



# GUIDELINES

*“Challenge”*

*M.U.S.A.*

*Design healthy, sustainable and accessible university  
canteens*

OnFoods – Spoke 7

**“Participatory design of solutions towards healthy and sustainable canteens”  
(PARCA)**



## CONTENUTI

1. Preface .....	3
2. The challenge .....	3
2.1 Requirements for the registration.....	4
2.2 Registration for the groupworks .....	4
3. The context.....	4
3.1 Canteens of the University of Bologna.....	4
3.2 Canteens from the University of Parma .....	5
3.3 The challenge as an opportunity for the future of university canteens .....	5
4. Project development .....	6
4.1 The mentoring program.....	6
4.2 Fase 1: Preliminary phase .....	7
4.3 Fase 2: Final proposal.....	7
5. Evaluation criteria.....	8
6. Final award .....	8
Partners and Sponsors .....	9
Contacts .....	9

## 1. Preface

In recent years, the focus on environmental sustainability and health has taken on an increasingly central role in various areas of society, and universities are no exception. In this context, the challenge we aim to tackle is particularly significant: how can we improve university catering services to make them not only more accessible and of higher quality but also environmentally sustainable and more inclusive from a social perspective?

This challenge, "**M.U.S.A. - Designing Healthy, Sustainable, and Accessible University Canteens,**" is part of the PARCA project (Participatory Design of Solutions Towards Healthy and Sustainable University Canteens), an initiative funded by the PNRR ONFOODS project aimed at promoting the co-design of innovative solutions for university canteens, with the goal of making them healthier and more sustainable. The project is being developed in collaboration with the Department of Agri-Food Science and Technology and the Department of Psychology of the University of Bologna, and the Department of Food and Drug Sciences at the University of Parma, with the support of ER.GO - Regional Agency for the Right to Higher Education in Emilia-Romagna.

This document aims to provide a comprehensive guide for participants to participate to the challenge, outlining not only the context and objectives of the project but also operational details, evaluation criteria, and future opportunities. We believe this initiative represents a unique opportunity for students to apply their skills, collaborate in an interdisciplinary context, and actively contribute to transforming university canteens into more sustainable and inclusive spaces. It could also be an occasion to gather suggestions and proposals for the use of Artificial Intelligence tools to improve the monitoring of consumption in catering services and to gather information on students' eating behaviors and habits.

## 2. The challenge

The competition is aimed at undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students enrolled at the Universities of Bologna and Parma. The goal is to engage students in creating innovative solutions to improve the sustainability and quality of university catering services, particularly for redefining the content of the call for tenders for the renewal of the contract for the canteen of the Department of Engineering of the University of Bologna, located on Viale Risorgimento 2, Bologna. Multidisciplinary teams composed of students from various fields of study will need to develop proposals that address environmental sustainability, economic accessibility, food quality, and social inclusion in university canteens.

The proposals should be inspired by principles of participatory co-design and follow an interdisciplinary approach, integrating technological, environmental, social, and economic elements. The primary goal is to promote university canteens that not only provide healthy and tasting meals but are also sustainable and accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

This process will include organizing a series of seminars for students, aiming to educate them on food sustainability in relation to university canteens. These workshops will prepare participants for the challenge, providing them with the skills needed to develop innovative proposals focused on improving university catering services. Final proposals will be evaluated based on their innovation, feasibility, and effectiveness, with a particular focus on the practical applicability of the solutions in the identified

thematic areas. At the end of the process, the best ideas will be awarded for their contribution to transforming university canteens into more sustainable and inclusive spaces.

## 2.1 Requirements for the registration

Students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, or PhD programs at the University of Bologna and University of Parma are eligible to apply. Participation requires **teams of 3 to 6 students**. The international composition of a group will be considered positively and prioritized during the selection and admission phase for the challenge, although it is not a mandatory eligibility criteria. Participants can register as pre-formed teams, or if they are alone but wish to participate, they can still sign up. In the latter case, those registered will be assigned to a team made up of other individual applicants, with the aim of promoting interdisciplinarity. The challenge and the organization of the seminars will be organized **both in English and Italian language**, therefore registration are open from people of different nationalities.

## 2.2 Registration for the groupworks

Registrations will be open **from October the 11th to November the 7th 2024**, and participants will need to fill out a **specific online form**. Below you can find the links to the registration forms:

- [Form for teams](#)
- [Form for single participants](#)

A selection committee will evaluate the groups based on the following criteria:

- **Multidisciplinarity of the working group:** The team composition should include members from different areas of study to ensure a multidisciplinary approach.
- **Motivational Letter:** Each team, or individual participant in the case of individual registrations, must submit a brief motivational letter (max 500 words). The letter should explain why the team or individual is interested in the challenge, what unique skills and perspectives they can bring, and what they expect from the project.

