

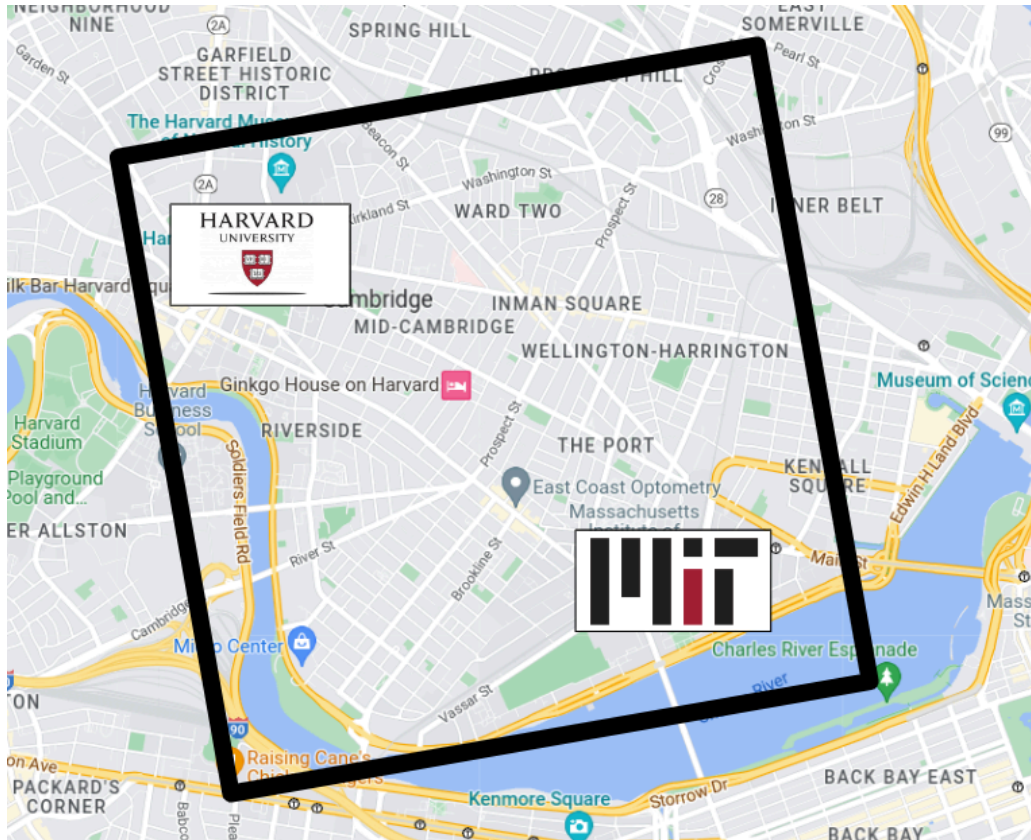
# The Impact of EA Community Building in Cambridge MA

*This doc was largely written in July 2022 and may be outdated.*

## Summary

- Harvard and MIT are concentrated pools of exceptional talent that are not yet being tapped with the same infrastructure that exists in other universities (e.g. Oxford)
- For professionals and recent graduates with community building experience (and especially technical skill), joining Cambridge MA community building efforts is plausibly one of your top options in terms of counterfactual impact over the next two years
  - The most promising candidates will do work (or work of a certain quality) that would not happen otherwise, so if you are skilled at a combination of EA CB, project management, and general competence, you either wouldn't be replaced or your replacement might do substantially worse
- If you are interested in joining community building efforts, shoot me an email at [giljuand@gmail.com](mailto:giljuand@gmail.com) and we'll chat about it! You can also see the (rough) job descriptions [here](#) [EDIT: no longer actively looking for hires].

## The landscape



**Claim:** There is no 2mi x 2mi region in the world that is more important than this one for recruiting young people to work on the world's most pressing problems.

Why do I believe this? Let's get some more information about the institutions in this square:

- **MIT and Harvard have been in the top 2-5** of [multiple global university rankings](#) (which measures many things, some of which are relevant for us and some of which are not) for many years in a row. Cambridge MA is the only place in the world with two top-five universities in one place.
- **~8% of all billionaires went to Harvard or MIT at some point** (according to [2018 census](#) of billionaires)

# ALMA MATERS

RANK	UNIVERSITY	NUMBER OF BILLIONAIRES 2017
1	Harvard University	188
2	Stanford University	74
3	University of Pennsylvania	64
4	Columbia University	53
5	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	38
6	Cornell University	35
7	Yale University	31
8	University of Southern California	29
8	University of Chicago	29
10	University of Michigan	26

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- (Juan's estimate) Something like **1-5 future billionaires attend Harvard/MIT per year**, on average
- Most of the funding in the EA community comes from Dustin Moskowitz, a billionaire who went to Harvard.
- Harvard has ~80 Nobel Prize winning graduates, MIT has ~30, for an average of **~1 future Nobel Prize winner per year** (Juan's estimate).
- MIT has a concentration of the world's best technical talent.
  - **I've heard that most people who are gold medalists at IMO go to MIT**, or at least that MIT is the plurality (see [here](#))
  - I did a random sampling of 10 IMO gold medalists from 2018 and 4 of them went to MIT
- The following people in the EA space went to Harvard:
  - Dustin Moskowitz (billionaire funder)
  - Bill Gates (billionaire funder)
  - Holden Karnofsky (Open Phil CEO)

- Prominent policy makers in AI and biosecurity
- The following people in the EA space went to MIT:
  - Paul Christiano (top AI safety researcher)
  - Nate Thomas (Founder/CEO of Redwood Research)
  - Staff at Redwood Research, Open Phil, 80K Hours, GiveWell

## Routes to impact for EA community building

We can see that MIT and Harvard have student populations with huge potential. How are EA community builders planning to leverage this into good outcomes for the world?

