

Development of Aspirational Nutrient-Dense Food Products for Adolescent Girls and Women of Reproductive Age to Prevent Anaemia

ICMR – Gates Foundation Grand Challenge

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Note: This document answers common questions about the Grand Challenge. It will be updated periodically as new queries are received. For questions not addressed here, contact Dr. Priyanka Gupta Bansal at gcanemia1@gmail.com.

SECTION 1 — Eligibility

Q. Who is eligible to apply?

This Grand Challenge is open to three categories of applicants:

- Food Industry Partners and Startups — companies or startups working in FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), fortification, or product innovation
- Academic and Research Institutions — universities and research centres with expertise in nutritional science, food technology, or behavioural science
- Non-Profit Organisations — organisations with a mandate in nutrition, health, or community engagement

Collaborations across these sectors are strongly encouraged as this may aid scale up. One organisation must serve as the lead applicant and primary grantee

Q. Can a for-profit company or startup apply as the lead organisation?

Yes. For-profit entities are explicitly eligible. The proposal must include a clear public health rationale and a commitment to affordability and equitable access for low-income populations. ICMR and the Gates Foundation will work with industry applicants to ensure the charitability of funded projects.

Q. Can organisations from outside India apply?

Proposals must be led by an India-based institution or organisation. International organisations may participate as collaborating partners or sub-grantees, provided the lead applicant is India-based and the primary work is conducted in India.

Q. Can a single organisation submit more than one proposal?

Yes. A single institution may submit multiple proposals, provided each has a different Principal Investigator (PI). An individual PI may lead only one proposal per round but may appear as co-investigator on others.

Q. Can early-career researchers or young investigators apply as Principal Investigator?

Yes. There are no restrictions on career stage. Proposals are evaluated on the strength of the science, the team's combined expertise, and the innovation — not on the seniority of the PI.

Q. Are consortia or multi-institution proposals encouraged?

Yes, strongly. Collaborations that bring together nutrition science, food technology, and behavioural science are viewed favourably by reviewers. One institution must serve as the lead applicant and primary grantee; partner organisations are included as sub-grantees with clearly defined roles.

Q. Do applicants need to be part of an ICMR or Gates Foundation partner network?

No. Any qualified applicant meeting the eligibility criteria may apply, regardless of existing affiliations with ICMR or the Gates Foundation.

SECTION 2 — Application Process**Q. What does a complete application consist of?**

A complete application includes four components:

- Applicant profile submitted via the Google Form on the application portal- <https://forms.gle/egd92XzphwgEc3ya8>. Captures lead applicant institution, principal investigator, co-applicants, organisational type, and contact details
- Proposal document —submitted as a single Microsoft Word (.docx) or PDF file, comprising the proposal (3–4 pages) plus the budget table and budget narrative (up to 2 additional pages), using the budget template provided in the Application Instructions
- References and Annexures-may be included within or alongside the proposal document

Q. What is the page limit for the proposal?

The proposal document must not exceed 3–4 pages (including figures and references), with up to 2 additional pages permitted for the budget table and budget narrative. The total submission must therefore not exceed 6 pages. There is no separate budget file — the budget is integrated into the same document as the proposal.

The five required proposal sections and their suggested lengths are:

- Section 1 — Introductory Information (½ page)
- Section 2 — Proposal Information (1 page)
- Section 3 — Development Plan and Path to Impact (½–1 page)
- Section 4 — Cost and Manufacturing Plan (½–1 page)
- Section 5 — Team and Capacity (½ page)

Q. What are the formatting requirements for the proposal document?

The proposal must follow these formatting requirements:

- Font: Arial or Times New Roman
- Font size: 11-point or larger
- Margins: at least 0.5 inches on all sides
- Line spacing: single
- Character spacing: standard (neither expanded nor condensed)
- File type: Microsoft Word (.docx) or Adobe PDF (.pdf)
- Maximum file size: 3 MB or less

Applications that do not adhere to these restrictions may be blocked from submission and review.

Section-level page guidance is provided in the Application Instructions document available on the portal.

Q. What is the submission deadline?

Applications must be submitted by 3rd July 2026 at 11:30 PM IST. Late submissions will not be considered. You may revise and re-submit at any time before the deadline.

Q. Can proposals be edited after submission?

Yes. Proposals can be revised and re-submitted at any time before the stated deadline. After the deadline, no modifications will be accepted.

Q. Is attendance at the pre-application webinar mandatory?

Attendance is strongly recommended but not mandatory. Slides and a recording will be made available on the Grand Challenge webpage for those unable to attend.

Q. Are letters of support or collaboration required at submission?

Letters of collaboration from partner organisations are encouraged but not mandatory at the application stage. Shortlisted proposals may be asked to provide formal institutional endorsements during due diligence.

SECTION 3 — Budget & Funding**Q. What is the maximum grant amount and project duration?**

Each selected proposal may receive up to Rs. 1,00,00,000 (One Crore INR) for Year 1 (Phase 1: Prototype Development), with a project duration of one year

Q. What costs are eligible under this grant?

Eligible costs correspond to the budget categories in the official Budget Template provided with the application package. These are:

- Personnel — salaries, wages, fringe benefits, tuition, or other direct compensation for project staff (list roles and effort allocation across activities such as product formulation, consumer testing, and sensory evaluation)
- Sub-contracts — contracts with external organisations for specific services (list separately if more than one)
- Sub-grants — grants to partner organisations (list separately if more than one; detailed sub-budgets not required at application stage but may be requested during due diligence)
- Capital Assets / Equipment — major equipment or infrastructure items required for prototype development and testing; must be essential, non-duplicative, and not already available at the institution
- Travel — domestic travel costs for field work, consumer testing, pilot studies, or dissemination activities (international travel not eligible unless essential to the project)
- Supplies — consumables, food ingredients, fortification premixes, laboratory materials, and packaging supplies
- Other Expenses — publication costs, communication, regulatory consultations, sensory evaluation panels, or other allowable costs

