

SIC 2026 Event Description

The format proposed for the 2026 edition of the **EPFL Sustainable Innovation Challenge (SIC)** follows the approach of challenge-based learning. The challenge and accompanying activities should be an occasion to promote inclusive, diverse, in-context learning for sustainability.

Theme

After covering many aspects of sustainability in 2025 and discussing “how to ensure technology benefits society?”, the theme proposed for 2026 is

“What is sustainable innovation?”.

With this theme, we aim to naturally promote discussion, value diversity and inclusion, and highlight complementary/no- or low-tech approaches to sustainability. The theme can be further framed as: “What kind of innovation for society?”, emphasizing the societal impact of different technological and innovative approaches.

We will propose a journey through the concept of innovation: starting with innovation, passing by renovation, to exnovation, guiding participants through the evolution of ideas and practices.

This theme will also allow us to discuss our own vision of sustainability and sustainable development, since sustainable innovation is part of our name.

Event Activities

In addition to the challenge itself, the proposed activities for the 2026 edition include:

- Seminars: 45 minutes of presentation followed by 15 minutes of Q&A. Topics will include “engaged science” and social/behavioral science approaches to sustainability. Specific topics and invited speakers are TBA.
- Academic Citizens Assembly: This session will include a moment of gathering and discussion, promoting direct democracy. Participants will engage in informed reflection, supported by scientific material provided in advance, and take part in structured discussion and free proposal of ideas/deliberation. The theme is TBA.

- Workshops: Participating teams will also have the opportunity to take part in interactive workshops on systemic thinking and project pitching.

This year, the SIC will exceptionally take place in parallel with the Sustainability Days at EPFL, allowing for a joint program. More details will follow soon!

Challenge

The challenge will be made of two parts: a systemic debate/discussion and a pitching session.

- **Systemic debate:** Teams will present how their projects fit within a systemic perspective on sustainability. Each presentation (about 7 minutes) will be followed by a Q&A session aimed at testing the soundness and coherence of the project at a system level. This phase will be evaluated by three jury members specializing in systemic sustainability.
- **Feasibility and Impact Pitch:** Teams will then pitch their projects in 3–4 minutes to “sell” their ideas. In this phase, the audience and three judges from industry will assess the feasibility and potential impact of each project.

Projects whose aim is not innovation in a classical sense will be considered if they have a good systemic approach and they demonstrate well how their project can impact society at a local level or as a whole.

Point attribution procedure:

- 50% of points: 3 juries → judging systemic approach
- 25% of points: 3 juries → judging feasibility and impact
- 25% of points: general public (students + external visitors) → judging originality and impact

This year's prizes go beyond monetary rewards. A total of 20,000 CHF in cash prizes will be distributed among the teams, and the winning teams will also receive mentorship support as well as access to EPFL's facilities and innovation infrastructure to help further develop their projects.

Schedule

We propose a two-day event (Thursday-Friday), divided as follows:

Tentative schedule:

Thursday	Friday
8:00 - 8:30 : Arrival/registration 8:30 - 9:00, Catering area of Rolex, 40 part.: Ice-breaker + Coffee	
9:00 - 10:00, Hodler space or Forum, 40 part.: Systems workshop	9:00 - 10:00, Hodler space or Forum, 80-100 part.: Seminar
10:00 - 13:00, Rolex Forum, 100 part or more.: Academic Citizens Assembly	10:00 - 11:00, Hodler space or Forum, 80-100 part.: Seminar
	Free time : Interactions with the jury, teamwork to finalize the challenge material and pitch
	12:00 - 13:00, Forum (if Sust. Coll. starts at 13:30) or Hodler, 100 part.: Challenge: pitches
13:00 - 14:00: Lunch	13:00 - 14:00: Lunch
14:00 - 15:00, , Hodler space or Forum, 40 part.: Pitching workshop	Afternoon: Teams' stands in Rolex Hall/ free time/visit to Forces Motrices Hongrin-Léman SA hydraulic power station
Free time: Interactions with the jury, teamwork to finalize the challenge material and pitch	
16:00 - 18:00, Hodler space or Forum, 80 part.: Challenge: systemic debate	
	17:00 - 18:00, Hodler space, 80-100 part.: Seminar
	18:00 - 19:00, Hodler : Prizes

Vision of the Event

Sustainability implies designing and running the event around deep, measurable environmental awareness and responsibility. We must insist that all participants minimize their carbon footprint: this includes traveling by train or bicycle whenever possible and keeping prototype shipments under strict size-and-weight caps.

In terms of innovation, we prioritize “frugal” no-, low- and high-tech solutions that commit to have a clear, realistic, and systemic impact, in both social and ecological domains. We look for systemic and data-backed engagement, and we will inspect teams’ past work. We also welcome and strongly support multidisciplinary projects.