A proposal for EA's social infrastructure

With the mix of this year's much bigger EA gathering + Peter Singer and Will MacAskill's new books on EA, EAO should anticipate a potentially large growth spurt of the movement this summer. And with this growth spurt, we should also anticipate a potentially large bottleneck in outreach and community-building functions, like:

1. Recruiting and integrating VIPs
2. Recruiting and integrating new talent
3. Growing sustained relationships between self-identified EAs, such that they can support one another's efforts

Without preempting this bottleneck, we run the risk of (a) many new EAs falling through the cracks, and (b) EAO team burnout. (I'm already approaching burnout when in comes to doing functions 1-3 above. My past two weeks were spent almost solely doing follow-ups and helping foster connections between aligned people.)

We need to build a better distributed social infrastructure to ensure sustainable movement growth. Ideally, this social infrastructure would have tiers to funnel deeper sustained engagement in the community. Below is one way these tiers might be structured, along with specific programs for how people within these tiers might get involved.

Tiers of EA

1. **Haven't heard of EA**
   a. *Popular media* - Will and Peter's books, blogs, videos, TEDx talks, etc.
   b. *Large events* - EA Global, the Solstice, bimonthly speaker events
   c. *Ambassadors* - People who will attend/give talks at meetings of marketable groups, like [DataKind](#)

2. **Promising people with some familiarity or loose commitment with EA**
   a. *Informal gatherings, e.g. dinners* - these are low-cost and curated
   b. *Match-making* - Matching people who have come into contact with EA based on the data they've given us (e.g. based on skills, resources, needs, etc). Note: this should also happen at all further tiers

3. **Somewhat dedicated EAs**
   a. *80K coaching*
   b. *Active donating to vetted charities (GWWC, TLYCS, GiveWell)*
   c. *EA chapters*
   d. *CFAR workshops*

4. **Very committed EAs**
   a. *Rising Heroes mentoring*
   b. *Earn-to-give and donating to meta-charities*
   c. *Posting on the EA forums*

5. **Core EAs (people with considerable influence within the movement)**
   a. *Running chapters/meetups*
   b. *Working at an EA org*
   c. *In a Rising Heroes Team*
   d. *In an EA Ventures Team*
   e. *Attending the EA Retreat*

6. **EA Leaders (people running orgs or major initiatives; thought leaders)**

Right now, there is attention being paid to every tier above *except Tier 2*. In my opinion, Tier 2 is the most important tier for early movement growth.

Simulations of the evolution of a complex, dynamic system - like a movement - demonstrate high dependence upon initial conditions. To avoid movement dilution and talent falling through the cracks when we hit discontinuous upward growth, we must protect and create systems to nurture at least three characteristics of EA:
- *Strong epistemology* - ensures the movement continues to have the right priorities
- *Effectiveness* - EA is largely successful thanks to success in recruiting Pareto-efficient members, who are well-equipped with skills and/or financial capital
- *Altruism* - much of the trust essential for collaborations inside EA seems dependent upon knowing that others are value-aligned and do not treat personal gain as an end

Tier 2 acts as an essential initial way to filter new potential EAs for the three characteristics above and give them personal connections to the EA network. However, Tier 2 currently only happens organically and sporadically. This is fine for a small movement. But not for one poised to grow exponentially. So, below, I outline two new programs that could help with recruitment, integration, and retention of Tier 2 candidates.

Tier 2 project one: A global network of dinners

<mark>Update: This plan is in motion - [see this doc](#).</mark>

Based on some of the research I did for [Reducetarian](#) message-framing, it seems like the best predictor of whether someone becomes a vegetarian is whether their friends also engage in vegetarianism (this accounts for more of the variance than self-reported interest in animal welfare or health benefits). The same was true of the civil right movement: the best predictor of whether students went down South to sign African Americans up to vote was whether they were part of a group that participated in this very activity.

EA is currently weak in the department of collective gatherings to act as a social reinforcer. When I get someone excited about EA, one of their questions is often, "When is the next meeting?" A question to which there often is no answer!

Supporting regular gatherings would:
- Help spread EA memes to new recruits through interaction with EAs.
- Aid with asset-mapping within the EA community (i.e., matching resources to needs)
- Strengthen the relationships amongst existing EAs
- Recruit new EAs and value-aligned VIPs (to be invited as dinner guests)
- Encourage new EA community leaders to emerge

Proposal #1: a global network of dinners.

