ICNL

Call for Grant Proposals: Malawi

Advancing Digital Rights and Youth Participation in Civic Space

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) is pleased to invite proposals for small grants to support civil society organizations (CSOs) working to advance digital rights and youth participation in **Malawi**. Grants of up to **USD $30,000** are available for projects meeting the criteria discussed below. The activities funded by the grant must be completed by November 30, 2026.

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until **February 23, 2026,** or until available funds are depleted. For more details and application instructions, please see below.

Background

Across Africa, expanding access to the internet and digital technology present important and ever-changing opportunities and challenges for civic space. In Malawi, access to the internet and digital tools remains uneven, and gaps in connectivity, digital literacy, and awareness of digital rights limit meaningful participation in civic space online, particularly for young people.

As digital platforms become more important for civic engagement, organizing, information-sharing, and learning, civil society actors and communities face heightened risks in digital spaces, including online harassment, surveillance, data insecurity, and the spread of disinformation. Youth are disproportionately exposed to those risks due to high levels of online engagement, limited access to digital security resources, and unequal power dynamics in online environments. Experiences of cyberbullying, harassment, and disinformation may undermine young people's confidence and safety in online spaces, ultimately limiting their willingness or ability to exercise their rights to expression and association in online spaces.

In Malawi, the exercise of digital rights is further shaped by restrictive legislative and regulatory frameworks. These include the Communications Act, Data Protection Act, and the Electronic Transactions and Cyber Security Act, which contain broad provisions governing online communication, content moderation, surveillance, and misinformation online. In this context, discretionary enforcement and weak safeguards compound existing gaps in digital security, elevating risks for youth and civil society participation online.

In light of these challenges, ICNL seeks to support forward-looking, locally led initiatives that strengthen Malawian youths' ability to advance digital rights, counter restrictive regulatory developments, and build resilience to digital security threats in line with international human rights standards. More specifically, ICNL aims to support civil society in Malawi to:

1. Advance advocacy for laws, policies, and practices that protect digital rights and the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, expression, and participation for youth in online spaces;
2. Respond effectively to restrictive legislative proposals and implementation practices, including legal harassment affecting civil society and youth activists; and
3. Strengthen civil society resilience, coordination, and strategic engagement to address challenges, particularly facing youth, and in the digital space.

In support of these objectives, applicants may propose a wide range of civic space-related activities. Initiatives that are innovative, incorporate digital technology, and are sustainable beyond the end of the project will receive priority. (Please do not submit proposals that are primarily service or humanitarian related.)

ICNL welcomes projects from youth organizations. Initiatives that are innovative, prioritize the interests of young women and girls, incorporate digital technology, and are sustainable beyond the end of the project will receive priority.

Illustrative activities include, but are not limited to:

- Monitoring, legal analysis, and advocacy related to draft or existing laws, regulations, or policies affecting digital rights and internet freedoms, including engagement with regulators, or oversight bodies;
- Forming (or strengthening existing) civil society coalitions to coordinate responses to restrictive digital rights-related legislation, or other measures constraining online civic space;
- Documenting and responding to restrictive or arbitrary implementation of domestic laws impacting digital rights and freedoms, and advocating for rights-respecting implementation through dialogue or public advocacy;
- Supporting youth CSOs to better understand their legal obligations under relevant laws, and to develop collective strategies that strengthen compliance and address restrictive legislation;
- Supporting youth CSOs to engage with regional or international accountability mechanisms (e.g., UN Special Procedures, treaty bodies, African Union

institutions or other regional forums) to amplify domestic advocacy and encourage reform around youth civic space and digital rights;

- Developing toolkits, publicity materials, multimedia, or other campaign materials to raise awareness among of digital civic space issues and how they affect youth; or
- Peer learning activities—such as exchanges, or communities of practice—bringing together youth civil society actors to share strategies for advancing enabling environment reform and inclusive participation.

Application Instructions

To apply for a grant, applicants must submit the following items **in English**:

- Proposal (see below)
- Line-item budget (no more than $30,000 USD) **using provided template** (if unable to access, please email africa@icnl.org for a copy). **N.B:** All budgets should **include** the cost of a **project-specific audit**, which is mandatory for this grant.
- Resumes/CVs of staff to be engaged in the project
- Background information about the applicant organization (e.g., website links or informational materials)

Content of Proposal

In *five pages or less*, please describe your proposal. The proposal should address the following topics:

- The civic space challenge or opportunity the project seeks to address and its relevance to youth in Malawi
- A description of proposed activities, objectives, and anticipated outcomes
- How the initiative will strengthen civic freedoms, enabling environment reform, or civil society resilience
- How the proposed project will be sustained beyond the end of the grant
- Applicant's relevant experience and partnerships
- A clear activity plan and timeline (all activities must be completed by November 30, 2026)
- Indicators or methods for assessing progress and success

Eligibility Requirements

Open to any non-profit organization based in Malawi.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Compliance with eligibility requirements and application procedures
- Demonstrated commitment to improving civic space and protecting digital rights
- Quality of proposed project, including proposed methodology/design, and feasibility of the project (e.g., activities are targeted to achieve stated results, and anticipated results are realistic and attainable)
- Likelihood that the proposed project will enhance civic space
- Proposed budget and value for money
- Inclusion of reasonable indicators to measure project success
- Innovative and forward-looking approaches to civic space promotion and protection, incorporation of digital technology and sustainability.

How to Apply

Interested applicants can apply by submitting all required documents by email to africa@icnl.org. Please ensure that the subject of your email is "**Digital Rights Grant – Malawi.**" Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until **February 23, 2026** or until available funds are depleted. Please note that ICNL is under no obligation to issue a grant and that only shortlisted candidates will be contacted. Questions about the grant opportunity may also be sent to africa@icnl.org.