

# PRD: ChowPal

Fall 2025

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## 1. Vision

For international students and culturally diverse home cooks who struggle to access authentic ingredients and trusted cultural recipes, ChowPal is a community-driven cooking and grocery marketplace that seamlessly connects recipe discovery, ingredient sourcing, and local ethnic stores in one platform. Unlike existing grocery delivery or social recipe apps, we offer culturally credible meal personalization and direct ingredient integration, making cultural cooking effortless, accessible, and emotionally grounding for students living away from home.

## Motivation

### The Core Problem

#### Finding Authentic Ingredients is Difficult and Time-Consuming

Students don't know which stores carry specific cultural ingredients. Generic grocery apps like Instacart lack ethnic grocery partnerships. Substitution information is unreliable or nonexistent. Students waste time visiting multiple stores or calling family for advice.

#### Recipe Discovery Lacks Cultural Context and Shopping Integration

TikTok and Instagram provide recipes but no ingredient sourcing. Generic recipe apps like Yummly and Tasty don't focus on cultural authenticity. Dietary restrictions (halal, kosher, Jain) require manual filtering. There's no connection between "I want to cook this" and "Where do I buy these ingredients?"

### **Ethnic Grocery Stores Struggle to Reach Student Customers**

Small ethnic grocers lack digital presence and marketing budgets. Students don't know these stores exist in their college towns. Store owners want student business but have no platform to reach them. The opportunity for a symbiotic relationship is currently unrealized.

### **Customer Development Validation**

Our team conducted 25 customer development interviews (15 buyers, 10 sellers) that validated these pain points:

#### **Key Findings:**

- 87% of international student interviewees reported difficulty finding cultural ingredients as a "frequent" or "constant" challenge
- 73% currently rely on peer networks and social media for cooking help
- 60% have abandoned cooking certain dishes due to ingredient unavailability
- 100% of ethnic store owners want better ways to reach student customers
- Students expressed strong interest (9/10 average) in an integrated solution

#### **Market Opportunity:**

- 1.1 million international students in the US (2024)
- Growing cultural diversity in cooking preferences among domestic students
- \$2 billion ethnic grocery market in college towns
- Untapped creator economy for student recipe makers

#### **Why Now?**

1. **Technology Maturity:** AI for dietary filtering and recommendations is now accessible and cost-effective
2. **Cultural Shift:** Gen Z values authenticity and cultural exploration in food
3. **Creator Economy:** Students want monetization opportunities for their expertise
4. **Delivery Infrastructure:** Existing partnerships (Instacart, DoorDash) make logistics feasible
5. **Competitive Gap:** No current solution addresses all three pain points together

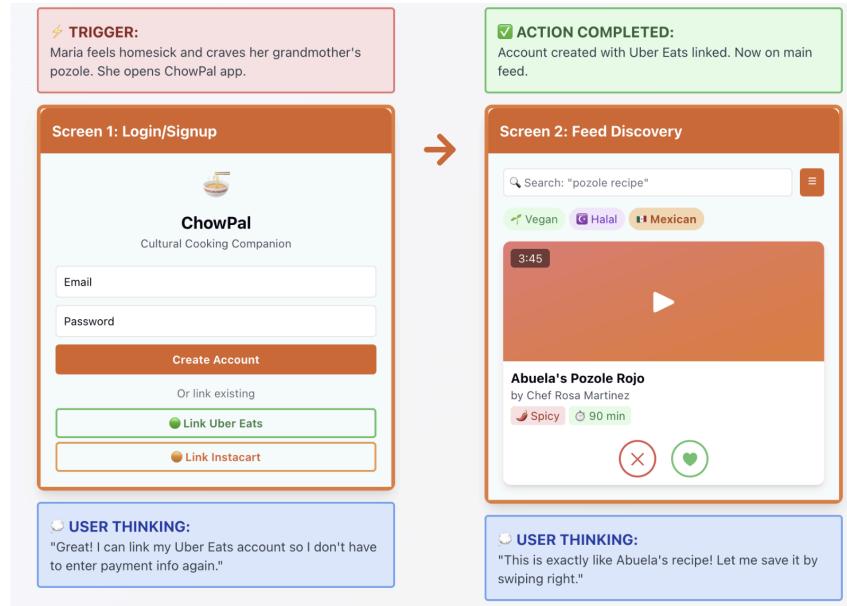
# Verbal/Visual Walkthrough of Use Cases

## Use Case 1: Aria - The Student Cook

**Persona:** Aria, 25 years old, international student at Boston University. Limited cooking experience, small dorm kitchen, tight budget.

**Quote:** *"I just want to make dinner without running to three stores."*

**Scenario:** Sunday evening after a long week of classes. Aria is homesick and wants to cook something authentic and comforting.



## User Journey:

### Step 1: Login/Signup

- Downloads ChowPal app
- Creates account with email or Google
- Links existing Uber Eats account (skips payment setup)

- Selects dietary preferences: Vegetarian
- **Key insight:** Linking delivery account removes friction later

### **Step 2: Feed Discovery**

- Lands on TikTok-style feed with auto-playing recipe videos
- Sees filter tags: Vegan /Halal /Jain
- Swipes through videos: Thai Pad Thai, Mexican Tacos
- Finds "Paneer Tikka Masala" - 25 min, Easy, Vegetarian
- Swipes right to save
- **User thinking:** "This looks delicious and not too complicated!"

### **Step 3: Recipe Detail**

- Opens saved recipe, watches full video
- Uses servings slider: adjusts from 4 to 2 people
- Ingredients update automatically
- Sees ingredients grouped by store:
  - Patel Brothers (2 mi): Paneer \$5.49, Tikka Masala spice \$4.99
  - Whole Foods (1 mi): Heavy cream \$3.49, Tomatoes \$2.99
- Total: \$17 (fits her budget!)
- Clicks "Add All to Cart" for both stores

### **Step 4: Checkout**

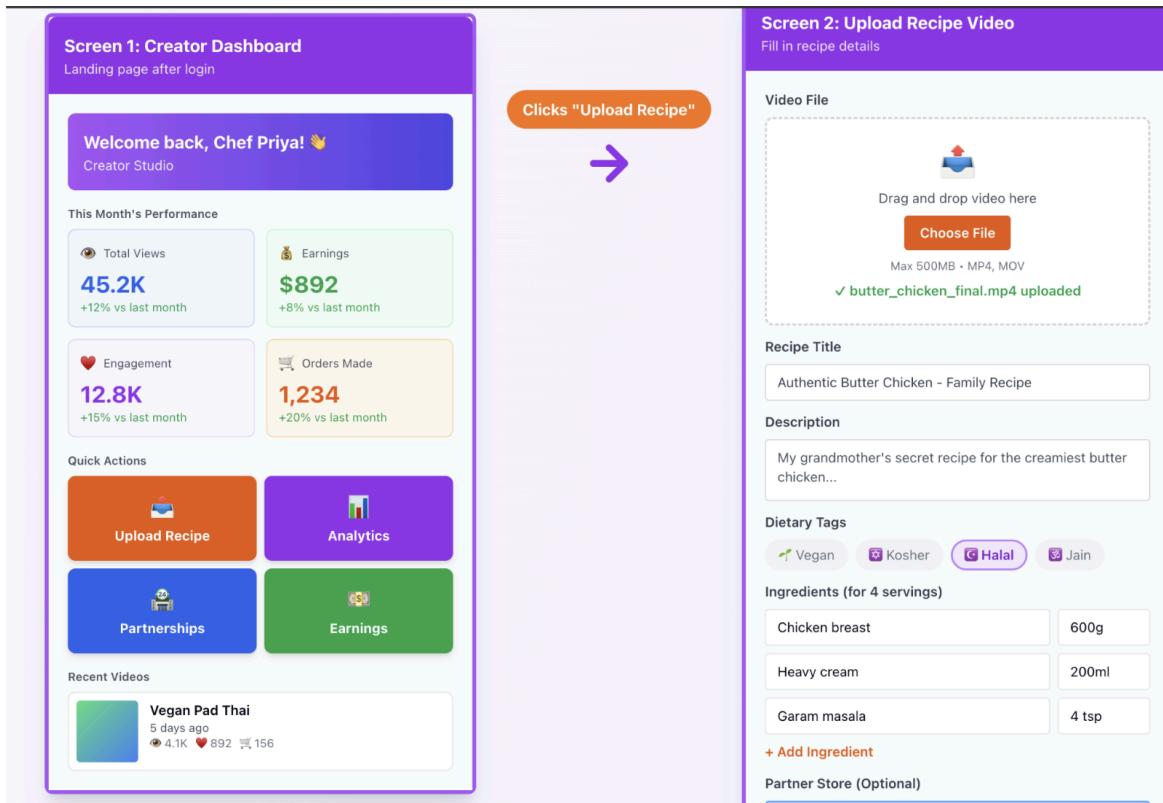
- Reviews cart with items from both stores
- Delivery fee: \$3.99
- Total: \$21
- Redirects to Uber Eats app (already linked)
- Completes checkout in 1 minute
- **Outcome:** Aria ordered everything in under 5 minutes without knowing where these stores are

