

Call for Proposals

Borlaug Global Rust Initiative – Global Wheat Health Alliance Seed Grants in Translational Wheat Health

Competitive awards for advanced undergraduate and graduate students at U.S. universities working to move wheat disease resistance from discovery into farmers' fields.

Cycle	Award size	Project duration	Proposals due	Awards announced
2026	Focused Seed Grant: up to \$10,000 Translational Team Grant: up to \$20,000	Up to 18 months	September 30, 2026, 5:00 p.m. ET	October 12, 2026

1. About the Seed Grants

Wheat pathogens now evolve and spread faster than the scientific workforce can deploy countermeasures. New races of wheat rust and emerging threats such as wheat blast require a pipeline of trained breeders, pathologists, and molecular biologists who can work across institutions and borders. The [Global Wheat Health Alliance](#) (GWHA) was established to connect gene discovery, field testing, and pre-emptive breeding so that stronger disease resistance reaches new wheat varieties and hybrids.

The BGRI-GWHA Seed Grants are the competitive research component of the Global Wheat Health Alliance. Two opportunities are available to advanced undergraduate and graduate students at U.S. universities: *Focused Seed Grants* up to \$10,000 and *Translational Team Grants* of up to \$20,000. Each of these grants is designed to support short, well-defined projects that advance the GWHA Focus Areas (see Section 5, below) and produce technologies and products that breeding programs or a national agricultural research system (NARS) partner can use.

This program is coordinated by the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative (BGRI) at Cornell University on behalf of GWHA, which is co-led by CIMMYT and Cornell/BGRI.

2. Award Types and Amounts

Two tracks are offered, distinguished by project scope, partnership requirements, and award size. An applicant may submit to one track only.

Track	Amount	Purpose and expected scope
Track A Focused Seed Grant	Up to \$10,000	A student-led research project addressing one Priority Focus Area (see Section 5 below). Typical uses: a phenotyping season at a GWH field site, a targeted genotyping or sequencing run, validation of a marker or diagnostic, or a structured data analysis of existing GWH material. At least one GWH, CIMMYT, or NARS collaborator is expected.
Track B Translational Team Grant	Up to \$20,000	A student-led project of greater scope conducted in formal partnership with a NARS or CIMMYT program, with a deliverable that a breeding program or national program will use: a validated protocol, a characterized resistance source moved into an adapted background, a surveillance or diagnostic workflow transferred to a partner institution, or an interoperable dataset. A written concurrence from the named partner is required.

The BGRI will fund as many strong proposals as available funds allow and reserves the right to fund at a level below the amount requested or to shift the balance between the two tracks as the applicant pool warrants.

3. Project Period

Awards are made for up to 18 months, allowing a project to span a full crop season and, where needed, a confirmation season.

- Earliest start date: October 15, 2026.
- All project activity must conclude and all funds must be expended no later than April 30, 2028.
- No-cost extensions beyond April 30, 2028 cannot be granted. The end date is fixed by the terms of the award.

4. Eligibility

- The applicant must be an advanced undergraduate, or a student enrolled in an MSc, MPS, or PhD program, at an accredited university in the United States, and in good academic standing at the time of application and for the full period of performance.
- The applicant must be the intellectual lead of the proposed work. Faculty may not apply on a student's behalf.
- A faculty advisor must confirm enrollment, endorse the project, and confirm that it can be completed within 18 months.

- Advanced undergraduate applicants must be within two years of completing their degree and must have a faculty advisor who commits to supervising the work through its completion.
- Students expecting to defend or graduate before the project end date should propose a scope that concludes before their departure, and must say so in the narrative.
- One application per student. A faculty advisor may endorse more than one applicant.

5. Priority Focus Areas

Competitive proposals address at least one of the following and state clearly which one. Each area is coordinated with gene discovery and marker development, field testing and disease phenotyping, and pre-emptive breeding.

A. Moving resistance into farmer-ready wheat

Pre-emptive breeding work that advances characterized resistance, singly or stacked, into adapted or elite backgrounds, or that shortens the path from a validated source to a line a partner program will test.

B. Gene discovery and marker development

Identification or validation of new resistance sources, resistance gene stacks, or susceptibility gene targets, and the diagnostic markers that make them deployable by a breeding program.

C. Wheat blast resistance diversification

Work that broadens the narrow genetic base of wheat blast resistance, characterizes pathogen variability, or tests deployment strategies in blast-affected environments.

D. Disease phenotyping and data quality

Standardized, large-scale disease evaluation at GWHHA field sites in Kenya, Mexico, Bolivia, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia, including protocol harmonization, scoring reliability, image-based or sensor-based phenotyping, and making resulting data interoperable and reusable.

E. Pathogen surveillance and diagnostic tool adoption

Work that puts surveillance data, diagnostic assays, or advisory tools into routine use by a national program, including the training, validation, and workflow adaptation that adoption actually requires.

REQUIRED FOR EVERY PROPOSAL: State your translational pathway

Every proposal, in every focus area, must state its translational pathway. Identify who will use the result, in what decision, and by when. Projects that end at a publication without a named user are not competitive.

