



Call for Applications: NPO Leadership Development

The Zenex Foundation invites applications for the **Non-profit organisation (NPO) Leadership Development Programme**, a two-year flagship leadership initiative that forms part of Zenex's broader capacity-building strategy. The programme is designed to strengthen senior leadership capacity within South Africa's education NPO sector.

This Call for Applications provides comprehensive information about the programme's purpose, structure, eligibility criteria, application process, and expectations of participating organisations and candidates.

1. Background and Rationale

Education NPOs play a critical role in supporting the delivery of quality education outcomes in South Africa. Over time, their role has evolved from operating largely outside the state to working more integrally with government and other stakeholders to strengthen education systems, particularly in contexts of fiscal constraints and increasing complexity.

Despite their importance, education NPOs face persistent leadership and organisational challenges, including:

- Resource constraints to invest in leadership development
- Challenges with prioritising succession planning
- Difficulties in attracting and retaining talent in the sector.

Recognising these challenges, the Zenex Foundation has prioritised capacity building as a key pillar. The project forms part of Zenex's broader capacity-building portfolio and specifically targets senior NPO leaders who are positioned to influence organisational sustainability, sector collaboration, and long-term education outcomes.

2. Purpose of the Leadership Development Programme

The purpose of the Leadership Development Programme is to support a comprehensive, accelerated programme for senior leaders in education NPOs, enabling them to:

- Strengthen leadership capabilities and strategic decision-making
- Build resilient, well-governed, and sustainable organisations
- Deepen personal leadership mastery
- Develop enduring peer networks within the education NPO ecosystem.

3. Programme Design and Components

The Leadership Development Programme is a cohort-based, blended programme running from April 2026 to April 2028. Participants will engage in structured learning and development activities, delivered through a mix of online and in-person modalities.

3.1 Short Courses

Participants will select 2-4 short courses aligned to their leadership needs and organisational context, chosen from reputable institutions and approved by Zenex. Courses are expected to be largely online and spread across the two years of the programme. Courses may include, but are not limited to:

- Financial management and sustainability
- Proposal writing and fundraising
- People management and conflict resolution
- Strategic communication
- Organisational culture and change management
- Visioning and strategy development
- Governance, compliance, and accountability
- Stakeholder and partnership management.

3.2 Leadership Coaching: Personal Mastery: Year 1

Participants will be supported through a leadership coaching programme by an external coaching agency managed by Zenex. The coaching will be focused on personal mastery, including:

- Self-awareness and leadership identity
- Behavioural patterns and decision-making
- Managing complexity, pressure, and influence.

Each participant will receive 10 coaching sessions (a combination of online and in-person sessions) delivered by experienced leadership coaches.

3.3 Work-Based Leadership Project and Mentorship: Year 2

Each participant will design and implement a work-related leadership project addressing a real organisational or sectoral challenge. The project must be directly relevant to the participant's role and organisational priorities.

Participants will receive up to 10 days of specialist mentorship to support project scoping, implementation, reflection, and learning.

3.4 Building Relevant International Network

The nature and format of this international exposure will be determined in consultation with selected participants. This component aims to build international network exposure to broaden perspectives, stimulate innovation, and strengthen global learning connections.

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Organisational Eligibility

To be eligible, the organisation must:

- Be a registered non-profit organisation operating in South Africa.
- Work in the basic education sector, including education delivery, advocacy, research, evaluation, data, or evidence-related initiatives.
- Nominate only one candidate for the programme.
- Provide written endorsement of the candidate's application.
- Commit to releasing the candidate to fully participate in programme activities over the two-year period.
- Support the integration and application of learning within the organisation.

Note: If the CEO is the applicant, the organisation's Board must provide the required endorsement and commitment.

4.2 Candidate Eligibility

The nominated candidate must:

- Hold a senior leadership position with decision making responsibility within the organisation.
- Have at least three years' experience in this role.
- Be under the age of 50 at the time of application.
- Be available to participate fully in all programme components.

Note: Zenex is committed advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Note: A needs analysis will inform final programme design for each selected participant.

5. Application Process

The organisation must submit a single application package that includes the following:

Organisational Endorsement (maximum two pages)

- A written endorsement confirming the organisation's support and commitment to the candidate's participation. This must include information on internal arrangements regarding the candidate's employment obligations upon completion of the programme.

Candidate Motivation Letter (maximum two pages) outlining:

- Their leadership experience
- Their leadership development needs
- A proposed work-related problem or case study, identified in collaboration with the organisation.

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

- The candidate's most recent CV.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend a panel interview.

6. Key Dates

- Call for Applications Opens: **12 February 2026**
- Application Deadline: **5 March 2026**
- Shortlisting, Interviews and Final Selection: **9–20 March 2026**
- Contracting: **April 2026**
- Programme Implementation: **April 2026 – April 2028**

7. Enquiries

For further information or clarification, please contact:

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The Zenex Foundation looks forward to partnering with education NPOs to invest in visionary, ethical, and resilient leadership that strengthens the education ecosystem in South Africa.