

PARTICIPANTS' HANDBOOK

Information on the **Innovate
for GMC** challenge

COHORT 1 Oct-Dec 2025

About the Program

The Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), envisioned by His Majesty The King, is a symbol of Bhutan's future: values-led, innovative, and globally relevant model for development. More than an economic hub, GMC is positioned as a living experiment on mindful living in the 21st century, a space where economic development, environmental stewardship and spiritual well-being converge.

This vision presents an opportunity for young Bhutanese to shape the future of the country by contributing ideas and reimagining how societies can thrive when grounded in values. To align Bhutan's youth with this opportunity, a youth innovation program will be launched as the flagship innovation program of GMC. The challenge seeks to empower young Bhutanese to co-create solutions to pressing national and global challenges through four pathways: (i) policy, (ii) entrepreneurship, (iii) non-profit projects, and (iv) blended fourth sector initiatives.

The program aims to become a national pipeline of changemakers, a proving ground for civic innovation, and a gateway into Bhutan's evolving innovation ecosystem. Selected participants will form dynamic innovation units supported by experienced mentors and industry experts, fundings, and strategic resources. The teams will develop actionable and mindful solutions that can be integrated into the GMC context and scaled across Bhutan.

The Youth Innovation Program will sandbox the growing details of GMC's principles. Youths will innovate for-benefit enterprise models that blend social purpose, financial sustainability, and inclusive ownership. By cultivating talent, fostering collaboration and anchoring innovation within the Bhutanese context, the youth innovation program seeks to inspire a generation of leaders who will shape not just the future of GMC but also Bhutan's role in the global space.

Program Objectives

- **Cultivate a culture of civic innovation.** The Youth Innovation Program aims to nurture a generation of Bhutanese who see innovation and problem-solving as a civic duty—youth who will take ownership of Bhutan's future.
- **Develop home-grown, context-sensitive solutions.** The program will prioritize solutions designed for Bhutan's realities while carrying lessons that are globally relevant.
- **Empower youth with practical skills.** Participants will gain hands-on experience in design thinking, systems analysis, and public policy—tools they can apply in their own lives, workplaces, and communities.
- **Integrate learnings to inform the development of a GMC Innovation Lab** that connects to national and global platforms.

Guiding Principles

Innovate for GMC is anchored in principles that reflect Bhutan's values and the spirit of Gelephu Mindfulness City. Every activity, decision, and solution under the program will be guided by these commitments:

- **Values-led engagement.** Uphold mindfulness, harmony, and sustainability as the foundation of innovation.
- **Experimentation with purpose.** Encourage creativity, resilience, and learning from failure—innovation as a disciplined practice.
- **Collaboration and inclusivity.** Embrace diversity of gender, region, skills, and perspectives, ensuring solutions are co-created with communities.
- **Action-oriented mindset.** Deliver practical, scalable, and impactful solutions that can be tested, refined, and adopted.
- **Integrity and responsibility.** Maintain transparency, accountability, and service to the nation in all actions.

Eligibility Criteria & Compliance Requirements

Innovate for GMC is open to a wide spectrum of young Bhutanese, reflecting the diversity of talent that will shape Gelephu Mindfulness City and the nation's future.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Age:** 20–35 years old.
- **Citizenship:** Open only to Bhutanese nationals.
- **Background:** Applicants may come from any sector: students, graduates, early-career professionals, entrepreneurs, civil servants, or private sector actors.
- **Education:** A minimum of a diploma in any field.
- **Commitment:** Applicants must show a genuine interest in civic innovation, public policy, and social impact, and be able to commit to the full duration of the program.

Special Conditions

- **Civil Servants:** To ensure agencies remain functional while enabling youth participation, a maximum of five participants per government department will be allowed in each Youth Innovation Program cohort. Additional interested applicants will be encouraged to apply in future rounds. Participants are required to obtain no-objection letter from their employer confirming their availability for the program.
- **Private Sector & CSOs:** Participants from companies/organizations are required to obtain a no-objection letter from their employer confirming their availability for the program.

