

Sustainability Awards 2025 rules and guidelines

Below are the general rules and guidelines for the Sustainability Awards. For more information, and to enter the submissions portal, please visit theSustainabilityAwards.com.

Basic criteria

1. The core principle for each category in the competition is to recognize packaging-related projects or innovations that, in the view of the jury, can have significant and positive environmental impacts. This can be understood either in relation to immediate performance metrics or in future potential.
2. Judges are asked to consider the holistic sustainability implications. Therefore, even where a competition category emphasizes one particular criterion, the winning submission should not score highly in this area at the expense of reduced performance according to other environmental metrics. Improved carbon footprint at the expense of reduced recyclability – and vice versa – are not sustainable outcomes.
3. The Sustainability Awards promotes rigorous assessment of substantive impacts. Therefore, submissions should be supported wherever possible and appropriate by empirical data, preferably with details of testing methodology.
4. Entries to the Sustainability Awards 2025 may be submitted to the following competition categories.
 - 4.1. If the entry represents either a product that is already in commercial use OR an initiative, such as a wider sustainability strategy or cross-value-chain collaborative project, it is eligible to enter the following categories:
 - Renewable Materials: development or innovative use of bio-based materials (such as fibre-based or bioplastics) with significant positive impact or potential in packaging applications.
 - Climate: packaging innovations that drive resource efficiency, e.g. through downgauging or reducing the carbon footprint of materials, or reducing the overall climate impact of packaged product itself, without causing other unintended environmental impacts.
 - Driving the Circular Economy: breakthroughs and innovations in recycling technology or reusable packaging systems; initiatives promoting increase in recycling rates or nurturing demand for recycle; ground-breaking use of recycled feedstocks.
 - Recyclable Packaging: innovations in packaging materials to facilitate recyclability; design for recyclability.
 - Machinery: innovations in engineering that have increased production line environmental efficiencies (in energy or water consumption or waste reduction) or facilitated adoption of sustainable packaging materials.
 - Best Practice: open to initiatives, projects, collaborations and strategies that make an outstanding contribution to minimizing the environmental impact of packaging and its supply chain. Individual innovations in packaging, materials and machinery are not eligible for this category. On the other hand, benchmarking tools and other software may be submitted.
 - E-Commerce: packaging innovations delivering holistic sustainability gains in e-commerce and direct-to-consumer channels.

4.2. If the entry represents an innovation that is intended for commercialization but not yet in commercial use, it is eligible to enter the following categories:

- Climate (pre-commercialized): packaging innovations that drive resource efficiency, e.g. through downgauging or reducing the carbon footprint of materials, or reducing the overall climate impact of packaged product itself, without causing other unintended environmental impacts.
- Renewable materials (pre-commercialized): development or innovative use of bio-based materials (such as fibre-based or bioplastics) with significant positive impact or potential in packaging applications.
- Driving the Circular Economy (pre-commercialized): innovations in recycling technology, reusable packaging systems, facilitating increased recycling, and involving significant use of recycled feedstocks.
- Recyclable Packaging (pre-commercialized): innovations in packaging materials to facilitate recyclability or are characterized by design for recyclability.

5. Please note, there are two additional awards that are separate from the main Sustainability Awards competition and to which we do not accept submissions through the competition portal. For the 'Readers' Award', nominations are made, and subsequently voted on, by Packaging Europe readers, with no involvement of the judging panel in selecting the winners. We also present an 'Outstanding Contribution' award to an individual in recognition to services to packaging sustainability. The recipient is chosen by a simple poll of the Sustainability Awards judges.

Submissions rules and eligibility

6. The innovations or achievements entered into the competition must have been launched or announced no earlier than 1st June 2023.
7. Entries must be submitted through the online competition portal thesustainabilityawards.awardsplatform.com.
8. All supporting information for submissions should be in English language.
9. Please refer to the descriptions of the individual categories for information about eligibility to enter a particular category.
10. Packaging Europe reserves the right to change the category to which a valid submission has been entered if it deems this appropriate. Packaging Europe is not obliged to inform participants in the Sustainability Awards if it amends the category of their entry.
11. Please carefully consider the eligibility of entries with regard to whether they are / are not already in commercial use. Packaging Europe reserves the right to change the category or disqualify an entry if it has been wrongly submitted.
12. The competition is open to entries from organizations and initiatives from the following organizations:

- a. Manufacturers and innovators across the packaging technology and waste disposal value chain, including suppliers of raw materials, converters, contract manufacturers, machinery suppliers and recycling technologies
- b. Brand owners
- c. Retailers
- d. Early stage R&D, including academic sector
- e. Individual entrepreneurs and designers
- f. Multi-stakeholder consortiums and projects
- g. NGOs
- h. Local municipalities

13. The competition is open to the following types of entries:

- a. Generic packaging substrates, formats, technologies and raw materials
- b. Specific packaging products and solutions, including machinery
- c. Wider projects and initiatives aiming to boost sustainability in packaging and FMCG through best practice, collaboration, research, benchmarking, etc.

14. Collaborative projects can be submitted as a joint entry, e.g. packaging developed jointly by a brand owner and packaging specialist. Collaborators are encouraged to work together on their submissions and share the credit.

15. There is a maximum of six entries per submitting organization. Large organizations with multiple business units are encouraged to coordinate internally to decide which innovations or initiatives to nominate. Packaging Europe reserves the right to withdraw submissions from the competition if this limitation has been exceeded.

Where autonomous organizations within the same group or holding company can reasonably be considered to be effectively separate organizations, the 'six entries' rule may be waived.

Packaging Europe reserves the right to make final judgements on such questions.

Where an organization is named as a collaborator in a project that submitted by a third party (see point 13 above), such entries do not count toward the limit of six.

16. Participants cannot submit the same product or initiative in more than one category. Otherwise, Packaging Europe reserves the right to withdraw the submission from one or all categories.

17. If a product or innovation has been submitted to the Sustainability Awards in the past, it cannot be submitted a second time, unless it has undergone sufficient advancement to be considered effectively a new entity.

Judging

18. Judges are to base their decisions on their objective assessment of the merits of entries and are instructed that no preference should be given to past or present Packaging Europe contributors, advertisers or sponsors.

19. Judges must recuse themselves from judging any submission where there is a conflict of interest, in particular if they represent or have a commercial relationship with the organization that made the submission.

20. Individual judges' grading and comments during deliberation will remain confidential.
21. Judges access and grade the submissions through the same online portal to which entries are submitted. Judging will take place across two rounds. In the first round, sub-groups of the jury will each assess a random selection of submissions in order to select those with sufficient merit to be considered as finalists. In the second round, the entire judging panel will assess all finalists across all competition categories.
22. Judges may instruct Packaging Europe to request additional information or clarifications from the finalists following the first round of voting. On receipt, such information will be shared with judges.
23. Winners are selected based on the aggregated grades of judges. Therefore, the results cannot be attributed to the opinions of any individual judge.
24. An overall winner 'Best Sustainable Packaging Innovation' will be selected for the 'commercialized' track of the competition. This will be the entry representing an innovation or innovation project that has accrued the highest overall score among the finalists in the second round of voting. Wider sustainability strategies (which may be eligible to enter the 'Best Practice' category) and pre-commercialized entries will not be considered for this award.

Sustainability Awards 2025 timeline

- Submissions open: 14th January 2025
- Submissions close: 14th March 2025 at 23:59 (US Pacific time)
- Finalists announced: 26th May 2025
- Winners announced at the Sustainable Packaging Summit, which takes place 10-12th November 2025 in Utrecht, Netherlands.