 million or more, it goes through a formal internal process involving the long-range planning committee making a decision as to whether to move forward. Part of the internal process includes conducting feasibility studies among members. LCIF communicates regularly with its committees to keep them updated as to what's going on with possible partnerships, and to gauge the committees' interest in the possible partnerships.

General criteria for LCIF's funding a project

Some major factors that influence LCIF's decision as to whether to fund a project are

- Whether the program falls under one of LCIF's four areas of service
- Whether members of LCI are interested in volunteering for and funding the project
- Whether LCI/LCIF has historically worked on the cause
- Whether the funding will be leveraged
- There is a preference for low overhead

Additional note on the leverage criterion: LCI members tend to prefer instances of funding in which their donations are leveraged as much as possible. Some of LCIF's grant programs only fund projects in the developed world for which 100% of its funding will be matched, and projects in the developing world for which at least 25% of its funding will be matched.

LCIF and neglected tropical diseases

LCIF funds work on controlling onchocerciasis and trachoma as a part of its work on maintaining and restoring sight. One of its grantees that does such work is The Carter Center. LCIF receives gifts in-kind for a drug for the treatment of onchocerciasis. These gifts are substantial: last year they constituted about \$6 million of the \$43 million of donations that LCIF received. LCIF has not given direct funding for the control of lymphatic filariasis or schistosomiasis, though The Carter Center funding indirectly supports the control of these neglected tropical diseases.

LCIF is in discussions with the Sabin Institute and other groups that work on neglected tropical diseases with a view toward the possibility of LCIF getting involved in an integrated approach to the treatment of neglected tropical diseases as opposed to having an exclusive focus on onchocerciasis and trachoma.

LCIF's research

LCIF does independent research on whether the interventions that it is considering funding are effective; it does not focus directly on the relative cost-effectiveness of the interventions.

LCIF'S work across countries

LCIF prefers to fund charities that work internationally over charities that work in a single country. This is because LCIF volunteers live in many different countries.

LCIF funds charitable efforts both in developed countries and in developing countries. The funding that LCIF provides maintaining and restoring sight goes primarily to developing countries.

Matching grants

In addition to the matching grant from the Gates Foundation for the Measles and Rubella Initiative, LCIF has received grants from corporations such as Johnson & Johnson and Bausch and Lomb. LCIF also gives matching grants to local LCI clubs.

Sources of funding

In the past, the vast majority of LCIF donations have come from its members. More recently, LCIF has received some funding from the Gates Foundation, other foundations, corporations and governments. However, it's still the case that a large majority of LCIF donations come from LCI members.

LCIF has a donation recognition program for unrestricted donations which is very popular. LCI members receive recognition for each increment of \$1000 of donations.

LCIF received \$43 million in donations last year.

Restricted vs. unrestricted funding

Often LCIF clubs in Europe and the US will fundraise for a particular cause such as the disaster in Haiti or the disaster in Japan. The clubs can restrict those donations. However, most of the donations that LCIF receives are unrestricted.