



THE
**LEARNING
TRUST**
BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



STRATEGIC PLAN **2026–2028**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Learning Trust (TLT) is a national non-profit organisation established in 2010 to strengthen the After-School Programme (ASP) sector in South Africa. Initially focused on grantmaking to emerging education NGOs, TLT has evolved into a **sector anchor** – offering catalytic funding, capacity development, convening networks, and influencing the education ecosystem.

By 2025, TLT had reached over **300,000 learners** and engaged **15,000 youth mentors** across all nine provinces. The organisation's strategic journey from grantmaker to ecosystem leader underpins this 2026–2028 plan, which responds to both crisis and opportunity in South Africa's education landscape.

Persistent inequities, learning losses post-COVID, and youth unemployment have highlighted ASPs as critical bridges between schools and communities. Yet, the sector faces challenges: funding constraints, over-reliance on short-term projects, and limited policy integration. At the same time, government interest in after-school learning and the potential of private sector CSR present strong opportunities for scaling impact.

Stakeholders consulted during the strategy process (board, staff, funders, and partners) agreed on TLT's dual mandate:

- **Deepen direct support** to community-based ASPs.
- **Drive systemic change** through learning, evidence, and advocacy.

This plan positions TLT to consolidate its leadership role – ensuring after-school programmes are not peripheral interventions but an **integral, resourced part of South Africa's education system**.

2. VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES



VISION

There is an abundance of After-School Programmes providing a variety of learning and development opportunities for all children to become thriving adults.



MISSION

The Learning Trust's mission is to advocate for, strengthen and grow the After-School Programme sector in South Africa by increasing both the number and the quality of ASPs that provide safe, holistic, and enriching learning opportunities for under-resourced communities. We do this by resourcing proven learning approaches, providing grants and capacity support, training and development opportunities, while serving as a sector convenor that works collaboratively with partners to test, elevate, and scale effective methodologies across the ASP sector. Through these efforts, we aim to ensure more learners have access to quality educational experiences beyond the classroom, and that the ASP sector is formally recognized as a vital part of the national education system, contributing meaningfully to policy, practice, and improved learner outcomes.

CORE VALUES

Integrity & Accountability

We act with honesty, transparency, and responsibility in all that we do. We honour our commitments, uphold good governance, and model the ethical leadership we expect across the sector.



Collaboration, Partnership & Relationships

We build trust-based relationships with organisations, communities, and institutional partners. We co-create solutions, connect people and ideas, and hold space for collective action across the after-school ecosystem.



Equity, Inclusion & Strength-Based Practice

We centre marginalised learners and actively address structural inequalities. We recognise and affirm the strengths, assets, and lived experience within community organisations, avoiding deficit narratives.



Learning, Reflection & Evidence-Based Practice

We create deliberate spaces for reflection, analysis, and learning. We use responsibly gathered data, practitioner knowledge, and lived experience to enhance program quality and inform sector-wide insights.



Excellence, Purpose & Vocation

We approach our work as a calling – not just a job. We strive for excellence in our programmes, partnerships, and organisational practices to ensure meaningful outcomes for learners and the organisations we support.



Adaptability, Resilience & Sustainability

We remain flexible and responsive to changing contexts, while planning for long-term organisational and sector sustainability. We support after-school organisations in growing, strengthening their foundations, and building resilience over time.



Stewardship & Incubation of the Sector

We hold a responsibility to nurture and strengthen the after-school ecosystem. We serve as an incubator for emerging organisations, providing the support and guidance needed for them to thrive and sustain their impact.



3. STRATEGIC APPROACH AND THEORY OF CHANGE

TLT operates as an **intermediary and catalyst**, not a direct service provider. The organisation's multi-level approach strengthens both **organisations** (supply of quality ASPs) and the **ecosystem** (policy, funding, and collaboration).

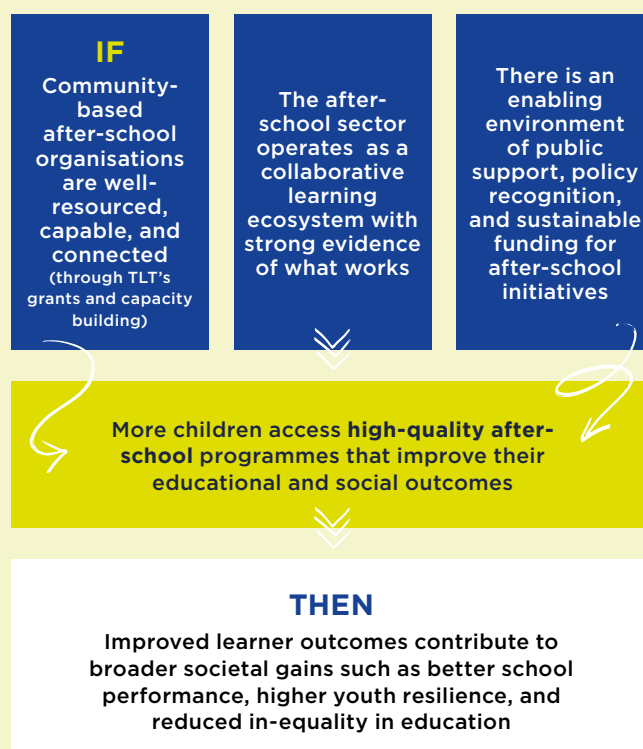
after-school programmes, improving educational and social outcomes, and contributing to **broader societal gains** such as reduced inequality and stronger youth resilience. This integrated theory of change drives TLT's four strategic pillars.

CORE ROLES

1. **Capacity Builder** – Investing in leadership, governance, and systems of ASP organisations.
2. **Convener and Learning Partner** – Fostering data-sharing, peer learning, and a collaborative evidence ecosystem.
3. **Advocate and Systems Influencer** – Promoting policy inclusion and resource mobilisation for ASPs.
4. **Organisational Steward** – Strengthening TLT's internal capacity and resilience.

THEORY OF CHANGE

If community-based after-school organisations are **well-resourced, capable, and connected**, and if the sector functions as a **collaborative learning ecosystem** with credible evidence of impact, and if there is an **enabling environment** of public support, policy recognition, and sustainable funding, then **more children will access quality**



4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The strategy is underpinned by key principles:



5. STRATEGIC PILLARS 2026–2028

Pillar 1

After-School Strengthening & Leadership

GOAL: *Build capable, resilient, and high-quality ASP organisations nationwide.*

KEY ACTIONS

- ✓ Provide **tiered capacity support** for emerging, growing, and mature ASPs.
- ✓ Institutionalise **After-School Quality Standards** and the **Quality Assessment Tool (QAT)**.
- ✓ Expand **grants and financial resilience support**, including a Resource Mobilisation Helpdesk.
- ✓ Develop **peer learning cohorts** and a national **ASP leadership network**.
- ✓ Promote **integration with schools** and provincial education systems.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By 2028, community-based ASPs are stronger, better governed, financially sustainable, and widely recognised as key education partners improving learner outcomes.

Pillar 2

Programme Alignment, Coherence & Impact

GOAL: *Ensure coherence, effectiveness, and evidence use across TLT's programmes.*

KEY ACTIONS

- ✓ Implement an **Integrated Programme Framework (IPF)** to align all initiatives with the Theory of Change.
- ✓ Embed **programme quality and safeguarding standards**.
- ✓ Expand **MEL systems and dashboards** to monitor results across pillars.
- ✓ Strengthen **data use, cross-thematic learning**, and continuous adaptation.
- ✓ Publish **Annual Impact & Learning Reports** to communicate outcomes and insights.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

A unified, data-driven organisation that continuously learns, adapts, and delivers measurable sector-wide impact.

Pillar 3 Influence, Advocacy & Resourcing

GOAL: *Position after-school programmes as a national education priority through strategic advocacy and funding mobilisation.*

KEY ACTIONS

- ✓ Amplify campaigns like **#LightsOnAfterSchool** and the **Amplify Symposium** to increase public and policy traction.
- ✓ Lead a **policy coalition** for a National After-School Policy Framework.
- ✓ Engage government and private sector partners to secure **sustainable funding streams**.
- ✓ Produce **evidence-based advocacy briefs** and sector research.
- ✓ Explore a **Centre of Excellence for After-School Learning** as a long-term institutional legacy.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By 2028, after-school programmes achieve greater policy recognition, new funding channels, and coordinated advocacy through a national coalition.

Pillar 4 Organisational Resilience and Sustainability

GOAL: *Strengthen TLT's internal systems, culture, and governance to ensure long-term institutional effectiveness.*

KEY ACTIONS

- ✓ Implement improved **operational systems**, HR processes, and digital tools.
- ✓ Build a **learning-oriented, well-supported staff culture** with development plans and wellness initiatives.
- ✓ Institutionalise **knowledge management** and documentation practices.
- ✓ Strengthen **governance and board engagement** with strategy-linked oversight.
- ✓ Conduct **annual foresight and scenario planning** for agility and risk mitigation.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

TLT operates as a resilient, adaptive, and values-driven organisation capable of sustaining its influence and impact.

6. IMPLEMENTATION, MEL, AND RISK MANAGEMENT

TLT's implementation approach is **phased, participatory, and adaptive**:

- **2026:** Framework design, systems setup, and pilot implementation.
- **2027:** Expansion, evidence generation, and coalition building.
- **2028:** Consolidation, evaluation, and sustainability planning.

A robust **MEL Framework** will monitor progress through a Results Dashboard, mid-term (2027) and final (2028) evaluations, and ongoing learning loops.

- **Key Risks:** Funding volatility, government turnover, staff burnout, partner fragility, and policy inertia.
- **Mitigation:** Diversified income, multi-level government engagement, internal resilience investments, and proactive scenario planning.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2026–2028 Strategy marks a decisive step in The Learning Trust's evolution from grantmaker to **sector system leader**.

Over this three-year period, TLT will consolidate its influence, strengthen its partners, deepen its learning culture, and secure lasting recognition and resources for the after-school sector.

By 2028, TLT envisions a **thriving ecosystem** where:

- After-school organisations are capable and sustainable,
- Evidence and collaboration drive innovation,
- Policy frameworks and funding mechanisms support continuity, and
- Every learner, regardless of background, has access to quality after-school learning that unlocks opportunity and hope.



