

# Start Up Energy Transition Award 2026 – Terms and Conditions

## 1) Eligibility

National and international companies that contribute to the success of the energy transition and climate protection goals with their product or service can apply for the ‘Start Up Energy Transition Award’ (‘SET Award’).

The company must have been founded no more than 10 years ago when applying, which means that it should not have been founded before September 2015. The object of the application must be an already implemented product or service, manufactured product, or existing prototype. It is not possible to apply with just an idea for which no concrete steps have been taken. The founding of a company and the development of a business plan are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Participation in other start-up initiatives or competitions is possible.

## 2) Participation deadline

Applications for the Start Up Energy Transition Award 2026 must be submitted by the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2025 at 23:59:59 CET. All applications submitted before this deadline will be included in the selection process.

## 3) Cancellation of the competition, no entitlement to participate

dena reserves the right to cancel this competition at any time. This is particularly true in the event that the public funding of the competition is not provided by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE). There is no entitlement to participate.

## 4) No participation fees

You will not be charged any participation fees to apply for the Start Up Energy Transition Award.

## 5) Categories

Applicants may only apply to one category. All subsequent applications to other categories will be disqualified.

For the 2026 edition, the five SET Award categories are: Industry, Buildings & Construction, Clean Energy & Storage (encompassing upstream energy production), Mobility & Transportation, and Quality Energy Access & SDG-7. In which sector does your idea or solution fall? Where does your start-up have the most impact? And which market does your core customer belong in? We look forward to seeing your applications.

### CLEAN ENERGY & STORAGE

The generation, storage, and distribution of clean energy is not just a technical challenge—it’s a human one. This category seeks start-ups addressing the decarbonization of energy-intensive sectors through renewable energy generation, advanced storage technologies, and sustainable distribution methods. Your solution should

demonstrate technical innovation with the potential for real-world impact, helping communities and industries transition to a net-zero future.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to: Clean Energy Generation | Energy Storage | Grid Operation & Demand Side Flexibility | Power Grids (TSO/DSO) | Smart Grids | Hydrogen & Applications | Bio & Alternative Fuels | Waste to Heat/Energy | Power-to-X | Market Platforms for Trading Energy | Digitalisation in the Energy Sector | Artificial Intelligence (AI) | Machine Learning (ML) | Resilience | Cyber Security | Critical Raw Materials | Circular Economy | Virtual Power Plants (VPP)

## **MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATION**

As one of the largest consumers of global energy, transportation is ripe for disruption. This category is for start-ups reimagining how we move people and goods, with solutions that cut emissions and improve energy efficiency. We're looking for technologies that not only drive the sector towards a low-carbon future but also redefine mobility in a way that benefits both people and the planet.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to: Smart Mobility | Charging Technology | Vehicle-to-X (V2X) | Synthetic Fuels/ Biofuels/ E-fuels | Public Transport | Cargo & Fleet Management | Energy Efficiency in Logistics | Last Mile Transportation | Maritime & Aviation Sector | Autonomous Vehicles | Drones and Robotics | Critical Raw Materials | Circular Economy

## **INDUSTRY**

The industry sector, responsible for one-third of global emissions and 38% of energy use, faces decarbonization challenges due to complex materials, bureaucratic hurdles, and high costs. Innovation is critical to making industrial processes cleaner and more sustainable, benefiting both the planet and the people who rely on them. This category seeks start-ups developing breakthrough technologies that overcome these obstacles, helping industries transition to more efficient, low-carbon operations with the potential for large-scale adoption.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to: Industrial Process Heat Decarbonisation and Electrification | Green Hydrogen for Industry | Increasing Efficiency | Waste Heat Utilisation | Carbon Reduction & Accounting | Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) | Direct Air Capture (DAC) | Manufacturing | New Chemical Processes | Critical Raw Materials | Supply Chains | Circular Economy | Energy as a Service (EaaS)

## **BUILDINGS & CONSTRUCTION**

Buildings consume 30% of global energy, from construction materials to the energy used for heating and cooling. This category seeks start-ups developing innovations that reduce energy waste and transform how we construct and maintain our buildings. Your innovation should enable energy-efficient buildings that contribute to a sustainable future, minimizing environmental impact while improving the well-being for those who inhabit them.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to: Heating & Cooling Solutions | New Materials | Urban Energy Transition | Energy Communities | District Energy Systems | Heat Supply & District Heating | Building Efficiency | Smart Energy Management Solutions | Life Cycle of Buildings | Critical Raw Materials | Supply Chains | Circular Economy

## **QUALITY ENERGY ACCESS & SDG-7**

Achieving universal access to affordable, reliable, and clean energy is central to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG-7). This category seeks start-ups empowering vulnerable communities with innovative solutions that make energy services accessible, resilient, and sustainable. We're looking for technologies and business models that bridge the energy gap, particularly for those most affected by climate change, fostering inclusion and sustainability in the global energy transition.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to: Affordable, Reliable, and Clean Energy for All | Off-grid Communities | Micro Grids | Expansion and Modernisation of Infrastructure | Energy Storage Solutions | Renewable Energy Integration | Last Mile Electrification | Decentralised Energy Systems | Humanising the Energy Transition | Empowerment through Energy Access.

