

Request for Expressions of Interest: Research Grants to Understand and Mitigate the Global Burden of Lead Poisoning (Round 2)

Background

Estimates suggest lead poisoning may affect a third of the world's children. Lead is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, a neurotoxin that impedes normal brain development, and may be responsible for a fifth of the gap in learning levels between rich and poor countries. Lead exposure is almost entirely preventable given adequate regulation and enforcement of its uses. Yet despite the huge ongoing burden in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), lead has been mostly neglected by the development community and national governments.

In recent years, key development actors and international organisations have been mobilising to act against lead poisoning internationally. The Partnership for a Lead-Free Future, a public-private partnership featuring the key health and development institutions, has been established with the goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning by 2040. National governments have begun to mobilise against the issue in their own populations. To make sure that these efforts are as well-targeted as possible and can maximise their impact, CGD is working to improve the evidence base on this issue.

In 2024, CGD issued a first call for proposals, awarding approximately US\$1 million to nine research projects spanning source identification, impact measurement, and solutions evaluation. Building on the success and lessons of the first round, we are now launching a second, expanded call for proposals.

We plan to distribute up to US\$5 million in this second round to researchers to generate relevant, timely, and high-impact evidence on lead poisoning, with a preference for research focused on LMICs.

Funding arrangement

CGD is issuing this call for expressions of interest with funding provided by [Coefficient Giving](#). Applications will be reviewed by a CGD review panel and selected in collaboration between CGD and Coefficient Giving on the basis of technical merit, policy relevance, and value for money. Coefficient Giving will have final approval authority, subject to budget review and Coefficient Giving's due diligence requirements. Approved research grants will be issued and administered directly by Coefficient Giving.

What we would fund

We are interested in funding new research that can help to inform action to reduce lead exposure. This is a deliberately broad and open call. Lead is inherently a multidisciplinary topic, and we hope to be surprised by research that answers questions we haven't thought of. We are eager to receive expressions of interest from across one or more relevant disciplines.

These may include, but are not limited to, economics, environmental science, public health, medicine, supply chain management, education, energy policy, chemical engineering, and management. Our guiding principles in decision-making are in selecting research that (i) is high quality and could be published in peer-reviewed academic journals, (ii) could meaningfully change a decision-maker's actions (whether that be a national government, international organisation, or private foundation), (iii) has global relevance across multiple LMICs and not just one narrow specific context, and (iv) provides high value for money. We are less likely to select research that just measures lead exposure in a specific, narrow context without generalisable lessons.

We are particularly interested in the following research questions, but applicants should not feel restricted to these topics.

1. Policy effectiveness

Reducing lead exposure ultimately depends on effective regulation, enforcement, and government action. Evidence on what works — and what doesn't — in driving policy change is limited. We are interested in research on:

- Why progress on lead mitigation has stalled in particular countries or for particular sources, and what the key barriers are.
- The effectiveness of specific policy interventions, including paint regulations, product standards, import controls, and enforcement mechanisms.
- Effective post-survey support packages for governments that have completed blood lead level surveys or source identification studies.
- Comparative regulatory analysis across countries to identify what policy approaches have been most effective.

2. Source identification and attribution

Understanding which sources of lead are responsible for population-wide exposure remains a top priority. We are interested in research that helps identify, characterise, and quantify sources of lead exposure across geographies and population groups. This includes but is not limited to:

- Isotopic source apportionment studies linking blood lead levels to specific environmental or product sources.
- Supply chain investigations tracing how specific products (e.g., spices, cookware, cosmetics, paint, pigments) become contaminated with lead.
- Market sampling and product testing across geographies to assess the prevalence of contaminated consumer goods.
- Research on emerging or understudied sources, including those whose use may scale up in the future and where early regulatory action could prevent large-scale exposure.

3. Used Lead-Acid Battery (ULAB) Recycling

Informal and substandard recycling of used lead-acid batteries is a major and growing source of lead exposure in LMICs. We are especially interested in research that can directly inform policy and programmatic responses, including:

- Quantifying lead exposure from different steps of the recycling process (acid draining, battery breaking, smelting, slag disposal) across different recycler types.
- Measuring the geographic spread of lead pollution from recycling sites, including through soil, air, and water sampling.

