



CALL FOR PROPOSALS

EdTech Programmes for Mathematics and English in Grade 4	
Issued by	Zenex Foundation
Focus area	Mitigating Learning Backlogs: Education Technology, Grade 4 Mathematics and Language
Number of schools	20
Provinces	Either KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, or Gauteng
Deadline for submission	11 March 2024
Preparation and stakeholder engagement	June 2024 – December 2024
Implementation start date	January 2025

1. Introduction

This is a call for proposals to implement an education technology (EdTech) solution/s to address Mathematics and English learning backlogs in Grade 4. This document sets out the relevant information required for submission of proposals to the Zenex Foundation (Zenex). The project must be implemented in 20 schools in a district/circuit in one of the four provinces in which Zenex operates.

2. Background

The Zenex Foundation has been supporting Mathematics and Language education to improve teaching and learning outcomes in the country for more than 25 years. Over the years Zenex has implemented and evaluated several models for improving learning outcomes in these gateway subjects. These include teacher as well as learner projects across the Foundation and Senior Phases.

Zenex recognised that many of its interventions were not yielding the expected outcomes. An analysis of its own data as well as research from a range of other organisations suggests that teaching and learning is impeded by the fact that many learners are performing below their required grade level. These conditions make it difficult for programmes that are pitched at grade level, to succeed.

This is the result of 'learning backlogs' that start in the Foundation Phase and accumulate over time¹. This problem has been exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19 lockdown and the resultant closure of schools and rotational attendance². The impact of such backlogs is worse in hierarchical subjects like mathematics, in which future knowledge is built on the foundations of previous knowledge.

Zenex recognised that these learning backlogs are a binding constraint to their grade and curriculum level initiatives. As a result, it sought to explore ways in which these 'learning backlogs' can be dealt with. To this effect, Zenex, is already supporting a range of initiatives to address learning backlogs.

3. Mitigating Backlogs in Grade 4 Using EdTech

As noted, Zenex would like to explore the use of technology to mitigate 'learning backlogs' in Mathematics and English in Grade 4.

Grade 4 is a difficult year for schooling globally, as learners switch from literacy and numeracy to learning about the world in various subjects. In South Africa, the situation is complex due to School Governing Bodies' preference for English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onward and this creates challenges for many learners whose home language is an African language. Therefore Grade 4 learners are faced with an increased cognitive demand as well as a language switch which impedes their ability to gain knowledge in a meaningful way. These conditions have a significant impact on the nature and impact of 'learning backlogs'.

In this context, Zenex is keen to explore the role EdTech can play in supporting learners to mitigate backlogs and accelerate learning to achieve grade level competence.

We recognise that technology can be used to augment classroom lessons, assessment, and after-school practice. Technology can grant a large number of children access to curriculum and practice opportunities.

However, we also recognise it can be impeded by infrastructure (including connectivity, devices, and data access) at home and school, which can significantly constrain programmes.

The project will help Zenex, and the sector, better understand the enabling and constraining conditions and establish whether there are cost-effective ways to provide quality education technology programmes to support Grade 4 Mathematics and English catch-up.

4. Scope of the Project

While Zenex will allow for innovative ideas, the scope of the project will be guided by the following parameters:

- In 20 schools in a circuit or district. (The proposed district will be agreed upon between Zenex and the service provider.)
- In Mathematics or English using technology solutions.
- Working with Grade 4 learners or teachers.
- Focusing on 'learning backlogs' in Mathematics or English.

¹ Perspectives on learning Backlogs in South African schooling <https://www.zenexfoundation.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Digital-Perspectives-on-Learning-Backlogs-in-South-African-schooling.pdf>

² Spaul, N., Daniels, R. C et al. (2021) NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 Synthesis Report: <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/1.-Spaul-N.-Daniels-R.-C-et-al.-2021-NIDS-CRAM-Wave-4-Synthesis-Report..pdf>

- Implemented in one of the four provinces, namely Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape.

5. Proposal Submission

Kindly submit NOT more than a five-page proposal outlining how you understand the task and how you will undertake the task. The proposal should include:

- A detailed description of the project. This includes the theory of change, the model of implementation (including dosages, whether it is after school or in school, who delivers the intervention, target beneficiary, whether it is an entire class or selected learners).
- A description of who is responsible for the infrastructure (devices, connectivity, data costs) – whether it is the school or the organisation.
- A high-level indicative budget.
- Experience and expertise of the organisation and team that will deliver the project.
- List of team members including race and gender.
- BEEE status.

6. Criteria for Evaluation of Proposal

- Robust theory of change to deal with 'learning backlogs'.
- Implementation model takes account of context and has the potential to scale.
- Experience in the field.
- Diversity of the team.
- Expertise of the team.

7. Proposal Process and Timelines

Following the submission of proposals, a shortlist of potential applicants may be required to attend an interview process.

Submission of proposals	11 March 2024
Shortlisted applicants to participate in the interview process	13 March 2024
Preliminary appointment of the service provider (Final appointment will be subject to approval of the proposal by the Zenex Board). Zenex will engage the preliminary service provider to refine the proposal for submission to the Board.	16 March 2024
Revised proposal for submission to Zenex Board	25 March 2024
Contracting	May 2024

8. Contact Person for Queries and Submission

Queries and proposals must be emailed to:

Mr Emisang Machedi at emisang@zenexfoundation.org.za or tel: (011) 481-7846.

The Zenex Foundation is an independent education grant-maker established in 1995 to improve teaching and learning outcomes in language and mathematics in South Africa. This strategic focus is driven by evidence of a proven relationship between language proficiency and success in mathematics, as critical for overall learner achievement. The Foundation's entire budget is committed to the fields of language and mathematics in Basic Education. To date, we have disbursed over R1,5 billion in the South African education sector, the impact of which continues to be evaluated through extensive research and evaluation to ensure that every investment and project drives the advancement of education.

Please visit our website at www.zenexfoundation.org.za for detailed information on our work.