



GRASSROOTS ACCELERATED EDUCATION FUND

APPLICATION
GUIDELINES

2025

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I. Introduction

The Grassroots Accelerated Education Fund (GAEF) drives transformational social change by investing in grassroots educators and their initiatives to improve learning outcomes for out of school and underserved children and youth in Nigeria. These local education leaders, deeply rooted in their communities, develop culturally appropriate solutions to address deeply rooted education inequalities in Nigeria. Rather than taking a "hand-out" approach, we embrace a model of "collaboration and co-creation" by working alongside grassroots organizations and partners to mobilize collective, community-driven efforts that advance education in underserved communities.

At Custodians of African Literature (COAL), we believe the ability to read and write are fundamental for a young person's success, making books essential for nurturing criticality in young leaders. With millions of children in Nigeria lacking access to quality education, grassroots organizations and citizen aid actors play a role in bridging this gap. Our Grassroots Accelerated Education Fund is designed to support these local initiatives, collaborating with them to deliver transformative education opportunities for marginalized and out-of-school children (OOSC) in underserved communities.

In 2024, we launched the "Empowering Citizen Aid Actors" program, a pioneering initiative aimed at strengthening grassroots leadership in education and youth development. Through micro financial grants and institutional capacity-building, we supported three community-driven organizations in Plateau State, one of Nigeria's most affected regions for out-of-school children. This pilot initiative successfully provided learning opportunities to 125 children, with 13 transitioning into formal education.

Building on this success, the 2025 call for this micro education grant will expand its reach, reinforcing our commitment to literacy and numeracy development, as well as other culturally and alternative models to education. By investing in grassroots education initiatives, we aim to create sustainable, scalable models that not only enhance learning outcomes but also contribute to long-term educational equity.

2. The Problem

Despite increased enrolment rates in recent years, a reading crisis persists in Nigeria. According to UNICEF (2022), three out of four children in basic education cannot read with comprehension or solve simple math problems. This learning deficit is especially critical in Plateau State, where inadequate school infrastructure, limited teacher training, and socio-economic barriers continue to hinder progress.

Nigeria remains home to 18.5 million out-of-school children, with northern states including Plateau having some of the highest exclusion rates (Adeleke & Alabede, 2022). In many rural communities, schools lack functional classrooms, instructional materials, and trained teachers. UNESCO (2023) estimates that Sub-Saharan Africa alone requires 15 million more teachers to address current education gaps.

The lack of early literacy interventions exacerbates the problem. Many children in underserved communities start school without foundational reading skills, leading to low literacy rates and high dropout rates. The absence of structured phonics instruction, guided reading, and vocabulary-building activities further limits learners' ability to engage meaningfully with learning materials. Additionally, a shortage of trained teachers means that many children do not receive the individualized support they need to develop critical literacy and numeracy skills.

Education insecurity in Plateau State is further driven by regional instability and economic hardships. Recurrent ethno-religious conflicts have displaced thousands of children, forcing them out of school and disrupting learning. Over 250,000 students have been affected by school closures due to violence (Gyang & Gusen, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Financial constraints further entrench inequality within the system, limiting children's ability to access and complete basic education.

Without strategic investments in literacy-focused education, these children risk being permanently left behind, limiting their opportunities for further education and economic empowerment. This micro educational grant seeks to directly address these challenges by supporting initiatives that provide structured literacy and numeracy interventions, ensuring that out-of-school children can gain essential skills and transition successfully into formal education.

3. Guidelines

3.1 What We Are Looking For

To enhance access to quality education for marginalized and underserved children, COAL is seeking proposals from grassroots-led initiatives that deliver structured, foundational learning programs rooted in local context. The 2025 Micro Educational Grant builds on insights from our 2024 cohort, where successful projects demonstrated the power of locally adapted curriculum, skilled facilitation, and strong community engagement to create sustainable learning pathways.

