Air and Water Labs Request for Proposals

Request for Proposals: Overview and Instructions

J-PAL's Air and Water Labs (AWLs) in India and South Africa (Cape Town), named Solutions and Advancements through Research for Water and Air (**SARWA**) and Water, Air, and Energy **(WAE) Lab** respectively, are calling for proposals to innovate, test, and scale evidence-informed solutions for the most pressing air and water challenges facing their regions in collaboration their government partners.[1] These AWLs invite proposals for either research or path-to-scale projects aimed at improving clean air and water access for millions of people by informing the decisions of local and national governments.[2] J-PAL affiliated and invited researchers can submit applications for proposal development grants, pilots, or randomized evaluations on cutting-edge policy innovations and technologies with the lab's government partner(s). To scale evaluated and effective solutions, J-PAL affiliated and invited researchers can submit path-to-scale applications in collaboration with each lab's government partner(s). Applications can also include NGO, private sector, or other collaborators working with the government partner(s).

If you are interested in applying, please first reach out to the relevant lab team member below to learn more about matchmaking opportunities and requirements:

- India (SARWA): Sanjana Gorti at sgorti@povertyactionlab.org
- Cape Town, South Africa (WAE Lab): Margaret Andersen at waelab@povertyactionlab.org

Please submit complete applications as one PDF to awl@povertyactionlab.org and CC kcai@povertyactionlab.org.

Deadlines for submission:

Full randomized evaluations and **path-to-scale** proposals for AWL funding are submitted to the K-CAI Board on the K-CAI RFP schedule. For these project types, short Expressions of Interest (EOIs) are due by 11:59 a.m. US ET on Thursday, February 29. Full proposals are due by 11:59 a.m. US ET on Thursday, April 4, with a decision released in June.

[1] For information on the Hub of Advanced Policy Innovation for the Environment (**HAPIE**), the Air and Water Lab hosted by J-PAL MENA, please see the Egypt Impact Lab website. Pilot and proposal development grant applications only will be accepted by HAPIE in the first RFP.
[2] In addition to clean air and water, AWLs can also accept proposals for projects on other priority issues related to climate, environmental, or energy policy as long as they are demand-driven by the government and have the potential to benefit people and/or the planet.

Proposal development and **pilot** proposals will be accepted according to each lab's review schedule:

- India (SARWA): Pilot and proposal development grant applications accepted on the same schedule as K-CAI's RFP: EOIs are due February 29, 2024, and full proposals are due April 4, 2024.
- Cape Town, South Africa (WAE Lab): Pilot and proposal development grant applications accepted on a rolling basis.

About J-PAL Air and Water Labs: In 2020, in partnership with King Philanthropies, J-PAL launched the King Climate Action Initiative (K-CAI), our flagship program to vastly expand work on climate change and poverty across J-PAL worldwide. Extending K-CAI's work and in partnership with Community Jameel, J-PAL South Asia, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Africa are leading three Air and Water Labs in close collaboration with government partners in India, Egypt, and South Africa (Cape Town) to co-generate evidence-based solutions for the most pressing air and water challenges and environmental priorities in these contexts.

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Motivation: The Air and Water Crisis

There is no substitute for clean air and water. Africa, MENA, and South Asia are on the front lines of the global air and water crises, facing high levels of water scarcity and worsening air and water quality that leads people to live shorter and sicker lives. In India, about 75 percent of households did not have drinking water on premises in 2018. Nearly 90 percent of children in MENA live in areas facing high or extreme water stress as of 2021. In 2019, nearly 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa lacked access to safe drinking water. Simultaneously, air pollution is one of the greatest threats to human health globally. In India, extraordinary levels of air pollution are shortening the average life expectancy by five years. In Africa, rising indoor and ambient air pollution contributed to 1.1 million premature deaths in 2019. These air and water crises are fundamentally connected to the broader global climate and energy challenge. Thus, labs also have the option to work on priority government policies related to climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, pollution reduction, and energy access.

Solutions to these problems are often scarce because data and evidence on potential solutions are limited. Without high-quality data and evidence, it is impossible to know where the problems are the most severe and what solutions would be the most effective to address them. Even when objective data are available, few high-quality impact evaluations of potential policies are available to guide decisions on air and water policy. The resulting uncertainty around the most effective course of action makes it difficult for governments to enforce policies, allows polluters to fall through the cracks, and ultimately harms vulnerable communities.

SARWA is embedded within the Department of Water and Sanitation, Government of India; the Government of Gujarat; and other state departments. WAE Lab is embedded within the City of Cape Town. Through the labs, J-PAL is working with government partners to co-diagnose the most pressing air and water challenges within the regions, expand policymakers' access to and use of high-quality data, co-generate evidence on promising solutions through pilot projects and randomized evaluations, co-design potential solutions based on existing evidence, and scale policies and programs found to be effective.

