

Call for Proposals

Western Uganda Youth Climate Action Flexible Seed Grants 2026 and 2027

Rural Smiles Foundation invites youth-led groups undertaking climate and environmental action in Western Uganda to apply for flexible seed funding for practical, community-based projects.

Grant information	Details
Total funding pool	USD 5,000
Award size	USD 500 per selected group
Number of awards	Ten grants across multiple cohorts
First cohort	Four youth-led groups
Application period	1 October to 31 October 2026
Information session	15 October 2026
Clarification deadline	23 October 2026
Application channel	https://grant.ruralsmiles.org

Important application notice

Applicants must create an account and submit a complete application through <https://grant.ruralsmiles.org>

PS: Creating an account does not constitute an application. Applications sent by email, WhatsApp, social media, post, physical delivery, or another channel will not be considered.

Issued September 21st, 2026

1. About this call

Rural Smiles Foundation has established a USD 5,000 flexible funding pool to support ten youth-led groups undertaking climate and environmental action in Western Uganda. Each selected group will receive USD 500 to implement one practical project responding to a locally identified problem.

Formal registration is not required. Informal, volunteer-led, community-based, and emerging youth groups may apply when they demonstrate active youth leadership, basic organization, community presence, and credible climate or environmental work. The application and reporting requirements have been designed to remain proportionate to the size of the grants while protecting transparency, safeguarding, and responsible use of funds.

The grants form part of the Renewable Energy and Climate Resilience work of Rural Smiles Foundation. This first funding cycle will operate as a pilot, generating baseline information and practical learning that will inform improvement and expansion of the funding programme in 2027, subject to results and resource availability.

2. Background and rationale

Climate change is already affecting livelihoods, ecosystems, agriculture, food security, water resources, health, and community infrastructure across Western Uganda. Rural communities are particularly exposed because many households depend directly on land, forests, wetlands, water, livestock, and rain-fed agriculture.

The National Environment Management Authority National State of the Environment Report 2024 reports that approximately 46% of Uganda's soils are degraded and 10% are very degraded. It further indicates that 85 to 90% of the highlands of Kabale and Kisoro are severely degraded, while annual soil loss in some highland hotspots exceeds 30 tonnes per hectare. These pressures reduce agricultural productivity, undermine food security, intensify rural poverty, and increase vulnerability to floods and landslides.

The report also records an average temperature anomaly of approximately 0.61 degrees Celsius above the 1981 to 2010 long-term mean in the Western Region and approximately 0.59 degrees Celsius in the Southwestern Region. About 13% of wetlands in the Western Region are reported to be degraded, weakening water filtration, groundwater recharge, biodiversity protection, and flood regulation.

Youth groups are responding through tree growing, ecosystem restoration, climate-smart agriculture, waste recovery, recycling, clean-energy solutions, environmental education, research, and advocacy. Many nevertheless remain excluded from conventional funding because they lack formal registration, audited financial statements, established offices, previous donor funding, or the capacity to prepare extensive applications. This call seeks to reduce those barriers without compromising accountability.

3. Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the fund is to enable organized youth groups to implement practical climate and environmental projects while strengthening their capacity to manage small grants responsibly.

During the 2026 and 2027 funding cycle, Rural Smiles Foundation will award ten grants of USD 500, beginning with four first-cohort recipients, support each recipient to implement and document one tangible climate or environmental project, provide capacity building to every recipient without deducting training costs from the grant, and use monitoring evidence from all cohorts to establish a baseline and improve future youth-led climate funding.

4 Funding structure and cohort model

Funding element	Value	Arrangement
Total pool	USD 5,000	Funds available across the complete pilot cycle
Grant value	USD 500	Fixed award for each selected group
Total recipients	Ten groups	Selected from the October 2026 applicant pool
First cohort	Four groups	Selection completed in November 2026
Later cohorts	Six remaining grants	Awards made at three-month intervals
Capacity building	Provided separately	Applicants must not budget for it

Applications meeting the eligibility and quality requirements will form an eligible applicant pool. Four groups will be selected for the first cohort. Other qualified applicants will remain under consideration for later cohorts at three-month intervals until the USD 5,000 pool has been fully allocated.