### **6) Prizes**

The winner of each category will receive a maximum cash prize of 10,000 euros. If more than one applicant receives the highest number of points in a single category, the prize money will be divided evenly. In addition, the two non-winning finalists in the Quality Energy Access & SDG-7 category will receive a cash prize of €5,000 each.

The announcement of the SET Award winners will be made at a celebratory award ceremony.

The decision regarding the awarding of the prizes will be the sole responsibility of the jury. There is no entitlement to publication, award ceremony, justification of the decision, or remuneration.

### **7) Selection procedure and jury**

Applicants can only apply for one category.

Following a criteria check, the submissions will be subject to a structured quantitative assessment process. During this, they will be submitted to a third-party agency, who will evaluate the applicants using a standardised modelling system designed around the questions found in the application. The third-party agency will produce a ranking of all the applicants for each category. The top 130 applications will be passed on to the jury.

The jury, which is made up of internationally recognised experts from politics, the energy sector, business, as well as investors, will conduct a largely qualitative review using an online tool to assign points. This review will determine the top 100 (SET 100) list, in addition to the 15 finalists. No information on the ranking will be communicated to the final jury.

The three best-placed applicants for each category are the finalists in the final round of the competition and will be invited to the SET Tech Festival & SET Award ceremony by dena. This will take place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 2026 (The SET Award Jury Meeting will take place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 2026). dena will assume responsibility for planning the arrivals, departures and accommodation. However, dena is not a tour operator. Should individual participants make special requests that incur additional costs (open-jaw flights, transfer to a location that is not the airport of departure or residence, flight or hotel upgrades to a higher class, extension of the stay, etc.), these additional costs must be borne by those participants.

The finalists are invited to once again present their applications with a live pitch on the SET Tech Festival stage. The winners will be announced at the end of the SET Tech Festival at a celebratory evening event.

The final jury also reserves the right to award special prizes to extraordinary achievements or not to award prizes in the aforementioned categories if the quality criteria are not satisfactorily met by any applicant. In addition, projects may be grouped between the various categories in each evaluation phase if deemed appropriate. The affected applicants will be informed accordingly.

## 8) Application documents

The application documents must be submitted via an online tool in English. All fields on the application form must be filled in with the corresponding information in complete sentences or bullet points and in English. References to attachments (e.g. 'see website' or 'see attached documents') or 'no statement' are not permitted and will not be considered. Please note the maximum number of characters in each instance. These fields must be filled in as concisely and comprehensibly as possible, taking into account the limited number of characters. The application will not be considered complete if the following information and documents are not submitted:

1. Completely filled out application form (Partially completed applications will not be accepted).
2. A pitch deck as a .pdf file containing no more than 15 slides.
3. High-resolution company logo (300 dpi) as a .jpg or .png file for publication on the SET website and in the competition documents.
4. All attached documents and pitch decks must be in English.

The applicant must be able to present a legal framework, proof of concept or a client, and/ or an industrial/ corporate/ institutional partner.

Only complete applications received before the deadline will be considered. By submitting an application, the applicant accepts these conditions for participation.

### Free Electrons program

\* Within this year's application form, applicants have the opportunity to apply for the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Free Electrons program. Should applicants opt to apply for this program through the SET Award application form, they will be prompted to answer several additional questions and agree to the terms and conditions of the Free Electrons program. This information will go directly to the Free Electrons application team. dena has no responsibility, liability and/or influence on the handling and outcome of the Free Electrons program. Free Electrons terms and conditions can be found [here](#).

*Free Electrons is a global innovation program, where some of the largest [energy utilities](#) and start-ups from around the globe work together to deliver pioneering solutions and co-create the future of energy. The program focuses on working to pilot projects, commercially deploy products, and facilitate investment opportunities, learning and development. Learn more about the Free Electrons program [here](#) and discover how you can disrupt the market with your solution.*

## 9) Photos, videos, brief descriptions (final documents)

If the application reaches the final round, the applicant will provide additional information on the company and the project (such as photos, brief descriptions, brief videos) on request of dena within seven business days

(Monday - Friday) for public relations work in connection with the SET Award 2026 (namely on the SET homepage, LinkedIn, Set Award flyers). Paragraph 12 will also apply to these documents.