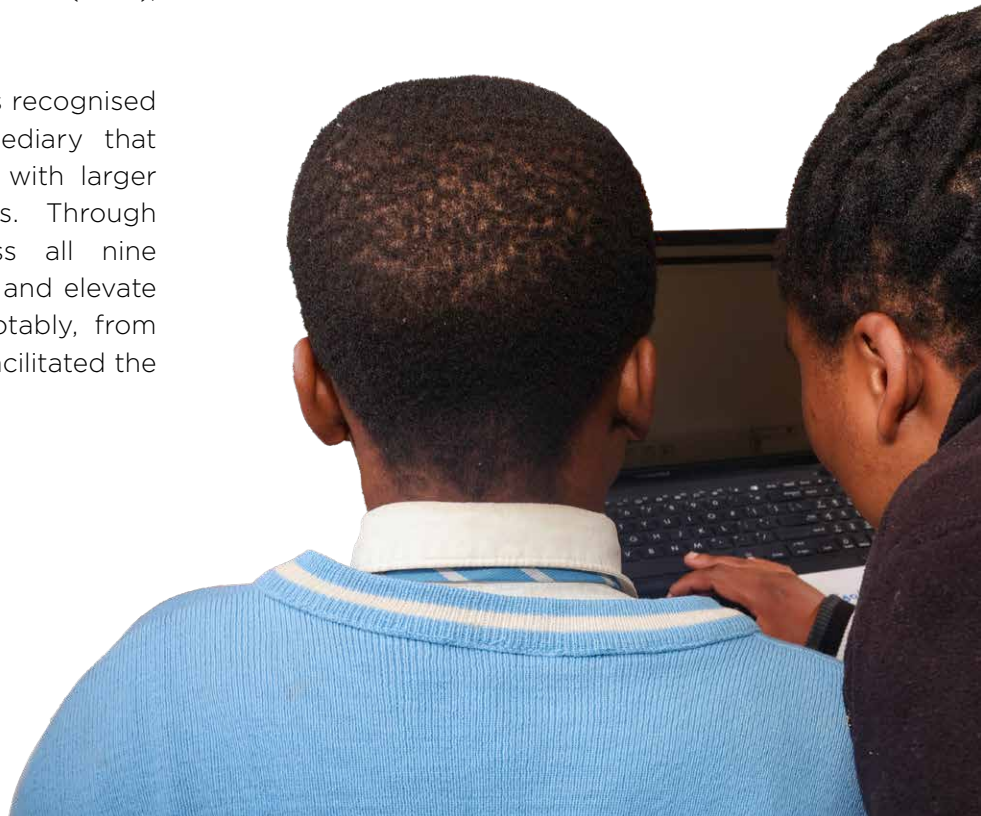
1. INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Learning Trust (TLT) is a South African non-profit organisation dedicated to strengthening the After School Programme (ASP) sector – the landscape of programmes providing safe, structured, enriching learning opportunities for youth outside of formal school hours.

Founded in 2010, TLT began as a modest grantmaker, focusing on emerging community-based education nonprofits in a few provinces. Over the past fifteen (15) years and a half, it has evolved into a sector-building anchor and advocate, expanding its role beyond funding to organisational capacity development, convening networks, and influencing the broader education ecosystem. TLT's core identity remains rooted in empowering grassroots ASP organisations (especially those serving under-resourced communities) by providing catalytic funding, coupled with hands-on organisational support in areas such as governance, leadership development, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and financial management.

Today, TLT operates nationally and is recognised as a sector convenor and intermediary that bridges local community initiatives with larger funding and impact opportunities. Through partnerships and networks across all nine provinces, TLT has helped formalise and elevate the after-school sector's profile. Notably, from 2022 to 2024, TLT and its partners facilitated the

recruitment of over 15,000 unemployed youth as after-school tutors and mentors, reaching more than 300,000 learners in underserved areas. These achievements illustrate TLT's journey from a responsive grant-maker to a proactive sector leader (and sector anchor) driving innovation and collaboration in extended learning. Throughout its history, TLT has championed the belief that providing safe, supportive after-school environments can dramatically improve educational outcomes and life prospects for South Africa's youth. This strategic plan builds on that legacy and the organisation's growing convening role to chart the course for 2026–2028.



2. CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC RATIONALE

EDUCATION AND AFTER-SCHOOL SECTOR LANDSCAPE

South Africa's education system continues to face persistent inequities and learning gaps, many of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In under-resourced communities, schools alone struggle to meet learners' academic and developmental needs, leading to high dropout rates and poor outcomes. After-school programmes have emerged as an essential support structure, providing tutoring, homework assistance, life skills, and a safe space that can bridge the in- and post-school learning opportunity gap. Over the past three years, initiatives like the Presidential

Employment Stimulus (through the Social Employment Fund, SEF) have enabled ASPs to scale up dramatically as part of the pandemic learning recovery, creating thousands of youth service opportunities and reaching learners at an unprecedented scale. By 2024, after-school programmes had a presence in all nine provinces, demonstrating their potential to improve national education outcomes. There is also growing official recognition of ASPs' value – for example, government budgets and policies are starting to acknowledge after-school programming as vital to youth development. However, this recognition is nascent, and sustained advocacy is needed to fully integrate ASPs into the education system's core priorities.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite their gains, the after-school sector and TLT face a complex environment in 2026. Funding for civil society remains under strain, both globally and domestically. Donor funding is contracting, and TLT must contend with the risk of over-reliance on a single large fund (the SEF), which is time-bound and subject to political shifts. Short-term project funding cycles remain common, posing a threat to the continuity of many ASP initiatives. At the same time, shifting donor priorities, geopolitical pressures, and economic pressures mean ASPs must clearly demonstrate impact, align with funder interests (such as youth employment or early childhood development), and continually innovate to secure resources. On the government side, unstable political leadership and bureaucracy can make partnerships unpredictable. Yet there are significant opportunities: South Africa's authorities are increasingly concerned with learning losses and youth unemployment, problems with which after-school programmes are a compelling part of the solution. TLT's recent experience with the SEF has shown that ASPs can deliver "dual outcomes" – academic improvement for children and work experience for young adults – on a national scale. This bolsters the case for more systemic support. Additionally, corporate social investment (CSI) in education and youth is a potential growth area, if TLT and the sector can communicate their impact in terms that resonate with business stakeholders.

Within TLT's own stakeholder community, there is consensus that the moment is ripe for TLT to step up as a sector leader. The conclusion of TLT's previous three-year strategy (2022–2024) prompted extensive reflection on these contextual changes and on TLT's evolution. During 2025, the organisation underwent a leadership transition and engaged in a participatory strategy development process involving the board, team, partners, and funders. Stakeholder consultations revealed a clear mandate: TLT should deepen its support for ASP partners while also driving

systemic change – these twin aims are seen as mutually reinforcing. There is a recognised need for greater evidence generation, knowledge sharing, and advocacy to secure the sector's future. At the same time, TLT must address internal needs for stronger systems and resilience to sustain a broader role. In summary, the strategic rationale for 2026–2028 is to position TLT to lead a coordinated effort in strengthening ASP quality and capacity (to benefit learners directly) while influencing the policy and funding environment for long-term sustainability. This plan is TLT's response to both the crisis and the opportunity in the after-school sector. By focusing our efforts on a few high-impact strategic pillars, we aim to ensure that after-school programmes become an integral, well-resourced part of South Africa's education ecosystem.





3. VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

OUR VISION

“There is an abundance of After-School Programmes providing a variety of learning and development opportunities for all children to become thriving adults.”

This vision paints a picture of a future South Africa where quality after-school opportunities are accessible to every child, especially those in poverty or underserved areas, enabling them to succeed academically and socially. It speaks to growth in both the quantity and quality of ASPs, so that extended learning becomes a norm for holistic youth development.

OUR MISSION

The Learning Trust’s mission is to advocate for, strengthen and grow the After-School Programme sector in South Africa by increasing both the number and the quality of ASPs that provide safe, structured, holistic, and enriching learning opportunities for under-resourced communities.

We do this by providing strategic organizational development support to ASP partners – including grants, tailored capacity strengthening, leadership development, and quality improvement tools – while serving as a sector convenor that works collaboratively to test, elevate, and scale effective methodologies across the ASP sector. Through resourcing proven learning approaches and championing evidence-based practice, we strengthen both individual organizations and the broader ecosystem.

Through these efforts, we aim to ensure more learners have access to quality educational experiences beyond the classroom, and that the ASP sector is formally recognised as a vital part of the national education system, contributing meaningfully to policy, practice, and improved learner outcomes.

In essence, TLT exists to catalyze and enable a thriving, high-impact after-school field aligned with South Africa’s broader educational goals.

OUR VALUES

TLT is guided by a set of core values and principles that underpin all our work:



These values collectively shape TLT's ethical and strategic compass. They ensure that, as we implement this 2026–2028 plan, it is collaborative, inclusive, evidence-driven, and geared toward lasting positive change in the lives of young people.

4. STRATEGIC APPROACH AND THEORY OF CHANGE

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The Learning Trust employs a multi-level, ecosystem-oriented approach to achieve its mission. Rather than delivering after-school programmes directly, TLT works as an *intermediary and catalyst* – strengthening the capacity of community-based ASP providers, forging connections among stakeholders, and influencing the broader environment in which the after-school sector operates. This approach recognises that sustainable impact comes from empowering local organisations and orchestrating the efforts of many actors toward common goals.

TLT's strategy in 2026–2028 emphasizes consolidation, deepening impact with existing partners, and strategic positioning of the sector. This period represents a transition focused on strengthening quality, sustainability, and systemic integration.

Our strategy is built around four core roles:



Capacity Builder (Pillar 1): We invest in organisational resilience and leadership capability, and programme quality of after-school programmes. By providing grants coupled with hands-on organisational development support, TLT enables grassroots ASPs to deliver higher-quality programmes and reach more children. Strengthening these frontline organisations forms the foundation of our theory of change – strong organisations run effective programmes that directly improve learner outcomes and sustain impact over time.



Convener and Learning Partner

(Pillar 2): TLT creates and facilitates platforms for shared learning, collaboration, and knowledge

exchange across the after-school sector. Through Communities of Practice, learning forums, and networks like the Data Collective, we help organisations break out of silos to learn together and establish common standards. We also serve as a knowledge hub – collecting data, evaluating what works, and disseminating evidence and best practices. By fostering a collaborative learning ecosystem, TLT amplifies the impact of individual programmes and builds a unified voice for the sector.



