

AIR QUALITY FUND | 2024

Snapshot of 2024 Global Air Quality Actors: A Surge of Local Demand for Data



Photo Credit: The photos for this mosaic were provided by the four Spring 2024 EPIC Air Quality Awardees: Permian Health Lung Institute in The Gambia, Breathe2Change eXpand (B2CX) in Argentina, AQ54, an initiative of 'data354' in Côte D'Ivoire, and WASARU of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

About the EPIC Air Quality Fund

In Summer 2024, the Energy Policy Institute at University of Chicago (EPIC) launched a new [\\$1.5 million Air Quality Fund](#), made possible by a generous gift from Open Philanthropy. The fund aims to significantly expand access to air quality data, with the goal of reaching 1 billion people by 2030 by supporting local groups in countries worldwide to monitor air quality, share the data openly and achieve national-level impacts for cleaner air.

In launching its first call for proposals, the EPIC Air Quality Fund has amassed a unique global view of the local talent and demand for air quality (PM2.5) data, especially in countries with a combination of high pollution levels, few resources and little-to-no pre-existing data.

The surge of applications from changemakers and experts around the world signals a capacity – and demand – for more investment in this talent pool.

Learn more about the fund by visiting: epic.uchicago.edu/area-of-focus/epic-air-quality-fund



322 Organizations in 74 Countries Express Passion for Sharing Air Quality Data and Achieving National Impacts

Our call for applications to support local actors in sharing air quality data in order to drive national-level impacts attracted 322 applicants from 74 countries (Figure 1). Regions with the highest number of applicants were in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This tracks with where the greatest burden of particulate pollution is felt, yet where there is the greatest need for resources (Figure 2).

75 percent of Applicants Propose Work in Countries that Lack Necessary Resources to Confront Air Pollution

Seventy-five percent – or 242 – of the applicants are seeking to work in countries that [EPIC has previously identified](#) as “higher

priority,” areas where small, well-supported initiatives have the highest likelihood to bring about national-level impacts in air quality improvement (Figure 3). For example, countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon are considered “higher priority” given the lack of air quality resources and ground monitoring and the impact of air pollution on life expectancy. Meanwhile countries like India scored lower, since, despite still having a serious air pollution issue, it is unlikely a single monitoring effort could achieve a national level impact, given the current number of government and civil society air quality monitoring efforts across the country.

Figure 1 - Number of applicants by country to the EPIC Air Quality Fund

1-5 6-10 10-20 21-35

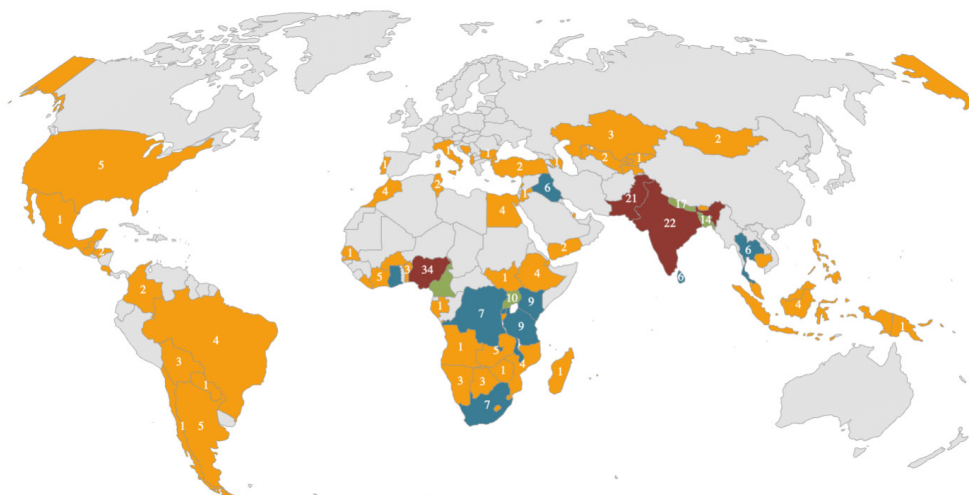
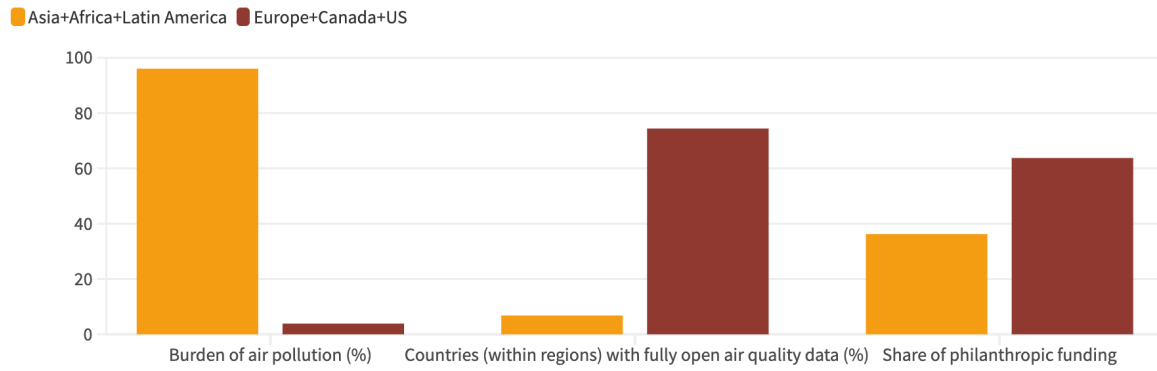


