

Career Planning Intensive

Overview

This document describes one way to run a Career Planning Intensive programme, over 4 or 5 weeks, with a single 2-hour session each week. Each programme would have 3-4 participants, and be run by an experienced community builder, or delegated to a particularly knowledgeable participant who you'd trust to follow this document (or a version you've created) effectively.

Introduction

Career planning is really hard, both to do in practice and also to find motivation for. Career planning in an EA-aligned way is even harder, because you're trying to optimise for having a large impact with your career, and in doing so have to speculate about future risks and trajectories, as well as prioritise between really important causes. Moreover, many young people don't have a good internal model of what their comparative strengths are or what type of work they're most likely to enjoy, compounding the difficulty in this process.

This Career Planning Intensive programme is not designed to fully solve this problem, but is one tool in the toolkit for EAs who want to think more about their careers and how they can have the most impact, while also living a fulfilling life. It's designed to provide a space for EAs to think hard and systematically about their career plans and options, as well as provide an opportunity to receive feedback and suggestions from peers.

Who is this programme for?

The target audience for this programme are members of the Effective Altruism community who've already spent a lot of time (>50 hours) thinking about their [cause prioritisation](#), learning about different global problems and potential solutions, but aren't set on a specific career path yet or would like to spend more time exploring their options. We do not believe it is suitable for individuals who are new to the EA community, as cause prioritisation is incredibly hard and requires a lot of deliberation, and is not within the scope of this programme.

What does this programme look like?

This programme consists of 4 weeks of discussions and co-working, with one 2-hour call each week. Before each call, participants are expected to read around 1-hour of content, stemming from 80,000 hours' career planning [article](#). For approximately half of each call, participants consider and discuss various prompts stemming from the article, either in short 1-1s or as a group, while the other half is spent working independently on their [workbook](#).

How to run this programme

The programme is coordinated on Slack, and the sessions are either facilitated by an experienced EA community builder, or delegated to particularly experienced participants who are keen to lead the sessions

themselves. This document could be used as a guide for how to run sessions if you (i.e. a community builder) are to delegate the task of running each session to a participant. The total time to facilitate this over 4-5 weeks is approximately 20 hours, including prep time.

Before running this programme, it is *highly* valuable that the organiser has methodically read through the 80,000 hours article that it's based upon, and has explored various ideas that the article is based upon. This is useful because it gives the organiser a better understanding of the value of different discussion prompts so that they can elaborate upon them, answer questions participants may have, and generally steer the sessions in more useful ways.

After accepting the participants who seem most promising according to whichever criteria you've selected, I would strongly suggest you ask them to fill in a fairly detailed bio to get a feeling for who they are and what their interests, strengths, current plans, etc., are. We had a few discussion prompts in the application form, however, I'm thinking more like A4 page length of personal bio. This would allow the participants to give each other much more informed feedback, and give the organiser a better picture of the needs of the different participants and how they can provide them with the most value.

Below is a breakdown for one way this programme could look like, session by session and minute by minute. This is no way meant to be prescriptive and is only meant to give you a foundation for how you could run a similar programme, so adapt it as you wish.

4-week Programme

Session 1: Icebreakers & Fulfilling, Impactful Careers (Section 1)

This is the first session of the programme. Participants are expected to have read section 1: "What does a fulfilling, high-impact career look like for you?" beforehand, as this will provide a basis upon which to have their initial discussions. It's also useful to ask them to copy and paste the workbook into their google drive account, but not to start working on it yet, and then share a commentable version of this document on the slack channel such that you can see how they're making progress.

