



School
Meals
Accelerator



School Meals Accelerator

INVITATION TO ENGAGE PROCESS

Overview and
Frequently Asked Questions



July 30, 2026

Overview of the Invitation to Engage

What is the Invitation to Engage?

The Invitation to Engage (I2E) is the School Meals Accelerator's process to guide selection of new countries for the Accelerator to support and work with in 2027 – resulting in up to 4 additional countries receiving support. It provides countries with a chance to assess their ambitions and priorities and allows the Accelerator to see where they can have the most effective engagement.

This process has been developed alongside key partners including the School Meals Coalition Secretariat, the Coalition Initiatives, and the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. These partners will continue to support the Accelerator throughout the Invitation to Engage process and as the Accelerator works with selected countries.

Who is eligible to participate in the Invitation to Engage?

The Accelerator is prioritizing countries that are members of the School Meals Coalition, are classified as low- or lower-middle-income countries and have submitted national commitments to the Coalition by July 12th, 2026. Focus is placed on these countries because they face the greatest needs and stand to benefit the most from the type of assistance provided by the Accelerator.

Eligible countries:

Angola	Guinea-Bissau	Pakistan
Bangladesh	Haiti	Rwanda
Benin	Honduras	São Tomé and Príncipe
Burkina Faso	Jordan	Senegal
Burundi	Kyrgyzstan	Somalia
Cambodia	Lao PDR	South Sudan
Cameroon	Lebanon	Sri Lanka
Central African Republic	Liberia	Tajikistan
Chad	Malawi	Tanzania
Congo	Mali	Togo
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Mauritania	Uganda
The Gambia	Mozambique	Yemen
Guinea	Niger	

How will the Accelerator prioritize and select countries for 2027 support?

Please note that the list above only shows which countries are invited to be involved in the process. The Accelerator will select up to 4 countries for support in 2027, which means that depending on how many countries choose to engage, the process is likely to be highly competitive.

To help countries decide whether to engage in this year's process, the list below provides information about what the Accelerator will be looking for and prioritizing in its 2027 country partners. Please read the box below carefully before you decide whether your country will engage.

- **The Accelerator is designed for countries that have ambition and have already made meaningful progress on school meals and are looking to take the next step. This often includes:**
 - A clear national vision, strategy, or set of goals for school meals institutionalized in a policy or law
 - Support from senior government leaders (Minister-level or above) for expanding or improving school meals
 - Sustained or increasing funding for school meals over time
 - Largely domestically financed school meals programme (>50% of funds from national government vs. external partners)
 - Sustained or increasing programme coverage in recent years
 - Remaining challenges that prevent the programme from reaching its full potential
- **Strengthening school meals systems takes time. Countries benefit from Accelerator support when the broader context allows for continuity and sustained focus. This means:**
 - If there are anticipated political transitions or national elections through 2027, countries should wait to be involved in the Invitation to Engage process until later years
 - If there is conflict or armed violence in a large part of the country, it is not the right time for Accelerator support
 - If there is institutional or social fragility that significantly disrupts government effectiveness, there is likely limited value to Accelerator engagement
- **The Accelerator is best positioned to support countries seeking to address challenges that affect the broader school meals system, rather than discrete technical issues or short-term implementation needs. This looks like:**
 - Challenges related to financing, coordination, procurement, governance, or other system-wide issues
 - Interest in an engagement centered on learning, relationship-building, and capacity strengthening
- **The Accelerator works best when there is a school meals system with minimum foundations in place to enable strengthening. This generally includes:**
 - A national school meals programme operating at a meaningful scale (e.g., nationally or in a majority of the country)
 - Clear government ownership, with defined ministry or agency responsibilities
 - Existing programme data, monitoring mechanisms, or reporting system
 - Government stakeholders actively seeking to improve programme performance and sustainability
- **The Accelerator is a collaborative partnership that requires commitment of time and openness to our ways of working. Countries are a stronger fit when there is:**
 - Willingness among government counterparts to dedicate time and leadership attention to the engagement
 - Commitment of relevant ministries and partners to regular discussions and joint decision-making
 - Openness to working across sectors and engaging with a broad range of stakeholders

How should my country participate in the Invitation to Engage?

The Invitation to Engage process will take place in three phases, with the Accelerator starting to work with and support new countries in 2027:



The Invitation to Engage process will be launched on July 20, 2026. As a first step, countries will be invited to undertake a consultative self-reflection and diagnosis exercise. This exercise is an opportunity to take stock of the national school meals programme, reflect on key strengths and challenges, and identify areas where additional support and partnership could help accelerate progress.

