

Why unrestricted funding is most valuable to Rethink Priorities

Rethink Priorities functions as a think-and-do-tank addressing global priorities. In 2025, we plan to continue researching solutions and strategies, mobilizing resources, and empowering movements in the following areas:

-  **Global Health & Development**
-  **Animal Welfare**
-  **Surveys & Data Analysis**
-  **Worldview Investigations**

Separately, we incubated the Institute for AI Policy and Strategy, which works to navigate risks and secure the benefits from advanced AI.

If you're considering supporting these particular areas, please reach out so we can share more material on the specific departments and their planned work. This document specifically concerns the opportunity to give unrestricted support for Rethink Priorities to use where we deem most impactful.

WHY UNRESTRICTED SUPPORT?

Unrestricted support is key to unlocking Rethink's full potential as an organization. Having flexible funding allows us to consider how we can most effectively help the broader fields that we work in to be more impactful rather than focus solely on the needs of one particular funder.




Much of Rethink Priorities' work benefits many organizations and individuals—directly and indirectly—but securing funding from each one of them (especially before starting a project) to cover the whole budget is neither practical nor possible. With unrestricted funding available, our researchers are empowered to start working on a project when we think it's the most impactful thing to do, rather than having to wait for the whole project to be funded.

For example, in many cases a funder commissions us to write a private report and we need to supplement the funding to make the necessary changes for publishing a public version.

As one of our strategic priorities for 2025, we aim to engage with more traditional funders to redirect significant philanthropic budgets toward more cost-effective interventions. Our research leads us to believe that traditional funders may be less effective in their giving than EA funders. Thus updating traditional funders' allocations toward even slightly more cost-effective areas and approaches would have greater marginal impact. We think this work could potentially be 3-10x as cost-effective to fund as directly giving the money to top recommended charities, as we have argued previously. Prospecting such traditional funders and building relationships with them is only possible with unrestricted funding.

While some foundations may provide general support to a specific research department, Rethink Priorities as an organization does not receive any unrestricted funding from our main institutional funders.

The following are instances where unrestricted funding is instrumental:

-  Investing in long-term returns through outreach efforts to new prospective clients and donors, outside of our current funding sphere
-  Time-sensitive opportunities where funder turnaround times would make them impossible to act upon
-  A hiring round where there is an unexpectedly high number of excellent candidates that we want to hire





HOW HAVE WE USED UNRESTRICTED FUNDS?

Many of our supporters are surprised to learn that the overwhelming majority of our funding is restricted. Thus far, we have raised ~\$8M from institutional and individual funders this year.

ONLY **7%** OF OUR FUNDING HAS BEEN UNRESTRICTED

Few of our donors know that the Moral Weight Project—one of the most impactful and widely spread projects Rethink Priorities has ever delivered (e.g. appeared in *Ethics* and *Oxford University Press*)—was funded in large part through unrestricted funding. Despite an initial lack of institutional support, we were able to take a strategic bet on this research project. The results have already influenced funding decisions and new organizations have already been formed as a result of the work. We still continuously see new examples of this research being impactful, and expect that to continue.

Unrestricted funds have also allowed us to:

-  Draft a research agenda on digital consciousness for it to then find new funding sources
-  Publish many otherwise unfunded ecosystem-service projects from the Survey Team
-  Continue work on improving our Worldview Investigations digital tools based on user feedback, while waiting to hear back from institutional funders
-  Do more extensive work on the EA Survey, making it useful beyond the funding we received

HOW MIGHT UNRESTRICTED FUNDS BE USED IN 2025?

We expect that 2025 will also present us with urgent and unforeseen opportunities that your donations would enable us to tackle. Our belief is that much of the most impactful research opportunities will be at the frontiers of the respective fields in which we work. At the same time, it is this exact type of research that is especially sensitive to changes in the landscape and priorities of funders. For Rethink Priorities to take leaps of faith pushing the frontiers, we need support from daring donors.

If you want to have a conversation about the above arguments, practicalities around your prospective donation, or proceeding with support restricted to a specific area, you can reach out to our CEO [Marcus A. Davis](#) who is happy to offer a call or to bring in the relevant researchers to answer your questions.



Marcus A. Davis

Co-Founder and CEO

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