

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS AWARDS 2026

ENTRY GUIDE

CELEBRATING SUCCESS
IN SUSTAINABILITY



WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS AWARDS?

Aotearoa New Zealand's longest-running sustainable business awards

For more than two decades, the Sustainable Business Awards have recognised the organisations and people driving the transition to an equitable, regenerative, circular economy - one where people and nature thrive.

The Awards are not about incremental improvement. They celebrate the bold: the innovators redesigning broken systems, the leaders making decisions that others will follow, the collaborations unlocking outcomes no single organisation could achieve alone.

They span different sectors, business sizes and structures. Past winners include household names such as ecostore, Air New Zealand and NZ Post, as well as emerging entrepreneurs whose award success has helped their ideas reach the world.

In 2026, with the pace of change accelerating and the stakes higher than ever, the Awards take on new urgency. Sustainability as usual isn't enough. In the face of unprecedented environmental and social challenges, the Awards finalists show us what's possible.

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is on a mission to forge an equitable, regenerative circular economy for Aotearoa New Zealand. This vision is reflected in the Sustainable Business Awards.



WHY SHOULD I ENTER?

Potential for global recognition

Finalists in the Sustainable Business Awards have the chance to be put forward as a nominee for the Earthshot Prize founded by Prince William. Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, official Aotearoa nominator for the Earthshot Prize, will assess which finalists would make the best candidates for the £1 million prizes on offer each year across five categories – Protect and Restore Nature, Clean Our Air, Revive our Oceans, Build a Waste-Free World, and Fix our Climate.



Be recognised as what's Next

Get named in our 'Next' list – the group of Awards finalists selected by the judges that are bringing potentially groundbreaking new ideas. Being named in the Next list offers you access to increased profile building and support for your business.*

Showcase your commitment

Be seen as a leader in Aotearoa New Zealand, receiving well-deserved recognition for your hard work and dedication.

Positive publicity

Enjoy widespread media coverage, lots of pats on the back and inspire others by showcasing your environmental progress and credentials.

Build valuable connections

Join a vibrant community of sustainability leaders and innovators, creating opportunities for meaningful connections and collaborations.

Differentiate yourself

Stand out from the rest with an Award from a trusted sustainable business brand with a 24-year legacy.

Celebrate and reflect

Reward your efforts, celebrate achievements and use the entry process as a moment to reflect on your sustainability progress, providing clarity for future direction.

Access expert feedback

As a finalist, you can receive valuable feedback from industry experts, helping to further improve your sustainability initiatives.

Inclusive and accessible

The Sustainable Business Awards are open to everyone, regardless of where you are on your sustainability journey, and entry is free – making it an accessible opportunity for all.

*additional services and opportunities are available to those on the Next list who are SBN Impact Investors (members)

WHAT IS THE ENTRY PROCESS?

2 June **Entries open**

Choose your category or categories. Provide a clear and compelling summary of your entry. Explain why you, your team, organisation, partnership or nominee deserves to win in the chosen category. The entry form will prompt you for more detailed information. This Entry Guide contains helpful hints and guiding questions to structure your entry.

30 June **Entries close**

Submit your entry via our website by 11.59pm, 30 June 2026.

July - August **Judging**

SBN staff compile all entries and hand them to our independent judges - experts in sustainability and business. If your entry shines, you'll be selected as a finalist and named in our 'Next' list: the list of innovators, entrepreneurs, projects and organisations leading us towards a better future for Aotearoa New Zealand.

September **Who's Next?**

If you're named on the Next list - congratulations! We may ask you to share more about your sustainability story. We'll launch a campaign celebrating your inclusion on the list and offer a number of profile-building opportunities.

26 November **Awards Evening**

Whether or not you're on the Next list, you are making a difference. Book a ticket to our Awards event and celebrate with others making Aotearoa New Zealand a more sustainable nation. We will announce a winner in each category, along with a number of sector-based commendations.

2026 AWARDS CATEGORIES

The 2026 Sustainable Business Awards feature a full suite of categories. Choose the one that best reflects your work, or enter more than one.



DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION AWARD

For the innovator reimagining what's possible.

The most urgent challenges we face won't be solved by doing things slightly better; they demand new thinking, new systems and new ways of operating. This award celebrates groundbreaking products, services, technologies and business models designed with sustainability and circular economy principles at their core.

