

# EAGxBerkeley 2022: Retrospective

## Summary

We think EAGxBerkeley went really well - both from an attendee and organiser perspective. We think that there was plenty to improve on and lots of lessons to be learnt, but the conference was overall a success!

Some rough figures:

- Date: December 2nd-4th, 2022
- Location: Oakland Convention Centre, Oakland, CA
- We estimate that **~550-600** people attended
  - **600** people registered for the conference
  - **900** people applied for an acceptance rate of **67%**
- Feedback indicates:
  - A **8.5/10** likelihood to recommend score
  - An average of **8.1 new connections per person**
- **~ 50 speakers**
- **110 sessions of programming (talks, panels, speed friending, meetups, office hours, etc)**
- **31 Orgs represented at the Career fair**



*Our closing photo :)*

# Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Conference Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
Summary and Top Advice	3
Venue and Production	5
Food / Catering	6
Hotel	7
Content and Programme	8
Website and Marketing	9
Admissions / Registration	10
Communication	11
Speaker Communications	11
Attendee Communications	12
Inventory and Merchandise	13
Volunteering	13
Pre / Post Events	14
<b>The Feedback</b>	<b>15</b>
Summary	15
Demographics	16
Satisfaction	16
Suggestions and Areas for Improvement	17
Speaker Feedback	22
Volunteer Feedback	22
The Team	23
Hiring	23
Budget and Finance	24
<b>Organiser's Personal Thoughts</b>	<b>25</b>
Elika	25
Mat	25
Tzu	26
<b>Document and Resources</b>	<b>27</b>

# The Conference Overview

## Summary and Top Advice

Here's some facts about EAGxBerkeley to put it into context. We formed as a team in June 2022. We started planning the conference around then, finding the venue by the end of July. We decided on the date Dec 4th, 2022 (since that was the only weekend the conference venue had space in 2022). We then seriously started investing more time into organising by mid-August – starting with save the dates, putting together a potential speaker list and programme, and planning strategy (admissions, etc). We then moved to opening admissions (by mid-Oct), finalising speakers (done by mid-Oct), the event programme (done by end Oct / Nov 1st), finalising admissions (end-Nov), and then the additional steps of having a successful conference (career fair, hotel, pre/post events, attendee/speaker communication, volunteering, venue, catering, etc).

Our mindset going into this was to **do everything early. We took the standard EAGx timeline and hoped to get everything done earlier than on there, so that by the time the conference came around – we (the organisers) would have nothing to do.** I can't emphasise enough how important that was in saving our well-being and health in the final weeks leading up to the conference. **I will say that I think it requires someone driving deadlines and taking 'control' of the timeline and enforcing it for that to happen, which means that internal communication, team trust, and meeting deadlines are really important.**

Elika had stressed from the get go that taking care of things way ahead of time and this was very clearly the way to go. Being at the event was pleasantly boring and following Elika's advice made a lot of this happen. In particular, having everything done with time to spare before the conference started gave us a breath of fresh air before the event started, so that when it did come we had our wits about us and were able to handle things as they came up; not needing to worry about any other leftovers. There were no big fires because we had things in control sooner than later, and would rather have it that way than leaving it to chance going wrong.

Key advice for the start of the planning process:

- **Get an all in one Venue:** While interviewing past organisers, it became clear that finding a venue that hosted catering, A/V, and accommodations got rid of most of the workload that "venue" necessitated. This was not explicitly mentioned and the relief that I heard across the board from the past organisers pointed out that having the all in one solution got rid of most of the work, and also potential for miscommunications to happen.
- **Set team expectations, communication, and deadlines:** I think the biggest failure mode comes from the team working dynamics and expectations. It's often the case

that something will happen (someone being upset, etc) - so it's not a big deal, but having clear expectations and communication and a shared understanding can help minimise conflict. We suggest everyone write and share a 'how to work with me' document to understand everyone's communication styles, everyone write down their expectations and needs (ex. how many hours can you commit, what do you want to work on, what do you absolutely not want to do, what are non-negotiables for you, etc), clarify team roles (in my opinion, someone should take charge. It makes things less awkward and leads to fewer things not getting done because someone didn't explicitly own it), and work out conflict resolution (what are you going to do if something doesn't get done, at what point does someone else pick up the work, etc).

- **Start with a shared vision and goals:** There's a tough challenge where someone needs to own something but when someone owns it, it unfortunately often means it's that person's - even when there's a strong attempt to make it shared. For example, if you write an admissions strategy document, ultimately, as much as you ask for feedback and additions, it's most likely going to be your admissions strategy that you invited the other team members to add to. Which means that the admissions process and key strategy is yours - not the teams. That might be unavoidable, so I think one key thing to do is set meeting times and work on strategy and goals together. So it's everyone's shared vision. That literally could be like having a meeting where you write together the admissions strategy. That means that everyone is bought in. Ultimately we had a key failure where I (Elika) wrote most of the strategy documents, which meant that key aspects of the conference were more mine than anyone else's, and it led to some tension and conflict to be honest.
- **Introducing yourself to speakers at the start / end of their session is good to do! It's nice for them to meet the person(s) who they've been emailing with.**
- **One big piece of advice is that there's going to be a bunch of stuff that isn't on the key list of things to do list that just comes up. Decide who's doing it and what the process is.**
  - For example, I was working on speakers and the event programme, and at some point I thought "we should just write all this in a document and share it with speakers" - stuff like how to get reimbursed, what the schedule is, etc - and so I put it in a document and called it the [speaker's handbook](#). This wasn't formally on my to-do list but it needed to get done so I just did it. **That's a good mindset to have but also dangerous, it led to me doing a bunch of stuff that just seemed necessary to do but wasn't the formal responsibility of anyone. It needed to get done, but in hindsight, there should have been a process for a misc to-do list where everyone took ownership and completed these tasks.** Because I had a tendency to take on these misc, unowned tasks, it led to me doing much more work than the rest of the team and the conference being a bit more of "Elika's vision" rather than a team vision. That wasn't good.