Applicants will not be required to submit a completely new application for each cohort. Before a later award, Rural Smiles Foundation may ask the group to reconfirm its interest, eligibility, contact details, community reference, project relevance, budget, and implementation readiness. A group may also be asked to update information that has materially changed. Inclusion in the applicant pool does not guarantee funding.

The implementation period and payment arrangements for each recipient will be stated in the grant agreement and are expected to align with the relevant cohort cycle. No expenditure may be charged to the grant before the agreement is signed and funds are officially disbursed.

5. What flexible funding means

Rural Smiles Foundation will not prescribe one project model or require all recipients to undertake the same activity. Applicants should identify a climate or environmental problem affecting their community and propose a focused response that reflects local priorities, available skills, and realistic opportunities for change.

Flexibility does not mean that funding may be used for any purpose. The USD 500 must remain connected to the approved project and should primarily finance direct, tangible implementation. A selected group may request a reasonable adjustment when circumstances change, but any significant change must remain consistent with the purpose of the grant and receive written approval before funds are redirected.

6. Eligibility requirements

The call is open to youth-led groups based in or actively operating within Western Uganda, including the Bunyoro, Tooro, Ankole, and Kigezi subregions. Most members and the principal leaders should be young people aged 18 to 35. Each applicant should have at least five active members and identifiable leaders, coordinators, or shared leadership arrangements.

A group does not need formal registration. It must, however, demonstrate a basic process for making decisions, coordinating activities, approving expenditure, and accounting to members. The group should ordinarily demonstrate at least six months of active climate or environmental work and a credible relationship with the community in which the proposed project will be implemented.

Applicants must be willing to maintain simple activity and expenditure records, participate in capacity building and monitoring, and comply with safeguarding, inclusion, non-discrimination, financial accountability, community participation, and do-no-harm requirements. Applications from individuals seeking personal financial support are not eligible.

Women-led groups, disability-inclusive groups, refugee-led groups, groups serving underserved rural communities, and groups involving young people who experience barriers to conventional funding are encouraged to apply. These considerations will support inclusion but will not replace the requirement to submit a relevant and feasible proposal.

7. Evidence of organization and previous work

The application must identify at least two responsible group representatives and explain their roles. It should describe how decisions are made, how members participate, who will oversee the grant, how expenditure will be approved, and how the group will prevent one individual from exercising unchecked control over the funds.

Evidence of previous work may include photographs, videos, brief activity reports, meeting notes, attendance records, social media posts, community references, endorsement letters, media coverage, testimonies, or other credible records. Evidence will be considered in proportion to the size, age, resources, and informal nature of the group. All information must nevertheless be accurate and capable of reasonable verification.

8. Eligible projects and costs

The proposed project must respond to a specific climate or environmental problem and present results that can reasonably be achieved with USD 500. Suitable interventions may involve tree growing and survival monitoring, agroforestry, ecosystem restoration, soil and water conservation, climate-smart or regenerative agriculture, community seed initiatives, wetland or riverbank restoration, waste collection, recycling, upcycling, briquette production, clean-cooking solutions, biodiversity conservation, environmental monitoring, renewable-energy demonstrations, or another locally appropriate response.

The budget may include necessary project materials, seedlings, inputs, small tools, essential equipment, protective items, locally appropriate technology, and reasonable project-specific transport or implementation costs. A focused project with clear and verifiable results will be more competitive than an ambitious proposal that cannot be delivered with the available funding.

9. Ineligible activities and costs

The grant will not support personal expenses, direct cash distributions, individual businesses, salaries, routine staff costs, general office expenses, land purchases, debt repayment, partisan political activity, costs incurred before the grant agreement, or activities unrelated to climate action or environmental protection.

Rural Smiles Foundation will not finance alcohol, weapons, prohibited items, discriminatory or exploitative activity, or projects that create unacceptable environmental, safeguarding, or community risks. Applicants must disclose whether the same project or costs have been submitted to or financed by another source. Costs already fully covered elsewhere are not eligible. Budgets dominated by meetings, allowances, administrative expenses, or activities without a tangible result will not be competitive.

