Clean Air Fund South Africa Portfolio Review

Request for Proposals

September 2026

We are seeking specialist expertise to conduct a strategic review of Clean Air Fund's South Africa Portfolio. The consultant or firm will have demonstrated experience in reviewing complex policy and systems-change portfolios, ideally for foundations or international NGOs, and translating insights into practical, forward-looking strategy recommendations. Experience with learning approaches such as contribution analysis, outcome mapping, and structured reflection processes is desirable. A strong working knowledge of South Africa's air quality, environmental and intergovernmental policy context is essential, and familiarity with the wider Southern Africa region is highly valuable.

Background to Clean Air Fund

Launched in 2019, the Clean Air Fund (CAF) is a philanthropic initiative with a mission to tackle air pollution around the world. Our aim is to help build and support a powerful global movement for clean air. We achieve this by bringing together funders, researchers, policy makers and campaigners working on a wide range of issues to find and scale solutions that will provide clean air for all. We work where the need and potential for impact are greatest: in the EU, Poland, Ghana, South Africa, India, Indonesia and the UK and global cities across Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. We also have global thematic programmes, raising air pollution up the international climate and health agendas. Our global themes span data, health, advocacy, super-pollutants and private sector engagement. More information about the Clean Air Fund can be found on our website: https://www.cleanairfund.org/

Background to the Assignment

South Africa became a CAF country programme in December 2023, and the first strategy, covering 2024 to 2026, was approved in May 2024. It works primarily in the three National Air Quality Priority Areas, around a vision of enhancing the capacity of all stakeholders to deliver coordinated and effective implementation of air quality strategies, policies and plans, in order to achieve a 40 percent reduction in particulate emissions in the Priority Areas by 2030. The strategy set five aims to 2026, covering emission reduction targets in the Priority Areas, improved air quality and health data for government decision making, enforcement of industrial emissions reporting, empowerment of community-based organisations, and scoping of work beyond 2026. Delivery has taken place in a complex operating context, shaped by fiscal constraints on government, active industry and civil society stakeholders, and an evolving regulatory and legal landscape.

We are preparing for a South Africa strategy refresh and anticipate this review to be a core component of that process. Given our work in South Africa is still recent, we do not anticipate an in-depth, retrospective review. Rather, this assignment is designed to be forward-looking: building on insights and lessons so far and identifying areas of strategic priority for the Clean Air Fund's work in South Africa over the next five years, either by building on existing activities or as new areas. All recommendations should be aligned to the Clean Air Fund's 2027-2031 strategy. With details to be confirmed during the inception phase, areas of focus will include national and subnational policy development and implementation, with specific recommendations to be developed around sector involvement and links to finance, health and equity. Bidders are requested to design an approach that is rigorous but tightly scoped, a priori.

Review purpose

This is a learning-focused, formative portfolio review intended to shape the next phase of the South Africa strategy. The purpose of the review is threefold:

1. Assess progress and strategic relevance of the portfolio since 2024.
2. Surface key outcomes, lessons and insights, including unintended effects.
3. Generate options and recommendations for the next strategy.

Relationship to the strategy refresh process

This review runs alongside, and is intended to feed directly into, the development of the next South Africa strategy. It is not a standalone accountability exercise. Findings will be used as they emerge rather than only at the final report stage, and the review team should expect an iterative, closely engaged relationship with the portfolio and strategy teams. Areas already covered by the strategy refresh, such as internal stakeholder mapping, are out of scope for this review.

There is a particular overlap on stakeholder engagement. The strategy refresh will involve its own consultation with government, civil society, industry and academic stakeholders, many of whom the reviewer will also want to speak to. The review team will be expected to work with the Clean Air Fund to align and, where sensible, combine these engagements, so that stakeholders are approached once rather than repeatedly and so that insight flows in both directions. Interview protocols and participant lists will be agreed jointly at inception.

Bidders should set out in their proposal how they would sequence and coordinate their work with the strategy process, and how they would keep the review's independence intact while still feeding into it in real time.

Review scope

The review covers the full range of work under the South Africa portfolio from the start of the current strategic period in 2024 up to the point of data collection. It covers work at national level, work in and across the three Priority Areas, including in cities, and engagement with government, civil society, industry and academic partners.

Review objectives

Objective one is to assess how effectively the portfolio's approach has supported progress toward its strategic aims.

This includes testing the strength of the portfolio theory of change, assessing the contribution of the portfolio to the outcomes observed, and setting that contribution in the context of the wider governance, fiscal, industrial and legal factors that shape air quality in South Africa. Objective one is expected to carry a weighting of approximately 35 percent.

Objective two is to identify lessons and generate strategic recommendations for the next South Africa strategy.

This includes recommendations that cover geographic focus, sectoral focus and partner focus, and should be realistic about what each recommendation would require in funding, capacity and time. The recommendations must align with the new CAF strategy (2027-2031). Objective two is expected to carry a weighting of approximately 40 percent.

Objective three is to map the policy pathways on which the next strategy will depend.

For the prioritised policies identified for the portfolio, the review should set out what the pathway to adoption, implementation and enforcement looks like over the next five years, including the key steps, the institutions and decision makers involved, and the points at which the Clean Air Fund can most usefully contribute. This objective also includes producing a replicable policy roadmap template that other Clean Air Fund portfolios can use. Objective three is expected to carry a weighting of approximately 25 percent.