Advocate and Systems Influencer

(Pillar 3): Beyond supporting programmes on the ground, TLT leverages evidence-based advocacy

to position after-school programmes as credible contributors to education outcomes and youth development. We strengthen existing advocacy platforms (LightsOnAfterSchool, Amplify After-School), deepen strategic relationships with government and institutional partners, and facilitate a coordinated sector coalition that provides a credible collective voice. Through targeted thought leadership, collaboration agreements, and strategic partnerships, we translate on-the-ground evidence into compelling narratives and policy engagement. We also lay foundations for sustainable, diversified resourcing – supporting partner fundraising readiness while exploring collaborative funding mechanisms. By bridging grassroots experience with high-level decision-making, we aim to secure the systemic recognition and resources needed for the sector to thrive.



Organisational Steward (Pillar 4):

TLT recognises that fulfilling these roles effectively depends directly on our own organisational health. This strategy emphasizes stabilisation, alignment, and incremental improvement of our internal systems and practices. We are strengthening core operational foundations, improving cross-team coordination, supporting staff development and wellbeing, building knowledge management systems, and enhancing financial resilience through funding diversification. We maintain realistic workload expectations aligned with this consolidation phase, while investing in our team's capacity and establishing clear processes that reduce person-dependency. This ensures TLT can model the organisational excellence we seek to instill in others and sustain our effectiveness over time.

Underpinning this approach is a **commitment to partnership at every level**. TLT does not work in a top-down manner; instead, we adopt a facilitative stance – co-creating solutions with our grantees, aligning with government priorities, and coordinating with other stakeholders rather than duplicating efforts.

Critically, this strategy prioritizes depth over breadth. Rather than expanding to new areas or partners, we concentrate on deepening impact with existing partners and in areas where we have established presence and comparative advantage. This means consolidating gains achieved in recent years, strengthening the quality and sustainability of programmes we already support, and ensuring that capacity-building translates into sustained learner outcomes. This focus on consolidation is a deliberate strategic choice – to do fewer things better, strengthen what works, and position both TLT and the sector for future growth from a place of strength.



THEORY OF CHANGE

The Learning Trust's theory of change can be summarised as follows:

If after-school organisations are strengthened and well-resourced through catalytic support, and effective practice is generated and applied through evidence, learning, and shared standards, and the sector operates as a coordinated ecosystem with aligned actors and partnerships, and resources and funding are mobilised to sustain and scale quality programmes, then more children access high-quality after-school programmes that support their learning, wellbeing, and development. In turn, improved learner outcomes contribute to a resilient, coordinated, and well-recognised after-school ecosystem, enabling young people to transition successfully into education, employment, and adulthood.

IF



In this theory of change, each element reinforces the others. For example, stronger ASP organisations deliver better results for learners, which generate evidence and success stories. Those, in turn, bolster advocacy efforts to secure policy changes or new funding that benefit the entire sector. Likewise, when government and funders buy into the after-school agenda, more resources flow to community programmes, allowing them to scale up and innovate, reaching even more youth. TLT sits at the center of this change model as an enabler and connector: by investing in organisations (the “supply” of quality programmes) and simultaneously shaping the ecosystem (“demand” and support for such programmes), TLT catalyzes a virtuous cycle of growth and improvement in the sector.

Our theory of change is graphically represented in three interdependent strategic pillars from the previous strategy – *Strengthening the Sector Base, cultivating a Shared Learning Ecosystem, and Positioning for Influence and Sustainability* – which continue to inform this plan. All strategic objectives in the 2026–2028 plan are aligned with this integrated change logic, ensuring that TLT’s activities at the organisational, sectoral, and policy levels work in concert to achieve our vision.

TLT’s approach is evidence-driven and adaptive by design. We regularly test our assumptions and learn from our experiences to refine the theory of change.

Key learnings from the previous period now embedded in this strategy include:

- **Relational support matters:** Coaching, mentorship, and hands-on accompaniment – not funding alone – truly builds organisational capacity and sustains quality improvements. This informs our tailored support approach and peer learning networks.
- **Evidence drives influence:** Linking after-school efforts to national education priorities (foundational literacy, numeracy, youth pathways) and demonstrating impact through credible data strengthens policy engagement and stakeholder buy-in.

This adaptive learning process means our theory of change is not static; TLT will continue to refine its strategies as new insights and data emerge, ensuring we remain effective in a changing environment.



See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of the Theory of Change.

THE CHALLENGE TLT IS SOLVING FOR

(1) EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDER PRESURE

- Oversubscribed and overcrowded schools
- Many learners fall behind in basic learning
- Large class sizes limit individual support

(2) LIMITED LEARNING SUPPORT BEYOND SCHOOL HOURS

- Many learners lack safe learning spaces after school
- Limited access to academic support and enrichment
- Developmental needs often go unmet



(3) UNDERDEVELOPED AFTER-SCHOOL SECTOR

- Programme quality varies widely
- Organisations operate with limited resources
- Weak coordination across actors
- Limited policy recognition and funding stability



SYSTEM CHALLENGE

The after-school ecosystem has significant potential to support learner success, but remains fragmented, uneven in quality, and insufficiently resourced to realise this potential at scale.

There is a problem →

After-school is part of the solution →

The ecosystem needs strengthening

TLT'S DETAILED THEORY OF CHANGE

Too many children and young people in under-resourced communities are locked out of meaningful learning and development opportunities beyond the school day. While after-school programmes have the potential to change this trajectory, the sector remains fragmented, uneven in quality, and constrained by limited and misaligned resources. Addressing this challenge requires more than expanding programmes. It requires strengthening the organisations and systems that make quality provision possible at scale.

The Learning Trust (TLT) operates as an ecosystem catalyst, working across multiple levels to strengthen organisations, improve programme quality, and build the enabling conditions required for the after-school sector to grow and thrive. This work is delivered through a set of interconnected platform functions that reinforce one another over time.

At the organisational level, TLT provides catalytic funding, leadership development, and tailored capacity support across core organisational development areas, including governance, leadership, financial management, and programme quality. This support strengthens the ability of organisations to deliver consistent, high-quality programmes and to operate sustainably over time.

Alongside this, TLT works with partners across a diverse range of programme areas spanning foundational learning, academic support, and youth development. This includes drawing on proven, scalable methodologies such as Teaching at the Right Level, ZaZi iZandi, while also supporting interventions such as high school academic support programmes (HSAP), as well as approaches that respond to long-standing learning challenges in areas such as STEM and technical and vocational pathways.

Through structured learning processes, including communities of practice, peer exchange, and ongoing technical support, organisations are supported not only to implement programmes, but to continuously adapt and improve them based on data, experience, and emerging insights. Evidence and adaptive learning are embedded across the work, shaping both programme design and sector-wide practice.

This is complemented by TLT's role in convening and connecting the sector. Through platforms such as the Catch-up Coalition and other sector-level engagements, TLT brings together organisations, funders, government, and practitioners to share knowledge, strengthen alignment, and build a more coordinated and unified sector voice.

At the same time, TLT works to mobilise and align funding, partnerships, and system resources. By connecting philanthropic, corporate, and public actors, and reinforcing alignment with quality standards and evidence on what works, TLT supports more strategic and sustained investment in the after-school sector.

When these conditions come together, stronger organisations, continuously improving programme practices, a more connected and coordinated sector, and better aligned resources, more children can access consistent, high-quality after-school programmes. These programmes support their learning, wellbeing, and development, reflected in improved foundational skills, stronger academic performance through initiatives such as high school academic support programmes (HSAP), and increased confidence and capability in areas such as STEM and other priority learning domains. In turn, this enables progression through educational and developmental pathways.

Over time, these improvements contribute to broader system-level change. The after-school sector becomes more resilient, better coordinated, and increasingly recognised within the wider education system. As its visibility and legitimacy grow, so too does its ability to attract sustained investment and support. Ultimately, this enables more young people to transition successfully into further education, employment, and adulthood, contributing to stronger individual outcomes and more equitable societal progress.

In this way, TLT's role is not only to support programmes, but to strengthen the system that makes those programmes possible, ensuring that impact is sustained, scaled, and continuously improved over time.

“The after-school sector becomes more resilient, better coordinated, and increasingly recognised within the wider education system.”



LONG-TERM IMPACT

A resilient, coordinated, and well-recognised after-school ecosystem that improves learner outcomes and enables young people to thrive and transition successfully into education, employment, and adulthood



SYSTEM LEVEL OUTCOMES

As sector-level changes take hold, after-school becomes more integrated and recognised within the broader education system.



COORDINATED SECTOR VOICE

- Sector actors collaborate and align around shared priorities
- Shared standards are adopted and collective advocacy is strengthened



SUSTAINABLE FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

- Funding for after-school becomes more diversified and reliable
- Partnerships across public, private, and philanthropic actors are strengthened



RECOGNISED AFTER-SCHOOL SECTOR

- After-school becomes increasingly recognised within education policy and national education conversations



SECTOR LEVEL OUTCOMES

As organisations strengthen, programmes improve, and learner outcomes advance, change takes shape across the after-school sector.



STRONGER ORGANISATIONS

- Governance, leadership and standards are strengthened
- Financial and operational systems function effectively
- Organisations demonstrate capability, resilience, and sustainability



HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMMES

- Programme design and delivery are strengthened
- Effective learning approaches are adopted and implemented
- Learning environments better support young people



IMPROVED LEARNER OUTCOMES

- Learners engage actively in learning activities
- Young people demonstrate confidence, wellbeing, and participation
- Learners progress through academic and developmental pathways
- Young people are ready for further education or employment

TLT PLATFORM FUNCTIONS

TLT operates as an ecosystem catalyst, driving four platform functions that strengthen organisations and build shared sector infrastructure, enabling impact beyond TLT-supported programmes.



STRENGTHEN ORGANISATIONS

- Strategic grantmaking
- Governance and leadership strengthening
- Organisational development support
- Adoption of quality standards



GENERATE & APPLY EVIDENCE

- Refining learning approaches, delivery models and youth workforce interventions
- Developing scalable programme models
- Generating and applying evidence, tools and standards on what works



CONVENE & INFLUENCE

- Convening sector actors through communities of practice
- Facilitating knowledge exchange and learning forums
- Driving collective advocacy and agenda-setting
- Strengthening the sector's shared voice



MOBILISE & DIRECT FUNDING

- Mobilising partnerships across funders and implementers
- Aligning funding with quality standards
- Unlocking new funding streams for the sector



ENABLING RESOURCES & ECOSYSTEM ACTORS

TLT's work draws on catalytic resources and partnerships across the education and youth development ecosystem.