- 0:00-0:10 - Introductions
 - Introduce the programme, yourself, and the high level goals of the programme
 - Ask the participants to introduce themselves. Potential suggestions:
 - i. Where are you from
 - ii. What are you up to in life
 - iii. What inspired you to join this programme
 - iv. What do you hope to get out of it?
 - Describe the agenda for this session
 - Emphasize that this programme will not provide shovel-ready career plans, but provides a space for systematic deliberation on our career planning in a rigorous way, as well as a space to gather feedback and suggestions from peers
- 0:10-0:50- 3x12 minute icebreakers
 - This depends on the number of people in each cohort. I would suggest trying to get each person to meet with all the other participants on a 1-1 basis.
 - i. If there are 4 participants, then it could be useful for the organiser to arrange a 1-1 with each participant *outside* of the allocated session time (perhaps even before the first

session) and for them to sit out of this to allow each participant to meet the others (3 rounds of 1-1s)

- ii. If there are 3 participants, then it makes sense for the organiser to get involved with these icebreakers and not to arrange prior 1-1s with the participants
 - Potential icebreaker questions to suggest to the participants
 - i. How have you kept yourself occupied during covid times
 - ii. What are your plans for the near future
 - iii. What did your life look like 3 years ago?
 - iv. What would you do if you had a million dollars? (non-EA purposes!)
 - v. Go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
 - vi. Have any questions answered, what would it be?
- 0:50-0:55 - 5 minute break
 - Highly recommend these little rests, 2 hours is a long time to be chatting and I think there's a lot of benefit from a 5 minute break to clear your head, go to the bathroom, and get a cup of tea, in order to come back strong for the following discussions.
- 0:55-1:40 - 3x13 minute discussions on Section 1, or a single big group discussion (I'm leaning towards a big group discussion is better)
 - Emphasise that the participants do not need to discuss *every* question every single time they go into a breakout room, however, these discussion prompts are still very valuable for guiding discussions. Participants can focus on specific questions that seem most thought-provoking.
 - Organisers are very welcome to change these discussion prompts if they think that they could choose better ones, or to focus the discussions on one prompt instead of having so many prompts in such a short period of time.
 - The participants could cycle between each other for these breakout room sessions, or they could have long calls with one other participant. I suspect it's best to cycle between the different participants, but you may want to explore other options.
 - I will bold the discussion prompts that seem most valuable, that you may want to emphasize
 - 1
 - i. **What's your definition of impartial positive impact? How confident are you in this definition?**
 - ii. What do you make of 80,000 hours' definition of impartial positive impact? *"Increasing wellbeing in the long term, and treating everyone's interests as equal, no matter their gender, background, where they live, or even when they live."*
 - iii. Apart from impact, what other things are you looking for in a career?
 - 2
 - i. **What does a fulfilling job look like to you?**
 - ii. What are your career goals?
 - iii. Do you believe that positive impact and personal satisfaction are mutually reinforcing goals?
 - iv. **What specific types of work have given you the most sense of [flow](#) in the past?**
 - 3
 - i. **If money were no object, what would you do?**
 - ii. What would your ideal 'ordinary Tuesday' look like, hour by hour?
 - iii. What kinds of things do you find *intrinsically* rewarding?
 - iv. **Imagine you're near the end of your life looking back. What would you feel was worthwhile?**
 - v. How willing are you to take risks with your career?
- 1:40-1:50 - Start to fill in Section 1 of the workbook

- Ask the participants to copy and paste the workbook from the article into their google drive accounts if they haven't already done this.
- Another useful tip is to change the colour of their "inputs" into this document to make it stand out more from the standard text, and potentially to make their inputs italic too. It also seems useful to change the numbers into actual google drive formatted numbers (ctrl+shift+7) instead of the weird formatting in the document.
- During this period, participants can switch off their camera and mic if they'd like some privacy while filling in their workbook, or the discussion can continue while they're filling in their workbooks.
- I tended to switch off my camera to reduce Zoom fatigue, but keep my headphones on such that if participants had questions I would hear them.
- 1:50-2:00 - Key takeaways
 - At the end of each session, I think it's valuable to ask participants to highlight their key takeaways from the discussion and reading for that week. This is to reinforce any insights they've had, systematise the vocalisations of these insights, and provide space for other participants to learn from these insights or provide feedback.
 - The trio of questions I quite like asking is:
 - i. What are your key takeaways from the reading and discussion this week?
 - ii. What would you like to learn more about before the next session, and how might you go about doing this?
 - iii. In what ways can we improve these sessions to be more helpful for your career planning?

