

# The 2014 Survey of Effective Altruists: Results and Analysis

*Analysis by Peter Hurford, Jacy Reese, David Moss, and Robert Krzyzanowski*

*Data Collection and Processing by Tom Ash and Peter Hurford*

*Feedback from Gregory Lewis and Bernadette Young*

## Introduction

In May 2014, a team from [.impact](#) and [Charity Science](#) released a survey of the effective altruist community. The survey offers data to supplement and clarify those anecdotes, with the aim of better understanding the community and how to promote EA.

In addition it enabled a number of other valuable projects -- initial seeding of [EA Profiles](#), the [new EA Donation Registry](#) and the [Map of EAs](#). It also let us put many people in touch with local groups they didn't know about, and [establish presences](#) in over 40 new cities and countries so far.

In sum, this is probably the most exhaustive study of the effective altruism movement in existence. It certainly exhausted us!

## Summary of Important Findings

- The survey was taken by 2,408 people, 1,146 (47.6%) of whom provided enough data to be considered, and 813 of whom considered themselves members of the EA movement (70.9%) and were included for the entire analysis.
- The top three sources people in our sample first heard about EA from were LessWrong, friends, or Giving What We Can. LessWrong, GiveWell, and personal contact were cited as the top three reasons people continued to get more involved in EA. (Keep in mind that EAs in our sample might not mean all EAs overall... more on this later.)
- 66.9% of the EAs in our sample are from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, but we have EAs in many countries. You can see the public location responses [visualized on a map!](#)

- The Bay Area had the most EAs in our sample, followed by London and then Oxford. New York and Washington DC have surprisingly many EAs and may have flown under the radar.
- The EAs in our sample in total donated over \$5.23 million in 2013. The median donation size was \$450 in 2013 donations.
- 238 EAs in our sample donated 1% of their income or more, and 84 EAs in our sample give 10% of their income. You can see the past and planned donations that people have chosen to make public on [the EA Donation Registry](#).
- The top three charities donated to by EAs in our sample were GiveWell's three picks for 2013 -- AMF, SCI, and GiveDirectly. MIRI was the fourth largest donation target, followed by unrestricted donations to GiveWell.
- Poverty was the most popular cause among EAs in our sample, followed by metacharity and then rationality.
- 33.1% of EAs in our sample are either vegan or vegetarian.
- 34.1% of EAs in our sample who indicated a career indicated that they were aiming to earn to give.

---

## Background

To give you background information to understand the survey, I'm going to briefly touch on its methodology. You can find much more than you'd ever want in the methodological appendix at the bottom of the page.

## Methodology

It's easy to survey, say, all Americans in a reliable way, because we know where Americans live and we know how to send surveys to a random sample of them. Sure, there may be difficulties with subpopulations who are too busy or subpopulations who don't have landlines (though surveys now call cell phones).

Contrast this with trying to survey effective altruists. It's hard to know who is an EA without asking them first, but we can't exactly send surveys to random people all across the world and

hope for the best. Instead, we have to do our best to figure out where EAs can be found, and try to get the survey to them.

We did our best, but some groups may have been oversampled (more survey respondents, by percentage, from that group than are actually in the true population of all EAs) or undersampled (not enough people in our sample from that subpopulation to be truly representative). This is a limitation that we can't fully resolve, though we'll strive to improve next year. At the bottom of this analysis, we include a methodological appendix that has a detailed discussion of this limitation and why we think our survey results are still useful.

---

## The Findings

The survey page was loaded by 2,408 unique visitors and 1146 (47.6%) of them answered the question on whether they self-described as an EA<sup>1</sup>. Of those 1146 people, 813 of these people considered themselves members of the EA movement (70.9%) and were included for the entire analysis.

### How Many EAs did we Find?

Answer to "Have you ever heard of the term Effective Altruism?"

<b>Yes</b>	1001
<b>No</b>	194

Answer to "Could you, however loosely, be described as an EA?"

<b>Yes</b>	813
<b>No</b>	333

### Cross-tabulation

---

<sup>1</sup> Opening the survey page and closing it creates a blank survey. It's unclear how many of these non-responses are people who deliberately decided to not take the survey, but it's possible that there may be a large number of people. Many of these people may have been non-EAs who decided the survey was not for them. But it's also possible we had a large non-response bias among our target population, even just among those who made it to the survey page. More on this in the "Methodological Appendix".

	<b>Yes (Heard EA)</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Yes (Describe EA)</b>	795	11
<b>No</b>	171	158

Note that cross-tabulations only include respondents who answered both questions. Missing data (1106 people<sup>2</sup>) are dropped for this cross-tabulation.

Our survey managed to recruit 813 people who self-described as EAs (70.9%) of our overall sample, and 17.7% of people who have heard of EA and were willing to take our survey still did not identify as EA. (Though I don't know what is up with the 12 people who consider themselves EA but have never heard the term.)

To put the 813 EAs in perspective, the [2013 LW Survey](#) found 468 EAs, and based on [the results of the 80,000 Hours Survey](#), Ben Todd estimates that there are between one and two thousand effective altruists in the world. So, if Ben's estimate is correct, it looks like we managed to survey a sizable percentage of the entire movement!



## What are These EAs Like?

*Where Do People Hear about EA?*

<b>LessWrong</b>	255 (31.37%)	<b>Facebook</b>	35 (4.31%)
<b>Friend</b>	119 (14.64%)	<b>TLYCS</b>	32 (3.94%)
<b>GWWC</b>	82 (11.32%)	<b>Search</b>	10 (1.23%)
<b>80K</b>	41 (5.04%)	<b>ACE</b>	3 (0.37%)
<b>GiveWell</b>	39 (4.8%)	<b>Other</b>	92 (11.32%)

<sup>2</sup> This number is so dramatically high because many people loaded the survey page but did not enter any information.

<b>Singer's TED</b>	37 (4.55%)	<b>Non-response</b>	68 (8.36%)
---------------------	------------	---------------------	------------

In our sample, LessWrong emerges as a powerful recruiter, with friends and GWWC / 80K next. Notably, some groups recruited well without appearing on this chart -- digging through the Other answers turns up nine people recruited by the Swiss EA groups, nine more from CEA, four by Leverage, three by Felicifia, and three by CFAR.

Of course, do keep in mind ways in which our sample may have oversampled people (such as those from LessWrong) and how this might change the rankings.



## How do These EAs Get Involved and Stay Involved?

### *Which Groups Involve People Further with EA?*

So we know LessWrong, friends, GWWC and TLYCS were important in introducing our sample to EA. But what helps get people more involved? Participants were asked, for each group, whether that group helped get them more involved in EA. (This is different from the previous question, which only asked people to pick one first point of contact. Here, participants could indicate multiple causes for greater involvement. Note that this makes it pretty difficult to compare the two tables together.)

