

Clean Air Fund Black Carbon Programme Evaluation

Request for Proposals

February 2026

We are seeking specialist expertise to conduct a formative evaluation of Clean Air Fund's Black Carbon programme. The consultant/ firm will have demonstrable experience working with INGOs or preferably foundations, to evaluate contributions to complex policy outcomes and to develop results and analysis that will guide future strategy and programming.

The consultant/firm will have significant experience conducting Theory Based, learning-focussed evaluations and generating tangible, evidence-based programmatic recommendations. The consultant/firm must have extensive experience evaluating policy and systems-level environmental interventions, underpinned by deep technical and policy expertise in international and national climate processes. They will have a demonstrable ability to manage complex, multi-country evaluations for philanthropic or development organisations, to generate strategic insights and to communicate findings clearly and persuasively to diverse technical and non-technical stakeholders.

Strong experience with evaluation methodologies including Process Tracing, Contribution Analysis and Outcome Harvesting as applied to progress on international regulatory and policy change is necessary. Experience of working in the unique context of re-granting is 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, India, South Africa 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

Super pollutants, often referred to as short-lived climate pollutants, are powerful drivers of climate change. Their potential to warm the atmosphere can be many times greater than Carbon Dioxide per tonne and they remain in the atmosphere for much shorter periods of time. Reducing them is critical to realising fast climate mitigation.

Black Carbon, or soot, is one of these super pollutants. It is a powerful climate and air pollutant and comprises of visible, dark fumes emitted from incomplete combustion of carbon-based fuels, solid waste and biomass burning. Black carbon emissions are concentrated regionally in East Asia, South Asia, and North and East Africa, primarily from the residential, transport, and industrial sectors. Black carbon plays a unique role in the climate system, affecting snow and ice melt, shifting rainfall patterns and extreme heat.

Black carbon, as a component of fine particulate matter (PM2.5), contributes to high levels of illness and mortality worldwide. Despite the damage black carbon causes to human and planetary health, it remains untracked and uncapped by most governments. Alongside deep decarbonisation, the global climate community is beginning to turn the spotlight onto super pollutants.

In 2024, Clean Air Fund launched a \$12.9 million programme to address black carbon's detrimental impacts on climate, health and the environment, via scientific research, strategic communications, policy and advocacy, and implementation of solutions to cut black carbon emissions.

Since its launch, the programme has supported a range of initiatives across three thematic areas:

1. Science and Communications

- Generating and disseminating robust evidence on black carbon emissions, impacts, and mitigation measures
- Raising awareness among scientists, policymakers, media, and the public.

2. Building Pressure

- Supporting advocacy, coalition-building, and stakeholder engagement to advance stronger regulations, international agreements, and financing for black carbon reduction.

3. Action

- Funding and guiding pilot projects, demonstrations, and policy implementation that aims to directly reduce black carbon emissions (for example, non-road machinery, household heating) or that strengthen the capacity of institutions to act.

See Annex A for a list of intended 2026 programme outcomes.

This assignment will evaluate how programme activities have contributed to progress on black carbon mitigation at global and national levels – for example, through reducing scientific bottlenecks, building a compelling case for action, driving policy and commitments and piloting solutions. This evaluation exercise is being conducted in the final year of the current three-year programme to gauge contributions toward intended outcomes and to generate findings and recommendations to inform CAF's future strategy on black carbon mitigation.

Evaluation purpose

This is a learning-focused, formative evaluation intended to shape the future direction of the black carbon programme. The purpose of the evaluation is threefold:

1. Assess the effectiveness of the approach taken to realise the strategic goals of the programme.
2. Evidence significant outcomes, intended and unintended, associated with the delivery of the current programme and extent to which intended outcomes are expected to be realised.
3. Generate lessons and insights which can be applied to maximise impact and inform the development of a subsequent programme phase.

Evaluation scope

This evaluation will cover the full range of work under the Programme since the start of the current funding envelope (January 2024). It will explore the effectiveness of Clean Air Fund's approach to addressing black carbon.

