

# Guide to Tabling<sup>1</sup>

## Should you table?

Probably. The main goal of tabling is to get many people to stop, hear your pitch, and most importantly:

- 1) Give you their emails/contact info so you can follow up with them if you'd like.
- 2) Get them to add an event calendar with all your upcoming events and socials, program info sessions + deadlines, etc - and run a lot of high-quality events to get people excited about your group.

You can also get Intro Program signups or even new organizers. Things that make tabling good include:

- Large population that you can easily attract (through e.g. eye-catching posters and flyers, free food, free books, and a crowd which generates intrigue).
- Good location to table (high traffic, ideally from first year students/people who are likely to be interested + impactful - e.g. engineering/CS/mathy part of campus for AI safety people, near dorms/student centre for undergrads, etc)
- Hard to get emails/contact info otherwise

UPenn was great on all of these accounts, having 10k students and a single central walkway that everyone passes through. But tabling could be good even in slightly non-ideal conditions.

## Benefits

- 20-25 signups per hour
  - About 3x worse than a club fair but still really good
  - Multiple people express interest in 1-on-1 or organizing
  - People hear about your events
  - Returns don't diminish much for at least the first 40 hours or so-you can easily get more than 3% of your undergrad population on your mailing list
- You sometimes find people who have heard of EA and didn't know your club existed
  - Or you get referred to such people or profs because someone walks up to the booth and says "my friend always talks about this" or "I heard about this in X class"
- Spreads general awareness of EA on campus in a way that seems positive and makes people more receptive to it (as long as you table in a polite way)
  - We've had people walk by the table multiple times until, their curiosity is finally piqued and then they check it out

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<sup>1</sup> Tabling is standing in a high-traffic area of a university (say, a central walkway) with a table, signs, free desserts, etc. to advertise your EA group.

# Supplies

- [REQUIRED] **High-quality desserts.** Oreos don't work. [Insomnia Cookies](#) work shockingly well and are what I'd recommend. Mini donuts also work well. You want something that's in a container where people can easily take them and see them as they're passing by. Bubble tea might be more popular than cookies, try different things and see what works best. Free books have been a huge draw at MIT both for the clubs fair and for general tabling, and free swag (like good-looking high quality shirts and laptop stickers (and maybe water bottles?)) can also be a big draw, and be great for advertising.
- [REQUIRED] At least one way for people to sign up for your mailing list and indicate interest in getting involved. This ideally includes at least two of the following, in order of best to worst:
  - A laptop with a form that collects emails and asks if they want a 1-on-1 or to organize for the group
  - A clipboard where people can write their email address
  - Flyers and/or a big poster with
    - A QR code
    - A short and easy-to-type URL
- [Highly Recommended] An enthusiastic and charismatic student from the university you're tabling at, who can wave to people they know. This can also make long-ish conversations happen at your booth, which makes more people interested. **When Brandon Saylor was tabling at Penn, we more than doubled our number of signups per hour.**
  - Read Brandon's advice [here](#).
- [Highly Recommended] Books to give out.
  - Doing Good Better
  - The Precipice
  - Scout Mindset
  - The Alignment Problem
  - Human Compatible
  - The 80,000 Hours Book (if just to talk about 80K and get people to check out their website which is better than their book)
- [Recommended] Visible diversity in the people tabling. If e.g. you have two men tabling the proportion of women that stop decreases noticeably and vice versa.
- [Recommended] A lightweight table
- [Recommended] A large sign with a lightweight stand (something like [this](#))
- [Recommended] Flyers to hand out with info about an upcoming event
- [Recommended] A nice tablecloth, possibly branded
- [Recommended] A cart to carry the equipment
- [Recommended] A tent
- [Recommended] String to tie stuff down if it's windy
- [Recommended] Chairs. Or you can borrow an existing bench. Though it's better to stand in front of the table and be proactive, and chairs discourage this

- [Recommended] Water

## Sample Script

*Wait for them to look at cookie/sign/you. Don't talk to them if they seem in a rush / on the phone / listening to music.*

Cookie?

We're <school> Effective Altruism, a club that gives students to the frameworks and resources they need to tackle the world's most pressing problems.

If you want to hear about our events or apply for our fellowship program, you can fill out this form here.

(As they fill out the form)

We think some of the biggest issues in the world, like extreme climate change, the next pandemic, or global poverty are bottlenecked on bright enterprising people like you being willing to tackle them with your career.

The fellowship is an eight-week long program where you spend about three hours a week learning about the philosophy behind effective altruism, diving into various cause areas, and figuring out what you can do to help. It's the best way to get started with our club.

We have meetings every Wednesday from 6-7 pm. We've got free dinner, great community, and various speakers or workshops or discussions.

*Michael's alternative pitch - more social justice-y, and not very refined:*

Have you heard of effective altruism before?

[if they say yes] What have you heard about it?

So, effective altruism is about trying to figure out how to do the most good with our lives.

That's a really broad premise, but the motivation is that we are in a position of incredible privilege being here, and have the opportunity to have a big impact on the world. But—especially at Stanford—it's unfortunately easy to follow the path of least resistance, and end up doing something performative—or might even actually be helping people, but not as much as another path would have.