Compliance Requirements

- Submit a **RBP security clearance certificate**.
- Provide a **medical certificate** confirming fitness to participate.
- The medical certificate will be issued by the Ministry of Health only after the shortlisted candidate goes through a medical screening process.
- Undergo a **drug test**, coordinated by the Ministry of Health
- Sign the **Code of Conduct** and consent forms for participation, data use, and media documentation.

Communication and Boundaries:

- Mentors and participants must communicate only through the official Innovate for GMC website or portal.
- Personal emails, phone calls, direct messaging or social media connections between mentors and participants are not allowed during the program.
- Sign and acknowledge understanding of the Participant Agreement.

Program Schedule Overview

The program is designed to equip all participants with essential skills in innovation and complex problem-solving. It begins with foundational modules that establish a strong base for developing innovative thinking and analytical approaches. Building on this foundation, participants will engage in practical, activity-based sessions that encourage them to identify and analyze real-world issues, formulate clear and professional problem statements, and prototype and test creative solutions. The journey culminates in a **Demo Day**, where participants will pitch their solutions, showcasing their ability to translate ideas into actionable innovations.

October 2025		
Date	Program	Remarks
1st and 2nd	Travel to Pelrithang	All participants to arrive by 2nd
3rd till 5th	Orientation from Innovation for GMC and Youth Integration Training	From I4GMC and Youth Integration Training Program at MPH Pelrithang
7th	Inauguration of Innovate for GMC	
8th till 17th	Youth Integration Training Program	Conducted by De-suung Skilling Program and RBP at Pelrithang
18th	GMC Session - Lecture 1	At Pelrithang
19th till 26th	GMC Excursion	Explore GMC borders from Lhamoizingkha to Nganglam
27th	Travel back to GMC	End of the program at Pelrithang
28th till 31st	GMC Lecture Series	At GMC

November	
Program	Remarks
Field Trip	Arranged by I4GMC Team
Session on AI; Creativity and Innovation; Entrepreneurship; and Religion	At RRCO Hall/Thromde Hall/JPWTI/Gelephu High School Auditorium
9th till 11th Prepare for 70th Birth Anniversary of 4th Druk Gyalpp	
Series of Guest Speakers	Participants can sign up for the sessions
Leisure Activities	Participants to explore according to their area of interest
Community Services such as volunteering at the Gelephu International Airport, Dog Shelter, clean up campaign etc.	All the participants are expected to contribute to community services
Learning/Workplace Excursion	If required the workplace/learning excursion will be arranged by I4GMC Team prior to 2 weeks notification by the team leaders

December	
Program	Remarks
Sessions on Business Plan Development; Storytelling and Narrative Building; Partnership Building and Scaling	Participants will be equipped with necessary skills with the final pitching and presentation at RRCO/Thromde Hall
Pitching Sessions	All groups to present with their ideation/proposals at RRCO/Thromde Hall
11th till 20th Preparation and Celebration of 118th National Day	
Final Ideas Presentation	Best ideas to present/pitch to investors/stakeholders etc.
Closing and Awarding of Certificates	
Departure of 1st Cohort by the end of December	

Expected Deliverables

By the end of each month, each individual/team is expected to:

- Submit a short personal reflection at the end of every two weeks to document their learning journey.
- By the end of November, develop a draft business plan or project/policy brief (problem statement/solutions, stakeholder analysis, risk analysis, assumptions etc.).
- By the end of December, each participant/group finalizes the business plan or project/policy brief, present and pitch to the mentors/potential stakeholders.