- Mapping the market structure and share of informal, low-standard formal, and high-standard formal recycling in priority countries.
- Evaluating policy levers such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, battery buyback programmes, and formalisation strategies, and assessing what country conditions enable their success.

4. Measurement and monitoring

Better, cheaper tools for measuring lead exposure are essential for surveillance, programme evaluation, and policy advocacy. We welcome proposals on:

- Development or validation of lower-cost, easier-to-use point-of-care blood lead level tests suitable for routine screening in LMICs.
- Approaches to environmental lead monitoring, including air quality monitoring, soil sampling protocols, and remote sensing methods (e.g., satellite detection of recycling sites).
- Standardisation of quality control protocols and reference materials for blood lead testing and source identification.
- Research to improve and validate modelled estimates of lead exposure at population scale.

Who we would fund

We expect to potentially fund a wide range of grant sizes, from smaller grants for PhD students, post-docs, and independent researchers, or for purely desk-based synthesis work, to larger grants for fieldwork and by academic institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and others. We are particularly interested in proposals from applicants in the Global South.

Intervention costs and researcher time may be eligible for funding. Course buy-outs are discouraged. There is a 10 percent cap on overhead costs.

CGD webinar Q&A

On 23 June, CGD will host a webinar to discuss the call for expressions of interest and answer any questions. Please RSVP to attend the call [here](#) to receive a dial-in link. Researchers interested in connecting with implementing organisations may register separately via [this form](#). CGD will also circulate a private list of implementing partners' priority research questions to registered researchers once that list is compiled.

Guidance on submitting expressions of interest

Expressions of interest should be submitted via the web form, available [here](#). Total content to be input is about three pages, and preparation time (active writing) should not exceed three hours. We will ask for the following information:

- A brief description of the research question and proposed research design (maximum 500 words).
- An explanation of how this project will help to answer one of the thematic priorities listed above, or otherwise provide relevant evidence for the global fight against lead poisoning (maximum 200 words).
- A brief description (no more than three sentences each) of the relevant background and skills of the proposed research team, and/or links to CVs or LinkedIn profiles.
- A proposed timeline for the research and publication.
- An initial budget estimate.

Deadline and process

Please submit expressions of interest via the form by the deadline of **2 August 2026**.

The selection process will proceed as follows:

1. **EOI evaluation and notification:** CGD will review all submissions and request full proposals from a shortlist of applicants provisionally selected, with approximately a 70% chance of receiving funding. Notification will be sent within approximately 1.5 months of the deadline.
2. **Full proposal submission deadline:** Shortlisted teams will have approximately 1.5 months to prepare full proposals.
3. **Full proposal review and final selection:** Full proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by CGD, including external peer review where needed. Final notifications will be shared within approximately 2 months of the full proposal deadline.
4. **Due diligence and grantmaking:** CGD will provide Coefficient Giving with the list of selected proposals. Coefficient Giving will conduct operational due diligence, including detailed budget review, ethics approvals, safeguarding requirements, and institutional compliance, before issuing grants directly to successful applicants.

If you are interested in applying but are either (1) unsure about whether a proposed idea would be eligible or (2) interested in early brainstorming/feedback on initial ideas, the CGD team would be happy to schedule a 30-minute one-on-one call to discuss. Please reach out to Theo Mitchell (tmitchell@cgdev.org) to set up a suitable time or to ask any further questions.

About CGD's Work on Lead Exposure

The Center for Global Development (CGD) is an independent, non-partisan think tank focused on global development, located in Washington, D.C. and London. For the last four years, CGD has been working to elevate lead poisoning to its deserved position as a top-tier development challenge, and to generate evidence and actionable strategies to address the problem. Since 2022, CGD has convened a Working Group of subject matter experts, senior figures in relevant international organisations, and NGO leaders. The Working Group's final statement, published in October 2023, called for global action and leadership to end childhood lead poisoning by 2040.

In 2025-26, CGD awarded nine research grants in the first round of this programme, covering isotopic source apportionment, lead measurement, small-scale randomised controlled trials, supply chain investigations, and quasi-experimental impact studies.

Applicants should note that grants will be issued and administered by Coefficient Giving, and grantees will be required to meet Coefficient Giving's operational and compliance requirements.