## **Use Case 2: Dev - The Recipe Creator**

**Persona:** Dev, 21 years old, passionate home cook and content creator. Wants to share family recipes and earn money while helping other students.

**Quote:** *"I love sharing my family recipes and seeing others try them."*

**Scenario:** Dev just finished filming his signature butter chicken recipe. He wants to upload it, partner with a local store, and track performance.



## User Journey:

### Step 1: Creator Dashboard

- Logs into ChowPal Creator Studio
- Sees monthly stats:
  - Total views: 45.2K (+12% vs last month)
  - Earnings: \$892 (+8% vs last month)
  - Engagement: 12.8K saves/likes
  - Orders: 1,234 ingredient orders generated
- Views top performing recipes
- **User thinking:** "Nice! My biryani video is doing well. Let me upload this new butter chicken recipe."

### Step 2: Upload Recipe

- Clicks "Upload Recipe"

- Drags video file (butter\_chicken\_final.mp4)
- Fills in details:
  - Recipe title: "Authentic Butter Chicken - Family Recipe"
  - Description: "My grandmother's secret recipe..."
  - Cuisine: Indian
  - Servings: 4
  - Prep: 30 min, Cook: 60 min
  - Difficulty: Medium
  - Dietary tags: ✓ Halal
- Adds ingredients (for 4 servings):
  - Chicken breast - 600g
  - Heavy cream - 200ml
  - Garam masala - 4 tsp
  - (etc.)
- **Optional:** Selects "Partner Store" - Patel Brothers
  - Commission: 10% per order using his ingredients
- Publishes recipe

### Step 3: Video Analytics (3 days later)

- Receives notification: "Your butter chicken video hit 2,000 views! 🎉"
- Opens analytics dashboard:
  - Total views: 2,347 (+18% from last week)
  - Avg watch time: 1:42 (68% completion - strong!)
  - Engagement: 456 likes, 89 shares, 34 comments
  - **Revenue Impact:**
    - Orders generated: 89 orders (3.8% conversion)
    - Earnings: \$127 from this video (\$1.43 per order)
- Reads comments: "This is the best butter chicken I've made!"
- **User thinking:** "Wow! 89 orders in one week and \$127 earned. My audience loves authentic Indian recipes. I should make more!"

### Use Case 3: Maya or Raj - The Store Owner

**Persona:** Maya (or Raj Patel), 39 years old, owns Patel Brothers Indian Grocery in Boston. Struggles to reach college students who don't know the store exists.

**Quote:** "*I wish more students knew how to use the spices I sell.*"

**Scenario:** Raj reviews his inventory and notices his premium garam masala (150 units, \$1,348 in inventory) is sitting on shelves. Only 8 units sold this month. He wants to move this inventory by partnering with creators.

The diagram illustrates a user journey flow. It starts with the "Screen 1: Store Dashboard" (left), which shows performance metrics like 342 orders (+24% vs last month) and 12 active partners. A callout "Clicks 'Find Creators'" leads to the "Screen 2: Find Creators Near You" (right). This screen allows filtering by distance (Within 5 miles, Within 10 miles, Within 25 miles) and cuisine type (Indian, Korean, Chinese, Mexican). It lists 24 creators within 5 miles, with "Chef Priya Kumar" highlighted as a top result. Chef Priya's profile shows 45K followers, 89% engagement, and 234 avg orders. A callout "USER THINKING:" describes how Raj sees this as a great partnership opportunity due to her proximity and ingredient usage.

**Screen 1: Store Dashboard**  
Store Hub - Landing page after login

**Store Hub** 🏪  
Patel Brothers - Boston, MA

This Month's Performance

Orders	Revenue
342	\$8.2K
+24% vs last month	+18% vs last month

Active Partners	Top Item
12	Basmati Rice 156 orders
Creators promoting	

Quick Actions

Find Creators	Ingredient Stats
Campaigns	Top Partners

Active Creator Partnerships

PK	Chef Priya Kumar Indian • 45K followers 67 orders \$1.2K
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➡️

**ACTION COMPLETED:**  
Raj clicked "Find Creators" and is now on a discovery page where he can search for and filter creators by location, cuisine type, and performance metrics.

**Screen 2: Find Creators Near You**  
Discover creators to partner with

Search creators by name or cuisine... Distance from Store: Within 5 miles, Within 10 miles, Within 25 miles

Cuisine Type: Indian, Korean, Chinese, Mexican

Sort By: Most Followers

Showing 24 creators within 5 miles

PK	Chef Priya Kumar Indian Cuisine Specialist 2.3 miles away - Cambridge, MA	4.9
45K	89%	234
Followers	Engagement	Avg Orders
Most Used Ingredients: Garam Masala, Turmeric, Chili Powder		
<a href="#">View Profile &amp; Send Partnership</a>		

**USER THINKING:**  
"Perfect! Chef Priya Kumar is only 2.3 miles away, has 45K followers, and I can see she already uses garam masala frequently in her recipes! Her engagement rate is 89% which is excellent. She averages 234 orders per video. This could be a great partnership. Let me view her profile."

## User Journey:

### Step 1: Store Dashboard

- Logs into ChowPal Business Portal
- Reviews "This Month's Performance":
  - Orders: 342 (+24% vs last month)
  - Revenue: \$8.2K (+18%)
  - Active Partners: 12 creators promoting his store
  - Top item: Basmati Rice (156 orders)
- Notices: Garam Masala is slow-moving
- **User thinking:** "My garam masala inventory is stuck. I need to find creators who use this ingredient."

### Step 2: Find Creators

- Clicks "Find Creators"
- Filters by:
  - Cuisine: Indian
  - Location: Within 5 miles of store
  - Followers: Sort by "Most Followers"
- Sees list of 24 local creators
- Top result: **Chef Priya Kumar**
  - 45K followers
  - 89% engagement rate
  - 234 avg orders per video
  - Most used ingredient: Garam Masala (used in 45 recipes!)
- Views her profile:
  - Specializes in North Indian dishes
  - Uses authentic spices
  - Her butter chicken video generated 89 orders
- **User thinking:** "Perfect! She uses garam masala in most recipes and has strong engagement. Let me partner with her."

