The Sustainability Award

Supported by the Nobel Sustainability Trust Foundation

Nomination Guidelines

2026

The Sustainability Award A word from the Nobel Sustainability Trust Foundation

Sustainability was defined in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development as the economic development activity that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Translated into research and innovation, sustainability covers a wide range from application-open to application-oriented research - additionally considering the marketability of new technologies. It suggests an interdisciplinary approach to all sciences including natural sciences, engineering, economics, societal, health, and environmental sciences. We believe that sustainability initiatives and programs which impact our societies and change public awareness are worthy of support.

"The Sustainability Awards supported by the Nobel Sustainability Trust Foundation" therefore build a bridge from scientific research to applied projects and international political initiatives aimed at the sustainable development of the economy and society.

Nomination Guidelines 2026-2028

The Sustainability Awards

The Nobel Sustainability Trust offers annual awards to recognise excellence whilst supporting the idea of sustainability in science, entrepreneurship, and civil society. In accordance with the contract between the Nobel Sustainability Trust (NST) and the University of Cambridge (2026), represented by its Frontier Technologies Laboratory (FTL) and the ClimaTRACES Lab, the contracted partners are to determine the topics of the "Sustainability Award supported by the Nobel Sustainability Trust Foundation" each year.

The awards, which recognise breakthroughs in science and implementation, are intended to align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but are decided based on the individual merit of each submission.

The rules and principles applied in the Award competition comply with the ethical principles and values characterised by the 'normal expectations of good practice in research' as upheld by the University of Cambridge. These general standards and codes of conduct in research include safeguarding the dignity, rights, health, safety, freedom of expression and privacy of those involved (Link to Ethics Policy).

1. The Sustainability Award for **Leadership in Implementation** will recognise individuals or organisations whose actions, either on a local or global level, have a significant impact on the adoption of sustainable approaches, or the implementation of sustainable solutions. These actions may be related to scientific breakthroughs, entrepreneurship and innovation transfer, civil society engagement, and diplomacy.
2. The Sustainability Award for **Outstanding Technology in Sustainability** will recognise significant contributions in fields such as artificial intelligence & data sciences, clean/ efficient energy delivery, materials science, healthcare, food, agriculture & water systems and many more.

Eligibility

1. Candidates such as individuals, teams, or groups, organisations from civil society (e.g., NGOs), enterprises (start-ups, SMEs, or business units of larger companies) and academia are all eligible. Heads of state, of governments, or of governmental institutions are excluded.
2. Candidates can be nominated by individuals from the public or private sector with proven experience and expertise in sustainability-related topics.
3. Nominations coming from NST representation offices, affiliated University parties, and members of the Award Committees are eligible. However, nominated candidates must be external to the organisations represented by the nominators of the above-mentioned parties.
4. The NST awards should not be given to individuals or organisations – donators and sponsors – that have supported or donated to the NST in the last five years before nomination. Inversely, those individuals or organisations that received an NST award should not donate to the NST in the five years after having received the award. The Award Committees should be informed about any donations or sponsoring that occurred in the past or are planned in the near future.
5. Self-nominations, nominations for the recognition of lifetime achievements, posthumous nominations, and project proposals for funding will not be accepted.
6. The number of nominations per nominator is not defined. Nominators are permitted to submit more than one nomination.
7. Nominators should avoid situations leading to any conflicts of interest and, therefore, take into consideration the circumstances listed under 'Final general aspects' in this document.
8. Nominations that would, from the perspective of FTL and NST, compromise the Sustainability Awards and the reputation of both institutions, will not be considered in the selection process. This condition will be not misused and decisions will be clearly communicated as required.

The Nomination Process

1. Nominations must be submitted to the submission email address communicated on the NST homepage using the nomination form provided. Nominations sent to a different email address and/or without using the template will not be accepted.
2. The nominators must consider the quality criteria summarised in the Addendum, and the nominations should reflect these. The nomination proposals should focus on the main characteristics and merits of the nominee's sustainability work.
3. The category and the field the nominee is nominated for, must clearly appear on the front page of the nomination. Those nominated in more than one category by a single nominator cannot be accepted.
4. The abstract is limited to 500 words and summarises the most important ideas, achievements, inventions, or outcomes and impact of the nominee.
5. Members of the various Awarding Committees should be able to recognise, from the first page, that the nomination is coming from qualified individual experts, organisations, FTL, or NST representatives.
6. The nominator must indicate their affiliation and sign the nomination. Digital signatures are accepted.

