Start Up Energy Transition Award 2027 – 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 August 2016. 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 2027 must be submitted by the 30th of November 2026 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 2027 edition, the five SET Award categories are: Clean Energy & Storage, Digital Energy, Markets & Economy, Buildings & Construction, Industry & Value Chains and Mobility & Transportation. 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.

1. 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:

Generation & Storage Technologies: Hardware Solutions | Clean Energy Generation (Solar PV, Wind Onshore/Offshore, Hydropower) | Green Hydrogen & Applications | Waste to Heat/Energy | Power-to-X | Fusion & Fission (incl. Small Modular Reactors/SMR) | Geothermal | Energy Efficiency | Energy Storage | Next-gen Battery Technology | Long-Duration Energy Storage (LDES) | Green Ammonia

Infrastructure & Assets: Expansion and Modernisation of Energy Infrastructure | Power Grids (TSO/DSO) and Operation | Grid Flexibility & Balancing | Physical Asset Management | Predictive Maintenance | Circularity

Energy Access & Equity: Affordable, Reliable, and Clean Energy for All | Off-grid Communities | Micro Grids | Renewable Energy Integration | Last Mile Electrification | Decentralised Energy Systems | Energy Communities | Empowerment through Energy Access

2. DIGITAL ENGERY, MAREKETS AND ECONOMY

The energy transition doesn't just need cleaner power — it needs smarter systems to generate, distribute, trade, and protect it. This category is for start-ups building the digital backbone of the new energy economy: software, data, and intelligence that make energy systems more efficient, resilient, and transparent, paired with the market platforms, financing models, and regulatory tools that get technologies deployed faster and at scale. Your solution should show how digital and economic innovation translate into a quicker, safer, and more inclusive energy transition.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

Software, Intelligence & Platforms: Digitalisation in Energy and Storage | Software Solutions | Artificial Intelligence (AI) | Machine Learning (ML) | Virtual Power Plants (VPP) | Smart Grids | Digital Asset Management | Digital Twins | Demand Side Flexibility | DERMS | Blockchain & Distributed Ledger Technologies

Security & Enabling Tech: Cybersecurity & Protection of Critical Infrastructure | Space-Energy-Nexus | Energy Efficiency of Data Centers | Data Spaces and Data Sharing | Quantum Technologies | Edge Computing

Market, Regulation & Enablement: Market Platforms for Trading Energy | IT Solutions for Energy Companies | Enabling Fast Rollout of Energy Technologies | Fast and Efficient Permitting | Green Job Creation | Financing the Energy Transition | New Business Models for the Energy Transition

3. 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 of those who inhabit them.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

Heating, Cooling & Building Tech: Heating & Cooling Solutions | District Energy Systems | Heat Supply & District Heating | Building Efficiency | Smart Energy Management Solutions & HEMS | Building Automation Systems (BAS) | Drones

Climate-Resilient Communities & Housing: Urban Energy Transition | Energy Communities & Community Engagement | Affordable Housing | Climate Adaptation & Mitigation | Deep Retrofit & Renovation | Passive / Net-Zero Buildings

Materials & Life Cycle: Life Cycle of Buildings | Circular Solutions | New and Alternative Materials | Bio-based & Low-Carbon Construction Materials (e.g. Mass Timber)

4. INDUSTRY & VALUE CHAINS

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:

Decarbonisation & Process Technology: Industrial Process Heat Decarbonisation and Electrification | Green Hydrogen for Industry | Waste Heat Utilisation | Carbon Reduction & Accounting | Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) | Direct Air Capture (DAC) | ETS Solutions | Manufacturing | Energy as a Service (EaaS) | Affordable Energy for Industry

Circularity, Materials & Advanced Manufacturing: Efficiency and Circular Solutions | New Chemical Processes | Recycling and Circular Extraction of Critical Raw Materials | Value Chains | Circular and Alternative Materials | Green Steel & Green Cement | Semiconductors, Sensor and Chip Technologies | Robotics | Industrial AI/ML

5. 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:

Vehicle & Fuel Technology: Next-gen Battery Technology | Smart Mobility | Charging Technology | Vehicle-to-X (V2X) | Synthetic Fuels/Biofuels/E-fuels | EVs | Hydrogen Mobility & Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCEV) | Circular Solutions in the Automotive Sector

Systems & Logistics: Public Transport & Rail | Affordable Mobility | Micromobility | Cargo & Fleet Management | Energy Efficiency in Logistics | Last Mile Transportation

Heavy & Autonomous Transport: Maritime & Aviation Sector | Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) | Autonomous Vehicles | Drones | Robotics

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.

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 start-up 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 most likely take place on the 11th of March, 2027 (The SET Award Jury Meeting will take place on the 10th of March, 2027). 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 11th 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 2027 (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 2027, SET Award 2027 ceremony and beyond for the purpose of public relations in connection with the SET Award 2027: 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 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 best submissions will be published before the award ceremony as part of a "best of list" of 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 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 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 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 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 intends to publish photo, video and audio recordings made as part of the SET Tech Festival 2027 and the SET Award ceremony 2027 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

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

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.

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 11th edition. From that point on, Free Electrons is solely responsible for the information that has been submitted.

Find Free Electrons privacy notice here.