AWL Funding Priorities

J-PAL's comparative advantage lies in conducting research to resolve the fundamental economic problems that lie at the heart of the air and water crisis. Through the research funds in each of the embedded labs, we look for projects across different multi-sectoral aspects of clean air and water access, including but not limited to:

- Regulation, including market-based regulation, to reduce air and water pollution
- Incentives and information for behavior change around water use, water treatment, and air pollution
- Water pricing, payment recovery, and billing systems, to cover the cost of infrastructure for improved water quality and quantity, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure availability and accessibility
- Tools and information to hold policymakers accountable for pollution policies
- Water conservation in households, farms, and industry
- Exploiting the improvements in remote sensing to improve regulatory efficiency
- Technology adoption for self-protection from poor air and water quality, to reduce the individual consequences of pollution
- Education and awareness-building among rural and urban households on WASH
- Water conservation, and water resource maintenance, with an emphasis on community-based initiatives

Each AWL will prioritize funding research and scaling projects in partnership with the government partner(s), as well as projects with high potential to influence policy and/or to improve access to clean air and water at scale. With a focus on approaches that respond to partners' top priorities regarding air and water or other environmental issues (demand driven) and have the potential to benefit people in poverty at scale, each lab will consider projected effect size and cost-effectiveness of Research and Path-to-Scale proposals of promising innovations measuring one or more of the following outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Improving air quality and/or reducing air pollution
- **Outcome 2:** Improving water quality and/or reducing water pollution
- **Outcome 3:** Increasing access to clean, usable water for people facing water stress
- **Outcome 4:** Measure the impact of research on policy changes at local, state or national levels (this could be by introducing new guidelines, standards or regulations)
- **Outcome 5:** Level of community engagement and participation in air and water quality improvement efforts
- **Outcome 6:** (WAE Lab) Increasing access to affordable, reliable energy for people experiencing poverty

Research teams considering expanded topics are invited to reach out to the relevant Air and Water Lab team using the contact information listed in **Annex 1** if they would like to discuss whether other topics may be in scope. Outcomes of interest may also be determined through these conversations.

Award Types, Proposal Guidelines, and Eligibility

Award Types

AWLs support research and scaling projects with lab partners in government. Each lab will prioritize projects with high potential for policy influence and/or to improve access to clean air and water at scale. The funds will support the following project types:

Research Awards:

- **Proposal development grants** (up to US$10,000): funds for exploratory work and travel to develop a pilot or full project proposal with a government partner.
- **Pilot grants** (up to US$75,000): Grants for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation of a randomized evaluation requires further testing and pilot data before launching the randomized evaluation.
- **Full randomized evaluation grants** (up to US$400,000[3]): These grants are for demand-driven research projects with lab government partners at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates. It is expected that these projects will lead to evidence being used in a policy decision and a paper publishable in a top economics or political science journal.

Path-to-Scale Awards:

- **Adapt grants** (up to US$75,000): grants to support projects where a potential evidence-informed solution has been identified, but it is not ready to be piloted at-scale. These grants can be used to support designing and adapting evidence-informed programs, policies, or delivery mechanisms to the relevant context.
- **Policy Pilot grants** (up to US$200,000): grants designed to provide technical support to partners piloting an evidence-informed solution at-scale, such as through monitoring implementation quality and ensuring that the program features maintain fidelity to the evidence. These grants may also be used to support path-to-scale research building on existing evidence and at-scale replication trials to evaluate interventions previously tested at a smaller scale.

[3] Please note that proposals that strategically leverage lower amounts of funding will be more competitive. One important cost-effective tool to consider is the wealth of administrative data available from government partners, a particular strength of the AWL structure.

- **Full Scale-up grants** (up to US$300,000): grants designed to provide technical support in rolling out or expanding evidence-informed solutions at-scale, based on the outcomes of a previous RCT or policy pilot evaluating the intervention in the same context. This grant can support a range of activities that can include but are not limited to: conducting analysis to help them secure key approvals for the scale-up, ensuring implementation and rollout protocols maintain fidelity to the evidence in terms of the key program features that drove positive impacts, and/or setting up low-cost partner-owned monitoring systems for scaled-up programs to report periodic progress to key decision-makers.

For more information on the types of Path-to Scale grants and examples of Path-to-Scale activities these grants may be used to support, please refer to pages 9–13 of the K-CAI RFP Overview.

Proposal Guidelines

Since J-PAL's Air and Water Labs are driven by government demand for rigorous evidence, project teams are asked to consult the lab leads before applying. For HAPIE, please follow the proposal guidelines outlined for the Egypt Impact Lab RFP. For SARWA and WAE Lab, please directly email the appropriate contact listed in **Annex 1** to discuss government engagement and receive approval to apply before submitting a proposal.

Eligibility Criteria

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and invited researchers are eligible to apply for all award types at AWLs. PhD students that have a J-PAL affiliate or eligible invited researcher on their thesis committee at their host university are eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants or up to $50,000 in pilot or full-scale funding. For more information on eligibility criteria, please see pages 14–16 of the K-CAI RFP Overview.

