

## **A conversation with David Alpert, Sarah Guidi, and Jonathan Neeley, December 16, 2015**

### **Participants**

- David Alpert – Founder, Website Editor, and President of Board of Directors, Greater Greater Washington
- Sarah Guidi – Managing Director, Greater Greater Washington
- Jonathan Neeley – Staff Editor, Greater Greater Washington
- Alexander Berger – Program Officer, US Policy, Open Philanthropy Project

**Note:** These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Greater Greater Washington staff.

### **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. David Alpert, Ms. Sarah Guidi, and Mr. Jonathan Neeley of Greater Greater Washington as part of an update on grants from the Open Philanthropy Project and Cari Tuna. The conversation focused on Greater Greater Washington's plans for the near future.

### **Plans for the near future**

Greater Greater Washington held a meeting on December 15 to get advice from about 12 professionals in relevant fields about how to refine the goals and strategies related to housing. Of the many ideas generated at the meeting, 3 which received support from participants were to focus on broadening education, organizing supporters, and facilitating discussions about housing in specific neighborhoods.

In the first 6 months of 2016, Greater Greater Washington plans to consider focusing on some or all of these 3 areas, as well as hiring an additional staff member, identifying places where they can have a localized impact, and identifying promising groups to mobilize in favor of increased housing.

### **Broadening education about housing**

Many people are not educated about the importance of affordable housing. When Greater Greater Washington staff laid out specific leverage points in the system where it may be able to intervene, meeting attendees felt that the lack of public knowledge of these issues was a key barrier to progress.

#### *Housing blog post series*

Mr. Alpert plans to publish a series of housing-related blog posts in the new year to help more readers to understand the importance of the issue and to give them the context to understand and support specific housing projects as they arise.

#### *Republishing and updating blog posts*

Greater Greater Washington has been experimenting with republishing select blog posts in order to reach a greater number of readers. It is also updating some blog posts, including a post about Metro passes. It may be worthwhile to update posts about housing supply that were first published about 5 years ago to include newer information.

### **Organizing supporters**

Greater Greater Washington would like to better organize its supporters and encourage them to participate in particular projects at times when there seems to be an opportunity for leverage. The organization expects to experiment to find a good balance of online and offline activities. It plans to write blog posts about notable projects and encourage supporters to attend particular hearings and declare their support for increased housing. However, it is unclear whether encouraging people to attend individual hearings at one stage of the process will have a high impact because they may not be willing to attend all follow-up hearings.

#### *Value of in-person meetings*

The Greater Greater Washington staff is considering to what extent holding panels is worthwhile in terms of the number of people reached. This is a difficult tradeoff because a typical blog post is read by 1,000 people, whereas panels often only attract roughly 25 people.

#### *Increasing online interactions*

Greater Greater Washington plans to update its content management system and redesign its website in order to generate more traffic and increase the amount of online discussion. The organization is also discussing ways to increase its level of social media interaction.

### **Facilitate discussions about housing in specific neighborhoods**

The third idea proposed at the meeting was to facilitate both online and offline discussions about housing in specifically targeted neighborhoods. Discussions would cover both reasons people may be wary of increased housing in their neighborhoods and whether they would be willing to approve additional housing if desired amenities such as parks, schools, and/or community pools were also added.

These discussions would be accompanied by increased organizing in these targeted neighborhoods to mobilize people in support of increased housing. Greater Greater Washington believes it may have an opportunity to engage neighborhoods in a different way than formal planning organizations do. It could potentially partner with and provide some basic education to an organization that is better positioned to implement this type of program.

However, this area would also be a greater step for Greater Greater Washington, and staff plan to first evaluate whether it makes sense to do in the short term or save as a later area for expansion.

### **Expanding staff capacity**

Greater Greater Washington plans to hire one more staff member. Staff are working to write a job description by the end of December and plan to begin recruiting in January. They would like to have someone begin working in the position by March.

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at  
<http://www.givewell.org/conversations>*