The process should be led by the government and informed by perspectives from across the school meals ecosystem, including at least two government ministries and two partner organizations. Because collaboration is central to the Accelerator's approach, countries will be asked to demonstrate how different stakeholders were involved and how they contributed to the reflection process. Completed self-reflections and diagnoses should be shared with the Accelerator by August 31, 2026.

Next, the Accelerator will invite shortlisted countries to a virtual workshop in November to explore their ambitions, priorities, and opportunities for engagement.

Lastly, the Accelerator will ask countries to confirm their political commitment (from a Minister-level official or above) to work with the Accelerator and establish elements likely to build a successful partnership (*more detail in following section*). The Accelerator will then select countries to work with and support in the beginning of 2027.

How are countries expected to engage with the Accelerator if selected?

Working with the Accelerator will take a lot of time and attention from government partners. Countries that get the most out of the engagement are those that can dedicate people, energy, and decision-making capacity to advancing their school meals priorities.

Every country's journey will be different, but successful partnerships typically include:

- **A dedicated government focal point** at a senior level (director or above) who serves as the main counterpart to the Accelerator and helps coordinate across government stakeholders and partners.
- **The government hosts and embeds a team member that is funded and provided by the Accelerator** who works alongside the focal point to advance priority initiatives and strengthen coordination across stakeholders.
- **Regular engagement and collaboration** with Accelerator team members and partners through discussions, planning processes, and joint decision-making.
- **Leadership of a diagnostic process** to identify strengths, constraints, and opportunities for strengthening the national school meals system.

To ensure a strong partnership, finalist countries will be asked to share an expression of political commitment (from a Minister-level official or higher) to these elements before beginning work with the Accelerator.

How can countries benefit from participating in the Invitation to Engage?

The process is designed to benefit both countries and the Accelerator: it helps the Accelerator better understand countries' priorities and ambitions, while supporting countries in assessing their progress, identifying opportunities for accelerating change, and considering whether this type of support would add value to their efforts. For countries who choose to engage, the process is designed to add value regardless of whether they are ultimately selected.

Participation in the Invitation to Engage provides an opportunity for governments and stakeholders to:

- reflect on progress towards national school meals ambitions and commitments;
- identify priorities and challenges that may be slowing progress;
- strengthen dialogue across sectors and stakeholders;
- explore opportunities for future collaboration through the School Meals Coalition ecosystem.

Frequently Asked Questions

What countries does the Accelerator work with?

Q: How should my country decide whether to be involved in the Invitation to Engage?

A: First, countries should check to see if they are on the list of eligible countries. Only countries on this list will be considered. Second, countries should go through the characteristics that the Accelerator is looking for and prioritizing when selecting country partners (*shown in detail earlier in this document*). Please review these carefully before deciding whether to engage. Lastly, governments should assess whether they have the capacity to engage with the Accelerator, with devoted time and leadership attention, since the Accelerator's approach relies on close collaboration and relationship building.

Q: Does meeting the eligibility requirements guarantee that a country will be selected?

A: No, meeting the eligibility requirements does not guarantee selection. The list of eligible countries shows who is invited to be involved in the process. The Accelerator will then look for the characteristics they believe are important to a successful partnership (including government ambition, country stability, systemic challenges, programme maturity, and willingness to engage in a highly collaborative partnership). The process will also consider how aligned countries are with the Accelerator's way of working. Since the Accelerator is only working with up to four additional countries in 2027, choices will be made based on where the Accelerator is best positioned to add value and establish a strong partnership with government counterparts.

Q: What conditions is the Accelerator looking for in a country partner?

A: The Accelerator will prioritize working with countries that show the following characteristics:

- Demonstrated government ambition and progress but still has room for improvement: Increasing financial and political commitment, alongside an existing programme with potential to scale.
- Challenges are structural rather than isolated technical fixes or short-term implementation fixes: For example, bottlenecks in financing systems, procurement model, multisectoral coordination, or other systemic challenges.
- Stable country context that allows for sustained engagement: No major conflict, political instability, or disruptive electoral cycles in the near term.
- A system with the minimum foundations in place to enable strengthening: Not too nascent and not too advanced national school meals programmes.
- Compatibility with the Accelerator's way of working: Openness to flexibility and complexity, cross-sector collaboration, and adaptive approaches.

A detailed list of these characteristics is included in the Invitation to Engage overview earlier in this document. Interested countries should review this list to decide whether they should participate in the Invitation to Engage process.