CATALYTIC INPUTS

- Catalytic or grant capital to fund and scale interventions
- Strategic donor collaboration and alignment
- Technical expertise and implementation support
- Sector knowledge, research, and evidence
- Data systems and infrastructure



ECOSYSTEM ACTORS

- Community-based after-school organisations
- Schools and local education systems
- Youth practitioners and leaders
- Government and policy stakeholders
- Philanthropic and corporate funders

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In implementing this strategy, TLT will adhere to several guiding principles that reflect both our core values and lessons learned from experience.

These principles will guide decision-making and the design of initiatives across all strategic objectives:



Focus and Depth (“One size does not fit all”): We will prioritise depth over breadth in our interventions. Rather than superficial expansion,

TLT will focus on tailoring support to each partner organisation’s specific needs and maturity level. This means differentiating our capacity-strengthening approaches for early-stage, growing, and mature ASPs. We focus our efforts where we have established presence and expertise, consolidating impact in those areas rather than spreading ourselves too thin. By doing so, we ensure that strengthening efforts translate into tangible improvements in quality and outcomes.



Accompaniment and Partnership (“Relational support matters”):

Genuine capacity strengthening is a relational, long-term process, not a one-off intervention. We walk alongside our grantee partners through coaching, mentorship, and peer networking, rather than just providing funds or short-term interventions. This approach to accompaniment builds trust and yields deeper transformation within organisations. We also practice participatory engagement – co-creating solutions with stakeholders (including youth and communities) wherever possible, thus fostering ownership and relevance in our initiatives.



Learning Culture and Adaptive Management (Evidence drives improvement):

MEL is a tool for continuous improvement, not just accountability. We promote a culture where data and reflection celebrate successes, identify challenges, and adapt programmes in real time. Through regular reflection processes (quarterly reviews, Communities of Practice, learning products), we ensure evidence informs strategic planning and programme refinement. We scale interventions that demonstrate impact and pivot from those that do not, sharing learnings with the sector to contribute to collective knowledge.



Outcome-Oriented Advocacy (“Advocacy must deliver traction”):

Raising awareness alone is insufficient; advocacy efforts must tie to concrete outcomes. We approach advocacy strategically with clear policy or resourcing objectives backed by evidence. We measure success by traction gained – new partnerships, collaboration agreements, policy shifts, and resources mobilized – rather than by output such as events held or media mentions.



Sustainability and Diversification:

We actively plan for financial and institutional sustainability for both TLT and partners. For partners, this means embedding resilience-building practices, diversifying funding sources, strengthening governance, and improving financial management. For TLT, this means pursuing diversified funding, exploring innovative financing models, establishing financial reserves, and investing in team well-being and capacity to

sustain performance. We consider risk scenarios in planning and remain agile to navigate political shifts, economic changes, and external shocks.



Accountability and Transparency:

We maintain open communication with stakeholders about strategy implementation – sharing progress, challenges, and financial information transparently. We regularly solicit and respond to feedback from partners, beneficiaries, and funders. Internally,

roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, with accountability systems (performance indicators and regular Board oversight), ensuring we stay true to our commitments and adjust responsibly when needed.

These guiding principles serve as the “rules of the road” for executing the 2026–2028 strategy, ensuring our actions align with our values and maximize positive impact for the after-school sector.



6. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PILLARS

In this strategic plan, The Learning Trust has defined four interrelated Strategic Pillars that together will drive our work from 2026 through 2028.

Each pillar represents a critical area of focus derived from our context analysis and theory of change. They are:



1. After-School Strengthening and Leadership:

Strengthen the quality, visibility, and organisational sustainability of After-School Programmes (ASPs) supported by TLT. This pillar focuses on fortifying the foundation of the sector – deepening impact with existing partners and consolidating gains achieved in recent years. Through tailored capacity strengthening, leadership development, quality standards, peer learning networks, and strategic grantmaking, we prioritise strengthening the leaders and practices of ASPs in our network – ensuring that after-school programmes are well-governed, credible, and capable of delivering consistent outcomes for learners and youth.



2. Programmatic Focus, Alignment & Impact:

Improve coherence, effectiveness, and learning across TLT's programmatic work and partnerships. TLT's diverse programmes, partnerships, and investments span organisational development, leadership, learning, and advocacy. To deliver consistent value and measurable results, these efforts must be aligned under a single strategic framework. The emphasis during 2026-2028 is on alignment, clarity, and learning – embedding systems and practices that support better decision-making, accountability, and evidence generation. By strengthening MEL practice, fostering adaptive learning, and ensuring all programmes operate within a shared Theory of Change, we maximise collective impact.



3. Influence, Advocacy & Resourcing:

Strengthen the visibility, legitimacy, and resourcing of the after-school sector through focused, evidence-led advocacy and partnership building. This pillar focuses on outward-facing change – strengthening the policy and funding environment so that after-school initiatives are increasingly recognised and supported within the education system. Through consolidating advocacy platforms, deepening government and institutional relationships, strengthening a coherent sector voice, and laying foundations for sustainable resourcing, we position after-school programmes as credible contributors to education outcomes, youth development, and national priorities.





4. Organisational Resilience & Learning (Internal Strengthening):

Strengthen The Learning Trust's internal coherence, systems, and organisational resilience, ensuring the organisation is well-positioned to deliver consistently, steward resources responsibly, and support the after-school sector effectively. This pillar recognises that TLT's ability to strengthen the sector depends directly on its organisational health. The focus for 2026-2028 is on stabilisation, alignment, and incremental improvement – from core systems and cross-team coordination to staff wellbeing, knowledge management, financial resilience, and strategic governance.

These four strategic pillars are tightly interconnected and aligned with our vision. Pillars 1, 2, and 3 correspond to our external theory of change (strengthening ASP organisations, ensuring programmatic coherence and evidence, and influencing the broader ecosystem), while Pillar 4 is an enabling pillar ensuring we have the internal capacity and resilience to execute effectively. In the sections that follow, we detail each pillar's key action areas, actions, and intended outcomes.

7. OUTCOME AREAS AND KEY ACTIONS

For each strategic pillar, this section outlines the Outcome Areas we aim to achieve by 2028 and the Key Actions TLT will take to achieve them. These represent the core of our strategic plan – translating objectives into concrete initiatives and results. Progress in these areas will be monitored through specific indicators (as discussed in the Monitoring & Evaluation section).

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1

AFTER-SCHOOL STRENGTHENING & LEADERSHIP

STRATEGIC GOAL

Strengthen the quality, visibility, and organisational sustainability of After-School Programmes (ASPs) supported by TLT.

This pillar focuses on deepening impact with existing partners and consolidating gains achieved in recent years, as we prioritise strengthening leaders and practices of ASPs in our network – ensuring that after-school programmes are well-governed, credible and capable of delivering consistent outcomes for learners and youth.

KEY ACTION AREA 1: DEEPEN ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

TLT will continue to provide tailored organisational support, with a focus on consolidation and responsiveness to partner needs.

KEY ACTIONS

- Provide differentiated capacity-strengthening support based on organisational maturity and need
- Offer hands-on accompaniment, coaching, and mentoring
- Use organisational assessments and learning conversations to guide support priorities and track progress over time
- Establish a Resource Mobilisation Helpdesk for guidance on proposal writing, donor mapping, and income strategies (mitigating the “funding cliff” risk)

KEY OUTCOMES

1. ASP partners demonstrate improved organisational maturity and self-sufficiency, with measurable progress across governance, financial management, operational systems, and leadership competencies (as tracked through organizational assessments over time)
2. Partner organisations achieve improved financial sustainability, with increased knowledge and access to diversified funding sources.
3. ASPs maintain or improve programme quality standards while strengthening their organisational foundations, ensuring that capacity-building translates into sustained learner outcomes

KEY ACTION AREA 2: STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY IN THE SECTOR

Recognising leadership is a critical driver of organisational quality, TLT will focus on strengthening leadership and management within partner organisations.

KEY ACTIONS

- Implement leadership and management development initiatives (such as the Management Accelerator Programme), refining them based on learning and participant feedback
- Create structured opportunities for peer learning and reflection among after-school leaders

KEY OUTCOMES

1. ASP leaders and emerging managers demonstrate enhanced leadership and management competencies, with increased confidence and capability to lead their organizations effectively
2. A culture of peer learning and reflective practice is embedded among after-school leaders, with leaders actively engaging in collaborative problem-solving and knowledge exchange, resulting in a stronger correlation between leadership capability and programme quality outcomes

KEY ACTION AREA 3: EMBED AND STRENGTHEN QUALITY STANDARDS AND PRACTICE

TLT will focus on strengthening the uptake and refinement of quality standards across supported programmes.

KEY ACTIONS

- Roll out and institutionalise the newly developed After School Programme Quality Standards and Quality Assessment Tool (QAT) across our network and beyond by supporting partners to engage meaningfully with it as developmental instruments
- Integrate quality standards into grant conversations, learning activities, and organisational support processes
- Use learnings from quality assessments to inform capacity-strengthening priorities and sector learning

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Partner organizations meaningfully adopt and integrate the ASP Quality Standards and QAT into their programme design, delivery, and continuous improvement processes, with measurable improvement in programme quality across the TLT network as evidenced by QAT assessments
2. Quality data informs strategic decision-making and creates a feedback loop between assessment, capacity strengthening, and programme refinement, while establishing a shared language around quality that enables effective peer learning and sector dialogue across the network.

KEY ACTION AREA 4: NETWORKING AND PEER COHORTS

TLT recognises that peer connection, shared problem solving, and practitioner learning are critical to organisational resilience and leadership development in the after-school sector. During this strategy period, the focus will be on deepening and formalising existing peer learning spaces.

KEY ACTIONS

- Facilitate structured peer learning cohorts for after-school learners and practitioners, aligned to organisational maturity, and need.
- Strengthen Communities of Practice and learning forums as spaces for reflection, shared learning, and mutual support, ensuring they are well-facilitated and purposeful
- Create opportunities for peer mentoring and knowledge exchange between mature and emerging partners
- Use peer learning spaces to surface practice-based insights, challenges, and innovations that can inform capacity strengthening (Pillar 1), learning and evidence (Pillar 2), and advocacy narratives (Pillar 3)

- Ensure networking and cohort-based learning remains accessible, relevant and responsive to partner capacity and time constraints

KEY OUTCOMES

1. ASP practitioners experience reduced professional isolation and strengthened organizational resilience, reporting stronger peer networks, mutual support systems, and improved capacity to navigate challenges through shared problem-solving
2. Peer learning cohorts generate actionable practice-based insights and innovations that inform capacity strengthening, advocacy narratives, and sector learning across all strategic pillars
3. Knowledge and experience flow effectively between mature and emerging partners, with Communities of Practice functioning as sustainable, self-organizing spaces for mentoring, reflection, and professional development

KEY ACTION AREA 5: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS AND LOCAL SYSTEMS

TLT will support partners to deepen relationships with, schools and local stakeholders, recognising that effective after-school programmes operate within broader learning ecosystems.

