



Request for Application (RFA)

Women Leadership in STEM

**Under Grand Challenges India
Project Management Unit, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance
Council
(PMU-BIRAC)
(A Government of India Enterprise)**

and

WomenLift Health, India

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Call Opens | 27th October 2023 |
| Closure of Submission | 20th December 2023, 1600hrs IST |



Introduction

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2012, where both parties agreed to collaborate on scientific and technological research to alleviate some of the world's most critical global health and development issues, for the benefit of the people of India and other developing countries. Grand Challenges India (GCI), a Program Management Unit of this joint-partnership housed at Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), New Delhi, seeks to identify opportunities to support studies focused on early-stage research and product development to tackle health and developmental issues with special emphasis on innovative, impactful research in existing strategies or creating completely new opportunities and pathways to the outcomes, sought on the broader global health and developmental challenges.

Research supports that having a gender-diverse leadership team positively impacts organizational performance. This effect arises from a wider range of perspectives, enhanced diversity of thought, improved morale, and increased resilience within the workforce. Empowering women in leadership roles serves to challenge traditional gender biases, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society that benefits all. Pursuing this objective, the Grand Challenges India partners, in collaboration with WomenLift Health, India, a non-profit organization dedicated to accelerating the progress of women into senior leadership positions by shaping their living and working environments, are launching a leadership development program. This program, named Women Leadership in STEM, is designed for mid-career women in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Its overarching goal is to amplify the influence and authority of women in STEM and stimulate a systemic change towards gender equality in leadership.

Here, we invite applications from women to participate in the Women Leadership in STEM program, aimed at fostering leadership skills and cultivating a diverse global network for its participants.

2. Background

In India, the proportion of female graduates at the tertiary level in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is quite high compared to many developed countries such as the US, UK, and Germany¹. However, only a small fraction of these graduates actually enter the STEM workforce or attain leadership positions. The challenges that impede women's participation in STEM careers and leadership roles are multidimensional, which includes gender stereotypes and biases, socio-cultural factors, work-life balance, limited access to networks and mentors, inadequate opportunities for skill development and advancement etc.

¹ <https://theprint.in/opinion/more-indian-women-are-in-stem-but-few-becoming-leaders-hard-to-retain-them-in-workforce/1465982/> (accessed on 17 July, 2023)



Addressing these challenges would require systemic changes along with attitudinal and behavioural changes.

An effective strategy to breaking the glass ceiling and advance gender parity involves providing women with mentorship for transformative leadership and excellence in their respective fields. Prioritizing the enhancement of women's leadership capabilities can help level the playing field, equipping them with the necessary tools and resources to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts. This can facilitate the equal representation and involvement of women in decision-making processes, leading to more balanced and diverse leadership teams.

Recognizing the barriers that hinder women's participation in STEM careers and leadership positions, Grand Challenges India (GCI)-Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and WomenLift Health are launching a leadership development program exclusively for women called Women's Leadership in STEM (WLS). This program aims to expand the power and influence of talented women in STEM and catalyse a systemic change to achieve gender equality in leadership.

The programme is designed to empower women in STEM institutions to expand their leadership sphere and realise their potential to:

1. Confidently rise as leaders and decision makers;
2. Cultivate the next generation of powerful women STEM leaders; and
3. Foster a strong network of champions and institutional partners.

3. Program Overview

The leadership development program has been designed as a part-time program that can be accommodated alongside a fulltime position. The program is for mid-career women professionals with 10-25 years of experience either in fixed or contractual positions from recognised public and private institutions. Through this program, **a cohort of 20 women professionals** will be selected. They will interact for **three fully-funded residential leadership workshops spanning 5 days each in a year**. The three residential workshops will include the elements of authentic, inclusive, strategic, and impactful leadership. The workshops will provide tools and frameworks for expanding and developing leadership styles, and creating an inclusive and diverse network to foster a strong sense of belonging and also enhancing their voice, presence, and influence.