Q: If my country meets all the conditions for effective engagement, what is the likelihood of selection?

A: In 2027, the Accelerator will only be working with up to four additional countries. When deciding whether to apply, you should consider the characteristics that the Accelerator is looking for and see if your country is a good fit before dedicating time and resources to the Invitation to Engage process.

Q: Our country has elections scheduled in 2027. Should we be involved in the Invitation to Engage?

A: Countries with presidential or major national elections are recommended to not participate in this cycle of the Invitation to Engage process. Political transitions are likely to affect the feasibility of sustained engagement. Countries with elections scheduled through 2027 should consider applying in future rounds of the Invitation to Engage process.

Q: Our school meals programme is heavily donor-funded. Will this disadvantage us?

A: The Accelerator generally prioritizes countries with substantial domestic financing because domestic ownership is often critical for long-term sustainability. However, when choosing countries to work with, the Accelerator considers the overall context and potential for impactful engagement.

Q: Would countries facing conflict in certain regions automatically be deprioritized, even if they are a strong fit on other dimensions?

A: Conflict itself is not necessarily an automatic disqualifier. The important consideration is whether the government has the capacity and time to engage, and ability to take on genuine ownership of the process. Applications must be government-led – if partners are advocating on behalf of government without active government engagement, that would be viewed negatively. The key question is whether the government can realistically participate in the Accelerator process.

Q: Do formal interministerial structures need to be in place to participate in the Invitation to Engage?

A: No, formal interministerial structures are not a requirement to engage. If ministries are already collaborating and the challenge is formalizing that collaboration, that is the type of issue the Accelerator could help address and could be a part of support. What matters is evidence that the government is making progress towards their goals and has demonstrated national commitment to its school meals programme.

Q: How many new countries will be selected in the Invitation to Engage process?

A: The Accelerator expects to work with and support a small number of additional countries (up to four countries) depending on country demand, fit, and available capacity.

Q: What if my country is not currently eligible or ready to apply?

A: Not all countries will be ready to participate in the current round of the Invitation to Engage process, and that is entirely expected. The Accelerator is designed for countries that meet specific eligibility requirements and are at a stage where they can fully engage with the process (*see characteristics that are prioritized in the above overview*).

Countries that are not yet eligible or ready should not view this as a barrier to future participation. The Accelerator expects to launch a new Invitation to Engage process again in mid-2027, providing

countries with time to address gaps, strengthen programme foundations, and reassess their readiness for a future application. In many cases, taking additional time to build the necessary conditions for success can strengthen a country's prospects for participation in a later round.

Q: Which countries does the Accelerator currently support?

A: The Accelerator is currently working with five countries: Indonesia, Philippines, Kenya, Zambia and Lesotho. These countries will continue to receive support in 2027. The Invitation to Engage process is intended to identify additional countries to join the Accelerator.

What does the Invitation to Engage process look like?

Q: How long does the Invitation to Engage process take?

A: The Invitation to Engage process runs from July 2026 to January 2027 and takes place in three phases. Countries should view it as a multi-month engagement rather than a single "application" exercise.

Phase 1 (July–August 31st, 2026) focuses on a government-led, consultative self-reflection and diagnosis process. Countries will have six weeks to organize consultations with relevant ministries, partners, and other stakeholders, reflect on the strengths and challenges of their school meals system, and share this with the Accelerator.

Based on these reflections and diagnoses, a number of countries will be invited to participate in Phase 2 (November 2026). This phase will consist of Accelerator-led workshops designed to deepen countries' submissions, strengthen the shared understanding of system challenges and opportunities, provide greater insight into the Accelerator's approach and ways of working, and allow both the country and the Accelerator to assess whether a partnership would be valuable and impactful.

Following Phase 2, a smaller number of countries will move to Phase 3 (December 2026), during which governments will be asked to provide an expression of political commitment. Finally, selected countries will be announced in January 2027.

Throughout the process, the Accelerator seeks to create value for participating countries by fostering reflection, dialogue, and alignment among stakeholders.

Q: When should my country submit their initial interest to participate in the Invitation to Engage?

A: Guidance to Phase 1, which involves the consultative self-reflection and diagnosis exercise, will be launched on July 20th. From that date, countries will have six weeks to complete the exercise and submit their interest. Materials should be sent to I2E@schoolmealsaccelerator.org by August 31st.

Q: Who should complete the self-reflection and application?

A: While school meals programmes are often led by a single ministry, the Accelerator asks that the self-reflection and diagnosis be developed through a consultative process that brings together a broad range of perspectives.

