



Teaching Innovation Lab: Expressions of Interest

January 14, 2026

Pilot Summary	
Pilot Purpose	The Teaching Innovation Lab (TIL), led by Elimu-Soko and supported by the Gates Foundation, invites innovators to propose and rigorously test low-cost, scalable approaches that strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) instruction within African public education systems.
Problem Statement	Most successful TPD programs have been funded by external donors at costs that exceed what governments can sustain. Governments face a trade-off between TPD reach and quality, with programs incorporating fewer than half of the features that the evidence identifies as effective. The frontier we seek to explore is whether innovations can shift this trade-off; delivering meaningful improvements in teaching quality at costs governments can absorb and sustain.
Pilot Parameters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Approach: Intervention embedded within evidence-based FLN program▪ Duration: 6–12 months▪ Award: Up to \$150,000 (inclusive of all taxes/fees)▪ Countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique▪ Scale: > 200 teachers, ideally > 400 teachers to enable intervention variants for A/B testing on cost, scalability or effectiveness
Innovation Themes	<p>Applicants may apply under one of four innovation themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Individual Teacher Support Tools2. Group Coaching & Peer Learning3. Closing the Data-to-Action Loop4. Finding & Spreading What Already Works <p>Applicants may also submit separate proposals addressing different innovation themes or suggest a combination of themes covered by a proposed pilot.</p> <p>Applicants should refer to the Teaching Innovation Lab Innovation Agenda for more detail on thematic definitions and hypotheses.</p>
Qualification Criteria:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Demonstrated experience in FLN, TPD, data use, peer learning, or teacher support▪ Existing government relationships in proposed country▪ Solutions must integrate into government systems and work in low-connectivity contexts▪ Evidence of prior effectiveness
Selection Process:	<p>Two-stage process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Stage 1 – Expression of Interest (max. 2 pages): Articulate the specific problem and testable hypothesis to be addressed by innovation▪ All EOIs will receive written feedback: Shortlisted applicants will be invited to develop full proposals

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage 2 – Full Proposal (max. 10 pages): Detailed technical, cost, and scaling plan
Indicative Timeline:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions/clarifications: On a continuous basis, with emails sent to info@elimu-soko.org EOI due: January 30, 2026 Applicant shortlist and feedback: February 6, 2026 Full proposals due: February 27, 2026 Interviews and Final decisions: March 2026 <p>All deadlines midnight GMT, communication to info@elimu-soko.org</p>

How to Apply		
Area	Detail	Evaluation weight
1. Context & Problem Definition	Describe the FLN-related system problem you aim to solve in your proposed country, and how it relates to the chosen theme.	15%
2. Testable Hypothesis & Intervention	Articulate the causal mechanism you intend to test, and outline the solution/intervention you will pilot (timeline, implementation activities and partners, key metrics and data collection, rough % breakdown of costs)	25%
3. Pathway to scale	Briefly describe how your innovation has potential to be sustainably scaled through integration with government systems	25%
4. Organizational Experience	Provide a brief overview of relevant experience and positioning to execute the pilot as described above	15%
5. Proposed Country & Government Relationship	Provide evidence of existing engagement with the Ministry of Education or relevant agencies, or a plan to work with local actors (e.g. national implementers) to secure engagement	20%

The EOI should focus on clarity of purpose and early feasibility.

All documents must be submitted in PDF format to: info@elimu-soko.org.

Shortlisted EOIs will be invited to submit full proposals, with feedback on areas to develop or clarify

Finalist proposals will undergo interviews before final selection and co-development of the pilot approach with partner governments.

Eligibility Criteria

We welcome applications from organizations, innovators or consortia with experience in one or more of the following areas: education technology platforms, teacher professional development, instructional design for foundational literacy and numeracy, mobile-based learning solutions, or structured pedagogy implementation in low-resource settings. Low-connectivity, offline-first solutions are encouraged.

Applications may be submitted by:

1. A single organization addressing the full scope of work, or
2. A consortium of organizations with complementary expertise (e.g., teacher training program implementer, tech innovator, and government expert), clearly represented by one lead partner

We particularly encourage applications from organizations based in Sub-Saharan Africa and those with existing relationships with education ministries in target countries. Non-African organizations with relevant tools and experience are encouraged to partner with local organizations that understand the local context and have existing government relationships.

Country Considerations

Applicants should propose the country or countries they intend to implement. Proposals must demonstrate credible government relationships in the target country, which could include a letter of support, a named government focal point, documented prior collaboration, or evidence of ongoing engagement with the relevant education ministry. Applicants are expected to demonstrate their understanding of the local context regardless of where they propose.

Elimu-Soko has established or is developing partnerships with education ministries in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, Mozambique, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Ethiopia. For proposals in these countries, TIL can help strengthen government engagement. In exceptional cases, TIL may consider facilitating introductions for applicants with highly promising, evidence-backed solutions who lack established relationships. Applicants seeking such support should clearly indicate this in their proposal and explain why TIL brokerage would be appropriate.