Along with the aforementioned workshop elements, the program will also include the following aspects:

- 1) **In-person Residencies:** Cohort members explore leadership frameworks, research, and tools in highly interactive residencies and workshop-style sessions focused on dynamic practice. The sessions include dynamic discussions and hands-on exercises to enhance skills, apply them, and reflect on lessons learned.



- 2) **Leadership Assessments:** These are developmental tools that provide meaningful data on understanding one's leadership traits, identify strengths to leverage, set short- and long-term development goals, and make the most of the current challenges and opportunities.
- 3) **Coaching:** Cohort members are paired with an executive coach who works one-on-one with them to build on their strengths and address areas for growth. Leadership style assessments will inform these conversations and enhance each participant's understanding of their own leadership skills. With this feedback and support from their coach, participants can decide which leadership competencies to focus on, paving the road for them to be a more powerful and effective leader.
- 4) **Access to Mentorship:** Effective women leaders are championed by a strong support network, including mentors. We identify senior-level leaders from the STEM disciplines to serve as mentors to the cohort. Mentoring groups, comprised of multiple participants and one mentor, are formed based on complementary backgrounds and professional trajectories. Participants will be able to rely on their mentor as a technical and career resource through the programme.
- 5) **Leadership Projects:** A leadership project is an opportunity for participants to design and lead efforts that tap into their expertise, network, passion and creativity while simultaneously serving as an avenue for practically applying their learnings from the program.
- 6) **Showcase:** The event at the end of the programme celebrates the group's growth as they graduate to a new phase of their leadership. During the showcase, participants are provided a platform to present their Leadership Projects to a larger audience, including influential stakeholders from the health and STEM fields, policy makers, and domain experts, subject to their availability.

4. Benefits of the Program

The program will offer a transformative experience that expands the power and influence of women leaders in STEM to make a difference in their communities, reach their full potential and thrive in their careers.

- **Enhanced Leadership Skills:** The program equips women with tools and strategies to enhance their voice, presence, and influence as leaders. The leadership program fosters growth both personally and professionally.
- **Expanded Network:** Joining the program connects participants to a diverse and inclusive network of women leaders, fostering a strong sense of belonging and creating opportunities for global collaboration and learning.
- **Peer and Mentor Support:** The participants will receive support from a powerful group of peers and mentors. It will provide an opportunity to develop life-long bonds with women who have had the similar career trajectories, enabling learning through shared and lived experiences.
- **Personal Growth:** The program fosters personal growth, helping participants grow both personally and professionally. The program focuses on helping participants



discover and embrace their authentic leadership style which boosts confidence and enables them to take on complex leadership challenges.

5. Eligibility

The prerequisites to apply for Women Leadership in STEM includes,

- i) The applicant should identify as a woman.
- ii) Work in **STEM research, policy, or practice** from government organizations (both Central and State), UGC recognised universities, public sector organisations, private organisations, autonomous institutions, research institutions.
- iii) Are a mid-career professional with minimum 10-25 years of experience in STEM field. Four years of PhD experience will add to the total years of experience.
- iv) Are an Indian National and reside and work within India.

6. Expectations from the Applicants

i) Commitment

- a. Upon selection, the participant will be required to attend three 5 days in-person learning residencies.
- b. All the program costs, including travel, food and lodging for the residency workshops will be covered. However, no stipend will be paid to the selected fellows.
- c. Access to a computer and stable Internet connection would be required in order to fully access all the material provided through the leadership development program and attend any virtual sessions (as applicable).
- d. The participants would be asked to complete some form of psychometric assessments to better inform them about leadership strengths and growth areas.

While the following are not technical requirements, our hope is that the participants will bring their passion, and commitment to the program, and engage actively with peers, mentors, and take full advantage of the resources provided.

ii) Leadership Project

In the application process, the participants will be asked to describe a leadership project idea, which would be a critical element of the application. The leadership projects would enable the participants to apply their skills, address real-world challenges, and make an impact in their fields. The leadership development program would facilitate refinement and structuring of the project. Implementation of the project does not have to be fully completed by the end of the program but can be continued beyond it.

A leadership project can be something that the applicant is passionate about and can focus on improving outcomes of research in STEM and gender equality, or take a gendered lens on any topic of their interest.