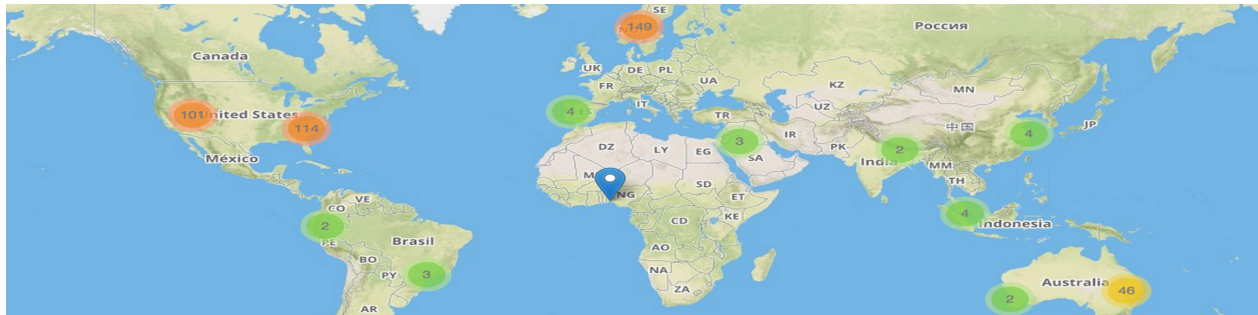
<b>Group</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>LessWrong</b>	316
<b>GiveWell</b>	267
<b>Personal contact</b>	237
<b>Friends/Family</b>	196
<b>GWWC</b>	180
<b>80K</b>	150
<b>Online EAs[1]</b>	144
<b>TLYCS[2]</b>	113
<b>Local group</b>	97

Non-response: 43 people for each item  
 [1]: e.g., blogs, the Facebook group, etc.  
 [2]: includes all mentions of Peter Singer, TED Talk, etc.

Here, again, LessWrong is the #1 source of increasing involvement for EAs in our sample, as well as the #1 source of people in our sample finding out about EA, and the #1 referrer to this survey.

This could mean that EAs generally underrate the impact of LessWrong on the movement. It also could just mean that since a bunch of people took this survey from LessWrong, the LessWrong numbers are inflated, and if our census was truly unbiased, then LessWrong’s influence would go down dramatically. For example, the survey was shared on LessWrong, but not on the websites of GWWC, 80K, GiveWell, or TLYCS, so it’s quite possible LW was oversampled and the other four were undersampled. This is discussed more in depth in the “Methodological Appendix”.

Furthermore, despite a lot of emphasis on student groups in EA, local groups end up represented here as an underwhelming way to introduce people in our sample to EA and get them more involved. Though this also could be that EAs involved only in student groups are a lot harder to survey, and a truly unbiased version of this survey would show a high effect for groups.



### Where in the world are the EAs in our Sample From?

<b>United States</b>	324	<b>Finland</b>	12
<b>United Kingdom</b>	123	<b>Norway</b>	9
<b>Australia</b>	54	<b>Netherlands</b>	8
<b>Canada</b>	35	<b>Sweden</b>	6
<b>Switzerland</b>	29	<b>New Zealand</b>	5

<b>Germany</b>	19	<b>Others</b>	44
----------------	----	---------------	----

*Non-response: 147*

As you can see, the two hubs of the US and the UK are quite strong, with 66.9% of all surveyed EAs. Australia and Canada don't do too bad either, being another 13.3% of all EAs. Also, many people made their locations public information, and [you can see them visualized on the Map of EAs!](#)

-

However, when we look at the survey data by city, the idea of particular hubs starts to break down a bit<sup>3</sup>.

<b>Bay Area (US)</b>	49	<b>Boston + Cambridge (US)</b>	22
<b>London (UK)</b>	40	<b>Cambridge (UK)</b>	13
<b>Oxford (UK)</b>	30	<b>Washington DC (US)</b>	12
<b>Melbourne (AU)</b>	26	<b>Basel (Swiss)</b>	11
<b>New York (US)</b>	22	<b>Vancouver (CA)</b>	9

*Non-response: 223*

It still seems right that the Bay Area (San Francisco / Berkeley) is still the largest EA hub. Oxford, usually considered the second largest hub and home to CEA, actually loses out to London. ...And EA Melbourne is not too far behind!

Yet people don't seem to think of New York or Washington DC as EA hubs, but they seem like they could do quite well, at least in our survey sample -- people have started active hubs with less!

---

<sup>3</sup> Here, users were invited to enter the city in which they lived, and we aggregated the data into these groups based on the presentation we thought was most useful (e.g., some people said they lived in the "Bay Area" writ large, others mentioned specifically that they lived in "Palo Alto", and I lumped those people into the "Bay Area" category.) This means the data here is rough. Collecting city data was a bit messy as we allowed free-response to this question, which was likely a mistake.



## Donation Totals

### *How Much are EAs Donating?*

While donating a large amount of money is neither necessary nor sufficient to be an EA, it does seem to be an activity commonly associated with effective altruism, and certainly something we want to emphasize. So how much are these EAs donating?

Across our entire survey, 766 people shared the amounts they'd donated -- 588 of these were self-described EAs. It's quite probable that these donations over-report actual EA donations, as people who would donate less might be less inclined to report it. However, the number of people reporting 0 donations (190 people, 127 of which are self-described EAs) shows that maybe people were more forthcoming than we'd expect.

So we painstakingly standardized all the donations into US dollars and found out that the average 2013 donation was \$8905.90 among all EAs who took the survey.

...This seems impressive, but it's because the number is highly right-skewed by a few major donors. The more informative metric, the median donation, was \$450.00. Certainly good, but not as impressive.

And donations don't change much when you correct for student status. The median donation of non-students is \$940.00, compared to the median donation of students at \$200.00. This difference is statistically significant (t-test,  $p = 0.013$ ), but perhaps not as large as I would have expected.

Maybe mean / median isn't a good way to visualize the donations. Instead, let's look at it in terms of deciles. As in, how much would you have to donate to be in the top X% of donors (based on the reports that we have)?

<b>To be in the top 90%...</b>	\$0.00	<b>9%...</b>	\$10K
<b>top 80%...</b>	\$0.00	<b>8%...</b>	\$10.3K



<b>top 70%...</b>	\$70.86	<b>7%...</b>	\$12.1K
<b>top 60%...</b>	\$198.91	<b>6%...</b>	\$13.9K
<b>top 50%...</b>	\$450.00	<b>5%...</b>	\$19.8K
<b>top 40%...</b>	\$813.53	<b>4%...</b>	\$23K
<b>top 30%...</b>	\$1.5K	<b>3%...</b>	\$30K
<b>top 20%...</b>	\$3.2K	<b>2%...</b>	\$60K
<b>top 10%...</b>	\$8.7K	<b>1%...</b>	\$108K

...And, to be the #1 recorded EA donor in our survey, you'd have to beat [the grand donation of \\$2M](#).