## Venue and Production

Here's some key notes on our process for finding a [venue and all things production](#). The first major tip is to find a venue that's all in one (bonus if it's also a hotel) if possible, and not an incredibly huge amount more money. That means they do catering, AV, etc in-house – which means less time organising between companies. If you can do this, this will drop your coordination and workload tremendously.

We took the usual means of finding a venue – just looked up large venues in the area that fit our rough size criteria (500-1000 people), called around and checked if they fit our needs. Surprisingly the Bay has very few large venues, so we ultimately only had one place that fit our needs so it was an easy decision. We then just worked out weekends they were free, selected a date (there was only one weekend they were free in 2022 and we didn't want to have the conference in 2023 because there was an EAG at the same venue in Feb. 2023), and worked on negotiating a contract. This took a while and it's just because for us the venue didn't really prioritise having to sign it – we were unofficially in an agreement and it just took multiple months to do contract negotiations, but they weren't going to give up the space.

We rented out most spaces in the conference centre, so that made it easy. We took a tour and did a food tasting all before signing the contract.

Closer to the conference (in October) we started planning what setup we needed in each room, the catering menu, AV needs, etc. This was just a long series of back and forths with our event director. Catering ended up being **very** expensive, but we put more about that in the next section.

In terms of AV and video - they had an in-house team, so it wasn't much work outside of letting them know what our AV needs were for the weekend (mic's in X, Y, Z rooms, a stage in X room, etc).

We did video recording on our own since it was quite expensive.

- (Mat) Coordinating video recording wasn't as smooth as I'd hoped.
  - Communication norms (using Slack) I think provided some drop off on handling this, which led me to being on standby and setting up equipment a couple times.
  - One volunteer mentioned it could be advisable to have a designated team to handle this, I think paying 1 - 2 people who are comfortable with the equipment and have a solidified schedule would suffice.
  - Also note, we were originally quoted \$20k to have video recording (equipment for one room and labour) and we ended up with a <\$650 solution to record in each room. If we had set up recording in all rooms this would've been \$60k which seems nowhere near worth it.

- Every conference I've worked at has had the problem of speakers using mics correctly and some complaints were made that speakers couldn't be heard. Just posted on the forum a solution

We hired one of the organiser's sister's as our photographer. This worked out well, but I think having more than 1 photographer in hindsight would have been good since I don't think we ended up with that many [photos](#). We did headshots - just had a space and a time attendees could come (shown on Swapcard) and this was extremely popular. One thing to note is if any attendees don't want to be photographed and also write a [photographer brief](#), where you can include any shots you want, etc.

Lighting for final photo required camera per

Key tips:

- Make sure you have a photographer – maybe check a few photos at the beginning but then let them do their thing. Make sure you tell them about the closing / opening group photo so they are there to take it!
- Offer attendee headshots if you have the capacity!
- Have an AV team if possible
- Send out AV instructions to volunteers and speakers if they are expected to be connecting their own laptop to present slides (it's usually just plug the dongle into their computer)
- Make sure you let speakers know if you need them to present off their own computer (we didn't realise this until the week of, which was fine, just resulted in another email to send speakers)
- Make sure that there's enough chairs on stage for any fireside chat - let the venue team know (ex. If from 12-1 pm you're having 4 people participate in a fireside chat, let the venue know and make sure there's 4 chairs). It's an easy thing to forget about.
- Walking around and checking on speakers at the start / end of their session seemed really appreciated
- **Make sure you have enough USB-HDMI adaptors and then a few extra if the venue isn't providing them!! We somehow had a bunch and ended up with still not enough.**

## Food / Catering

As part of our contract for booking the venue - we agreed to a minimum spend on food and beverage through the Oakland Marriott City Centre and their catering team. They did all the catering (we weren't allowed to have other F&B on site that wasn't from them).

We ultimately ended up providing five meals: dinner on Friday, lunch and dinner on Saturday, and breakfast and lunch on Sunday. We had coffee and tea throughout but no snacks. We also had a volunteer only dinner on Sunday night. All the food was vegan.

This was the bulk of negative feedback. EAG / EAGx's in the past have had more meals than this and continuous snacks, so people had different expectations. We did send multiple pre-conference logistics emails communicating what meals would be catered - but generally not everyone reads them or agrees with what they read.

In general, some advice and thoughts:

- The feedback form mentions a pretty consistent wanting of more food / snacks, I should've given that more thought when we were cutting back.
- Lots of compliments on being vegan, but many comments on it being primarily alt-meat instead of naturally vegan food (mainly an issue because it could taste too much like meat, grossed some out.)
- Having food out for ~3 hours was a good call and comes at no extra cost
- I'm unsure of what to call the general category, but salads and fruits would've been a great addition to each meal. Quite a bit of the negative comments were based on the absence of these.
- Communicate as much as possible and then a bit more about catering and food expectations
- We made a document with food options around the venue and a slack channel for #informal-hangs. We found that the restaurants we put on the document got used (especially for Sunday dinner) and pleasantly, the Slack channel was used by a few to coordinate getting breakfast together on Saturday. That was great!

## Hotel

We held the conference at a hotel-conference venue so there were attached rooms we booked in our contract. We had a 75-room minimum. This was great. Getting a conference venue with a hotel attached and getting attendees to stay there if possible I think just leads to more time spent at the conference and a smoother, less hectic experience. It was also great as an organiser to wake up and be there! It made setting up each morning / cleaning up at night much nicer.

What we did to coordinate room booking was to try and minimise the complication. We had two links: one for speakers, where all nights were billed to our account; and one for attendees - where we paid for Friday and Saturday night up to 75 rooms (to hit our minimum). It was maybe slightly confusing and in hindsight we should have added the room link to the registration email, but in the acceptance / registration email, [we linked this spreadsheet with a FAQ on getting a hotel room and finding a roommate](#). We then had people email in to ask for the booking link. This just helped us make sure that the 75 rooms ideally got allocated to people who financially needed a room and the rooms were more filled to capacity (i.e. 3-4 people instead of just 1). It did come at the cost of some confusion.