We are particularly interested in models and initiatives that:

1. **Deliver Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Skills:** We are seeking projects that focus on building core competencies in reading, writing, and arithmetic through structured and developmentally appropriate learning strategies. The literacy component should incorporate phonics instruction, reading comprehension, writing practice that encourage sentence construction, journaling, creative arts and storytelling. Numeracy should be taught using real-life contexts, visual aids, and interactive games that help children grasp basic arithmetic concepts and build problem-solving skills in a fun and engaging manner.
2. **Adopt Child-Centred and Inclusive Teaching Methods:** Successful proposals will employ experiential and play-based learning approaches that foster engagement and comprehension. Teaching should be inclusive, using low-cost materials and locally available resources to support diverse learning styles. Multi-sensory methods that incorporate sight, sound, and touch should be prioritized, ensuring that learning is accessible to all children regardless of ability or background.
3. **Promote Parent/guardian and Community Engagement:** Strong community ownership and collaboration are essential to the success and sustainability of any educational intervention. Projects should actively involve parents, teachers, local government actors, educators, and youth in planning and implementation. This may include parental literacy sessions, community reading clubs, and peer mentoring initiatives that create a culture of learning and accountability within the community.
4. **Strengthen Facilitator/Teacher Training and Support:** Projects should clearly outline how they will identify, train, and support community facilitators or teachers to deliver high-quality education. Training should focus on both content and pedagogy, equipping facilitators to use inclusive, participatory methods. Ongoing support through coaching, peer learning, and performance feedback will be essential to ensure instructional quality and learner outcomes throughout the project duration.
5. **Ensure Strong Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** We expect all proposals to include a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that articulates how learning progress will be tracked, measured, and reported. A clear logical model or theory of change should be presented, detailing the linkage between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Assessment tools, milestone tracking, and feedback mechanisms should be built into the implementation plan to support adaptive learning and continuous improvement.
6. **Support Transition into Formal Education:** Projects should demonstrate a clear pathway for learners who are out of school to transition into formal or recognized alternative/informal education models. This should include alignment with national curriculum standards or working with schools and education authorities to facilitate enrolment. Proposals

must explain how they will document and support children's progression beyond the project timeline.

7. **Demonstrate Scalability and Sustainability:** Priority will be given to grassroots models that are affordable, replicable, and capable of being sustained beyond the grant period. Projects should avoid heavy reliance on high-cost tools and instead utilize locally sourced materials and community-driven solutions. Applicants should also show a vision for future growth whether through policy and practice integration, partnerships, or local resource mobilization.

3.2 Eligibility Criteria

- Support is exclusively granted to legally registered, non-profit, community-based organizations and social enterprises that are actively operating in Nigeria. Initiatives must have been operational for at least 2 years.
- Projects must contribute to literacy at grassroots, low-income and underserved communities in Plateau State.
- Projects must be locally led and demonstrate strong community engagement and support, including the involvement of parents, educators, government and other relevant stakeholders.
- Applicants must provide a clear plan for project implementation, including a timeline, budget, and expected outcomes within the 12-month grant period.
- Priority will be given to projects that have the potential for long-term sustainability and scalability beyond the initial grant period, with a clear vision for future growth and impact.
- Projects should incorporate innovative approaches, such as the use of technology, arts-based learning, and creativity to enhance educational outcomes and engagement.
- Organizations must demonstrate effective child safeguarding measures, including policies, procedures, and practices that prioritise the protection and welfare of children in their care.
- Applicants should demonstrate a commitment to monitoring, evaluation, and learning throughout the project lifecycle to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.
- Projects must prioritise disadvantaged and/or marginalised communities, with a primary focus on children and young people up to the age of 18.
- Organizations should possess an organizational bank account in the organization's name, as donations cannot be made to individual accounts due to COAL's institutional financial policy.
- Organizations who have previously received a micro education grant from COAL are eligible to apply again and should clearly demonstrate a scalable plan for existing projects and propose a new model.

Organizations are not eligible to apply if they:

- Represent political parties, religious organizations or engage in lobbying activities.
- Are not legally registered.
- Are for profit entities.
- Organizations with no track record in educational initiatives
- Organizations without implementing capacity in Plateau State
- Organizations without basic financial systems in place

3.3 Eligible Expenses

- The Grassroots Accelerated Education Fund focuses on the organization's achievements over the years and its potential both in fulfilling its mission and in terms of its vision for change.
- The purpose of the call is to support organizations by providing project-based funding to cover the expenses necessary to more effectively fulfil their education initiatives.
- The application should report all costs incurred directly for planned activities and programs during the year-which may include, but are not limited to, the following items:
 - Expenses inherent to programming.
 - Volunteer costs and related stipend.
 - Meals for learners
 - Communications and impact highlight
 - Evaluation costs, including the collection, storage and analysis of data and the production of evaluation reports.

4. Grant Amount and Capacity Development

If your project is selected, you'll be eligible for a micro grant of up to **₺2,000,000**, depending on your project's scope and scale. In some cases, we may consider larger grants for projects with potential for widespread impact.

