



## Request for Expressions of Interest: Research Grants to Understand and Mitigate the Global Burden of Lead Poisoning

### Background

Modelled 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 raised \$150 million with the goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning by 2040, with plans to raise further funds. National governments such as India and Malawi have begun to mobilise against the issue in their own population. To make sure that these efforts are as well-targeted as possible and thereby maximise their impact, CGD is working to improve the evidence base on this issue.

We plan to distribute a total of US\$1 million to researchers to generate relevant, timely, and high-impact evidence on lead poisoning, with a preference for research focused on LMICs.

### What We Would Fund

We are interested in funding new, empirical research to be published in peer-reviewed academic journals which tackles one (or more) of three key questions:

1. **Sources:** Where is the lead coming from? Source assessment is an obvious priority to develop context-specific policy responses to lead exposure. CGD has produced a preliminary [review of methods and priorities in source assessment](#) in developing countries, which includes suggestions for specific questions under this umbrella, and potential research designs to address them. We are interested both in *which* sources are to blame for population-wide exposure, as well as the process by which they become sources. Market and lifecycle analysis of certain sources would therefore also be valued.
2. **Impacts:** How much does lead contribute to cardiovascular disease risk, hurt children's cognitive development, increase proclivities to violence, etc.? There is a large literature on each of these topics, disproportionately concentrated in richer countries, and often lacking clear causal evidence. We're particularly interested in proposals for new, desk-based analysis of natural experiments that provide credible causal estimates of the size of these harm parameters. Unlike other proposals, research on this question in high-income countries would be eligible.
3. **Solutions:** What works to reduce lead exposure? We would welcome both desk-based analyses and new experimental or quasi-experimental fieldwork to evaluate credible lead mitigation and remediation interventions in LMICs. We are agnostic as to specific policy options. As examples, proposals might evaluate lead paint bans, test new innovations to clean up the used lead-acid battery recycling market, or evaluate the replacement of leaded cookware and other household items, etc. Separately, there is [promising evidence](#) on the effectiveness of nutritional interventions—in particular, calcium and iron supplementation—in ameliorating lead exposure, but this evidence base is relatively weak. A randomised control trial of these interventions would therefore be highly valued.

Please note that the specific research designs are only suggestions, and while we expect most proposals will fall within the three broad questions above, we will consider any research which will generate relevant, timely, and high-impact evidence on global lead poisoning.

Lead is a multidisciplinary problem and 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; and chemical engineering and management.

In some circumstances, CGD would be open to collaborating with researchers on a project. More information on our team and our previous work is available below. Please indicate whether this would be of interest by checking the relevant box on the [Expression of Interest \(EOI\) form](#).

## Who We Would Fund

Small grants are available to PhD students, post-docs, and independent researchers, capped at \$25k for desk research and \$50k for proposals that include field work. Larger grants are available to academic institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and others, capped at \$300,000 maximum.

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 15 percent cap on overhead costs.

## **Lead Researchers' Forum**

Successful applicants will join CGD's Lead Researchers' Forum, a new vehicle to facilitate knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and growing and strengthening the community of lead researchers. Obligations for the Lead Researchers' Forum include attendance (and possibly presentation) at annual research conferences in Washington, D.C., as well as participation in quarterly zoom calls. Please ensure your proposed budget includes sufficient funds for two two-day trips to Washington, D.C. (one trip per year, over two years).

## **CGD Webinar Q&A**

On November 7, at 12PM ET, CGD will host a webinar to discuss the call for expressions of interest and answer any questions. Please RSVP to attend the call [here](#) and you will receive a dial-in link.

## **Implementer-Researcher Matchmaking Event**

On November 14, from 11AM-1PM ET, CGD will host a virtual, 2-hour "matchmaking" event to identify potential pairings of interested researchers and active implementers. Implementers will briefly present active or proposed workstreams for which they are open to evaluation or other complementary research activities. Please RSVP to attend the event [here](#); you will receive a dial-in link and further information as the date approaches.

## **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 three questions 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 (form below) by the **deadline of Monday, December 16 (23.59PM ET)**. CGD will launch a first-round review process and request full proposals from a subset of applicants, with notification of status by January 30. Full proposals for Round 2, if requested, will be due by March 15. Final notification to Round 2 applicants will occur by May 15, and we will make disbursements in the following months.

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 Rory Todd ([rtodd@cgdev.org](mailto:rtodd@cgdev.org)) to set up a suitable time or if you have 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 three 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.

## Safeguarding and Anti-Corruption

Please note that all applicants who plan to conduct fieldwork using a grant **must** be affiliated or partnered with institutions which have the following policies:

- Anti-fraud, anti-corruption, anti-bribery policy
- Child protection policy / safeguarding policy
- Whistleblowing policy

We expect to only make larger grants to institutions, rather than sole researchers.