Nominator: Open Philanthropy. Open Philanthropy's mission is to help others as much as they can with the resources available to them. So far, they have concentrated on selecting focus areas in two broad categories: Global Health and Wellbeing and Global Catastrophic Risks.

Curator: Paul Niehaus (with thanks to Heidi Williams)

Question: How would different decision making criteria (i.e. metrics on which proposals are scored) and aggregation methods (e.g. picking favorites vs consensus) at science funders change the kind of work that's done? How should we compare criteria, and which outcomes matter for such a comparison?

Current state of knowledge (as of 10/26/2023): Azoulay and Li discuss different funding models, though do not come to a conclusion on consensus vs. variance. A review of the literature suggests that peer review of applications can identify some of the most promising ideas, but the level of signal is fairly weak.

Decision relevance: Open Philanthropy believes scientific progress is important to growth and health advances. Therefore, they are interested in making sure scientific funding processes work as well as possible to maximize the amount of impact per federal research dollar. If there are improvements that can be made to how science is funded, Open Philanthropy might fund advocacy for such improvements. More generally, evidence on the costs and benefits of existing grant proposal review processes could lead directly to reforms to those processes.

Timeline: none.

Ideas & resources: One might look at past data of applications and see how the set of funded projects would have differed if you had used different selection criteria, such as max score or lottery (above a quality floor). Alternatively, you could randomize with a specific RFP, so that some subset of proposals are selected under different criteria or you randomize across RFPs, so that you can also see how various selection criteria affects the kinds of applications received. The Science for Progress Initiative at J-PAL and the Metascience Challenge at experiment.com are additional potential funders of research in this area.