Field Visits

To connect classroom learning with real-world contexts, participants are encouraged to engage in exposure visits, including but not limited to:

- De-suung Skilling Centres
- Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck Super FabLab
- Bio-Fab Lab at the College of Natural Resources
- Bhur Organics
- Khenrig Namsum Cooperative
- Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative
- Motanga Industrial Park
- Menjong Sorig Pharmaceuticals Limited
- Thimphu Tech Park
- Trong, Zhemgang (Tourism Knowledge Centre)
- Startup Centre, Thimphu/Samtse
- Raising Coffee Nursery for climate resilient coffee plantation (UNDP Initiative)
- Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation into Tourism Sector In Bhutan (UNDP Initiative)
- Climate and Health Co-investment Facility Coordination Programme (UNDP Initiative)
- People Centric and Inclusive Access to Justice (UNDP Initiative)
- Plastic waste management and circular economy (UNDP Initiative)

Support for Participants

The youth innovation program is a sandboxing of the Gelephu Mindfulness City, the city built on mindful principles of enabling innovation through safe environment and conducive policy. As participants, you will have access to structured support systems for your learning, wellbeing, and safety.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a cornerstone of the Youth Innovation Program learning experience. To help you refine your ideas, gain sectoral insights, and expand your networks, your group will have access to mentors who are **industry experts, policymakers, entrepreneurs, academics, and innovators** from Bhutan and abroad.

What You Can Expect

- **Expertise on Demand.** Mentors will only be available for a limited number of hours during the program. Their role is to provide **high-level, targeted advice** rather than daily supervision.
- **Real-World Insights.** Mentors bring experience and domain expertise — expect practical feedback, examples, and networks.
- **Connections.** Where appropriate, mentors may point you to further resources, contacts, or opportunities.

What We Expect from You

- **Be Prepared.** Come to mentorship sessions with a clear agenda and specific questions (e.g., “How do we test our prototype with users?” rather than “What do you think of our idea?”).
- **Respect Their Time.** Use sessions efficiently, take notes, and follow up only through agreed-upon channels.
- **Follow Up with Action.** Incorporate advice into your project and share updates with your mentor at the next touchpoint.

Boundaries

- All mentorship interactions must remain professional. Personal advances, favoritism, or requests unrelated to the program are prohibited.
- If you feel uncomfortable during any interaction, report it immediately to the Safeguarding Officer.

How to Maximize Mentorship

- Treat each session as an opportunity to “pressure test” your ideas.
- Listen actively, but remember you are not obliged to accept all advice — filter what best fits your project.
- Build a habit of sending a **short thank-you note** or update — it strengthens relationships for the future.

Learning & Program Support

- **Mentorship.** One-to-one and group guidance from national and international mentors.
- **Training.** Access to foundational and elective workshops, including guest lectures and clinics.
- **Resources.** Use of co-working spaces, labs, and digital platforms to support your innovation journey.
- **Stipend.** The youth innovation program expects its participants to learn financial literacy and management. Therefore, each participant is paid a fixed monthly stipend. This stipend is expected to be used for accommodations, fooding, etc.
- **Travel & Logistics.** Transport, accommodation, and field visits organized by the program.
- **Recognition.** Certificates, recommendation letters, and opportunities to showcase your work at Demo Day.

Wellbeing & Safety

- **Medical Emergencies.** In the event of an illness, participants can access medical services at the Central Regional Referral Hospital in Gelephu. In cases of emergencies or accidents, participants must call the project management team at the listed emergency contacts.
- **Counseling & Psychosocial Support.** Access to confidential counseling services if participants experience stress, trauma, or personal challenges during the program. A project support team consisting of trained counselors and clinical counselors are available if needed.

Safeguarding & Harassment

The youth innovation program enforces a zero-tolerance policy for harassment, abuse, and discrimination. To protect participants:

- A **Safeguarding Officer** will be appointed and introduced at orientation. This officer is your first point of contact for any concerns.
- A **Welfare Committee**, composed of independent experts, will handle complaints with impartiality and confidentiality.
- **Clear boundaries for officials and mentors:** all communications must remain professional, and personal advances or favoritism are prohibited. Officials from the project team and mentors commit to a shared code of conduct.