Despite saying we were only paying for Friday and Saturday night, some people did think we were paying for Sunday night. I don't know what more we could have communicated to say we weren't - but just know that excess communication when it comes to who's paying for

what is probably always a good idea. It's also good to be extra communicative about how many rooms there are - ex. If you're just paying for up to 75 rooms and then making sure to remove language about accommodation from any emails after those rooms are taken.

A note on minors is to maybe make sure a minor coming along doesn't feel pressured to find a roommate they don't know / feel comfortable sharing a room with. Also, some of them might need an adult to check them in - just double check with Ollie / CEA before agreeing to be that person.

Our advice

- Be extra communicative - about who's paying, up to what number of rooms, when the booking deadline is, etc
- Have attendees book themselves - just send them the link, don't submit names to the hotel or any of the other methods
- Make sure the speaker link / link for free rooms billed to your account doesn't get shared

## **Content and Programme**

It's a strange reality that so much work goes into developing the programme, yet the most important part of EAG/x's is 1-1's, but alas, that's just a fact of life. This took a lot of time, I'll be honest. Start early and really think about what you want to promote are my two biggest pieces of advice.

[This content document](#) has lots of information on our process for getting the programme made, including finding speakers, deciding who we wanted to speak, making it into a schedule, and more. [Here's our ultimate event programme / source of truth](#). We also did attendee lightning talks - which I think went well and were really enjoyed! Details of how they were run are [here](#).

[We also had a career fair - the details on the career fair are here](#). I'd 100% recommend having one.

We did benefit by being based in the Bay - an area with lots of EA organisations so we could get many local speakers. We also capitalised on having a lot of rationalists nearby and had a lot of them present workshops on rationality. That was extremely enjoyed and I'd highly recommend adding a few workshops on rationality (repeat workshops on the same topic are okay!).

Generally our process was to:

1. Make a long list of potential speakers, prioritising those nearby



2. Decide on what content we definitely wanted (in rough themes - ex. something on cause-prioritisation) and what the specific vision of the conference was and how it relates to the attendees
  - a. Ex. we were in the Bay, which has many AI safety organisations so we were attracting many applicants interested in AI safety and also had many potential speakers locally so it made sense to have a pretty strong AI safety focus
  - b. Same with rationality content
3. Share the speaker list with Ollie and comm. Health and anyone else for review, for additional suggestions, etc
4. Reach out to a few people in each 'cause area' and ask if they can attend
5. Continue until you have a good number of confirmed speakers (we ended up having about 40-50 'speakers' - about 10-20 were people based in the bay who held office hours or participated on panels. I think we had more speakers than average mainly just because so many of them were local, so it wasn't a big undertaking to have them 'present something')
6. Work on getting everyone slotted into a timing and given specific content
  - a. Many speakers had talk titles and slides - so it was just a matter of getting their information, when they preferred to speak, and slotting them in
  - b. Some others were open and that's where I worked with them to decide what they should present on. Ex. working with someone who teaches rationality content to help decide exactly what they should present
  - c. We also wanted to have career panels - so we asked people in relevant cause areas if they would participant - either just do that or on top of giving a talk / workshop
7. In terms of how we actually made a schedule - I basically just made a spreadsheet and listed every possible room for every hour, and then worked on filling it in. First I put in people who had specific timing requests, then I just added more trying to maintain a balance of making sure the same cause area speakers' weren't presenting at the same time and making sure the schedule was fairly balanced.
  - a. That document turned into our event programme
8. I sent that around to speakers to confirm the time worked for them and made any changes needed

## Website and Marketing

In terms of marketing and a website, I think we did a pretty good job. We had our website up by mid-August - nothing special or difficult about that (just make sure to update it with admissions policy / admissions link and close the link at the appropriate dates).

We knew we were going to be delayed on opening admissions so planned to do a bunch of pre-opening admissions marketing. We had a google form save the date - which ended up having over 500 people on it. We posted on a variety of groups and facebook pages and slacks, the standard. All viewable here.

Once admissions opened, we reached out to all the EA groups within our target area (west coast of the US mainly) and sent them information about the conference. We had a few different flyers with the option to just send out a mass email / message about the conference with some information and a more in-depth ask of getting organisers to send more details of the conference and nudge people they think could really benefit to apply. We sent a few follow ups to student groups up until the applications closed.

I think making yourself available to groups in your target region - messaging organisers, introducing yourself, asking them to invite people they think would get a lot of value out of it (and optionally sending in recommendations for application review) are really high-value and important.

Because we are based in the Bay and there is a pretty large EA community, we didn't have to worry about getting many HEAs. I did message many local EAs to ask them to attend and presented a few paragraphs on why I thought it was high value for them to attend (mostly to add value). I think this was helpful and I recommend doing this.

Our advice:

- Start marketing early
- Doesn't have to be fancy - a set of save the dates, messages to all relevant groups, and then multiple reminder messages before applications close
- Ask local HEAs to come
- I think reaching out to professional groups is underrated. If you have time, I'd also encourage you to reach out to people who might be EA adjacent (ex. at a plant based protein company) to see if they are interested

More details [here](#) including [our marketing plans and group contacts](#).

## **Admissions / Registration**

We opened admissions a little before two months before the conference (early / mid October and the conference was at the start of December). That was less so our choice and more a hold up from changing over the admissions process on CEA's side. I think that the timing was a bit short and wish it would have opened a few weeks prior. In general, I would push for getting admissions open around two months before the conference.

We all got trained on doing admissions and just set ourselves the group target to try to get most applications viewed and processed within a week. We found that the workload wasn't too high. Most applications only took a few minutes, a few took much longer or were second opinion-ed to Ollie.

Mat: I think I was a bit miscalibrated, going through the initial exercise with Ollie I felt it was pretty clear what the bar is, but I think the practice ended up being different than the actual

process. I think selecting cases that were more spread out instead of "pretty clear yes / no" would be helpful.

With registration, we had a lot of badges that were never printed. Not sure what happened but we ended up going through all of the spare badges (including staff and speaker badges). I think a better way to export all attendees on Excel or some sort of flowchart would be helpful because I was worried about messing up and I did. It ended up being okay but it could have been a big deal (to not have enough badges).

