



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Dialogue on Innovative
Higher Education Strategies

HRK German Rectors' Conference
The Voice of the Universities

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

DIES LEADx - Leadership for Transforming Higher Education Institutions

DEADLINE: 4 MAY 2025 (23:59 CET)

The **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**, the **German Rectors' Conference (HRK)**, and the **University of Potsdam (UP)**, in partnership with a dedicated advisory board for this programme consisting of regional higher education organisations—the ASEAN University Network Gender Justice and Inclusion Thematic Network (AUN-GJI), the Espacio Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Educación Superior (ENLACES), the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA)—**invite female Vice Presidents (or equivalent positions) from higher education institutions in the designated target countries** (see eligibility criteria) to apply for the DIES Executive Programme "**LEADx – Leadership for Transforming Higher Education Institutions**".

DIES LEADx is part of the DIES programme (Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies), which aims at strengthening higher education management structures in countries of the Global South. DIES is jointly coordinated by the DAAD and the HRK and supported by funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Implemented by:



The DIES LEADx Advisory Board:



Supported by the



BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES – WHY BE PART OF DIES LEADx?

Higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide face increasing challenges in rapid global and regional transformations. To successfully navigate institutional change, enhance academic excellence, and foster sustainable networks, HEIs must adopt innovative leadership strategies. A modern, collaborative leadership approach—characterized by participation, cooperation and inclusion—is key to succeeding in this evolving landscape. While many leaders embrace inclusive and transformative leadership styles, structural and cultural barriers within higher education institutions and beyond can hinder their full potential. Unlocking the power of these leadership approaches, therefore, requires both a cultural shift and institutional transformation. By joining DIES LEADx, you will become part of a community of like-minded higher education leaders from DIES partner regions in the Global South dedicated to driving institutional transformation while actively promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

The DIES LEADx course is designed to equip **female Vice Presidents—or women in equivalent senior management positions—from HEIs in selected countries of the Global South** with essential skills such as leadership, communication, and change management, to drive institutional transformation, navigate complex stakeholder environments, and implement sustainable leadership structures within their institutions. DIES LEADx aims to foster a new paradigm of leadership characterized by inclusivity and collaboration.

Key objectives of the course include:

- Strengthening leadership and management capacities in higher education institutions
- Supporting change initiatives aligned with institutional strategies
- Embedding gender equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across leadership practices
- Multiply impact by mentoring mid-level leaders and integrating academic networks into change initiatives
- Enhancing communication, conflict resolution, and stakeholder engagement skills
- Fostering international collaboration and peer-learning among participants

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS – WHAT TO EXPECT?

The DIES LEADx course is a structured blended-learning programme for **25 participants** that combines two in-person workshops with synchronous and asynchronous online sessions, interactive, applied learning experiences, and hands-on change initiatives that participants implement with support from experts in a group mentoring setting. The course consists of **five modules**, each offering practical insights and interactive learning opportunities. Each module was developed and contextualized together with high-ranking European and regional experts, in consultation with an advisory board composed of regional higher education organisations. The modules are delivered by a core team of five experts—two from Europe and one each from the three target regions—and are detailed below:

MODULE 1: Strategy, Leadership and Governance

In this module, participants explore leadership approaches tailored to higher education institutions in a dynamic environment characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA), focusing on shared and distributed leadership as well as the impact of governance structures and organisational design. They employ strategic foresight tools, such as Future Modelling, to proactively identify and address institutional challenges. Through a blend of theoretical inputs, case studies, and peer learning, participants reflect on their personal values and leadership styles to drive transformative change.

MODULE 2: Leading Change and Organisational Development

In this module, participants tackle the dynamic challenges of leading change in higher education by distinguishing between induced and emerging change—including crisis management—and identifying key macro trends. They explore change management theories and advanced leadership models, such as adaptive and situative leadership, to overcome resistance and drive transformation. Through expert inputs, analytical exercises, and collaborative group work linked to their personal Change Initiatives, participants develop practical strategies for sustainable organisational development.

