

What's been similar and different between operations work and aid policy grantmaking:

Similarities

- Friendliness and trustworthiness,
 - Aid policy: Given how difficult it is to tease out causality of success when so many variables may influence a policy outcome, it's important to be trustworthy and approachable so that peer funders, advocates, and government officials feel comfortable sharing their candid thoughts. This helps you validate claims about different actors' track records and make more informed decisions.
 - Ops: Being easy to work with helps encourage colleagues to let you be a greater multiplier. It can give others at the org a lower bar for asking for help, and allow you to take on higher trust tasks to build valuable skillsets.
- Ruthless prioritization
 - Aid policy: Given the wide range of potential geographies and policy goals for Open Phil's team of two, we have far more opportunities to investigate than time to investigate them. We end up needing to resist the urge to stretch ourselves thin, and quickly prioritize based on timeliness and expected impact from additional investigation. Often this means doing enough diligence to be confident in decision-relevant parameters, but not having complete information on every aspect of a grant.
 - Ops: my sense is that Open Philanthropy has more ops capacity than most EA orgs, yet there were always more valuable projects than person-hours to cover them. Similarly to aid policy, we would try to rank tasks in order of expected impact, considering precedent/expectations, effects on culture, time savings, money savings, and time-sensitivity.
- There's no substitute for on-the-job learning
 - Aid policy: Though a degree in public policy or public administration may be a helpful way to build context on the history of foreign affairs and the state of aid today, starting this work without a related academic background didn't feel like a handicap. Most skills I use are tailored to how Open Phil models impact, and communication-related soft skills that are improved through experience.
 - Ops: For me, generalist ops is the epitome of a "learning by doing" job. The range of tasks is so wide, and the needs of each organization are so different, that the learning from my first month on the job may have been more valuable to my future job performance than the eight years I spent in high school and college.
- The importance of mission alignment for long term impact

- Aid Policy: As a field, aid policy has a plurality of goals. Yes, ~all advocates want more aid, but beyond that, different advocates prioritize a range of different aid programs and aid sectors. I imagine that if you aren't bought into your organization's goals for where governments should direct aid (e.g. if you value increasing learning-adjusted years of schooling, but your organization lobbies for more climate spending), you'll be unhappy and ineffective at work.
- Ops: I think that much of the value from operations work comes in redesigning systems and thinking of process improvements, which is usually not in the job description. My guess is that people who feel connected to the mission of their organization feel stronger motivation to think of and pursue high-level change.

Differences:

- In my experience, aid policy involved a higher amount of external communication than operations, often with later career people.
- Working in aid policy, I often feel like the limiting factor for being able to get things done is creative energy or focus. In my generalist operations role, it felt like the limiting factor was hours in the day.
- Emotionally, I feel the "hits" and "misses" of grant outcomes from Open Phil's aid policy grants more viscerally now than when I worked in operations.