6. Allowable and Unallowable Costs

Allowable

- Research supplies and consumables.
- Genotyping, sequencing, phenotyping, and analytical service fees.
- Sample shipment, phytosanitary certificates, and import or export permits.
- International travel to a GWH partner institution or field site, at the lowest reasonable economy fare.
- Domestic travel to a GWH workshop, partner institution, or field site.
- Lodging up to \$200 per night, and per diem at the applicant institution's published rate.
- Visa and entry permit fees.
- Registration for one conference or training course, up to \$700.
- Open access fees for a manuscript arising directly from the award.

Unallowable

- **Indirect costs or overhead of any kind.** No indirect costs may be charged by the applicant's institution to this award.
- Tuition, student fees, and health insurance.
- Stipend, salary, or wages for the applicant, faculty, or staff.
- Permanent equipment and capital purchases.
- Costs incurred before the award start date or after April 30, 2028.
- Expenses already covered by another award or funding source.

7. Submission Process

Prepare the materials below as a single combined PDF. Name the file “LastName_BGRIGWHA_2026”. Use 11-point type and one-inch margins. Select one grant track and submit only one proposal. Once your application is complete, submit it online through the [BGRI-GWHA Seed Grant application page](#).

1. **Cover page.** Project title, applicant name, degree level and program, expected completion date, institution, faculty advisor, track applied for, total amount requested, and the priority focus area addressed.
2. **Abstract, 150 words maximum.** Written for a general audience and suitable for publication on the BGRI website.
3. **Narrative, 1,000 words maximum.** Describe the objectives, the focus area addressed and why, main tasks and their sequence across the period of performance, collaborators including the named GWH, CIMMYT, or NARS partner (for Translational Team Grants), expected outcomes, and the translational pathway. Figures and references do not count toward the word limit.

4. **Budget and justification, one page.** Include a line-item table with a short justification for each line. State any cost share or complementary support.
5. **Faculty advisor letter, one page.** The letter must confirm enrollment and good standing, endorse the project, and confirm feasibility of completion within 18 months.
6. **Partner concurrence.** Required for Track B, encouraged for Track A. A signed letter or a forwarded email from the named GWHA, CIMMYT, or NARS partner confirming their role is acceptable.
7. **Applicant CV, two pages maximum.**

Proposals that exceed the stated limits, omit a required component, or arrive after the deadline will not be reviewed. Questions may be sent to the contact below through September 18, 2026, and answers of general interest will be circulated to all who have inquired.

8. Review Criteria

Proposals are reviewed by a panel convened by BGRI and drawn from GWHA partner institutions. Reviewers with a conflict of interest recuse themselves.

Criterion	Weight
Alignment with GWHA objectives and a stated priority focus area	25%
Translational pathway: a named user, a specific decision, a credible timeline	25%
Scientific quality and feasibility within 18 months and the requested budget	20%
Quality of the partnership and of co-mentorship with a GWHA, CIMMYT, or NARS collaborator	15%
Budget realism and value for money	15%

Across the portfolio, the panel will also seek breadth: multiple focus areas, multiple institutions, and engagement with more than one country and partner program.

9. Award Conditions and Reporting

Awardees join a cohort coordinated by the GWHA Fellow in Translational Wheat Health, who supports scheduling, shared protocols, and cross-project learning. Each awardee agrees to the following.

- Complete at least one visit to a partner institution or field site, or co-deliver one GWHA virtual workshop, during the award period.
- Present the work once at a GWHA virtual workshop or learning event.
- Submit a one-page interim progress report with an expenditure summary at month 9.
- Submit a final report of no more than three pages by May 15, 2028, covering objectives met, results, data and materials generated, partner engagement, and any publications or presentations.

- Contribute one short narrative and two photographs, with consent for use, to the Annual GWHHA Impact Note.
- Notify BGRI of any publication, dataset, germplasm release, or follow-on funding arising from the award, including after the award has closed.
- Share data and protocols generated under the award with GWHHA partners on reasonable request, consistent with the policies of the applicant's institution and of any partner program.

Acknowledgment language for publications and presentations: *"This work was supported by the Global Wheat Health Alliance seed grant program, coordinated by the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative at Cornell University."*

10. Timeline

Date	Milestone
September 2, 2026	Call released
September 18, 2026	Deadline for questions
September 30, 2026, 5:00 p.m. ET	Proposals due
October 1 to 9, 2026	Panel review
October 12, 2026	Awards announced
October 15, 2026	Earliest start of the period of performance
Month 9 of the award	Interim progress report due
April 30, 2028	All activity complete, all funds expended
May 15, 2028	Final report due

11. Contact

Dr. Maricelis Acevedo

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Research Professor, School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University

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Proposal submissions: bgri.cornell.edu/awards/bgri-gwha-grant-application

The Global Wheat Health Alliance is co-led by CIMMYT and Cornell University / BGRI, with the John Innes Centre, the University of Maryland, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization, the Bangladesh Wheat and Maize Research Institute, and the Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agropecuaria y Forestal of Bolivia.