

1. INTRODUCTION

The Zenex Foundation surveyed its stakeholders in September 2017 to gauge views on the organisation's progress since the last survey was completed in March/April 2014.

Feedback from stakeholders will: (1) inform Zenex's strategy over our next five-year strategy period (2019 – 2023); (2) help us improve our day-to-day operations; and (3) inform how best we can communicate with stakeholders.

The Zenex Board and Staff have found the feedback from stakeholders most useful, and it has given us much to consider as we prepare for 2018 and for our next strategy period. The findings of the survey have been shared with all stakeholders who were surveyed and is available to review on the Zenex website.

We thank all of those who have taken part in the survey. This document outlines a broad action plan in response to the survey.

With thanks

The Zenex Foundation Team

2. RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

2.1. Strategy

The Zenex Board is pleased that stakeholders understand the focus of the Foundation to be Maths, Science and Language and that there is broad consensus that we should continue with these focus areas during the next five-year strategy period.

As recommended by some stakeholders, we will make more explicit some of the strategy areas that are already fundamental to our approach. These are:

- Strengthening capacity of M&E in the education sector: Zenex is developing a programme to strengthen M&E in the education sector at an institutional (academic), organisational and individual level (with specific focus on emerging evaluators).
- Strengthening capacity within the NGO sector: much of the Foundation's work is done in partnership with the NGO sector. During the current strategy period we have invested in strengthening the capacity of the NGO's we work with and we will continue to do so in the next strategy period.
- Share research and evaluations findings in the sector: This is outlined in section 2.5 of this document.



2.2 Organisational Relationships

The findings of the survey suggest that many of our strategic partnership relationships are dominated by the demands of day-to-day programme management requirements and that there is a need to broaden and deepen these relationships beyond the scope of existing programmes. In response to this, Zenex will:

- Create more opportunity for 1-1 organisational engagement outside of the scope of day-to-day programme management conversations.
- Create more targeted sub-sector specific opportunities for engagement between organisations with similar interests e.g. those working in the field of foundation phase literacy.

2.3 Grantmaking approach

The survey suggests that Zenex needs to be clearer about its grantmaking approach. Many of those surveyed are not clear if partners in the education sector can send unsolicited funding proposals, or if Zenex only accepts responses to Requests for Proposals.

Zenex will communicate more clearly about its grantmaking approach and will also communicate more about possibilities for partnership and collaboration in the education sector.

There were also suggestions that Zenex should consider smaller grants within a lighter grantmaking framework (shorter turnaround time, lighter reporting requirements) to encourage innovation in the sector. Zenex is a multi-year funder, and its strategic focus remains to support a few big projects rather than to fund small programmes. However, innovation is one of our core pillars and we will seek opportunities and provide resources for innovation within the multi-year projects.

2.4 Operations

We note with concern perceptions that our programme management approach is not consistent, that reporting requirements are onerous and that more programme capacity is needed to manage the Zenex programme portfolio.

In terms of programme management, we are reviewing our operating systems and are commissioning a new information management system that will streamline how we work and will bring consistency into our programme management approach.

In terms of reporting, Zenex is a learning organisation. The management team and board require in-depth reporting. We engage with the details of reports, as it informs our thinking, the design of new programmes and the broader strategy of the Foundation. In our grant funding we do make resources available for reporting. However, as part of the new management system, managing reporting will be considered.



We take cognisance and value the feedback that the Zenex team becomes unavailable when preparing for board meetings. With additional staff capacity and the new information management system we will ensure we balance the requirements of the board and other stakeholders more effectively.

2.5 Communications & knowledge sharing

While stakeholders surveyed had a broad sense of the strategy, impact and grantmaking approach of the Foundation, understanding was superficial.

We recognize that not enough knowledge sharing and building on lessons learned is taking place. As outlined earlier, the Foundation will amplify this area of work, we are addressing this by:

- Setting up a dedicated knowledge management and communications unit. This will put out information on a more regular basis, and will create more opportunity for engagement and learning. This knowledge management unit will also redevelop the website to ensure that information is more easily available and that the content is better curated.
- Compiling a database of all M&E education reports published by the Foundation since 2011 and making these available in a format that is user friendly and where lessons learned are easily accessible.
- Continuing to fund organisations that promote knowledge sharing and engagement. We realise that there is a great need for a sector wide knowledge hub – so actors in the education sector can come to one place for research and information. Zenex undertakes to look at what it will take to create such a knowledge hub.
- It is now becoming standard in our contracts with partner organisations that materials developed will be open source. We will make these materials more easily available and accessible by packaging them for specific audiences.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Over the past 20 years, Zenex has disbursed nearly R1billion in the South African education sector. This grantmaking relies on the Foundation working alongside and in partnership with NGOs, researchers, academics, consultants and those at the coalface of the education system – school management, teachers, governing bodies and learners.

It is these partners who we have surveyed in 2017. Feedback from the survey will guide us as we commit to new programmes in 2018 to improve our operations and communications – such as:

- the development of the programme to develop the skills base and capacity of the education M&E sector;
- the commissioning of the information management system;
- the setting up of a dedicated knowledge management unit and sector wide knowledge hub.



This feedback will also guide us as we prepare for our next strategy period 2019 – 2023. We will continue to consult with partners both informally and through stakeholder surveys to ensure that we remain a learning organisation with open working relationships with our partners.

