

AFRICAN UNION

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

INNOVATING EDUCATION IN AFRICA 2026

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Deadline: 30 April 2026, 23:00 EAT (GMT+3)

1. Background

Africa's education and training systems continue to face persistent challenges in access, equity, quality, relevance, and skills alignment, despite notable progress in recent years. An estimated 20% of children aged 6-11 are out of school, increasing to 33% for those aged 12-14, and about 60% of youth aged 15-17 remain excluded from education, with girls disproportionately affected. Additionally, a shortage of qualified teachers, uneven teacher distribution, limited opportunities for continuous professional development, and a growing mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs undermine learning quality and employability.

At the post-basic level, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems across Africa face structural constraints including outdated curricula, weak industry linkages, limited digital integration, insufficient green and climate-responsive skills training, and inadequate incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics and emerging technologies. Similarly, higher education institutions often operate with limited research capacity, weak innovation ecosystems, and insufficient mechanisms for knowledge transfer and commercialization, gaps that constrain Africa's ability to leverage science, technology and innovation (STI) as drivers of wealth creation and societal problem-solving, as envisioned under the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2034).

Addressing these challenges requires innovative, scalable, cost-effective, and system-integrated solutions tailored to Africa's context. Innovations must tackle issues of access, relevance, employability, productivity and resilience, including strengthening teacher training, higher education transformation, TVET modernization, industry partnerships, digitalization, and green skills ecosystems. Critically, such solutions must also advance the strategic priorities of STISA-2034, including: (i) strengthening STI infrastructure and research capacity; (ii) promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship; (iii) accelerating research commercialization and technology transfer; and (iv) fostering triple-helix partnerships among government, academia, and industry.

Furthermore, in alignment with the AU Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, innovations must embrace ethical, inclusive, and governance-conscious approaches to AI integration in education. This includes building foundational AI literacy among educators and learners, developing contextually relevant AI-enabled pedagogical tools, ensuring data privacy and algorithmic transparency, and investing in the digital infrastructure necessary to support responsible AI adoption across diverse African settings. By anchoring innovation in these continental frameworks, the Innovating Education in Africa (IEA) 2026 initiative seeks to catalyze education systems that are not only more equitable and effective, but also more adaptive, research-informed, and future-ready.

The 2026 IEA Call is therefore aligned with:

- [Continental Education Strategy for Africa \(CESA 2026-2035\)](#);
- [Continental TVET Strategy \(CTVET 2025-2034\)](#);
- [AU Digital Education Strategy \(DES\)](#);
- AU Decade of Education and Skills Development (2025-2034);
- [Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa \(STISA-2034\)](#);
- [AU Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy](#);
- [Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 and 6](#).

In particular, CTVET-34 calls for systemic transformation of Africa's skills ecosystem through digitalization, greening of TVET systems, integration of AI and robotics, strengthened industry partnerships, and alignment of national strategies with continental standards. STISA-2034 prioritizes the development of STI infrastructure, skills development, and research commercialization to address societal challenges and create wealth. The AU Continental AI Strategy provides the ethical, governance, and capacity-building framework for leveraging artificial intelligence to accelerate development across sectors, including education.

In this context, Innovating Education in Africa (IEA) was established in 2018 by the African Union (AU) to identify, promote, and support systemic adoption and replication of transformative innovations across education and training systems in Africa.

Since inception:

- Over 1,500 education stakeholders engaged;
- 180 innovations promoted;
- Up to USD 1 million mobilized to support scaling and validation.

In 2026, IEA expands its scope to explicitly support innovation in Basic Education, Higher Education, TVET, Digital Systems, Green Skills, AI and Robotics ecosystems across Africa.

IEA 2026 Thematic Focus Areas

The 2026 Call particularly welcomes innovations in the following areas:

1. Innovation in Basic and Secondary Education

1. Foundational literacy and numeracy technologies.
2. Teacher professional development innovations.
3. AI-enabled assessment and adaptive learning.
4. Inclusive and gender-responsive education technologies.

2. Innovation in Higher Education & STI Ecosystems (STISA-Aligned)

- University-industry innovation hubs.
- Research commercialization platforms.
- Digital universities and hybrid learning ecosystems.
- Robotics and advanced STEM centres of excellence.
- STI Infrastructure for Education (Laboratories, Incubators, Science Parks).

3. Innovation in TVET and Skills Development (Aligned to CTVET-34)

- Digital and AI-integrated TVET training models.
- Robotics, automation and advanced manufacturing training.
- Green and climate-responsive skills development.
- Industry-led apprenticeship and dual training systems.
- Skills mobility and certification frameworks aligned with AfCFTA.

4. AI, Robotics and Emerging Technologies in Education (AU AI Strategy Aligned)

- Robotics labs in schools and TVET institutions.
- AI-powered skills forecasting tools.
- Simulation-based technical training systems.
- Innovation hubs for youth tech entrepreneurship.
- AI Ethics, Governance, and Data Privacy in Education.