The award recognises homegrown creativity and innovation that goes beyond improving existing approaches. It rewards organisations challenging current systems, unlocking new ways of operating and accelerating progress towards a regenerative future where nature and people thrive.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs of any size

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- originality and ambition
- a clear departure from current practice
- positive environmental and social impact
- potential to scale, be replicated or reshape markets over time
- evidence of systems-level thinking
- contribution to regenerating natural systems



MARKET MOVER AWARD

Organisations of all sizes can shape markets. What they buy, sell, specify, stock, promote, invest in or make easier for others to access can influence what the rest of the economy does.

This award recognises organisations using that influence deliberately: pulling their customers, suppliers, partners or sector toward circular, regenerative and equitable outcomes.

This goes beyond internal sustainability improvements. It includes organisations that use their procurement, products, customer relationships, facilities, logistics, data, platforms, brand, standards or operational infrastructure to create demand for better solutions, de-risk new approaches or help sustainable suppliers reach viability. The test is whether the organisation is creating conditions for others to change, not just changing itself.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Businesses, councils and other organisations using commercial or market levers to shift demand, supply or sector practice.

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- deliberate use of commercial levers to drive environmental or social outcomes
- measurable positive impact on suppliers, partners, or the wider market (not just internal improvement)
- evidence of system-level intent: policies, relationships, commercial decisions or investments that shift what others do
- outcomes proportionate to the organisation's scale and influence
- a credible case that the organisation is helping make circular, regenerative or equitable choices more viable, visible or normal in its market



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

For the leader making bold moves others will follow.

Transformational change needs people willing to act before the path is clear - leaders who challenge the status quo, make courageous decisions and bring others with them towards more ambitious outcomes for people and nature.

This award honours individuals or teams who go beyond business-as-usual leadership to drive meaningful progress towards a regenerative, circular economy. It recognises leadership that creates momentum within organisations and beyond, helping to shape a more sustainable future. This includes leaders who build capability in others and contribute to long-term resilience and future-readiness in Aotearoa New Zealand.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Individuals in leadership roles, teams in any sector, business, community, government, iwi or not-for-profit, working towards environmental or social sustainability outcomes.

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- clarity of vision and long-term thinking
- evidence of systemic leadership and impact beyond their own organisation
- ability to inspire and mobilise others
- commitment to regenerative outcomes for both people and the environment
- demonstrated understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context and what transformational leadership means within it



EMERGING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER AWARD

For the emerging leader whose vision is already changing what's possible.

The leaders Aotearoa New Zealand needs most may not be on anyone's radar yet. This award recognises a leader within the first 10 years of their career who is driving meaningful progress towards a sustainable, regenerative future. They may not yet have a long track record, but they demonstrate clarity of vision, courage to act and the ability to influence others beyond their immediate sphere.

It celebrates individuals bringing fresh thinking, initiative and a clear sense of purpose to the challenges ahead.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Individuals aged 30 or under in any sector, business, community, government, iwi or not-for-profit, working towards environmental or social sustainability outcomes.

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- clarity of vision and the courage to pursue it early in a career
- evidence of meaningful positive impact relative to experience and resources
- ability to inspire and mobilise others - peers, organisations or communities
- commitment to both environmental and social outcomes
- potential for long-term, systemic change



COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE AWARD

For the organisation whose communications are helping people think differently and act in new ways.

The most urgent sustainability challenges aren't just technical problems, they're human ones. Solving them requires changing how people think, feel and act. This award recognises initiatives that use communications, storytelling and engagement to influence behaviour and accelerate progress on sustainability challenges.

It celebrates the ability to connect with audiences, inspire action and contribute to meaningful, lasting change - not just raising awareness. It includes initiatives that demonstrate measurable behaviour change and contribute to wider shifts in systems or decision-making at scale.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Businesses, NGOs, government agencies, councils, media organisations, individuals and communications agencies entering on behalf of a client

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- clarity of the behaviour change goal and the strategy behind it
- creativity, reach, engagement and quality of the communications work
- evidence of measurable behaviour change
- positive environmental or social impact resulting from that change
- ability to inspire action beyond the initial audience
- scalability or replicability of the approach



OUTSTANDING COLLABORATION AWARD

For the partnership achieving outcomes no single organisation could have reached alone.

Some of the most important sustainable outcomes don't belong to any one organisation. They emerge when unlikely partners pool what they each bring - expertise, networks, resources, relationships - and work toward something bigger than any of them could deliver independently.