10. Capacity building and grant support

Every selected group will receive capacity building and basic implementation support from Rural Smiles Foundation. Applicants must not include capacity-building expenses in the USD 500 project budget because this support will be organized and financed separately. The arrangement protects the full grant for direct project implementation.

Capacity building may address project planning, financial management, recordkeeping, safeguarding, inclusive participation, climate action approaches, monitoring, evidence collection, documentation, responsible storytelling, sustainability, and reporting. Participation in required sessions will form part of the grant agreement.

11. Expected results and verification

Result area	Indicator	Verification
Access to finance	Ten eligible youth-led groups receive USD 500 each	Signed agreements and disbursement records
Practical action	Each recipient completes one approved climate or environmental project	Activity records, monitoring visits, photographs, videos, or testimonies
Responsible management	Each recipient maintains basic narrative and expenditure records	Final report, receipts, payment evidence, and expenditure summary
Capacity strengthened	All recipients participate in required capacity building	Attendance, session records, and participant reflection
Pilot learning	Evidence from all cohorts informs the next funding cycle	Baseline, monitoring findings, cohort review, and learning summary

Project-specific indicators will reflect the intervention proposed. Examples may include trees planted and surviving, land restored, waste collected or reused, households reached, technologies demonstrated, soil and water structures established, or other measurable changes appropriate to the project.

12. Assessment criteria

Assessment area	Weight	What reviewers will consider
Relevance of the climate or environmental problem	20 percent	The proposal identifies a clear, locally grounded problem and explains who is affected.
Evidence of existing community climate action	20 percent	The group demonstrates credible previous or ongoing work and community presence.
Youth leadership and basic organization	20 percent	Roles, participation, decision-making, and financial oversight are sufficiently clear.
Feasibility and expected results	20 percent	The proposed response is realistic, focused, measurable, and achievable with USD 500.
Inclusion safeguarding and do no harm	10 percent	The project anticipates participation, protection, exclusion, and environmental risks.
Financial accountability and value for money	10 percent	The budget is reasonable, direct, transparent, and connected to tangible results.

Rural Smiles Foundation will also consider geographical representation and the participation of women, persons with disabilities, refugees, and underserved communities when forming the grant portfolio. These portfolio considerations will be applied after technical quality and eligibility have been established.

13. Selection and verification process

1. **Eligibility screening.** Applications will be checked against the location, youth leadership, group organization, experience, submission, and basic compliance requirements.
2. **Technical assessment.** Eligible applications will be scored against the published criteria and reviewed for feasibility, safeguarding, accountability, and value for money.
3. **Applicant pool.** Applications meeting the required standard will form the pool from which first and later cohort recipients may be selected.
4. **Verification.** Rural Smiles Foundation may contact group representatives, community references, local leaders, beneficiaries, or other relevant persons and may conduct a telephone, virtual, or in-person discussion.
5. **Final selection.** Four groups will be selected for the first cohort. Later recipients will be selected at three-month intervals, subject to continued eligibility and available funds.
6. **Contracting.** Successful groups will sign a grant agreement and complete orientation and capacity-building requirements before disbursement.

An application may be declined or disqualified when it contains materially false or misleading information, conceals a conflict of interest, duplicates another submission, cannot be reasonably verified, or presents unacceptable financial, safeguarding, or environmental risks.

14. Monitoring reporting and learning

Reporting will be proportionate to the small and flexible nature of the grants. Selected groups will not be required to produce audited financial statements or lengthy technical reports. They will agree on a simple project and spending plan, retain receipts or other acceptable expenditure evidence, document activities, and participate in monitoring and learning conversations.

At the end of implementation, each recipient will submit a concise narrative and financial report describing what was completed, who participated or benefited, what results were achieved, how the grant was spent, what challenges arose, what was learned, and how the work may continue. Rural Smiles Foundation may use field visits, telephone verification, virtual monitoring, project records, community testimonies, or other appropriate methods to confirm results.