The two-phase selection process

1. The selection process is conducted by two Award Committees under the coordination of the Frontier Technologies Laboratory (FTL) and ClimaTRACES at the University of Cambridge. The committees oversee the evaluation and the shortlisting of the nominations until the final selection of the awardees. The evaluation and deliberation within the Committees remain confidential.
2. The members of the Award Committees are identified by the NST and FTL annually, depending on the topics of the award. Aspects such as interdisciplinarity, gender balance, diversity in terms of organisational affiliation, and geographical region are considered in this process.
3. Nominations are reviewed according to the respective award category they have been submitted for.
4. The nominations are initially screened by the NST and by the project manager at FTL responsible for the selection process (and all affairs related to the NST Sustainability Award).
5. The project manager at FTL considers whether the nominators have addressed the quality criteria mentioned in the 'Addendum' such as the main characteristics and merits of the sustainability work of the nominee, the list of publications and/or patents, the description of transfer into praxis, and indicators of success.
6. For clarity, the NST and FTL will each examine *all* of the nominations.
7. Only the nominations that fulfil the described criteria are qualified to be reviewed by the members of the Pre-Selection and the FTL Final Selection Committee.

I. The pre-selection process by international experts

1. The Pre-Selection Committee consists of 10 to 15 highly renowned experts, international professors, researchers, and entrepreneurs.
2. Each member will be asked to evaluate the nominations and provide a shortlist of the nominations that most deserve the award regarding the ambition and idea of the Sustainability Award supported by the NST taking into consideration the criteria mentioned in the 'Addendum'. For each award, they will establish a first shortlist without ranking that will constitute the basis for further discussions within the Pre-Selection Committee.
3. The pre-selection process will be made based on at least two virtual conferences and via email / remote exchange. FTL will organise virtual conferences, which will be chaired by the Pre-Selection Committee General Secretary.
4. The decision on a final shortlist for each award will be based on the simple majority. Members of the Pre-Selection Committee will vote, e.g., via hand signals or using the voting function of the videoconference tool. The votes will be recorded by a project manager. The pre-selection phase ends when all members of the Pre-Selection Committee agree on the final shortlist for each award. The final shortlists will be forwarded to the FTL Final Selection Committee.

II. The final selection of awardees by FTL

1. The University of Cambridge delegation, from various Schools and Institutions, familiar with sustainability-related research and entrepreneurship will support the final selection process. The final selection will take place within FTL under the lead of the director of the laboratory.
2. The members of the Final Selection Committee will receive the shortlist of the Pre-Selection Committee for each award.
3. The discussions take place within the Final Selection Committee and are moderated by its chair.
4. The FTL Final Selection Committee identifies the award winners with consideration of the quality criteria as summarised in the 'Addendum'. The decision will be based on a simple majority. The vote will be recorded by an FTL project manager but will stay confidential within the Final Selection Committee.
5. The members of the Pre-Selection Committee will be informed about the final decision.

Final general aspects

1. NST does not intervene during the two-phase selection process.
2. The list of the submitted and shortlisted nominations will not be made public without further consent.
3. During the selection phase, members of the Pre-Selection and the Final Selection Committee who submitted a nomination are kindly asked not to participate in the discussion and evaluation of their respective nominee(s).
4. To ensure that there is no actual or potential conflict of interest, nominators should not submit nominations if the following circumstances apply:
    1. First-degree relationships (marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership) with the nominee.
    2. Personal, including financial, interest in the nomination's success (or that of any person listed above).
    3. Any other situation that would compromise selection or introduce bias when evaluating the proposal.
5. Collected personal data regarding the nominators and the nominee will only be processed in the frame of the above-described nomination processes. For this purpose, data submitted in the proposals will be stored by the FTL and the NST, and distributed to the members of the Award committees involved in the evaluation process. The committees will be informed that documents must be kept strictly confidential and that personal data must be handled in accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). General anonymised information may be used for research purposes and for the improvement of the selection process.
6. Members of the Pre-Selection and the FTL Final Selection Committee will be asked to treat information related to the selection process, including the nomination proposals, with confidentiality and not to disclose the names of the awardees before any official publication from the NST and FTL.

Addendum

Quality Criteria for the Sustainability Award

The following quality criteria must be clearly addressed in all nominations. Nominators are expected to explicitly reference these criteria in their submissions. Both the Pre-Selection Committee and the Final Selection Committee will apply these criteria when evaluating nominations and establishing shortlists. The assessment will consider both the substance and the demonstrable impact of the nominee's work.

General Evaluation Criteria (Applicable to All Categories)

1. **Alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

   Nominations must clearly demonstrate how the nominee's work contributes to one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

   - The specific SDGs addressed should be explicitly identified.
   - The nature, scope, and depth of the contribution should be briefly characterised.
   - Both nominators and reviewers are expected to articulate this alignment in clear and concrete terms.

2. Contribution to Research, Technology Development, and Implementation

The nomination should describe the nominee's substantive contributions to:

- Scientific research and knowledge generation;
- Development of innovative technologies, methodologies, or systems; and
- Practical implementation, deployment, or scaling of solutions.

The evaluation will consider the nominee's role, level of responsibility, and influence on outcomes.

3. Originality, Innovation, and Creative Excellence

The nomination must demonstrate the originality and creativity of the nominee's work in comparison with international peers and competitors.

- Novel approaches, disruptive concepts, or pioneering methodologies should be highlighted.
- Incremental advances should be clearly distinguished from transformative contributions.

4. Recognition and Distinctions (if applicable)

Where relevant, the nomination should list up to three of the most significant prizes, awards, or recognitions received by the nominee, including:

- The awarding institution;
- The year awarded;
- The relevance of the award to sustainability or innovation.

