

CALL FOR PAPERS AND SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

GICHD INNOVATION AWARD 2026

OPEN UNTIL 15 MAY 2026

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1. Introduction

The Innovation Award of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), organised under the auspices of the Mine Action Innovation Hub, is an initiative designed to stimulate creativity, accelerate innovation, and broaden engagement between the mine action community and the wider scientific, technological, and innovation ecosystems.

The Award invites individuals, organisations, and consortia to present new, practical, and impactful ways to enhance mine action responses.

Awardee(s) will be invited to present their solution during an Award Ceremony. In addition, Awardee(s) will receive a symbolic monetary prize of CHF 4,000, visibility across GICHD platforms, and opportunities to explore potential partnerships and follow-up support to further develop, test, or pilot their proposed innovation.

2. Background

Landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive ordnance (EO) continue to threaten lives and livelihoods in over 60 countries. Someone is killed or injured roughly every two hours. EO blocks access to essential services, restricts mobility, education, and health care, and hampers recovery and development. Long after conflict ends, it often remains near homes, schools, roads, farmland, and waterways—forcing an estimated 75 million people to live with daily risk. Despite decades of effort, explosive ordnance contamination remains a critical humanitarian and development challenge.

Mine action encompasses activities aimed at reducing the social, economic, and environmental impact of EO—a category that includes landmines, cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance (UXO), abandoned ordnance, booby traps, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and other hazardous items.

Responding to EO contamination demands scarce and valuable resources. Stakeholders strive to achieve the maximum possible results, at minimum cost and in the shortest feasible time.

Land release is the main approach used to meet this goal. According to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)¹, land release is an evidence-based decision-making process that helps determine which land should be targeted for action and which land does not require any action. It involves:

- identification of hazardous areas;
- cancellation of land through gathering evidence using non-intrusive interventions;
- reduction of land through gathering evidence using intrusive interventions; and
- clearance of land where EO contamination is confirmed.

¹ [IMAS, 07.11, Land Release, 2nd Edition, 16 January 2026](#)

Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) is an integral part of mine action planning and implementation and is one of the five complementary pillars of mine action. EORE is designed to ensure that women, girls, boys, and men in affected communities are aware of the risks from EO and are encouraged to behave in a way that reduces the risk to people, property, and the environment. The objective is to reduce the risk to a level where people can live safely, thus contributing to an environment where economic and social development can occur free from the constraints imposed by EO contamination.

Amid evolving technologies, complex emergencies, and constrained resources, there is a growing need to design EORE that is more effective and efficient, tailoring risk messages to diverse audiences at speed.

To learn more about the challenges and needs in land release and EORE innovation, you may consult the following resources: the [GICHD Innovation Conference 2025 Report](#); the [GICHD Innovation Conference 2023 Report](#); and the report of the [2024 GICHD Innovation Session on AI for Mine Action](#), where experts explored practical applications of AI and developed innovative ideas for the sector.

Further reading references are provided in the last section.

3. Scope of the Award

The 2026 GICHD Innovation Award focuses on land release and EORE. Submissions are welcome across the breadth of land release and EORE, including but not limited to:

- Reliable detection of explosive ordnance
- Precise location and delineation of contaminated areas
- Efficient excavation of buried threats
- Data-driven decision-making, operational analysis, and information management
- Logistics and supply-chain optimisation
- Explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) and tailored messaging
- Disposal of explosive ordnance
- Blast and fragment protective technologies

This open scope ensures that diverse types of innovation—technical, operational, methodological, behavioural, or capacity-building—can be showcased and recognised.

4. Award categories

Awards will be given in the following categories:

1. **Breakthrough Innovation:** Novel solutions that substantially improve efficiency, effectiveness, or quality in mine action operations, introducing new ways to address persistent challenges.
2. **Frugal Innovation:** Simple, practical, and resource-efficient solutions that address operational challenges and can be easily adopted or replicated in comparable settings.
3. **Scalable Innovation:** Solutions that have been successfully tested in operational environments and are ready to transition to broader operational deployment, demonstrating a technology readiness level (TRL) of 6–7 or higher and clear pathways for adoption across mine action programmes or contexts.

5. Participation

5.1 Target audience

The Award aims to engage a diverse range of participants from various fields to ensure the generation of innovative solutions. The Award is open to individuals, organisations, and consortia that bring diverse perspectives and expertise from a variety of sectors:

- Mine action practitioners: National Mine Action Authorities (NMAAs) and mine action organisations.
- Academia: Professors, researchers, and students in engineering, robotics, sensing and geophysics, computer science, AI/ML, data and geospatial analysis, applied physics, materials science, operations research, logistics, systems engineering, instructional design, simulation for training, etc.
- Technology providers: Companies, startups, and non-profit technology providers developing cutting-edge technological solutions relevant to land release and EORE.
- Entrepreneurs: Professionals with creative ideas and entrepreneurial drive. Innovators who have solutions adaptable to mine action, whether in methodology, technology, or process improvements.

The participants are incentivised to partner with NMAA, mine action field practitioners and organisations, EO affected national academic organisations and local communities.

5.2 Submission process and requirements

All submissions must be completed through a two-step process by **23:59 (CET) on 15 May 2026**. Submissions will only be considered complete if both of the following steps are followed:

1. **Submit the Microsoft Form (“[The submission form](#)”)**. The form collects applicant and organisational details, title and abstract of the submission, as well as thematic and technological tags for classification.
2. **Download the [GICHD Innovation Award 2026 Submission Template](#)** available on the Award webpage, complete it, and send it by email to **innovation@gichd.org**. This document should be properly referenced using any consistent citation style, completed in English, and should not exceed 5,000 words. While you are encouraged to follow the template for clarity, consistency, and ease of review, you may adjust section titles or content as needed.

