

NATIONAL STARTUP AWARDS 6.0 (NSA 6.0)

Brief note on Student Innovator/ Aspiring Entrepreneur

1. About Startup India

Startup India is a flagship initiative of the Government of India, implemented by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Launched in January 2016, the initiative aims to foster innovation, support entrepreneurship, and enable startup growth through simplification and handholding, funding support, incentives, market access, and ecosystem development.

As of October 2026, more than 2,56,000 startups have been recognised by Startup India, DPIIT. The startup ecosystem spans across 56 industries & sectors, with entrepreneurs developing solutions to economic, social, technological, and environmental challenges.

2. National Startup Awards (NSA)

The National Startup Awards is a flagship initiative of Startup India to recognise and reward startups developing innovative products, services, and solutions with the potential to scale, generate employment and wealth, and create measurable socio-economic impact. The Awards also help connect recognised startups with relevant ecosystem support, including mentorship, investors, corporates, markets, and government stakeholders.

Five editions of the National Startup Awards have been successfully completed since the initiative was conceptualised in 2019. The fifth edition recognised startups across 20 award categories and received 3,163 applications from across the country. The results of NSA 5.0 were announced on 16 January 2026, National Startup Day, in the presence of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, and the Hon'ble Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal.

3. 6th edition of National Startup Awards

The sixth edition of the National Startup Awards (NSA 6.0) is proposed to continue recognising high-potential startups across 20 general award categories. The proposed focus is on innovation, scalability, economic impact, inclusivity, environmental impact, and solutions relevant to India's development priorities. The edition is intended to spotlight startups contributing to technological advancement, manufacturing competitiveness, inclusive growth, and the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

In addition to the 20 general categories, three special categories are proposed: Women-Led Startup of the Year, North-East Startup Excellence, and Student Innovator/ Aspiring Entrepreneur.

4. Opportunities for Students and Young Innovators

Students can play an important role in the startup ecosystem by identifying real-world problems, developing innovative solutions, validating prototypes, and building ventures with the potential to grow into sustainable businesses. Through outreach to universities, colleges, incubators, and student innovation communities, Startup India aims to improve awareness of entrepreneurship pathways and national platforms that can support student-founded startups.

This category aims to identify and nurture young innovators from schools and colleges across the country. The award structure comprises four sub-categories and eight national awardees, as follows:

Sub-category	Age Criteria	Winner	Runner-up	Total (approx.)
I. Budding Innovators	10-14 Years	₹3 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹5 lakh
II. Rising Innovators	14-16 Years	₹3 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹5 lakh
III. Young Changemakers	16-18 Years	₹4 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹6 lakh
IV. Emerging Entrepreneurs	18+ Years	₹6 lakh	₹3 lakh	₹9 lakh

5. Process of application

The proposed special category seeks to identify promising student-led innovations from schools and colleges across India, including solutions aligned with **“Shakti Ki Sapta Dhara”** and **the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047**. DPIIT recognition is not required for this category. Individuals or teams of up to four may apply; applicants should demonstrate a prototype, minimum viable product (MVP), working model or proof of concept, with clear problem-solving, scalability and potential impact.

5.1. Four subcategories and proposed prize allocation

Sub-category	Eligibility	Winner	Runner-up	Total
Budding Innovators	10-14 Years	₹3 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹5 lakh
Rising Innovators	14-16 Years	₹3 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹5 lakh
Young Changemakers	16-18 Years	₹4 lakh	₹2 lakh	₹6 lakh
Emerging Entrepreneurs	18+ Years	₹6 lakh	₹3 lakh	₹9 lakh
Total	Eight national awardees			₹25 lakh