Reporting & Redressal Mechanism

If you experience or witness misconduct, bullying, harassment, or unsafe behavior:

- **Report immediately** to the Safeguarding Officer (verbally or in writing).
- The officer will **acknowledge your report within 48 hours** and ensure immediate safety if required.
- The officer will conduct a **preliminary investigation** and submit findings to the Welfare Committee within 7 days.
- The Welfare Committee will review the case and decide on **appropriate actions within 2 weeks**.
- You will be informed of the outcome, and confidentiality will be maintained throughout.
- Where necessary, cases will be referred directly to law enforcement authorities.

Possible actions include: verbal reminders, written warnings, loss of privileges, suspension, or removal from the program. Any act that constitutes a crime will be handed to the authorities.

Emergency & Support Contacts

These will be shared in your orientation pack and displayed at all Innovate for GMC venues:

- Medical emergency hotline
- Safeguarding Officer contact
- Program Support Desk contact (logistics, general help)
- Harassment & grievance reporting email

Key Emergency Numbers



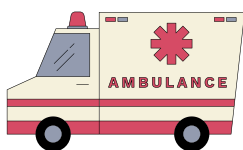
113 – General
Emergency Hotline



110 – Fire & Rescue
Services



111 – Traffic



112 – Ambulance &
Medical Emergencies



999 – Disaster
Communication
Helpline Unit

The Royal Bhutan Police offers toll-free emergency services to guarantee an immediate response to accidents, crimes, and public safety concerns.

Participant Pledge & Expectations

As a Innovate for GMC participant, you are part of a unique national initiative. Considerable effort and resources have been invested to bring you here. In return, we ask you to uphold this pledge:

My Pledge as a Innovate for GMC Participant

I commit to:

- **Respect the opportunity.** Make full and responsible use of the resources provided including stipends, mentorship, training, and facilities.
- **Engage wholeheartedly.** Participate in all sessions, field visits, and activities with energy and focus, knowing this program is designed for adults who are trusted to take initiative.
- **Be accountable.** Deliver work of high quality, respect deadlines, and actively contribute to my team.
- **Uphold values.** Live by the principles of respect, integrity, inclusivity, and mindfulness at all times.
- **Protect the program.** Safeguard the reputation of Innovate for GMC, GMC, and Bhutan through my conduct.

Commitment to Deliverables

During the program, I will submit:

- **Personal reflections** to capture my growth and learning journey.
- Team deliverables, including project briefs, prototypes, and presentations.
- A final project report and presentation at Demo Day.

Attendance and Withdrawal

- Full attendance in all mandatory sessions is required.
- Withdrawal for reasons beyond the candidate's control (illness, family emergency, natural disasters) will be accepted as valid grounds for withdrawal.
- Voluntary withdrawals based on reasons within the candidate's control will be subjected to refund of expenses incurred.
- If a participant discontinues work on their product/idea and no longer wishes to pursue it, the participant may grant Innovate for GMC a non-exclusive license to further develop or showcase the product/idea in the spirit of the program. If no such agreement is made, the ownership remains solely with the participant(s).

A Call to Action - Innovate for GMC is a pipeline for Bhutan's future leaders and innovators. By joining this cohort, you are not only investing in your own growth, but also carrying the hopes of a nation. Approach each day with courage, discipline, and creativity. **Your journey here has the power to shape the future of GMC, and Bhutan itself.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Critical information about the
Innovate for GMC challenge
at a glance.

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1. About the Program

What is Innovate for GMC?

The Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), envisioned by His Majesty The King, is a symbol of Bhutan's future: values-led, innovative, and globally relevant model for development. More than an economic hub, GMC is positioned as a living experiment on mindful living in the 21st century, a space where economic development, environmental stewardship and spiritual well-being converge.

Innovate for GMC presents an opportunity for young Bhutanese minds to shape the future of the country by contributing bold ideas to build GMC by identifying, discovering, and reimagining solutions to real-world issues across. The challenge seeks to empower young Bhutanese to co-create solutions to pressing national and global challenges through four pathways: (i) policy, (ii) entrepreneurship, (iii) non-profit projects, and (iv) blended fourth sector initiatives.