### Step 3: Send Partnership Request

- Clicks "Send Partnership Request"
- Fills partnership form:
  - Partnership type: "Promote Specific Ingredient"
  - Ingredient: Garam Masala - Premium Blend
    - Price: \$8.99 per unit
    - Stock: 150 units
  - Commission rate: 10% (\$0.90 per unit sold)
  - Promotion details: "Premium garam masala, fresh-ground weekly in small batches"
  - Special offer: "10% discount for first-time customers"
  - Campaign duration: 1 month
- Reviews summary:
  - Creator: Chef Priya Kumar (45K followers)
  - Product: Garam Masala Premium Blend
  - Commission: 10% per order
  - Offer: 10% off first purchase
  - Est. reach: 45K potential customers
- Sends partnership request
- **Priya accepts within 24 hours**

## Step 4: Campaign Results (2 weeks later)

- Opens "Ingredient Analytics" dashboard
- Sees Garam Masala performance:
  - **Before partnership:** 8 orders/month
  - **After 2 weeks:** 89 orders! (11x increase)
  - Revenue: \$712 (89 units × \$8)
  - Commission paid: \$80.10 (11% of revenue)
  - Remaining inventory: 61 units
  - **59% of stuck inventory moved in just 2 weeks!**
- Top creator impact: Chef Priya Kumar
  - 67 orders from her audience
  - \$536 revenue attributed to her
- **User thinking:** "This is incredible! I went from 8 units per month to 89 in 2 weeks. I only paid \$80 in commissions for \$712 in revenue. This is way better than advertising. I need to partner with more creators!"

### Business Impact:

- Moved 59% of dead inventory
- 11x increase in sales
- Reached 89 new young customers
- ROI: 8.9x (\$712 revenue / \$80 commission)
- Built relationship with Chef Priya for future promotions

## Use Case 4: Admin - Platform Moderator

**Persona:** Sarah, ChowPal community manager. Responsible for content moderation, user safety, and platform quality.

**Goal:** Keep platform safe and high-quality while scaling operations efficiently.

**Scenario:** Monday morning, Sarah reviews flagged content and resolves disputes.

### User Journey:

#### Step 1: Admin Dashboard

- Logs into admin portal at 9am
- Sees prioritized queue:

- **High Priority (3 items)**
  - Recipe flagged for food safety
  - Store payment dispute
  - Creator ban appeal
- **Pending Review (12 items)**
  - New creator applications
  - Recipe quality checks
  - User reports
- Platform health metrics:
  - Active users: 15,234 (+8%)
  - New recipes today: 23
  - Avg response time: 2.3 hours ✓
  - User satisfaction: 4.6/5 ✓
- AI alerts:
  - 2 potential duplicate recipes
  - 1 suspicious review pattern
  - 5 inventory discrepancies

## Step 2: Content Moderation

- Opens high-priority item: "Recipe flagged for food safety"
- Recipe: "Raw Chicken Sushi" by @FusionChef99
- Flagged by: 3 users
- Reason: "Promotes eating raw chicken - dangerous!"
- Reviews:
  - Watches full video
  - Reads community reports
  - Checks creator's defense: "This is Japanese tataki technique - chicken is seared"
  - AI analysis: "Video shows searing, similar to approved recipes"
- **Decision:** Keep recipe but add safety warning
  - Action: Adds label "⚠️ Advanced technique. Ensure proper temperature."
  - Notifies creator and users who flagged it
- Time spent: 4 minutes

## Step 3: Store Dispute Resolution

- Opens: "Payment not received - Al Madina Market"
- Store owner claims: "Fulfilled 18 orders, haven't received \$247.50"
- System check reveals:

- ✓ 18 orders confirmed
  - ✓ All marked fulfilled
  - Bank account verification expired Oct 15
- **Root cause:** Security requires bank re-verification every 90 days
- Resolution:
  - Sends automated re-verification link to store owner
  - Email: "Please re-verify your bank account. Payment will process within 24 hours."
  - Closes ticket
- Time spent: 3 minutes

#### **Step 4: Weekly Operations Report**

- Reviews moderation metrics:
  - Total reviews: 67 this week
  - Approved: 51 (76%)
  - Edited: 12 (18%)
  - Removed: 4 (6%)
  - Avg time per review: 4.2 minutes
- Common issues:
  - Food safety concerns: 23%
  - Copyright questions: 15%
  - Quality issues: 12%
- Creator applications:
  - Reviewed: 15
  - Approved: 12 (80% approval rate)
  - Rejected: 3 (not students, low quality, duplicate content)
- Store partner health:
  - Active stores: 15
  - Avg rating: 4.3/5
  - Inventory accuracy: 87%
  - 1 store needs attention (multiple out-of-stock complaints)

**Outcome:** Sarah maintained platform quality, resolved disputes quickly, and identified trends for product team to address.

## **Technology Considerations**

**Realistic technology available today:**

- **Video streaming:** Cloudflare Stream, AWS CloudFront
- **Delivery integration:** Instacart API, Uber Eats API (existing partnerships)
- **Payments:** Stripe Connect (creator payouts), integrated with delivery partners
- **AI features:**
  - Video analysis for ingredient detection (OpenAI, Google Vision)
  - Recommendation algorithm (collaborative filtering)
  - Content moderation (AWS Rekognition, OpenAI Moderation API)
- **Mobile app:** React Native (iOS + Android)
- **Database:** PostgreSQL for structured data, S3 for videos

#### **vLongTerm considerations (3-5 years):**

- AR try-before-you-buy (ingredient visualization)
- Voice-controlled cooking mode
- Real-time inventory sync with store POS systems
- Predictive ordering based on cooking patterns

## Detailed Design & Features Description

ChowPal's product development is guided by five core principles that shape every feature and design decision.

### **1. Cultural Authenticity Over Scale**

We prioritize genuine cultural content from verified community members over mass-market recipes. Creators must verify their student status and cultural background before publishing content. This means slower initial growth, but it creates defensible differentiation and builds stronger community trust. For example, we reject fusion recipes that dilute authenticity unless clearly labeled, and our dietary tags reflect culturally-specific standards like Jain food principles and halal certification requirements.

### **2. Integration Over Building**

ChowPal connects existing services rather than rebuilding complex infrastructure. We partner with established delivery platforms like Instacart and Uber Eats instead of creating our own logistics network. Our value proposition centers on discovery and connecting recipes to ingredients, not on reinventing payment processing or delivery operations. This allows us to

focus resources on our core differentiator while providing users with familiar, trusted checkout experiences.

### **3. Transparency Builds Trust**

Every rating, review, and creator credential is visible to users. We combat fake content through verification systems and community moderation rather than hidden algorithmic filtering. The creator earnings model is completely transparent, showing exactly how much creators earn per view and per order. Store inventory accuracy metrics are publicly visible, creating accountability.

### **4. Mobile-First, Video-First Discovery**

Gen Z learns through short-form vertical video consumed on mobile devices. Our primary interface mimics TikTok's discovery feed rather than traditional search-based recipe sites. Videos auto-play as users scroll, creating ambient discovery of recipes they didn't know they wanted. All interactions are optimized for thumb-friendly mobile gestures.

### **5. Democratic Creator Economy**

Every creator earns money from their first video, with no minimum follower counts or view thresholds. We provide transparent per-view payments (\$0.01) and per-order commissions (\$0.50) from day one. Monthly payouts go to all creators, even those who earned only \$5. This ensures that sharing cultural knowledge is valued financially, not just socially.