This shows the true nature of EA donations -- *highly* skewed toward a few, top donors. Arguably, even someone working a minimum wage job could afford to be in the top 50% EA donors, but it would take quite the earning to give career to be able to make it into the top 1%.

In total, the 2013 donations among all self-described EAs in our survey was over \$5.23M! That's a good haul! If you made donations not reported in the survey, [please report them via the EA Donation Registry](#), which lets you anonymously bump up the public total for 'team EA' and also - if you so choose - share your own donations to [inspire others](#).

### *Percent of Income*

...But what is this in percentage of income? The mean EA in our sample donates 11%<sup>4</sup>, but again this is because of a skew. The median is 3.2%. While this may seem low when benchmarked against the 10% of the Giving What We Can pledge, it is higher than the United States national average.

To better visualize, let's look at how many people donate a certain amount of income or higher. I'll also include percentages of the total amount of records I have (362).

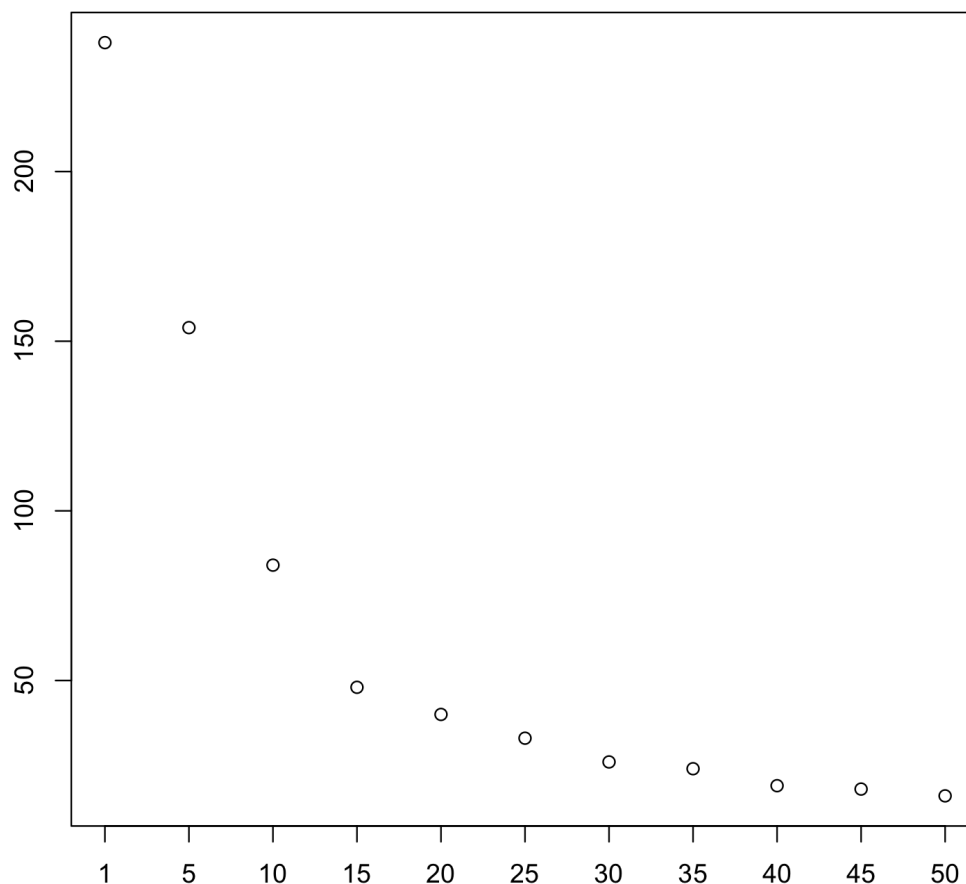
<b>Donate 1% or more</b>	238	<b>30%...</b>	26
<b>2%...</b>	204	<b>40%...</b>	19

---

<sup>4</sup> Percent income percentages were performed only for people with income greater than \$10K, as donations as a percentage of income became quite absurd with low incomes, including many people donating without any income at all. This was chosen prior to any analysis.

<b>3%...</b>	188	<b>50%...</b>	16
<b>5%...</b>	154	<b>60%...</b>	14
<b>10%...</b>	84	<b>70%...</b>	13
<b>15%...</b>	48	<b>80%...</b>	13
<b>20%...</b>	40	<b>90%...</b>	13

We can also see a similar breakdown in this cumulative frequency graph:



At least 84 EAs in our survey are on pace with the [Giving What We Can pledge](#)... but many are not. This just goes to show that 10% is a big ask, *even for EAs earning more than \$10K*. ...Though having 16 people committed to the 50% level or higher is pretty impressive!

Keep in mind, however, that this is just a snapshot of 2013, and not necessarily an indication of any sort of sustainable long-term pledging. Also, keep in mind that this doesn't capture the EAs that are [saving now while waiting for better causes to donate to later](#). If you are

interested in some actual donations and donation plans that people have made, check out [the EA Donation Registry](#).

---

## Where Are These EAs Donating To?

Naturally, our next question as EAs seeing \$5.2M moved is wondering where that money went. So where are EAs donating?

### Number of EAs donating to various organizations

<b>Against Malaria Foundation</b>	211	<b>The Humane League</b>	22
<b>Schistosomiasis Control Initiative</b>	114	<b>80,000 Hours</b>	21
<b>GiveDirectly</b>	101	<b>Project Healthy Children</b>	16
<b>Machine Intelligence Research Institute</b>	77	<b>Centre for Effective Altruism[2]</b>	14
<b>GiveWell[1]</b>	46	<b>Giving What We Can[1]</b>	10
<b>CFAR</b>	45	<b>Animal Charity Evaluators[1]</b>	10
<b>Deworm the World</b>	43	<b>Leverage Research</b>	7
<b>Vegan Outreach</b>	27		

[1]: unrestricted, does not include money donated to their top-charities.

[2]: unrestricted, does not include money to 80K and Giving What We Can

### *How Many EAs Give to Multiple Places?*

The [standard advice for EAs is to not split donations](#), though anecdotally I feel like many EAs (including myself, despite having co-written the linked article) still do donate to multiple organizations and even feel like it is a rational thing to do. Is this true in our data?

Looks like it. 213 people donate to at least one charity, and 95 of them donate to at least *two* charities. In fact, 6 EAs donated to five charities or more, and two people donated to *seven* charities.

