Organisation Background

Established in 2019, Clean Air Fund is a global philanthropic organisation working to create a future where everyone breathes clean air. The Clean Air Fund funds and partners with organisations that promote air quality data, build public demand for clean air and drive policy change and it is itself funded by a number of major foundations. As air pollution is a complex and cross-cutting issue – affecting human health and the climate as well as equity and economies – Clean Air Fund takes a multi-stakeholder approach, collaborating with governments, funders, businesses, campaigners and others. They influence and support decision-makers to act on air pollution. They also amplify the clean air movement’s impact by connecting people, increasing resources to the field, and sharing evidence of what works. Clear Air Fund has 40 employees working across the United Kingdom, India, Ghana, Belgium and Switzerland.

Using the Project Fair Principles and Standards of Fair INGO Reward to enable remote working and a matrix structure

As a young organisation, Clean Air Fund’s Human Resources framework is in its infancy. This stage of development offered an opportunity to use the Principles and Standards to evaluate and develop their reward strategy. To begin with, the charity’s Board approved the adoption of all the Principles and Standards, which were used in their original language with minimal rewording. The Principles and Standards were then used to build the reward policy and infrastructure, focusing on a ‘total-reward’ approach. As credible evidence, the Principles and Standards helped in managing difficult reward conversations with staff during the change process. For example, the principles were referenced to explain the underlying rationale for paying staff in local currency instead of US dollars in order to reflect local living costs and avoid skewing the job market.

Clean Air Fund aligned its reward approach with its three core values (collaborative, dynamic, and evidence-informed) and with its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. According to this approach, to be collaborative means that reward packages should be transparent, competitive and sustainable. They should also support pay progression subject to location, and help staff in their personal circumstances. Similarly to be dynamic, rewards should be adaptable to changing circumstances and workforce compositions, and reviewed every two years. Finally, to be evidence-based, reward decisions should be based on rigorous internal and external data. This also involves using sound judgment, based on organisational constraints, and actively seeking and giving feedback. This alignment between values and reward approach ensures the principles and rewards framework does not feel too removed from the organisation.

As part of this process, Clean Air Fund started to consider the rationale for limiting the recruitment of some jobs to particular locations. This led to de-linking recruitment from specific locations unless there was a strong justification for a job to be placed in a specific geography. Roles could therefore be recruited wherever the best candidate is found across any of Clear Air Fund’s locations, and paid in the local currency based on the appropriate salary for that market. The matrix working structure at the Clean Air Fund, whereby junior staff work across managers from other teams, allowed staff to work in different projects across locations. Likewise, the organisation standardised all job descriptions worldwide to increase equity and transparency and ensure benefits reflected diverse conditions and life stages of staff. Furthermore, whatever the location of operation the organisation is committed to consistency in its market position based on local NGO market data across geographies.

Finally, the organisation will comply with local laws as the bottom line in defining minimum standards, whenever they exist. Taken as a whole, this approach has enabled to rebalance the concentration of power in one location, and widen the talent pool at all levels.
Recommendations for other organisations

→ Have a wider view of how any type of reward will impact your organisation

To introduce the Principles, it is helpful to understand the impact of certain measures, which could include unexpected and even negative effects. For example, you might be able to advertise for jobs and recruit anywhere, but does your organisation have relevant systems or know how to manage at a distance? Also, don’t jump straight into implementation. Take your time and see what would make more sense for the team. Consider what is your best entry point: Equity, relevance of your current package, cost rationalisation, other? Also keep in mind organisational culture, and what will speak to your stakeholders.

→ Have a critical friend

For Clean Air Fund, it was the Project Fair INGO Reward Forum. The Forum offers a safe space to share uncertainties and questions, avoiding the need to reinvent the wheel.

→ Constant communication with stakeholders

You also need to talk to your staff and different stakeholders, from funders to senior management to double-check your thinking and decisions.

→ Create milestones and show progress

Taking an incremental approach to an initiative of this scale means creating a series of phases to work through, where you can show progress to your Board, senior management, and staff. This helps bring visibility to the broader project and can increase the buy-in from others as they can see the direction you’re taking. Continuously monitor and evaluate your progress and how rewards are being implemented, and communicate broadly to your stakeholders.