5.2. Category focus: Shakti ki Sapta Dhara

S. No.	Stream	Focus as stated in the address	How students can participate (indicative ideas)
1	Manufacturing: Cost, Quality and Scale	India to become a reliable hub in global supply chains, meeting global standards on cost, quality and scale.	Low-cost redesigns of everyday products using local materials; simple tools, jigs or testing devices for local workshops and MSMEs; ideas that cut waste or energy use in production.
2	Agriculture and Food Processing	Moving from farm to export market; traditional cuisine, millets, spices, fruits and flowers to become global brands.	Low-cost post-harvest storage or preservation; soil or moisture sensors; value-added millet and local food products; tools linking farmers to buyers.
3	Technology and Innovation	Third pillar of Saptadhara.	Apps, AI or IoT solutions for local problems; assistive devices for persons with disabilities; learning tools in regional languages.
4	Gati Shakti: Seamless and High-Speed Connectivity	Seamless and high-speed connectivity; port-led development.	Road-safety alert systems; last-mile transport solutions for villages; route or delivery tracking for local vendors; accessible public transport aids.
5	Defence Shakti: Self-Reliance in Defence	Self-reliance in defence production and becoming a global supplier; next-generation technologies, drones, counter-drone systems, indigenous technologies and cyber security.	Cyber-safety and digital-fraud awareness tools; drone or sensor concepts for disaster response and search and rescue; low-cost communication aids for remote areas.
6	Green and Blue Economy	Global scale in green hydrogen, renewable energy, energy storage, green mobility and green manufacturing; blue economy opportunities from fisheries, ports,	Solar or other clean-energy devices; waste-to-energy and plastic recycling; water conservation; coastal clean-up, fish-freshness or marine monitoring solutions.

S. No.	Stream	Focus as stated in the address	How students can participate (indicative ideas)
		shipping, offshore energy and marine resources.	
7	Soft Power: Yoga, Ayurveda, Tourism, Culture and Creative Industries	Yoga, Ayurveda, handicrafts, culture, tourism, wildlife, sports, films, VFX, animation, gaming, digital content and the creative economy.	Digital marketplaces for local artisans; heritage or eco-tourism apps; educational games and animation based on Indian history and folklore; wellness and Yoga apps.

5.3. Student category: proposed seven-stage process flow

Stage	Process	Lead/ Responsibility
1. Call opens	Applications opened on Startup India portal	Startup India, DPIIT
2. Student applications	Individuals or teams submit online applications	Students/ Teams
3. Outreach and handholding	Statewide dissemination, guidance and mentoring through schools/colleges	State/ UT Startup Nodal Agencies
4. Window closes	Applications compiled and shared State/UT-wise	Startup India, DPIIT
5. State/UT evaluation	Evaluate on common score sheet; nominate up to 10 teams per State/UT, irrespective of subcategory	State/ UT Startup Nodal Agencies
6. National Jury	Nominated teams present, grouped by subcategory	National Jury/ DPIIT
7. Winners announced	One winner and one runner-up in each of four subcategories	Startup India, DPIIT

Indicative selection funnel: applications from schools and colleges across 36 States/UTs → up to 10 nominations per State/UT (approximately 360 nationally) → National Jury presentations → eight national awardees. Proposed scoring: Innovation / originality and problem-solving (50 points), Scalability (30 points), and Economic Impact (20 points).

5.4. Proposed multi-level selection process

Level 1 – School/college level: Schools and colleges should make a concerted effort to encourage participation by all interested students. Selection should be inclusive and should give students an opportunity to work in teams, identify real-world problems, develop ideas and present solutions. Each school should endeavour to put forward at least one team from each relevant student level/sub-category, subject to the availability of suitable entries. The names of all members of each team must be recorded and submitted.

Level 2 – District level: The district-level process should ensure participation of both government and private schools/colleges. Entries received from institutions should be reviewed on a common evaluation framework. Each district should endeavour to shortlist approximately 5–15 teams, depending on the number and quality of applications, to ensure meaningful competition at the State/UT level. The shortlisted teams should represent the quality and diversity of innovations emerging from the district.

Level 3 – State/UT level: States/UTs should conduct a transparent assessment of district-level entries and select the strongest teams for nomination to the national process. States/UTs have been requested to share one or two of the best student/team entries in each of the four sub-categories, subject to the final nomination format and overall cap communicated by DPIIT. Nominations must be based on merit; the

teams forwarded should be the best among those who applied and should not be nominated merely to meet a numerical target. The existing proposal for up to 10 nominations per State/UT may be retained as the overall cap unless DPIIT communicates otherwise.

Level 4 – National level: DPIIT/Startup India will consolidate nominations received from States/UTs and arrange evaluation/presentations before the National Jury. The Jury should identify the best entries in each sub-category against the common criteria already proposed: innovation/originality and problem-solving (50 points), scalability (30 points), and economic impact (20 points).

5.5. Objectives and learning outcomes

The initiative should not be viewed only as a competition or an award exercise. Its broader objectives are to familiarise students with India's entrepreneurship and startup movement; encourage them to identify local and real-world challenges; and help them develop teamwork, communication, problem-solving, feasibility assessment and presentation skills. Students should be encouraged to explain the problem they seek to solve, the users/beneficiaries, the feasibility of the proposed solution, the stage of development and its potential impact. Team-based entries should provide each member an opportunity to contribute and present.