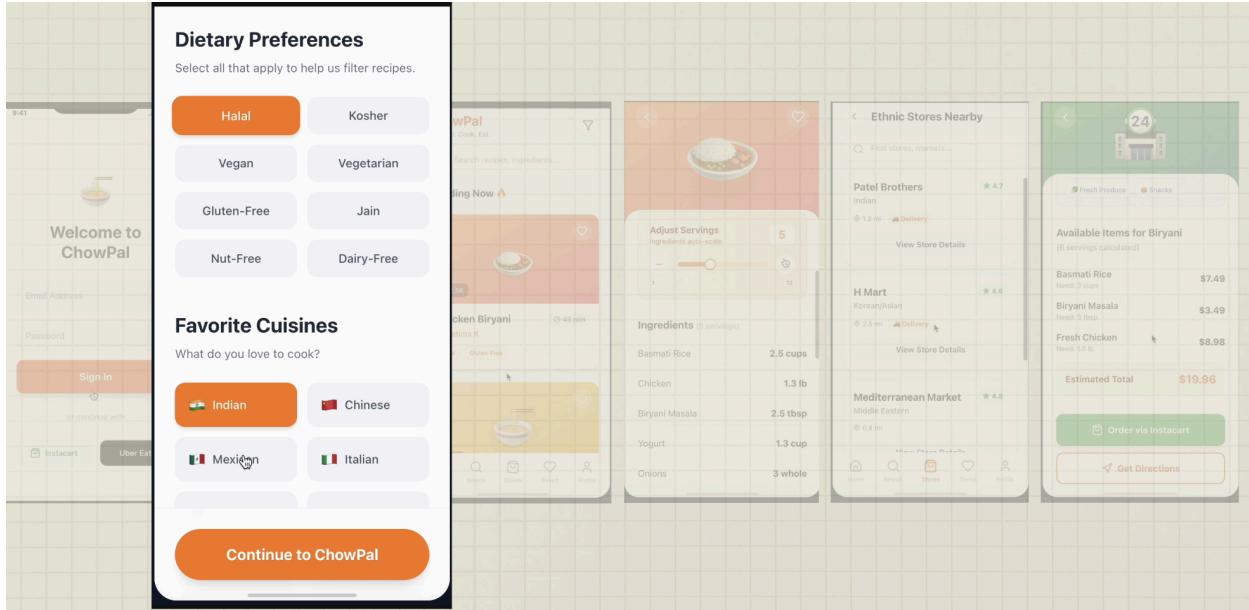
#### Features & Information Architecture

ChowPal's feature set serves three distinct user groups: students discovering and cooking recipes, creators sharing their expertise, and store partners reaching new customers.

#### Student Experience: Discovery and Cooking

#### **Onboarding Flow**

When students first download ChowPal, they complete a brief personalization setup.



The process takes under 2 minutes:

- Select dietary restrictions: Halal, Kosher, Vegan, Vegetarian, Gluten-Free, Jain, Nut-Free, Dairy-Free
- Choose favorite cuisines: Indian, Chinese, Mexican, Italian, etc.
- Optionally link existing Instacart or Uber Eats account

This one-time setup personalizes their feed without requiring extensive profile building.

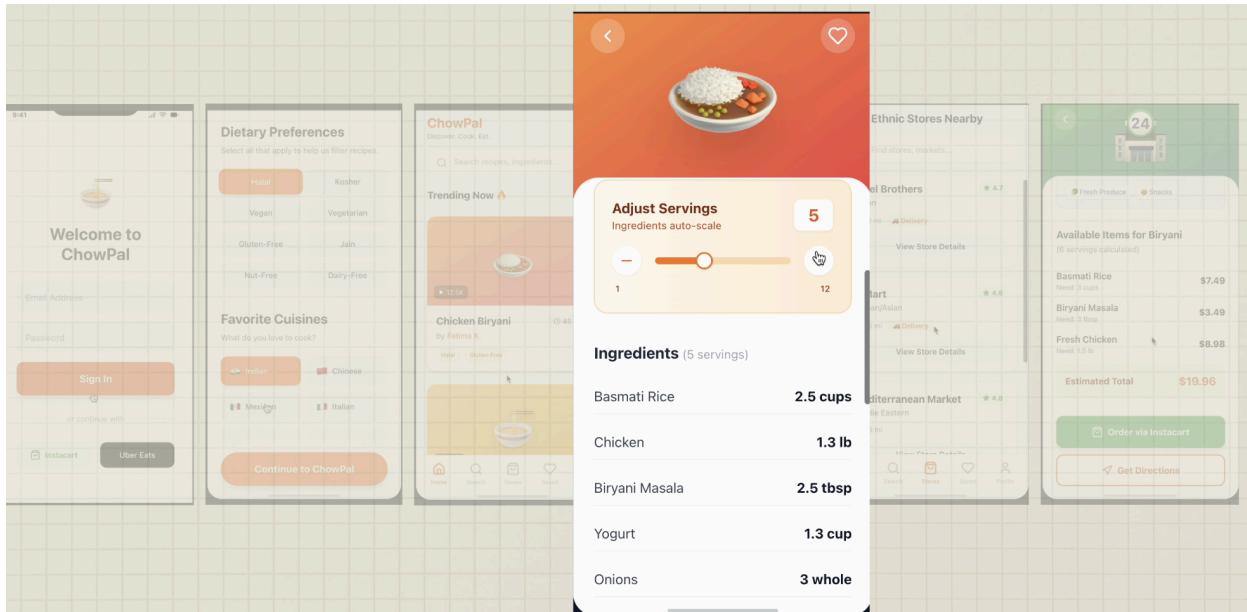
## Discovery Feed

The main interface presents a vertical scrolling feed of recipe videos that auto-play as users scroll. Key features include:

- **Search bar** at top for finding specific recipes, ingredients, or creators
- **Quick filter tags** below search: 🌱 Vegan, 🌟 Halal, ✡ Kosher, 🕉 Jain, 🍞 GF
- **Swipe interactions**: Left to skip, right to save to collection
- **Video overlay info**: Recipe name, creator handle, cooking time, difficulty, dietary tags

Users experience discovery as entertainment rather than search. The algorithm learns from their swipe patterns and adjusts recommendations accordingly.

## Recipe Detail View



When users tap on a recipe, they access the full detail page with several innovative features:

The **servings adjustment slider** is our key differentiator. Users adjust from 1 to 10 servings, and ingredient quantities update in real-time. This solves the common pain point where students cooking for different group sizes struggle with recipe math—no more mental calculations to halve or double recipes.

**Ingredients are intelligently grouped by store.** Each store section shows:

- Store name and distance from user's location
- Availability status (✓ In stock, ⚠ Low stock, ✗ Out of stock)
- Individual ingredients with checkboxes and prices
- "Add All to Cart" button for one-tap purchasing

If an item is out of stock at one store, the system automatically suggests alternative stores or substitution options. This smart grouping means students can see exactly where to get specialty items (ethnic grocery) versus common items (mainstream grocery) without manually figuring it out.

Below ingredients, **cooking instructions** appear as step-by-step text linked to video timestamps. Users can tap any step to jump directly to that portion of the instructional video. The **community section** at the bottom displays photos from other students who cooked the recipe successfully, along with written reviews and practical tips.

## Checkout Process

ChowPal aggregates items from multiple stores into a unified cart view showing items grouped by store, delivery fees, and total cost. Users tap "Checkout" and redirect to their linked delivery service with all items pre-loaded. They complete payment within the familiar app, then return to ChowPal.

## Creator Experience: Sharing and Earning

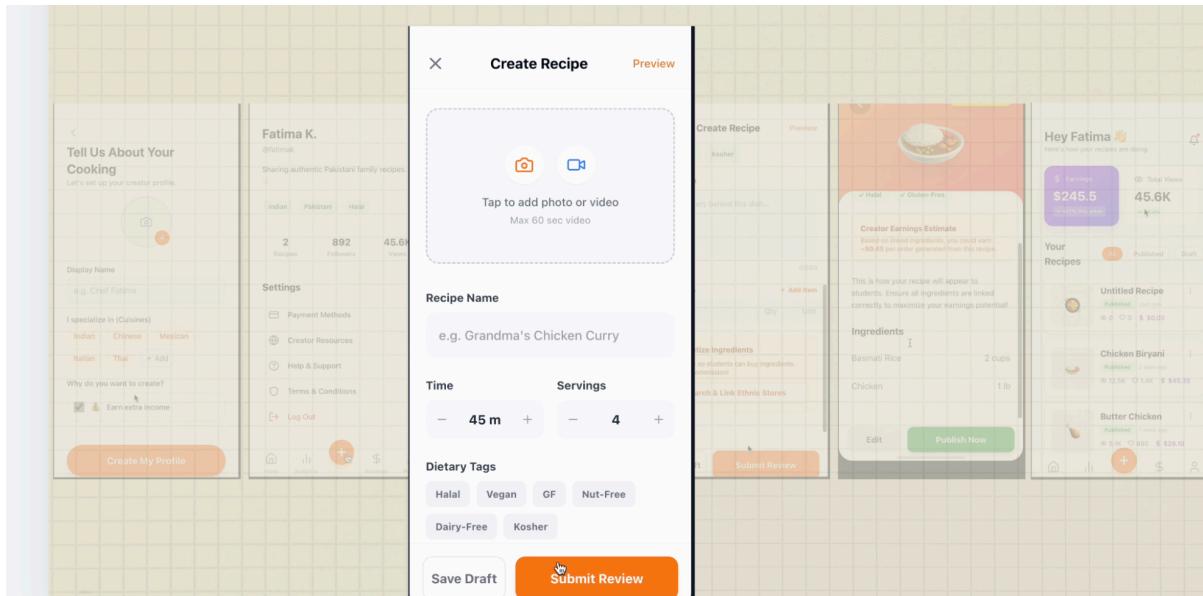
### Creator Dashboard

Creators access a dedicated dashboard showing monthly performance at a glance:

- **Total earnings** displayed prominently with % change from previous month
- Key metrics: Total views, engagement rate, orders generated
- Top-performing recipes with individual statistics
- Prominent "Upload Recipe" button for quick access

The dashboard is designed to motivate creators by showing tangible results from their content. Seeing "\$127 earned this month" is more compelling than abstract engagement metrics.