Crucially the evaluation will detail lessons identified from the above, specifically, how Clean Air Fund can amplify the future impact of its work on black carbon, detail the approaches which have been less successful to date and identify new avenues which could be pursued in the future.

The evaluation will situate findings and recommendations in context of changes and opportunities within the external operating environment and the reality that significant changes to policy and financing involves multiple actors and long timeframes.

Out of scope: Modelling of projected black carbon emissions reductions associated with the programme or quantification of specific health impacts.

Equity

Equity will be considered throughout the evaluation, drawing on and reflecting the principles set out by the [Equitable Evaluation Initiative](#) and in line with CAF's 'equity sensitive' approach.

Evaluation objectives

Reflecting the purpose and scope, the evaluation has three key objectives:

Objective 1: Assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the approaches taken to resolve scientific bottlenecks, build a compelling case for action, drive policy and commitments, and pilot solutions.

This objective involves assessing the strength of the programme Theory of Change, the extent to which the programme intentions by this point have been achieved and exploring the enablers and barriers to progress. It will assess the contribution of the Programme to observed outcomes at global, regional and national scales, in the context of the other factors (notably: geopolitical factors) which influence the adoption of commitments, regulations and targets as well as the role of other actors within the ecosystem. It will do so in consideration of the operating approach of the programme alongside coordination with CAF's other Portfolios of work (Global Advocacy, Health, geographic portfolios).

Objective 1 is expected to have a weighting of approximately 35% in the assignment.

Objective 2: Evidence the degree to which the direction of, and approaches taken within, the implementation of the Programme have been appropriate in progressing its strategic goals.

This objective will explore the appropriateness of the programme design and implementation, to derive strengths and weakness. It will do so by considering the wider operating context, evidence for key assumptions, developments and progress seen and new opportunities.

Objective 2 is expected to have a weighting of approximately 25% in the assignment.

Objective 3: Identify lessons and evidence to develop strategic recommendations for CAF's future work on black carbon, to help shape the direction of future programme phases.

This objective will deliver a deep dive on strategic opportunities for CAF to build on the progress to date regarding black carbon emissions mitigation and its role in driving climate and health gains through scientific, policy and solutions approaches. It will generate strategic recommendations on ways for CAF to pursue further programme impact in possible future iterations of the programme to enable effective progress towards the longer-term ambitions of the work.

This will include but is not limited to generating recommendations on the future:

- a) Regulatory framework focus
- b) Sectoral focus
- c) Partner focus
- d) Geographic focus
- e) Research focus

Objective 3 is expected to have a weighting of approximately 40% in the assignment.

Key evaluation questions

There are six proposed key evaluation question (KEQ) areas:

1. How appropriate was the programme approach and implementation in progressing its near-term goals? What does this assessment mean in regard to future approaches?
2. What has been the multiplier effect of the approach across the three thematic areas (Science & Communications, Building Pressure, Action)? What were the synergies and the gaps in this approach? How cohesive has the design and delivery of the three themes been?
3. How impactful have programme investments been, or are expected to be, in achieving intended 2026 outcomes across the areas of:
 - Generating scientific consensus on the climate and health impacts of black carbon
 - Strengthening international governance and increasing funding allocated to black carbon mitigation
 - Driving national commitments to tackle black carbon
 - Integrating black carbon reduction strategies into major climate change and clean air policy frameworks
 - Developing broader awareness and engagement about black carbon as a climate and health issue among governments, NGOs, businesses, and communities.
4. To what extent has the programme been relevant, internally and externally coherent, efficient and effective in progressing its near-term goals?
5. What has helped and hindered the Programme to progress its strategic aims? What does this mean for further programme phases?
6. What recommendations can be drawn from an assessment of the programme and emerging field level opportunities, which can accelerate and deepen impact through a subsequent phase of the programme?

Proposed methodological approaches

There are a range of potential methodological approaches suitable to assess the Programme contributions to observed outcomes and generate the depth of insights required to drive future impact. We expect proposals to present a rationale for the recommended methodology and would like the evaluation to employ a Theory Based approach, such as Contribution Analysis or Process Tracing, combined with elements of Outcome Harvesting.