For three months, selected participants will form dynamic innovation units supported by experienced mentors and industry experts, fundings, and strategic resources. The teams will develop actionable and mindful solutions that can be integrated into the GMC context and scaled across Bhutan.

What is the purpose of the program?

The Innovate for Gelephu Mindfulness City program is designed to cultivate a generation of youth who are driven by civic responsibility and innovation. It seeks to develop home-grown, context-sensitive solutions tailored to the needs of Gelephu Mindfulness City while equipping participants with practical skills in design thinking, system analysis, and experimentation. Through this process, the program aims to build a strong pool of young changemakers and future leaders who will play a vital role in shaping Bhutan's future.

What are the expected deliverables?

Participants will work in teams to produce actionable concepts, models, or proposals for different aspects of city development categorized into four themes. At the end of the program, each team will submit a final report; prototype or concept demo; policy memo or pilot proposal; and a final presentation. The best ideas may be taken forward into detailed planning stages and implementation with the possibility of the youth themselves involved in the implementation.

2. Eligibility

Who can participate?

1. Bhutanese Youth aged 20 – 35 from diverse educational, professional, and geographic backgrounds are welcome.
2. A minimum of a diploma qualification is required.
3. Fully committed to reside in Gelephu for the three-month challenge duration

What qualities or skills are required?

No specific skills are required. Applicants should have curiosity, creativity, and commitment to teamwork.

Can students or those currently employed participate?

Youths within the age range, irrespective of their employment or social status can participate. They must be able to commit to key program events and deadlines while balancing other responsibilities.

Can Bhutanese citizens studying abroad apply?

Yes, Bhutanese citizens studying abroad can apply, as long as they are willing to relocate to Gelephu for the entire duration of the program.

How many participants will be selected?

Each cohort will consist of a minimum of 500 youth participants. For further details on each cohort, refer to the website.

3. Application Process

How do I apply?

Applications can be submitted online through the program's official portal. You'll need to provide personal details, your educational background, and an updated CV.

How are participants selected?

Selection will be based on the CV submitted and thematic area selected.

How will I know if I am selected?

The application timeline will be provided on the program website. Selected participants will be notified via email.

Whom can I contact for questions during the application process?

Contact details are available on the official program website.

What documents are required if I am employed?

In addition to the general requirements, selected applicants who are employed will need to produce a "No Objection Certificate" issued by their agency.

If I don't get selected in the first cohort, can I reapply in the next cohort?

Yes. You will have the opportunity to apply again in the next cohort if you are still interested. As long as you continue to meet the eligibility criteria at the time of application, you are welcome to reapply and bring forward your ideas and motivation.

Can I apply for the challenge if I am planning to sit for RCSC main examination?

We would encourage you to apply for the next cohort if you are planning to sit for RCSC main examination.

4. Logistics & Practical Arrangements

Where will the challenge take place?

The challenge will be hosted in the Gelephu Mindfulness City.

What kind of accommodation options will be provided – hostels, apartments, or co-living?

Youth will be provided with a fixed monthly allowances, from which they are expected to cover their accommodation and meals, and local transportation. The Governor's office of GMC will facilitate by providing a list of available accommodation options at a discounted price. Participants are encouraged to explore co-living options.

What about travel costs?

Travel to and from Gelephu, including the mandatory field visit, will be arranged by the Program. In addition, the program will cover a one-time travel outside Gelephu related to the challenge. Participants will, however, be responsible for their own local transportation.

What resources and facilities are available?

Participants will have access to:

- Workspace and internet for team collaboration
- Stationery and prototyping supplies
- Shared meeting rooms for mentor sessions and presentations
- Program management and admin support

What does a typical daily schedule look like?