### Recipe Upload Process



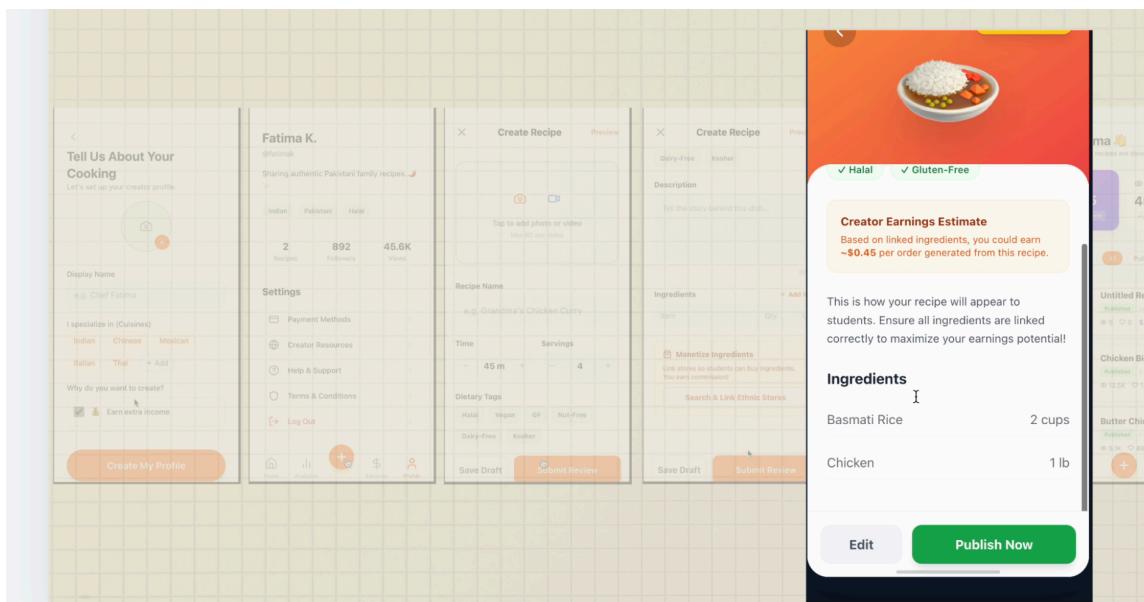
The upload interface is intentionally simple to reduce friction:

1. **Video upload:** Drag/drop or record in-app (60 second max)
2. **Recipe details:** Name, prep/cook time, servings, difficulty (Easy/Medium/Hard)
3. **Dietary tags:** Multi-select checkboxes for Halal, Vegan, GF, Nut-Free, Dairy-Free, Kosher

4. **Ingredients:** Add items with quantities and units (AI suggests from video, creator confirms)
5. **Save Draft or Submit Review**

The entire flow takes 5-10 minutes for experienced creators. AI-assisted ingredient detection speeds up the process—creators just review and confirm rather than typing everything manually.

## Publishing and Preview



Before publishing, creators see a preview showing:

- How the recipe will appear to students
- **Earnings estimate:** "Based on linked ingredients, you could earn ~\$0.45 per order"
- Dietary tags displayed clearly (✓ Halal, ✓ Gluten-Free)
- Note: "Ensure all ingredients are linked correctly to maximize earnings potential"

This transparency helps creators understand monetization potential and encourages them to link ingredients properly. They can edit to make changes or tap "Publish Now" to go live immediately.

## Analytics and Performance

After publishing, creators track performance through detailed analytics:

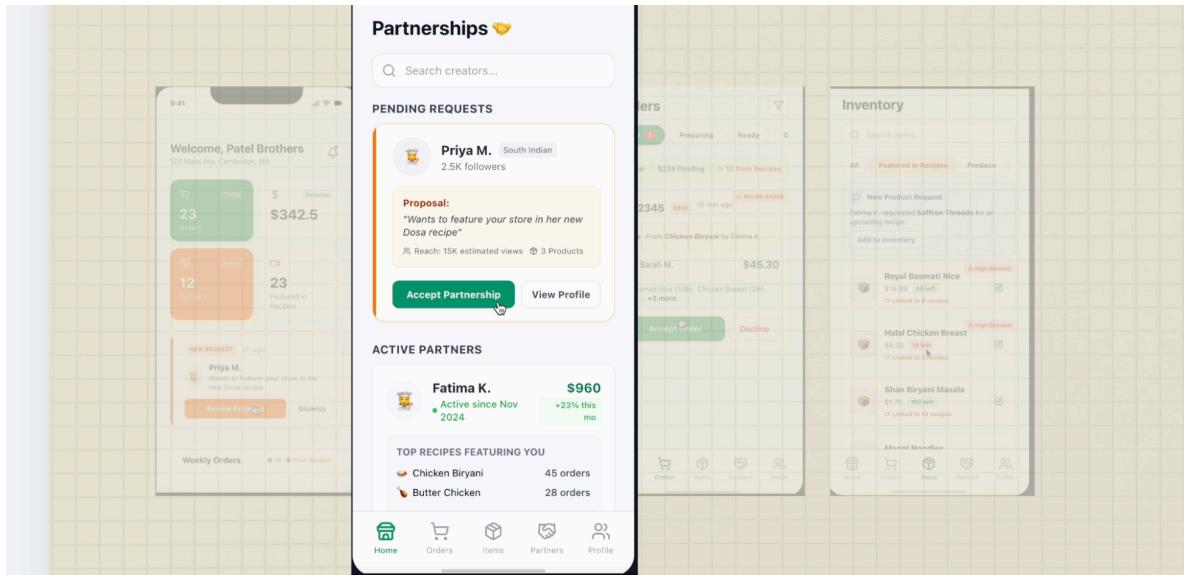
- Time-series graphs showing views over days/weeks

- Engagement breakdown: likes, saves, shares, comments
- **Orders generated** (most valuable metric—directly correlates to earnings)
- **Earnings breakdown:** Revenue from views (\$0.01 each), orders (\$0.50 each), tips
- Demographic data: which universities and cuisines drive most engagement

This data helps creators optimize future content. If they see "Chicken Biryani generated 89 orders and earned \$127" while another recipe underperformed, they know what their audience values.

## Store Partner Experience: Reaching Students

### Store Dashboard



Store owners access a business portal showing monthly performance:

- Total orders received through ChowPal
- Revenue generated with % growth vs. previous month
- Average order value and active creator partnerships
- Top-selling products with order counts
- Customer demographics (which universities are ordering)

The dashboard includes quick action buttons for common tasks: Find Creators, Update Inventory, View Orders, Manage Campaigns.