Acceptance of participation will be communicated **by November 11, 2024, while the first seminar of 1 hour will be held on the same week** (11-15 November).

## 3. The context

The challenge will take place within the context of the University of Bologna, including the city of Bologna and all its campuses in the Romagna region (Forlì, Cesena, Rimini, and Ravenna), as well as the University of Parma. The primary focus will be on university canteens that provide catering services to their users, including students and staff, under contracts with the Regional Agency for the Right to Education.

### 3.1 Canteens of the University of Bologna

University canteens aim to provide a full meal for lunch or dinner, accessible to students enrolled at the University of Bologna by showing their university badge, which grants them a discounted rate. Additionally, scholarship students can use a prepaid system through a dedicated app, funded equally by a portion of their scholarship and a contribution from ER.GO.

At the University of Bologna's campuses, located in Bologna, Cesena, Forlì, Rimini, and Ravenna, university canteens or dining areas are not present in every department. Some departments have an internal dining area available to enrolled students and staff, while other canteens are strategically located in high-traffic areas, such as the historic center in Bologna, to serve most students attending nearby classes.

In Bologna, some dining points are managed under contract with the Regional Agency for the Right to Higher Education (ER.GO). These dining points include:

- Ex Fornace Galotti at the Navile teaching center (Via Gobetti, 101 – Bologna, Italy)
- Engineering (Viale del Risorgimento, 2 – Bologna, Italy)
- Mensa Irnerio (Piazza Puntoni, 1 – Bologna, Italy)
- Scuderia (Piazza Giuseppe Verdi, 2 – Bologna, Italy)
- Veneta (Via Antonio Zanolini, 41 – Bologna, Italy)
- Bar Volume (Via Cesare Pavese, 50 – Cesena, Italy)
- Bar Campus Forlì (Piazzale Igino Lega, 2 – Forlì, Italy)
- Ex ENAV (Via Montaspro, 97 – Forlì, Italy)

In addition to these contracted dining points with ER.GO, there are several partnered dining options such as bars, bakeries, pizzerias, self-service restaurants, ethnic restaurants, and spaces where students can consume meals prepared at home or bought elsewhere.

### 3.2 Canteens from the University of Parma

The University of Parma has three dining points operated in partnership with ER.GO, which provides catering services for students in Parma. The dining locations are:

- Campus Bar (Viale delle Scienze, 57/a – Parma, Italia)
- Campus Self Service (Viale delle Scienze, 57/a – Parma, Italia)
- Grossardi (Vicolo Grossardi, 4 (secondo piano) – Parma, Italia).

In addition to these ER.GO-operated points, students can also access university bars located within the Department of Economic and Business Sciences on Via Kennedy and the Department of Veterinary Medical Sciences on Via Del Taglio in Parma. Furthermore, like their counterparts at the University of Bologna, Parma students can visit affiliated dining facilities for additional options.

### 3.3 The challenge as an opportunity for the future of university canteens

The challenge will focus on the dining points operated in partnership with ER.GO at the University of Parma and the University of Bologna. The goal is to develop solutions and proposals that can be directly integrated into public tenders for university catering services, aiming to stimulate more competitive, innovative, and appealing offerings from competing catering companies.

The challenge provides the opportunity to influence the contents of the tenders, particularly concerning the procedures for managing the cafeteria of the Department of Engineering at the University of Bologna, located at Viale Risorgimento 2, Bologna. By proposing more challenging and ambitious evaluation criteria, especially those aligned with the needs of students, this approach aims to bring about tangible change in the service quality and offerings to enhance participation and satisfaction among the student population.

Furthermore, university cafeterias represent a unique opportunity for integrated sustainability efforts—addressing nutritional, environmental, economic, and social aspects within food systems. In this context, the challenge is timely and stimulating, responding to contemporary needs and challenges. Finally, university dining facilities in both Bologna and Romagna, as well as Parma, are progressively evolving into multifunctional spaces that provide various services for students, with extended opening hours beyond traditional meal times. Therefore, it would also be valuable to receive proposals regarding the diverse usage of these spaces.

## 4. Project development

The project will be developed by the pre-formed working group, registered and accepted by the Commission, during the period from November 11, 2024, to **January 12, 2025**, which is the deadline for the preliminary proposal submission (Phase 1). After this phase, the group will have an additional period of one month, from January 13 to **February 16, 2025**, to finalize and submit the final proposal (Phase 2).