KEY ACTIONS

- Support partners to strengthen collaboration with schools, including communication around learner progress, complementary learning approaches, and documenting effective partnership models for network-wide learning
- Engage selectively with district or local education structures to support partner delivery and strengthen the enabling environment

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Partner organizations establish stronger collaborative relationships with schools characterised by regular communication, shared learner progress tracking, and complementary learning approaches
2. After-school programmes are increasingly recognized and valued by schools and local education stakeholders as legitimate partners in the learning ecosystem
3. Documented partnership models and selective district engagement strengthen the enabling environment and provide learning resources for the broader network

KEY ACTION AREA 6: ALIGN GRANT MAKING ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

There is a more coordinated and integrated grant-making process aligned to the organisation's strategic priorities.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop and implement a coordinated grantmaking framework that aligns funding decisions, criteria, and processes across different grant types with strategic priorities and quality standards
- Establish regular cross-team communication and planning processes to ensure coherence in grant portfolio management and decision-making
- Streamline grant application, reporting, and compliance processes to reduce partner administrative burden while maintaining accountability

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Grantmaking processes are strategically coordinated and integrated across TLT, with clear alignment to organizational priorities, quality standards, and strengthened internal collaboration
2. Partners experience a more coherent and supportive grantmaking relationship, characterized by aligned expectations, reduced administrative burden, and integrated funding and support processes
3. The grantee portfolio demonstrates strategic intentionality, with clear rationale for core partnerships, innovation grants, and collaboration funding that collectively advance TLT's strategic goals

INTENDED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- ✓ All TLT grantee organizations and partners demonstrate strengthened organizational health, leadership capability, and programme quality, with improved governance, financial sustainability, and consistent application of quality standards
- ✓ After-school leaders across the network exhibit increased confidence and competence in strategic decision-making, managing complexity and change, and leading quality improvement through embedded peer learning
- ✓ The TLT partner network is recognized as a credible, collaborative force within the broader learning ecosystem, with strengthened relationships with schools, parents, and education stakeholders

- ✓ Learning and insights from partner strengthening efforts meaningfully inform sector-wide evidence generation (Pillar 2) and advocacy strategies (Pillar 3), positioning the network as thought leaders in the after-school sector

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2

PROGRAMME FOCUS, ALIGNMENT AND IMPACT

STRATEGIC GOAL

To improve coherence, effectiveness, and learning across TLT's programmatic work and partnerships.

The Learning Trust's diverse programmes, partnerships, and investments span organisational development, leadership, learning, and advocacy. To deliver consistent value and measurable results, these efforts must be aligned under a single strategic framework. The emphasis during 2026-2028 is on alignment, clarity, and learning – embedding systems and practices that support better decision-making and accountability.

KEY ACTION AREA 1: STRENGTHEN PROGRAMME COHERENCE AND ALIGNMENT

KEY ACTIONS

- Clarify how all programmes and initiatives align with the overarching Theory of Change
- Strengthening coordination across programmes, MEL, Communication, and Operations teams
- Use regular planning and reflection processes to assess coherence and adjust where needed

KEY OUTCOMES

1. All TLT programmes and partnerships operate within a shared strategic framework, with clear alignment to the Theory of Change, reducing duplication and strengthening coordination
2. Internal coordination and communication are strengthened, with programme, MEL, communication, and operations teams working from shared priorities and information
3. Thematic clarity and focus are established across the organisation (leadership development, inclusion, resilience, education outcomes), enabling clearer tracking of progress and more coherent articulation of TLT's collective contribution

KEY ACTION AREA 2: STRENGTHEN MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL) PRACTICE

KEY ACTIONS

- Expand MEL capacity to consolidate learning and evidence generated across programmes and partnerships
- Develop a centralised organisational MEL system to track performance indicators, visualise progress, and identify emerging trends
- Conduct regular learning and reflection sessions to ensure MEL data informs strategic planning, implementation adjustments, and resource allocation
- Develop learning products (case studies, data briefs, stories of change) to communicate key insights internally and externally

KEY OUTCOMES

1. MEL practice is strengthened across TLT, with expanded capacity to consolidate, analyze, and use learning and evidence for programme improvement and strategic decision-making
2. A functional MEL system enables data-driven decision-making, providing teams with real-time visibility of performance indicators, progress tracking, and emerging trends
3. Accessible learning products communicate key insights, supporting evidence-based advocacy, fundraising, policy engagement, and partner learning

KEY ACTION AREA 3: EMBED A CULTURE OF REFLECTION AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING

TLT will build reflection and adaptive learning into organizational rhythms and practices.

KEY ACTIONS

- Build structured reflection and learning reviews into programme cycles, team rhythms, and partner engagements, that surface challenges and successes, informing programme adjustments
- Establish a digital knowledge repository to store insights, tools, and case examples, facilitating institutional memory and peer learning

KEY OUTCOMES

1. A culture of reflection and adaptive learning is embedded across TLT, with structured reflection integrated into programme cycles, team practices, and partner engagements
2. A digital knowledge repository strengthens institutional memory and peer learning, providing accessible storage of insights, tools, and case examples

KEY ACTION AREA 4: IMPROVE EVIDENCE GENERATION AND USE

TLT will systematically generate, communicate, and use evidence to strengthen credibility and sector influence.

KEY ACTIONS

- Consolidate learning and evidence into accessible outputs, including an Annual Impact and Learning Report that presents progress, highlights successes, and documents lessons learned
- Use evidence strategically to support advocacy, fundraising, and partner learning
- Share evaluation findings through learning events, stakeholder dialogues, and advocacy campaigns, linking TLT's results to sector-wide goals

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Evidence and learning are systematically consolidated and communicated, with annual impact reporting and accessible learning outputs strengthening internal and external accountability
2. Evidence is used strategically to support advocacy, fundraising, and partner learning, with evaluation findings shared through stakeholder dialogues and campaigns
3. TLT's credibility as a learning organisation is strengthened, reinforcing the legitimacy of after-school programming in national development discourse

INTENDED OUTCOMES BY 2028

- ✓ All TLT programmes and partnerships operate within a shared strategic framework aligned to the Theory of Change, with strengthened coordination, reduced duplication, and clearer thematic focus across the organisation
 - ✓ MEL practice and systems enable evidence-informed decision-making, with functional systems, regular learning processes, and accessible learning products supporting planning, resource allocation, and programme refinement
 - ✓ A culture of reflection and adaptive learning is embedded across TLT, with structured reflection informing programme adjustments and institutional memory strengthened through knowledge management systems
- Evidence and learning are strategically used to strengthen credibility and sector influence, through consistent impact measurement, annual reporting, and strategic engagement with advocacy, fundraising, and policy stakeholders



STRATEGIC PILLAR 3

INFLUENCE, ADVOCACY AND RESOURCING

STRATEGIC GOAL

To strengthen the visibility, legitimacy, and resourcing of the after-school sector through focused, evidence-led advocacy and partnership building.

This pillar focuses on outward-facing change – strengthening the policy and funding environment so that after-school initiatives are increasingly recognised and supported within the education system. The 2026–2028 strategy focuses on consolidating existing advocacy initiatives, deepening strategic relationships, and strengthening TLT’s advocacy capacity through evidence-based engagement.

KEY ACTION AREA 1: CONSOLIDATE AND STRENGTHEN EXISTING ADVOCACY PLATFORMS

KEY ACTIONS

- Maintain and strengthen major campaigns (#LightsOnAfterSchool and Amplify After-School), expanding reach, securing media coverage, and linking to specific policy influence, partnership development, and resourcing objectives
- Ensure all advocacy messaging is grounded in evidence and learning from Pillar 2, combining data with practitioner and learner stories
- Refine success measures to focus on traction indicators (follow-up engagements, formalised partnerships, funding leads) in addition to reach or visibility.

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Established advocacy platforms demonstrate deeper impact and traction, with expanded reach, consistent media coverage, and clear links to policy influence, partnerships, and resourcing outcomes
2. All advocacy messaging is evidence-based, grounded in data and learning from Pillar 2 and enriched with practitioner and beneficiaries stories
3. Advocacy effectiveness is measured through tangible traction, with follow-up engagements, formalised partnerships, and funding leads tracked alongside traditional visibility metrics.

KEY ACTION AREA 2: DEEPEN GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

TLT will strengthen strategic relationships with priority stakeholders to position after-school programmes as credible contributors to education and youth development.

KEY ACTIONS

- Deepen engagement with existing and emerging priority stakeholders
- Position after-school programmes as credible contributors within education outcomes, youth development, and employment-linked initiatives
- Cultivate collaboration agreements focused on shared learning, feasibility testing, and implementation insight

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Strategic institutional relationships are deepened with priority stakeholders
2. After-school programmes are increasingly positioned and recognized as credible contributors to education outcomes, youth development, and employment-linked initiatives
3. Targeted collaboration agreements are established with a clear scope focused on shared learning, feasibility testing, and implementation insight

KEY ACTION AREA 3: STRENGTHEN A COHERENT AND CREDIBLE SECTOR VOICE

TLT will facilitate collective sector representation and advocacy to strengthen credibility and influence.

KEY ACTIONS

- Evolve the Catch-Up Coalition into a broader after-school coalition providing a coordinated platform for learning, alignment, and collective advocacy
- Develop and share common advocacy tools that partners can adapt and use consistently
- Facilitate joint engagements with policymakers where collective representation strengthens credibility and impact
- Secure speaking opportunities for TLT and partner representatives at relevant forums to strengthen positioning as credible knowledge partners

KEY OUTCOMES

1. A coordinated after-school coalition provides a credible sector platform for learning, alignment, and collective advocacy with government and stakeholders
2. Common advocacy tools enable consistent, professional sector messaging.
3. TLT and partners are increasingly recognized as credible sector voices and trusted knowledge partners in after-school programming

KEY ACTION AREA 4: LAY FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFIED RESOURCING

The focus during 2026–2028 is on design, testing, and readiness of new funding mechanisms.