### Inventory Management

Store partners maintain a product catalog through a simple interface:

- Enter product name, price, and stock status (In Stock/Low Stock/Out of Stock)
- System highlights high-demand items based on recipe trends
- CSV bulk upload available for stores with existing POS systems
- Automatic low-stock alerts via email and SMS

## Creator Partnership Tools

The partnerships interface helps store owners collaborate with creators. They can search and filter creators by cuisine type, follower count, and proximity to store. Each creator profile displays:

- Follower count and engagement rate
- Average orders generated per recipe
- Which ingredients they use most frequently

**Pending Requests** show partnership proposals from creators. For example: "Priya M. wants to feature your store in her new Dosa recipe—15K estimated views, 3 products needed." Store owners can accept or view the creator's full profile.

**Active Partners** section lists current collaborations with revenue generated and top-performing recipes. For example: "Fatima K. - \$960 earned since Nov 2024. Top recipes: Chicken Biryani (45 orders), Butter Chicken (28 orders)."

## Partnership Request Flow

When store owners want to promote slow-moving inventory, they can proactively reach out to creators:

1. Select "Promote Specific Ingredient"
2. Choose product from inventory (e.g., "Garam Masala - \$8.99, 150 units in stock")
3. Set commission rate (typically 10%)
4. Add promotional details and special offers ("10% off for first-time customers")
5. System estimates reach based on creator's audience
6. Send partnership request for creator to accept/decline

## Performance Analytics

Store partners track results through ingredient-level analytics showing orders before and after partnerships, revenue generated, commission paid, and remaining inventory. Visual graphs

display sales spikes after partnership activation. The "Top Creator Impact" section attributes revenue to specific creators, helping identify which partnerships deliver the best ROI.

### v1: Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

The MVP validates our core hypothesis: can we successfully connect international students with authentic recipes and local ethnic grocery sources in a way that benefits all three parties? Our launch focuses on Boston with constrained features to test this fundamental value proposition.

**Launch Metrics:** 500 student users, 50 recipes, 5 store partners, 100 orders placed within first month.

#### Priority 0 (P0) - Must Have for Launch

These features are absolutely essential. Without them, the product doesn't function.

#### For Students:

- Account creation (email/Google) with optional Instacart linking
- Discovery feed with basic filter (Veg/Non-Veg toggle only)
- Recipe detail page: video player, servings slider (1-10), ingredient list grouped by store
- "Add to Cart" → Instacart redirect
- Save recipes to personal collection

#### For Creators:

- Student verification (.edu email required)
- Upload pre-recorded video (no in-app recording yet)
- Manual ingredient entry with quantities
- Basic dietary tags (5 options: Vegetarian, Vegan, Halal, Kosher, GF)
- Simple dashboard showing views and earnings (\$0.01/view, \$0.50/order)
- Bank account linking for monthly payouts

#### For Store Partners:

- Store registration (name, address, hours, Instacart connection)
- Manual inventory entry for top 20 products only
- Email notifications when orders come in
- Basic dashboard showing weekly order count and revenue

#### Platform/Admin:

- Content moderation queue to review new recipes
- Approve/reject recipes and ban users if needed
- Basic analytics: total users, recipes, orders, system health

**Why this is P0:** This is the minimum core loop. Students discover recipes → see ingredients grouped by store → order through Instacart → cook. Creators upload recipes → earn money. Stores get orders. If any piece breaks, the value proposition fails.

#### Priority 1 (P1) - Important for Traction

These features aren't required for launch but are needed within 3 months to retain users and scale.

#### For Students:

- Full dietary filters (Halal, Kosher, Jain, Vegan, GF, DF, NF - not just Veg/Non-Veg)
- Recipe ratings (1-5 stars) and written reviews
- Photo uploads of finished dishes
- Following system (follow creators, see "Following" feed tab)
- Multiple store support in one cart (order from 2-3 stores simultaneously)
- Order tracking integration with push notifications

#### For Creators:

- In-app video recording (don't need external camera app)
- AI-assisted ingredient tagging from video analysis
- Enhanced analytics with graphs, watch time data, demographic breakdowns
- Video editing tools (trim, add text overlays)

#### For Store Partners:

- Advanced analytics showing recipe attribution (which recipes drive sales)
- Inventory alerts for low-stock items
- Suggested products to stock based on trending recipes
- CSV bulk upload for larger catalogs

**Why P1:** These features increase engagement and stickiness. Users stay because they're invested in creators they follow and the community they've joined. Creators get better tools and insights. Stores can manage inventory more efficiently.

#### Priority 2 (P2) - Nice to Have

These improve the experience but aren't critical for MVP or initial traction.

#### **For Students:**

- Meal planning: Weekly meal plan generator with grocery list compilation
- Cooking mode: Hands-free voice navigation through recipe steps
- Recipe collections: Curated themed collections (Quick Weeknight Meals, Date Night Dinners)
- Smart substitution engine: AI suggests ingredient alternatives for dietary restrictions

#### **For Creators:**

- A/B testing for recipe thumbnails
- Creator tiers and badges (Verified, Pro, Rising Star status)
- Collaboration features: Co-create recipes with other creators
- Video templates and effects

#### **For Store Partners:**

- Promotional campaign tools: Create discount codes and featured placements
- Recipe sponsorship: Pay creators to feature specific products
- Customer retention programs: Loyalty discounts for repeat orders

#### **Content (C) - Can Wait**

These are low priority or require significant resources better spent elsewhere in v1.

- Social sharing to Instagram/TikTok/Facebook (external platform integration)
- Desktop web app (full-featured, not just responsive mobile web)
- Nutritional information (calories, macros, allergen tracking)
- Live cooking classes (real-time video streaming)
- Brand partnerships and sponsored content marketplace

#### **vNext: Post-MVP (Months 3-6)**

After validating the core model in Boston, we expand features and scale to new markets. The focus shifts from proving the concept to deepening engagement and expanding reach.

**Primary Goal:** Increase retention and prepare for multi-city expansion

#### **Key Features to Add:**

### **Enhanced Social Layer** to build community stickiness:

- User profiles (not just for creators—all users get profiles)
- Activity feed showing what friends are cooking
- Direct messaging between users
- Recipe sharing to friends within the app

### **Gamification** to drive habit formation:

- Achievement badges: "Cooked 10 recipes," "Tried 5 cuisines," "3-week cooking streak"
- Cooking streaks (consecutive days cooking)
- Campus leaderboards (most active cooks per university)
- Monthly challenges: "Cook 3 Thai recipes this month for a badge"

### **Creator Community Tools:**

- Creator forum for sharing tips and best practices
- Collaboration features for co-created recipes
- Mentorship program pairing experienced creators with newcomers
- Monthly creator spotlight series

### **Geographic and Partner Expansion:**

- 15-20 stores in Greater Boston (Cambridge, Somerville, Allston)
- Add DoorDash and local delivery services beyond just Instacart
- In-store pickup option for students who want to shop in person
- Expand to nearby universities (Tufts, Brandeis, Northeastern)

### **Target Metrics for vNext:**

- 2,500 active users
- 200 published recipes
- 20 store partners
- 1,500 monthly orders
- 4.5+ average rating
- 30% of users return weekly

vLongterm: Vision for Scale (Months 12-24)

The long-term vision positions ChowPal as the default platform for cultural cooking among college students, and eventually, the broader home cooking market. This phase focuses on national scale, AI enhancement, and revenue diversification.

#### **AI & Personalization Features:**

We introduce advanced AI capabilities that provide unique value. A **smart meal planning assistant** generates weekly meal plans based on user preferences, past orders, and seasonal ingredients. The "**What can I cook?**" feature analyzes ingredients users have on hand and suggests matching recipes. **Voice-controlled cooking mode** allows hands-free navigation through recipes while cooking. We add **nutrition tracking** that automatically calculates calories and macros from recipes. An **advanced substitution engine** suggests alternatives that maintain authentic flavor profiles while accommodating dietary restrictions.

#### **Platform Maturity:**

We launch native iOS and Android apps (moving beyond mobile web) with offline recipe access for cooking without internet. Multi-language support adds Spanish, Mandarin, and Hindi to reach more international students. Users can download recipes for offline cooking, solving the problem of phones going to sleep mid-recipe.

