

Multidonor funds

Choosing cause areas is the most consequential decision a philanthropist makes. While many causes are worthy, philanthropy can accomplish far more in some areas than others. For this reason, we rigorously investigate a broad range of causes to identify where philanthropists can have a particularly significant impact.

When we identify an outstanding cause and have early signs of traction, but require additional resources to operate at scale, we often launch multidonor funds — vehicles that bring together multiple philanthropists to support especially high-impact work. Pooling funds can provide new funders with access to a sophisticated grantmaking apparatus in an important, tractable, and often neglected area, without requiring them to recreate the wheel themselves.

How this works in practice

The Lead Exposure Action Fund (LEAF), launched in 2024, exemplifies our approach to multidonor funds. Lead exposure causes an estimated 1.5 million deaths each year, primarily in low- and middle-income countries, plus other severe health and cognitive issues. Yet this issue only received around \$15 million per year in philanthropic funding prior to the launch of LEAF. That is less than 1% of the funding that goes toward diseases with similar health burdens, such as tuberculosis or malaria (which are themselves neglected relative to their burdens).

Coefficient Giving's investigation of lead poisoning began with in-depth research on the global health burden and the amount of philanthropic attention devoted to the issue. We then dug into the evidence about the underlying mechanisms by which lead causes harm, and its various impacts — from shortened lifespan to cognitive and financial effects. And in areas where we felt the evidence was less clear — such as the educational and economic impacts of lead poisoning — we commissioned new studies.

After becoming convinced of the issue's importance and neglectedness, we still questioned whether it could be tackled cost-effectively at scale, given limited prior work on the problem. Through our partner GiveWell, we made a set of exploratory grants to get better answers to our questions: we contributed funding to Pure Earth to undertake testing and mitigation focused on spices in South Asia, and to the Lead Exposure Elimination Project (LEEP) to reduce the use of lead in paint in Malawi and other countries.

These small grants, complemented by other ongoing efforts in the space, were substantially more promising than we had anticipated. In Bangladesh, a research and mitigation project has led to the complete elimination of lead in turmeric, which we project will prevent exposure over the next five years that would eventually result in 20,000 deaths. In Malawi, LEEP assisted the government in launching a national lead paint ban, reducing its market share by 60%. And in Georgia, Pure Earth's partnership with the government (which preceded our involvement) led to a 60% reduction in blood lead levels over a four-year period. These results gave us confidence that this issue was not only important and neglected, but also tractable and unusually cost-effective at scale.

Collectively, these findings suggested that a coordinated philanthropic effort could be highly effective. In 2023, we began to develop a four-year philanthropic strategy aimed at dramatically reducing global lead poisoning through investments in measurement, mitigation, and raising widespread awareness of the problem. Over the following year, we assembled a coalition of 12 philanthropic partners to bring this plan to life. In parallel, we worked closely with governments to develop the Partnership for a Lead-Free Future (PLF), launching it concurrently with LEAF. In its inaugural year, 31 governments committed to undertaking serious policy action through the PLF, annual funding grew from under \$15 million to over \$70 million, and our understanding of the problem rapidly increased, with seven blood lead level surveys completed or ongoing and over 20 planned.

This approach — deep research, focused grantmaking to resolve key questions, evidence-based and cost-effective strategy design, and partnerships for scaled impact — runs through all of our multidonor funds, from the Abundance and Growth Fund (where we were early, large funders of the YIMBY movement) to global health initiatives launching over the coming year.