5.3 Evaluation process

The evaluation process is designed to ensure a fair, rigorous, and transparent assessment of all submissions. It consists of two stages:

1. **Initial Screening and Shortlisting (18 to 29 May 2026)**

The GICHD will conduct an initial screening of all submissions to verify eligibility, completeness, relevance to mine action, and correct categorization. The evaluation criteria below will also be applied to assess the relevance, quality, and potential impact of the submission. Based on this initial review, up to five proposals per category will be shortlisted and transmitted to the evaluation panel.

2. **Evaluation Panel (Mine Action Innovation Technical Sub-Group) (1 June to 29 June 2026)**

The five finalists in each category will be evaluated by a panel of the Mine Action Innovation Hub members and additional experts as required. The composition of the evaluation panel will aim to ensure diversity of expertise and perspectives, including technical, operational, academic, research, and field-based knowledge, as well as balanced consideration of regional and gender representation. Conflicts of interest will be declared and managed appropriately.

Subject to need, the Award Panel may request a remote presentation of the full paper. Remote presentation of the full paper to the Award Panel will take place between 1 June and 15 June 2026.

Following assessment against the evaluation criteria—and, where applicable, the presentation—the Panel will conduct a final review and select one awardee per category. The awardee(s) will be announced by 1 July 2026. Decisions of the Panel are final.

5.4 Evaluation criteria

Submissions will be evaluated against the defining characteristics of one of the Award categories – Breakthrough, Frugal, or Scalable Innovation. The following **cross-cutting evaluation criteria** will be used to rank submissions within each category:

- **Impact:** The significance of the problem the submission aims to solve and the potential benefits of its implementation.
- **Relevance:** The extent to which the proposed solution addresses a clearly defined operational need in mine action.
- **Technical quality:** The logic, coherence, completeness, and clarity in communicating the technical ideas of the submission.

5.5 Post-Award opportunities

Awardees will be invited to present their solution during the Award Ceremony, scheduled for October-November 2026. Their participation in the ceremony will be fully covered by the GICHD.

Winning submissions will be featured and highlighted on the Award webpage. Other submissions will also be published as part of a knowledge base, subject to special requests on data handling, ensuring visibility of innovative ideas and facilitating knowledge sharing across the mine action community (see the [GICHD Innovation Award 2025](#) knowledge base as an example).

Furthermore, the GICHD may select one or two solutions—especially from the Scalable Innovation category—for structured follow-up and potential piloting in 2026-2027.

6. Intellectual property, data protection and use of submissions

6.1 Permission for Award-related use

Authorship and intellectual property remain with the applicant(s). GICHD does not claim ownership, patent rights, or commercial rights over submitted innovations.

By submitting an entry, authors confirm that the work is their own and that they hold the rights necessary to submit it. Applicants remain responsible for ensuring that their submission does not infringe third-party intellectual property rights.

Applicants grant the GICHD a non-exclusive, royalty-free licence to:

- publish the title, abstract, and/or summary of their submission on the GICHD website,
- feature the work during the Award Ceremony and related events,
- include the submission in a publicly accessible library of innovations hosted by GICHD,
- use and reference the submission in GICHD communications materials.

6.2 Confidential content

If a submission includes sensitive or proprietary information, applicants should clearly mark such content. GICHD will handle this information confidentially and will not publish it without explicit permission.

6.3 Protection of personal data

By participating in the GICHD Innovation Award 2026, you consent to the [Privacy Notice for GICHD Events](#). Information is used for review and administration of the Award. Requests or questions about how your personal data will be used can be sent to b.ohanyan@gichd.org.

7. Timeline

The key dates for the submission and evaluation process are presented in the table below.

Deliverables	Date
Deadline for submission	15 May 2026
Initial screening of submissions	18-29 May 2026
Panel evaluation of selected submissions	1-29 June 2026
Presentations to the award panel (as needed)	1-15 June 2026
Award decision and announcement	1 July 2026
Award ceremony	October-November 2026

8. Diversity and inclusion

The GICHD highly encourages participation from underrepresented groups, particularly women, youth, persons with disabilities and representatives from EO-affected countries and territories. By fostering a broad and inclusive participation base, the Award ensures a rich variety of ideas and perspectives.

9. Point of contact

For additional information about the Award, please contact Boris Ohanyan at b.ohanyan@gichd.org.

10. Background reading material

GICHD. "[A Guide to Mine Action](#)", accessed 16 March 2026.

GICHD. "[Difficult Terrain in Mine Action](#)," accessed 16 March 2026.

GICHD. "[Operational Efficiency in Mine Action](#)", accessed 16 March 2026.

GICHD. "[Innovation Conference 2023. Final Report](#)", accessed 16 March 2026

GICHD. "[Innovation Conference 2025. Final Report](#)", accessed 16 March 2026

UNMAS. "[IMAS 04.10 – Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations](#)", accessed 16 March 2026.

UNMAS. "[IMAS 07.11 – Land release](#)," accessed 16 March 2026.

UNMAS. "[IMAS 12.10 – Explosive Ordnance Risk Education \(EORE\)](#)", accessed 16 March 2026. <https://www.mineactionstandards.org/standards/07-14/>