KEY ACTIONS

- Strengthen TLT’s internal fundraising and donor engagement capacity, aligned to consolidation priorities and organizational sustainability
- Undertake design and scoping work for collaborative or pooled funding approaches through donor consultations
- Support partner ASPs to improve resourcing readiness through targeted guidance, proposal support, and alignment with funding priorities
- Explore opportunities to engage public and private sectors through campaigns (e.g., Adopt-an-ASP)

KEY OUTCOMES

1. TLT’s fundraising and donor engagement capacity is strengthened, with reduced reliance on any single funder through diversified income streams
2. Foundations are established for collaborative or pooled funding approaches, with design and scoping work completed and donor engagement underway
3. Partner ASPs demonstrate improved resourcing readiness, accessing targeted guidance and support to align with corporate and philanthropic funding priorities
4. Sector funding shows measurable growth, with at least a 25% increase by 2028 measured through combined ASP budgets or tracked new funding commitments.

KEY ACTION AREA 5: EVIDENCE-INFORMED THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

TLT will translate learning into strategic thought leadership that influences policy and funding conversations.

KEY ACTIONS

- Translate learning and evidence into targeted thought leadership outputs (learning briefs, opinion pieces, presentations) linked to specific policy or funding conversations
- Create opportunities for partner organisations and practitioners to be visible contributors to sector dialogue
- Prioritise quality, relevance, and timing of outputs over volume

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Evidence-based thought leadership outputs influence policy and funding conversations, with learning briefs, opinion pieces, and presentations strategically timed and targeted
2. Partner organisations and practitioners are visible contributors to sector dialogue, positioned as credible voices alongside TLT
3. Thought leadership is valued for quality, relevance, and strategic impact rather than volume, strengthening TLT’s credibility and influence

INTENDED OUTCOMES BY 2028

By 2028, the after-school sector will have strengthened visibility, legitimacy, and credibility, with TLT recognized as a trusted knowledge partner and strategic foundations in place for more diversified and sustainable resourcing.

- ✓ After-school programmes are increasingly recognized as credible contributors to education and youth development policy discussions, with evidence-based advocacy driving tangible traction
- ✓ Strategic institutional relationships are deepened through more intentional partnerships (DBE, IDC, provincial departments, youth pathways actors), formalized through collaboration agreements focused on shared learning and implementation insight
- ✓ A coordinated sector coalition provides a credible platform for collective advocacy, with common tools and joint engagements strengthening sector voice and influence
- ✓ Foundations for sustainable, diversified resourcing are established, with TLT's own funding diversified, partner resourcing readiness improved, and sector funding increased.
- ✓ TLT is positioned as a credible thought leader, translating evidence into strategic outputs that influence policy and funding conversations while continuing to strengthen organizational advocacy capacity.





STRATEGIC PILLAR 4

ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY (INTERNAL STRENGTHENING)

STRATEGIC GOAL

To strengthen The Learning Trust's internal coherence, systems, and organisational resilience, ensuring the organisation is well-positioned to deliver consistently, steward resources responsibly, and support the after-school sector effectively.

This pillar recognises that TLT's ability to strengthen the sector depends directly on its organisational health. The focus for 2026-2028 is therefore on stabilisation, alignment, and incremental improvement.

KEY ACTION AREA 1: STRENGTHEN CORE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

TLT will improve the consistency, clarity, and effectiveness of its internal systems, prioritising fit-for-purpose solutions.

KEY ACTIONS

- Conduct a thorough review of current operational systems (finance, HR, project management, IT, knowledge, and data management) with emphasis on usability and clarity
- Develop and document a Standard Operating Procedures manual for key organisational processes (grantmaking cycles, partner engagement, reporting, contracting)
- Introduce incremental system improvements were identified

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Core operational systems are reviewed and strengthened, with clear understanding of usability gaps and priority improvement areas across finance, HR, project management, IT, and data management
2. Standard Operating Procedures are documented for key processes, providing clarity and consistency in grantmaking, partner engagement, reporting, and contracting
3. Fit-for-purpose system improvements are implemented, reducing administrative burden and supporting effective delivery

KEY ACTION AREA 2: IMPROVE CROSS-TEAM COORDINATION

TLT will strengthen internal coordination to reduce duplication, improve information flow, and support collaborative problem-solving.

KEY ACTIONS

- Establish regular planning, coordination, and reflection rhythms across teams (cross-team planning sessions, quarterly strategy check-ins)
- Clarify roles, decision-making responsibilities, and handover points across programmes, MEL, Communications, and Operations
- Strengthen internal communication practices to reduce duplication, improve visibility of work, and support collaborative problem-solving

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Regular cross-team planning and reflection rhythms are embedded, with established processes for coordination, strategy check-ins, and collaborative problem-solving
2. Roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are clarified, reducing confusion and improving handovers across programmes, MEL, Communications, and Operations
3. Internal communication and information flow is strengthened, with reduced duplication and improved visibility of work across teams

KEY ACTION AREA 3: SUPPORT STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

TLT will maintain realistic workload expectations and create a supportive, sustainable workplace culture.

KEY ACTIONS

- Maintain realistic workload expectations aligned with the transitional and consolidation phase of the strategy
- Support staff development through targeted learning opportunities, peer learning, and role-appropriate skills building
- Promote a culture that values reflection, care, and balance, including flexible ways of working where possible
- Review and strengthen people management practices to support retention, performance, and professional growth

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Workload expectations are realistic and sustainable, aligned with organizational capacity and the consolidation phase of the strategy
2. Staff development is supported through targeted learning, with access to peer learning and role-appropriate skills building opportunities
3. TLT is experienced as a supportive, value-aligned workplace, with strengthened people management practices supporting retention, performance, and wellbeing

KEY ACTION AREA 4: STRENGTHEN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

TLT will ensure that organizational knowledge and learning are systematically captured, stored, and accessible.

KEY ACTIONS

- Establish clear systems for storing, organizing, and accessing key organizational documents, learning outputs, and partner information
- Develop an internal knowledge library (digital repository) for strategies, reports, partner information, and toolkits
- Integrate programme reviews, reflection and learning into regular organizational rhythms, linking learning to planning and decision-making

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Knowledge management systems are established and functional, with clear processes for storing, organizing, and accessing organizational documents, learning outputs, and partner information
2. An internal knowledge library strengthens institutional memory, providing accessible storage of key strategies, reports, toolkits, and learnings from after-action reviews
3. TLT's operations are increasingly institutionalized

KEY ACTION AREA 5: IMPROVE FINANCIAL RESILIENCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

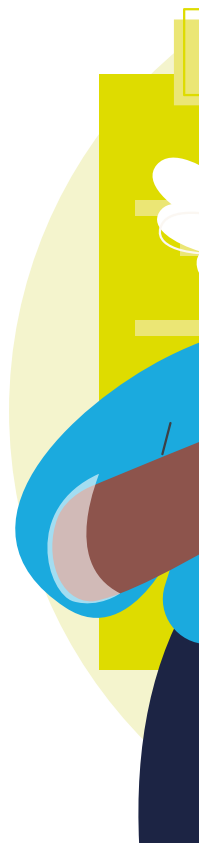
TLT will strengthen financial planning, diversification, and risk awareness to support sustainable operations.

KEY ACTIONS

- Strengthen financial planning, monitoring, and scenario analysis to support informed decision-making
- Reduce organizational exposure to single-source funding risk through gradual diversification of income streams
- Build internal capacity for responsible, transparent, and sustainable financial management
- Ensure compliance, transparency, and strong governance practices remain embedded across all financial processes

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Financial planning and monitoring systems are strengthened, with scenario analysis supporting informed, proactive decision-making
2. Funding diversification reduces single-source dependency, with organizational exposure to any single funder reduced and income streams gradually diversified
3. Financial management capacity is strengthened, with compliance, transparency, and strong governance practices embedded across all processes



KEY ACTION AREA 6: SUPPORT BOARD ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE

TLT will strengthen strategic alignment and oversight through focused Board engagement during this period of transition and consolidation.

KEY ACTIONS

- Facilitate periodic Board strategy and learning conversations focused on the after-school sector, funding environment, and TLT's evolving role
- Support the Board to engage meaningfully with strategic priorities through focused deep dives

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Board engagement is strengthened through regular strategy and learning conversations, with shared understanding of the after-school sector, funding environment, and TLT's evolving role
2. The Board provides meaningful strategic oversight, engaging with priority areas through focused deep dives and informed governance



INTENDED OUTCOMES

- ✓ TLT operates with greater internal clarity, consistency, and confidence, with strengthened core systems, documented procedures, cross-team coordination, and improved organizational coherence
- ✓ Financial resilience and risk management are strengthened, with diversified funding, robust planning and monitoring systems, and transparent governance practices supporting informed decision-making
- ✓ Staff experience TLT as a sustainable, supportive, and value-aligned workplace, with realistic workloads, professional development opportunities, and strengthened people management practices
- ✓ Organizational knowledge and institutional memory are systematically preserved, with effective knowledge management systems reducing person-dependency and positioning TLT for future growth from a place of strength.



8. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Executing a multifaceted strategy of this scope requires a clear, phased implementation approach.

The Learning Trust will roll out the 2026–2028 Strategic Plan in a manner that balances delivery ambition with organisational capacity, learning, and adaptability.

This approach is intentionally designed to support consolidation, transition, as well as coherence and steady progress across the four pillars:



YEAR 1 (2026): FOUNDATION AND ALIGNMENT

The focus will be on strengthening core foundations across all pillars. This includes finalising key frameworks and processes, initiating priority activities, and testing selected approaches. **Examples include:**

- **Pillar 1:** Providing differentiated, tailored organisational capacity-strengthening support to grantee partners based on organisational maturity and need; rolling out the ASP Quality Standards and Quality Assessment Tool; launching the Management Accelerator Programme; and establishing structured peer learning cohorts and Communities of Practice
- **Pillar 2:** Finalising the shared Theory of Change, establishing the centralised MEL system, and initiating regular cross-team learning rhythms
- **Pillar 3:** Consolidating major advocacy campaigns (#LightsOnAfterSchool and Amplify After-School), deepening priority stakeholder relationships, and evolving the Catch-Up Coalition into a broader after-school coalition

- **Pillar 4:** Completing the operational systems review, documenting Standard Operating Procedures, and establishing cross-team coordination rhythms



YEAR 2 (2027): DEEPENING REFINEMENT

Building on Year 1 learnings, the emphasis will shift to deepening implementation and strengthening consistency. Proven approaches will be refined and embedded, learning activities will be expanded where appropriate, and internal systems will be more fully integrated into day-to-day practice. This includes refining capacity-strengthening approaches based on partner feedback, expanding use of quality assessment data, strengthening evidence-informed thought leadership, and embedding adaptive learning practices across the organisation.



