



SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (SGCI)

2025 PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING MEETING: BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF THE DIGITAL GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES



DATE

10TH - 12TH DEC, 2025



VENUE

BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE



BACKGROUND

The Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) in Sub-Saharan Africa, through its Research Management project, is convening a Peer-to-Peer Learning Meeting from 10 to 12 December 2025 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The Association of African Universities (AAU), in collaboration with the Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ), is organizing this three-day meeting under SGCI Phase II+. The gathering will bring together core Information Technology and Grants Management staff from selected Science Granting Councils (SGCs), including councils from Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Namibia, Ghana, Senegal, Botswana, and Uganda. Participants will reflect on the implementation of the digital grant management system to date and explore practical strategies for system customization, long-term sustainability, and future cross-council collaboration. This meeting builds on ongoing collaborative efforts by the AAU, NCRST, NSTIC SL, and UNCST with the participating councils to strengthen digital grants management capacity across the SGCI network.



RATIONALE

The Digital Grants Management System (DGMS) was introduced and supported under SGCI Phase II to enhance the efficiency and transparency of research funding processes across participating councils. As SGCI Phase II+ concludes, there is a critical need to consolidate the progress made and maintain momentum into the next phase of the Initiative. The 2025 Peer-to-Peer Learning Meeting is a timely opportunity for councils to take stock of achievements, lessons learned, and challenges encountered in rolling out their DGMS platforms. It will specifically focus on discussions around the upgrading, scalability, and sustainability of these digital grant systems. By convening council grants and technical officers, the meeting aims to deepen peer learning and facilitate technical discussions on how to further enhance the implementation and adoption of DGMS across the councils. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the digital grant management systems, particularly their scalability and continued adoption across Councils, is a key driver for this meeting. Ultimately, the peer-to-peer learning exchange will inform planning for the next phase of SGCI support (Phase III), helping to “build momentum” so that the gains achieved under Phase II+ are not only preserved but scaled up in the future.





OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Peer-to-Peer Learning Meeting are to:



Reflect on Progress: Review and document the achievements, best practices, and challenges of implementing DGMS in participating councils under SGCI Phase II+. This includes displaying the new consolidated DGMS version, allowing councils to assess system updates, identify remaining gaps, and provide feedback to strengthen usability and readiness for wider adoption.

Peer Learning & Knowledge Exchange: Facilitate the sharing of experiences among councils to learn from one another's innovations in system usage, customization, and grant management workflows. Councils will present their DGMS experiences and practical insights to improve uptake and effectiveness.



Plan Enhancements for Scalability and Sustainability: Collaboratively identify strategies and requirements for upgrading and sustaining the DGMS moving forward. This involves discussing scalability (e.g., handling joint calls or multi-country funding opportunities) and integration of new features to meet evolving needs. The meeting will generate agreed-upon priority actions and recommendations to guide future improvements and Phase III initiatives.

Strengthen Collaboration: Reinforce the network of SGCs by fostering stronger relationships and trust between IT and grants management officers. Identify critical system improvements, agree on immediate technical actions, and outline longer-term enhancements and support needs that will shape DGMS sustainability and Phase III planning.





EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By the end of the meeting, the following outcomes are anticipated:



Documented Lessons and Best Practices: A consolidated report of lessons learned, success stories, and best practices in DGMS. This documentation will inform the participating Councils and guide future SGCI activities related to digital grants management.



Agreed Priorities and Recommendations: A set of actionable recommendations for enhancing and scaling the digital grants management systems, developed collectively by the councils. This will include agreed priority improvements (e.g., key system features or process changes) and strategies to ensure sustainability post-SGCI Phase II+. These recommendations are expected to feed into planning for the next phase of SGCI support.



Defined System Enhancements: A clear outline of technical requirements and opportunities for system customization, based on the consolidated DGMS review, council feedback, and parallel IT sessions. This includes specifications for supporting joint calls, multi-agency workflows, and harmonised standards across councils.



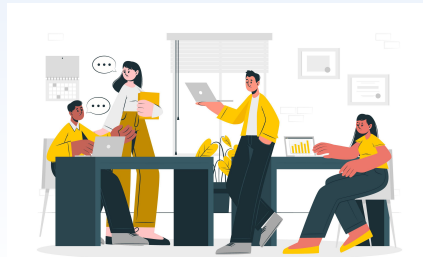
Strengthened Peer Network: Improved communication and collaboration channels among the SGCs. The meeting's interactive format is expected to strengthen professional relationships and trust, laying the groundwork for ongoing peer support and knowledge exchange among the councils beyond this event. Participants will leave with new contacts and a stronger sense of a community of practice in digital grants management.