Why dinners?
Cost-effectiveness and scalability. Dinner are much more cost-effective and scalable than other means toward accomplishing similar goals (e.g., a speaker series), since one does not need to book a venue (an apartment or restaurant suffices) or run heavy operations. Rather, you simply need to give EA community leaders enough money to purchase food and drinks.

Sustained relationships. The informal nature of an intimate dinner is better for facilitating sustainable relationships than similarly-aimed networking events (which tend to involve people trading in monologues about their CVs rather than the type of conversations that create interpersonal bonds). Meanwhile, they allow for more structure and often deeper conversations than a party.

Curation. Dinners are more conducive to curation of high-caliber individuals than larger events, which tend to scare VIPs away. In my past lives in the art and science worlds, I noticed that attendance to such dinners included a much higher bar of folks. The cognitive science mafia dinner looked like David Eagleman and Gary Marcus on Gerry Ohrstrom's roof (incidentally, this was when I first encountered Riva). The art mafia dinner looked like Harvard professors and wealthy collectors at Knight Landesman's apartment. I've started to curate the philanthropy mafia here in the Bay with a first gathering that put EAs like Holden together with the leads of Google.org, OS Fund, and other major philanthropists. Friends of mine like Riva and Evan Steiner have similarly and successfully used the dinner model to recruit and build relationships with VIPs.

Tier 2 project two: Asset-mapping

Update: this is now happening. People can fill out profiles at www.effectivealtruism.org/join. Here is a map of where all the data goes.

There needs to be a better system for harnessing the skills and resources (assets) latent in the community, especially as it grows. A possible system for asset-mapping:

Data Collection
Could be a simple "create a profile" form that asks each individual for data like:
- Name
- Email
- LinkedIn profile
- Skills

- City, State, and Country of residence
- Optional for those who want to add more detail (note: whether someone optionally chooses to fill in more info about themselves is an interest bit of data in itself)
    - EA self-identification
    - Needs (How can the community help you?)
    - Gives (Other than the skills above, what can you bring to the community?)
    - EA sub-communities of interest
    - Profile picture upload

Data capture could happen on EA.org, before EA dinners, from registration for EA Global, from applying to EAV, from student applying to EA Fellows. It can then be automatically added to CEA's CRM. Here's a typeform I made for data collection. It can be embedded on and rebranded for any EA website. I've started chatting with Tom Ash about getting the data to be automatically uploaded to the EA hub site.

Filter

We can ask volunteers or Mechanical Turkers/virtual assistants (if we take privacy measures) to go through the Google Sheet of collected profiles and rank them for perceived effectiveness based on LinkedIn profile.

More dedicated people with greater knowledge of the community should go through the Google Sheet and rank every profile for which of the commitment tiers above the profile likely falls under.

Engage

The most potentially effective and dedicated people should receive generally more attention, including:
- Invites to local dinners
- Priority invites to EA Global
- An email asking them to update their profile info every six months
- Active match-making services (matching EAs to others they might collaborate with)
- Recruitment by EA orgs
- 80K coaching

Local organizers should also receive an email whenever someone in their area fills out a profile.

Use cases
- Talent sourcing
    - Ben Todd wants to find a new head of research for 80K. He sorts the database by selecting skill tags, "research" "management" and effectiveness rating to find suitable candidates.
    - We want to send someone to a minor speaking engagement at SOCAP. Ideally that someone will convince others to become EAs while there. We sort the database by "public speaking" and "networking" or "persuasion."

- ○ We need entrepreneurs for a themed track at EA Global. We sort the list by "entrepreneur."
- General social infrastructure
  - ○ Jonathan Courtney wants to do targeted outreach for new, dedicated GWWC members. He sorts the sheet by the tags "global poverty" and "effective giving" or "earn-to-give."
  - ○ A new EA wants to throw a meetup in NYC but doesn't know any other EAs there. We sort the database by which EAs live in NYC.
  - ○ In three years, we're trying to figure out whether there's enough of a critical mass of EAs in Kazakhstan and Swaziland. We use a function to count how many EA profiles have come from these countries.
  - ○ Niel Bowerman throws a dinner and is figuring out the seating arrangement. Based on "needs" and "gives" info, he seats people who have a certain need next to someone with a corresponding give.
  - ○ Max Tegmark wants to find self-identified EAs with public policy and persuasion skills who live in DC and are interested in AI risk for a lobbying brainstorming session. He sorts by tags "Self-identified EA" "public policy" "persuasion" "DC" "interest in AI risk."

etc. I think it could actually be fairly powerful, as we could have the form getting data capture on EA.org, before EA dinners, from registration for EA Global, from applying to EAV, from student applying to EA Fellows, etc.