

Microsoft SME Project FAQs

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Purpose: This document summarises the Microsoft SME Project requirements, evidence and payment rules in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) format, aligned to the programme model and the Microsoft SME Rate Card.

Category	Question	Answer
Onboarding and Contracting		
Due diligence (SME)	What due diligence must the SME complete during onboarding?	<p>The SME must complete and upload all required due diligence information through the Collective X (Collective X) Partner Portal as part of the formal onboarding process.</p> <p>To proceed to contracting and WIL activation, the SME must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully complete and pass Collective X due diligence verification • Complete the online Co-Funding Application • Be evaluated by the DSIF Technical Evaluation Committee • Receive a formal allocation confirmation from the DSIF Technical Evaluation Committee
Eligibility (SME)	What eligibility criteria must the SME meet to participate?	<p>The SME must confirm (in the online application) that it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is part of the Microsoft South Africa Emerging Partner Programme. • Has a legitimate vacancy and intention to employ the beneficiary after the 6-month Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) period (supported by an SA Youth opportunity card for the vacancy). • Can provide a structured 6-month WIL programme (WIL plan as evidence). • Can provide tools of the trade (computer, data, internet access, etc.). • Has structures and suitably qualified resources to provide meaningful supervision and mentorship.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will contract with the beneficiary in line with South African labour laws. • Will participate in Collective X monitoring & evaluation (including completion of Youth Placement Insight Check-Ins and uploading SkillsTX assessment outputs). • Declares any family/close relationships (safeguarding requirement).
Eligibility (beneficiaries)	What evidence is required to confirm that beneficiaries meet the programme criteria?	<p>Immediately after contracting, the SME must upload the following to Salesforce (per beneficiary):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified copy of the beneficiary's ID. • Signed affidavit confirming the beneficiary is unemployed, has limited/no prior work experience (less than 12 months), has not been in ongoing employment in the 6 months prior to WIL commencement, and grants permission for Collective X/SME to share information (Collective X template). • Proof of beneficiary registration on the SA Youth platform and successful appointment into the SME's WIL opportunity. • Completed beneficiary information spreadsheet (Collective X template): name, surname, ID, email address, contact number, race, gender, PWD status, digital role, WIL start and end dates, and extended employment start date (if applicable). • Where PWD is indicated: the SME must confirm the disability classification using Collective X guidelines and confirm (tick-box) that all required criteria are met.
Structured WIL plan	What is required for the structured 6-month WIL plan?	<p>The SME must develop and upload a structured 6-month WIL plan per role (using the Collective X template) to Salesforce. This plan is incorporated as an annexure to the Co-Funding Agreement.</p> <p>A WIL Plan Framework and step-by-step User Guide are provided to support SMEs and can be downloaded from the Collective X Partner Portal.</p>
Contracting (Collective X and SME)	What agreements must be signed during contracting?	<p>Two agreements must be in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed Co-Funding Agreement between Collective X and the SME (the rate card and structured WIL plan are incorporated as annexures).

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signed Work-Integrated Learning Agreement/contract between the SME and each beneficiary (Collective X template is a guideline only; the SME may use its own contract provided required clauses are included).
WIL agreement minimum clauses	If the SME uses its own WIL contract, what minimum clauses must be included?	<p>At minimum, the WIL contract must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with South African labour legislation. Specify a 6-month duration. State the starting stipend for the full 6-month period. Clarify that a stipend increase from month 4 is not guaranteed and is only granted on SME recommendation (performance-based) and subject to timeous completion of Youth Development Check-Ins. Attach the structured WIL plan as a signed annexure. Require the beneficiary to provide bank confirmation letters (stamped and dated) in months 1 and 4; and immediately provide a new letter if the bank account changes. Require the beneficiary to complete the online Youth Development Check-In by the 22nd of the month, every two months (months 2, 4 and 6). Include a simplified safeguarding clause and attach the safeguarding policy as an annexure (the policy must be explained to the beneficiary).
SFIA Assessments and SkillsTX		
Skills and roles	How will we ensure that beneficiaries develop the right skills for our business environment?	The SME completes a Skills Mapping Report to align the learner's workplace tasks to the specific job skills required in the SME environment, and to capture the evidence needed for those skills to be formally recognised through digital skill badges at the end of the programme. A step-by-step Skills Mapping Guideline is provided and can be downloaded from the Collective X Partner Portal to support SMEs in completing this process.

