

UNIgreen Innovation Challenge

Call for projects

About UNIgreen

UNIgreen is an Alliance of eight Higher Education Institutions that are committed to promoting excellence in education, research and innovation, and that are active in developing knowledge and solutions that give an answer to the needs of local communities.

The UNIgreen Alliance is working towards becoming the leading European University in the fields of Sustainable Agriculture, Green Biotechnology, and Environmental and Life Sciences, where students and the entire Academic Community develop the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and competences to become agents for the transition towards a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy, supported by an ecosystem that connects education, research, innovation and society to promote sustainable development.

More information can be found at <https://unigreen-alliance.eu/>

1. Objectives of the Call

The UNIgreen Innovation Challenge is designed to support and empower students and recent graduates across the UNIgreen Alliance by fostering a dynamic and inspiring environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation. It offers participants the opportunity to develop and refine their ideas, experiment with new solutions, and actively contribute to the green transition while strengthening their academic and professional growth. The Challenge also promotes collaboration across disciplines and partner institutions, encouraging cross-cultural teamwork, knowledge exchange, and the development of a strong and interconnected UNIgreen student innovation community.

2. Topics of the Call

The call is dedicated to innovation projects within the scope of UNIgreen in the fields of Sustainable Agriculture, Green Biotechnology, and Environmental and Life Sciences, especially:

- Biochemistry and Biotechnology
- Sustainable Crop Production
- Food Technology, Quality and Safety
- Biodiversity, Forestry and Agroecology
- One Health
- Bioeconomy, Agricultural and Rural Policy
- Plant Breeding
- Responsible Governance, Land Use and Climate Change

including (but not exclusively): the reduction of CO₂ emissions and pollution, supporting the environmental transition of agriculture, production of biomaterials, reduction and valorization of agriculture waste, reduction of the usage of pesticides and fertilizers, crops adaptation to biotic and abiotic stress, monitoring and management of biodiversity, preservation of soils and water, protection of plants, animals and human health, clean energy, bioeconomy or social innovations will be considered.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Eligible Participants

The competition is open to:

- Students enrolled at Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD level at any UNIgreen Alliance partner institution at the time of submission;
- Graduates (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD) from UNIgreen Alliance partner institutions who completed their most recent degree no more than one year prior to the date of first project submission.
- Teams may consist of one to six members.
- Teams may be composed either of members from a single institution or be cross-institutional, involving participants from different UNIgreen partner institutions.
- Teams may combine current students and eligible alumni (graduates within one year).
- All team members must individually meet the eligibility criteria outlined above.
- Each team must designate one member as the primary contact person for communication with organizers.

3.2 Language of submission

All application materials, including the written proposal, supporting documents, and oral presentations, must be submitted and delivered in **English** to ensure equal evaluation conditions across the Alliance.

3.3 Innovation advancement

The UNIgreen Innovation Challenge supports early-stage innovative ideas and emerging solutions. Projects submitted to the competition may be at the **idea stage**. Projects do not need to have a fully developed prototype or market-ready solution. However, applicants must clearly demonstrate the innovative nature of the idea, the scientific or technical foundation of the concept, and the potential feasibility and development pathway.

4. Intellectual property and use of materials

To ensure transparency and protect the interests of all participants, the following principles apply to intellectual property (IP) and the use of submitted materials within the UNIgreen Innovation Challenge.

1. All intellectual property rights related to the submitted projects, including concepts, data, prototypes, methodologies, and related materials, remain the exclusive property of the participants, in accordance with applicable institutional regulations.
2. Participation in the competition does not transfer ownership of any intellectual property rights to home member institutions nor UNIgreen.
3. Participants are solely responsible for ensuring appropriate protection of their intellectual property prior to public disclosure during the competition process.
4. By participating in the competition, participants grant UNIgreen and its partner institutions a non-exclusive, royalty-free right to: publish the project title, team members' names, institutional affiliation, and a non-confidential summary of the project; use non-confidential descriptions, images, and presentation materials for communication, dissemination, reporting, and promotional purposes related to UNIgreen activities; promote selected projects through websites, social media, newsletters, and official reports. Any publication of detailed technical information beyond the submitted non-confidential materials requires prior written consent from the participants.
5. Final presentations and related events may be photographed, audio-recorded, or video-recorded for documentation, dissemination, and promotional purposes. Participants will be informed in advance of any recording. If required by applicable regulations, explicit consent for recording and public dissemination will be obtained.