Registration on the day went smoothly. We put everyone's names in alphabetical order by first name - I think this led to some confusion but not sure what the alternative is. I saw a volunteer at one point not really looking for the name and instead writing one manually - I think that's bad and did lead to some people thinking they didn't have a printed badge. We generally tried to always (especially on the first day of the conference and Saturday morning) have one organiser at the registration table to answer any questions.

I (Elika) had a lot of opinions and frustrations about the admissions process and norms. I put them on [this forum post](#) in case you want to read it.

Some advice / takeaways:

- Don't be afraid to second opinion and/or ask questions (to Ollie or the participant)
- I found it helpful when some group organisers got in touch and sent over people they recommended. I often benefited from having additional information about applicants from organisers (when relevant), so don't hesitate in asking
- Don't admit a person and not make a travel decision. There's some chance you'll forget about it and then they will never get an answer about travelling
- Make sure you're clear on your travel grants and admissions policies and try to be fair (specifically with out of region people and who meets the bar - feel free to 2nd opinion to Ollie)
- Double and triple check your registration list when getting name badges printed
- Keep track of any late registers and make sure you write them a name badge
- Make sure you order around 25% extra of each type of spare blank badge (volunteer, attendee, speaker, staff)

## **Communication**

### Speaker Communications

Elika handled all speaker communication just to make it easy / seamless. I'd recommend having one person do it - whoever's in charge of content most likely - but make sure that the other organisers of course have a way to communicate to speakers via the main communicator.

[Here's a more detailed document with links to all the emails sent out and more.](#)

In general my process was:

1. Confirm individual speakers - communicate with them individually and set their session and content
2. About two months before the conference (when the registration link was ready), I sent all confirmed speakers an email with the registration link, the speaker guide, and some logistics information.
3. I then just kept track of who registered and submitted their slides / content info and nudged each speaker that didn't
4. About 2-4 weeks before, I sent out another email just confirming everyone could attend and asking if they have any questions or needs.
5. The week of the conference, I sent a final logistics email with maps of the venue, a link to the schedule, information about the AV setup, their speaker liaison volunteers, and my contact information.

I think it went well. There were no major issues with any speakers. Key advice is to:

- Have one person be point for communication - this just reduces the chance of miscommunication / errors
- Send out a few detailed speaker comms emails and make sure to nudge speakers individually when they haven't done something
- Offer to help work through sessions and slides, a few speakers took me up on this and I think they appreciated it
- Send out a big logistics email the week of, so it's fresh on the speaker's mind. Make sure you send them maps and clarify expectations around how long their session is, AV needs, and when they need to be there / be done

#### Attendee Communications

We followed a similar process to speaker communication as attendee communication. We primarily used Zoho because that's where all registered attendees were. We did the following:

1. In each acceptance and registration email - have a link to the attendee guide, have the rooming information, and the Slack link
2. About a week before the conference, we sent out a big logistics email via Zoho on information about the conference - meal schedules, venue map, etc.
3. We also sent out information about the conference and getting the most out of it when Swapcard went live

All of our emails are viewable on Zoho. Some advice and reflections:

- Varied organiser opinions on having both Slack and Swapcard
  - Erika: I loved having Slack and think it was good to have, led to informal connections, and was just easier from an organiser perspective. I think it's also much nicer to use which leads to more people communicating

- Mat :I think that having two different places for advertising / communicating is distracting and leads to messages being dropped. Having a single spot (Slack OR Swapcard) would be better. It also makes it unclear where someone should look for info, and (in my attendee experience) was overwhelming.
- Make sure to double check that all information is correct before sending it out
- Make sure you know what the different fields in Zoho are. I accidentally sent out an email headed "unsure" because I was unsure what that field was in Zoho.

## **Inventory and Merchandise**

We oddly ran out of Large shirts very quickly. We had no shirts left but a decent amount of stickers leftover. All merch had great reactions (this year is personally my favourite, and would highly recommend the designers again.)

Borrowing inventory from a single place was the better move. The additional coordination that tracking multiple sources takes is way too high and easily leads to confusion when detailing with multiple people and having to track what goes where.

## **Volunteering**

We thought the volunteering process was generally smooth and the volunteers were a key reason the event logistically ran separately. Starting off, the first thing we did was get a volunteer organiser to be in charge of the entire volunteer team and process. This was a little bit more hectic than we would have liked as our original person dropped the ball and wasn't able to help.

We started organising volunteers about a month before the conference. That process was to go through volunteer applications, make selections, and assign teams and roles. We just flagged people who were interested in taking a leadership role / people in our network we knew were responsible as asked if they could be team leads. We then just assigned roles based on the volunteer team preferences volunteers wrote. We put them into shift schedules based on their rough availability.

This all happened about 2 weeks before the conference. By two weeks out, we'd sent around preliminary shift schedules and organised volunteer team training. In terms of communication - we sent out an email with basic volunteering information. Then we had one training the Monday before the conference where we went over volunteer teams. That's when volunteers got their shifts and were asked to confirm. Then we had one in-person training on the morning of the conference.

I thought we had a good amount of volunteers (about 25) for a 600 person conference. I think the shifts were maybe a bit long (they were 4-5 hours). Ultimately, there were about 5 volunteers + team leads who really went out of their way to help a ton and that was amazingly useful.

Having a dedicated volunteer room / 'war room' where we were and everything was super convenient. We also stocked it with snacks which seemed appreciated :)

We organised a volunteer dinner on Sunday night after the conference ended (at the venue), which was I think a really well appreciated way to say thank you. I highly recommend doing this. The feedback was overall wonderful. One volunteer mentioned that the experience was nice enough that it made them want to volunteer more (when they were coming to the conference thinking they wouldn't anymore.)

