



## Grantmaking Criteria

*Updated August 23, 2022*

We envision a world where African social changemakers have access to the resources they need to accelerate their impact and are recognized by funders as critical drivers of systems change on the continent. To achieve this vision, we seek to support changemakers as they upend systems, build ecosystems, accelerate collaboration, and deliver deep, systemic, community-rooted change. When we started the Fund, we spoke to African social changemakers about the barriers they faced and the factors of organizational resilience they needed to overcome those hurdles. These discussions revealed that African social changemakers often face the sharpest funding inequity during their transition towards growth and systems change. This updated criteria was prepared in partnership with our visionary partners, Board, Founding Working Group, and other stakeholders to help us identify areas where we can make our grantmaking more simple, straightforward and equitable. Therefore, making it possible to identify partners who are at the right growth stage for our funding and who have the foundations of organizational resilience to persevere.

We are sector-agnostic and highly focused on accelerating impact. We therefore partner with grantees across sub-Saharan Africa in the areas of **Health, Education, Human Rights, Livelihoods, Technology, and Emerging Sectors** with the goal of having a balanced and diverse portfolio of locally-led organizations across sectors. We evaluate all potential partners using criteria including Basic Eligibility, Characteristics of Early-Stage and Growth-Stage Organizations, and Factors of Organizational Resilience. If you believe that your organization is a good fit, please [subscribe to our newsletter](#) where we announce the launch of our open application process in August of each year.

### **+ Basic Eligibility**

*We believe that the following criteria are a necessity to receive funding from the African Visionary Fund and as such, compelling applications must meet the following prerequisites.*

#### **African-founded, African-led & African-based**

We support organizations that are African-founded, African-based, and African-led. The organization's founder/founders and top leadership position are all African. This person should report to the board and must have the decision-making power of an Executive Director/CEO.

#### **Sub-Saharan Africa focus**

We are currently focused on supporting organizations based in and serving communities in Sub-Saharan Africa only, with a long-term plan to be fully Pan-African.





**Registered in their country of operations**

For the most part, we grant to and partner with organizations registered as not-for-profit entities although we know that the specifics of an organization's registration will look different in different countries and plan to accommodate on a case-by-case basis.

**Board growing from a founding board to more of a governance board**

We believe in the importance of an organization's board development critical to their success. We are looking for organizations who are growing past the initial founding board stage to a more structured governing board stage with basic systems and structures in place. We prioritize organizations on a pathway to ownership of strategic and governance roles by the board.

**Paid staff**

Tackling complex social problems is a marathon and not a sprint. We believe that to do this work well, employees need to be compensated enough to sustain themselves and so we prioritize organizations whose employees receive fair compensation for the work they do.

**External audits every year for past 2 years**

We believe that in addition to being a legal requirement in most countries, financial audits provide a fair assessment of an organization's financial health and therefore prioritize organizations with at least 2 years of audited financials.

**Basic financial management systems and processes**

We believe that robust financial management practices support an organization's sustainability and ability to deliver effective services. We therefore prioritize organizations that employ clear processes for annual budgeting, use basic accounting software, and incorporate regular financial reporting to the board and leadership team.

**+ Early-stage and Growth-stage**

*We seek to support organizations that are just past their early start-up phase and are seeking to accelerate their impact. These criteria help us assess which organizations have high potential for impact and need capital to get them to the next phase.*

**Min. annual operating budget of \$200K, max of \$1.5M (Indicator Only)**

We believe that organizations within a \$200,000 to \$1,500,000 annual budget size are most likely at the right size and stage for our funding. However, we readily make exceptions and take into consideration the full context of an organization's budget, cost of impact, and stage of development. We also seek to support organizations with diverse revenue sources and therefore aim for our annual grants to be less than 30% of an organization's budget.

**Min. 3 years of operation**

We believe that a minimum track record of 3 years gives most African social changemakers the chance to pivot when needed. We do not have a maximum number of years of operation because we have found that





the start-up phase for many African-led organizations can be much longer due to being chronically under-resourced by a biased system of funding.

#### Clear and defined model

We recognize that clear models of impact do not always mean models focused on one particular issue but we seek organizations who can clearly define their model and know what works. We know that clear models do not always mean models focused on one thing. Holistic models can be just as clear, intentional, and aligned to a theory of change as those with a singular focus.

#### Clear articulation of the organization's why

We look for leaders who are clear on why their organization exists and can clearly articulate the problem(s) their organization seeks to solve with intention.

#### Demonstrable impact

We seek to support deep, systems-strengthening, community-rooted change with the recognition that this type of impact takes time and can sometimes be difficult to measure rigorously. We value organizations who can communicate the impact of their work and have ambition to increase their capacity to measure that impact, if needed. We do not require organizations to have RCTs or highly rigorous evaluations because we understand those are expensive and inaccessible at the stage we fund at.

### + Organizational Resilience

*We know that there are organizational assets that help impact endure and factors outside of funding that can impede an organization's progress. We look for these factors of organizational resilience so that we can build upon an organization's strengths.*

#### Systems change focus

We believe that the world's biggest complex social problems arise from broken interconnected systems with several players and multiple root causes of the brokenness. We also recognize through our own mission that systems change is a journey and addressing these root causes will involve trade-offs and require direct program work. We therefore look for organizations who have a strong awareness of systems change, can describe their understanding of the ecosystem they work within, and have a clear strategy to collaborate with key stakeholders to drive long-term change.

#### Mission-lived leadership

We recognize and value the knowledge and expertise of social changemakers with lived experience of the problem they seek to solve as well as demonstrated and persistent commitment to their mission. We prioritize organizations with proximate leadership teams who are guided by their own lived experience and care deeply about their organization's mission.





### **Clear strategic direction**

We believe that a vision without a strategy and a plan will remain largely unrealized and so we look for evidence of an organization's strategic choices about where they will focus to achieve their goals.

### **Community-driven**

We believe that proximity matters in improving lives and we want to fund organizations that are deeply rooted and invested in the communities they serve.

### **Learning orientation**

We believe that learning at the individual and organization level are critical to success and we look for leadership teams that display self-awareness and humility. We look for examples of the ways organizations have used new information or data to change or improve their programs or operations.

### **Commitment to gender equity**

We believe in the power of diverse teams to address the complex and often intractable challenges we face as a society. We also know that transformative change requires applying an intersectional lens to our work. We therefore seek to partner with organizations who have been intentional around gender equity—even when the organization's work is not explicitly focused on women and girls—and are committed to tackling gender imbalances and injustices within their organizations.

### **Deep leadership bench awareness & aspiration** *(Nice to Have)*

We believe that the choice and cultivation of an organization's leaders is vital to its long-term health and ability to deliver impact and seek to fund organizations with a deep commitment to leadership development and succession planning, regardless of budget size.

### **Strong governance systems**

We look for organizations with a board of directors who serve as strategic thought partners and active fiduciary stewards of the organization's resources. We want to support an organization on their governance journey and seek to understand what structures, systems, and reporting mechanisms have been implemented at the board level thus far. We recognize this will be different for each organization based on their board development stage.

