

APC LocNet Microgrant Programme – 2025

Supporting Local Digital Services & Community Connectivity in South Africa

This is an **open call** for South African-based community networks (CNs) and community-centred connectivity initiatives (CCCI) to submit short-term projects supporting community centred connectivity initiatives concerning community connectivity infrastructure implementation and local services.

As part of the LocNet initiative's new 2024-2027 project cycle, the first phase of this specific microgrant programme was designed in September 2024. The second phase continues in 2025 with existing and new LocNet partners and networks in South Africa. Organisations are invited to submit short-term project proposals concerning expanding community connectivity implementation to neighbouring communities and local services development that will be supported with this microgrant.

Grant Details

All activities related to each mini project must be budgeted within USD 3,500.00. Projects must be completed within a 6-month timeframe. Please note that prioritization will be for one mini-project per organisation. In other words, only one project will be considered per Community Network.

As a result of micro-grant feedback from 2024, this cycle will allow for the purchase of equipment for initiating and/or expanding CCC/CN deployment. It can fund maintenance and installation services and pilot research or feasibility studies for the CN.

Activity Lines

The proposal submission could be split up into different activity lines or as one, based on the following categories:

1. *Peer-to-peer (P2P) tailored mentoring and scholarships on network infrastructure and local services*
2. *Community centred infrastructure funding to extend the network to neighbouring communities and this can include feasibility or network design studies*
3. *Local services to create CN demand and community use (i.e. CCCI equipment needs, community-based data centres). This can include documenting operational community-based data centres and learning lessons from these CCCI experiences.*
4. *Gender-sensitive approaches in infrastructure development and builds, as well as technical training*

Target Participants

South African-based grassroots and new Community networks (CNs) and community-centred connectivity initiatives (CCCIIs).

Application Requirements

The microgrant projects must adopt human rights-based and gender, race and territory equality approaches, with a special emphasis on women-led initiatives and integration of a gender and power imbalances perspective at all levels of project conceptualisation, planning and implementation.

Strategic Priority Alignment - Terms of Reference

All applicant organisations must demonstrate clear alignment with at least one of the Five Strategic Priority Areas for CCCIs outlined in the National Strategy for Community Networks in South Africa (detailed in APPENDIX). This alignment is not merely administrative but foundational to the microgrant's purpose.

Successful applicants will become part of a dedicated community of practice corresponding to their chosen strategic priority area. This community of practice will facilitate knowledge exchange, peer learning, and collaborative problem-solving among CNs/CCCIIs working within the same strategic focus.

Applicants must clearly describe their specific impact objectives for the microgrant period, demonstrating how their proposed activities will advance their chosen strategic priority while strengthening their organisational capacity. The microgrant should serve as a catalyst for meaningful growth that extends beyond the six-month implementation period, creating lasting benefits for both the CN/CCCI and the communities they serve.

This strategic approach ensures that microgrant activities contribute to broader sectoral development while addressing the unique needs and opportunities within each applicant's operational context.

Priority Area Distribution

To ensure comprehensive sectoral development and maximize learning opportunities within communities of practice, applications are encouraged across all Five Strategic Priority Areas. The selection process will consider the overall distribution of projects across priority areas, with preference given to applications that contribute to a balanced portfolio of initiatives addressing the full spectrum of these areas in South Africa.

Monitoring and Support

The LocNet team, together with the National Coordinator team, will follow the process, specifically the assessment of the applications and implementation of the project as part of orientation and monitoring conversations (the frequency will be agreed during the initial call for the approved microgrant projects). In addition, an ecosystem approach that integrates participation and ownership of project participants as well as future outcome thinking will be used to ensure sustainability beyond the life of the project.

Application Process

As the deadline is short, mini projects must be concise and objective. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis with priority given to initiatives demonstrating strong community engagement, clear social impact potential, and sustainable implementation plans.

If you are interested, please fill in the attached Template for Implementation Partner Country specific Activities with the micro-projects that you and/or your organisation would like to implement within up to a six-month time frame.

Important Dates:

- Deadline for submitting CN/CCC micro-project filled template: **05:00 PM, Friday, 29 August 2025**
- Deadline for project end and reporting: **31 March 2026**
- Complete the attached template and email to locnet@apc.org with subject line as: *SUBJECT: 2025 LocNet Microgrants - South Africa - [INSERT YOUR CN/CCCI NAME]*

APPENDIX:

Five Strategic Priority Areas for CCCIs

The microgrant programme aligns with the National Strategy for Community Networks in South Africa. The strategy identifies five key areas for developing CCCIs. This appendix shows how the activity lines connect to these broader strategic goals.

Priority 1: Policy and Regulatory Environment

Current licensing costs and spectrum access create barriers for community networks. CCCIs need better advocacy for policy reform and stronger voices in regulatory discussions.

This programme builds policy and regulatory knowledge and advice through sharing and exchange of experiences (both grassroots and government expert levels), which helps in the understanding of regulatory challenges from a practical perspective.

Priority 2: Funding and Partnerships (External Facing)

To address over-reliance on grants which creates sustainability challenges, CCCIs need to explore diverse funding sources and partnerships.

Mapping out new/existing partners as well as preparing investment ready documentation of CNs will help to identify potential partnership opportunities as well as demonstrate community demand to future funders and collaborators.

Priority 3: Capacity Building

Communities often lack awareness of CCCI opportunities and access to technical training. Skills development and peer-to-peer knowledge transfer are essential.

P2P mentoring and scholarships on network infrastructure, plus gender-sensitive technical training, directly address this need.

Priority 4: Financial Sustainability (Internal Facing)



R H I Z O M A T I C A

No CN in South Africa currently operates a break-even model. CCCIs need to explore the social enterprise approaches and diverse revenue stream generation while maintaining community ownership.

Developing services that communities use and provides operational experience as well as future business planning.

Priority 5: Social and Economic Inclusion

Networks must generate broader community benefits while addressing historical inequalities. This includes developing services, ensuring community participation, and creating economic opportunities.

Community connectivity extension and local services create economic opportunities for communities, while gender-sensitive approaches address historical inequalities in network participation.