

IfEDI AFRICA

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

OFFICIAL CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Public invitation and award overview

Recognising Excellence. Celebrating Impact. Advancing Africa.

Presented at ACOEDI 2026 | 26-29 October 2026 | Emperors Palace Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa

Call for Nominations

The Institute for Economic Development & Innovation (IfEDI Africa) invites nominations for the 2026 IfEDI Africa Economic Development & Innovation Excellence Awards, an annual professional and institutional recognition programme celebrating demonstrated excellence, ethical leadership, evidence-based practice and measurable development impact across Africa.

The awards will be presented during the African Conference on Economic Development and Innovation (ACOEDI 2026), taking place from 26 to 29 October 2026 at Emperors Palace Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

IMPORTANT: THESE ARE NOT THE ACOEDI PAPER OR INNOVATION COMPETITION AWARDS

The IfEDI Africa Excellence Awards recognise people, institutions, partnerships and sustained practice. ACOEDI paper, research-presentation and innovation competition awards recognise work submitted or presented within the conference competition. A nomination for an Excellence Award is assessed on demonstrated track record and impact beyond a single conference paper, presentation, project pitch or innovation entry.

Why these awards matter

Africa needs institutions and professionals that can move from ideas and policy intentions to measurable improvements in economies, enterprises, places, institutions and livelihoods. The Excellence Awards create a visible benchmark for what exceptional economic development and innovation practice looks like.

- Measurable economic, institutional and/or social impact.
- Evidence-based practice and demonstrable results.
- Innovation in methods, systems, partnerships or implementation.
- Ethics, integrity, governance and professional excellence.
- Sustainability, institutionalisation and long-term value.
- Collaboration, inclusion and public value.
- Learning, replication and contribution to stronger economic development systems.

Who may be nominated?

Nominations are invited from across Africa. Nominees should demonstrate substantial professional, institutional or programme impact in Africa during the assessment period. Individuals and institutions may be nominated by colleagues, clients, partner organisations, community stakeholders or other credible nominators. Self-nomination is permitted for competitive categories unless otherwise stated.

- Economic development and Local Economic Development (LED) professionals.
- Municipalities, metropolitan governments and economic development units.
- Economic development, investment promotion and development agencies.
- Universities, research institutions and knowledge organisations.
- Government departments, public entities and development finance institutions.
- Innovation hubs, incubators, accelerators and entrepreneurship-support organisations.
- Chambers, industry associations, NGOs/NPOs and private-sector organisations undertaking economic development work.
- Cross-sector partnerships and collaborative economic development initiatives.
- Infrastructure, utilities, finance, skills, market, land and other enabling-system actors where the nomination demonstrates deliberate use of an enabler to advance economic development.

2026 assessment period

For competitive awards, the primary assessment period is the 36 months preceding the opening of nominations: 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2026. Earlier achievements may be referenced where they are necessary to demonstrate continuity, sustainability, institutionalisation, progression or longer-term impact. The Distinguished Contribution Special Honour is assessed on sustained contribution over an extended period and is not limited to this competitive assessment period.

2026 award categories

No.	Award	Eligible	What it recognises
1	Economic Development Professional of the Year	Individual	Flagship recognition for exceptional professional leadership, practice and measurable impact.
2	Young Economic Development Professional of the Year	Individual	For professionals aged 35 or younger at the nomination closing date who demonstrate exceptional early-career impact.
3	CEDEL Ethical Leadership Award	Individual	For exceptional ethical leadership, integrity, public value and professional conduct in economic development and innovation.
4	Economic Development & Innovation Institution of the Year	Institution	Apex institutional award for outstanding performance, capability, leadership and measurable development impact.
5	Municipal Economic Development Excellence Award	Institution	For a municipality or metropolitan government demonstrating strong economic development implementation and outcomes.
6	Economic Development Agency Excellence Award	Institution	For an agency demonstrating excellence in investment, enterprise development, economic transformation and implementation.
7	University & Knowledge Institution Economic Development Leadership Award	Institution	For converting research, skills, innovation and engagement into demonstrable economic development value.
8	Enterprise & Innovation Ecosystem Excellence Award	Institution	For strengthening entrepreneurs, enterprises, innovators and the systems that enable them to succeed.
9	Economic Development Partnership of the Year	Partnership	For a cross-institutional partnership delivering measurable development outcomes that no partner could achieve alone.

No.	Award	Eligible	What it recognises
10	Evidence-to-Policy & Practice Impact Award	Individual / Institution	For demonstrable translation of evidence, research or knowledge into policy, institutional decisions or implementation.
11	Economic Development Enablers & Catalysts Excellence Award	Institution / Partnership	For exceptional use of an enabling system, asset, instrument or capability to unlock measurable economic-development outcomes.
Special Honour	Distinguished Contribution to African Economic Development & Innovation	Special recognition	For sustained, exceptional contribution over an extended period. This is not a standard competitive category and is conferred through a special recognition process.