---

## What Causes are These EAs Supporting?

Of course, not all EAs can afford to donate even if they wanted to, and many EAs are saving so they can donate later, or doing direct work instead of making money to donate. So we were curious about what people support, outside of donation totals. So here we ask, for each cause, whether the EA supports that cause or not (allowing people to indicate multiple causes).

<b>Poverty</b>	579
<b>Metacharity</b>	422
<b>Rationality</b>	411
<b>Cause Prioritization</b>	345
<b>AI Risks[1]</b>	332
<b>Environmentalism</b>	317
<b>Existential Risk[1]</b>	301
<b>Animals</b>	296
<b>Politics</b>	291
<b>Far future[1]</b>	233

[1]: The following options were given: 'Existential risk (artificial intelligence)', 'Existential risk (other)', and 'Far future concerns (besides existential risk)'.

Reading the [“The Four Focus Areas of Effective Altruism”](#), one would expect a roughly even split between (1) poverty, (2) metacharity, (3) far future / x-risk / AI, and (4) nonhuman animals. Above, instead of equal splits, poverty emerges as a clear leader<sup>5</sup>.

Though, maybe this isn't fair. If we redefine meta-charity to also include rationality and cause prioritization, it takes the top slot (with 616 people advocating for at least one of the three). And if you take far future, x-risk, and AI as one cluster, it comes in third with 441 people advocating for at least one of the three. (Poverty, at 579, claims second place.)

---

<sup>5</sup> Statistically significant with a t-test,  $p < 0.0001$ .

Still, the fourth sector, animal rights/welfare, is much smaller than the other three, below environmentalism and not that much higher than politics. Yet environmentalism and politics don't get much attention in EA circles.

It's worth noting that there were statistically significant differences among support in some causes based on groups that the respondent affiliates with. For example, people from LessWrong were more likely to support x-risk (no surprise there). For more, see the "Methodological Appendix".

## How Much Meat Do These EAs Eat?

<b>Eat Meat</b>	251
<b>Meat Reducing</b>	144
<b>Near Vegetarian</b>	98
<b>Vegetarian</b>	142
<b>Vegan</b>	127

*Non-response: 51*

Despite "animal welfare" being a less popular cause than other causes, there appears to be a widespread concern for reducing meat among EAs, with 69.1% of EAs at least reducing the amount of meat they eat, a 33.1% vegan/vegetarian rate, and a 15.6% vegan rate. While it's hard to get reliable national statistics, it seems indisputable that the vegetarianism / veganism rate is much higher than [the US national average of ~3% vegetarian and ~0.5% vegan](#).

Now, of course, we'd like to know -- how do diet and cause choice relate to each other?

<b>Diet</b>	<b>% Indicating Concern for Animals as a Cause</b>
<b>Eat Meat</b>	8.3%
<b>Meat Reducing</b>	26.4%
<b>Near Vegetarian</b>	43.8%
<b>Vegetarian</b>	49.3%

<b>Vegan</b>	76.3%
--------------	-------

...That's a pretty clear relationship, and it's statistically significant (Chis-square,  $p < 0.00001$ ).

## What Careers are These EAs Pursuing?

<b>Earning to Give</b>	<b>Research[1]</b>	<b>Direct[2]</b>	<b>Hybrid[3]</b>	<b>Other[4]</b>
214	166	91	13	144

[1]: Includes academia.

[2]: Any work in a non-profit, whether EA or otherwise.

[3]: Not an official category, but these are the people in the "Other" section who indicated that they would do a mix of earning to give and direct work.

[4]: People who aren't pursuing other careers, including careers not influenced by EA. This does not include those who just did not answer this question (non-response = 185).

## Donations Among Earning to Give

And, of course, the big question on everyone's mind -- how much money are these "earning to give" people making? And how much are they donating? Keep in mind that this question includes people who want to pursue earning to give, but haven't started yet. To be more fair, we'll exclude students. When we do this, the median donation in 2013 for people on a "earning to give" path is \$1844.97, which is twice the median non-student donation of \$940, enough to be in the top 30% of EA donors, and statistically significant (t-test,  $p = 0.013$ )<sup>6</sup>.

If we use 80,000 Hours's definition of earning to give as someone who is taking a high-earning career (not defined by them, but I'll personally say income  $\geq$ \$60K), donating 10%, and self-identifying as EA, our survey has 106 such people, all of which explicitly state they are earning to give (or are doing an ETG Hybrid, in two cases). These people account for \$1M in donations.

<sup>6</sup> That is, people earning to give donate a statistically significantly larger amount than people not earning to give. Furthermore, people who state they are earning to give in their careers also donate a larger percentage of their income (t-test,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

## The Demographic Grab Bag

### *How Many EA Friends Do These EAs Typically Have?*

How connected is the EA movement? We decided to look at this by checking how many friends each person has. The differences between referral groups are statistically significant (see the methodological appendix for details).

	<b>0-5 friends</b>	<b>6-10</b>	<b>11-20</b>	<b>20+</b>	<b>Nonresponse</b>
<b>Overall</b>	477 (59%)	114 (14%)	72 (9%)	80 (10%)	70 (8%)
<b>EA FB<sup>7</sup></b>	94 (57%)	19 (12%)	17 (10%)	20 (12%)	15 (9%)
<b>Lesswrong</b>	181 (63%)	38 (13%)	19 (7%)	25 (9%)	25 (9%)
<b>Personal Outreach</b>	71 (59%)	15 (12%)	16 (13%)	12 (10%)	7 (6%)

It appears that over half of EAs are not very connected with each other, but the top 10% are very well connected.