These methodologies are well suited to a Programme level evaluation of support to policy and interventions in a complex environment. They can help understand the relative contribution of a given set of actors within an area of change. Proposed options will seek to establish to what extent, and how, the support from the Clean Air Fund has enabled outcomes relating to progress on the areas of focus under the black carbon programme. This will be based on a hypothesised change process (expected to be reflected as a Theory of Change) with evidence generated to support or refute the theory and develop alternative or supplementary explanations for how change might have occurred.

An integration of Bayesian Confidence Updating may also be used, to give further rigour to the evaluation results.

Following a systematic review of programme and external documentation¹ we expect the methodology to involve refining the existing programme Theory of Change. This will be done in close collaboration with internal stakeholders to ensure consensus on the causal pathways linking activities under the Science and Communications, Building Pressure, and Action pillars to intended short, medium and long-term outcomes. This will enable a robust entry point for the evaluation.

We envision a mixed methods approach to primary data collection. Where data availability allows, quantitative methods will complement qualitative findings, including analysis of surveys, policy counts, funding flows, or early mitigation indicators linked to portfolio-supported actions. To provide deeper insight into how change occurred, the evaluation will develop a small number of illustrative case studies in high-impact countries, regions, or initiatives, tracing change pathways across science, advocacy, and action. Policy and finance tracking will assess how black carbon has been integrated into national and international frameworks over time, in relation to programme activities. Evidence will be synthesised and supported by rigorous triangulation across data sources, with validation of emerging findings through structured verification, sense making and learning with CAF and selected stakeholders.

This evidence and sense making approach will share and ground truth emerging findings and evidence, enable collective reflection and insight generation, and ensure that strategic recommendations generated by the evaluation process are co-created, feasible and impactful and that they are able to directly influence the design of a subsequent programme phase.

We are open to other methodologies and suggestions which consultants/ firms think would be appropriate for effectively meeting the evaluation objectives and answering the KEQs.

Target audience and users

Primary users include the Super Pollutants Portfolio team, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team, Fundraising team and members of Senior Leadership Team.

Timing

Anticipated Deliverables and Key Dates

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Key Deliverables</u>	<u>Tentative Completion Date</u>
Desk research, conceptual framework, design and planning	Inception Report	April 2026
Data collection	Internal KIIs and workshops	May 2026
	External KIIs and workshops	June 2026
Data analysis and synthesis	Data analysis against KEQs	July 2026
	Initial insights and recommendations	August 2026
Sense making and evaluation reporting	Evidence and sense making workshop	August 2026
	Draft evaluation report and recommendations	September 2026
	Final evaluation report	October 2026
	Communications materials	October 2026

¹ Such as strategic plans, grant and financial records, monitoring data and governance reports, scientific publications, policy documents, and relevant donor or multilateral initiatives

Deliverable scope

Inception Report: A succinct report, including a completed desk review, to present the finalised evaluation framework, detailed methodology, refined evaluation questions, work plan, key indicators, key informants, and project timeline and scheduling. This report will be reviewed by CAF before full implementation. The inception report will not exceed 25 pages, excluding annexes.

Initial insights and recommendations: A succinct written output, which summarises the findings and emerging evidence from the data collection and analysis and presents early recommendations for the next phase of the programme, including recommendations for revisions to the programme ToC. This output will give an overview of the main results of the evaluation and their application. The information will form the basis of the subsequent sense making workshop.

Sense making: Interactive session(s) to engage those closest to the work to provide meaning and elaboration on findings and insights. It is expected that a digital workspace will be developed to make results and findings assessable and to enable the facilitation of these sessions across geographically dispersed stakeholders. Results will be incorporated in the evaluation report and recommendations. Sessions will not exceed two hours and will be conducted online.

Draft Evaluation Report: A comprehensive draft report that presents the evaluation's methodology, findings, lessons, and draft recommendations and conclusions. This report should include case study write-ups, illustrative examples, and visual aids (charts, tables or infographics) as needed to communicate results. This draft will be reviewed by CAF before finalisation. The draft evaluation report will not exceed 35 pages, excluding annexes.

