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Can charity raters achieve both rigor and scale?

With increasing attention to effective altruism, a movement to ensure philanthropic donations achieve as much impact as possible, there is also growing demand for information to guide those donations. That is where charity raters come in.

But these tend to fall into two groups: large charity raters such as Charity Navigator survey thousands of organizations, collecting basic financial transparency data, such as the percentage of an NGOs budget that goes to overhead expenses. Smaller charity raters such as GiveWell do deep dives into questions of programmatic effectiveness, then recommend a small group of the charities as worthy of funding. For GiveWell, only four make the mark of top charities.

These organizations typically face a trade-off between the investment of time and money per assessment and the number of organizations they evaluate. As a number of them rethink their ratings to account for a shift toward “results based development,” some of the sector’s brightest minds are asking: Might there be a middle ground?

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