Executive Summary

- The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) offers a unique opportunity in the Middle East for young adults from Israel, Palestine, Jordan and all over the world to live together for a four month semester environmental study and peace building programme.
- Programming includes the Peace-building and Environmental Leadership Seminar – a safe facilitated forum to discuss issues of race, culture, identity and politics – while teaching practical listening and leadership skills; Transboundary Water Management research and stakeholder meetings; and a strong and active network of programme graduates continuing our work.
- Success can be found in the continuing work of our graduates despite difficulties in the region.
- We propose our organizational experience as evidence to the importance of long-term, in-depth programming in building trust between Palestine and Israel and Jordan that can lead to lasting, ground-level peace and cooperation.

1. Introduction

1.a. **Reason for submission** We are submitting our evidence as the only programme in the Middle East to bring together young adults (students) from Palestine, Israel, Jordan and internationally for extended periods of living and studying together. We believe deeply in the importance of the long-term and in-depth contact and skills building offered at the Arava Institute as the most meaningful and successful bridge for real trust-building and cooperation in the Middle East.

1.b. **Organizational Profile** The Arava Institute makes an ongoing and innovative contribution to peace education and social justice through its mission to train the next generation of environmental leaders in the Middle East to work together to solve critical regional challenges. Since 1996, the Arava Institute has educated over 800 environmental and social justice leaders who have the technical literacy and practical skills to build a more peaceful and sustainable Middle East.

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) — one of the leading environmental academic and research institutions in the Middle East— challenges the mindset that peace and cooperation cannot be achieved in the Middle East. Even in times of conflict, AIES provides a positive paradigm for relationships between Jews and Arabs in the region, one that builds trust and understanding.

AIES is the only nongovernmental organization in the Middle East to provide Jews and Arabs from the region the opportunity to live, study and work together. Many students arrive with fears and trepidation about meeting “the other” for the first time. The Arava Institute helps transform these misperceptions and fears into friendships and understanding, and most importantly into trusting partnerships that sustain, even in the
face of conflict. A quote from a Palestinian alumna expresses these achievements: “We are not just talking about it, we are doing it. We are changing things together.”

2. **Examples of relevant programmes – Goals and Achievements**

2.a. Peacebuilding and Environmental Leadership Seminar - PELS

The Peacebuilding and Environmental Leadership Seminar (PELS) is a compulsory, non-credit component of the Institute’s academic studies programme that consists of discussions, workshops, guest lectures and field trips that provides a safe forum for students to investigate aspects of the social and political context in which environmental problems develop, as well as the kinds of relationships needed to foster a more just, peaceful and ecologically secure future.

PELS creates a facilitated forum for participants to express their views on race, religion, culture, identity, history and the current political situation. Participants gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and political sensitivities inherent in such discussions, as well as gain leadership and communication skills needed to establish and maintain cooperation across the region.

2.b. The Centre for Transboundary Water Management (CTWM)

The Centre for Transboundary Water Management (CTWM) is a research centre led by Dr. Clive Lipchin using a multi-disciplinary cross-border approach to water management in our region. Research areas include wastewater management in transboundary watersheds, the Red Sea – Dead Sea Pipeline, solar desalination and more. The Centre regularly promotes and holds stakeholder meetings and conferences between Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli water professionals and stakeholders – be they engineers, politicians, NGOs, students, and more.

All our Research Centres (Long-term Ecological Research; Renewable Energy; Sustainable Agriculture) work on a cross-boundary approach with joint research with Jordanian and Palestinian partners.

2.c. The Arava Alumni Peace and Environmental Network (AAPEN)

Students leave the Arava Institute poised to cooperatively implement initiatives that raise public awareness about forgiveness, peace, and sustainability. These young leaders are building a more peaceful and sustainable future in the Middle East, the United States, and throughout the world. The Arava Alumni Peace and Environmental Network (AAPEN) supports over 800 alumni in maintaining connections with each other and serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas and creation of new initiatives, functioning as a network of young professionals working on peace and the environment in the Middle East.

3. **Evidence of success**

Despite the trials and tribulations of life in the Middle East, our students manage to maintain communication. For example, when violence in Gaza escalated in autumn of 2012, it was thanks to PELS that Arava students knew how to support and talk to one another. In student-led PELS dialogue groups, they spoke candidly about their identity, their fears, and their hopes of dispelling centuries-old animosity with forgiveness and
love. Through PELS, the foundation for respectful communication had been established so that when the discussions came to an end, students continued to express their solidarity through small but meaningful gestures.

Throughout various political crises, we have witnessed other dialogue groups fall apart. Our alumni network continues to meet, cooperate and work together, at times while communicating serious disagreement, despite difficult times, relying on tools of listening and trust developed as students at the Arava Institute. Approximately 70% of our graduates work in related fields of environment, peace-building, community organization, and so on.

4. **Issues encountered when trying to access British government support**
We submitted a PELS proposal to the British Embassy in 2012. We were not aware of the possibility of other British funding for our work in the region.

5. **Broad costs of the project**
The Academic Programme as a whole costs approximately 470,000 GDP per year. The PELS Programme specifically costs 56,000 GDP per semester. Student scholarships, especially for Jordanian and Palestinian students, cost 5,500 GDP per semester, including room and board.