



**“The Circular Shift: Business Reinvented”
Student Competition for Developing a Circular
Transformation Strategy for a Selected Corporation**

CIRCULAR WEEK 2026





1. Competition Information

Organizing Body: Institute of Innovation and Responsible Development (INNOWNO)

Duration: February 2, 2026 – October 26, 2026

Final Competition Date: October 26, 2026

Target Group: Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD students from all universities across Poland

2. Problem Description

Although we have observed steps toward moving away from the wasteful "take-make-dispose" model for many years, these changes are occurring far too slowly to address the challenges facing our planet. One of the fundamental obstacles to more responsible consumption and production is international corporations, which are reluctant to change how they conduct their operations. As a result, they perpetuate the current status quo among millions of consumers worldwide.

An alternative to the current model of corporate operations is the circular economy (closed-loop economy). It involves maximizing economic value in the economy and retaining the value of goods within the limits set by our planet's resources. To achieve this, the circular economy closes economic loops throughout the entire product lifecycle. Products can be reused, repaired, repurposed, manufactured from recycled raw materials using renewable energy, and so on. The possibilities are numerous, but all of them aim to increase resource productivity – benefiting not only the environment and society, but also corporate competitiveness.

More efficient use of resources by the world's largest corporations can transform entire industries. Implementing a so-called circular transformation of these entities – that is, closing economic loops within their own operations and throughout the entire business ecosystem of a selected enterprise – can have far-reaching consequences. The scale of action by the largest market players can result in significant growth in the market for circular products and services, which has the potential to encourage other entities to implement similar transformations and, consequently, to transition to a closed-loop model across the entire economy.

Actions of this type begin with simple ideas, supported by rigorous analysis. This is exactly what we invite you to participate in through our student competition. We ask you to describe an innovative change in a product, service, value chain, business model, etc., that could significantly impact the closing of economic loops within the operations of a selected international corporation (without naming it) or an imagined corporation based on real-world entities. This change should influence a more sustainable way of managing resources within the selected enterprise and, perhaps, also among its stakeholders. We expect innovations that will increase resource productivity. As a result, corporate competitiveness will grow while negative externalities from business operations will be reduced.

3. Competition Timeline:

Stage 1: RECRUITMENT

Timeline: February 2 – April 6, 2026





Interdisciplinary teams or individual students register their desire to participate in the "The Circular Shift: Business Reinvented" competition. Individual students will be contacted to form teams.

Stage 2: EDUCATION

Timeline: April 2026

Teams will have the opportunity to participate in an online lecture on closed-loop economy concepts, circular business models, and practical examples of circular transformation. The session will also provide an opportunity to ask organizational questions.

Stage 3: PREPARING THE COMPETITION PRESENTATION

Timeline: July 13, 2026

Teams participating in the competition have until July 13, 2026, to submit their competition presentation in accordance with the requirements described in the "Competition Presentation" section. The presentation should include a proposal for an innovative change in a product, service, value chain, or business model that could significantly impact the closing of economic loops in the operations of a selected international corporation. The presentation must be prepared in English.

Stage 4: SELECTION OF FINALIST TEAMS

Timeline: September 7, 2026

The jury will select six teams to be invited to the competition final. At this stage, only minor modifications to the competition presentation are possible, including clarification of the proposed idea and visual changes.

Stage 5: COMPETITION FINAL

Timeline: October 26, 2026

On October 26, 2026, the competition final and a hybrid conference for students will be held, featuring invited international guests participating in Circular Week, including representatives from embassies, the European Commission, and the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. Six previously selected top teams will participate in the final. The final will begin with introductory lectures by circular economy experts. Each team will then present their competition submission to the jury and audience. The jury will select the three best teams, including the team that receives the grand prize.

Finalists will receive monetary prizes:

- **Grand Prize: 5,000 PLN**
- **2nd Place: 3,000 PLN**
- **3rd Place: 2,000 PLN**

The winning project will also have the opportunity to present itself on the main stage of the most important Circular Week 2026 conference – **the European Sustainability Congress**, which will take place in the week following the competition final (29.10.2026).

4. Competition Presentation





The main task is to develop a presentation of your solution following the chapters in the outline below. The subsections are suggestions for content that you may, but do not have to, use.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Company Description
- 1.2. General Context
- 1.3. Analysis of Current Market Situation

2. Our Approach

- 2.1. Description of the Proposed Innovation
- 2.2. Differences Compared to the Company's Current Operations

3. Results

- 3.1. Economic Effects
- 3.2. Environmental Effects
- 3.3. Social Effects

4. Implementation Opportunities

- 4.1. Proposed Implementation Method or Plan
- 4.2. Resource Flow Diagram
- 4.3. Financial Flow Diagram
- 4.4. Marketing Action Plan

5. Barriers and Opportunities

- 5.1. Identification of Bottlenecks in Implementation
- 5.2. Technologies Supporting Implementation
- 5.3. Potential Legislative Challenges

6. Summary and Next Possible Steps

The presentation should not exceed 25 slides. The expected presentation duration is 15 minutes.

Please submit the file in PDF format to z.koch@innowo.org by July 13, 2026.

5. Evaluation Criteria for the Competition Presentation

Submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- 1. **Implementability** – the feasibility of implementing the proposed solution – 25 points
- 2. **Comprehensiveness** – the description of actions should account for the characteristics of operations in selected industries, real operating conditions, and proven technologies – 25 points
- 3. **Innovation** – proposed solutions should not directly replicate already existing circular applications, but may significantly develop them – 20 points
- 4. **Effectiveness** – the proposed solution should produce results that are most likely to convince companies to implement the solution in practice – 30 points





The selection of finalist teams (the 6 best teams) will be based on jury members' scores in the four categories above. The jury, comprising a representative from INNOWO and partner universities, will evaluate each competition presentation independently. After scores are summed, the finalist teams will be selected.

Final presentations will be evaluated according to analogous rules. However, the finalist teams will be evaluated by an expanded jury consisting of the President of the INNOWO Institute Board, representatives of partner universities co-organizing the event, representatives of embassies, the European Commission, the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, and other circular economy experts.

6. Example Ideas for Circular Transformation of Selected Corporations

- A global soft drink producer transitions completely to aluminum packaging
- 10% discount on purchases when delivery is delayed by one week from a leading e-commerce platform
- The world's largest rideshare corporation introduces a cost-reduction option through a "ridesharing" feature