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Skills Configuration and Profile Setup	What happens during Skills Configuration and Profile Setup, and what is required from the SME?	Once the WIL Skills Mapping Report is approved, SkillsTX configures the SME skills environment by linking workplace activities to SFIA-aligned skills and defining the core skills required for the job role. These core skills are then used for beneficiary self-assessment, workplace evidence submission, mentor review, and final proficiency confirmation. As part of this process, a SkillsTX domain is created for the SME, the role-specific core skills are configured within the domain, and an SME mentor must be formally identified.
SkillsTX baseline	What assessments must be completed in month 1?	Each beneficiary must complete a baseline self-assessment and gap analysis on SkillsTX in month 1.
SkillsTX reports (all beneficiaries)	What SkillsTX reports are generated for all beneficiaries?	SkillsTX generates the following for all beneficiaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline self-assessment and gap analysis report (month 1). • Progress reports (months 3 and 6). • Cumulative Digital CV / employability profile with evidence (ongoing).
SFIA Level 3 assessment (conditional)	When is the SFIA Level 3 competency assessment required, and for whom?	The SFIA Level 3 competency assessment (for 6 core skills aligned to the assigned role) is ONLY applicable to beneficiaries who are NOT offered an extended employment opportunity by the SME after the 6-month WIL period.
Uploading assessment evidence	What SkillsTX evidence must the SME upload to the Collective X Grant Management system?	Per beneficiary, the SME must upload: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline gap analysis report (month 1). • Progress reports generated by SkillsTX (months 3 and 6), co-signed by the supervisor/mentor. • Where applicable, the SkillsTX report verifying SFIA Level 3 competency results for the 6 core skills.
Mentor / Supervisor Role	What is the role of the SME mentor or supervisor in the WIL programme?	The SME mentor or supervisor plays a critical role in supporting the beneficiary's workplace learning, performance development, and skills verification during the WIL period. The mentor provides day-to-day guidance, ensures beneficiaries are exposed to the correct workplace activities, and reviews and approves workplace evidence linked to the defined role skills. The mentor also supports performance feedback, confirms that activities completed are aligned to the approved Skills Mapping Report, and validates evidence submitted for final skills proficiency confirmation. This role helps ensure that

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		skills recognised at the end of the programme accurately reflect real workplace capability.
Who pays SkillsTX	Who pays for SkillsTX platform use and SFIA assessments?	<p>Collective X pays SkillsTX directly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For ALL beneficiaries: creation of an employability profile/career talent tracker and platform use/baseline tools for up to the 6-month WIL period. • For beneficiaries NOT offered extended employment after WIL: the SFIA Level 3 assessments. • For beneficiaries NOT offered extended employment who meet SFIA Level 3 competency: competency badges.
Work-Integrated Learning Stipend Co-Payments		
WIL completion definition	What constitutes successful completion of the WIL phase?	<p>WIL is regarded as successfully completed when the beneficiary has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed 6 months of WIL aligned to the structured WIL plan, under direct supervision and mentorship; and • Required feedback/check-ins have been completed and uploaded (see reporting requirements below).
Check-ins (SME)	What Youth Placement Insight Check-Ins must the SME complete during WIL?	<p>The SME must complete two online Youth Placement Insight Check-Ins by the 22nd:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First check-in due in month 3. • Second check-in due in month 6. <p>Upload requirement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If fewer than 5 youth are in WIL: upload per beneficiary. • If 6 or more youth are in WIL: upload per role/cohort.
Check-ins (beneficiary)	What Youth Development Check-Ins must beneficiaries complete during WIL?	<p>Each beneficiary must complete an online Youth Development Check-In by the 22nd of the month, every two months during WIL (months 2, 4 and 6).</p>
Stipend value and payment	What stipend amount will beneficiaries receive during the Microsoft SME WIL programme?	<p>The stipend paid to beneficiaries during the 6-month Work Integrated Learning (WIL) period depends on role complexity and increases after the first three months to support progression and retention.</p> <p>Medium Complexity Roles (6 Months WIL)</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Months 1–3: R4 000 per month • Months 4–6: R4 500 per month • Total 6-Month Stipend: R25 500 High Complexity Roles (6 Months WIL) • Months 1–3: R4 500 per month • Months 4–6: R5 000 per month • Total 6-Month Stipend: R28 500
Stipend value and payment	How are stipend costs shared between Collective X (Programme Funding) and the SME employer?	<p>The stipend is funded through a co-funding model designed to ensure SME commitment while reducing early employment risk.</p> <p>Funding Split</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME Contribution: 40% of stipend cost • Collective X / DSIF Programme Contribution: 60% of stipend cost. <p>Medium Complexity – Total Contribution Over 6 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME Total Contribution: R10 200 • Programme Total Contribution: R15 300 <p>High Complexity – Total Contribution Over 6 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME Total Contribution: R11 400 • Programme Total Contribution: R17 100 <p>Important Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stipends are non-VAT applicable. SMEs may top-up stipends at their own cost if required for retention or performance reasons. • The model is designed to support quality WIL delivery and long-term employment absorption.