### 4.1 The mentoring program

During Phase 1, the working groups will have the opportunity to actively participate in online seminars and webinars. These sessions aim to equip the groups with specific skills related to sustainability in university catering systems. The seminars will be led by experts and stakeholders from the field of university catering and sustainability, including researchers and university professors specializing in behavioral economics, psychology, nutrition, as well as professionals from catering service companies, public procurement managers, and communication experts associated with the University of Bologna and Parma, among others.

The goal of these seminars is to encourage students to think critically about innovative proposals that are grounded in real-world contexts and address current issues and challenges. Additionally, the mentorship program will include sessions where groups can directly consult with experts for support and advice during the project development phase. The seminars will be six (of 1 hour each) and will cover the following topics:

- University catering: Characteristics, challenges, and opportunities
- The role of specifications in university catering

- Management controls on catering services and compliance with tender specifications
- Nutritional aspects of catering
- Psychological aspects of food choices and behavior
- Sustainable behavior in catering
- Measuring and communicating sustainability
- Multifunctionality of university canteens
- How to prepare an abstract and a video pitch

These topics aim to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the various elements involved in university catering, emphasizing sustainability, innovation, and effective communication strategies. The focus on practical skills, such as preparing abstracts and video pitches, will also help participants effectively present their ideas and proposals.

In addition to the specially organized seminars, participating students in the working groups will have the opportunity to attend a series of seminars on food and nutrition as part of the seminar cycle led by Early Career Scientists from Spoke 7 of the PNRR OnFoods project. This represents a valuable opportunity to delve deeper into the topics addressed by the Challenge, as well as to gain knowledge and insight into the OnFoods project.

#### 4.2 Phase 1: Preliminary phase

Phase 1 involves participation in a series of seminars specifically organized for this Challenge, focusing on the discovery of sustainability in university catering. Following the completion of the seminars, the working groups will be required to present an initial proposal that concisely summarizes the innovative and essential elements of their project.

The output expected at the conclusion of Phase 1 is a document in the form of an abstract and a conceptual map. This document should capture the essence of the project, its objectives, and the reasons why these elements are innovative and relevant to the goals established by the challenge. Additionally, it should cover all the themes addressed during the mentorship and identified as essential components to be included in the final proposal. This structured approach aims to ensure that students not only grasp theoretical knowledge but also apply it effectively in their projects, leading to actionable and impactful solutions for university catering sustainability.

#### 4.3 Phase 2: Final proposal

Phase 2 involves a detailed exploration, refinement, and further development of the abstracts submitted in Phase 1. During this phase, the project must take a comprehensive form, incorporating all required elements and adhering to a specified structure outlined in the guidelines. The deliverables for Phase 2 will include a pitch presentation and a written document where the working group will present the project to the committee, detailing the key ideas developed throughout their work. The final project must include the following aspects and follow the indicated structure:

- General Introduction of the Project (500 words)
- Development of Healthy and Sustainable Menus (1000 words)
- Economic Accessibility (1000 words)

- Proposals for Multifunctional Use (500 words)
- Space Design (500 words)
- Environmental Sustainability (focusing on strategies for reducing food waste) (1000 words)
- Communication Plan (1000 words)
- Appendices (maximum 15 pages)

This structured approach ensures that students not only delve deeper into their initial ideas but also present comprehensive and actionable proposals that address various aspects of sustainability in university catering.

## 5. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation of the projects proposed by the participating groups will be conducted by a committee composed of experts in agro-food economics, psychology, and nutrition, as well as stakeholders in the sustainability sector, specifically focusing on university catering services. This includes professionals from catering companies, the Emilia Romagna regional agency for student rights (ER.GO), and local administrative bodies.

The criteria for the final evaluation will consider the following aspects:

- **Innovative elements proposed by the project:** The committee will assess how original and creative the solutions are in addressing the challenges outlined in the challenge.
- **Environmental, economic, and social sustainability of the proposal:** This criterion evaluates the overall sustainability of the proposed solutions, considering their impact on the environment, economic viability, and social equity.
- **Feasibility of the proposal:** The practicality and implementability of the project will be crucial, ensuring that proposed solutions can be realistically applied in the university setting.
- **Multidisciplinarity of the project:** The committee will look for diversity in expertise within the project team, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach that incorporates various disciplines.

This thorough evaluation process aims to recognize projects that not only present innovative ideas but also are feasible and sustainable, contributing effectively to enhancing university catering services.

## 6. Final award

The winning team proposing the project will be awarded a prepaid card for access to catering services, provided and sponsored by ER.GO, which can be used at the dining points of the Universities of Bologna and Parma. The amount on the prepaid card is defined as follows:

- €500.00 for each member of the winning team;
- €250.00 for each member of the team that places second;
- €100.00 for each member of the team that places third.



## Partners and Sponsors



## Contacts

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