### *Gender*

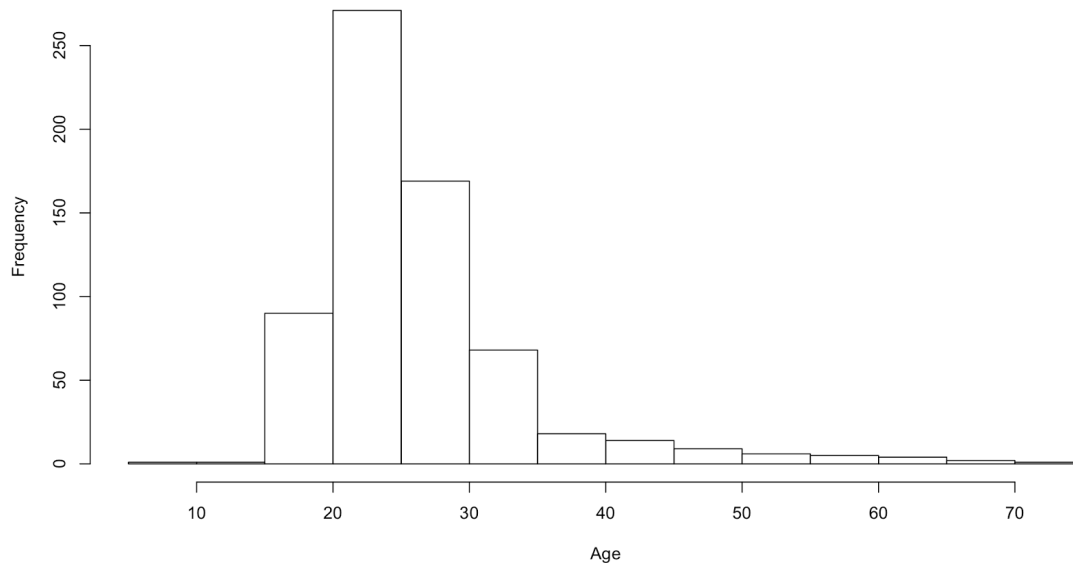
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Nonresponse</b>
<b>Overall</b>	156 (19%)	498 (61%)	10 (1%)	149 (19%)
<b>EA Facebook</b>	28 (17%)	102 (62%)	3 (2%)	32 (19%)
<b>Lesswrong</b>	34 (11%)	197 (68%)	2 (1%)	55 (19%)
<b>Personal Outreach</b>	30 (25%)	75 (62%)	2 (2%)	14 (12%)

At 75.0% male, our sample was male-heavy across the board, but mostly in the group recruited from Lesswrong. The differences between referral groups are statistically significant (see the methodological appendix for details).

<sup>7</sup> Overall is broken up into referral groups based on what link the respondent clicked to take the survey. Referrer groups include Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE), the EA Profiles, EA FB (the EA Facebook group / EA Forum), Lesswrong, other Facebook groups, and personal contact (direct messaging). Only EA FB, Lesswrong, and personal outreach produced sufficient numbers to be useful for statistics (other groups had less than 10 participants). Much more detail is given in the methodological appendix.

## Age

EAs are also said to be pretty young. Our mean age is 26.7 and our median age is 25 (SD = 8.08)<sup>8</sup>. To get a better visualization, we can look at a histogram:



## Religion

	<b>Agnostic / Atheist</b>	<b>Christian</b>	<b>Buddhist</b>	<b>Jewish</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Nonresponse</b>
<b>Overall</b>	566 (70%)	32 (4%)	12 (1%)	6 (1%)	26 (3%)	171 (21%)
<b>EA Facebook</b>	117 (71%)	6 (4%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	5 (3%)	35 (21%)
<b>Lesswrong</b>	204 (71%)	9 (3%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	8 (3%)	62 (21%)
<b>Personal Outreach</b>	92 (76%)	5 (4%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	16 (13%)

<sup>8</sup> There might be some data integrity issues with this question. For example, I'm not sure who the 7 year old was who took our survey, but welcome to EA! ...Also, thank you to the one person who entered their age as "John" and made the data processing just a little more difficult. You know who you are.



## Student Status

	No, Not Student	Yes, Student	Nonresponse
<b>Overall</b>	370 (46%)	290 (36%)	153 (19%)
<b>EA Facebook</b>	62 (38%)	71 (43%)	32 (19%)
<b>Lesswrong</b>	154 (53%)	76 (26%)	58 (20%)
<b>Personal Outreach</b>	57 (47%)	47 (39%)	17 (14%)

## What Moral Philosophies Do EAs Hold?

	Consequentialism	Deontology	Virtue Ethics	Other	Nonresponse
<b>Overall</b>	560 (69%)	18 (2%)	41 (5%)	162 (20%)	32 (4%)
<b>EA Facebook</b>	117 (71%)	4 (3%)	3 (2%)	34 (21%)	7 (4%)
<b>Lesswrong</b>	207 (72%)	8 (3%)	16 (6%)	49 (17%)	8 (3%)
<b>Personal Outreach</b>	76 (63%)	1 (1%)	10 (8%)	29 (24%)	5 (4%)

---

## The Great Methodological Appendix: How Confident Can We Be in These Survey Results?

This is the boring part for the survey wonks.

### Analysis

The analysis began in earnest on 1 September, 2014. The analysis was mainly done by Peter Hurford, but assisted by Jacy Anthis, David Moss, Robert Krzyzanowski, and several

MTurk workers. Separately Tom Ash led data collection. These teams were separated so as to avoid not biasing the results, since Tom might be inclined to skew the analysis one way or another if he can see how results would pan out in advance.

Data continued to be collected by Tom throughout the analysis period, up until Tom first saw a draft of the analysis on 5 October (see below); we have not included responses after this point to avoid a potential source of bias. Data from 5 October was merged into the dataset and numbers were re-run. Surveys taken after 5 October were ignored for the purposes of this analysis.

Analysis was done in R. All scripts and associated data can be found in the [public GitHub repository for the project](#). Data was collected by Tom Ash and then handed to the data analysis team in anonymized format, as described in the survey's privacy policy. Currencies were converted into American dollars and standardized via the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform, and then processed and analyzed using the open source [Surveytools2 R package](#), created by Peter Hurford.

## **Analysis Pre-Registration, and Abandoning the Pre-Registration**

In early September 2014, [a pre-registration was made with our intentions for the analysis](#). It called for four different multi-variable regressions to see how five different descriptive variables -- where the participant heard about EA, the groups that got the participant involved, the number of EA friends the participant had, the participant's moral philosophy, and where the user took the EA survey from -- influenced four different variables of interest -- the percent income donated of non-students, career path, causes supported, and diet choice. It then called for more descriptive statistics.

Unfortunately, the variables collected made constructing multi-variable regressions quite difficult, as "the group that got the participant involved" could involve multiple groups and "causes supported" could involve multiple causes. Therefore, the decision was made to not try multi-variable regression and instead opt to present descriptive statistics only.

We tried to restore some of the original hypothesis testing by subgrouping participants by their referrer when doing so results in a statistically significant difference. Future research with this data-set could perhaps look into correlations to test individual hypotheses, but we're not yet sure if the data is representative and reliable enough to make that effort worth it.

## **Possible Bias**

Imagine for a moment that we managed to survey every single person in the world who self-identifies as an EA fully and accurately and collected their results. This “truly unbiased census” would give us an accurate view of EAs.

No matter how we may caution against it, any claims of “EA Survey Results” may be taken by some casual readers to have the same weight as if we completed such a “truly unbiased census”. Saying that 15.8% of our survey respondents are vegan would be taken by these readers to mean that 15.8% of EAs truly are vegan.

Given that this isn’t the “truly unbiased census”, such a jump is invalid as a logical deduction. But how good is it as an inference? That is, how similar to the “truly unbiased census” is our EA Survey? How can we even know?

