

REIMAGINING MATHEMATICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

Call Overview

Item	Details
Funder	Zenex Foundation
Focus Area	Teacher Development: Mathematics and Language Teaching and Learning (including English First Additional Language)
Target Phase	Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6)
Primary Beneficiaries	Teachers
Geographic Scope	South Africa
School Sample	Approximately 10 schools
Duration	Up to 3 years (with annual review and renewal)
Grant Value	Up to R3 Million
Application Deadline	30 June 2026

1. Introduction

This Call for Proposals seeks innovative, evidence-generating approaches to strengthen mathematics and language teaching and learning in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6), with a particular emphasis on teacher development and multilingual pedagogy. It is intended for organisations, universities, research institutions and partnerships that can pilot and test new approaches in approximately 10 schools over three years. The overarching aim is not only to improve learner outcomes but also to generate practical evidence that can inform future policy, programme design and scale-up across South Africa.

This document outlines the challenge we are seeking to address, the types of innovations we are interested in supporting, the application process, and the criteria for assessing proposals.

2. Background and Rationale

Zenex has invested in strengthening teaching and learning in South African schools, with a particular focus on mathematics, language, teacher development, and system improvement. Throughout this work, we have sought not only to support effective programmes, but also to identify, test, and scale approaches that can contribute to broader improvements across the education system.

This Call for Proposals forms part of that ongoing commitment. It seeks innovative ideas that strengthen teaching and learning in the Intermediate Phase, while generating evidence about what works in Intermediate Phase mathematics and language teaching. Successful proposals will

contribute to Zenex's broader goal of improving teaching and learning outcomes for learners in the Intermediate Phase, while building knowledge that can inform policy, practice, and future investment.

Drawing on its years of experience and engagement working alongside schools, provincial districts, universities, and implementing partners, Zenex has encountered three interconnected challenges that appear to continue influencing teaching and learning:

1. The need to strengthen teacher knowledge and practice

Intermediate Phase teachers lack strong mathematical content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and assessment capability to effectively teach Intermediate Phase mathematics.

2. Learning backlogs and progression

Many learners enter the Intermediate Phase with significant gaps in foundational mathematical knowledge, fluency, and conceptual understanding, making it difficult for them to engage with grade-level content. Teachers are often required to balance curriculum coverage with addressing these learning deficits, and without targeted support, curriculum pacing can take precedence over learner mastery. This contributes to cumulative learning backlogs that become increasingly difficult to address as learners progress through the system.

3. The need to support teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms

Intermediate Phase teaching is further complicated by the transition to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in Grade 4. For many learners, this shift is abrupt and can limit their ability to participate fully in classroom learning and engage meaningfully with mathematical concepts. There is therefore a need for greater understanding of how language impacts mathematics learning in multilingual classrooms and for approaches that can help teachers navigate the intersection between language development and mathematical understanding during this critical phase of schooling.

The above challenges point to the need for innovative approaches that strengthen teacher professional practice, support learner progression and enable effective teaching and learning in multilingual contexts.

3. Scope of the Project

This Call seeks innovative teacher development programmes focused on mathematics and languages (including English First Additional Language (EFAL)) in the Intermediate Phase.

Proposals may focus on a single grade or multiple grades within the Intermediate Phase where there is a clear rationale.

We are interested in projects that contribute to one or more of the following outcomes:

- Strengthened teacher content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and instructional practice.

- Improved teacher capacity to assess learner understanding and respond to diverse learning needs.
- Improved learner fluency, conceptual understanding, reasoning and problem-solving.
- More effective approaches to addressing learning backlogs and supporting learner progression.
- Improved teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms.
- Improved learner participation, communication and engagement in mathematics and language learning.

Zenex is particularly interested in interventions that combine high-quality teacher professional development with opportunities to test, refine and generate evidence on new approaches to mathematics and language teaching and learning. We are looking for innovations that not only improve classroom practice and learner outcomes but also contribute to a broader understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions.

Successful proposals should demonstrate how the intervention will generate learning and evidence that can inform future programme design, policy, practice, and potential scale-up within the South African education system.

4. Priority Areas for Innovation

Applicants may focus on one or more of the following priority areas:

4.1 Teacher Professional Development and Instructional Practice

At the heart of this Call is the belief that improving learner outcomes requires sustained improvements in teacher knowledge, instructional practice, and decision-making. We are therefore interested in innovative approaches that support teachers to strengthen mathematics teaching and learning through ongoing, job-embedded professional development linked directly to classroom practice.