MEETING STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

This peer learning meeting will be conducted in an interactive, participant-driven format rather than a traditional workshop style. Over the three days, sessions will employ a mix of presentations, open discussions, group work, and informal exchanges to maximize engagement and practical learning. Key components of the meeting's structure include:

Peer-Led Presentations: Selected participating councils will serve as resource persons by showcasing their digital grant management systems and sharing firsthand experiences. These peer-led presentations will highlight each council's achievements, innovations, and challenges in implementing the DGMS. By hearing directly from fellow councils, participants gain contextual insights and can identify replicable practices and solutions. Brief Q&A discussions follow each presentation to allow clarification and deeper exploration of specific issues.



Roundtable Discussions: The agenda features facilitated roundtable sessions on strategic topics that are common to all councils. For example, one roundtable will focus on understanding the requirements and workflows for conducting joint grant calls involving multiple funding agencies. During these discussions, all participants, regardless of role, have the opportunity to contribute ideas, share experiences, and collectively brainstorm solutions. The roundtable format encourages open dialogue and equal participation, leveraging the diverse perspectives in the room to address complex, cross-cutting issues.



Group Reflection & Plenary Sessions: Each day begins with a brief plenary recap of the previous day's discussions and ends with collective reflections to distill insights. These reflective sessions give participants a chance to highlight key takeaways, align on conclusions, and clarify any outstanding questions. A final plenary on the last day will be devoted to reviewing the overall learnings and formulating recommendations for the way forward, including inputs to an SGCI Phase III roadmap. Through moderated dialogue, the group will validate the meeting outcomes and ensure consensus on next steps. Opening and closing ceremonies bookend the event, featuring remarks from organizers, an SGCI impact video, and acknowledgements of contributions, including a special tribute to the late Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini during the networking dinner.



Networking and Informal Exchanges: The meeting is intentionally designed to foster networking and less formal knowledge exchange among participants. Beyond structured sessions, ample time is allocated for coffee breaks, joint meals, and an evening networking dinner, which provide space for bilateral conversations and relationship-building. These informal interactions are a valuable complement to the formal agenda, allowing council representatives to discuss ideas one-on-one, share stories, and build trust in a relaxed setting. The networking dinner in particular will serve as both a social mixer and a reflective session, encouraging participants to share experiences in a convivial environment with a moment to honor a distinguished colleague's memory as noted above. Such peer bonding activities strengthen the community of practice that SGCI aims to cultivate.



This dynamic peer-to-peer facilitation style, combining participant presentations, collaborative discussions, hands-on breakouts, and reflection, is in line with SGCI's established approach to capacity building. It ensures that all attendees are actively engaged as both learners and contributors, and that the collective expertise in the room drives the learning process.



ROLES OF PARTICIPATING COUNCILS

The success of the meeting will rely on the active involvement of the participating SGCI's, each playing complementary roles:



Association of African Universities (AAU): As the lead coordinating for SGCI's Research Management work, the AAU oversees the overall planning and delivery of the meeting. The AAU provides strategic guidance on content, ensures the programme aligns with SGCI objectives, and manages logistics and administration in partnership with the host council. AAU representatives will facilitate key sessions and moderate discussions, drawing on their cross-cutting perspective across all participating countries.



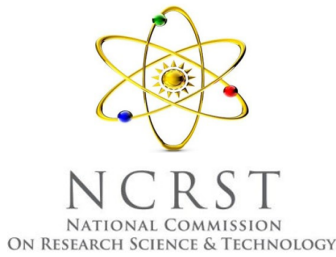
Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ): The RCZ is the host council for this event, responsible for local hosting arrangements and providing on-the-ground support in Bulawayo. In addition to handling venue logistics and hospitality, RCZ officials will play a prominent facilitation role, including delivering the welcome address and co-chairing sessions, thereby embedding local context and leadership into the meeting. RCZ's role exemplifies country ownership, and its experiences with DGMS will be shared for peer learning.



Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST): UNCST has been a key technical partner in the development and implementation of the DGMS under SGCI Phase II. In this meeting, UNCST serves as a co-facilitating council, lending its expertise in digital system development and adoption. UNCST experts will help lead technical breakout sessions, especially for IT officers, provide demonstrations of system improvements, and contribute to shaping the recommendations on future DGMS enhancements. Their involvement ensures that lessons from Uganda's DGMS journey inform collective discussions.



National STI Council of Sierra Leone (NSTIC SL): As one of the councils that actively collaborated in SGCI's digital grants management initiative, NSTIC SL is also engaged as a co-facilitator. Representatives from NSTIC SL will share insights from Sierra Leone's perspective, including successes and challenges in DGMS uptake, and help moderate peer exchange sessions. NSTIC SL will contribute by sharing its experience with the digital grants management system and supporting the facilitation of selected sessions, in line with the collaborative approach used across the participating Councils.