Session 2: Cause Prio & Long-term Paths (Sections 2 and 3)

This is perhaps the hardest session, and may benefit from being broken into two separate sessions. I'm very uncertain about this - it would likely require turning the programme into a 5-week programme as all the weeks feel very busy. This may hinge largely on how experienced the participants are in cause prioritisation - if they're very new to this concept then more time will likely be required, and I would suggest splitting this session into two 2-hour sessions and spending longer on the discussion prompts or creating new ones, and giving more time for participants to fill in their workbooks.

Other resources could also be added if it was split up, such as more resources on how to do cause prioritisation, the INT framework, evaluating the 80,000 Hours priority paths, etc., as well as a deeper evaluation of the possible long-term paths available to participants, e.g. exploring a range of job boards (80,000 Hours, civil service, NGOs, etc.) to provide more perspective on the opportunities available. On this latter point, a degree of forecasting is also required to consider what the job landscape may look like in 10-30 years time, which could also be a focus of consideration.

If they've spent a lot of time doing cause prioritisation (I suspect a fairly small fraction of EAs in reality), then this session could perhaps remain as one 2-hour session. Below I will present the single 2-hour session we ran for sections 2 and 3, however, please feel free to adapt this to accommodate two 2-hour sessions if you decide to do this.

- 0:00-0:10 - Hellos, build rapport, introduce the session
- 0:10-0:25 - Cause prio discussion in breakout rooms
 - What is your moral framework, and what does it suggest you should do? **Who are the moral patients that deserve your attention, in terms of geography, time, and species?**

- Have you come across issues in your life that others might be missing but that seem like they might be important?
- 0:25-0:40 - Cause prio discussion in breakout rooms
 - **What global problems do you think are most pressing?**
 - **How would you start to rank these against each other? E.g. ITN framework, cost-effectiveness, etc.**
 - Who do you know who has an interesting perspective, or is doing unconventional work that might have an impact on these pressing problems?
- 0:40-0:55 - Fill in section 2 of the workbook
 - This is unlikely to be completed in 15 minutes, it's more likely to take around 30-40 minutes. An easy adaptation to this session is therefore to expand the above discussions, and allow more time to fill in the workbook.
 - You could also send some resources to participants to look through that help with cause prio, perhaps in the slack channel beforehand.
 - If you do opt for trying to do sections 2 and 3 in one session, I would suggest you emphasize that participants should complete the sections *before* the next session.
- 0:55-1:00 - 5-minute break
- 1:00-1:15 - Evaluate cause prio, explore uncertainties and start to consider roles
 - What is your ranked list? 2.1.3
 - [after ranking] what are your biggest uncertainties?
 - What could you learn that would most change your ranking?
 - What did you feel most uncertain about in making your ranking?
 - If you could get the answer to one question, which question would be most useful?
 - **What roles can you think of that tackle the most pressing problems?**
- 1:15-1:30 - comparative advantage discussion in breakout rooms
 - **What are your key strengths / your comparative advantage? How might you use these to solve pressing problems?** How could you develop a better model for figuring out what your key strengths are?
 - Does developing transferable career capital factor into your choices today? How could you do more of this for further personal development?
- 1:30-1:50 - Complete section 3 of the workbook
 - This is very hard and participants are unlikely to complete it in 20 minutes
- 1:50-2:00 - Key takeaways
 - Another option at the end of this session (especially if the session is extended so as to give more opportunity for exploration and completion of the workbook) would be to have a group brainstorming session for each individual, thinking about different long-term roles that address the most pressing problems they identified, according to their comparative advantage.
 - This could look something like bringing all the participants together, and going from one to another, asking them to describe their preliminary cause prio, comparative strengths, and list of long-term paths, and explore whether the group can come up with even more exciting and impactful long-term paths that fit the bill.
- Other potential discussion prompts
 - How much do ideas such as longtermism vs neartermism, impartial welfare, and diminishing marginal returns factor into your career planning?
 - What do you think about the concept of existential risk factors?
 - How high should you aim with your long-term career plans?
 - Do you agree that the average person's peak productivity occurs during the age range of 40-50?