In terms of key advice and areas for improvement:

- We got feedback that the in-person training day of and the online one the week prior was very similar - the in-person one could have been shorter
- We had a check in / check out on Slack process (via messaging the respective team slack channel) which helped make sure everyone was there without having to remember to check. Highly recommend just asking people to check in!
- The all volunteers Slack channel was really used and volunteers did a great job pinging us when they needed something / if something was urgent. I didn't feel like we were 'bugged' by volunteers in any way.
- Volunteer appreciation dinners + snacks are always appreciated
- Sent out the shift schedule as soon as you can - ideally at least a week before or by the time Swapcard launches
  - As a follow up, maybe ask what time people get in because the most common reason for having to move around shifts was that people weren't getting in until later in the day on Friday
- Stress to ask people to find someone to swap shifts with themselves instead of asking the team leads / organisers. That will save a ton of having to message people
- If you can, have 1-2 backup volunteers. Some people in the days leading up to the event decided they didn't want to volunteer and finding another person did take some resources. This backup person could be someone whose attended other conferences and volunteered, so doesn't need much context

## **Pre / Post Events**

We helped organise a variety of community events before and after the conference. We felt strongly about having events around the conference to facilitate social connection and connection with the Berkeley EA community. *We were particularly well placed as organisers to do this because all three of us have spent time in the Bay with the EA community, hence had a good understanding of the community and organising events there.*

We followed two processes:

1. Let community members organise events and just added them to the community events document to promote them. This was far easier and preferred. An example of this was the Hackathon.

- a. To further this, I like the idea of asking people who are interested in trying out Operations to run events like these. It's simple enough of an experience and with low enough stakes that it makes sense to delegate while also not a burden to offer advice if needed.
2. Decide what events we wanted / at what venues and then found someone to host it. An example of this were the afterparties. This was less preferred as it meant having to facilitate more things being done.

Our advice:

- Make it clear that these are community run events not sponsored by CEA or the conference
- Think about community health / check in with the community health team if you haven't hosted afterparties before
- Be overly clear about who is funding what (ex. Is the conference paying for pre-event dinners?) and set up a process for reimbursement if so
- Make sure to add the community events to Swapcard, Slack, the Attendee guide, etc so that everyone is invited and has access to the same information
  - Advertising this on the slack
- I (Elika) wish we ran more EAGx prep sessions virtually and made sure groups that had a large number of attendees did too since I think those are particularly valuable (and not everyone can make the in-person one scheduled)

## The Feedback

### Summary

- Likelihood to Recommend: 8.5
- Connections: 8.1
- 34% attendees responded

### Average's to Survey Q's

- **How likely is it that you would recommend EAGx to a friend or colleague with similar interests to your own?** 8.5/10
- **How many one-on-one meetings did you have during EAGxBerkeley?** 9.5 meetings
- **How many \*new\* connections did you make at the event?** 8.11 connections
- **Before EAGxBerkeley, how many people in the EA community did you know well enough to ask for a favour?** 15.4 or excluding outliers, 10
- **EAGx is a place where I feel welcome:** 4.4/5
- **EAGx is a place where others are open to exploring ideas that are different than those they already believe:** 4.1/5
- **EAGx is a place where individuals express their beliefs with humility:** 3.8/5
- **EAGx keeps me motivated to do good** 4.1/5
- **What percentage of your interactions with other attendees did you find valuable?**

- **What did you think of the "Anything but EA" hour?** 7.3/10
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy were you with the food?** 7.2/10

## Demographics

Some rough demographics

- Mainly from the U.S. / living in the U.S. - makes sense with our target group (North America)
- Average age = 25.6 yrs old
- Race/ethnicity - Predominantly white
- Gender - Predominantly male (50-60%)

## Satisfaction

**Please describe your \*most\* valuable experience from the conference, and why it was important to you.** Here's some (non-exhaustive) common responses.

- Michael Air's Theory of Change workshop
- Talking to AI safety / governance researchers and experts - getting career and research advice
- Experiencing what the community was like through volunteering
- Finding research collaborators and mentors
- The most valuable experience might have been playing tag on Saturday. It was stupid and not EA related, but a ton of fun and a really good activity for just being able to fuck off for a bit and spend some time enjoying the moment with those around you.
- Career fair! Learning about new jobs and meeting recruiters
- Finding friends in the EA community
- It was not a particular moment in the conference that I think was the most valuable to me, I think all round the entire conference was a life changing experience for me.
- Getting valuable advice from 1-1s on careers
- Met person from my EA intro fellowship
- Generally learning more about EA and gaining more of a sense of being part of the EA community
- The Hackathon. We exceeded my expectations about what we could build for the EA community
- Duncan's rationality workshops!
- Chatting with speakers at office hours
- I learned about the work that Bruce Friedrich and the Good Food Institute are doing to support efforts to move away from meat production.
- Various talks!
- 80k career planning workshop



## Suggestions and Areas for Improvement

Please describe your \*least\* valuable (potentially negative) experience from the conference.

- The rooms were cold
- Career fair was not as inviting as some people helped, some booths were empty
- Lack of snacks
  - No soylent, no huel, no snacks, no dinner. Very hungry.
- People cancelling 1-1's at the last minute
  - Or not showing up
- No good area to get work done
- Poorly organized meetups, didn't allow me to build any genuine connections besides have one interesting conversation
- Community norms
  - Feeling condescended to or not taken seriously
  - Talked to people who don't think community health is important. Essentially appealing to the fact that AGI timelines are so short that we ought to sprint to find solutions and that working on DEI stuff is not important.
  - a certain sense of elitism being conveyed at certain points during the conference
  - People were talking about how EAs well-being should be prioritized over other people. I found that to be very concerning and almost made me reconsider aligning myself with the movement.
- I wound up taking a lot of advice requests from very junior students, and often didn't have answers to the questions they wanted help with, and didn't find that much productive to talk about

**"Do you have any comments about the culture & community at the conference you want to share?"**

- Lots of AI interest – some people thought it was too AI safety focused, people wanted more interaction + ability to distinguish between who was interested in AI safety vs mainly interested in other cause areas
- Some parts of the culture feel a little like toxic productivity culture
- I liked the drawing table.
- Neurodivergence is real and seems very prevalent— for a first-time attendee, maybe there could have been something done for folks to feel more comfortable
- People enjoyed the meditation and reflection sessions as they provided a balance to process all the conversations and learnings.
- Just maybe try to encourage being nice & such - sometimes people felt disrespected
- The conference (mainly the events) could do a better job highlighting disagreements in the community.
- It's too young. Let's get retired people in here