Final Evaluation Report: A polished, publication-quality report incorporating all feedback from the draft. It will include 5-page executive summary, introduction (context and purpose), methodology, findings, case studies, clear lessons, conclusions and recommendations. The final report will not exceed 35 pages, excluding annexes. The writing should be clear and accessible, making the report useful to both funders and public audiences. The final report will serve as a case study of the programme impact and may be published or otherwise shared by CAF.

Communications materials: a blog post based on the evaluation evidence which provides an overview of the programme progress, emerging impacts, lessons and future potential, suitable for publishing.

All deliverables must be submitted in English and in a digital format.

Costs

The maximum available budget for this assignment USD 200,000 (inclusive of all applicable tax, travel, and other expenses).

Proposal format and requirements

The successful consultancy or firm will have a demonstrated track record of delivering similar scale evaluation 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 evaluation, we cannot accept proposals from existing grantees or organisations receiving funding from CAF.

The team must demonstrate:

- Experience in evaluating policy or systems-level interventions

- Strong track record in conducting impact or outcome evaluations of climate change, air quality, or environmental programs, particularly those involving policy advocacy. This includes deep technical and policy knowledge of international and national climate and clean air processes (e.g. UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, Gothenburg Protocol), as well as demonstrated experience delivering high-quality evaluations for donors or foundations.
- Proven ability to manage complex, multi-country evaluations under tight timelines, including coordinating across consultants or country teams, engaging a diverse range of stakeholders across regions and cultures
- Strong mixed-methods research skills and proven track record of applying these within Theory Based evaluation exercises
- Proven experience generating strategic insights
- Expertise in working with international philanthropic or development organisations
- Commitment to equity and ethical evaluation practices
- Excellent communication skills and ability to produce clear, well-structured, action orientated reports and concise briefs or presentations tailored to both technical and non-technical audiences.

Applicants should provide:

- A proposal for executing this assignment. This will include a short cover letter, your approach, an expanded set of proposed activities, methodologies, deliverables, and associated deadlines to meet the assignment objectives. Proposals will clearly describe how the evaluation will address the broad scope and synthesize findings across different levels and geographies described above. Proposals must include a detailed timeline and schedule for all deliverables.
- A budget with activity and cost breakdown. Estimated days and day rates for each team member must be included. The budget must be inclusive of all applicable taxes.
- The proposal and overall budget will not exceed 10 pages. Annexes can be used to include CVs of the proposed team members and detailed budget breakdowns (beyond the 10 page limit).
- An overview of similar assignments you may have conducted for other organisations (included as a succinct annex).

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.

Submissions may be shared with partner stakeholders such as the CAF Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Advisory Group.

Timeline and submission

The deadline for questions is 20 February, 2026.

The deadline for submission of proposals is **17.00 GMT, Monday 2nd March, 2026**. Proposals must be submitted via email to tnelson@cleanairfund.org and aroy@cleanairfund.org

Activity	Date
Deadline for questions	20 February, 2026
Deadline for proposals	2 March, 2026

Interview with shortlisted companies/individuals	Week of the 2 nd March , 2026
Decision on preferred bidder	By the 13 th March, 2026
Proposal finalisation and agreement	Week of the 16 th March, 2026
Contracting and project start	25 March, 2026
Deadline for completing the work	30 October, 2026

Annex A

Intended 2026 programme outcomes include:

- **Scientific consensus on climate and health impact of black carbon** – New studies addressing the bottlenecks and strategic dissemination will work towards scientific consensus and reduced uncertainties.
- **Global governance and finance** – Stronger international governance (e.g. inclusion of black carbon in climate and air pollution forums and agreements) and increased funding allocated to black carbon mitigation.
- **National commitments** – New or enhanced commitments by governments to tackle black carbon (such as national action plans, regulations on key sources, or dedicated budget lines).
- **Policy integration** – Integration of black carbon reduction strategies into major climate change and clean air policy frameworks at regional and national levels.
- **Awareness and engagement** – Broader awareness and engagement about black carbon as a climate and health issue among governments, NGOs, businesses, and communities.