- How do you feel about taking big risks in your career re impact, i.e. that you may have a 99/100 chance of having no impact but 1/100 chance of preventing a catastrophe?

Session 3: Strategic Focus, Best-guess Next Steps, & Adapt (Sections 4, 5 and 6)

This session acts like an opportunity to debug the participants' plans, as well as considering backup plans if "plan A" doesn't work out.

At the end of this session, participants are expected to have completed sections 4, 5 and 6 of their workbook, and to then send their workbooks to friends, peers, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, etc., who can provide feedback and make suggestions on their career plan. Receiving this feedback from people who really know the participants seems incredibly valuable, so really lean into the importance of this step at the end of the session, as well as ensuring that the workbooks are tidied up, checked over and presentable before sending them out to people.

Session 4 could occur 2 weeks after this session instead of the next week, in order to allow plenty of time for participants to finish off their workbooks if they haven't yet done so, to send it to peers etc., and to receive feedback *before* the final session.

- 0:00-0:10 - hellos
- 0:10-0:20 - Discuss strategic focus in breakout rooms
 - What are the benefits of the different strategic focuses? Which one seems most appropriate to your situation? Why?
 - Betting on one of your longer-term paths (with a backup plan)
 - Exploring
 - Career capital opportunism
 - Impact opportunism
- 0:20-0:25 - workbook section 4
- 0:25-0:40 - Discuss best-guess next career step - thinking backwards
 - What was your shortlist of longer-term paths you wrote down in section 3?
 - **Which next steps would most accelerate towards them?**
 - What career capital would most help you advance in your top longer-term paths?
- 0:40-0:55 - Discuss best-guess next career step - thinking backwards
 - **What tests could you do that might let you eliminate each of your longer-term path ideas as a promising option?**
 - Can you think of any shortcuts towards your long-term path? Are these better than developing more generic career capital, e.g. consulting?
- 0:55-1:00 - break
- 1:00-1:15 - Discuss best-guess next career step - thinking forwards
 - **What problems or options are you feeling excited about right now? What next steps might they suggest?**
 - How could you use the career capital you currently have to most help to contribute to a pressing problem in the next few years? [impact opportunism]
 - Is there anything that you could do that you think you seem usually good at? Optimising for fit
- 1:15-1:35 - workbook section 5
- 1:35-1:45 - Discuss plan b and z
 - May be useful to send the participants these definitions first

- Plan A — This is your best-guess next career step and the longer-term paths from your shortlist that it could help you work toward. For instance, it could be to do an economics PhD with the aim of becoming a researcher in economic history, an advisor on macro-economic policy, or working for a nonprofit.
 - Plan B — These are promising alternatives to your Plan A that you can switch into if Plan A doesn't work out. For instance, if you don't get into a good PhD programme after a masters, you could plan to apply to roles in policy.
 - Plan Z options — What you'll do if everything goes wrong — e.g. move back in with your parents, live on your savings, go back to your old job.
- Plan B prompts
 - What are your backup plans, if your best long-term options don't pan out?
 - What's the most likely reason your plan A wouldn't work out?
 - Are there good nearby alternative or exit options for our plan A?
- Plan Z prompts
 - If you pursue your plan A, what's the worst realistic scenario that could pan out? How would this come about? How can you reduce the chances of this happening?
 - What can you do to cope if this or something similar does materialise? This could be your "plan Z"
- 1:45-1:55 - workbook section 6
- 1:55-2:00 - finishing up
 - If you have more time, you could have a quick discussion on key takeaways, or a group discussion reflecting upon the content of the week
 - Remember to emphasize to the participants the value of getting feedback from peers etc., so to aim to finish their workbooks ASAP and send their completed workbooks for feedback within the next few days. Their career plan doesn't need to be perfect, and it may well totally change after they get feedback (mine did!). Perfect is the enemy of the good!
 - Could be good to have a week off after this session so that participants can finish the workbook off and gather feedback