- Recommendations: more outreach to lower-income and underrepresented communities in lower-income countries.
- Loved the bean bag chairs and chill lounge space on the side of the main ball room!
- More play! The efforts toward encouraging play were the highlight of my conference. I think that helping EAs to connect through non-intellectual activities is a crucial (and oft neglected) aspect of community building. This conference was an outlier (and very impressive) in this respect :)

### **Do you have any comments about our event app? (Swapcard)**

- Buggy
  - It was super convenient to book the 1:1s! Also a little buggy in the messaging system (some 1:1 requests disappeared)
  - Very buggy. Had to upload my bio several times and missed important communication from other attendees.
  - Some messages didn't show up
- I wish it integrated with gcal
- Swapcard still let's me schedule one on ones when it conflicts with an event I'm signed up for. It doesn't notify me when this happens.
- It would be great if it notified you when you receive a message.
- Slow chat notifications made last-minute coordinating difficult. Many higher-profile attendees left 1-on-1 requests pending instead of marking slots as unavailable or declining.
- "It seems as though speakers do not automatically have 1-on-1 meeting times set to "unavailable" during times when they are scheduled to have office hours.
- Wish I could search people by keywords or tags.
- Recommendation: allow group chats to be formed and for there to be customizable features like on Facebook messenger with their group chats.
- Swapcard notifications often went missing (ex conversations are muted when meetings need to be declined to be rescheduled). No obvious way to reschedule. 2 different ways to reach a person's profile which allow you to do different things. I attended EAGSF, so when I searched for people who attended both EAGxBerkeley and EAGSF, their profile would switch over to the EAGSF page, and I could no longer book time with them (because the EAGSF conference instance for their profile was loaded). I couldn't export events on the android mobile app to my calendar app which I prefer to avoid missing notifications. These issues were manageable but required workarounds or using my phone or the app more than I would have liked to.
- The name I gave when signing up for the event was my legal name since I thought verifying my name with an ID or something may be required. The name I used in Swapcard was my preferred name that others know me as. I changed the name in Swapcard to my preferred name but the name kept being changed to my legal name which made it difficult for others to find me.

## Do you have any comments about the conference logistics (food, venue, or other practicalities)?

- Food
  - Snacks would have been good . Bananas too.
  - Fruit as a snack would be amazing
  - More salad / veggie healthy options would be amazing, otherwise it was amazing!
  - I missed the food choices of the big EAG conferences. I missed the Soylent. I was hungry on Sunday late afternoon. It would have been great to have snacks at all times.
  - The beyond bolognaise pasta was the best fake meat thing I've eaten ever
  - Please have food available the whole day lol.
  - Was extra food donated? When I left the conference one night, I had two different people ask me if I could help them buy food, would have been great to offer extra conference food. A good first step would be to coordinate with the catering company, but here are some other resources.
  - "Thank you for making it all vegan!!!!!!"
  - Food made me throw up
  - Lunch on Sunday gave me a stomachache.
  - I was sad about not having breakfast Saturday and dinner Sunday, as I've found meals at EAGs to be a great time to converse with people. I would have happily accepted a significant decrease in food quality in exchange for having the additional meals."
  - Encourage more natural vegan food, maybe using chia seeds, flax seeds which is naturally high in fibre
  - I like that the food was vegan, but it seems they could have made more naturally vegan meals, rather than trying to put meat alternatives in everything.
- Vegan vs non-vegan
  - Got lots of feedback for some people being glad it was all vegan and others not
  - Generally think that all vegan food is the way to go
- Logistics
  - A sign outside the nap room telling people to be quiet woulda been great
  - Communication about hotel pricing was unclear and changed last minute.
  - Send out Swapcard sooner."
  - I think a more centralised, read-only, location for logistics could be helpful. (Aggregating emails, slack announcements, swapcard, docs, faqs, etc.)
  - Ah yes, a note: I think it would be valuable to record the conferences. Even if fancy recording equipment isn't available, something like using Zoom to record the speaker or some other rudimentary means would still be better than nothing."
- Anything but EA hour

- "Anything but EA hour should have a CONCRETE LOCATION, it's not enough to just say 'don't talk about EA', further (basic) coordination is important.
- I don't like that everyone was forced to do the Anything but EA hour. I do plenty of non-EA things in my free time, but when I come to an EA conference I want to do EA career things. It's fine to make "Anything but EA" a theme for that hour's events, but please don't block me from scheduling 1:1 meetings on Swapcard.
- Anything but EA is a good idea, however a bit directionless in its implementation. Perhaps events specifically designed for non-EA stuff may be more suitable here.
- Event content
  - Wifi was nearly non-existent on top floor, esp rooms 203-208, food was amazing, enough and served long times - best experience food wise so far, didn't like that two entrepreneurship talks were scheduled in conflict (CE & Momentum)
  - "Really enjoyed the programming, several of my friends that didn't expect much out of the conference ended up finding it very valuable!!
- Venue
  - It was great to have the hotel rooms in the same venue as the conference.
  - "I really like walking 1-1s, and the venue made that slightly inconvenient since there were no loops to walk around.
  - I appreciated the convenience of the location and access to catered meals. I have been to other conferences where these factors have been less ideal.
  - Wish there were more comfy bean bags and chairs in the big room
- Allergens
  - I know allergens were kept in mind, but it would have been great to have them specified on the food menu items' labels (e.g. unless I read the packaging, I don't usually eat spring rolls because they often have sesame oil, which I'm allergic to).
    - *Mat: Not sure what this refers to, I checked every label and all allergen info was located on it. Pretty sure this isn't accurate*
- "If there's one thing I could change, I would want EA to be a little more humble. I don't really know how it might be done, but I think it would be really nice to just get people to clean up after themselves a bit and to not leave half-eaten food laying around.