Key review questions

There are three headline key review questions, each with a small number of sub-questions. Bidders should keep the review tightly focused on these:

1. Where in the South Africa portfolio do we have evidence of traction, and what has the Clean Air Fund contributed?

1. How well has the portfolio positioned itself to influence air quality outcomes at national level and in the Priority Areas since 2024?
2. What significant outcomes, intended and unintended, can be associated with the portfolio, including policy and regulatory outcomes, improvements in data and evidence use, and ecosystem-building outcomes, and what and how has the Clean Air Fund contributed to them?
3. What has helped and what has hindered the portfolio in progressing its strategic aims?

2. What are the biggest opportunities and constraints for the South Africa portfolio over the next five years?

4. What are the policy windows, upcoming regulations, and implementation opportunities and gaps? For the prioritised policies, what does the pathway to adoption, implementation and enforcement look like over the next five years?
5. Where should the portfolio build on existing activities and where are new areas of focus justified, across national and subnational policy, sector engagement and links to finance, health and equity?
6. What has the portfolio learned about working with the Clean Air Fund's global thematic programmes, and what principles and practical approaches would strengthen country-to-thematic working for the next South Africa strategy?
7. What would each option realistically require in funding, capacity and time?

3. What is the distinctive role of the Clean Air Fund in South Africa, and what should it stop or do less of?

8. Where can the Clean Air Fund add the most value, given the roles of government, industry, civil society, academia and other funders?

9. What are the pros and cons of stopping, scaling down or reshaping current areas of activity?

Proposed methodological approaches

There are several potential approaches which are suitable to give us the insight required to assess CAF's contributions to outcomes seen. We are open to considering different options but would like the review to employ a Theory Based approach, testing the portfolio theory of change and making a proportionate, evidence-based contribution claim, combined with elements of Outcome Harvesting. Given the light-touch, formative nature of this review, we are looking for a rigorous but tightly scoped design: a contribution narrative supported by triangulated evidence, not a full causal evaluation. Bidders should be explicit about the depth of causal claim their approach can credibly support within the budget and timeline. Indicatively, we expect the design to combine a document and grants synthesis, key informant interviews with Clean Air Fund staff and external stakeholders, opportunity mapping of policy windows, upcoming regulation and implementation gaps, and validation workshops.

The methodology must include an internal sensemaking workshop with relevant CAF teams and a stakeholder validation workshop in South Africa with external stakeholders, including government, civil society, industry and academic partners as appropriate, to ground truth emerging insights, surface alternative explanations and build shared ownership of the recommendations. Facilitation, travel and participation should be costed. Bidders should note that public life in South Africa largely shuts down between mid-December and mid-January.

Target audience and users

- Primary users: CAF's South Africa Portfolio, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team, and members of Senior Leadership Team.

- Secondary users: Members of other country and thematic Portfolio teams, fundraising team.

Timing

Work is expected to start in November 2026 and to be completed by January 2027, so that clarity on strategic choices is available in early January 2027 ahead of Senior Leadership Team sign-off. The indicative schedule is set out below.

Anticipated Deliverables and Key Dates

Phase	Key Deliverables	Tentative Date
Inception	Inception Report	November 2026
Data collection	Document review and KIIs	November 2026
Analysis and Sensemaking	Analysis against the review questions	December 2026
	Internal sensemaking and stakeholder validation workshops	
Reporting	Final review report	January 2027
	Review summary materials	
	SA policy roadmaps and Policy roadmap template	
	Presentation on findings	

Costs

The maximum available budget for this assignment is USD 75,000 (inclusive of VAT and all other applicable taxes, travel, and other expenses). Cost effectiveness will be considered while reviewing proposals.

Proposal format and requirements

The successful consultancy company or individual(s) will have a demonstrated track record of delivering similar strategic review activities for global organisations. We encourage proposals from organisations (consortium or otherwise) which reflect the diversity of the CAF network.

Please note, to maintain the independence of the review, we cannot accept proposals from existing grantees or organisations receiving funding from CAF.

The consultancy firm or individual(s) must demonstrate:

- Experience in reviewing policy or systems-level interventions, ideally in South Africa
- Proven track record of using Theory Based review approaches
- Proven experience generating strategic insights
- Expertise in working with international philanthropic or development organisations
- Deep understanding of South Africa's institutional and policy context
- Commitment to equity and ethical review practices
- Ability to deliver clear, action-oriented reports within a tight timeline

Applicants should provide:

- A proposal for executing this assignment. This would include a short cover letter, your approach, an expanded set of proposed activities, methodologies, deliverables, and associated deadlines to meet the assignment objectives.
- A budget with activity and cost breakdown, including estimated days and day rates. The proposal and budget should not exceed 10 pages, with CVs of the proposed team members included as Annexes.
- An overview of similar assignments you may have conducted for other organisations (included as a succinct annex).
- Two recommendations/testimonies from previous clients once shortlisted

After the application deadline, the Clean Air Fund will review proposals and engage with preferred suppliers to expand on the project objectives and approach, and to develop an agreed set of activities and associated budget before contracting.

Proposals will be scored against the elements within the RfP. We will also consider value for money while reviewing proposals.

Timeline and submission

The deadline for questions is 30th September 2026. The deadline for submission of proposals is 17.00 BST, 6th October 2026. Proposals must be submitted via email to palur@cleanairfund.org.

Activity	**Date**
Deadline for questions	30th September, 2026
Deadline for proposals	6th October, 2026
Interview with shortlisted companies/individuals	12th – 15th October, 2026
Decision on preferred bidder	By 20th October, 2026
Proposal finalization and agreement	Week of the 26th October, 2026
Project start	2nd November, 2026
Deadline for completing the work	31st January, 2027