ICNL

Call for Grant Proposals - Zimbabwe

Advancing Civic Freedoms and Strengthening Participation

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) is pleased to invite proposals for small grants to support civil society organizations (CSOs), including community-based organizations (CBOs), women's rights organizations, youth groups and digital rights defenders working to advance civic freedoms and strengthen participation of civil society in **Zimbabwe**. 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, the ability of civil society to participate in local and national level governance and economic processes continues to face sustained pressure from restrictive laws and security-driven regulatory approaches. In Zimbabwe, the enactment of the Private Voluntary Organizations Amendment Act in 2025 imposed new constraints on civil society actors, including strict registration procedures, restrictions on funding and activities, and broad government oversight powers over private voluntary organizations (PVOs), a form of CSO. Laws such as the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act of 2019 have limited peaceful assembly, while amendments to the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, and the Cyber and Data Protection Act of 2021 have increased surveillance, and stifled free expression and the sharing of information, including online. Civil society, including women, youth, environmental defenders and digital rights defenders, face barriers to their public participation from such legislation and its implementation.

In this context, ICNL seeks to support **forward-looking, locally led initiatives** that strengthen civil society actors' organizational resilience and enable them to continue participating in governance and socio-economic initiatives under the new legal rules and requirements. More specifically, ICNL aims to support civil society in Zimbabwe to:

1. Monitor the implementation of the PVO Amendment Act and other associated legislation and practices, with a view to engaging in evidence-based national, regional, and international advocacy around barriers to civic participation;

2. Strengthen opportunities for civil society to withstand and continue operating and participating under the current legislative framework; and
3. Respond effectively to restrictive legislative proposals and promote more enabling implementation practices of existing laws and regulations.

In support of one or more of these objectives, applicants may propose a wide range of civic space–related activities. (Please do not submit proposals that are primarily service provision or humanitarian-related.) ICNL welcomes projects that emphasize implementing new and innovative approaches to civic space strengthening and protection. Initiatives that are innovative, incorporate digital technology, and are sustainable beyond the end of the project will receive priority.

Illustrative activities include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting CSOs to understand and respond to legal obligations to sustain operations and continue participating in local or national processes in the face of specific legislative restrictions;
- Documenting and responding to restrictive or arbitrary implementation of the PVO Amendment Act, Cyber and Data Protection Act, or other laws, and advocating for rights-respecting implementation through dialogue or public advocacy;
- Monitoring, legal analysis, and advocacy related to draft or existing laws, regulations, or policies affecting association, assembly, expression, digital rights, or access to resources, including engagement with legislators, regulators, or oversight bodies;
- Supporting CSOs to engage with regional accountability mechanisms (e.g., African Union mechanisms or other regional forums) to amplify domestic advocacy and encourage reform;
- Developing toolkits, publicity materials, multimedia, or other campaign materials to counter negative civil society narratives or raise awareness around civic freedoms issues; and
- Peer learning activities—such as workshops, exchanges, or communities of practice—bringing together civil society groups or subsets (e.g. women civil society organizations) 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
- 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 the PVO Amendment Act, the Cyber and Data Protection Act, or other civic space constraints in Zimbabwe;
- A description of proposed activities, objectives, and anticipated outcomes;
- How the initiative will advance civic freedoms, legislative reform or improved implementation, or strengthen civil society participation;
- 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 Zimbabwe.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Compliance with eligibility requirements and application procedures
- Demonstrated commitment to improving civic space
- 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

- Innovative and forward-looking approaches to civic space promotion and protection, incorporation of digital technology and sustainability
- Proposed budget and value for money
- Inclusion of reasonable indicators to measure project success.

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 "Civic Space Grant – Zimbabwe." 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.