YEAR 3 (2028): CONSOLIDATION AND REVIEW

The final year will focus on consolidating gains, assessing progress against intended outcomes, and strengthening readiness for the next strategic cycle. This includes measuring improvements in organizational maturity across partner ASPs, evaluating advocacy traction and policy influence, assessing the effectiveness of internal systems, and conducting comprehensive learning reviews. Evaluation, reflection, and documentation will inform future strategic decisions and position TLT and the sector for continued growth.

This sequence allows TLT to prioritise quality and sustainable change, ensuring that learning informs implementation at each stage.



PILLAR LED COORDINATION AND CROSS-TEAM WORKING

Implementation will be organised around the four strategic pillars, with clear accountability and coordination.

- Each pillar will have a designated lead and a small cross-functional working group drawn from relevant teams (e.g. programmes, MEL, operations, communications).
- These groups will be responsible for translating strategic priorities into annual workplans, coordinating delivery, and tracking progress.
- Regular cross-pillar coordination sessions will ensure alignment, particularly where learning and evidence (Pillar 2) inform advocacy (Pillar 3), or where internal systems (Pillar 4) enable programme delivery (Pillars 1–3).
- Senior leadership will provide oversight, support problem-solving, and report progress to the Board on a quarterly basis.



ANNUAL WORKPLANS AND MONITORING AND REVIEW

The strategy will be operationalised through annual plans that specify activities, timelines, responsibilities, and outputs.

- Strategic priorities will be translated into annual operational plans and tracked through a central implementation matrix.
- Progress will be reviewed regularly through team meetings, leadership check-ins, and quarterly reporting.
- This approach supports early identification of delays or challenges and enables timely adjustment of plans and resource allocation.



PARTNER AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Implementation will be carried out in partnership with external stakeholders, consistent with TLT's commitment to collaboration and accompaniment.

- Partners will be engaged through structured learning spaces, working groups, and advisory mechanisms aligned to specific pillars.
- Communication with partners and stakeholders will be maintained through regular updates, briefings, and shared learning activities.
- This participatory approach supports relevance, shared ownership, and sector alignment.



RESOURCE ALIGNMENT AND STEWARDSHIP (BUDGETING)

Resources will be aligned with strategic priorities.

- Budgets will be structured to reflect pillar-level priorities and phased implementation.
- Staff time will be allocated with attention to workload balance and sustainability.
- Early investment will focus on strengthening systems, coordination, and learning capacity, particularly where these enable more effective delivery across pillars.
- The Board will approve budgets that clearly link financial allocations to strategic intent.



ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND LEARNING

A core feature of the implementation approach is adaptive management.

- Learning and evidence generated through MEL processes will inform ongoing decision-making.
- Regular reflection points, including a mid-strategy review in 2027, will assess progress and inform adjustments.
- Activities may be refined, paused, or adapted in response to learning, without undermining overall strategic direction.



RISK MANAGEMENT IN IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation will be informed by proactive risk awareness.

- Key risks related to delivery, resourcing, partnerships, and external context will be monitored. Mitigation strategies will be reviewed periodically, with escalation pathways where needed.
- This approach supports organisational resilience and continuity of delivery in uncertain conditions.



COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING

Progress will be communicated clearly and consistently.

- Internally, staff and leadership will receive regular updates on implementation progress.
- Externally, learning and progress will be shared through annual reporting and selected public communications.
- Transparent communication supports accountability, trust, and sustained stakeholder engagement.

In summary, our implementation approach is deliberate, coordinated, and adaptive. By phasing delivery, working through the strategic pillars, and aligning resources and learning processes, the organisation aims to maintain a steady pace of execution that strengthens impact without overwhelming capacity. Strengthened internal systems and coordination (Pillar 4) will support effective delivery across all pillars during the 2026–2028 period.

9. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL)

A robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning framework is essential for tracking the implementation of this strategic plan and driving continuous improvement.

TLT's MEL approach for 2026–2028 will build on existing MEL practices and incrementally strengthen capacity. It will operate on two levels: (1) monitoring our strategic plan performance (are we doing what we said and achieving the outcomes we intended?), and (2) strengthening MEL capacity sector wide as part of our Pillar 2 objectives.

The following outlines our MEL plan:



PERFORMANCE MONITORING OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

We will develop a Strategy Results Framework that prioritizes a manageable set of indicators aligned with the plan's structure, listing each strategic objective, the key outcomes we aim to achieve under each, and the indicators with baselines and targets through 2028.

- **We will assign responsibility for data collection to relevant team members:** The new shared MEL tools we implement for partners will greatly facilitate collecting standard outcome data (like learner improvements, attendance rates) across our network.
- **Frequency:** We will monitor output and activity indicators continuously (monthly or quarterly updates on activities completed, number of events held, etc.). Outcome indicators will be reviewed annually, depending on how long it takes for them to manifest (e.g., policy

influence may not show results for 1 year or more). We'll incorporate these into an annual strategy review process where we analyze what the data is telling us about our progress.



DATA SYSTEMS AND TOOLS

Building on Pillar 2's Data Collective, TLT will strengthen and streamline existing tools for MEL:

- Develop a simple online dashboard for monitoring key metrics. This will visually show progress on our strategic indicators in real time or via periodic updates (e.g., number of learners reached across all programmes, updated quarterly).
- Expand existing platforms like TeamPACT help collect standardised program data from partners (like attendance, test scores, etc.).
- **Streamlines MEL Templates:** We will refine and simplify partner reporting templates (for both quantitative data and qualitative insights), reducing burden while maintaining accountability.
- **Knowledge repository:** All evaluation reports, case studies, and learning documents will be stored and indexed for easy retrieval, contributing to organisational memory and sector learning.



EVALUATION AND LEARNING

In addition to ongoing monitoring, we will undertake more in-depth evaluations at key points:

- **Mid-term Review (mid-2027):** We plan an external or internal evaluation of the strategy's first half. This will assess the effectiveness of interventions to date, the outcomes achieved versus targets, and the strategy's relevance in the evolving context. The findings will directly inform any necessary course corrections or adjustments in focus for 2028.
- **Final Evaluation (end-2028):** An external evaluation to measure the impact of the 2026–2028 strategy. It could include stakeholder interviews, trend analysis (e.g., changes in partners' capacity scores and shifts in the funding landscape), and case studies. This will not only account for our stakeholders but also provide learning for the next strategic cycle.
- **Real-Time Learning Loops:** We will practice continuous learning as part of our MEL. For instance, after each major training or event, we gather feedback (through surveys and focus groups) and immediately incorporate improvements for next time. Our team meetings will review MEL data, including partner outcome data indicating weaker results in one province. We will discuss the reasons for these results and strategies for addressing them. We will document these reflections as short “lessons learned” memos so that, over three years, we can build a knowledge base of which strategies worked best.



CAPACITY BUILDING IN MEL

Given our strategic aim to improve the MEL sector-wide, we will take a phased approach to building partner MEL capacity. We will track things like, how many partner organisations have improved their M&E practices (for example, the number that start using baseline-endline evaluations for their learners, or that produce an annual report with outcomes). This will be scaled incrementally based on partner readiness and TLT capacity.



DATA QUALITY AND CREDIBILITY

We recognise that our claims and advocacy will only be as strong as the data behind them. Therefore, part of our MEL approach is to ensure data quality control. We will implement checks such as sample data audits of partner-reported data. This will lend credibility to our consolidated evidence. Additionally, we will triangulate data – combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from interviews or observation – to get a fuller picture.



FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

MEL is not just about numbers; it's also about hearing from stakeholders. **We will incorporate feedback loops by:**

- Conducting an annual partner satisfaction survey to gauge how partners view TLT's support and where they see impact or need (this is a form of evaluation of our services).
- Leveraging partner visits and existing touchpoints to gather feedback from youth beneficiaries.
- Continuously engaging with our funders/donors through existing reporting and relationship management processes, to get their perspective on our progress and whether our reporting meets their expectations, adjusting if needed.



USING MEL FOR LEARNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Above all, TLT is committed to closing the learning loop. Data and evaluations will not sit on a shelf – we will actively use them to inform decisions. **For example:**

- If MEL data shows certain types of organisations (say smaller community-based ones) are struggling more in financial sustainability, we might allocate additional resources or tailored interventions for that subgroup (like targeted training on fundraising).
- If our advocacy tracking indicates low uptake by corporates, we might pivot our messaging or strategy towards them (maybe our message needs reframing for that audience, which we glean from feedback).
- Successes identified by MEL will be scaled or replicated. For instance, if one province's approach to integrating ASPs into schools yields strong results, we'll document it and seek to replicate it elsewhere.

In line with our overall focus for this strategy, this MEL approach prioritises depth over breadth - selecting critical indicators, strengthening existing systems, and building MEL capacity incrementally rather than implementing extensive new infrastructure. Our aim is sustainable, realistic MEL practice that genuinely informs decision-making without overwhelming organizational capacity.



10. RISKS AND MITIGATION

Implementing this strategy in a dynamic context comes with risks.

The Learning Trust has identified key risks that could impede achievement of our objectives and prepared mitigation strategies to address each:



FUNDING UNCERTAINTY AND OVER-RELIANCE

- **Risk:** Over-reliance on single funding sources or a general downturn in donor funding could create budget shortfalls for TLT and partners.
- **Mitigation:** Under Pillar 3 and Pillar 4, we are proactively diversifying funding sources by engaging new foundations, corporate CSI programmes, and international donors. We will explore innovative financing options, including pooled funds, while establishing financial reserves covering at least six months of core operating costs. We maintain strict financial management with contingency budgets to ensure core functions continue if expected funding does not materialize.