MODULE 3: Managing People, Conflict and Communication

In this module, participants focus on managing interpersonal and team dynamics by enhancing delegation, team building, and effective communication to foster trust and collaboration. They practice negotiation and conflict resolution techniques—including role-playing and simulations—to address diverse and culturally specific challenges, and to build inclusive, respectful environments. Through case studies and peer consulting, participants develop practical strategies to empower teams and resolve conflicts while promoting diversity, gender equality, and inclusion.

MODULE 4: Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Alliances

In this module, participants learn to engage external stakeholders and build strategic alliances in higher education, with a focus on regional and European contexts. They further develop skills to manage relationships with ministries, governmental bodies, and key partners while using tools like positioning analysis and benchmarking to identify growth opportunities. Through expert inputs and practical exercises, they explore data-driven decision-making, risk management, and securing third-party funding to support institutional goals and enhance operational efficiency.

MODULE 5: Empowered Leadership and Personal Growth

In this final module, participants synthesize earlier leadership and change management skills while focusing on personal growth and authentic, values-driven leadership. They deepen self-awareness, refine their leadership styles, and enhance public communication through mentorship, networking, and media training. Emphasizing self-management, intercultural competence, and work-life balance, the module equips participants to lead with resilience, confidence, and authenticity in diverse cultural contexts.

The format of the programme includes **expert-led workshops** facilitated by renowned international trainers from Europe and the partner regions, hands-on case studies and institutional exchanges, peer-learning and good practice sharing, and networking opportunities with leaders from the higher education sector.

Before the first in-person workshop, a virtual **kick-off session** (to be held in early September, exact date TBD) will be held to introduce participants to the programme, outline expectations, and facilitate initial networking. The **two in-person workshops** will take place at the **University of Potsdam, Germany**, close to Berlin, the capital of Germany. During the in-person workshops, participants will visit German universities, research organisations, and higher education policy institutions, gaining first-hand insights into the German academic and governance landscape. The in-person workshops will be held on the following dates which applicants should fully block to participate:

- **6-10 October 2025** (expected arrival on 5 October and departure on 11 October)
- **9-14 March 2026** (expected arrival on 8 March and departure on 15 March)

Throughout the programme, participants will have the opportunity to engage in **Fireside Chats** and experience **Keynotes** to connect with higher education leaders and experts worldwide. These sessions will take place both during the in-person workshops and online, with around **four virtual events** ensuring continuous engagement and learning. Keynotes will feature renowned experts addressing critical higher education topics such as governance, internationalisation, and strategic leadership, providing in-depth insights into sector-wide challenges and trends. Fireside Chats will offer a more informal, interactive space where experienced leaders share personal leadership experiences, challenges, and strategies, particularly in male-dominated institutional cultures. Together, these activities will foster meaningful dialogue, peer exchange, and strategic networking to support participants in leading effective institutional change.

FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE – INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE INITIATIVES

Participants are required to outline an institutional challenge in their application and provide initial strategies to address it. Throughout the course, these **Change Initiatives** will be further developed and implemented with guidance and mentoring from experts and peers. The initiatives should address key challenges at their home institutions, align with strategic development goals, and be relevant to each applicant's area of senior management (e.g., research or teaching and learning or internationalisation). While the initiatives should always consider gender equity, diversity, and inclusion as cross-cutting themes, they can also directly focus on these areas.

Examples of potential challenges include:

- Why do women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, and how can my university overcome structural barriers to provide equal opportunities?
- How can my institution integrate sustainability into governance and operations despite limited resources, resistance to change, and a lack of institutional commitment?

- How can my institution strengthen the integration of research and teaching to foster academic innovation, improve student learning outcomes, and support faculty in adopting research-informed pedagogies?
- What prevents my institution from effectively sharing institutional knowledge, and how can it create a centralised platform to enhance collaboration and institutional learning?

Applicants must submit their application with a nominated **Change Mentee**, a mid-level institutional leader at their home institution, who plays a key role in supporting the Change Initiative. The Change Mentee should demonstrate a strong interest in leadership development and be well-positioned to contribute to both the analysis and implementation of the initiative. In their application, participants must justify their selection by outlining the Mentee's role, expertise, and how their involvement will enhance the initiative's impact. This nomination is crucial, as the Change Mentee serves as both a collaborator and a future leader, fostering a sustainable and inclusive leadership culture within the institution.