Attaining a representative sample is a significant challenge in any survey of this nature because (i) we do not have a basis for the actual distribution of EAs across various subpopulations and were not able to share the survey with every group equally, (ii) the responses were collected voluntarily on an online form. These challenges are inherent to many public surveys, especially those studying amorphous populations like members of a specific ideology or social movement (e.g. vegetarians, feminists, various EA subpopulations).

Many published studies do make use of convenience sampling when studying groups that are impossible to reach via more normal methods, such as the [2013 Running USA Survey](#) and [the DiverseGreen Survey](#). It’s also common with our friends at LessWrong with the LessWrong Survey, and other attempts at surveying the EA movement by 80,000 Hours.

## **Penetration Strategy**

To minimize undersampling and oversampling of different parts of EA, we did spend a significant amount of work to penetrate the EA population (those who self-identify as Effective Altruists). Although there is certainly room for error with this strategy, the survey team (Peter, Jacy, and Tom) felt this was the best we can do currently, though others (Bernadette and Greg) disagree.

As we wanted to maximise the number of EAs engaged by the survey and its follow-up projects, we distributed it to the EA community through a variety of means. These included email, social networks, the wider web, and personal contact. The survey was shared on Facebook in most EA groups and several personal pages, and on LessWrong.

It was also graciously shared with their followers by Animal Charity Evaluators, the Effective Altruism Blog, THINK, various local groups, Slate Star Codex, and Rockstar Research Magazine. It went around mailing lists for the 2013 EA Summit, CFAR alumni, Leverage

Research, MIRI and others. Several individuals kindly offered to send it to EAs that they knew.

We tried to get other groups to distribute the survey as well, such as GiveWell and CEA, but were unable to, due to poor planning on our part and the needs of those groups.

Overall, we struggle to tell precisely how well this penetration succeeded. LessWrong ended up being an important factor for many people joining EA. But is that an indication of the actual prominence of LessWrong in the EA community, or just an indication that more people on LessWrong are inclined to take surveys? What would the true LessWrong referral rate be in the “truly unbiased census”?

Time for a deep dive...

## What were our Subpopulations?

We’ve seen what groups get people in our sample involved in EA and sustain their involvement, but what groups are people in our survey coming from? A good way to look at this is first looking at referral data gathered via tracking what website survey takers came from:

<b>LessWrong</b>	288	<b>ACE</b>	4
<b>EA Facebook</b>	165	<b>Other Facebook[1]</b>	1
<b>Personal Contact</b>	121	<b>Other / Unable to track</b>	228
<b>EA Profiles</b>	7		

[1]: This survey was posted in all EA-affiliated Facebook groups. This category includes all survey takers that arrived from Facebook, but did not arrive via the EA Facebook group, Tom’s facebook, or Peter’s facebook.

As you can see, some people were unable to be tracked by IDs. But we did ask people to self-report how they found the survey. Here’s what we get by looking to the self-reports:

<b>EA Facebook</b>	160	<b>EA Org</b>	12
<b>LessWrong</b>	139	<b>ACE</b>	5
<b>Friend</b>	58	<b>Other EA Venue</b>	3
<b>FB, elsewhere</b>	34	<b>Other non-EA Venue</b>	3

<b>Local Group</b>	25	<b>Other, unspecified</b>	282
--------------------	----	---------------------------	-----

There is a good bit of discrepancy between this data, with only 45.1% of the people accessing the survey via the LessWrong URL claiming to have found the survey via LessWrong, and only 21.8% of the people accessing the survey via the EA Facebook URL claim to have found the survey via that venue.

Given that I don't expect many people would lie about this sort of thing, this suggests that many people may have been referred to the EA Facebook link or the LessWrong link from another source (e.g., a friend pointed them to the link, and they put the referrer as "Friend") and there was probably a large population who frequent both LessWrong and the EA Facebook group and saw the link in both places. This might mean that the groups are less "stratified" than we might be inclined to think. It's also quite possible people have unreliable memories about these matters.

But what differences do they actually have?

## Differences in our Subpopulations

The first place to look was how much differences in sampling matter. Do EAs that come from LessWrong act significantly differently than EAs who are recruited from the Facebook group? If all the groups are essentially similar, then it might not matter that much that we oversampled or undersampled any one particular group.

To look into this, we checked to see where people were taking the survey from. We used the URL information because it contained three nicely sized groups -- those recruited from LessWrong, those recruited from the EA Facebook group, and those recruited personally through the contact of the survey authors. Here's how they compare:

<b>Variable</b>	<b>LWers</b>	<b>EA FB</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Significant?<sup>9</sup></b>
<b>Mean Age</b>	27.2 (SD 8.2)	25.2 (SD 6.8)	27.4 (SD 8.0)	NS
<b>% Male</b>	84.5%	76.7%	70.1%	***
<b>% Consequentialist</b>	76.0%	77.2%	69.0%	NS
<b>% Atheist</b>	90.3%	90.0%	87.6%	*

<sup>9</sup> \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , NS Not Significant ( $p > 0.1$ ). Comparisons were Chi-square for everything except age, income, donation, and % inc. donated, which was compared with an ANOVA test. Tests were done across all referral categories, not just the categories listed.

<b>% Veg</b>	21.2%	35.2%	28.9%	***
<b>% Poverty</b>	65.6%	75.8%	71.1%	NS
<b>% X-risk</b>	45.5%	40.0%	33.9%	***
<b>% Student</b>	33.0%	53.4%	45.2%	***
<b>Median Income[1]</b>	\$50,000	\$29,400	\$19091.43	**
<b>Median Donation[1]</b>	\$1000	\$905.32	\$323.85	NS
<b>% Inc. Donated[1]</b>	2.5%	7.6%	1.6%	NS
<b>N</b>	288	165	121	

[1]: Excludes students.

We found statistically significant differences in age (People from the EA Facebook group are much younger), % male (LessWrong is more male-dominated than EA as a whole), vegetarianism (LessWrong is less likely to be vegetarian), student status (many more people on the EA Facebook group are students), and income (people on LessWrong are a lot more wealthy than people on the EA Facebook group, who are in turn a lot more wealthy than the people we personally contacted). Furthermore, we found marginally significant differences in consequentialism (personal contacts were less consequentialist) and atheism (personal contacts were more religious).

On the other hand, no statistically significant differences in cause choice or donation amounts (despite the significant differences in income). This might suggest a statistically significant difference in the percentage of income donated, but despite the numbers looking significant to the eye, they ended up being statistically insignificant as well (ANOVA,  $p = 0.22$ ). Surprisingly, the internet headquarters of existential risk reduction, LessWrong, was not statistically significantly more likely to endorse existential risk than those recruited through other methods.

