Crowdfunding

While crowdfunding – or internet-based giving – has been around for more than a decade, there has been a flood of new sites in the past few years. With 138 such sites in the U.S. alone – one of which, Kickstarter, a New-York based arts microfunding site reports that it will distribute more than $150M this year – crowdfunding is provoking much discussion about the changing shape of philanthropy.

One such change with broad implications is that crowdfunding puts the power of setting charitable priorities and targeted giving into the hands of individuals rather than large institutions. Participants on these sites tend to set relatively small and tightly focused fundraising goals. Up until recently, goals have tended to remain individually-focused, such as raising funds for creative projects or personal medical expenses. Now, people are hoping to leverage the expanded reach of both donors and participants for new causes, such as academic research.

Launched in April 2012, Microryza is a new site that hopes to turn the crowd-based financing effort to science. Drawing on the biological origins of its name, this startup wants to support a community to provide “microgrants to seed new research.” In addition to funding, the site will serve as a place for networking and sharing research. In this way, while the goal is to have scientific research projects funded, the emphasis is less on the outcomes of the research, and more on the process itself. There are also new sites, such as Fundageek.com, that make it easier for undergraduate students to obtain funding for research. These non-traditional means for research funding allow for a more interactive, transparent, and less restrictive way for individuals to raise money.

Microryza, and perhaps other similar platforms, claims no ownership over the IP that is generated in the course of the research. Additionally, the funds raised currently come in to the researcher as a gift, although there are platforms that channel the funds through the researchers’ universities so they can be tax deductible. In addition to the questions this raises about university overhead, there are also new and interesting questions about the implications of the public-at-large funding academic research. What types of research will the public choose to fund, or for that matter, understand well enough to make informed funding decisions? While these types of questions are far from being answered, many believe that crowdfunding in this space is here to stay.

For more information: Inside Higher Ed, Houstonian Online, Crain’s Chicago Business, #SciFund Challenge.
New Foundation Alert

CEA Foundation

On June 27, 2012 the Consumer Electronics Association announced the new charitable arm of its organization, the CEA Foundation. The foundation seeks to develop and disseminate technology to senior citizens and people with disabilities to help connect them to the outside world and improve their quality of life.

Isolation is often a common problem amongst the senior and disabled populations, and can lead to emotional, physical, and financial problems. Studies show that technology can ease the burdens that isolation creates, allowing all individuals to reconnect with life.

The first grantee of the CEA Foundation is Selfhelp Community Services, Inc., an eldercare service organization located in New York. Selfhelp has created a Virtual Senior Center that brings technology into the homes of senior citizens to create interactive experiences and opportunities for socializing. Through computer, video, and internet technology, senior citizens are able to take classes, engage in exercise, and connect with relatives, friends, and the outside world.

The CEA Foundation plans to expand their activities with Selfhelp and other organizations to deliver technology to enhance the lives of the aging and disabled communities.

To learn more information, visit the CEA Foundation’s website at [http://www.ceafoundation.org](http://www.ceafoundation.org).


Funder to Watch

Good Ventures and GiveWell

In 2011, Dustin Moskovitz (co-founder of Facebook and OFR Digest’s “Funder to Watch”), and his girlfriend, Cari Tuna, established Good Ventures, a foundation focusing on improving the quality of life worldwide, advancing public policy, and increasing the impact of philanthropy. Recently, Good Ventures has formed a partnership with GiveWell, a nonprofit charity evaluator that helps donors decide where to give based on financial and programmatic analysis.

With this partnership, Good Ventures and GiveWell plan to act as a single team, evaluating funding opportunities that are most in line with the organizations’ shared values. Both believe that too often, donors give to charities based on emotional appeals and influential marketing materials rather than effectiveness of the organization at fulfilling its mission. Through their collaboration, Good Ventures and GiveWell seek to make information in the nonprofit sector transparent, giving donors the knowledge to choose organizations where their money will be the most impactful. This arrangement is believed to become more common amongst nonprofits in the future, and it will be exciting to watch this partnership as it develops.

Source: ([GiveWell.org 6/28/2012](http://www.givewell.org/2012/06/28/20120628.htm))
Arts Integration at Research I Universities

Driven by the increasing demand for creative leaders in today's world, universities are launching initiatives and spurring a dialogue around supporting the integration of artists and arts practice at American research universities. In early June, 23 Research I universities (including MIT, Stanford, Princeton, Michigan, Vanderbilt, and others) pledged $80K to establish a formal national communication network to support this effort. The initial funds will support collaborations with consulting and communications firms to support the establishment of this network.

Additionally, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded $500K to the University of Michigan for an initiative to spur this national effort. The three-year grant will fund the first comprehensive guide to best practices in arts integration at research universities. So far, the ArtsEngine initiative has produced interdisciplinary courses, a living-learning community dedicated to creative process, student competitions, exhibits, performances and creative work and research by faculty.

Source: (www.heritage.com 6/17/2012)