**If you've been to more than one EA conference, how has this conference compared to others?**

- Worse food, still great vibes and value
- This was the worst conference so far, but not bad (all the previous ones have been great, so the bar is very high)
- More comfortable and chill, just as impactful
- As mentioned before, I really enjoyed the talks in this conference- they were engaging, creative, informative, beginner and intermediate friendly, and broad with the variety of talks.
- Cozy.
- Better, more inspiring. The events especially were top notch.
- I think less useful to me, due to diminishing returns. I think objectively it was about as good as other EAGx conferences
- "More students and fewer professionals
- Seemed less professional. I took this conference more chill, which helped me have a more fun time
- I've been to 5. Better than EAG DC and SF. Worse than both in London.
- For me it was just as valuable as EAG San Francisco 2022. A little better than EAGxVirtual, but I still think we should do two EAGxVirtual conferences each year instead of one.
- It was a lot better because I scheduled fewer 1-1s and I defined my goals beforehand.
- The social elements were a lovely addition that had been lacking at previous events.
- Worse than average for networking and somewhat worse than average for "vibes"; I think this is due to student/contributor ratio skewing too heavily student, and the conference feeling kinda empty sometimes? Especially at the career fair, with many booths unstaffed, and at some meetups where there weren't enough professionals who could help the many students with networking
- Venue was less confusing than most
- This one was smaller and felt more casual than the EA Global I attended. There were a lot of students. It was nice, just a different vibe.
- Berkeley was smaller and more relaxed than EAGSF 2022, and had the same great 1-1s experience.
- Attendees were dumber than the average EAGSF

## Speaker Feedback

- **On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend \*presenting\* at EAGx to a friend or a colleague?** 8.2/10
- Everyone was very satisfied or satisfied with speaker logistics (minus one issue with starting one speaker's recording late)
- Key written feedback was:
  - Support for meetup hosts was relatively hands off. Perhaps with more support I could have been better prepared to run an awesome meetup, but also I'm not sure I'd advocate for adding more overhead here (for organisers or hosts), and it went fine anyway. On balance I'd probably make no changes to the organisers' engagement with meetup hosts.
  - I had already travelled to the conference before I learned we needed to bring adapters for our computers, so it would be good to have that information nailed down further ahead of time. It would also likely be beneficial to be able to talk to our speaker liaisons before the day of our presentation, just to know where to meet them and what they need from us.
  - Maybe a break between sessions so less of a rush for room setup and takedown
  - Make sure there are sufficient audio people so that they are in the room on time for the talk to begin (2 out of 3 of my presentations were slightly delayed because the guy wasn't there to prepare the audio).
  - "My room manager for Sunday morning was waylaid and I just went ahead and set up the room/AV myself. I didn't mind (I kind of enjoyed it) and the workshop went just fine, but I know that I'm a very low-maintenance presenter. I could see someone who needs more hand-holding becoming flustered in that situation.
  - The video recording was set up late, even though one of the organisers confirmed it'd be set up.

## Volunteer Feedback

- **How likely is it that you would recommend volunteering at EAGx to a friend or colleague?** 9.4/10
- Most (95%) volunteers were satisfied or extremely satisfied with all aspects of the volunteering process
- *Note: there was only 11 volunteer responses and we had about 20-30 volunteers*
- Key written feedback was:
  - This was very well organised! Maybe some of the documents, e.g. the volunteer handbook were too long
  - My change in shift request is not satisfied, room management basically don't have much to do else than sitting in the room so it is a bit waste of time, the coordination is not too good like sometimes the equipment positions are unknown

- Getting the schedule sooner would have helped me plan my event better
- All my questions were answered immediately and the uptown room was a great work space.
- Could have used less redundancy in the volunteer training, but overall volunteer stuff was great, really appreciated having a space to gather and having snacks and stuff
- Really great volunteer team. Things ran smoothly. It was a bit weird to take panellists up to the speaker room just to bring them back down, given that there was nothing they needed to prepare. I would urge these types of events to just have all panellists meet at the ballroom instead since it was hard to find them all and some got confused and met at the ballroom instead.
- Suggestions to improve the process were:
  - Make the conference free for them
  - Make them busy during the hours and make changes to shifts when they asked for it
  - Put volunteer shifts on Swapcard

## The Team

Our core team was Erika, Mat, and Tzu. We had a bunch of support from other people though: namely Vaidehi Agarwalla and Anjay Friedman helped a ton with overall strategy and direction guidance. And then help from lots of great contractors and volunteers to actually execute. Ollie Base, Elinor Camlin, and Angelina Li (from CEA) were extremely helpful, key reasons this went well, and were all super helpful listening ears and hands.

In all honesty, I think we worked okay together. Our team dynamics were like an inverted U where the vertical axis was team vibe – we started out in June / July good, then there was a pretty big dip in September - October, and then November and December were much more positive / good. This was mainly due to the fact that we just had a mismatch in communication, working style, and expectations for a little bit which led to some frustration and bad team dynamics. We ultimately communicated really openly about this and worked on it, leading to a pretty successful event and good working relationship by the end.

**Generally, I think a conference is a lot of work and a key difficulty will be working together, especially remotely, to execute everything. Some things to pay attention to are: working style, communication style, expectations (around deadlines, etc), shared vision, who's doing what, what to do when something goes wrong, who's ultimately in charge (to handle some major decisions), etc.**

## Hiring

We started as a three person team: Erika, Mat, Tzu. We did struggle to hire more mostly because a) by the time we got around to hiring, we had developed a lot of the conference so more wanted to hire contractors to help with specific tasks (which ended up being okay),

b) didn't have time or capacity to run a hiring round so just went with people in our network with experience / that came recommended (also okay to do). We ended up hiring people to help with: career fair, hotel, photography, and merch design. We had someone else for pre/post events, but this ended up not working out.

I think that we did an okay job hiring and managing them. I (Elika) ended up managing everyone and towards the last 2 months of the conference, I spent a good amount of energy checking in and trying to be a good manager. Ultimately, I did share with the new team members that what I valued most was people meeting deadlines and working independently, and that while I wanted them to check in and ask all the questions they needed, I trusted them to take ownership, make decisions, and make their task their own. I think this worked well. I'd highly recommend not micro-managing.

Hiring was hard though! It's difficult to find people not in your network and make sure you trust them. So if you want to hire outside of your network / run a large, open hiring round, I'd recommend doing it sooner rather than later and doing a test task associated with it.