Session 4: Feedback, Uncertainties, Judgement Call, & Action (Sections 7 and 8)

This session tries to wrap up all content from previous discussions, explore any remaining uncertainties or confusions that participants have, evaluate the feedback they've received thus far from their peers etc., and then develop some concrete small next actions.

- 0:00-0:05 - Hellos
- 0:05-0:10 - workbook Section 7.1.1
 - Compile the uncertainties listed here: 2.2, 3.3, 5.2.3, 6.3 all in 7.1.1 - **tell 80k to include this in the form**
- 0:10-0:25 - breakout room discussion on potential failure modes
 - **Why are you most likely to be wrong about your plan?**
 - To make this more vivid, imagine that your plan has failed — what went wrong? (Do a 'premortem' on it.) These 'negative' frames are some of the most useful ways to reduce any overconfidence bias and spot problems with your plans.
 - What would a kind, wise friend advise you to do?
 - It's often easier to see the mistakes that other people are making because you have more distance from the situation. This prompt tries to help you gain this distance about yourself.

- 0:25-0:40 - breakout room discussion on how you feel about your plan from different perspectives
 - Change the time frame with [10/10/10](#).
 - Imagine you've already made the decision (on what your next steps will be). How do you feel 10 minutes later? How do you feel about it in 10 months' time? **Imagine it's 10 years in the future. How do you feel about it looking back?**
 - How do you feel about your plan in general?
 - What's some of the most insightful feedback you've received thus far? Has this changed your plan at all, and if so, why?
- 0:40-0:55 - Workbook time
 - Adjust uncertainties in 7.1.1, if participants have had any more reflections
 - 7.2 Rank uncertainties according to:
 - How easy the uncertainties seem to be to resolve
 - How much difference resolving them would make to your career plan
- 0:55-1:00 - Break
- 1:00-1:10 - Discuss investigating uncertainties
 - Use the ladder approach, utilising low-cost options first before embarking upon big projects
- 1:10-1:30 - Workbook time
 - Investigate uncertainties 7.3
 - Write out your best guess 7.4
- 1:30-1:45 - Discuss concrete small next steps
 - What can you do in the next month to make progress on your career goals?
- 1:45-1:50 - Write these down in 8.1
- 1:50-2:00 - Organise follow up call as review point, send out post-programme evaluation form, thanks for being awesome!

5-week Programme

Session 1, 3 and 4 are the same in this programme, but session 2 is split up into two different sessions. Therefore, session 3 and 4 become session 4 and 5. This is to give more time to considerations of cause prio, and to explore and brainstorm more ideas for long-term options and paths. This version is best suited to groups who've spent less time working on their cause prioritisation, or are more uncertain about their futures.