Figure 2 · Resources to address particulate pollution (PM2.5) are not adequate to address the issue, nor applied in a geographically strategic manner. From: [EPIC Analysis](#)



Data on health burden: Analysed using data from AQLI Annual Update 2024, Data on monitoring infrastructure from: 2022 OpenAQ report: <https://documents.openaq.org/reports/Open+Air+Quality+Data+Global+Landscape+2022.pdf>, Data on philanthropic funding: <https://s40026.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Clean-Air-Fund-Philanthropic-Foundation->

Figure 3 · Breakdown of Applicants working in countries deemed as ‘higher priority’ for this round of funding. Full list of priority countries is [available here](#).

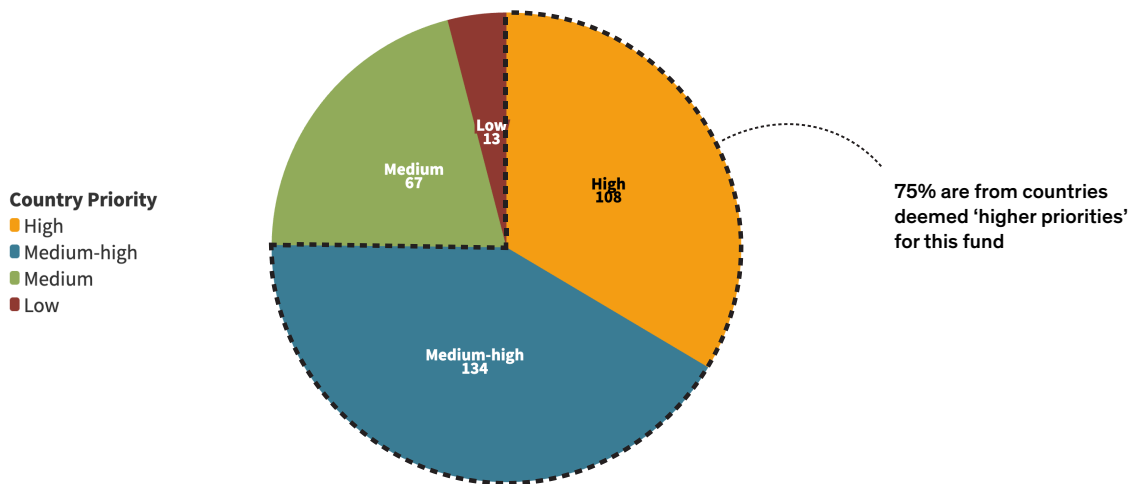


Figure 4 · Breakdown of applicants based on entity type

Entity Type: Academic institution Nonprofit For profit Government Other



Applicants Come from a Variety of Sectors, Including Governments

Applicants most frequently came from academic or non-profit institutions (Figure 4). Surprisingly, about 10 percent of applicants were from government entities. These included city governments, national environmental agencies, transport authorities and state-owned hospitals. This interest highlights an unmet demand from governments seeking support of even the most basic air quality data infrastructure and to make such data available to the public.