National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST, Namibia): Namibia's NCRST has been involved in the planning of the meeting as another experienced council in DGMS deployment. NCRST will contribute by sharing its country's experiences and co-leading certain discussions. Along with RCZ and NSTIC SL, NCRST's participation in facilitation reflects a multi-country leadership approach.

Participating Science Granting Councils: All attending SGCs are not merely audience members but active contributors to the meeting. Each delegation, comprised typically of an IT officer and a grants management officer or similar key staff, is expected to engage fully. This includes preparing a brief presentation on their council's DGMS status, actively participating in group work, and sharing candid feedback during discussions. The peer learning model relies on the openness and contributions of every council. The diverse experiences of the councils, ranging from early-stage DGMS adopters to more advanced implementers, form the knowledge base from which everyone will learn. In summary, the councils collectively drive the content of the meeting, supported by the facilitation of AAU and partners.

The participating Councils will support the facilitation of selected sessions throughout the meeting. The collaborative roles outlined above embody SGCI's commitment to partnership between the Councils, ensuring that the meeting is not only for the Councils but also by the Councils in terms of knowledge generation and sharing. This approach is expected to enhance ownership of outcomes and encourage the application of the meeting's learnings in each Council's context after the event.



WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
08:30 - 09:00	Arrival & Registration	AAU
09:00 - 09:40	Opening Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome Address ▶ Opening Remarks ▶ Objectives of the meeting 	Dr Partson Chikudza RCZ AAU Representative
09:40 - 09:45	Group Photo	All Participants
09:45 - 10:15	Reflections on Phase II: Overview of achievements, lessons, and challenges.	Mr Collins Mwesigwa
10:15 - 11:15	DGMS Customisations and Improvements Showcase DGMS implementations at the council level.	RCZ – Zimbabwe NSTIC SL – Sierra Leone UNCST – Uganda
11:15 - 11:30	Coffee Break	All Participants
11:30 - 12:30	DGMS Customisations and Improvements Showcase DGMS implementations at the council level.	NCRST – Namibia NSTC – Zambia NCST – Malawi
12:30 - 13:00	Learning Session Display of their system and an overview so far.	NRF – Kenya COSTECH – Tanzania

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
13:00 - 13:40	Understanding DGMS System Gaps A moderated session where councils summarise key issues, insights from the learning session.	All Participants
13:40 - 14:40	Lunch & Networking	All Participants
14:40 - 15:20	Display of the consolidated system Showcase DGMS implementations made since May 2025.	All Participants
15:20 - 15:40	Closing Remarks	All Participants

DAY 2: THURSDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
08:30 - 08:50	Recap & Day 2 Objectives	Moderator
08:50 - 10:00	Next Step: Understanding Joint Calls This will be a Q&A and experience-sharing session on the requirements of joint calls. Councils that have run calls with other councils will provide information on the processes and methods used in running these calls. This session will provide a better understanding of the process and requirements for joint calls, enabling the DGMS to be developed to incorporate these.	Zambia Malawi Namibia Uganda Senegal Ghana Botswana

DAY 2: THURSDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
10:00 - 11:00	Feedback Session What councils think of the consolidated system, what worked, what did not, and how best we can update to suit councils and run joint calls	All Participants
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee Break	All Participants
11:30 - 13:30	Parallel Session IT Officers / Devs Session: Review the collective changes made to the DGMS, prioritise and work on fixes & enhancements from the feedback session. Suggesting further collaborations. Grant Officers Session: Grants Officers give feedback, what they would like to be added, what they have experienced from other systems.	Moderator
13:30 - 14:30	Lunch	All Participants
14:30 - 15:40	Presentations on Outcomes of both Parallel Sessions What was achieved during the parallel session, and what would you like to see in Phase 3?	Team + Open Discussion

DAY 2: THURSDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
15:40 – 16:00	Closing Remarks	All Participants
18:00 -	Networking Dinner This networking dinner will be held in remembrance of Ms Nodumo Dhlamini in her home state. We encourage that stories and memories of Ms Dhlamini be shared during this dinner.	All Participants

DAY 3: FRIDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2025

Time	Activity/Session	Facilitator/Remarks
08:30 - 09:00	Recap of Day 2	Moderator
09:00 - 11:00	Technical Officers Convene Final consolidated understanding of previous sessions. Final modification of the system	IT / Dev Only
11:00 - 11:40	Showcase of the Final System Show worked on the system for the Grants Officers' viewing	All Participants
11:40 - 12:00	Closing Ceremony What should Phase 3 look like?	AAU / Council Teams
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch	All Participants



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