Proposals should demonstrate how teachers will be supported to develop deeper mathematical content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, assessment literacy, and the ability to respond effectively to diverse learner needs. Support may include coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, lesson study, peer observation, collaborative planning, reflective practice, or other innovative professional learning models.

We are particularly interested in approaches that help teachers:

- Strengthen their understanding of mathematics content knowledge, progression, and conceptual development across the Intermediate Phase.
- Diagnose learner misconceptions, foundational gaps, and barriers to learning.
- Use assessment evidence to plan, adapt, and differentiate instruction.
- Facilitate mathematical reasoning, problem-solving, communication, and learner engagement.

- Translate curriculum intentions into effective classroom instruction that promotes conceptual understanding alongside procedural fluency.
- Reflect on and continuously improve their classroom practice.

4.2 Learning Recovery, Progression and Mathematical Achievement

Zenex is interested in approaches that address learning backlogs while supporting learners to access and succeed in grade-level mathematics. These may include:

- Diagnostic assessment approaches and tools that help teachers identify and respond to learning needs.
- Learning recovery and accelerated learning models.
- Differentiated instruction that responds to diverse learner needs.
- Progression benchmarks and learning trajectories that support instructional decision-making.
- Classroom assessment approaches that provide actionable information about learner understanding and next learning steps.
- Strengthening mathematical fluency, number sense, conceptual understanding and algebraic reasoning.
- Reviewing, adapting or developing Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) that support progression, pacing and mastery.
- Developing, adapting or testing Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) and classroom resources that support learner achievement.

4.3 Multilingual Teaching and Language-Responsive Pedagogy

We are interested in proposals that demonstrate how teachers will be supported to:

- Use multilingual pedagogies that strengthen learner participation, understanding and achievement.
- Integrate language development with mathematics teaching and learning.
- Develop learner's mathematical vocabulary, academic language and conceptual understanding.
- Facilitate mathematical discourse, explanation, reasoning and communication across languages.
- Use translanguaging and other language-responsive strategies to support meaning-making.
- Create classroom environments where learners can draw on their full linguistic repertoire when engaging with mathematical concepts.
- Strengthen the teaching of EFAL as a foundation for learning across the curriculum.

Particular interest will be given to approaches that move beyond translation and focus on how language can be leveraged to deepen conceptual understanding, learner engagement and participation.

5. Proposal Submission Process – Expression of Interest (EOI)

Zenex is seeking concise, innovative, evidence-informed expressions of interest (max. 2-3 pages) that address a clearly defined challenge in Intermediate Phase mathematics and/or language

teaching and learning. The EOI should demonstrate how the proposed intervention will strengthen teacher practice, improve learner outcomes, and contribute to broader learning about effective approaches that have the potential to inform policy, practice and scale.

Applicants must submit a concise EOI that includes:

- Organisational background
- Problem statement
- Rationale and theoretical underpinning
- Proposed innovation
- Target beneficiaries including province(s) to be included, number of teachers, number of schools, grades and subject (e.g. EFAL, mathematics, Home Languages, etc.)
- High-level budget.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a detailed proposal, and Zenex will work with them to finalise the design.

6. Expression of Interest Criteria

The EOI will be assessed against:

Criteria	Weighting
Relevance to the Call and identified challenges	25%
Clear expression of the innovation	25%
Quality of theoretical underpinning	20%
Organisational capacity, experience and expertise	15%
Value for money	15%

7. Key Dates

Milestone	Date
Submission of Proposals	30 June 2026
Communication to shortlisted candidates/organisations	3 July 2026
Interview shortlisted candidates, if required	8 July 2026
Information/clarification workshop	13-17 July 2026
Full Proposal Submission	7 August 2026
Submission to Board	24 August 2026
Notification of successful applicants	7 September 2026
Project contracting	21 September 2026
Project Start	1 October 2026

8. Expression of Interest Submission and Contact Person

Expression of Interest must be submitted electronically to Ms Lauren Tracey-Temba at Laurentt@zenexfoundation.org.za or for queries, please call: +27 11 481 7831.

Documents must be submitted in Word format. Late submissions will not be considered.

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 R1,6 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.