Review Process and Timelines

Travel/Proposal Development and Pilot Proposals

Applications will be reviewed on a monthly basis by the AWL review committee consisting of the Scientific Advisors of the lab and a senior management team member of the J-PAL regional office. See the application instructions on the templates provided on the AWL webpage to apply.

Full RCT and All Path-to-Scale Proposals

Applications should be submitted to K-CAI's RFP and will be reviewed on an annual basis. The selection of awards for full RCT and Path-to-Scale proposals will follow the same two-stage review process that proposals submitted to K-CAI follow. See full K-CAI application instructions to apply.

Proposals will be distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of research and policy experts on environment, energy, and climate change issues with a focus on air and water in the region. Applications will be reviewed by at least two referees, one member of the K-CAI review board and one J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher with related expertise in air and water. Applications will then be reviewed and scored by the K-CAI Review Board as well as the AWL's Scientific Advisor(s). Funding decisions will be finalized during a review board call. For a more detailed description of the K-CAI review process, please see page 16-17 of the K-CAI RFP Overview.

Conditions to Access Funding

If your proposal is selected for funding, it will be subject to the same terms and conditions as proposals funded through K-CAI. These terms include:

1. **Requests to participate in peer-review for future rounds**
2. **Trial registration with the AEA RCT Registry**
3. **Participation in AWL and K-CAI activities**
4. **Crediting SARWA or WAE Lab in future presentations and publications**
5. **Collecting and reporting gender-disaggregated data**
6. **Progress reporting and final report**
7. **Collecting and reporting program cost data**
8. **Collecting and reporting implementation processes**
9. **Data publication**

Additionally, projects will be required to track and report on one or more of the AWL key outcome metrics for the intervention that they are evaluating and/or scaling, in addition to the number of people reached and their average income level, where available. The AWL requires grantees to track one or more of the following:

- Improvement in air quality or access to clean air: Reductions in local air pollutants, such as particulate matter as quantified by improvements in health
- Improvement in water quality or access to clean water: Reductions in water pollution as quantified by water quality measures or by reductions in the incidence of water-bourne diseases
- Increase in water security: Access to clean, usable water for drinking, bathing, agriculture, or similar uses
- If the project is focusing on another environment, energy, or climate change priority for the government outside air and water, please propose the outcome metrics that are most appropriate for the project.

Administrative Notes

Payments and Subawards

The majority of AWL grants will be hosted at the relevant J-PAL regional office and will not have a subaward contracted through MIT. For grants that are provided in an award to the grantee's host institution, please see instructions in the corresponding application forms for your award type for more information.

Code of Conduct

Since J-PAL is part of MIT, everyone who is associated with J-PAL, including researchers worldwide receiving grants from J-PAL initiatives, are considered part of the broader MIT community. Therefore, it is our hope and expectation that they will adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available here. A part of MIT's broader policies, this section, titled "Relations and Responsibilities Within the MIT Community," contains specific provisions regarding personal conduct, harassment, discrimination and retaliation, violence against community members, and substance use. Please take some time to review these.

Additionally, all PIs must adhere to their local university Code of Conduct as well as that of the local host university.

Annex 1: Contacts for Air and Water Labs by Region

For questions about priorities, application and review processes, eligibility, and general inquiries, please reach out to the relevant AWL contact listed below or visit the website for SARWA or WAE Lab.

For questions about award setup and administration, please reach out to the relevant AWL Grant Administrator listed below.

For questions about K-CAI, please reach out to kcai@povertyactionlab.org, or visit the K-CAI website.

Solutions and Advancements through Research for Water and Air (SARWA) - India Government Partner(s): Department of Water and Sanitation, Government of India; Government of Gujarat; other state departments	**J-PAL South Asia Contact** and **Grant Administrator:** Sanjana Gorti (Lead, J-PAL South Asia AWL) sgorti@povertyactionlab.org
Water, Air and Energy (WAE) Lab - Cape Town, South Africa Government Partner: City of Cape Town	**J-PAL Africa Contact:** Margaret Andersen (Policy Manager, J-PAL Africa) **Grant Administrator:** Leandra Palmer (Senior Operations Associate, J-PAL Africa) All WAE Lab-related questions may be directed to waelab@povertyactionlab.org
Hub of Advanced Policy Innovation for the Environment (HAPIE)* - Egypt Government Partner(s): The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development	**J-PAL MENA Contact:** Heba El-Sahn (Policy Manager, J-PAL MENA) helsahn@povertyactionlab.org **RFP Questions:** eil_rfp@povertyactionlab.org

* Information for the Hub of Advanced Policy Innovation for the Environment AWL (J-PAL MENA) included for reference. HAPIE serves as the Egypt Impact Lab's extension in a new thematic area related to environment, energy, and climate change.