Challenge Brief

cause 2026

THE FUTURE IS LOCAL

A Global Open Innovation Challenge to Unleash the changemaker within you!

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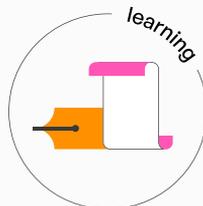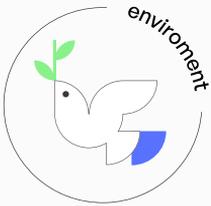
Purpose.

*We believe everyone has
the potential to be a changemaker!*

CMR University proudly presents CAUSE 2026, an open innovation challenge designed to inspire students worldwide to tackle real-world challenges through the transformative power of Design Thinking. Rooted in our mission to nurture creative thinkers who drive positive global change, this initiative empowers participants to create impactful solutions aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

At CMR University, we are committed to equipping students with 21st-century skills such as creativity, empathy, critical thinking, and collaboration, enabling them to transform ideas into actions that matter.

CAUSE 2026 offers a platform for students to think beyond conventional boundaries, prototype bold solutions, and lead with purpose, while addressing pressing challenges through innovative, human-centred approaches.

Join us in CAUSE 2026 and be part of a movement where passion meets purpose, and ideas shape a sustainable future. Together, let's care, collaborate, and create positive global change.

The Competition is open to both UG and PG Students across the globe!

Theme

Reimagining our futures locally

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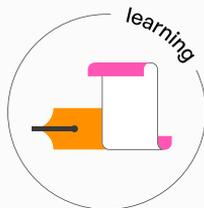
The Future is Local

Reimagining our futures, locally.

The Future Is Local invites all students to return to the roots of design: people, place, and lived experience. It focuses on designing with local communities using the Design Thinking process to understand real lives and co-create meaningful solutions. Students begin by choosing an entry domain to anchor their exploration. From there, they immerse themselves in a local context such as a neighbourhood, village, campus, school, market, or shared public space to observe, listen, and learn from people. Rather than starting with a predefined problem statement or technology, students allow real challenges to emerge through empathy, immersion, and participation.

Why this theme?
'Because we care locally. CAUSE aims to begin a student's journey to care, collaborate, and create, building future leaders who are empathetic to the world immediately around them, and who learn to design in ways that are grounded, responsible, and human.

What kinds of solutions?
Solutions may take the form of products, services, systems, spaces, or tech-enabled tools, but they must be grounded in community insights and developed with active participation from users. The emphasis is on process over assumptions, and on shaping futures that grow from people, place, and participation, local in origin, yet adaptable in impact.

CATEGORIES

These Categories are simply starting points to guide your exploration. As you spend time in the context and engage with people, your specific problem area will naturally emerge.

*Each category has a set of examples to get you started, however you are free to go beyond them.

1) Community, Everyday Systems & Urban Infrastructure

Explore how people live their daily lives and how local systems work or don't work. This domain includes urban infrastructure, mobility, access, communication, inclusion, and everyday community experiences.

Examples:

- Access to information and basic services (offline or digital)
- Safety, mobility, and usability of public/shared spaces
- Urban infrastructure and services (water points, sanitation, street lighting, walkability, public transport touchpoints, signage, last-mile access)
- Communication gaps within communities and institutions
- Inclusion and participation in everyday systems
- Ways communities coordinate, inform, or support one another (tech-enabled or non-digital)

2) Health, Hygiene & Wellbeing

Explore how people care for their physical, mental, and social wellbeing in real routines, real spaces, and real cultural contexts. This domain includes prevention, care, dignity, and everyday support systems.

Examples:

- Preventive health and hygiene behaviours
- Mental wellbeing, emotional support, and social care
- Care for children, elders, and vulnerable groups
- Clean, safe, and dignified environments for daily living
- Low-tech or digital tools that support awareness, monitoring, or care (where appropriate)

3) Environment & Sustainability

Explore how communities interact with their environment and manage shared resources in daily life.

Examples:

- Waste management, segregation, and recycling practices
- Water use, conservation, and access
- Energy practices and sustainable living
- Local environmental or climate-related issues
- Tools, systems, or technologies that support conservation, tracking, or collective action

4) Learning, Skills & Livelihoods

Explore how people learn, build skills, and earn a living within local contexts. This domain includes education, employability, informal learning, local enterprise, and craft-based livelihoods.