15. Applicant information and later cohort consent

Eligible applications will be retained for consideration during later cohorts. During submission, applicants will be asked to consent to the collection, retention, and use of their information for eligibility screening, assessment, verification, communication, grant administration, safeguarding, monitoring, evaluation, and later-cohort selection.

Applicants should obtain consent before submitting another person's contact information, photograph, testimony, or other personal information. They may request a correction to their information or withdraw from consideration for later cohorts. Withdrawing from the applicant pool will not affect a grant agreement that has already been awarded. Applicant information will be handled in accordance with applicable data-protection requirements and the privacy policies of Rural Smiles Foundation.

16. Safeguarding integrity and conflicts of interest

Applicants must identify and manage risks that could affect children, young people, persons with disabilities, refugees, community members, volunteers, or the environment. Proposed activities must promote inclusion, informed participation, dignity, non-discrimination, and do-no-harm practice.

There is no application fee. Rural Smiles Foundation has not authorized any staff member, volunteer, partner, reviewer, or third party to request payment in exchange for application assistance, shortlisting, verification, or selection. Applicants must not offer money, gifts, favours, or another benefit to anyone involved in the process.

Applicants must disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest involving their group, representatives, references, Rural Smiles Foundation personnel, reviewers, or partners. An undisclosed conflict or attempted interference with the assessment may result in disqualification.

17. Application process

An authorized representative must create one applicant account on behalf of the group at <https://grants.ruralsmiles.org>. After signing in, the representative should select this funding opportunity, complete every required section, upload the requested documents, provide the required declarations and consent, review the information for accuracy, and submit the application before the portal closes.

Creating an account does not constitute an application. An application will only be considered after the complete form has been successfully submitted. Applications remaining incomplete or in draft form when the portal closes will not proceed to assessment. Each group should submit only one application; duplicate applications may be removed during screening.

Only applications submitted through the Rural Smiles Foundation Grants Portal will be considered. Applications sent by email, WhatsApp, social media, post, physical delivery, or another channel will not be accepted. Applicants are encouraged to create their accounts and begin early so that connectivity problems or missing evidence can be addressed before the deadline.

18. Information required in the application

The application will request the group's name, location, contact details for two responsible representatives, leadership arrangements, number and general composition of members, brief history, description and evidence of climate or environmental work, and information about decision-making and financial oversight.

Applicants will also describe the climate or environmental problem, proposed project, target community, expected results, implementation approach, risks, safeguarding measures, sustainability, and a simple USD 500 budget. A community reference and the required accuracy, consent, data-protection, and conflict-of-interest declarations must also be provided.

19. Application timetable

Stage	Date
Applications open	1 October 2026
Applicant information session	15 October 2026
Deadline for clarification questions	23 October 2026
Applications close	31 October 2026
Eligibility screening	1 to 5 November 2026
Technical assessment	6 to 13 November 2026
Verification of shortlisted applicants	14 to 20 November 2026
First-cohort applicants notified	By 25 November 2026
Grant agreements and orientation	26 to 30 November 2026
Expected first-cohort disbursement	Early December 2026
Later cohort selections	At three-month intervals

Rural Smiles Foundation may adjust dates after the application deadline when operationally necessary. Any significant change will be communicated through the Grants Portal.

20. Applicant information session and questions

An applicant information session will be held on 15 October 2026. The session will explain the purpose of the fund, eligibility requirements, acceptable uses of funding, the cohort model, the application form, assessment, verification, capacity building, safeguarding, and reporting. Participation is encouraged but not mandatory and will not provide an advantage during assessment.

Clarification questions may be submitted until 23 October 2026 through the channel indicated on the Grants Portal. Relevant questions and responses may be made available to all applicants so that everyone has access to the same information. Questions received after the deadline may not be answered before applications close.

21 Contact and submission

Application portal [Open the Grants Portal](#)

General enquiries grants@ruralsmiles.org

The application portal will automatically open on 1 October 2026 and close on 31 October 2026. Only applications successfully submitted through the portal will be considered.