Primarily, by addressing the bottlenecks identified by grantmakers in the space. Excerpt from an Open Phil grantmaker:

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Many of the promising opportunities in AI safety, AI / bio policy, and biosecurity [are] bottlenecked on finding really good people.

- AI safety: on [extremely talented researchers and research engineers](#)
- AI / bio policy: on [finding people who are good fits for policy roles](#)
- Biosecurity: broadly on people with entrepreneurial and operational talent who can get things done

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Given that, we can do the following in Cambridge MA:

- **Persuade top technical talent to work on cutting edge AI alignment research**
  - I've heard it said from other EAs that "creating another Paul Christiano" would be worth dozens of additional "merely average" AI safety researchers. If we want to get another top AI alignment researcher, you need to recruit from the pools of the most talented minds, many of whom are at MIT and Harvard.
  - This will require making a compelling case that such work is challenging/interesting, socially rewarding (via e.g. prestige), and well funded. EA community builders can help here by identifying talented students and facilitating conversations between them and other top researchers.
  - Talk to Juan for a more comprehensive set of initiatives planned here.
- **Create future entrepreneurs or project managers to start impactful EA/longtermist initiatives**
  - We want to grow the set of people who are capable of identifying neglected opportunities to do lots of good, which means cultivating the "cause prioritization" and "theory of change" mindsets in some entrepreneurial students (instead of e.g. telling them to just go work on some already identified opportunity)
  - Entrepreneurs within specific cause areas are also needed, e.g. people to organize shovel-ready biosecurity initiatives.
- Just get more MIT/Harvard students to join the EA-interested talent pool

- Even an average MIT/Harvard software engineering alum has skills that would be valuable for an increasing number of EA orgs. The same is true of physical engineers, consultants, biologists, data scientists, writers, etc.

Some other sources of impact will likely be:

- Influencing elite institutions to care more about certain problems
  - Working with faculty or administration to create an “Existential Risk Initiative” or AI alignment research group at Harvard or MIT would give more mainstream credibility to these ideas and lead to object-level work done by nonEAs as well.
- Supporting the growth of a biosecurity hub
  - Boston will probably be the top biosecurity in the world due to the biotech industry and especially the new EA-aligned biosecurity groups like Sculpting Evolution at MIT and Alvea
- Get basic ideas about cause prioritization, x-risk, and longtermism “in the water” in elite circles
  - Even if most people at Harvard and MIT don’t “become EAs”, getting most of them to read *The Precipice* seems quite good. There are other broad outreach mechanisms that seem like ways of slightly shifting values, priorities, considerations of the future elite

## The impact of you joining

As much as the EA community has been growing in recent months, the number of people who have the relevant skills (e.g. project management, operations, skill talking with talented students) and are willing to move to Boston soon (i.e. in the next two months) is small. I am having difficulty sourcing new hires. If you have the right skills and experience, AND can help with Boston community building sometime soon, then you would provide enormous value.

If you, the reader, have the right skills and experience, and choose not to join, then I think the spot you leave open would be filled with someone comparable in the next 6-12 months. **My very rough guess is that filling that spot 6-12 months sooner would lead to something like 2-8 students from Harvard/MIT who counterfactually become Highly Engaged EAs.** I also think the distribution of outcomes is heavy-tailed (i.e. I put substantial probability on the number of EAs created being higher).

The full-time Boston EA community building team is also small enough that early hires will play a large role in the future direction and management of the whole team, so **the effect of a better candidate joining sooner could actually persist for years**, in this extremely valuable community building environment.

## Other considerations

While I hope you are strongly weighing the impact of your different career options, there are many non-impact reasons to join the Boston EA community building team.



- I've personally really enjoyed living in Cambridge MA and Boston more generally. I highly recommend visiting (reach out and we'll coordinate!) if you want to get a feel.
- How does Cambridge compare to other EA hubs?
  - Pros:
    - pleasant dense neighborhoods with lots of great cafes and bars
    - immediate access to big-city amenities (e.g. Cambridge much closer to Boston than Berkeley to SF)
    - beautiful autumn
    - strong public transit
  - Cons:
    - cold winters
    - less urban amenities than NYC/SF
    - inferior options for hiking compared to SF
- Boston probably has the largest student EA population in the US, and the professional EA community will be rapidly growing due to two upcoming [office spaces](#) opening up (in the style of Constellation and Lightcone). If you enjoy having an EA social network, Boston is a great place to be.
- I will buy you vegan ice cream. :)

If, after reading this, you're interested in learning more or joining the community building team, please shoot an email to [giljuand@gmail.com](mailto:giljuand@gmail.com) and I'll follow up. You can also see the (rough) job descriptions [here](#).