

The Community Inclusion Innovation Challenge – South Africa

2026 Program Overview

Shonda McLaughlin, PhD, CRC

Fulbright U.S. Scholar (2025–2026), The University of Johannesburg, Soweto

Program Overview

The Community Inclusion Innovation Challenge – South Africa invites youth and young adults to explore practical ideas that could improve accessibility, participation, and opportunity in their communities.

Participants are invited to propose and test small ideas that help communities work better for people with disabilities of all kinds.

The challenge encourages creativity, autonomy, dignity, and practical problem-solving.

Participants will develop an idea, test it in a small way, document their progress, and share their work during the final virtual event.

The Challenge Prompt

What idea could you create, test, or start that would help your community work better for people with disabilities of all kinds?

Participants are invited to propose practical ideas that improve accessibility, participation, or opportunity for people with disabilities.

Disabilities may be visible or invisible, including mobility, sensory, cognitive, learning, mental health, neurological, or chronic health conditions.

Possible Focus Areas

Ideas may focus on improving accessibility in areas such as:

Public spaces

Sidewalks, curb cuts, buildings, parks, transportation stops, or other parts of the built environment.

Communication

Information that is easier to read, hear, see, or understand.

Technology

Apps, digital tools, or online spaces that remove barriers.

Education and learning

Ways students with disabilities can participate more fully in school or training programs.

Work and entrepreneurship

Ideas that help people with disabilities access employment, build skills, or create income.

Community life

Sports, arts, events, or social spaces that welcome people of all abilities.

Ideas do not need to be large projects. Small, practical solutions that can be tested or demonstrated are encouraged.

Who Can Participate

The challenge is open to youth and young adults ages 18–29.

Participants with and without disabilities are welcome.

People with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply.

The challenge is fully virtual, allowing participation from communities across South Africa.

Program Structure

Selected participants will:

- Develop a community inclusion idea
- Test or explore the idea in a small way
- Share brief progress updates during the challenge
- Participate in two virtual group meetings
- Present their idea during the final virtual event

Communication will take place primarily through WhatsApp, with email as an additional option.

Participants will work independently on their ideas while still having access to shared updates and optional guidance.

What “Testing Your Idea” Means

Testing your idea does not require building a full solution.

Testing your idea could include:

- Creating a prototype or demonstration
- Gathering feedback from community members
- Documenting a problem and proposing a solution
- Redesigning something to make it more accessible
- Trying a small version of your idea in real life

The goal is not to solve the entire problem of disability inclusion in one month.

The goal is to take one real step toward improvement.

Documentation

Participants should briefly document their progress during the challenge.

Updates may include:

- Short written messages
- Voice notes
- Photos
- Short video updates

Updates do not need to be long. A few sentences, a quick voice note, or a photo with a short explanation is enough.

Examples:

“Today I visited the park near my house and took photos of areas where the sidewalk is broken.”

“I asked five people with disabilities whether this app feature would help them.”

“Trying to redesign this flyer so it is easier to read.”

Key Terms**Idea**

A clear suggestion for improving accessibility or inclusion in your community.

Test

A small way to explore whether your idea could work in real life.

Prototype

A simple model, example, or demonstration of your idea.

Experiment

An attempt to try your idea on a small scale to see what happens.

Final Submission

Evidence of the work you completed during the challenge.

This may include a short report, photos, a video explanation, a prototype, or documentation of your experiment.

The goal is learning and exploration, not perfection.

Participation Requirements

Selected participants must:

- Be between the ages of 18 and 29
- Join the WhatsApp communication group
- Attend two virtual group meetings
- Attend the final virtual event
- Document their progress during the challenge
- Submit a final explanation, demonstration, or presentation of their idea

Seed Grants

Selected participants may receive small seed grants to support further development or testing of their ideas.

We anticipate awarding approximately eight seed grants.

Additional awards may be made depending on the strength of ideas and available resources.

Current seed fund: R30,000

Key Dates

Application Deadline

May 1, 2026 — 11:59 PM SAST

Participant Notification

By May 5, 2026

Challenge Period

May 8 – June 1, 2026

Final Virtual Event

June 1, 2026

All times follow South African Standard Time.

Application Questions

Full Name

Age (confirm you are between 18 and 29)

City / Province / Country/Zip

Email Address

WhatsApp Number

Do you identify as a person with a disability?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

What idea could you create, test, or start that would help your community work better for people with disabilities of all kinds?

How would you test or explore your idea during the challenge?

Why does this idea matter to you or your community?

Consent and Media Permission

Participants may share updates during the challenge through messages, voice notes, photos, or short videos documenting their ideas and progress.

These materials may be used in program communications, reports, presentations, websites, social media, or a future YouTube channel highlighting community innovation.

Participation in public sharing is optional.

Participants who prefer not to have their materials shared publicly may still participate.

Consent Question:

Do you give permission for photos, videos, voice recordings, or written updates related to your participation to be used for program communication, education, or outreach?

Yes

No

Participation Confirmation:

By submitting this application, I confirm that:

I am 18 years of age or older

I understand the expectations of the challenge

I agree to participate respectfully

Evaluation Rubric

Projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:

Understanding of the Problem (0–5 points)

Creativity and Innovation (0–5 points)

Practicality and Feasibility (0–5 points)

Effort and Documentation (0–5 points)

Testing and Learning (0–5 points)

Dignity and Respect (0–5 points)

Maximum Score: 30 points

Projects with the highest scores may be considered for seed grant awards.

Application Link

Apply here:

<https://forms.gle/7ZvTQstpyhLXxuWE9>



Flyer Image

The Community Inclusion Innovation Challenge - SOUTH AFRICA

Virtual Challenge for Youth & Young Adults (Ages 18–29)

What idea could you create, test, or start that would help your community work better for people with disabilities of all kinds?

Seed Grants Available!

Youth and young adults are invited to share creative, practical ideas that improve accessibility, participation, and opportunity in their communities.

Possible Areas for Ideas

- **Public Spaces** – sidewalks, curb cuts, buildings, parks, transportation stops
- **Communication** – information that is easier to read, hear, see, or understand
- **Technology** – apps, digital tools, or online spaces that remove barriers
- **Education & Learning** – ways students with disabilities can participate more fully
- **Work & Entrepreneurship** – ideas that expand employment or economic opportunity
- **Community Life** – sports, arts, events, or social spaces that welcome people of all abilities


Who Can Participate

- **Youth and young adults ages 18–29**
- **Participant Notification:** By May 5, 2026
- **Challenge Period:** May 8– June 1, 2026
- **Final Virtual Event:** June 1, 2026

Apply

Scan to apply or visit:
forms.gle/72VT0stpyhLXxurVES

To learn more:
<https://thevocationalrehabacademy.com>



This initiative was developed during the 2025–2026 Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program

Social Media Announcements

Applications are now open for the Community Inclusion Innovation Challenge – South Africa.

Youth and young adults ages 18–29 are invited to share practical ideas that could help communities work better for people with disabilities of all kinds.

Participants with and without disabilities are welcome. People with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply.

Seed grants available.

Apply here: <https://forms.gle/7ZvTQstpyhLXxuWE9>

Deadline: May 1, 2026 — 11:59 PM SAST.

Contact: shonda@thevocationalrehabacademy.com

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

This initiative was developed during and made possible by the 2025–2026 Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program at the University of Johannesburg, Soweto, South Africa.

The views and initiatives expressed here are those of the organizer and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Fulbright Program, the U.S. Department of State, or the University of Johannesburg.