5. Data Protection

The UNIgreen Innovation Challenge involves the collection and processing of personal data of participants. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and applicable national data protection laws.

6. Principles of Fair Competition

The UNIgreen Innovation Challenge is conducted in accordance with the highest standards of fairness, integrity, and academic excellence, as well as those of start-up incubators. The competition is based on the following principles:

1. **Equal treatment:** All participants are treated equally regardless of their home institution, academic level, discipline, gender, nationality, or background. All applications are evaluated using the same published criteria and procedures.
2. **Transparency:** The rules, eligibility conditions, evaluation criteria, selection process, and timeline are clearly defined and communicated in advance.
3. **Decisions are based solely on the established criteria,** and the evaluation process is documented to ensure traceability and accountability. To ensure openness and accountability in the selection process, the participants will receive summarized feedback on their applications, and the individual scores awarded by the Jury will be documented and securely archived.
4. **Merit-based evaluation:** Projects are assessed exclusively on their quality, relevance, innovation potential, feasibility, and expected impact. Selection is determined by objective scoring against predefined criteria, ensuring that awards are granted on merit.

5. Confidentiality: All submitted materials are treated as confidential. Jury members and organizers commit to protecting sensitive information, including intellectual property, unpublished data, and business concepts. Information is used solely for evaluation and competition-related purposes.
6. Conflict-of-interest: Jury members are required to declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest prior to the evaluation process. In cases where a conflict exists, the concerned member will abstain from reviewing, scoring, or discussing the relevant project to ensure impartiality and fairness.

7. Selection Criteria

At the local level, projects will be evaluated in two stages: a written proposal assessment and an oral presentation assessment. At the finals, the projects will be evaluated through an oral presentation. In both stages, Jury members will score each criterion using a five-point scale, where:

- 1 – Very insufficient
- 2 – Insufficient
- 3 – Satisfactory
- 4 – Very satisfactory
- 5 – Outstanding

7.1. Evaluation of the Written Proposal

The written application will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Clarity of the project description: coherence, structure, and comprehensibility of the proposal;
- Alignment with the scope of the call: relevance to UNIGreen thematic priorities and objectives;
- Mastery of the subject: understanding of the scientific, technical, or societal background;
- Soundness of the work plan: feasibility, logical structure, and appropriateness of planned activities;
- Assessment of expected impacts: clarity and credibility of the proposed social, environmental, and/or economic benefits;
- Identification of needs that can be addressed within UNIGreen: relevance of the project to the UNIGreen ecosystem and potential for further development within the Alliance.

7. 2. Evaluation of the Oral Presentation

During the final local selection stage, projects will be evaluated on the basis of the oral presentation. The following criteria will be considered:

- Quality of presentation materials: clarity, structure, and visual support;
- Quality of delivery: clarity of speech, engagement, and communication skills;
- Mastery of the subject: depth of knowledge and confidence in presenting the solution;
- Identification of relevant implementation steps: clarity of the development roadmap;

- Identification of bottlenecks and risks: awareness of potential challenges and mitigation strategies;
- Understanding of key concepts and principles underlying the proposed solution;
- Quality of responses to Jury questions: ability to provide clear, reasoned, and convincing answers;
- Progress status and readiness level of the solution: maturity and development stage of the project.

7.3 Final Rankings

- For each stage, the final ranking will be based on the average score awarded by Jury members.
- In the event of a tie, the Jury President shall exercise a casting vote to determine the final ranking.

8. Complaints procedure

To ensure fairness and transparency, participants may submit a complaint regarding the evaluation process.

1. Complaints may relate only to procedural matters, such as the application of the published rules, eligibility criteria, or evaluation process.
2. Complaints cannot concern the Jury's professional or qualitative assessment of the project.
3. Complaints must be submitted in writing within five calendar days from the official communication of the results.
4. The complaint should be addressed to the Rector of the university.
5. A written response will be provided within five calendar days from the date of receipt of the complaint.
6. The decision of the Rector issued after the review of the complaint shall be final.



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Application Form

1. Title of the project
2. Summary of the project (1/2 page): provide a concise overview of the project, including the relevant background and context. Clearly articulate how the proposed initiative aligns with the objectives and scope of the call for proposals. Outline the general principles and innovative concepts underpinning the project, and summarize any preliminary results or achievements to date, if applicable. Finally, detail the planned next steps and key activities to be undertaken.
3. Expected social, economic and environmental benefits of the solution proposed by the applicants. (1/2 page)
4. How can UNIgreen contribute to fulfil the needs of the project? (1/2 page)