POLITICAL/GOVERNMENT INSTABILITY

- **Risk:** Political changes or shifting government priorities could delay or derail policy influence and partnership commitments.
- **Mitigation:** Through Pillar 3, Through Pillar 3, we adopt multi-level engagement across national, provincial, and district levels to avoid dependence on single champions. We frame advocacy around evidence and children's outcomes rather than politics, and build relationships with career government officials who provide continuity across

political transitions. By formalizing support through policy frameworks and official plans, we institutionalize ASP recognition. If the policy environment becomes unfavourable, we pivot to private sector and community-driven support.



CAPACITY AND RETENTION RISKS (INTERNAL)

- **Risk:** Strategy delivery could stretch TLT's team, risking staff burnout or turnover that disrupts programme continuity and institutional memory.
- **Mitigation:** Pillar 4 directly addresses this through realistic workload management, structured task distribution, improved internal communication and planning, staff development, and recognition efforts. We are implementing succession planning for critical roles and strengthening knowledge management systems to reduce person-dependency. Our focus on consolidation over expansion helps maintain sustainable workloads.



PARTNER CAPACITY AND ABSORPTION RISKS

- **Risk:** Some ASP organizations may remain fragile financially or operationally despite support, with varying capacity to adopt new tools and practices.
- **Mitigation:** Our Pillar 1 strategy of “deepening, not broadening” focuses resources on comprehensive partner strengthening. We tailor support intensity based on organizational maturity, provide more frequent engagement for fragile partners, and support funding diversification at the partner level. Through regular capacity assessments and relationship management, we catch issues early. Peer learning enables stronger organizations to mentor emerging ones, creating a support network.



EXTERNAL SHOCKS (PUBLIC HEALTH, ECONOMIC, ETC.)

- **Risk:** Pandemics, natural disasters, economic crises, or infrastructure challenges (like load shedding) could disrupt programme delivery and divert resources.
- **Mitigation:** Building on COVID-19 lessons, we maintain programme flexibility, including the ability to shift to remote support, smaller groups, or alternative delivery models. Financial reserves and diverse funding provide buffers. Under Pillar 4, scenario planning identifies potential shocks and response strategies. We maintain coordination with broader civil society networks to ensure that after-school needs are represented in crisis responses.



REPUTATIONAL RISK

- **Risk:** Increased visibility brings scrutiny; partner incidents, financial misuse, or safety issues could damage TLT’s reputation.
- **Mitigation:** We uphold high compliance and ethics standards, including thorough grantmaking due diligence, requiring child protection policies, strengthening audits and financial monitoring, and providing safeguarding training. We maintain transparency, addressing issues promptly and honestly. A diversified partner portfolio and strong track record built through MEL and communications (Pillar 2) buffer against isolated incidents.



LIMITED POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

- **Risk:** Despite best efforts, desired policy or systemic changes may not materialize by 2028.
- **Mitigation:** Through Pillar 3, we set realistic intermediate goals and celebrate incremental wins (such as provincial funding initiatives or formal school-ASP partnerships). We work both “inside and outside” the system, strengthening community and private sector support as parallel avenues, ensuring sector sustainability regardless of policy progress.



TECHNOLOGICAL RISKS

- **Risk:** New data systems and digital tools create risks of privacy breaches or technical failures.
- **Mitigation:** We implement robust data protection measures, including POPIA compliance, secure cloud storage with backups, explicit consent protocols, and staff training on digital security. Alternative systems (including simple Excel-based options) serve as contingencies.



CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

- **Risk:** While not immediately obvious, events like power outages (given South Africa's electricity issues) or extreme weather could disrupt after-school programme schedules or communications.
- **Mitigation:** We encourage partners to have alternative plans (e.g., daytime holiday camps if schools close, or shifting meeting times during load-shedding schedules). TLT can invest in basic resilience resources – e.g., ensuring our office and key partner sites have backup power or internet solutions so that data isn't lost and operations continue. We'll

also consider environmental sustainability in our program design (though this is a minor risk area, being proactive aligns with broader resilience thinking).

In summary, TLT approaches risk management as integral to strategy execution. Each risk is assigned to a responsible team member and reviewed periodically in management meetings using RAG (Red-Amber-Green) status indicators. Our mitigation measures are embedded across all four pillars – from diversifying funding to investing in internal systems, partner relationships, and organizational resilience. By anticipating challenges and preparing responses, we increase our likelihood of delivering strategic objectives even in suboptimal conditions.



11. RESOURCING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Achieving the goals of this strategic plan requires adequate financial, human, and organizational resources, as well as a clear approach to long-term sustainability for both TLT and the broader after-school sector.



FINANCIAL RESOURCING STRATEGY

TLT's budget will be aligned with the strategic pillars, and we will pursue a diverse mix of funding sources to support each area. **Our financial resourcing approach includes:**

- **Diversification of Funding Sources (Pillar 3 & Pillar 4):** Over 2026–2028, we will actively cultivate relationships with 3–5 new major funding partners, reducing dependency on single sources. This includes engaging corporate CSI programmes, bilateral and multilateral donors (UNICEF, USAID), South African and international foundations, and high-net-worth individuals. We will leverage improved evidence and thought leadership to make compelling cases to funders.
- **Strategic Partnerships and Co-Funding (Pillar 3):** We will structure funding partnerships around strategic priorities, for example, securing dedicated grants for capacity development (Pillar 1) or co-funding advocacy initiatives with government and other NGOs (Pillar 3). The Catch-Up Coalition model, which mobilized R191 million through IDC and others, demonstrates the potential of pooled funding approaches, which we will expand.
- **Foundations for Innovative Funding Models (Pillar 3):** During 2026–2028, we will complete design and scoping work for collaborative funding mechanisms, including pooled funds or trusts for after-school programmes. We will explore social investment models and identify potential revenue-generating

services (e.g., training modules, tools) to subsidize nonprofit activities.

- **Multi-year and Core Funding:** We will advocate for multi-year commitments and unrestricted core funding to support institutional strengthening (Pillar 4) and provide implementation flexibility. Improved MEL systems (Pillar 2) demonstrate effective use of core support.
- **Internal Resource Allocation (Pillar 4):** Budget allocation will ensure each strategic pillar is adequately resourced, with protected budget lines for capacity building, learning, and advocacy. We will implement appropriate cost recovery through management fees on large grants and collaborative projects to sustainably cover organizational overhead.



HUMAN RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE

Ensuring we have the right people and skills is a critical part of resourcing. **We will:**

- **Strategic Team Capacity (Pillar 4):** We will assess staff capacity annually and budget for strategic hires or consultants as needed, aligned with realistic workload expectations. We will use consultants and advisors for targeted skill-building, rather than permanent expansion, where appropriate.
- **Leverage Networks and Partnerships:** We will engage skilled volunteers through corporate programmes or university fellowships, explore secondments with partners and

fundraising, and actively utilize Board expertise for fundraising, strategic guidance, and stakeholder engagement.

- **Staff Development and Wellbeing (Pillar 4):** Investment in targeted learning opportunities, peer learning, and role-appropriate skill-building will strengthen organizational capacity and support retention and sustainable performance.



SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY AND HANDOVER

Our plan is not just about TLT's sustainability, but also that of the after-school sector. **We will take steps to ensure that the improvements made are institutionalised and sustained:**

- **Building Partner Self-Sufficiency (Pillar 1):** Through organizational capacity strengthening, leadership development, and quality standards, we aim for ASP partners to thrive with reduced direct TLT support, attracting their own funding and sustaining quality improvements.
- **System Integration (Pillar 3):** We are working toward embedding after-school programmes in government structures through policy frameworks, provincial and district budgets, and formalized collaboration agreements – ensuring public funding sustains the work beyond TLT's involvement.
- **Institutionalizing Learning and Standards (Pillar 1 & Pillar 2):** Quality Standards, QAT, MEL systems, and peer learning networks will create sector infrastructure that persists independently, with documented learning products and tools available across the broader ecosystem.
- **Long-term TLT Vision:** We will continue to build financial reserves and, where feasible, explore an endowment fund to support core operations. We will document strategy outcomes thoroughly to support future funding and strategic planning beyond 2028.



TRACKING SUSTAINABILITY METRICS

- **We will track sustainability through key indicators, including:** TLT's donor dependency ratio (no single donor exceeding a defined threshold), months of financial reserves, number of ASPs receiving government funding, year-on-year growth in total sector funding, and partner organizations' diversified income streams. These metrics will be reported regularly to the Board and inform strategic adjustments.



CONCLUSION

The Learning Trust's Strategic Plan 2026–2028 presents a focused, consolidation-oriented roadmap to strengthen the after-school sector in South Africa.

Through deepening organizational capacity, strengthening evidence and learning systems, advancing strategic advocacy and partnerships, and building internal resilience, we aim to position after-school programmes as recognized, credible contributors to educational equity and youth development.

This plan is comprehensive yet realistic, designed for a period of transition and consolidation. It is also a living document – we will adapt and learn as

we progress, guided by evidence, reflection, and our commitment to the sector. With concerted effort from our team, partners, Board, and supporters, we are confident that by 2028, The Learning Trust will have contributed to a stronger, more connected, and more sustainable after-school sector – one with improved organizational capacity, credible quality standards, strategic policy relationships, and diversified funding foundations that position it for continued impact beyond this strategic cycle.



APPENDIX A - DETAILED THEORY OF CHANGE

THE LEARNING TRUST – THEORY OF CHANGE 2026–2028

Thriving learners and equitable education through a sustainable after school ecosystem

OUTCOMES

ASPs institutionalised in education policy

Diversified, sustained sector funding

Improved programme quality & leadership across ASPs

Resilient, learning oriented TLT organisation

OUTPUTS

- Quality Standards & QAT adopted across partners
- 100+ ASPs trained in governance, MEL & leadership
- Peer learning cohorts & alumni network established

- Annual Impact Reports & learning briefs published
- #LightsOnAfterSchool & Amplify campaigns scaled
- Pooled fund & sector coalition launched

ACTIVITIES

- Capacity support & grants
- Leadership pipelines
- Child protection & governance

- Integrated programme framework
- Campaigns & policy working groups
- Systems & SOPs

- Govt MoUs & partnerships
- Pooled funds & CSI partnerships
- Shared MEL tools & data use
- Annual reflection reviews

- Staff wellbeing & development
- Knowledge management
- Strengthen and improve processes and systems
- Optimal HR capacity through training, development and recruiting

INPUTS

- Skilled staff & technical expertise
- Funding & strategic donor partnerships
- Alliances with DBE, NASCEE, NECT, corporates & universities

- Digital tools & MEL infrastructure
- Active Board governance

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