Session 2: Cause Prio

- 0:00-0:10 - Hellos, build rapport, introduce the session
- 0:10-0:25 - Cause prio discussion in breakout rooms or big group discussion (quickly anonymous poll the participants to determine which they prefer)
 - What is your moral framework, and what does it suggest you should do? **Who are the moral patients that deserve your attention, in terms of geography, time, and species?**
 - How much do ideas such as longtermism vs neartermism, impartial welfare, and diminishing marginal returns factor into your career planning?
- 0:25-0:40 - Cause prio discussion in breakout rooms
 - **What global problems do you think are most pressing?** List as many as you can think of.
- 0:40-0:55 - Cause prio discussion in breakout rooms
 - **How would you start to rank these against each other? E.g. ITN framework, cost-effectiveness, etc.**
- 0:55-1:00 - Break
- 1:00-1:15 - Breakout room discussion

- Have you come across issues in your life that others might be missing but that seem like they might be important?
- Who do you know who has an interesting perspective, or is doing unconventional work that might have an impact on these pressing problems?
- How might you reach out to people you know who are doing really interesting impactful work, such that you can learn from their experiences and knowledge?
- 1:15-1:40 - Aim to complete section 2 of the workbook
 - If participants can't finish the section within this time frame, ask them to ensure they complete it before the beginning of the next session
- 1:40-2:00 - Group discussion on cause prio and uncertainties
 - What are the main causes you've highlighted?
 - What are your biggest uncertainties?
 - What could you learn that would most change your ranking?
 - What did you feel most uncertain about in making your ranking?
 - If you could get the answer to one question, which question would be most useful?
- Homework for next week
 - Look through as many job boards as you can for inspiration
 - Read through section 3 of the 80k article

Session 3: Long-term Paths

- 0:00-0:10 - Hellos, build rapport, introduce the session
 - Motivate the session: most people's impact seems to occur in their 40s-50s, so being in a strong position at this stage in life can have a large contribution to our ability to have a large impact. Hence the focus on *long-term paths*, one perspective is we could try to optimise our careers for this period of relatively high-impact
- 0:10-0:25 - Breakout room discussion
 - How can we improve our understanding of the different types of long-term roles that exist that may be impactful?
 - Eg job boards (80k, uk civil service, , attending conferences or webinars and networking, stalking companies on LinkedIn, doing internships, finding mentors, cold emails with specific questions relevant to their work, more generic questions may be OK for more junior roles, ask the junior people how to reach out to more senior people eg "is there anyone in this field you think I should reach out to?", work on an independent project and seek out advice from people in relevant industries
 - *Could quickly ask participants to summarise their thoughts after this discussion to share their ideas and inspire more research on this question*
- 0:25-0:40 - Breakout room discussion
 - **What roles can you think of presently, that tackle the most pressing problems?**
 - How might these roles change over the next few decades?
- 0:40-0:55 - Comparative advantage discussion in breakout rooms
 - **What are your key strengths / your comparative advantage? How might you use these to solve pressing problems?** How could you develop a better model for figuring out what your key strengths are?
 - Does developing transferable career capital or broad skills factor into your choices today? How could you do more of this for further personal development?
- 0:55-1:00 - Break
- 1:00-1:30 - Group brainstorming

- Based on everyone's preliminary cause prio, their comparative strengths and interests, **what additional long-term paths can we collectively brainstorm for each participant?** Aim to come up with as many different ideas as possible - be as creative as you can, and be ambitious with the suggestions, considering best-case scenarios.
- Spend ~7 minutes on each person, or if this is particularly useful, extend it further.
- 1:30-1:50 - Complete section 3 of the workbook
- 1:50-2:00 - Group discussion on key takeaways from this session
 - What's something that you want to research further or better understand after this session?
 - What's something that you've learnt or considered in this session that you are keen to dig deeper into?

Other ideas

There are many ways this programme could be adapted, such as the aforementioned expanding of session 2 into two sessions. Here are some bullet points on other things you could explore while running your own version of this.

- A month after the last session, get back together for 1 hour to check in, evaluate progress on next steps, each participant presents their career plan in-depth, and other participants get a chance to debug and suggest other ideas
- 3 month check in to see how we're all doing
- 12 month check in to evaluate progress on macro career planning and progress
- Sessions could just be one big discussion, or one long 1-1 with another participant instead of the cycling. Participants in the first cohort preferred the cycling, this likely (as everything in this programme) requires more trial and error