The lack of difference in donations or cause choice makes the concern of undersampling and oversampling less than originally anticipated, as it seems like the EAs in our sample act more or less the same regardless from where they were recruited. However, this still does not address any concern that we missed an important recruitment channel (for example, getting less engaged EAs from student groups) that would produce different results. Also, the undersampling / oversampling appears to affect our views of diet, as well as basic demographic information, which might make for challenges to these findings.

## Comparison of the 2014 EA Survey LW Population with the 2013 LW Survey

Another question we might have is how accurately we captured the populations that we actually did sample. We can do this by comparing our survey results to surveys that were taken in the past.

The first benchmark we make along these lines is comparing the LessWrong subpopulation from the 2014 EA survey with the EA subpopulation from the [2013 LessWrong survey](#), since the two surveys asked similar questions. This will at least give us some sense of how accurately we managed to capture the LessWrong population.

The 2013 LessWrong survey captured 432 people who self-identified as EAs (35% of those who answered the question). Our EA survey captured 277 self-identified EAs who took the survey via the LessWrong link (49.8% of those whom we have referral data for). Let's see how well these two subpopulations line up.

Variable	2014 EA Survey, LWers	2013 LW Survey, EAs	Sig. <sup>10</sup>
Mean Age	27.2 (SD 8.2)	25.0 (SD 7.0)	***
% Male	84.5%	89.5%	NS
% Consequentialist	76.1%	78.7%	**
% Atheist	90.3%	93.0%	**
% Veg	21.2%	23.4%	**
% Student	33.0%	46.1%	***
Median Income[1]	\$50,000	\$40,000	NS
Median Donation[1]	\$1000	\$50	**

[1]: Excludes students.

Here, it seems that we did not do a good job of capturing the Lesswrong EA population between surveys. The original LessWrong sample was statistically significantly more likely to be a student, a vegetarian, an atheist, a consequentialist, and a male.

It's possible that perhaps EA got more diverse over the year between these two surveys and this change was reflected in our survey. Indeed, comparing the [2013 LW Survey Results](#) to

<sup>10</sup> \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , NS Not Significant ( $p > 0.1$ ). All comparisons made with t-tests.

the [2014 Results](#) shows it's possible that is the case. It's also possible EAs may have been drawn to our survey, but not the original LessWrong survey -- or vice versa.

## Comparison of the EA Facebook Group to a Random Sample

Similarly, how well did we sample the people from the EA Facebook group? Did only the more active people choose to respond to the survey, leaving the less active people (who may have different characteristics) behind?

Our survey results indicate at least 165 people took the survey are in the EA Facebook group (though the number could be higher as our referral metrics are imperfect). By contrast the EA Facebook group has 4,247 members (as of 2 Nov 2014), although its administrators believe that many of these are spam accounts.

Obviously, we did not get a perfect census of the EA Facebook group (let alone all EAs in general), so how could we be sure we were sampling the EA Facebook group right? Were the types of people more excited to take and complete our survey different in any way?

To look into this, we compare our EA Facebook respondents to a random sample of members of the EA Facebook group. Making sure we compare well with a random sample is important to check ourselves against "response bias", where only certain type of EAs are inclined to take (and complete) the survey.

To gather the random sample, we randomly selected 200 members from the EA Facebook membership roster at the time and sent them each Facebook messages asking them to take our survey, extolling the benefits of a random sample and offering a chance to win \$250. This took place about two months after we started promoting the survey. 28 of them (14% response rate) obliged.

Variable	"EA FB" Referrals	"EA FB" Random Sample	Sig. <sup>11</sup>
Mean Age	25.2 (SD 6.8)	27.0 (SD 4.5)	NS
% Male	76.7%	66.7%	NS
% Consequentialist	77.2%	92.6%	NS
% Atheist	90.0%	89.3%	NS
% Veg	35.2%	32.1%	NS

---

<sup>11</sup> All comparisons made with t-tests.



<b>% Poverty</b>	75.8%	75.0%	NS
<b>% Environmentalism</b>	43.6%	53.6%	NS
<b>% X-risk</b>	40.0%	39.3%	NS
<b>% Student</b>	53.4%	34.6%	NS
<b>Median Income[1]</b>	\$29,400	\$24,000	NS
<b>Median Donation[1]</b>	\$905.32	\$700	NS
<b>N</b>	165	28	

[1]: Excludes students.

\*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , #  $p < 0.1$ , NS Not significant

It's good to know that there were no statistically significant differences between our random sample of the EA Facebook group subpopulation and our self-reported sample of the EA Facebook subpopulation. Though, this is hardly an actual validation, given that our collected random sample was so small as to make most statistical testing pretty useless, with even a 20% difference in student status not being a clear enough effect to be statistically significant.

Also, the 14% response rate was likely to be highly non-random, further biasing the results. It's worth noting that many of the people in the sample, while they meet the definition of "people in the EA FB group", did not share any mutual friends with the survey researchers. Of course, we can't change the definition of "EA" midway, but we felt like that clarification is important.

It's generally dangerous territory to go digging into statistically insignificant effects, but one perhaps could be inclined to think we're undersampling non-students, pro-environmentalists, and women... but it would also mean we're undersampling consequentialists, which doesn't seem right at all! ...It's hard to draw conclusions from these results.

## **Comparison of the 2014 EA Survey with Charity Science's 2013 Survey**

Another place we can look for comparisons is with Charity Science's 2013 Survey of EAs. Their interview was in person based on their own contacts, so we would also expect a bias, but perhaps a different bias than our own due to a different sampling method (word of mouth referrals and personal network). Their sample size was also much smaller than ours (42 vs. our 768).

Variable	2014 EA Survey Average	2013 Survey Average
Age	26.7 (7-75)	25 (17-46)
Gender	75% male	75% male
% Donate	Median 3.3%	Median 10%

The statistics for age are easily within 1 SD, and the gender comparison is identical. However, the donation median was off. I imagine that our donate median is more accurate because we're not sampling from EAs notable enough to be in our own personal networks, who -- knowing Joey and Xio -- probably donate a lot.

### Comparison of Our Results to 80K's Survey

Another area to look for is 80,000 Hours. 80K surveyed their members, and [analyzed the results](#), and then [analyzed the results again focusing on earning to give in particular](#). While the survey was specific to 80K and focused on their [career coaching](#), a fair amount of the questions were similar, and the results may help us benchmark the audience of our survey that came from 80,000 Hours. Also, we expect 80,000 Hours survey takers to be moderately representative of EAs overall, so we would hope for pretty similar results between these two surveys.

While 80K didn't offer much demographic information to benchmark, they help us look at a couple other of our questions.