Applicants Have Expertise, But Most Have Not Yet Had the Opportunity to Lead; Support Structures Are Needed For Success

In an anonymous follow up survey, a strong majority of applicants – 87 percent – indicated that they have previous experience in air quality monitoring, yet only 23 percent have had the opportunity to be the primary lead on an air quality project before. This is not

surprising; by design, this call for applications is seeking those from countries that have historically received exceedingly few resources to support air quality work. Meanwhile, across many technical fields, there has been a pervasive [labor division](#) between Global South and Global North experts that exists, in part, due to where funding, often originating from the Global North, is frequently confined to flow, in addition to [other systemic barriers](#). Observing this dynamic in our applicant pool reinforces our decision to prioritize funding such local actors, in order to achieve our immediate aims of data generation translating into national level impact, as well as a related wider aim to build in-country capacity, including award management and project leadership for air quality work.

This dynamic also points to the need for structures to support funded applicants, in the form of award management assistance, professional network building, and technical support, all of which will take dedicated resources to build them for this global talent pool.



Photo Credit: Spring 2024 EPIC Air Quality Awardee, Breathe2Change eXpand (B2CX) in Argentina

In Applicants' Own Words

More than half of applicants from higher priority countries expressed that one of their national-level ambitions is to influence the creation of a National Air Quality Standard in their country, ratchet up its ambitions, or promote policy that can help their country meet its Air Quality Standard. This makes sense. According to the [2024 Air Quality Life Index Update](#), more than three-quarters of countries and territories around the world are not meeting their national pollution standards or have not even set a standard.

Meanwhile, applicants also indicated in an anonymous follow up survey that they have observed positive impacts even through the act of applying to the EPIC Air Quality Fund, particularly in the form of building civil society and government partnerships and translating into more open data policies. Representative responses from applicants in their own words:

“

Applying to the EPIC Air Quality Fund has resulted in new partnerships, such as collaborations with the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Health.”

- EPIC Air Quality Fund Applicant

“

The application process has prompted a review and adjustment of our data policies, specifically emphasizing the need for more transparent and accessible air quality data.”

- EPIC Air Quality Fund Applicant

“

Many stakeholders have shown a strong interest in the project and are actively seeking additional funding opportunities to support air quality monitoring in [my country].”

- EPIC Air Quality Fund Applicant

Looking Ahead: Seeking Partnerships to Help Supply Meet Demand from High Quality Applicants

The first round of applicants revealed a surge of demand from a talented, global pool of local air quality changemakers and experts to stand up air quality monitoring in their communities. EPIC will be able to make 10-15 awards this round, but it anticipates it will be unable to support the total number of high quality applicants. To close air quality data gaps globally as fast and with as much impact as possible, EPIC is seeking to connect with additional organizations to support more high quality applicants either in parallel or in partnership with the EPIC Air Quality Fund. If you or your organization are interested in discussing potential collaborations, please reach out to chasenkopf@uchicago.edu.

ABOUT EPIC CLEAN AIR PROGRAM

The EPIC Clean Air Program is working to bring actionable information about the quality of the air we breathe and its impact on our health to every corner of the globe in order to motivate action and lay guideposts for efficient air pollution policies. This work includes an Air Quality Monitoring and Data Access project to bring high quality and high frequency air pollution monitoring and data access to the places of the world where it is needed most; the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI), which uses air pollution data to translate the impact of pollution on a person's life expectancy; and several particulate pollution trading markets being piloted in Indian cities in coordination with state governments.

ABOUT EPIC

The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) is confronting the global energy challenge by working to ensure that energy markets provide access to reliable, affordable energy, while limiting environmental and social damages. We do this using a unique interdisciplinary approach that translates robust, data-driven research into real-world impacts through strategic outreach and training for the next generation of global energy leaders.

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