#### **Geographic Scale:**

National expansion brings ChowPal to 20 college towns across the US, including New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Austin, and Seattle. We establish 200+ store partnerships nationwide. International pilots launch in Toronto, London, and Sydney where large international student populations exist.

#### **Marketplace Expansion:**

We introduce a **kitchen equipment marketplace** with affiliate partnerships for pots, pans, spices, and appliances. A **cooking class platform** lets creators host live and recorded classes for additional revenue. **Subscription tiers** launch:

- **Free tier:** Basic access with ads
- **ChowPal Plus (\$5/month):** Ad-free experience, exclusive recipes, priority support
- **ChowPal Pro (\$15/month):** Unlimited meal planning, nutrition tracking, all exclusive creator content

**Creator memberships** allow fans to pay \$3-10/month for exclusive recipes and behind-the-scenes content from favorite creators.

## Revenue Diversification:

Beyond transaction fees, we explore B2B opportunities. **College dining partnerships** help university meal plans incorporate diverse cultural options. We offer a **white-label platform** for grocery chains wanting their own recipe-to-cart solution. An **API for developers** opens our recipe and ingredient matching data. **Data insights products** provide anonymized trend data to CPG brands about which cuisines and ingredients are growing in popularity.

## Long-term Goals:

- 50,000+ active users across 20 cities
- 5,000+ recipes covering 30+ cuisines
- 200+ store partners nationwide
- \$500K monthly GMV (Gross Merchandise Value)
- Path to profitability established
- Series A funding raised for international expansion

This evolution transforms ChowPal from a Boston-focused MVP into a national platform that fundamentally changes how young people discover, learn, and cook cultural food.

## Roadmap / Timing

	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter Jan-Mar	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter Apr-Jun	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter Jul-Sep	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter Oct-Dec
Version 	Version 1.0 MVP Launch	Version 2.0 Community Features	Version 3.0 AI & Monetization	Version 4.0 National Scale
Strategy 	Acquisition: Free app, limited in-app purchases	Activation: Focus on ratings & community engagement	Retention: AI personalization & creator monetization	Acquisition: New segment & geographic expansion
Key Features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recipe discovery feed</li><li>• Dietary filters (halal, vegan, etc.)</li><li>• Delivery integration</li><li>• Creator video upload</li><li>• 10-15 ethnic store partnerships</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recipe &amp; creator ratings</li><li>• Comment sections</li><li>• Save collections</li><li>• Social media sharing</li><li>• Push notifications</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AI meal recommendations</li><li>• Creator monetization</li><li>• Cooking mode voice guide</li><li>• Ingredient substitutions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Live cooking sessions</li><li>• Community challenges</li><li>• Multi-language support</li><li>• Store inventory integration</li><li>• Launch in 10 cities</li></ul>
Key Metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 500 active users</li><li>• 50 recipes</li><li>• 100 orders</li><li>• 15 partnered stores</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2,000 active users</li><li>• 200 recipes</li><li>• 500 orders/month</li><li>• 80% recipes rated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5,000 active users</li><li>• 100 monetized creators</li><li>• 2,000 order/month</li><li>• 40% AI-driven orders</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 15,000 active users</li><li>• 1,000+ creators</li><li>• 5,000 orders/month</li><li>• \$50K monthly revenue</li></ul>

In Q1, ChowPal launches Version 1.0 as an MVP focused on acquisition via a free app with limited in-app purchases. Core features: recipe discovery, dietary filters, delivery integration,

creator uploads, & 10–15 ethnic store partnerships. 500 users targeted; 100 total orders projected.

For Q2, the shift is toward activation through community features: ratings, comments, saves, social sharing, and push notifications. Goals are set at 2,000 users and 500 monthly orders.

Q3 focuses on retention with AI personalization and creator monetization by offering AI meal recommendations, voice-guided cooking, ingredient substitution, while targeting 5,000 users and 2,000 monthly orders.

Finally in Q4, we release Version 4.0 which focuses on a national scale with live cooking, community challenges, multilingual support, deeper store integration, expansion to 10 cities, targeting 15,000 users and \$50K monthly revenue. Overall, success will be driven by CAC below \$15, LTV above \$150, 10–15% commission, and high creator satisfaction.

## Scenarios for Service Introduction

Our phased rollout strategy introduces ChowPal to progressively larger audiences while maintaining quality and learning from each cohort. We considered three alternative approaches before settling on our current plan.

**Alpha Testing (Month 3, Internal)** involves 20-30 team members and close friends cooking real recipes and placing actual orders. This validates basic functionality and catches critical bugs before external users see the product. We rejected the idea of skipping alpha because early technical issues would damage our reputation with students who expect consumer-grade app experiences.

**Beta Launch (Month 4-6, Boston only)** opens to 500 recruited students from BU, Harvard, and MIT through targeted outreach at cultural student organizations. We provide dedicated Slack support and weekly feedback sessions, incentivizing participation with free delivery during the beta period. This controlled environment lets us iterate rapidly based on real user behavior while keeping the community small enough to personally support. We considered launching directly to all Boston students but rejected this because we need time to refine the creator onboarding process and ensure store partners can handle order volume reliably.

**Full Boston Launch (Month 7, Version 1.0)** removes all restrictions and opens to every student in Greater Boston through guerrilla marketing on campuses, Instagram/TikTok ads, and creator partnerships. By this point, we've proven the model works, fixed major bugs, and established

10-15 reliable store partnerships. The alternative of launching in multiple cities simultaneously was rejected because managing quality across different markets would dilute our focus and make iteration slower.

**Multi-City Expansion (Month 9+, Version 2.0-4.0)** replicates the Boston playbook in New York and Philadelphia, then scales to 10 cities by year-end. Each new city gets a dedicated community manager and partnerships with 5-10 local ethnic grocers before launch. We considered a slower campus-by-campus rollout but rejected it as too slow to achieve the network effects needed for a marketplace platform. Our chosen approach balances speed with quality, allowing us to prove product-market fit in one city before scaling nationally.

## Metrics

ChowPal monitors success in four key areas: Acquisition, Engagement, Retention, and Business performance. *Acquisition* through Time to First Purchase and Recipe-to-Cart Conversion helps in understanding how efficiently users move from discovery to transaction and the effectiveness of the platform in converting interest into sales. *Engagement* is tracked via DAU/WAU, Recipe Engagement Rate (views converting into saves, shares, favorites, and add-to-cart), Search-to-Recipe View Success Rate, Creator Upload Frequency, and Featured Ingredient Inventory Turnover. These metrics are representative of how actively users interact with content, how well search performs, and how consistent creators and stores are in their contributions.

*Retention* is reflected by Day 7 and Day 30 User Retention Rates and the 30-Day Repeat Purchase Rate to show whether users continue to return and make purchases over time. These metrics will affirm long-term stickiness and loyalty on this platform. *Business performance* is measured in respect of AOV, Order Completion Rate, Partnership-Driven Order Percentage, Creator Monthly Earnings Growth, and Ingredient Promotion Success Rate. Individually and collectively, these metrics confirm revenue health, partner contribution, and effectiveness in monetization across the marketplace.

## International

**When:** Start international expansion in **Month 9-12** (after proving Boston model), beginning with **Canada** (Toronto pilot).

### Why Canada first:

- Similar market (large international student population)

- Minimal localization needed (English/French)
- Similar delivery infrastructure (Instacart already operates there)
- Less regulatory complexity than other markets

**Timeline:**

- **Year 1 (Months 9-12):** Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal)
- **Year 2:** English-speaking markets (UK, Australia)
- **Year 2-3:** Western Europe (Germany, France, Netherlands)

## Tricky Issues Around Internationalization

**1. Store Partner Networks:** Biggest challenge. Ethnic grocery partnerships are location-specific. We can't just "turn on" London—we need to build relationships with local halal markets, Asian grocers, etc. from scratch in each city.

**2. Delivery Partner Variations:** Instacart doesn't exist everywhere. UK uses Deliveroo/Gorillas, Europe uses different services. Each integration is custom work.