SME stipend co-payment request	What must the SME submit to request the monthly stipend co-payment?	<p>The SME must upload an invoice and supporting evidence to the Collective X Grant Management system. Evidence includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME stamped bank account confirmation letter (not older than 3 months). To reduce administration, upload bank letters with
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		<p>month 1 and month 4 invoices (dated and stamped in those months).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Month 4: the SME must motivate which beneficiaries will not qualify for the stipend increase (performance-based). If performance improves later (month 5 or 6), the SME may decide to grant the increase, but must advise Collective X before submitting the relevant invoice. • Month 6: where applicable, a copy of the employment contract for each beneficiary offered extended employment. • By no later than the 15th of month 6: the SME must advise Collective X which beneficiaries will NOT receive extended employment post-WIL (this triggers which beneficiaries must complete the SFIA Level 3 assessment).
<p>Proof of stipend payment to beneficiaries</p>	<p>What proof is required that the SME paid the stipend to beneficiaries?</p>	<p>The SME must provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary bank confirmation letters (stamped and dated) - not older than 3 months. To reduce administration, upload with month 1 and month 4 invoices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If a beneficiary changes bank accounts during WIL, upload a new bank confirmation letter in the month the new account is activated. ○ Payroll report showing beneficiary name, bank account number, transaction date and amount paid.
<p>Payment rules and timing</p>	<p>How are stipend co-payments calculated and when are they paid?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-payment amounts are linked to role complexity (role complexity and co-payment values are provided in a separate annexure). • Co-payments are released monthly for the full 6 months of WIL. • Collective X disburses the co-payment to the SME within 5 working days of receiving the invoice and required evidence. • Stipends are non-vatable.
<p>Extended Employment and Retention Incentive</p>		

Category	Question	Answer
Eligibility for the incentive	When does an SME qualify for the extended employment and retention incentive?	<p>The SME qualifies when it can evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beneficiary has a qualifying employment/engagement contract for a minimum of 6 months, effective immediately after completion of the 6-month WIL period; and • The beneficiary is still in the employ/engagement of the SME 3 months after the start of the extended employment period; and • The placement is in the same or equivalent role as during WIL (all four “extended employment equivalence” dimensions are met).
Extended employment equivalence	What are the four “extended employment equivalence” dimensions?	<p>Extended employment equivalence is defined across these minimum standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration: Minimum 6 months continuous engagement. • Income: Market-related / above minimum wage. • Work intensity: Minimum 40 hours per week. • Skill depth: Same SME and same/equivalent role and skills set as the WIL appointment (core skills remain relevant to the pathway).
Evidence and invoicing	What must the SME submit to claim the incentive, and what evidence is required?	<p>The SME must upload (to the Collective X Grant Management system):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invoice. • SME stamped bank account confirmation letter (stamped and dated in the same month as invoice submission). • Proof of salary payment for months 1, 2 and 3 of extended employment (retention): payroll reports reflecting beneficiary name, bank account number, transaction date and amount paid; plus beneficiary bank confirmation letters stamped and dated in the same month as invoice submission. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the beneficiary changes bank accounts during extended employment, bank confirmation letters for each month must be

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		<p>uploaded for that beneficiary. Note: A copy of the signed employment contract would typically already have been submitted with the month 6 WIL payment request.</p>
Qualifying vs non-qualifying engagements	Do freelance or project-based arrangements qualify for the incentive?	<p>Extended employment incentives are payable where the SME demonstrates sustained, qualifying employment or employment-equivalent engagement after WIL. Qualifying engagements may include permanent, fixed-term, or structured project-based arrangements, provided the minimum standards for duration, income, work intensity, and skills application are met. Light-touch, ad-hoc, or once-off freelance engagements do not qualify.</p>
Incentive value and payment	What is the incentive amount and when is it paid?	<p>The incentive is R12 000 (incl. VAT) per beneficiary. It is disbursed after the SME submits the invoice and required evidence via the Collective X Grant Management system.</p>