5. Leadership, Commitment, and Risk-Taking

The evaluation will consider the nominee's personal or organisational merits, including:

- Demonstrated leadership qualities and vision;
- Long-term commitment to sustainability objectives;
- Willingness to take calculated risks in pursuit of innovative or impactful solutions;
- Ability to inspire teams, stakeholders, or broader communities.

6. Evidence-Based Achievements and Measurable Impact

All claims of achievement must be supported by tangible evidence and concrete examples, such as:

- Quantifiable outcomes or performance indicators;
- Documented societal, environmental, or economic impact;
- Verifiable milestones or implementation results.

Category-Specific Criteria (1)

Leadership in Implementation

For nominations in the category Leadership in Implementation, this year (2026), particular attention will be given to individuals or organisations that demonstrate outstanding leadership in the responsible deployment, scaling, and importantly thoughtful governance of *artificial intelligence (AI)* based solutions that deliver measurable sustainability impact. Please note, the scope of the award is not limited to 'AI implementation' or use of any technology - it also includes thought leadership, or cultural leadership, enabling significant change.

1. From Concept to Real-World Deployment

- Demonstrated leadership in translating research, models, controls, or algorithms into operational systems addressing sustainability challenges;
- Successful implementation of solutions in real-world environments or provisioning of resources to facilitate change, including but not limited to energy systems, climate analytics, environmental monitoring, healthcare, food and agriculture, urban systems, or public services;
- Evidence of adopted use, updated workflows, and long-term operational effectiveness of deployed sustainable systems.

2. Impact-Driven, Equitable, AI Implementation

- Clear and measurable sustainability outcomes directly enabled, or significantly enhance, by AI deployment (such as emissions reduction, resource optimisation, improved resilience, risk forecasting, or social and environmental benefit);
- Use of quantitative indicators, benchmarks, or monitoring frameworks to assess the performance, safety and impact of AI/Machine Learning-based solutions;
- Demonstrated ability to align AI implementation with broader sustainability strategies and policy objectives.

3. Scalability, Adoption, and Institutional Uptake

- Evidence that policies, practices or solutions have been successfully scaled or replicated across organisations, sectors or geographic regions;
- Adoption by industry, public-sector institutions, or civil society organisations, demonstrated through contracts, partnerships, or long-term programmes;
- Sustainability of the implemented system/ practice, including operational feasibility, cost effectiveness, and organisational readiness.

4. Leadership, Governance, and Responsible AI

- Demonstrated leadership in managing interdisciplinary teams and engaging stakeholders in system transformation;
- Commitment to responsible AI principles, including transparency, explainability, fairness, data protection, and accountability;
- Proactive engagement with regulators, policymakers, or standards bodies to shape ethical and governance frameworks, advocating of safe deployment of AI in sustainability contexts.

5. Change Management and Long-Term Vision

- Strategic vision for using AI as a catalyst for systemic and long-term sustainability transformation;
- Capacity to overcome technical, institutional, or cultural/ societal barriers to AI implementation;
- Demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and leadership in driving any positive change from pilot stages to sustained impact.

Category-Specific Criteria (2)

Outstanding Technology in Sustainability

For nominations in the category **Outstanding Technology in Sustainability**, particular attention will be given to the development, performance and real-world relevance of technologies that advance sustainable development. The evaluation will focus on technological excellence, applicability and measurable impact.

1. Technological Innovation and Novelty

- The degree of innovation demonstrated by the technology, including originality in design, architecture, materials, systems integration, or processes;
- The extent to which the technology advances beyond the current state of the art within the relevant sustainability domain;
- The robustness, reliability, and technical soundness of the technology, including validation through testing, pilots, or operational deployment;
- Where applicable, the reproducibility, scalability, and adaptability of the technology across different contexts or regions.

2. Relevance for Sustainability and Real-World Application

- The direct contribution of the technology to addressing sustainability challenges, including environmental, social, or economic dimensions;
- The demonstrated or foreseeable applicability of the technology in real-world settings, such as industry, infrastructure, public services, or community deployment;
- The potential of the technology to deliver measurable sustainability benefits, such as reductions in emissions, resource use, waste, or negative environmental impacts.

3. Commercialisation, Market Readiness and Scaling Potential

- The potential for translation of the technology into viable products, services, platforms or solutions;
- Evidence of commercial viability or clear pathways to market, including business models, partnerships, licensing strategies or pilot customers;
- Indicators of market readiness and scalability - such as technology readiness level (TRL), manufacturing feasibility, deployment cost structures, or regulatory compatibility.

4. Quality, Validation and Demonstrated Impact

- The quality and credibility of technical validation, including peer-reviewed publications, technical reports, standards compliance, patents, or third-party assessments;
- The influence and relevance of the technology within its field, demonstrated through adoption, citations, references in policy or industry frameworks, or benchmarking against comparable technologies;
- Documented evidence of impact, such as performance metrics, case studies, field trials, or measurable sustainability outcomes.