



Call for Applications

**EARLY LITERACY
SOLUTIONS CHALLENGE**



“Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.” – Margaret Fuller

The **Innovation Edge Early Literacy Solutions Challenge** calls for solutions designed to meaningfully impact young children’s early literacy and language skills development.

It seeks bold solutions related to the following idea: **Imagine if preschool teachers in South Africa’s low income communities were optimally supported and equipped to enable language and literacy development in ways that are appropriate for young children - playing, talking, doing, imitating, exploring, singing, telling stories and reading.**

Social entrepreneurs with a proven track record of implementation within any sector are invited to apply for funding and support. Proposed solutions must be related to the challenge and idea described above. The stage of the solution or venture can be anywhere on the spectrum - from feasibility to scale-up.

Successful applications will consider these elements of preschool teacher support:

- Training focused on the use of modeling and practice of new instructional approaches
- Specific training focused on interaction skills
- Contextually appropriate teacher guides that simplify the instructional process
- Positive and collaborative teacher support
- Support focused on increasing teacher confidence
- Ongoing mentoring, coaching and supervision
- Reflection and peer learning
- Provision of high-quality resources in all languages that focus on providing practical strategies for supporting language and literacy development in ways that are appropriate for young children (playing, talking, doing, imitating, exploring, singing, telling stories and reading)

Selected applicants will be supported to pitch their solutions to the Innovation Edge Investment Committee in September 2022. Successful social entrepreneurs will receive fit-for-purpose (amount and financial instrument) funding, customised venture building support and connections to social capital.

Submissions deadline: 15 June 2022

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY or go to: https://innovationedge.org.za/apply-now/](https://innovationedge.org.za/apply-now/)

CONSIDERATION CRITERIA

- The solution must be focused on supporting the Early Literacy and Language development teaching practices delivered by preschool teachers/ECD practitioners working with 4 to 6 year olds in Early Learning Programmes in low-income communities in South Africa.
- The solution must be context appropriate and can adopt either a low tech or a no tech approach.
- Solutions must be at the stage of feasibility testing; or prototyping and market testing; or transitioning to scale. We do not accept ventures in the ideation phase.
- The applicant must have evidenced early traction either in the early childhood sector or a similar adjacent sector.
- The applicant must be in a position to evidence future sustainability and growth beyond investment from Innovation Edge.
- The applicant must have a deep understanding of the problem and have been proactive in identifying possible solutions.

PROMPTS TO CONSIDER

The Problem

[The Thrive by Five Index 2021](#) found that almost half (49%) of 4 to 5 year old children from SA's poorest households are falling behind in meeting the required standards in the area of **[Emergent Literacy and Language](#)**. And these are children who are attending early learning programmes.

Research has shown that children who have poorly developed language and early literacy skills when they begin school are more likely to struggle to learn to read and write. Language and literacy are gateways to learning across all subjects, to completing school and making a positive contribution to society. Language is also a fundamental part of social interaction and strong relationships, and therefore of socioemotional wellbeing.

[The Early Emergent Language and Literacy Thrive by Five Action Brief](#) places an emphasis on teaching practices. The author reminds us that early years teachers are often underqualified, under-resourced and that initial teacher training does not include a focus on language and early literacy.

How might your solution draw on the evidence of what works best?

- Training should include high-quality resources in all languages and should focus on providing practical strategies for supporting language and literacy development in ways that are appropriate for young children (playing, talking, doing, imitating, exploring, singing, telling stories and reading).
- Children learn best in their mother tongue and books in African languages are not easily available or affordable.
- Training and qualifications alone have limited impact on continuing improvement, whereas mentoring and supervision have been shown to have a significant impact on improving the quality of services.
- Field-based/on-site consultation is a key component of quality improvement, as it provides ECD staff with opportunities to receive feedback on their practices. However, challenges with effective delivery, including the capacity of supervisors and trainers, commitment, and cost are noted.

- The following methods of training and support have been found to lead to teachers adopting effective classroom practices in successful, large-scale literacy programs
 - a. Training focused on the use of modeling and practice of new instructional approaches
 - b. Initial training was typically face to face
 - c. Coaches were provided structure in how they supported teachers
 - d. Teacher guides simplified the instructional process
 - e. Students were provided books at a 1:1 ratio
 - f. Teacher support was positive and collaborative
 - g. Support focused on increasing teacher confidence
 - h. Teacher support happened frequently and helped teachers solve problems they faced

RESOURCES

ITEM	LINKS
The Thrive by Five Index	https://www.thrivebyfive.co.za/
The Thrive by Five Emergent Language and Literacy Action Brief	https://www.thrivebyfive.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ActionBriefEmergentLanguageAndLiteracy.pdf
2022 Reading Panel Background Report	https://www.readingpanel.co.za/resources
Learning at Scale Interim Report 2021	https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Learning%20at%20Scale%20Interim%20Report%20-%20Final%20Draft.pdf
Early Childhood Education (ECE) Research in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Current Literature and Future Research Possibilities (Draft 22-09-2021)	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CbBGntBFdQLoSPZGRhfXUhD2aUMLp9j2/edit?usp=sharing&oid=104790871501954040982&rtpof=true&sd=true