The most successful leadership projects:

- Are targeted, specific, relevant, achievable, and measurable ones.
- Are fuelled by passion and deep interests of the participants.
- Can realistically start being implemented within the duration of the program.
- Can continue beyond the program and do not have to be fully wrapped up by the end of the program.

iii) Relevant Themes for the leadership project

The leadership projects may be designed to address real-world challenges related to the themes such as,

- 1) Centering women and girls in STEM,
- 2) Catalysing institutional change,
- 3) Optimising pathways to leadership,
- 4) Building integrated and resilient health systems,
- 5) STEM innovation and policy.

A leadership project could accomplish one or more of the following, but is not limited to:

- Promoting STEM or gender education in a particular group
- Developing a new or better technology
- Innovating a better way to collect/analyze/use STEM/gender data
- Improving a gender or STEM-related process/system in your organization
- Empowering or enabling women in your community or organization to be successful
- Incorporating a gendered lens into a policy, practice or research project where it was absent

The project proposal (which will be a part of the application form) should include a background of the project (100-300 words), project implementation description (100-300 words) and expected impact of the proposed project (100-300 words). The Project implementation description may include how one plan to accomplish & implement their project, feasibility of the project, and continuation of the project beyond the leadership program.

BIRAC or WomenLift Health would not provide any funding for the leadership project. The support provided would be mainly in the form of connecting the participants with highly experienced mentors, and experts within the network. The peers can also be an excellent resource for enhancing one's project.

7. Application Timelines and Key Dates

| | |
|---|---|
| Call Opens | 27th October 2023 |
| Closure of Submission | 20th December 2023, 1600hrs IST |
| Selection committee review and final selection | January-February, 2024 |
| Cohort Announcement | Last week of February, 2024 |
| Cohort onboarding (virtual meeting) | March, 2024 |
| First Residency | May, 2024 |
| Second Residency | August, 2024 |
| Third Residency | November, 2024 |

8. Application Guidelines and Process

The details of the program and the application submission format can be accessed through this application link.

The process for submitting the application online is detailed below:

- A. Go to BIRAC's website <https://www.birac.nic.in> // **Women Leadership in STEM Application Link**
- B. An account needs to be created to access the application page.
- C. If you are already a registered user, then kindly enter your login credential at the below link in order to submit the application: <https://birac.nic.in/login.php>
- D. Once you login into <https://birac.nic.in> by using login credentials, kindly click on “Grand Challenges India (GCI)” under programmes. Click to submit new proposal under Grand Challenges India.
- E. Select “Women Leadership in STEM” on the dashboard to start filling the application.
- F. Applicants are advised to fill and submit their applications early without waiting for the last date in order to avoid any last-minute contingencies. The system stops accepting applications automatically after 4:00 PM of the last date of submission.
- G. In case of any query, please drop an email at user-23@birac.nic.in
- H. Applicants are advised to provide sufficient details in their applications to allow an informed and fair evaluation/review (Refer Annexure 1).



- I. Requests for changes in the Applications once submitted will not be entertained.
- J. Please read through the Application in its entirety and ensure that your technical details and organization details are in compliance with the eligibility criteria provided. Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria and/or do not directly respond to the call area will not be reviewed, regardless of other parameters.

9. Documents Required

- i) Current Resume or CV
- ii) A brief Leadership project proposal (part of the application form)

Contact Information

Further information can be obtained at BIRAC website. www.birac.nic.in

Contact Person

Mission Director, Grand Challenges India, Email: mdpmubmgf.birac@nic.in

Senior Program Manager, Grand Challenges India, Email: user-23@birac.nic.in

Annexure – I

Selection Process

- Grand Challenges India (GCI), PMU- BIRAC and WomenLift Health team will screen the proposals for eligibility. If an application is found to be incomplete or not complying with the provisions described in the Request for Application, the application will be considered ineligible.
- Proposals that meet the eligibility criteria will be reviewed by an expert committee. After evaluation, the expert committee will recommend shortlisted applications.
- The shortlisted candidates will be called for a personal interaction with the expert committee who will make the final selection of 20 participants for the leadership program.