Examples:

- Access to education, training, and skill development
- Gaps between learning and local work or livelihood opportunities
- Informal learning, apprenticeships, and community knowledge systems
- Youth employability, reskilling, and future-of-work transitions
- Local livelihoods and micro-enterprises, including **crafts, artisanship, maker communities, and traditional skills**
- Tools, platforms, or systems (digital or non-digital) that support learning, work, or livelihoods

Timeline

16 Feb '26 — **Registrations Open**

Registration & Team Formation
Teams of 2 to 6 UG/PG students register in the CAUSE 2026 Website. Open to higher education students globally

Problem Identification & Solution Building
Teams identify a real-world problem aligned to the chosen theme
Apply the Design Thinking to understand, explore and identify potential solutions.

25 March '26 — **Final Submission (Online)**
Teams Submit their project Pitch Video and supporting presentation.

3 April '26 — **Announcement of Shortlisted Teams**
Expert Jurors evaluate the projects and Shortlisted teams will be notified.

23 April '26 — **Changemakers Bootcamp**
Shortlisted Teams will be invited to an exciting in-person bootcamp at CMR University, Lakeside Campus, Bangalore
Mentoring, workshops, and solution refinement

24 April '26 — **Ground Zero - Final Showcase & Pitch**
Presentation and poster showcase at Design Thinking Day
Evaluation by an expert jury - Winners stand

* Remote participation allowed for International and distant participants.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS.

How to submit your pitch

There are 2 Submission requirements.

1. **Document your process of problem solving in a presentation format saved as a pdf.**
- Should not exceed 15 slides.
- Keep the content crisp and do not overload your presentation with text.
- This is a supporting document for your Pitch video.
- The template for the submission can be found at **here**.

Format: Unique ID number
Example: CAUSE2026#12345

2. A video of your problem statement and solution as a pitch not exceeding three minutes. (mp4 format/ landscape)

Your pitch must talk about
- The problem - The user and their context
- Your insights
- Your solution
- How is your solution addressing the problem?
- Your plan to implement the solution
- Upload your video on either YouTube/Vimeo/Google drive (please ensure that anyone with the link can view the video)

Format: CAUSE2026#Unique ID number
Example: CAUSE2026#12345

- Copy the Video link and share it on the student dashboard after you login.

Criteria

Problem Statement	Problem is clearly defined, specific, and aligned with The Future Is Local theme and fits within 1 or more of the Categories. It is grounded in a real local context and explains who is affected, where, and why it matters. Demonstrates strong understanding of the context.
Insights from Research	Demonstrates strong use of primary research (observation, conversations, immersion) supported by relevant secondary research. Insights are clear, evidence-based, and directly inform the problem framing and solution direction.
Solution Ideation & Impact	Solution is thoughtful and relevant to the local context. It addresses the problem effectively and shows clear potential for positive impact. Benefits and intended outcomes are clearly articulated. Co-creation with users/community is a plus where possible, but not mandatory.
Feasibility & Implementation Plan	Implementation plan is realistic and well thought out for the local setting. Clearly outlines steps, resources, stakeholders, timeline, and how the solution will be tested, refined, and executed.
Presentation & Pitch Video	Presentation is engaging, concise, and clearly communicates the problem, insights, solution, and implementation plan. Pitch video is compelling, well-paced, and professional.

Shortlisted

Shortlisted Teams: Next steps

1. Online Feedback Session
📅 Date: April 10, 2026 (Friday)
- Attend an online feedback session to prepare teams for the solution showcase.

2. Solution Showcase: Poster Preparation
Before arriving at CMR University, teams must prepare a poster (it should fill a 3x4 ft board) showcasing their solution.
Poster Requirements:
- Content: Clearly communicate the problem, your insights, the solution, prototype, and its impact.
- Design: Ensure the poster is visually engaging and easy to understand.
- Purpose: This will be displayed during the Changemakers Bootcamp and serve as a key element in presenting your work.

3. Submission of Final Pitches
📅 Deadline: April 22, 2026 (Wednesday)
- Submit your final presentation on the morning of April 22.
- Ensure your submissions are concise, clear, and impactful.