Proposals should articulate the specific problem the innovation addresses in the target context, drawing on the applicant's direct knowledge of the local education system. Generic proposals that do not demonstrate contextual understanding will be rated lower.

Exclusion Criteria

We will NOT consider funding:

1. Solutions that require external personnel to deliver ongoing implementation. Sustainability through government systems or a clear pathway towards it is required.
2. Approaches that create parallel systems rather than integrating with existing government infrastructure and curricula.
3. Proposals focused solely on initial teacher training without ongoing support mechanisms.
4. Solutions that add significant burden to teachers' workload without removing existing demands.

Background and Context

What We Know Works

Teacher quality is the most important school-based factor affecting student learning¹. The difference between a highly effective teacher and a less effective one can mean the equivalent of an additional year of schooling for students². Two decades of rigorous research have identified what effective teacher professional development looks like in LMICs.

Structured pedagogy programs that provide teachers with detailed lesson plans and quality materials, combined with ongoing instructional coaching, produce some of the largest impacts on learning outcomes documented in education interventions³. Kenya's Tusome program, reaching 7 million learners across nearly 24,000 primary schools, demonstrated effect sizes of 0.6 standard deviations for reading outcomes⁴. A meta-analysis of 60 causal studies found that instructional coaching improves teaching quality by 0.49 standard deviations on average, with effects persisting over time⁵.

The evidence is clear: effective TPD combines focused training with continuous support, aligned materials, and structured opportunities for teachers to practice, receive feedback, and adjust⁶. Programs that prioritize active practice, modelling, discussion, and lecture in descending order consistently outperform those that invert this time allocation⁷.

The Cost-Quality Challenge

The question is no longer what works. The question is what can work at scale, within government budgets, using government personnel. The examples we have of effective TPD programs are typically expensive. They require trained coaches who visit classrooms regularly, high-quality materials, and sustained follow-up over months or years. Most successful programs have been funded by external donors at costs that exceed what governments can sustain. When donor funding ends, programs collapse. A World Bank review of 33 countries found that most government TPD programs incorporate fewer than half of the features that the evidence identifies as effective⁸. LMIC government adoption of relevant solutions is limited by resource constraints and a lack of sustainable integration pathways, rather than by a lack of evidence.

This creates a stark trade-off. Governments can fund high-quality programs that reach a small number of teachers, or low-cost programs that reach many teachers but change little. The frontier we seek to explore is whether innovations can shift this trade-off; delivering meaningful improvements in teaching quality at costs governments can absorb and sustain.

¹ Burroughs, N., Gardner, J., Lee, Y., Guo, S., Touitou, I., Jansen, K., & Schmidt, W. (2019). *A Review of the Literature on Teacher Effectiveness and Student Outcomes*. In *Teaching for Excellence and Equity*

² Evans, D., & Yuan, F. (2018). The economic returns to quality teaching. World Bank Research.

³ Mejia, J. (2021). Teacher professional development: Teacher training. RTI International.

⁴ Piper, B., Destefano, J., Kinyanjui, E. M., & Ong'ele, S. (2018). Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(3), 293-321

⁵ Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318759268>

⁶ Mejia, J. (2021). Teacher professional development: Teacher training. RTI International.

⁷ Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

⁸ Popova, A., Evans, D. K., Breeding, M. E., & Arancibia, V. (2022). Teacher professional development around the world: The gap between evidence and practice. *World Bank Research Observer*, 37(1), 107–136. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkab006>

Objectives and Innovation Themes

Across African public education systems, teacher professional development (TPD) is typically characterized by high costs, fragmented structures, and limited day-to-day support for teachers. Although strong evidence identifies what works—structured pedagogy, ongoing coaching, active practice, focused routines—most systems cannot sustain these models at scale within government budgets.

The Teaching Innovation Lab seeks to identify innovations that deliver measurable improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes at costs governments can absorb. Drawing on the challenges described across Themes 1–4 (see descriptions below and the TIL Innovation Agenda document for further detail), the facility aims to address:

The scarcity of practical, daily-use instructional supports for teachers

- Weaknesses in availability of coaching personnel and peer learning structures
- Gaps in how data are collected, interpreted, and used for targeted support
- Limited mechanisms for recognizing and diffusing exemplary local practice

Across these themes, the facility will generate evidence on:

- Which innovations improve teacher practice and student learning
- Which solutions can be owned, delivered, and scaled by governments
- Which cost structures are feasible and sustainable
- Which routines improve the coherence of teacher support systems

This RFP includes four innovation themes, testing innovations aligned to the following hypotheses within government education systems. We seek solutions that strengthen existing TPD structures for foundational literacy and numeracy instruction, solutions that can be delivered at costs African governments can absorb and sustain.