This award recognises collaborations that have produced meaningful environmental or social outcomes through genuine partnership. It celebrates the quality of the working relationship as much as the result: shared risk, mutual contribution and a willingness to operate outside familiar territory.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Businesses, councils, NGOs and government agencies

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- a clearly defined partnership with named organisations and distinct contributions from each
- outcomes that required collaboration to achieve and evidence that no single partner could have done it alone
- genuine mutuality: shared risk, shared learning and shared benefit
- positive environmental or social impact that is measurable and meaningful for Aotearoa New Zealand



FUTURE FINANCE AWARD

For the funder taking smart risks to unlock a sustainable economy.

The solutions we need exist. Often what's missing is the right capital at the right time. This award recognises funders, philanthropists and financial institutions using capital as a catalyst for change, supporting innovation, enabling new markets and accelerating impact.

It highlights the critical role finance plays in enabling solutions to scale, supporting new approaches and shaping the direction of the economy.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Philanthropists, impact investors and financial institutions

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- willingness to deploy early or catalytic capital for positive impact
- leverage achieved (did this investment act as a catalyst that brought others along or did it just fund something directly on its own?)
- support beyond capital, including networks and expertise
- portfolio diversity and systems change focus
- long-term value creation through nature-based solutions or regenerative enterprises



REGENERATING NATURE AWARD

For the organisation restoring and protecting the natural world as part of doing business.

Business and nature are not separate and this award recognises organisations that understand that. These are the organisations integrating nature into the core of how they operate (through their business model, their partnerships, or their commercial activity), taking action to restore ecosystems and actively working to enhance biodiversity. This might include embedding nature within core business models, delivering measurable ecological uplift and linking regeneration outcomes to long-term economic value.

This reflects the growing imperative to move beyond reducing harm toward actively supporting the health and resilience of the natural world.

WHO IT'S FOR:

Organisations of any size or sector - including businesses, not-for-profits, councils, iwi and community groups whose work restoring and protecting the natural world has a meaningful connection to the business world.

WHAT JUDGES ARE LOOKING FOR:

- measurable positive impact on biodiversity and ecosystem health
- integration of nature into core strategy and decision-making
- long-term commitment and evidence of progress
- approaches that actively restore or regenerate natural systems, not only minimise damage



NEXT AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND (SUPREME) AWARD

For the organisation or leader contributing most significantly to a sustainable, regenerative future for Aotearoa New Zealand.

This award is not entered directly. Judges select the winner from across all category winners, recognising the entry that best demonstrates exceptional ambition, system-level impact and the potential to create lasting change for Aotearoa New Zealand.



HAVE ANY NIGGLY QUESTIONS?

Is my business too big or too small?

Any size organisation, as well as individuals, can enter. Judges take the size of the organisation into account when considering applications.

Can collaborations and partnerships enter?

Yes, the more the merrier! Sometimes collaborations take us to new and exciting places, so please tell us about them.

Is it cheeky to nominate myself?

No! New Zealanders generally don't celebrate their own achievements and we want to change that. You can nominate yourself, someone can nominate you, or you can nominate someone else.

Can overseas projects enter?

Yes - but only if the technology and ideas were generated here in New Zealand and you can demonstrate the impact for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Should I enter if I wasn't previously selected as a finalist?

Of course! We want to hear about your progress.

Who gets to see my entry? Is it confidential?

Entries are compiled by the Awards Team at SBN and sent straight to the judges. Your entry form is confidential. If you are chosen as a finalist, we'll want to tell everyone about the great work you're doing so make sure your initiative, project or business can be talked about.

Do I have to be an SBN Impact Investor (member) to enter?

No, anyone can enter.

Can I enter if I have won before?

Yes!

Can I submit more than one entry?

Yes, you can submit as many entries as you like. You'll need to fill in a separate entry form for every category you enter.

What is the Next list?

The Next list is the list of Awards finalists. It represents what's 'next' in sustainable business. Organisations and people on the Next list enjoy promotion throughout the year.

You mention 'circular economy' – what's that?

In a circular economy, resources are never abandoned to become waste or pollution. Products are designed to be safe and easy to manage in cycles of production and reproduction. By minimising the use of new resources, the circular economy aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact. This also creates the economic foundations for the nature regeneration that is urgently needed.

**GOOD LUCK WITH
YOUR ENTRY!**

Still have questions?

Contact us at:

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W [sustainable.org.nz/
sustainable-business-awards/](https://sustainable.org.nz/sustainable-business-awards/)