**3. Cultural Dietary Standards:** "Halal" certification differs by country. UK halal ≠ US halal ≠ Middle East halal. Same with kosher standards. We'd need local expertise to validate tags.

**4. Currency & Payments:** Multi-currency support, VAT vs sales tax, different payment methods (Venmo doesn't exist outside US).

**5. Language & Measurement:** Not just translating UI—recipes need metric conversions, cultural context, and human-reviewed translations (not just Google Translate).

**6. Regulatory Compliance:** GDPR in Europe, food safety regulations vary, content moderation laws differ by country.

**Right approach:** Start with culturally similar markets (Canada, UK) to learn before tackling complex markets (Asia, Middle East).

## Projected Costs

The budget for ChowPal is based on what it actually costs to develop, launch, and operate the product for a year. ChowPal is intended to be a lean but feature-rich marketplace. At a high level, Year 1 requires an investment of roughly \$850,000, the majority of which goes toward the

personnel who create and run the experience, with the remaining funds going toward the cloud infrastructure and fundamental operations that maintain the service's stability and compliance.

### **High-level Estimations:**

- Total investment for the first year: \$850K, with an average monthly burn of roughly \$70K as the team transitions from MVP to national scale features.
- Allocation: Roughly 10% operations (\$85K), 20% infrastructure (\$170K), and 70% personnel (\$595K).

Category	Position	Quantity	Estimated Projections	Roles And Responsibility
<b>Personnel</b>	Full Stack Developer	2	\$595,000 (Share of around 70% in total Budget)	Build the core product like recipe feed, user profile, backend APIs etc.
	Mobile App Developer	1		Build Android/iOS App
	DevOps Engineer	1		Looks after AWS, CI/CD, Monitoring etc.
	Product Manager	1		Owns the product roadmap, align features, makes the trade-off calls
	UI/UX Designer	1		Develops intuitive and user familiar interface
	Partnership Manager	1		Brings ethnic grocery stores to platform
	Community Manager	1		Handles support, creator onboarding etc

<b>Infrastructure</b>	Cloud Hosting (AWS/Azure)	EC2, RDS, Load balancers	\$170,000 (Share of around 20% in total Budget)	Caching, LB keeps the web and Api layer responsive as traffic grows
	CDN			For smooth video playback
	Storage	S3/Blob Storage		Storing user images, recipe videos
	Dev tools and Licenses	GitHub, Figma, JIRA, Slack, API Postman,		Tools required for development activities to get going
	Third-party APIS	Stripe, Google Maps, Push Notification etc.		
	Misc			
<b>Operations</b>	Legal and Compliance		\$85,000 (Share of around 10% in total Budget)	For forming a company, creating contracts with store partners
	Marketing and User Acquisition	Content Creators, Campus Ambassadors, etc.		To Increase the reach of product
	Misc			All other services to keep the app functional.

This cost structure gives ChowPal enough time to hire a focused team, build the core product, support growth to about 10,000 to 15,000 monthly active users, and be in a good position to raise the next round of funding. All of this is possible while staying leaner than delivery-first competitors that had to spend millions on logistics infrastructure.

# Operational Needs

To maintain growth from 500 active users in Q1 to 15,000 by Q4, ChowPal requires full operational support for user acquisition, store partnerships, content moderation, and technical infrastructure. For the MVP launch, a dedicated Partnership Manager will first onboard 10–15 ethnic grocery stores. By year's end, this number will have increased to 50+ partners through in-person visits, inventory API integrations, and revenue-share negotiations (10–15% commissions). In addition to continuous order fulfillment assistance, real-time inventory updates, and analytics on recipe-driven sales, store owners receive dashboard training (2–4 hours per store, limited onboarding phase in Q1 & Q2) to increase their 20–30% lost revenue in the offline stores.

In order to handle 500–5,000 monthly inquiries on recipe ratings, dietary filters (such as halal, vegan, and kosher), and creator disputes, community operations needs a full-time Community Manager who speaks English, Hindi, Mandarin, and Arabic. There are limited contractor spikes during beta (100 orders per month), which will transition to in-house by Q3 with the AI rollout. Recipe comments, video uploads (50 videos per month in Q1, 500 videos per month in Q4), and user-generated collections are all subject to content moderation, which uses automated flags in addition to manual review for 80% recipe rating coverage to prevent spam or cultural misrepresentations. With a goal of less than two hours for response times, user support scales through ticketing (Zendesk) and push notifications for order issues with delivery partners (Uber Eats, Instacart, Weee!).

A DevOps Engineer oversees AWS auto-scaling for traffic spikes (viral recipes: 10x users), 99.9% uptime for recipe feeds and AI dietary filtering, and CICD pipelines for quarterly releases (v1 MVP in Q1, v2 Community in Q2, v3 AI in Q3, and v4 Scaling up in Q4). DAU/MAU, recipe-to-cart conversion, and inventory turnover are all tracked by ongoing monitoring (Datadog); 20 campus ambassadors participate in finite beta testing to provide input on 15 partnered stores that are listed in the APP. Part-time legal and compliance counsel is required for FERPA (student data), PCI-DSS (Stripe payments), and food safety disclaimers, along with yearly penetration testing.

# Addressing Caveats/risks

Risk	Detailed Description	Severity	Mitigation Strategy
Low User Adoption	International students may continue relying on Instagram/TikTok reels or family WhatsApp groups instead of downloading a dedicated app	High	Hyper-local campus onboarding partnerships (NU Sanskriti, MESA, Chinese Students Association); influencer-student micro ambassador program; recipe-to-cart prompts inside social content to convert passive watchers into in-app cooks.
Freemium Monetization Challenge	Users may stay on free tier causing slow revenue growth.	High	Introduce premium-only delights (AI diet filters, AR guided cooking, cultural masterclass creators); offer limited-time premium trials tied to onboarding; in-app grocery cashback incentives for premium users.
Ingredient Sourcing Dependence	Platform relies on third-party ethnic grocery stores; broken stock links or outdated availability may break trust and lead to uninstall.	Medium	Real-time API store sync + manual daily inventory verification for early markets; buffer stock flagging; automated “alternate store same ingredient” redirect; alert: “nearby store has fresh stock.”
Content Authenticity &	Student creators might upload recipes copied	Medium	Cultural verification tags, plagiarism check

Copyright Issues	from YouTube/TikTok or misrepresent cultural authenticity.		on upload, community review badges, recipe certification by cultural org partners, incentive rewards only for original content.
Privacy & Data Concerns	Location + dietary info could make users wary about data handling.	Medium	GDPR/FERPA-compliant storage, anonymous browsing mode, opt-out for location tracking, transparent “Where your data goes” onboarding screen; segmented data firewall from store analytics.
Limited Local Reach at Launch	Boston-only rollout may slow network effect, cultural variety, and recipe diversity.	Low–Medium	City-by-city expansion starting with campuses with highest South Asian/Chinese/Middle Eastern density (Ann Arbor, Austin, UCSD); ambassador-led recipe marathons to seed content before launching city store partnerships.

#### New Risks Identified POST - MRD

Risk Category	Risk Description	Severity	Fix (Execution Level)
Food Safety	Recipes may be incorrect, undercooked, or lack allergen clarity.	High	Recipe moderation + disclaimers, allergy tags, AI allergen

			scanning.
Competition Re-Positioning	Core competitor risk shifted from Instacart → social food algorithm dominance (TikTok cooking creator surge).	High	Cultural niche + AI match + direct grocery link (TikTok cannot click-to-cart authentic spice immediately).
Store Partner Hesitation	Ethnic store owners may delay adoption due to tech unfamiliarity.	Medium	Demo onboarding, zero-commission launch phase, store dashboard with simplified UI.
Creator Quality Gatekeeping	Low-effort or inaccurate recipes degrade trust.	Medium	Monetization tied to authenticity score + ratings → verified cultural home-cook badges.
Data Privacy Execution	Now less about “fear” and more about tactical protection for scale.	Medium	Formal encryption stack, third-party audit policy before expansion to 2nd campus.