4.Arrival at CMR University
📅 Date: April 22, 2026 (Wednesday)
📍 Location: CMR University, Lakeside Campus
- Arrive and get ready for an immersive experience filled with collaboration and learning.

5.Changemakers Bootcamp
📅 Date: April 23, 2026 (Thursday)
📍 Location: CMR University, Lakeside Campus
Workshops:
Solution Impact Workshop and Pitching Workshop with Mentors
Teams will showcase their prepared posters as part of the bootcamp activities.

6. Ground Zero: The Finale
📅 Date: April 24, 2026 (Friday)
📍 Event: Design Thinking Day – Ground Zero
- Categories:
    - National Teams
    - International Teams
    - CMR University Teams
- Pitch your solutions to a distinguished panel of judges and showcase your poster as part of the event.
- Compete for recognition, prizes, and the coveted changemaker title.

Important Notes
- Poster Preparation: Ensure your poster is ready before arrival. It will play a critical role during the Bootcamp, Solution Showcase, and finale.
- Stay Updated: Watch your email and the student dashboard for detailed guidelines and updates.

We are excited to see your creativity and innovation in action. Let's make CAUSE 2026 a groundbreaking success! 🌟

Awards

Winners stand a chance to win from a prize pool of over INR 1,50,000 or USD 1600 in the following **3 categories,**

CAUSE CHANGEMAKERS AWARD - NATIONAL
CAUSE CHANGEMAKERS AWARD - INTERNATIONAL
CAUSE CHANGEMAKERS AWARD - CMR UNIVERSITY

CAUSE Signature Awards - Nominated by jury

All Shortlisted Teams for the Solution Showcase and the Changemaker Bootcamp will also receive a Certificate of Recognition

FAQ's

ANSWER TO ALMOST ALL OF YOUR QUESTIONS

QnA

1. What will we get if we win?
A cash prize from a pool of over Rs. 1,50,000 / USD 1600* to be won.

2. Will I get a certificate for participation?
Yes, every team shortlisted for the final showcase will receive a participation certificate.

3. How many projects will be selected for the final showcase?
This will be decided by CMR University based on the number of registrations

4. Can I participate as an individual?
We are sorry, the competition is only for groups. Collaboration is a vital component of Design Thinking, and we expect it to be reflected in your projects. A minimum of 2 members and a maximum of 6 members per team are required.

5. Can we submit multiple projects?
No, only one project will be accepted per team.

6. I don't know anything about the Design Thinking Process. Can I still apply?
We believe the Design Thinking Process is innate to human beings, and we are open to all applications. To learn more about Design Thinking, please refer to the brief.

7. What about intellectual property rights?
All intellectual property rights of the applicants are retained by the applicants throughout their time working at CMR CAUSE 2026. By submitting a solution to one of our challenges, you still keep your intellectual property rights.

QnA

8. Can I join another team after registering?
We recommend thinking carefully before joining another team, as this may disrupt the team dynamics. However, we have provided the option to add/remove team members (except for the primary member) until the last date of registration, March 25, 2026, on your user dashboard once you sign up.

9. Is the competition physical or virtual?
The first round will be an online submission. For the final round and showcase, participants from India must be physically present at CMRU, Bagalur Campus on April 23 & 24, 2026. International participants can choose to participate either physically or virtually, but CMRU will not provide funding for travel or accommodation

10. Do I have to pay for participating in CMR CAUSE?
No, there is no application fee for participating in the CAUSE Challenge.

11. Will CMRU reimburse any costs incurred in creating my project?
Participants are responsible for their projects, and there will be no reimbursement for any costs incurred by participants.

12. How will I receive my cash prize if I win?
After verifying your ID/Student ID, the cash prize will be granted. The mode of the transaction will be informed.

13. What happens if there is plagiarism?
Plagiarism will be checked. Any violation of state/national laws will result in immediate disqualification. CMR University reserves the right to cancel or modify the rules of the event without prior notice. The university's decision will be final regarding awards, prizes, and disputes.

CAUSE 2026

CARE | COLLABORATE | CREATE

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

https://cmr.edu.in/design-thinking-day/register-now/

For any details and information, simply drop a mail at:

design.thinking@cmr.edu.in

STAY UPDATED

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