

Job Title: Project/Program Manager – Rural Futures (Level 4 or 5)

Location: Bengaluru / Chikkaballapur

Organization: WELL Labs (IFMR/KREA University)

Duration: 24 months (extendable)

Compensation: Competitive, based on experience

About WELL Labs

WELL Labs is a centre of excellence housed within IFMR/KREA University, dedicated to fostering innovation and research for social and environmental impact. Our work lies at the intersection of water, environment, land, and livelihoods. We are a cross-disciplinary team of water experts, social scientists, entrepreneurs, economists, and architects working to co-create resilient futures for India's rural and urban landscapes.

The Rural Futures Initiative at WELL Labs focuses on dryland regions of peninsular India, where land and water degradation, coupled with climate variability, threaten local livelihoods. Our goal is to regenerate natural systems and improve farm and off-farm incomes by developing scalable models for sustainable land and water management.

About the Role

We are seeking an exceptional Project/Program Manager to lead our Outcome-Based Financing (OBF) for Groundwater Restoration initiative, while also contributing to other key components of our Rural Futures portfolio. This is a unique opportunity for a technically strong, systems-oriented, and impact-driven leader to anchor high-stakes work that directly influences groundwater governance, climate resilience, and rural livelihoods.

The OBF initiative seeks to develop and pilot an incentive-based framework where Gram Panchayats are rewarded for groundwater table recovery, leveraging energy savings from shallower pumping. It brings together climate finance, energy efficiency, rural governance, and natural resource management into a single, innovative intervention.

Key Responsibilities

1. Project Leadership & Strategy

- Manage one or more projects under the Rural Futures portfolio, including full lifecycle planning and delivery.

- Lead the design and implementation of the OBF model for groundwater restoration across four phases: macro-assessment, incentive mechanism design, pilot implementation, and scale-up.
- Translate project goals into actionable plans, timelines, and deliverables, and ensure high-quality execution.

2. Technical Oversight & Research

- Guide technical analysis of groundwater overuse, energy consumption, and carbon implications across hard rock aquifer systems.
- Oversee integration of multiple data sources (e.g., well census, CGWB, BESCO, satellite datasets).
- Support the design and refinement of incentive mechanisms such as "Recharge Credits" for GPs based on measurable aquifer recovery.

3. On-Ground Piloting

- Identify and onboard pilot Gram Panchayats in partnership with local governments and CSO partners.
- Supervise field implementation, including the use of groundwater sensors, blockchain-based data systems, and community engagement platforms.
- Collaborate with J-PAL South Asia for rigorous evaluation via RCTs and impact assessment.

4. Stakeholder & Partnership Management

- Build and maintain relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders including:
 - State and national government departments (e.g., ACIWRM, Ministry of Jal Shakti, NITI Aayog)
 - Academic and research institutions
 - Technology providers and utilities
 - Donors, funders, and climate finance platforms
- Prepare policy briefs, donor reports, and knowledge products to support advocacy and scaling.

5. Team & Operational Management

- Build and manage a multidisciplinary project team including analysts, field staff, and consultants.
- Track budgets, risks, resource allocation, and ensure compliance with reporting norms.
- Maintain documentation, dashboards, and project learning repositories.

6. Communication & Thought Leadership

- Drive strategic communications on groundwater and climate adaptation innovations.
- Present project insights at workshops, webinars, and conferences.
- Contribute to peer-reviewed publications, blogs, and reports to influence the policy and practice ecosystem.

Qualifications & Experience

- Master's degree (or higher) in Rural Development, Environmental Economics, Water Resources, Public Policy, or related fields.
- At least 8 years of experience in managing multi-stakeholder programs, preferably in the areas of rural livelihoods, water-energy nexus, or natural resource governance.
- Experience working in semi-arid or hard rock aquifer regions of India is highly desirable.
- Familiarity with performance-based financing models, results-based funding, or climate finance mechanisms is a strong plus.
- Experience leading government interface, field programs, and donor-funded initiatives.

Skills & Competencies

- Deep understanding of India's agrarian and water governance systems.
- Strong program and people management skills, with demonstrated ownership and accountability.
- Excellent written, verbal, and visual communication skills.

- Strong analytical and systems thinking ability; comfort with quantitative data analysis and mapping tools is a plus.
- Ability to manage complexity and ambiguity in dynamic project environments.
- Fluency in English; proficiency in Kannada or Telugu would be a strong advantage.

Why Join Us?

- Be at the cutting edge of groundwater governance, energy transitions, and rural transformation in India.
- Work with thought leaders and innovators in water systems, policy, and development.
- Shape an initiative that has the potential to shift how India manages its most critical resource – groundwater.
- Be part of a young, mission-driven, and collaborative team working to co-create systemic change.

How to Apply

Send your application through our career Page
“Application: Project Manager – Rural Futures (Groundwater OBF)”

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.