Economic Development Enablers & Catalysts

This pathway recognises how an enabling system, asset, instrument or capability is deliberately used to advance economic development. Application areas may include Energy for Economic Development; Water for Economic Development; Transport & Mobility for Economic Development; Digital Infrastructure, Data & AI for Economic Development; Land & Spatial Development for Economic Development; Finance and Procurement for Economic Development; Skills & Knowledge for Economic Development; Trade & Market Access for Economic Development; Tourism, Culture & Sport for Economic Development; Natural Resources and Food Systems for Economic Development; and Climate, Green & Circular Transition for Economic Development. These are application areas under one award pathway, not separate sector awards. Technical scale or sector performance alone is not sufficient: nominations must demonstrate measurable economic-development outcomes.

CEDEL AWARD AND PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATION

The CEDEL Ethical Leadership Award is an excellence recognition. It does not, by itself, confer professional certification or the CrCEDEL professional designation.

Awards independence, declarations and recusal

Nomination, judging and award outcomes are independent of IfEDI Africa membership, professional certification, sponsorship, commercial relationships, ACOEDI registration or conference participation. Service on an IfEDI Africa board, council, committee or other governance structure, or an institutional relationship with IfEDI Africa, does not automatically disqualify a nominee. Instead, all relevant relationships and potential conflicts must be fully declared.

Any judge, Awards Council member, Secretariat official or other person involved in the process who has a material personal, professional, financial, governance or institutional relationship with a nominee must disclose that relationship and recuse themselves from screening, scoring, verification, moderation and deliberation on that nomination. Each eligible nomination must be assessed by at least two non-conflicted independent adjudicators. Where a nominee has a material connection to the administration or governance of the awards, the nomination must be handled by non-conflicted personnel and adjudicators.

What judges will look for

All competitive awards use a common 60% core assessment, combined with 40% category-specific criteria. This allows awards to share a common IfEDI standard while still assessing what excellence means in each field.

Common criterion	Weight
------------------	--------

Common criterion	Weight
Demonstrated impact	20%
Quality and credibility of evidence	10%
Sustainability and institutionalisation	10%
Ethics, governance and professional standards	10%
Inclusion, collaboration and public value	10%
Category-specific excellence	40%

Judges will place greater weight on verified outcomes than on descriptions of activities. An award may be withheld where the required standard has not been met.

Nomination and adjudication process

1. Stage 1 - Nomination: submit the official nomination form, a concise impact narrative, 3-5 key pieces of supporting evidence and one independent referee endorsement.
2. Eligibility screening: the Secretariat confirms completeness, eligibility and declared conflicts. Eligibility screening does not determine merit.
3. Independent first-round assessment: every eligible nomination is assessed by at least two non-conflicted adjudicators before shortlisting and moderation.
4. Stage 2 - Finalist verification: shortlisted nominees may be asked for additional evidence, a second independent referee, verification interviews, reports or other documentation required by the adjudication panel.
5. Final adjudication: verified finalist evidence is assessed and moderated before final outcomes are confirmed.

Important dates

Activity	Date
Call for nominations opens	1 September 2026
Nominations close	15 October 2026, 23:59 SAST
Eligibility screening	16 October 2026
Independent first-round assessment	17 October 2026
Shortlisting and moderation	18 October 2026
Finalist notification	20 October 2026
Finalist evidence verification	21 October 2026
Final adjudication	22 October 2026
Outcome communication	22 October 2026
Awards ceremony at ACOEDI 2026	28 October 2026

Recognition of recipients

- Official IfEDI Africa Excellence Award certificate.
- Trophy or plaque.
- Recognition during ACOEDI 2026.
- Visibility through IfEDI Africa communication platforms.
- Potential inclusion in IfEDI excellence and knowledge publications, where applicable.
- Recognition within a continental network of economic development and innovation practitioners and institutions.

ACOEDI registration or attendance is not an adjudication requirement for the Excellence Awards. Finalists are encouraged to attend the ceremony where practical, but conference participation does not influence nomination, shortlisting or award outcomes.

Confidentiality and evidence handling

Information and evidence submitted for adjudication will be used for eligibility screening, judging, verification and awards administration. Access should be limited to authorised Secretariat personnel, Awards Council members and adjudicators with a legitimate role in the process. Confidential or commercially sensitive evidence will not be published without appropriate permission, and public recognition will use information approved for communication by the nominee or nominating institution.

How to nominate

Complete the official 2026 Nomination Form and submit the required Stage 1 documents electronically to the IfEDI Africa Awards Secretariat.

SUBMISSIONS

Email: awards@ifedi.org | info@ifedi.org

Website: www.ifedi.org

Telephone: +27 (0) 87 551 0639 | +27 (0) 65 924 3925

Closing date: 15 October 2026, 23:59 SAST

Nominate. Recognise. Inspire. Transform.