During the programme, participants will collaborate in **Change Teams** to foster peer exchange and cross-institutional learning through regular feedback and discussions. Each team will be guided by an assigned expert who provides strategic mentoring, facilitates group discussions, and helps navigate challenges throughout the process.

Finally, participants will be encouraged to incorporate **External Exchanges** into their Change Initiatives, such as site visits or dissemination events, which can be conducted either in-person or digitally. These activities may involve neighbouring institutions or collaborations with fellow participants, fostering networking, knowledge exchange, and a broader impact.

ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION

Applicants must be **female Vice Presidents** at a higher education institution in the partner countries. Eligible roles also include **female leaders in equivalent positions** who are part of the executive senior management team (e.g. Vice Rector, Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor, depending on institutional naming conventions) with responsibility for a specific academic domain or institutional theme—**excluding top-level leadership positions such as President, Rector or Chancellor**. Candidates who have been recently appointed to these roles are eligible, provided they are in office by the start of the programme and can demonstrate readiness to implement a Change Initiative within their scope of responsibility. A high proficiency in English is required, as the course is conducted entirely in English.

Applications are welcome from higher education leaders in the following countries:

Africa:

Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Latin America:

Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru

Southeast Asia:

Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam

The DIES LEADx programme is open to **a maximum of 25 female leaders per cohort**. A selection committee consisting of renowned international higher education experts, supported by the DAAD, the HRK, and the University of Potsdam, will be responsible for the selection process. The selection will be based on eligibility, the target group match for both the main candidate and the Change Mentee, demonstrated personal and institutional motivation and commitment, the strength of the proposed institutional challenge and initial strategies, as well as the English proficiency. The diversity of countries and institutions will also be taken into account during the selection process.

PROGRAMME FUNDING AND PARTICIPATION FEE

The DIES LEADx programme costs will be covered mainly by the DAAD through funds of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The following expenses will be covered according to DAAD regulations:

- General course costs
- Flight costs for the participants (economy class) for both in-person workshops in Germany
- Local group transportation in Germany to the workshop venue and visits etc.
- Accommodation, breakfast, catering and selected group meals during the in-person workshops in Germany as indicated in the agendas
- Emergency health insurance during the in-person workshops in Germany

Participants' home institutions are expected to cover a fee of 500 EUR, along with national transportation costs (e.g., travel to and from the airport), visa fees and airport taxes, etc., and potential additional per diems if applicable.

HOW TO APPLY

Please submit your online application by **4 May 2025 at 23:59 CET** by following these steps:

1. Visit <https://dies-leadx.org/> to access information about the application process. The registration link will be posted there once available. **Registration opens on 26 March 2025.**
2. Once registration is open, register using your name and e-mail address.
3. You will receive an e-mail with a link to your individual application form and a password.
4. Follow the link in the e-mail and log in using your e-mail address and password.
5. Complete the online application survey.
6. Ensure your application is complete, including all **required application documents** as annexes (see below).
7. When the application is final, click on **"Hand in Application"** on the last page.

You may return to your online application as many times as needed to add or edit information until you click “Hand in Application.” Once submitted, your application is final and cannot be edited.

Please save a copy of all your application data—especially the details of your planned Change Initiative—for your records.

If you submit your application by mistake, please contact us immediately. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the DIES LEADx-Team at the University of Potsdam via diesleadx@uni-potsdam.de.

APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

To be considered, applicants must submit a complete application, which includes:

1. Online Application Form, including:
 - Personal information
 - A motivation statement
 - An analytical description of the Challenge and Change Initiative
 - The nomination of the Change Mentee (name, position, role etc.)
2. Letter of Commitment (PDF) signed by top institutional leadership, including
 - Confirmation of the candidate's participation and institutional support
 - Explanation of the candidate's role and responsibilities in senior leadership
 - Endorsement of the Change Initiative's alignment with the institutional strategy
 - A statement on the Change Initiative's relevance and expected institutional impact
 - Commitment to cover the 500 EUR contribution, national transportation costs, visa fees, airport taxes, etc., and potential additional per diems if applicable.
3. Letter of Interest from the Change Mentee, confirming acceptance of the nomination and commitment to supporting the Change Initiative.
4. Organisational Chart that shows your position within the institution as well as the position/unit of the Change Mentee.

Applications that do not include all components cannot be considered.

Contact details

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