So what effective altruism tries to do is use evidence, research, and careful reasoning to answer the question of what the most pressing problems are: what affects the most people, most severely? what's neglected, that others aren't already working on? what can we actually solve? And then puts that knowledge into practice, by orienting our lives and careers towards the best ways to work on those problems.

[continue into stuff about what the club does]

### **If they ask...**

*What problems do you focus on?*

We're cause-neutral, which means we aren't married to a specific cause area. We care about people, not causes, which means we've changed what causes we focus on when evidence shows us another cause area may be even more pressing.

We also recognize that what cause area you find most impactful will depend on your own values and ethics.

That said, I can list a few cause areas we think are pretty impactful right now (and what ethical principles might help you decide between them).

If you're willing to care about people in other countries as much as people in the US, then global health and development is a great option.

If you value the well-being of animals, animal welfare and alternative proteins might be even more impactful.

If you think extinction is much much worse than a mere catastrophe because extinction would quash countless future generations, then preventing existential risks might be even more impactful still. This can look like mitigating risks from extreme climate change, or preparing for the next pandemic, or researching ways emerging technologies could be dangerous.

There are a lot of other important cause areas to consider, and a lot of details I'm glossing over right now. If you want to learn more about this, feel free to sign up for a 1-on-1 or apply for our fellowship program!

*But how do you make an impact? Do you like volunteer? Or consult with nonprofits?*

We think the most impactful thing people do is their career. Our main focus is on helping people find a high impact way to spend the rest of their lives, not on smaller opportunities like volunteering. We also think that taking the time to learn the basics of cause prioritization can

greatly increase your impact and it's important to do this before starting on direct work. That said, we're really excited about our members working on big impactful projects and directly attacking top cause areas after they've learned some of the basics, and we have plenty of resources to support them in this. We can also connect members to opportunities like the Stanford Existential Risks Initiative where they can do high-impact research.

*What exactly is the fellowship / can you say more about the fellowship?*

You'd be matched with a small group with a mentor which meets weekly to casually discuss some of the most useful ideas from effective altruism: what tools we might use to prioritize between different problems, philosophical and ethical issues that come up when we do that, diving into a few problems that seem unusually pressing from a global perspective, orienting your career towards maximizing impact, and—importantly—criticisms of effective altruism. It has 1-2 hours of readings and videos before each week's discussion.

## Tips

- Get students' emails as soon as possible.
- Once one or two people are at the table, more people tend to flock to it because it looks interesting. So once one person stops, try to engage them for a bit in conversation even if the conversation you're having with them doesn't seem super valuable.
- Having two people tabling is good because often you want to have an in-depth conversation with one person and not let other people pass by. It also makes things more fun and makes carrying equipment easier.
- Learn the names of people in your classes (or find a popular friend who is good with names). You can recognise a lot of the people who pass you by.
- Be wary of class times.
  - Certain times may be much more busy than others. **Try to look at your signup data to find the best time slot table.**
  - People may be in a rush to get to class
- Try different locations
  - This tells you which places are best and might let you reach different students

## Addendum 1: Pitch advice by Brandon

- Hey! I'm Brandon Saylor. I'm a Sophomore at Penn and one of the organizers of Penn EA, and I think in my short time here, I've gotten to know a decent amount of people on campus through different groups. I also just am really good at remembering names and faces and things about people, which is a skill I've trained myself on.
- My main strategy with tabling was to

- Sit down and look for people Locust (Locust Walk, the main path that cuts through Penn's campus) that seemed to look at the table, or the cookies.
- I would then say "hey, are you interested in a free cookie?"
- They would then 75% of the time say, yes!
- And then I would say "alright well before you take a cookie you're going to have to listen to my little spiel and sign up for my list serve, is that alright?" and I would usually like smile or laugh
- Person 90% of the time says yes (if they don't, its because they have to run off somewhere in a timely manner)
- Then I followed it up with my pitch, which I will mention down below in the pitch section.
- It helped to wave to somebody I knew on campus and call them by name, because then we would have a more engaging conversation than average, which would attract more people to come to the table. Sometimes we had as many as 8-9 people at the table listening into the things we were talking about.
- Key with the pitch: it MUST be fast! People don't want to listen to you for more than 60-90 seconds. Maybe 90 is too much. People are busy, walking to class, going to meet a friend, walking about. They do not have time to talk to you longer than that. You need to speak fast, intelligently, and EXTREMELY friendly. You also should probably sound casually passionate. Not weirdly passionate. (Ex. less "I think that AI is going to kill everybody" more "I want to create positive social impact and change lives more than anything else"). If people want to then continue this conversation, by all means do so, but maybe put it off for another time. Your time should be spent engaging with new people more than anything else. Ask them for their phone number and if they would be willing to meet sometime this week to just talk more. People love to grab coffee and talk about crazy things! Do NOT frame it as "do you wanna have a coffee chat?" or "do you wanna have a one-on-one?". I get that this makes sense in the EA community, but people casually on campus looking at clubs don't want to think about it this way. They're already stressing about their finance club coffee chat that they feel they have to come extremely prepared to. Keep things very casual. Seem like a cool person who does normal things, and I think you'll have a lot of success.