In the weeks leading up to the conference, having the extra team members was critical and we couldn't have done it without them. We definitely needed to hire someone to run the career fair because it was a lot of work (coordinating, printing banners, etc).

## **Budget and Finance**

Conferences in California are expensive! Just letting you know that before you see our costs document. It's unfortunately not something we can really change as we had a venue catering minimum.

In hindsight, I would consider running a smaller EAGx through a UC Berkeley space that's more specific and less expensive, but that's an entirely different conference experience to be honest.

We kept our budget and finance tracking simple. We had a Soldo card from CEA that we charged most expenses too. I will say that I (Elika) preferred to just put everything on my personal card and get reimbursed because that way I could just keep track of receipts and have everything taken care of. Some initial investigation/conversation is required with CEA to get a Soldo card. Many people using the Soldo is good, but can also lead to a lot of expenses without receipts; being proactive about uploading receipts is good.

We kept it simple - most expenses were paid via EV to the conference venue. Other expenses were either on the Soldo or my personal card. I tried to minimise volunteers / other team member's paying for things on their personal card just to reduce oversight. We had a [budget and spend tracking document](#) and just sent reminders to make sure everyone



updated it. We used the Soldo card more actively pretty much during merch purchase (shirts, stickers) and the week leading up to the conference for team food.

## Organiser's Personal Thoughts

### Elika

- *I have a lot of thoughts and limited time to write, so feel free to set up a meeting and I can share more thoughts / in more detail*
- Organising a conference is fun! Have fun! Be creative with what you do!
- Communication is everything and an important skill and opportunity to work on it
  - I definitely made many mistakes in communication, expectations, management, and more
- I think no one talks about how it can be hard to be a gatekeeper to further involvement in EA – to reject people, to be the one controlling the space. It can feel like a lot, know who you can reach out to (or reach out to me)
- Being a team lead is more about managing and setting team culture than I initially realised and I definitely didn't put enough resources and attention into that
- Attending your own conference is not fun (at least it wasn't particularly fun for me), especially if it's going smoothly since that means there's little to do, but you can't quite rest
- People really don't fill out feedback forms. It's frustrating and annoying, but what can you do
- I highly highly recommend organising or getting someone to organise pre and post events. People are already there, maximise the connection and the fun!

### Mat

- Interviewing past organizers was the quickest way for me to get oriented to the planning process. I highly recommend getting a list and reaching out (ask the EAGx Organizers Slack) at periodic times.
  - This depends on your planning timelines, but after your first “chunk” of work (so you can get clarity on what seems out of place or confusing, “why do we do this?”)
  - Again mid-way through (again, if anything seems out of place then you can gain context)
  - And  $\leq$  a month out, the final moments can be stressful and having someone relive their stressful moments can prevent you from experiencing that again.
  - More probably wouldn't hurt, but I only had 3-4 in a week and that cleared up a lot of confusion I had.
- Premortem is a “panic attack with style”; murphyjitsu, premortem, etc. are cool words to describe, “I'm worried that this might happen, I'm going to write this down and then think of a solution to this.” Fortunately, coming up with a satisfactory response can quell the anxiety but also hedges your event from having unforeseen accidents.

- Any time you have something that comes to mind that could potentially go wrong, write it down in your group's Premortem
- Decide on your tools early and then don't switch
  - We switched our messaging and task management platforms a couple times (FB -> Slack, Notion -> Asana) and this was painful and nonessential.
  - Experiencing similar pains with other orgs, my recommendation is to get an idea of you think will work (as a group!) and then go for it. If you don't like it, it's 3-5 months and you'll get an in depth reason of what to find in another product.
- It's valuable to run smaller "test run" events for yourself before running a big event like an EAGx.
  - Some decisions take 3-4 months before you get to know if you made the right call or not. This is bad for updating your beliefs.
  - A solution is to throw an EA get together, a weekend retreat (<10 people), some sort of small stakes event that lets you see what a complete event would look like and specifically what went wrong when you did the small ones.
    - These are much easier to correct, and also let you know what would be a much bigger issue if on a larger scale.

## Tzu

- Wished more college EAs actually showed up, but was finals
- 1. Outsourcing: Contracting designer for design work and shirts
  - a. Custom ink volunteer shirt setting
- 2. Photographer hours estimation (turns out takes more hours than expected). Editing is hard and time consuming. Get a piece of good photography-background-cloth
- 3. Hackathon process
- 4. Working with kickass colleagues. Personal: wish i studied the handbook more closely sooner. Personal workload management as a college student was difficult. The quality of my work felt heavily bottlenecked by my time capacity
- 5. Didn't end up actively updating Asana
- 6. Personal shoutout to Mat: Thank you for offering space and kindness to hear how I was doing. Organising EAGxBerkeley would have been less fun without you alongside.
- 7. Personal shoutout to Elika: Learned from Elika importance of not staying too long in meta and do more object-level tasks. Also learned to prioritise tasks based on need vs nice-to-haves. I came up with some nice-to-haves that the time spent would've been better to do the "needs". I am inspired by Elika, a real Ops baddie, always trying to come up with systems to resolve issues / conflicts. I really appreciated when Elika was very proactive when our team dynamics were at its lowest, and I felt that it was essential to us doing better.
- 8. We were advised by CEA Community Health team to consider having FTX-related conversation spots to

9. Admissions was tough: gatekeeping a new EA's involvement with travel funding was tough. Being very specific to a target demographic has been helpful (for us, it was "mainly college students in the US")
10. Handling the FTX situation: we had unwanted media attention / journalists
  - a. on the flip side, kelsey piper and
11. having a #internal-feedback channel was helpful to pay attention to venue fix details

## Document and Resources

*Note: It's not sharing enabled just because some of this is information we don't want entirely publicly accessible. Mostly because it has people's contact information (like speakers, etc). Please just request for access for anything or if you want to look at most of it, request for access for the entire EAGxBerkeley folder.*

[Documentation and Processes - links to all our resources and planning information](#)

[Retrospective Notes](#)

[EAGxBerkeley Google Drive](#)

[Feedback form](#)

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