CONFERENCE MANIFESTO

A Shared Agenda for Digital Skills at Scale

CollectiveXChange 2026 | Johannesburg | 15 October 2026

South Africa's National Digital Skills Plan has moved from design to pilot to early scale-up. Convened by Collective X and built with government, business and philanthropic partners, it has shown what coordinated action can achieve. The challenge now is scale, on a far greater order than anything we have attempted so far.

That requires three levers to move together: policy alignment, multi-year financing and clear employer demand. No single actor can move them alone. Every part of the digital skills ecosystem has a role, and a responsibility, to act.

> **At CollectiveXChange 2026, we set out our shared position on what must happen next.**

1 Policy alignment

Policy sets the conditions under which everyone else can invest, train and hire with confidence. Together, we will:

1.1 **Build certainty for outcomes-based skilling.** Move toward multi-year support for outcomes-based skilling, giving the ecosystem the certainty needed to build sustainable pathways without requiring a guaranteed individual job at the outset.

1.2 **Strengthen demand signals.** Create a more responsive demand-signalling system, so training can adapt quickly as employer and labour-market needs change.

1.3 **Make recognition and curricula more agile.** Develop more agile approaches to skills recognition and curriculum design, ensuring credible employer-aligned learning is not held back by accreditation processes that cannot keep pace with changing demand.

1.4 **Build trust through verified outcomes.** Build trust through delivery and verified outcomes, using proven ecosystem assets, clear measures of placement and employment, and mechanisms that partners can rely on at scale.

2 Multi-year financing

Financing determines whether what works can last and grow. Together, we will:

2.1 **Pay for outcomes, not activity.** Shift more skills funding toward outcomes-based financing, rewarding verified employment and other meaningful economic outcomes rather than activity alone.

2.2 **Fund the delivery architecture.** Finance the delivery architecture as well as the final outcome, ensuring that providers have the capacity, systems and infrastructure needed to deliver reliably at scale.

2.3 **Back models built to scale.** Move beyond bespoke projects toward institutionalised scale, concentrating capital behind models that can be replicated and sustained nationally.

2.4 **Pool capital around shared outcomes.** Aggregate capital around shared outcomes, bringing government, business and philanthropic funding together while recognising that skills investment must demonstrate value to compete for limited resources.

2.5 **Build funder confidence.** Build confidence through proportionate verification and clear regulation, creating common standards that allow funders to deploy capital with greater certainty.

2.6 **Keep measurement rigorous but simple.** Simplify the models that underpin delivery and measurement, including M&E, verification and reporting, so that systems remain rigorous without becoming too complex or costly to scale.

3 Skills for the AI era

AI is changing which skills matter, and how quickly. Meeting that shift at national scale starts with the people who teach and the systems we already have. Together, we will:

3.1 **Build educator and trainer capability first.** Use proven train-the-trainer, coaching and institutional models to spread AI capability at national scale.

3.2 **Use the institutional muscle memory we have.** Repurpose delivery systems that have worked in education, public health and other national programmes, rather than automatically creating new structures.

3.3 **Make AI a whole-of-government agenda.** Treat AI as a whole-of-government implementation agenda, connecting national policy to individual departments, business and the wider ecosystem.

3.4 **Design skills systems that evolve.** Design skills systems to evolve in response to AI, recognising that technology and labour-market demand are moving faster than traditional institutional and policy cycles.

3.5 **Prepare people for economic participation, not only existing jobs.** Help South Africans use AI to improve productivity, navigate careers, create income and build businesses.

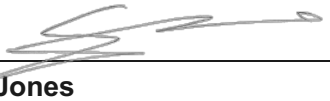
3.6 **Keep the transition human-centred.** Ensure that capability, governance and adoption are shaped around people and meaningful economic participation.

Endorsement

Signed

Ziaad Suleman
Chairman of the Board, Collective X

Date 26 October 2026

Signed 

Evan Jones
Chief Executive Officer, Collective X

Date 21 October 2026

ABOUT THIS MANIFESTO

This Manifesto was created based on the conversations at CollectiveXChange 2026. The event was hosted in Johannesburg on 15 October 2026. It was convened by Collective X, with co-convenors Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies, Human Resource Development Council, Business Unity South Africa, Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, and Youth Employment Service (YES).