Additionally, both successful and unsuccessful applicants will receive technical and institutional support in the following:

- Corporate governance for non-profit management
- Project management in the development sector
- Basics of monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Resource mobilization
- Financial management
- Accelerated learning models
- Youth volunteers to support the implementation of successful initiatives and many others.
- Child safeguarding and protection measures.

4.1 Selection Process

All proposals will be reviewed by a panel. Shortlisted applicants may be invited for an interview or to provide additional information. Final decisions will be communicated within 8 weeks of the application deadline.

- Selected organizations will receive notification of their acceptance by June 2025.
- Final award decisions will be publicly announced in June, with agreements finalized and first milestone of funds disbursed by the end of June 2025.
- Due to the anticipated high volume of applications, detailed feedback will not be provided to organizations that are not selected.

| Activities | Timeline |
|---|--|
| Grassroots Accelerated Education fund opens | 14 th April |
| Information session | 26 th April |
| Deadline of micro grant call | 16 th May |
| Panel review | 17 th to 31 st May |
| Due diligence and interviews of shortlisted organizations | 2 nd to 14 th . June |
| Final notification of selected awards | 16 th June |
| Public Announcement | 19 th June |
| Completion of contracts and disbursement of first milestone | 27 th June |
| Project starts | July 2025 |

5. How to Submit Your Application

- Interested organizations should submit a proposal by downloading and [filling out this proposal template here](#)
- After completing the proposal, please [fill this form](#) to provide a general information about your organization and project, and upload the completed proposal, with additional supporting documents stated in the proposal template.
- Please make sure that all the information included in your application is complete, as you will not be able to make any changes to your application once it is submitted.

Deadline: All applications should be submitted by 11:59pm on **16th May 2025**

For any questions or inquiries, please contact us at info@coaling.org. We also encourage applicants to attend our upcoming webinar to learn more about the application process and tips for success on 26th April 2025 at 10:00AM WAT, [register here to attend](#).

5.1. Grant Agreement and Payment

- COAL will draft a Grant Agreement to be signed by the recipients of the selected financial grants.
- The Grant Agreement will include the start and end dates of the contract, the amount, financial requirements, payment deadlines, general provisions, implementation and amendments, and expected reports.
- Beneficiaries will receive between 40-50% of the financial contribution as the first payment upon completion of the contract.
- The organization receiving funding must indicate an active bank account in the name of the organization.
- Organizations must be prepared to provide financial and project status reports.
- A due diligence check will be conducted prior to disbursement of funding.

5.2. Selection Criteria

- Decisions are the prerogative of the Selection Committee, which include COAL's board, external experts, and members of the COAL team.
- Panel members will select which applications to support based on their judgment, taking into consideration the quality of the applications and the overall alignment to the objective of the call.

Proposals will be evaluated based on the selection criteria listed below

Submitted proposals will be assessed using the following key criteria:

1. **Alignment with Core Values:** The organization's mission and strategy must place education as a driver for social change at its core.
2. **Local Relevance:** The initiative should address a critical educational challenge that is deeply relevant to the local community.
3. **Clear Problem Definition:** The proposal should clearly describe the issue at hand, showing strong insight and understanding.
4. **Creativity and Innovation:** Preference will be given to initiatives that use original, context-specific, and intersectional approaches to solve problems.

5. **Defined Target Group:** The project should have a well-identified and realistic target audience that aligns with its goals, structure, and budget.
6. **Impact and Promise:** Either a proven track record or a strong, evidence-backed potential for making a difference is essential.
7. **Vision and Drive:** The organization should show bold thinking and the determination to create real, lasting change both within their community and beyond.

The Selection Committee Will Prioritize Organizations That

- Take on big education challenges using bold, locally informed approaches.
- Apply an intersectional lens, understanding how education intersects with other social issues like poverty, health, and violence and focus on achieving lasting impact.
- Emphasize transformative processes and systems change over just short-term outputs.
- May be small or emerging but show vision, consistency, and a strong potential for impact.
- Understand that what works in one place may not work in another context matters greatly.

What GAEF Does Not Support

- **Literacy in Isolation:** We are not interested in projects that promote education without a clear plan to track outcomes and measure real change in learners.
- **Unstructured or Hobbyist Projects:** We do not fund occasional or inconsistent initiatives lacking a clear strategy, dedicated leadership, or ongoing programming. While size is not a disqualifier, projects must show commitment, continuity, and a focused approach to making an impact.