Delivering school meals at scale is complex. Countries must navigate challenges that cut across education, health, agriculture, social protection, and food systems, which are often difficult to align due to different logics and incentives. Ensuring all children receive healthy and nutritious school meals every day requires

bringing together ministries, partners, financing and evidence around a shared vision that translates into effective and consistent implementation.

In this spirit, the self-reflection and diagnosis should involve representatives from at least **two government sectors or ministries** and **two partners**. The objective is to develop a shared view of the programme's strengths, challenges, and priorities, rather than relying on the perspective of a single institution or individual. Because this collaborative approach is an important foundation of successful partnerships, the Accelerator will also ask how different ministries and partners were involved in this process.

Q: Which partners should be involved in the consultation process?

A: Countries choose the partners they would like to engage. The Accelerator encourages a broad partnership ecosystem in the Invitation to Engage process. Therefore, at least two partners should be consulted in the self-reflection and diagnosis, although more partners are encouraged wherever possible.

Q: Can a country submit more than one template for the first phase?

A: No. The Accelerator will only accept one application per country. The application should represent the views of multiple ministries and sectors, but only a single consolidated application should be submitted from each country.

Q: Can multiple ministries jointly submit an application?

A: Yes. In fact, the Invitation to Engage process encourages collaboration across government ministries and stakeholders and is intended to be consultative in nature.

Q: In Phase 3, does the expression of political commitment letter have to come from the Minister of Education?

A: No. Countries may decide which minister provides the political commitment. It does not need to be the Minister of Education.

Q: What happens if a country is not selected?

A: For countries who choose to participate, the Invitation to Engage process has been designed to add value irrespective of whether they are chosen to receive Accelerator support. Through the consultative self-reflection and diagnosis process, governments have an opportunity to bring together stakeholders from across sectors and institutions to:

- Clarify priorities and ambition for their school meal programme;
- Strengthen cross-sector dialogue and alignment;
- Better articulate challenges and opportunities;
- Develop a stronger shared diagnosis of their school meals system;
- Identify potential areas for future investment and evidence generation;
- Build relationships that may support future engagement with other partners.

The Accelerator hopes that the process itself will help foster a broader, more strategic conversation around school meals and strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders.

Not being selected does not prevent a country from participating in future Invitation to Engage rounds.

Q: Is the Invitation to Engage a one-time opportunity?

A: No. The Invitation to Engage is expected to become a recurring process as the Accelerator grows and continues to learn. Countries that are not selected this year may be encouraged to participate in future rounds when circumstances are more favorable or readiness has increased.

Q: Can a non-eligible country still use the self-reflection and diagnostic tools?

A: Yes. Countries are welcome to use the tools and undertake the self-reflection and diagnostic process for their own learning and planning purposes. However, only countries on the eligibility list can be selected for support in 2027 and no exceptions will be made.

About the Accelerator

Q: Is the Accelerator primarily a grant-making initiative?

A: No. The Accelerator is not primarily a grant-making initiative, and countries should not view the Invitation to Engage process as a request for direct programme funding or operational support (including food or the direct provision of supplies). Instead, the Accelerator focuses on helping countries identify and address systemic or structural challenges most critical to achieving their school meals ambitions.

That said, the Accelerator will mobilize expertise, partnerships, technical assistance, and catalytic financial resources to support priority activities identified through the engagement process. Any funding provided is intended to enable and accelerate systems change, rather than serve as a standalone source of programme financing.

Q: What does the Accelerator offer to countries?

A: The Accelerator's approach is about systems strengthening. Drawing on decades of experience and evidence in school meals and economic development, blended with research and expertise on systems thinking, adaptive leadership, and organizational learning, the Accelerator accompanies countries on their scale up journey by combining collaborative, systems-based ways of working with high-quality technical expertise, partnerships, and catalytic resources to unlock sustainable, system-wide progress. The Accelerator's distinctive contribution is not only the expertise it helps mobilize, but the way it works with governments and partners to unlock progress together.

