

Inside Development

Philanthropy

Open Philanthropy launches programs for South Asia, global aid work

Open Philanthropy has announced hires for its first new programs in five years, which aim to reduce the health effects of air pollution in South Asia and increase the efficacy of foreign aid for the world's lowest-income people.

By [Stephanie Beasley](#) // 06 January 2022



A view of buildings shrouded in smog in Noida on the outskirts of New Delhi, India last November 2021. Photo by: Mayank Makhija / NurPhoto / Reuters

Influential research and grant-making organization [Open Philanthropy](#) announced this week that it has [hired](#) lead officers for its first “new causes” in more than five years: South Asian air quality and global aid advocacy. The group expects the two programs to support its efforts to cost-effectively direct millions of dollars toward grants aimed at boosting incomes or increasing the years of healthy life for the world’s lowest-income people.

Santosh Harish, a former fellow at the [Centre for Policy Research](#) in New Delhi, will become the program officer for South Asian air quality, examining the health impacts of air pollution. Open Philanthropy recently

issued a [report on the issue](#), which it called “an unusually promising space for philanthropy aimed at improving global health.”

Norma Altshuler will lead the new global aid advocacy program, which aims to increase the amounts and effectiveness of foreign aid from wealthy countries. Altshuler is currently a program officer in gender equity and governance at the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#).

[GiveWell's move to delay \\$110M reopens debate on giving now vs. later](#)

GiveWell has received backlash after saying it will withhold some funding until 2022, as it waits for opportunities to use the money in ways that would be more effective than cash transfers.

“Our goal is to do as much good as possible with the funding that we have,” Otis Reid, a research fellow who works to identify new cause areas at Open Philanthropy, told Devex. “We have a belief that a lot of the value that you can get comes from picking the right causes rather than picking the right grants within those causes, although they’re both really important.”

South Asian air quality presents a major global health concern, with the potential to generate health care costs reaching as much as three times those linked to breast cancer globally, and it isn’t receiving enough philanthropic dollars, according to Reid.

The [group's research](#) cites an estimate putting philanthropic spending for South Asian air quality at roughly \$7 million in 2019. However, annual philanthropic spending on air pollution reduction in India that focuses on its role in climate change — rather than focusing on its health effects, as Open Philanthropy proposes to do — is between \$100 million and \$350 million, according to the research.

“It’s pretty neglected,” Reid said of health-focused spending on the area.

Open Philanthropy funded more than [\\$200 million](#) in grants through its global health and well-being team in 2020 and expects that number to “rise substantially” in coming years. The group said it currently spends [roughly \\$100 million](#) yearly on “cost-effective direct global health aid.” And in 2020, it directed \$3 million to pilot grants for South Asian air quality.

Meanwhile, the global aid advocacy program will start with an annual budget of \$20 million to \$30 million, according to a [now-closed posting](#) for the cause’s program officer position. That amount may eventually increase to between \$50 million and \$100 million or more.

Open Philanthropy’s previous engagement in global aid advocacy has been “limited,” the job posting said, but it is now interested in pursuing areas such as “Political and policy advocacy for new, cost-effective

global health programs” and “Supporting expansion of high-return investments within existing aid institutions,” such as the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#).

Open Philanthropy said it expects its work in South Asian air quality and global aid advocacy to continue for at least five years. After that, it will determine whether to extend, expand, or phase out the programs based on progress reviews, the group said.

Open Philanthropy was created in 2014 as a partnership between charity assessment and grant-making organization [GiveWell](#) and the [Good Ventures](#) foundation, established by billionaire philanthropists Dustin Moskovitz and Cari Tuna. The group now operates independently. However, both Open Philanthropy and GiveWell receive funding from Moskovitz and Tuna.

The organizations recently made news when GiveWell decided to [hold on to a portion of the \\$300 million](#) that Open Philanthropy committed last year, waiting to find opportunities that it considers more cost-effective than those available in 2021.

Reid said that how Open Philanthropy decides to spend its funds in the future will greatly depend on the sort of grant opportunities available.

“We think there’s a lot of work to do and a ton of impact to be had,” he said.

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