In addition to the budget table, a one-paragraph Budget Narrative must be provided explaining the major cost drivers and how costs relate to planned activities and target outcomes. The narrative should cover:

- Rationale for the largest budget line items
- How personnel effort is allocated across project activities (e.g., product formulation, consumer testing, sensory evaluation)
- Justification of any capital equipment purchases as essential and non-duplicative
- Any cost-sharing, in-kind contributions, or co-funding from partners

Note: The Budget Template and Narrative must be submitted as a part of the proposal document (not as a separate file), within the 2 additional pages permitted for this purpose Budget-related questions should be directed to Dr. Priyanka Gupta Bansal at gcanemia1@gmail.com.

SECTION 4 — Scope & Technical Requirements

Q. What food product formats are in scope?

The challenge is open to a broad range of food product formats, including:

- Nutrient-dense or fortified snacks — bars, bites, chikkis, savoury crispies and similar formats
- Drinkable formats — ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages, powder drink mixes
- Novel delivery formats — gummies, chewables, sprinklers, or hybrid food-supplement products
- Products incorporating regionally relevant ingredients such as millets, seeds, spices, and plant-based sources
- Convenience or on-the-go formats aligned with modern consumption habits

Products should be positioned in mainstream food categories — not as medicines or supplements — and should be aspirational, desirable, and suitable for daily consumption. Products high in fat, sugar, and salt will not be considered.

Q. Are traditional pharmaceutical supplement forms (tablets, capsules) eligible?

No, not as the primary product. Proposals focused solely on tablets or capsules without meaningful food-format innovation will not be funded.

Q. What is the target iron content per serving?

Proposals should aim to deliver approximately 4–5 mg of iron per serving, consistent with recommended daily intake targets for the target population. Higher or lower amounts may be considered if scientifically justified. Applicants must address the form of iron used, its bioavailability profile, potential interactions with inhibitors common in Indian vegetarian diets, and use of synergistic ingredients such as Vitamin C to enhance absorption.

Q. Should proposals address all three age sub-groups?

No. Proposals may focus on one or more sub-groups, adolescent girls (10–19 years), young women/WRA (20–35 years), or older WRA (35–49 years). The target population must be clearly specified and the product concept meaningfully adapted to that group's preferences, consumption behaviours, and nutritional needs.

Q. Are proposals focused on basic or mechanistic research eligible?

Not in isolation.. Proposals must be grounded in consumer insights, which should inform and drive the product development process. The proposed product must then be developed and tested for sensory quality and consumer appeal. Pure mechanistic research without a consumer insight-led product development and sensory/consumer acceptability testing component will not be funded.

Q. Are simple or low-technology solutions acceptable?

Yes. Fit-for-purpose, accessible solutions are often preferred, especially those scalable in resource-limited settings. Innovation must be meaningful in terms of product desirability, consumer acceptability, or nutritional delivery, not necessarily in technological complexity.

SECTION 5 — Review & Selection

Q. How will proposals be reviewed?

Proposals go through a three-stage process:

- Stage 1 — Initial screening by ICMR for completeness and eligibility
- Stage 2 — Independent expert review and scoring against published criteria

- Stage 3 — Shortlisted proposals presented to ICMR's Competent Authority for final approval; shortlisted applicants may be invited to present to an expert panel

Q. What are reviewers looking for?

Reviewers will assess proposals on:

- Clear problem framing and a well-defined target population (adolescent girls and/or WRA)
- Innovative product concept with strong consumer and behavioural insights
- Evidence-based nutritional formulation and a credible bioavailability strategy
- Practical consumer acceptability and pilot testing plan
- Feasible pathway to scale through public health programs and/or commercial channels
- Multidisciplinary team with relevant expertise across nutrition, food technology, and behavioural science
- Cost considerations suitable for low- and middle-income settings

Q. How many proposals will be funded?

There is no predetermined number. ICMR and the Gates Foundation aim to fund a complementary portfolio of proposals across product formats and target populations. The number of awards will depend on submission quality and portfolio considerations.

Q. Is there a provision to request that a particular individual not be assigned as a reviewer for a proposal?

No. However, all reviewers are required to declare conflicts of interest and those with declared conflicts will not be assigned to review the relevant proposal. The reviewer list is not publicly disclosed.

Q. Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback?

Due to the volume of submissions and the review timeline, applicants whose proposals are not selected may receive a decline notification without detailed feedback. ICMR will endeavour to share summary feedback where feasible.

SECTION 6 — Contact & Support

Q. How can queries not covered in this FAQ be submitted?

Email your queries to Dr. Priyanka Gupta Bansal at gcanemia1@gmail.com. Questions of general interest will be incorporated into updated versions of this FAQ, posted on the Grand Challenge webpage.

Q. How can applicants verify that their application has been submitted successfully?

An email confirmation will be sent to the registered email address of the Principal Investigator upon successful submission. If you do not receive confirmation within 24 hours, please contact the ICMR helpdesk.

Q. Will this FAQ be updated after the webinar?

Yes. This document will be updated periodically throughout the open call period. The most recent version will always be available on the Grand Challenge webpage. Applicants are advised to check for updates before finalising their submission.

Applications are due by **3rd July 2026 at 11:30 PM IST**. Late submissions will not be considered.

Contact: Dr. Priyanka Gupta Bansal | gcanemia1@gmail.com