The following summaries are informational; applicants must refer to the accompanying Innovation Agenda for complete definitions and learning objectives.

Theme 1: Individual Teacher Support Tools

Low-cost, offline-first tools that strengthen teachers' daily instructional routines for FLN.⁹

Across African education systems, teachers lack practical, immediately usable tools for daily instruction in foundational literacy and numeracy. Systems emphasize workshops and compliance but fail to provide actionable guidance teachers can use during school hours. When training ends, teachers return to classrooms without ongoing support to translate what they learned into daily practice.

⁹ An individual teacher support tool is any resource—ranging from digital applications to structured pedagogical routines—designed to streamline daily classroom tasks and enhance instructional delivery. Whether high-tech or low-tech, these tools provide the practical frameworks and automated assists that help teachers manage time, differentiate learning, and execute effective teaching strategies with greater consistency

Interventions within this theme will test how practical, low-cost, offline-first tools that fit within teachers' daily routines can sustain and reinforce structured pedagogy between formal training events and coaching visits, extending the impact of existing TPD investments at marginal additional cost.

Theme 2: Group Coaching and Peer Learning

Structured, protocol-driven peer learning models that use existing government cluster structures.

Most African education systems include some form of teacher cluster meeting, professional learning community, or subject-based network. The infrastructure exists. But in practice, many cluster meetings lack clear protocols, facilitation support, or connection to instructional improvement. Attendance is inconsistent. The impact on teaching practice is limited.

Interventions within this theme will test how digitally enabled, peer-led coaching models with clear protocols, light facilitation, and structured reinforcement can deliver sustained practice change at a fraction of the cost of traditional cascade training or regular in-person coaching, using existing government cluster structures.

Theme 3: Closing the Data-to-Action Loop

Tools and routines that help middle-tier actors and school heads translate existing data into targeted support.

Ministries collect vast amounts of data from classroom observations, student assessments, attendance records, inspection reports, and school improvement plans. Very little of it is used to guide teacher support. Middle-tier actors, including inspectors, curriculum support officers, district planners, and school heads, describe persistent gaps in data quality; data interpretation; structured action routines; and role clarity. Solutions must also equip both middle-tier proximate actors (e.g., schools heads) to translate data into targeted teacher support

Interventions within this theme will test how comprehensive workflows and decision and action prompts – comprising simple tools and routines, such as dashboards, PLC agendas, or feedback routines - can strengthen data reliability and help middle-tier actors and school heads translate it into where support is needed. The goal is to improve instructional quality more cost-effectively than generating new data or building new systems.

Theme 4: Finding and Spreading What Already Works

Systems for identifying and documenting local exemplary practices and diffusing them through existing structures.

Within every country, there are teachers and district officers achieving strong foundational learning outcomes despite operating under the same constraints as their peers. They have developed practices that work in their context, with their students, using available resources. But systems rarely identify and document these methods or create pathways for peer diffusion. Teacher motivation suffers when there is no recognition for excellence and no pathway for professional contribution beyond the classroom.

Interventions within this theme will test how low-cost systems for identifying, documenting, and diffusing local exemplary practice can improve teaching quality while strengthening teachers' professional identity and engagement.

Terms and Conditions

The following terms and conditions apply to all grants awarded through this RFP:

- **Intellectual Property:** Implementing Partners grant Elimu-Soko, the Project Funder, future funders, and relevant governments a non-exclusive, perpetual, irrevocable, worldwide, royalty-free license to use all developments produced through the project. Background IP remains with the Implementing Partner, with license granted for use where necessary.
- **Anti-Terrorism, Anti-Corruption, and Sanctions Compliance:** Implementing Partners must comply with all relevant laws, maintain adequate controls, and warrant that neither they nor their representatives appear on any sanctions lists.
- **Confidentiality:** Both parties must protect non-public information except where disclosure serves a Legitimate Business Purpose as defined in the agreement.
- **Data Protection:** Implementing Partners consent to the processing and transfer of personal data as necessary for project delivery and compliance.
- **Insurance:** Implementing Partners must maintain adequate insurance and ensure compliance by subcontractors.
- **Indemnification & Limitation of Liability:** Implementing Partners agree to defend and indemnify Elimu-Soko against all claims arising from project delivery except in cases of Elimu-Soko's gross negligence or misconduct.
- **No Agency Relationship:** Elimu-Soko does not act as principal for Implementing Partners; no partnership or joint venture is created.
- **Use of Name & Publicity:** Implementing Partners must seek approval before using Elimu-Soko's name in promotional materials.

About Elimu-Soko and the Teaching Innovation Lab

Elimu-Soko works with governments to strengthen public education systems in Africa. The Teaching Innovation Lab is a Gates Foundation-funded initiative to identify scalable, cost-effective teacher support innovations.