Product Development Brief Standard

A five-input specification framework for commercializing any beverage concept, tea, coffee, RTD, or functional, ready for co-packer handoff.

I. The Five Required Inputs

- **Concept:** working name plus the specific market angle it occupies. State who it displaces, not just what it is.
- **Flavor Profile:** taste description built around 2 to 4 anchor notes, ranked by dominance. Vague profiles ("fruity, refreshing") produce unusable first samples.
- **Base:** the foundational ingredient or format locked before formulation starts, black tea, arabica, botanical infusion, whatever the category. Changing base mid-development restarts the cycle.
- **Price Target:** reverse-engineered from required gross margin and channel (retail, wholesale, DTC), never set as an aspiration first and margin second.
- **Compliance Envelope:** every certification requirement, organic, non-GMO, kosher, allergen-free, defined before a supplier is approached, since it narrows the eligible supplier pool immediately.

II. Pre-Brief Diligence Checklist

- Confirm whether this is a warm relationship or cold approach. Cold approaches should lead with a completed brief, not a conversation.
- Get MOQ and development timeline in writing before the brief is sent, not after samples arrive.
- Define brand position first: buyer profile, price point, and narrative. A brief without a defined buyer produces a technically correct product nobody was asked to want.

III. The Iteration Cycle

- **Round 1:** supplier proposes based on brief. Expect directional, not final.
- **Feedback Standard:** every note must be specific and measurable. "More citrus, target higher than sample A, closer to market benchmark X" is usable. "Make it better" costs a full cycle and a fee.
- **Documentation:** log every sample number, tasting note, and decision against it. This log is your traceability record through the entire development process, the ability to reconstruct exactly why the formula landed where it did, and to point to the decision point if a dispute arises later over what was approved and when.
- **Approval Gate:** final sign-off requires a locked spec sheet, not a verbal "this is good."

IV. Ownership and IP Terms, Confirm Before Round 1

- **Revision count:** capped and stated in the agreement, not open-ended.
- **Formula ownership:** confirm explicitly. Default industry position is the co-packer retains the formula unless the contract states otherwise.

- **Deliverables on approval:** spec sheet with tolerances, any lab testing performed, certification documentation package.

Why This Is Harder Than It Looks

- Every input above sounds simple in isolation. Getting all five right simultaneously, and knowing which one to compromise on when a supplier pushes back, is where most first-time brand builders lose four to six weeks and a development fee, often running into the thousands, to a brief that looked complete but wasn't.