IEA 2026 also seeks innovations that support Member States in strengthening policy frameworks and institutional capacity to align National Digital Education Strategies, Green Skills Frameworks, AI and Robotics policies with the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 26-35), Continental TVET Strategy (2025-2034), and STISA-2034.

IEA Call

The AU Innovating Education in Africa Call invites innovators to propose practical education innovations with the potential for sustainability, scalability and replication on a wide scale. We are looking to mobilize continental education innovators to rethink solutions that will help address education and skills development challenges in Africa.

We aim to create change by:

1. Incentivizing innovators to identify major education and skills development challenges in Africa.

2. Sourcing innovative ideas and solutions to those challenges for adoption replication and scale-up; and
3. Encouraging innovation partnerships involving education and training institutions, governments, and other key stakeholders.
4. Supporting policy dialogue and structured engagement between innovators and governments to promote alignment of national digital, greening, AI and robotics strategies with CESA 26-35, CTJET-34, and STISA-2034 priorities.
5. Supporting Member States in domesticating the AU Continental AI Strategy within the education sector, focusing on capacity building, infrastructure, and ethical use.
6. Promoting research commercialization and STI infrastructure development aligned with STISA-2034 priorities.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Applications will be accepted from citizens of AU Member States leading an organization that meets the following criteria.

1. Successfully implementing an education innovation in one or more AU Member States with verifiable outcomes. An education innovation refers to a product or service being offered by an organization that uses a relatively distinct approach – with respect to the African context– in addressing challenges in the education system.
2. Legally registered and licensed to operate in an AU Member State.
3. Directly responsible for the implementation and management of the innovation, i.e., not acting as an intermediary.
4. Demonstrates potential for integration into public systems and alignment with continental frameworks including CESA 2026-2035, CTJET 2025-2034, and STISA-2034.

An innovation refers to a product, service, system, technology or institutional model using a relatively distinct approach, within the African context, to address challenges in education, higher education, TVET or skills ecosystems.

Representatives from Academia and National Research and Innovation centers, Science Parks, and Technology Transfer Offices are particularly encouraged to apply under the Higher Education & STI Ecosystems pillar.

3. Application Procedure

Submissions should be made online in English or French at <https://tinyurl.com/mr29ffcc> with the following information.

1. A brief statement of the challenge being addressed (100 words).
2. Description of the innovation, specifically how it functions, the implementation approach, the revenue model, and alignment with CESA,

CTVET-34, STISA-2034, and/or AU Continental AI Strategy priorities (500 words).

3. Report on the performance and outcomes of the innovation (500 words).
4. Description of how the innovation contributes to digital transformation, greening, AI integration (including ethics), robotics capacity, STI infrastructure, research commercialization, or skills alignment with industry (where applicable).
5. Documentation of business registration and license of operation.

Note: Only one innovation per organization may be submitted. Past IEA grant recipients are not eligible.

Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2026 by 23:00 EAT (GMT+3). Inquiries may be sent to: Mr. Chigozie Emmanuel Okonkwo - Education and Skills Advisor | Email: OkonkwoC@africanunion.org

4. Evaluation and selection process

Submissions will undergo the following process.

	Activity	Outcome	Timeline
i	Eligibility Check	The longlist of eligible innovations	01-08 May 2026
ii	Technical review and Shortlisting	50 promising innovations and 10 finalists for Early Pitch are selected.	08 May - 20 May 2026
iii	Early Pitch (Virtual)	5 finalists for Final Pitch are selected	May 2026
iv	Final Pitch (TBC)	3 Innovations are selected and awarded grants	June 2026

Evaluation Criteria will include:

1. Innovation and distinctiveness.
2. Scalability and sustainability.
3. Evidence of measurable impact.
4. Interoperability with public systems.
5. Industry relevance (for TVET innovations).
6. Climate and gender responsiveness.
7. Alignment with CTVET-34 and STISA-2034 priorities including digitalization, green skills, AI ethics, robotics integration, and STI infrastructure development.
8. Potential for research commercialization, technology transfer, and STI infrastructure development (for Higher Education innovations).

5. Benefits for successful applicants

Successful applicants will benefit from:

1. Grants of up to USD 50,000 to strengthen interoperability with public education and TVET systems, while generating evidence of impact.
2. Promotion of innovation to AU Member States, RECs and Development Partners, including publication in the Africa Education & Skills Innovations Handbook 2026.
3. Certificate of Recognition from the AU Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation.
4. Capacity building support from partner organizations.
5. Structured engagement opportunities with Member States to inform national policy dialogues on digital transformation, greening of TVET systems, AI governance and robotics integration aligned with CTVET-34 and STISA-2034.
6. Participation in the 2026 Innovating Education in Africa Expo and Ministerial Policy Dialogue on CTVET-34 and STISA Alignment.
7. Contribution to the development of the Continental Policy Toolkit on Digital, Greening, AI, and Robotics Integration in TVET and Higher Education.
8. Inclusion in the Brief on AI Readiness in African Education Systems and the IEA 2026 Innovation Catalog.