For example, 80K asked their respondents how they learned about the EA movement, and the top five sources were, in order: (1) CEA, (2) LessWrong, (3) Word of Mouth, (4) Peter Singer / TED, (5) GiveWell. Our survey was very similar, with a slight reversal -- (1) LessWrong, (2) CEA, (3) Word of Mouth, (4) Peter Singer / TED and (5) GiveWell. It's important to note that LessWrong was also a big referrer for 80K, since this replication lowers the chance that our high LessWrong percentage was just a fluke result of oversampling.

We can also look to cause choices. 80K's top five cause choices: (1) global health / poverty, (2) promoting effective altruism / metacharity, (3) existential risks, (4) ending factory farming, (5) improving decision making.

Our top five cause choices were pretty similar, though not as spot on: (1) global health / poverty, (2) promoting effective altruism / metacharity, (3) improving decision making, (4) cause prioritization, (5) existential risks.

Lastly, we can benchmark donation totals. 80K randomly sampled 10 of the 39 people they found to be pursuing earning to give and found a current median donation of £1,310 over the last three years (mean donation £25,474) -- that's a median donation of \$703/year (mean \$13,671/year). These numbers are much lower than our findings of a median \$1806.94 (mean \$32,319.21), though the difference is not statistically significant (t-test,  $p = 0.96$ )<sup>12</sup>, largely because of small sample size.

## Comparison of Our Results to Giving What We Can

I don't know of any public information on [Giving What We Can](#) members beyond the membership count and donation totals. GWWC currently (as of 2 Nov 2014) has 644 members. However, we only found 72 people in our survey who noted that they had donated 10% or more, which might indicate that we are missing a large chunk of GWWC's population.

Of course, GWWC's membership count of 644 does not mean that there are 644 people donating 10% or more, as a significant number of GWWC members are students who are keeping a 1% pledge and some GWWC members don't keep their 10% pledge despite the best of intentions. Moreover, our donation count is for 2013, which would not account for any growth in membership over 2014.

Still, it seems like a concern that we might be missing GWWC's member base, and we should endeavor to reach out more to them with future surveys.

## Comparison of Our Results to GiveWell's Money Moved

Lastly, let's look at GiveWell's donors. In 2013, GiveWell [tracked their donors](#) across a few metrics in common with our survey, which we can use to check our responses for people who indicated that GiveWell was a factor at getting them involved in EA (thus making them probably a GiveWell fan).

The first is donation totals...

Donation Amount	GiveWell's Count	Our Count
>=\$100,000	6 (0.07%)	9 (2%)

---

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, we can go through the data and find the standard deviation is £18,520.46 over three years, or \$9544.49 per year. Based on the mean and standard deviation for each population, we can then calculate the t-test.

\$50,000 - \$99,999	6 (0.07%)	6 (1.3%)
\$10,000 - \$49,999	117 (1.39%)	41 (8.9%)
\$5,000 - \$9,999	167 (1.98%)	44 (9.5%)
\$1,000 - \$4,999	974 (11.59%)	123 (26.7%)
\$1 - \$999	7136 (84.89%)	238 (51.6%)

Of course, there's no reason to expect these numbers to match up precisely, because many GiveWell donors (especially those donating smaller amounts) don't actually self-identify as EAs. What I was mainly interested in was how many of GiveWell's top donors we would capture in our sample, and it seems that we were just as representative of big donors as GiveWell is.

The second is age -- GiveWell surveyed all their donors giving \$2K or more and found the following distribution:

<b>Age</b>	<b>GiveWell's Count</b>	<b>Our Count</b>
20-29	91 (35.3%)	98 (67.1%)
30-39	89 (34.5%)	31 (21.2%)
40-49	39 (15.1%)	8 (5.5%)
50-59	18 (7.0%)	5 (3.4%)
60-69	16 (6.2%)	4 (2.7%)
70-79	4 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)
80+	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)

Our audience is younger than GiveWell's, even with the restriction that one must have donated \$2K or more.

Additionally, people find out about GiveWell differently than they find out about effective altruism. Recall that our top five referrers were (1) LessWrong, (2) CEA, (3) Word of Mouth, (4) Peter Singer / TED and (5) GiveWell. When we limit this to people who have donated \$2K or more, it changes to (1) LessWrong, (2) CEA, (3) Peter Singer / TED, (4) GiveWell and (5) Word of Mouth.

For GiveWell, they found that their top five referrers were (1) Peter Singer, (2) Word of Mouth, (3) internet search, (4) online media, and (5) print media. It does make sense that LessWrong and CEA get people more involved in effective altruism rather than introduce people to GiveWell. (Though it could also be the case that LW and CEA introduce people to GiveWell a lot, but this effect is just overwhelmed by the size of the other referrals.)

Overall, our audience is pretty different than GiveWell's. But this shouldn't cast doubt (nor increase our trust), as GiveWell's audience and the audience of effective altruism are different groups, and were only expected to be *somewhat* similar.

## Conclusion

Make no mistake. Convenience sampling, as we have done, can lead to a large amount of bias, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to know whether the sample gathered was representative. However, we still think our survey is about as reliable as it can get given our limitations. When push comes to shove, we don't have a "truly unbiased census" and [we have to go with the best we've got](#).

We benchmark well compared to past surveys, having accurately captured subpopulations relative to other surveys (though it's still impossible to tell if our surveys just suffer *the same* non-response bias...). Moreover, while the subgroups themselves do differ, it's not clear if they differ enough on metrics that matter for us to be overly concerned. Lastly, our overall population was quite large compared to estimates of the total EA population, which does reduce the risk of convenience sampling.

One might think that the biggest competitor of this EA survey would be the smaller EA surveys that have been completed, or mere anecdotes. It's arguable that this survey is more reliable than other surveys, due to increased sample size, and more reliable than anecdotes. While this survey may be under-representative or over-representative of some groups, it is likely more representative than the personal view of any individual EA.

Again, it's important to note that it is inappropriate to make claims about the EA movement *writ large* without acknowledging that one might be generalizing from an insufficient or biased sample. Every claim in this results post, and all publications about this survey, are careful to talk about "EAs in our sample", rather than the EA population *writ large*.

In fact, even generalizing about individual subpopulations still requires that we know there wasn't non-response bias in the patterns of who in the community took the survey and who did not. I'd caution everyone who quotes this survey to take care to note the numerous caveats listed within, apply their own keen judgment, and continue to test hypotheses raised here.

Above all, we hope you find this data useful. This data still might be of incredible interest to many and potential strategic importance to some, as a few of our findings appear to contradict common perceptions of the EA movement.

Do not hesitate to come forward with compliments, comments, or concerns, and we will do our best to address them in next year's survey!