Schools and colleges should be encouraged to create broad awareness and enable as many students as possible to participate, while selection at each subsequent level should remain competitive and merit-based.

5.6. Team details and recognition at each level

Every application and nomination should list the full name of every team member, along with the class/year and institution. The team composition should be verified at school/college level, and the complete list should accompany entries at district, State/UT and national levels. DPIIT will endeavour to provide recognition/prizes to participants whose teams are selected at the school/college, district or State/UT level, subject to the final design, budget and modalities of the programme. The national winner and runner-up prizes specified in the main note remain separate and unchanged.

5.7. Programme on 16 January

States/UTs are expected to organise or facilitate their own programme around 16 January to promote student innovation and entrepreneurship. States/UTs should encourage corresponding activities at district level and support participation in the national-level programme. The State/UT plan may include student presentations, display of prototypes or working models, interaction with entrepreneurs/startups, and recognition of shortlisted teams. The detailed format and coordination arrangements may be communicated separately by DPIIT.

5.8. State/UT coordination and support from DPIIT

State/UT Startup Nodal Departments may be requested to serve as single points of contact; circulate the call through school and higher-education networks, including regional-language outreach; guide applicants; assess applications using a standard score sheet; and submit up to 10 nominations. DPIIT would provide the portal, State/UT-wise application data after closure, common evaluation and nomination formats, and consolidation of nominations for the National Jury.

6. States/ UTs roles and responsibilities

All States and UTs are requested to kindly:

1. Designate the State Startup Nodal Department as the single point of contact for this category;
2. Circulate the call for applications to schools and colleges, including in regional languages;
3. Provide outreach and handholding support to applicants; and
4. Evaluate applications on the common scoring sheet and nominate up to 10 teams.
5. Ensure wide outreach so that students across schools and colleges are made aware of the initiative and encouraged to participate.
6. Encourage each school/college to put forward at least one team from each relevant student level/sub-category, wherever feasible.
7. Ensure that government and private institutions are both covered in the district-level selection process.

8. Conduct a district-level shortlisting exercise and endeavour to select approximately 5–15 teams for State/UT-level competition, depending on the number and quality of entries.
9. Select and forward only the strongest, merit-based entries at State/UT level, aiming to identify one or two best entries in each sub-category, subject to DPIIT's final nomination instructions and the overall nomination cap.
10. Maintain the full names and class/year of every team member at every stage and submit complete team details with each nomination.
11. Plan a State/UT-level programme around 17 January and encourage corresponding district-level activities, in coordination with the national programme.
12. Support recognition of teams selected at school/college, district and State/UT levels, in coordination with DPIIT and subject to the final programme modalities

The presentation on the special category is enclosed herewith for reference. The cooperation of all States and UTs is solicited to ensure that every young innovator in the country gets a platform.

Annexure – I

1. Information to be collected from students

The proposed application form should collect the following information in a clear, student-friendly format:

Information group	Details to collect
Student details	Student's full name; class/year of study; school/college name; father's name; mother's name. Contact details.
Location	State/Union Territory and district.
Category selection	One Shakti Ki Sapta dhara stream/category selected by the student/team.
Project details	Project title; problem being addressed; proposed solution; how it works; intended users/beneficiaries; expected impact.
Development stage	Idea, prototype, working model, minimum viable product (MVP) or proof of concept.
Team details	Individual or team application; names and classes/years of team members, where applicable. The working brief allows teams of up to four.
Supporting material	Project description, photographs, presentation, video, prototype link or other evidence.

2. Step-by-step application process for students

Step 1 – Access the application. Open the application link/portal communicated by Startup India, DPIIT or the State/UT nodal agency.

Step 2 – Enter student details. Fill in full name, class/year, school/college name, father's name, mother's name, State/UT and district, along with any other required details.

Step 3 – Select one Saptdhara stream. Review the seven approved streams and select the one that best fits the project. Selection should be based on the innovation's focus.

Step 4 – Describe the problem. Explain the real-world problem or need, who experiences it and why it matters.

Step 5 – Explain the innovation. Describe the solution, what is new or different, how it works and how it may benefit people or communities.

Step 6 – Indicate development stage. Select the current stage: idea, prototype, working model, MVP or proof of concept—and attach supporting material where available.

Step 7 – Review and submit. Check the information, complete any required declarations/consents, submit before the deadline and save the acknowledgement/reference if generated.