The Accelerator works with and through partners to bring the following capabilities, expertise, and resources:

- Evidence, learning, and accountability: support to design and implement monitoring and accountability systems; support for better evidence generation and evaluation
- Coordination and delivery models: multisectoral coordination, local procurement models, support to transition towards a food systems approach and regenerative agriculture, among others
- Sustainable financing and ownership: support to develop robust, mission-oriented approaches to school meals and innovative domestic and international financing solutions

In addition to thematic technical expertise, The Accelerator offers tools and practices that support systems strengthening and collective learning:

- System diagnostics and sense making: to look beyond symptoms to patterns, incentives, relationships, assumptions, power, and context
- Convening and partner scanning: to create spaces where actors who shape the system can strengthen relationships, think, learn, and work together differently. The Accelerator deliberately invites unseen or unheard actors in, increasing diversity
- Trust-based relationship development: to align around shared purpose, surface different perspectives, and generate additional value
- Capacity building and leadership development: to support individual development and cultivate systemic leadership

Q: What does “systems strengthening” mean?

A: Systems strengthening means improving the underlying structures, relationships, processes, and capabilities that shape how school meals programmes operate. Rather than focusing only on isolated problems, the Accelerator works with countries to address the conditions that have impact across the whole ecosystem.

Q: Is there a membership fee or financial contribution required to participate in the Invitation to Engage or to work with the Accelerator?

A: No. There are no membership or application fees and there are no charges for Accelerator support. However, governments should expect to invest significant time and effort through consultations, workshops, meetings, and engagement activities.

Q: What languages can the Accelerator support if governments are more comfortable engaging in other languages?

A: The Accelerator currently has capacity to engage in English, French, and Spanish. If a country reaches later stages of the process whose government speaks another language, the Accelerator will make every effort to ensure language is not a barrier. However, at present, application materials are available only in English, French, and Spanish, and support from partners may be needed for assistance in other languages.

Q: How long does engagement with the Accelerator last?

A: The exact duration of engagement depends on country priorities and circumstances and generally lasts ~2-4 years. However, the Accelerator is designed to support sustained progress rather than short-term projects or one-off technical assistance assignments.

Q: How does the School Meals Accelerator relate to the School Meals Coalition and its initiatives?

A: The School Meals Accelerator is one of the initiatives supporting countries to achieve their School Meals Coalition ambitions and commitments. While the Coalition provides a platform for political leadership, advocacy, peer learning, and collective action, the Accelerator works directly with a small number of countries to help address systemic barriers and strengthen the foundations needed to scale and sustain school meals programmes.

The Accelerator works closely with the Coalition Secretariat, the Coalition's Initiatives (the Research Consortium, Sustainable Financing Initiative, Data and Monitoring Initiative, and Cities Feeding the Future), and other Coalition partners throughout both the Invitation to Engage process and country engagement. It is designed to complement—not duplicate—the support available. In practice, Accelerator engagements are expected to draw on and work alongside the Coalition's initiatives and partners to advance country priorities.

Q: How does the School Meals Accelerator relate to the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty?

A: The School Meals Accelerator and the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty work closely together, both through the Invitation to Engage process and beyond. While the Global Alliance has a broader mandate on hunger and poverty, the two initiatives share a common belief in country leadership, systems strengthening, and cross-sector collaboration. In particular, they have a strong area of potential convergence in supporting countries to strengthen and scale sustainable school meals programmes.

For countries that have already developed a school meals pre-plan with the Global Alliance, this will be a valuable input to the Invitation to Engage process. As part of what is shared, the Accelerator will ask that the plan be uploaded alongside the self-reflection and diagnosis. This is an important signal that the country has already sought support in this area, is prioritizing school meals, and is engaging with different partners. However, please note that a pre-plan developed with the Global Alliance does not replace the Accelerator's Invitation to Engage process. Countries will still be asked to complete the reflection process, which is designed to generate additional data and insights about the broader school meals system. If a country with a Global Alliance pre-plan is selected to work with the Accelerator in 2027, the Accelerator will use the plan as a foundation and build on it through additional partnerships, discussions, and perspectives that can help strengthen and advance the country's efforts.

Q: How does the Accelerator work with partners?

A: The Accelerator is not designed to be the sole provider of technical assistance. Instead, it works with governments to identify priorities and challenges and then helps connect them with the partners that have the expertise, resources, and capabilities best positioned to support those needs. The Accelerator's role is often to convene, coordinate, facilitate, and strengthen collaboration across the ecosystem, while drawing on the specialized expertise of partners where appropriate.

Q: How does the School Meals Accelerator relate to WFP?

A: The School Meals Accelerator is hosted by WFP but operates independently under a governance structure that includes countries and a diverse group of stakeholders. This arrangement was intentionally designed to enable the Accelerator to work across the broader School Meals Coalition ecosystem and mobilize support from a wide range of partners. At the country level, the Accelerator works with WFP and other partners to complement, rather than duplicate what is already happening.