## **10) Confirmation of receipt of the application**

After your application is submitted, you will receive an automatic confirmation of receipt. If you do not, please contact us immediately.

## **11) Confidentiality**

dena assures that your documents will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. All submitted documents will be made available to the third-party rating agency and the jury only for the purpose of conducting the selection process. The third-party rating agency and the juries are bound to secrecy.

## **12) Usage rights / publication**

The following information on the finalists will be published at the SET Tech Festival 2026, SET Award 2026 ceremony and beyond for the purpose of public relations in connection with the SET Award 2026: Name of the company, basic information about the company and project in the form of a brief description.

The following information on all applicants may be published at a later time on a World Energy Council and dena led SET online platform: Name of the company, year established, industry, country, and project information in the form of a brief description.

The following information on the 100 best submissions will be published before the award ceremony as part of the 'SET 100 List' of the 100 most successful applications for the purpose of public relations: Name of the company, year established, industry, country, and project information in the form of a brief description.

This does not imply any right to publication or public relations work on the part of dena.

The applicant grants dena and the World Energy Council the simple usage rights (right to make publicly available, translation right, right to store on any available medium [multimedia right] as well as database right, etc.), unrestricted in terms of content, time and location, to the works submitted to participate in the competition as well as submitted to dena for the purpose of public relation, such as the brief descriptions, photos, videos (final documents) and the company logo, which are subject to copyright protection, for the purpose of public relations. dena and the World Energy Council has the right to reproduce the work in its entirety or in part (in print, online, etc.) and publish it, stating the applicant's name. The applicant shall label the work of third parties separately and notify dena and the World Energy Council of the source.

The applicant hereby warrants that he/she may freely dispose of the usage rights to the final documents and company logo and that no third-party rights, in particular trademark rights, copyrights, personal rights or other ancillary copyrights, prevent dena's use of them.

In addition, the applicant affirms that any third parties owning copyright to the final documents and company logo have fully renounced their right to be named as creator of the work in accordance with §13 (2) of the Copyright Act (UrhG).

As a precautionary measure, the applicant shall release dena and the World Energy Council upon first request from all third-party claims, which such parties derive from any rights they may hold to the final documents or company logo. This also includes the costs of an appropriate legal defence mounted by dena against third parties. Otherwise, liability is determined by the provisions of law.

The exploitation rights shall be granted without compensation.

### **13) Video and audio recordings**

dena and the World Energy Council intend to publish photo, video and audio recordings made as part of the SET Tech Festival 2026 and the SET Award ceremony 2026 on the SET homepage, on LinkedIn, on YouTube, in the SET newsletter, in flyers, and in brochures for the purpose of public relations and documentation either via dena itself as well as via media and network partners.

### **14) Contact**

German Energy Agency / Deutsche Energie-Agentur GmbH (dena)  
Chausseestrasse 128 a  
10115 Berlin, Germany  
Tel: +49 (0)30 66 777 904  
Email: [Deborah.Bartel@dena.de](mailto:Deborah.Bartel@dena.de)  
Further information: [www.startup-energy-transition.com](http://www.startup-energy-transition.com)

The Start Up Energy Transition Award is presented in cooperation with:

World Energy Council (WEC)  
62-64 Cornhill  
London EC3V 3NH, UK  
Further information: [www.worldenergy.org](http://www.worldenergy.org)

Free Electrons program: <https://freeelectrons.org/contact/>

### **15) Privacy notice**

Personal data may be used as stated in the [data protection declaration and these terms and conditions](#).

The Start Up Energy Award is presented in cooperation with the World Energy Council (WEC), a registered UK charity (charity number 1086559) and a company limited by guarantee incorporated in England and Wales (company number 04184478), 62-64 Cornhill, London EC3V 3NH, UK, [www.worldenergy.org](http://www.worldenergy.org). Thus the applications are disclosed to the WEC to oversee the evaluation and selection process for the Top 100 and the finalists.

WEC will make your data anonymous for their use for the World Issues Monitor research.

At the end of the SET Award application period, Free Electrons will receive a CSV file containing the information of those applicants who have opted in to Free Electrons, and will use it for their evaluation process for its 10<sup>th</sup> edition. From that point on, Free Electrons is solely responsible for the information that has been submitted.

Find Free Electrons privacy notice [here](#).