The challenge does not follow a rigid daily timetable. Participants are expected to manage their own schedules during the entire program. However, they need to attend key workshops, mentor check-ins, showcase events, and other events outlined in the handbook.

5. Work Streams & Teaming

What are “work streams”?

Work streams are thematic focus areas such as sustainability, smart infrastructure, culture & identity, economy, governance, and social inclusion under four broad categories which are;

1. Social/Cultural
2. Business/Commercial
3. Governance/Planning/Strategy
4. Engineering/Architecture/Urban Planning. Participants will join one stream aligned with their interest and skills.

How will the teams be formed?

A: A team of 1-10 participants will be formed to ensure diversity in skills, backgrounds, and perspectives. Each team will need to identify their team lead and the program management team will ensure timely check-ins and guidance whenever required.

How large are the teams?

Each team may consist of 1- 10 participants.

Will I be assigned to a thematic focus area (health, education, green infrastructure, etc.), or can I choose?

Participants will be matched to a thematic focus area based on the topics they show interest in during the application process, along with their CVs. This way, you'll be working in an area that best aligns with passion and like minded group members.

Will the program ensure gender balance, regional diversity, or disadvantaged groups?

Yes, the challenge will make efforts to ensure diversity and inclusion, with attention to gender balance, regional representation, and participation from disadvantaged groups.

Is the challenge only for GMC-related solutions, or can ideas also address national or global issues?

The challenge is focused on GMC-related solutions but the wider national or global issues can be addressed as well.

Can participants choose their own mentors, or will they be assigned?

Once teams are formed, the program management team will introduce participants to a pool of national and international experts for guidance and teams are encouraged to reach out and find their mentors.

6. Deliverables & Evaluation

What will participants be expected to produce?

Each team will submit:

- Prototype or Concept Demo
- Policy Memo or Pilot Proposal,
- If selected, presentation at a "Demo Day" to senior officials and partners

How will the ideas be evaluated?

Ideas will be evaluated by designated evaluators based on predefined criteria.

Are prototypes required?

Teams may submit digital or physical prototypes depending on the solution and resources available. Teams may also choose to work on policy issues that do not require physical prototypes.

Is this challenge mainly symbolic, or will real implementation follow?

The challenge is designed to go beyond symbolism. While the challenge provides a platform for learning and idea generation, it also creates clear pathways for implementation. If a team develops innovative ideas, pragmatic solutions, or workable prototypes that are selected by the evaluation board, they will be given opportunities to further develop and scale their projects. This may include pilot funding, policy integration, mentorship, partnership or follow-up fellowships.

7. Timeline

What is the challenge timeline?

The challenge will be for three months, with structured workshops, mentoring sessions, field immersions and a final showcase. The details are available in the handbook.

What happens after the challenge ends?

Selected ideas may move forward into pilot projects or policy discussions. Participants may also be invited to join advisory networks for future stages of the city's development.

8. Participation & Benefits

Do participants get paid?

A: A fixed monthly allowance (Nu.30,000/-) will be paid, which should cover logistics like meals, accommodation, local transport, stationaries, etc.

What mentorship or support will the participants receive?

Participants will receive guidance from experts, access to seed funding for prototypes, workspace, and networking opportunities with public, private, and civil society actors.

What do participants gain from the challenge?

- Hands-on experience in innovation and policy design
- Mentorship from experts in diverse fields
- A certificate of participation and recommendation letter upon request
- Networking with peers, professionals, and policymakers

What happens if a participant drops out midway?

Full attendance in all mandatory sessions is required. Reasons beyond the candidate's control (illness, family emergency, natural disasters) will be accepted as valid grounds for withdrawal. Voluntary withdrawals based on reasons within the candidate's control will be subjected to refund of expenses incurred.

Is full-time participation mandatory, or can it be hybrid/remote in some cases?

Full-time participation is mandatory.

How much time commitment is required?

Participants are expected to manage their own time to complete the project within 3 months. However, attendance is expected for key program events (orientation, midpoint check-in, final showcase).