

WEGE PRIZE 2025

DESIGN BRIEF

WANT TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Let's collaborate to create a circular economy

The facts are clear. We desperately need to transform our throwaway linear economic system into one that is regenerative and restorative by design. Realizing a circular economy is a powerful way to address climate change, resource scarcity, and biodiversity loss while also meeting critical social needs.

So how do we do this? With innovative solutions that are driven by design and built on three core principles, all underpinned by a shift to renewables:

1 ELIMINATE WASTE AND POLLUTION

We need to consider waste and pollution as design flaws rather than inevitable by-products of the things we make.

2 KEEP PRODUCTS AND MATERIALS IN USE

We need to design products to be reused, repaired, re-manufactured, or, better yet: kept in circulation and out of the landfill.

3 REGENERATE OUR NATURAL SYSTEMS

We need closed loop systems that actively enhance water and nutrient cycling and help the entire ecosystem renew and recover.

THE CHALLENGE

THE CHALLENGE FOR WEGE PRIZE PARTICIPANTS IS TO:

- Build a strong and diverse transdisciplinary team of five students
- Identify a complex, "wicked" problem to address
- Develop a compelling solution that is built on the three core principles of the circular economy

WHAT IS A WICKED PROBLEM?

A highly complex problem that involves multiple stakeholders and is especially resistant to resolution. Efforts to solve one aspect of the problem often reveal or create other obstacles that must be addressed as well.

WEGE PRIZE IS LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS THAT ARE*:

- **Circular** - helping accelerate the transition to a circular economy and a shift towards renewables. Not just recycling/upcycling, but designing out waste entirely
- **Innovative** - providing unique value and exploring untapped potential
- **Viable** - demonstrating the potential for marketability, profitability, and financial sustainability
- **Scaleable** - effectively contribute to expanding the circular economy at a global level
- **Systemic** - accounting for the way in which parts of a system both influence each other and work as a whole
- **Not solely reliant on behavioral change** - if behavioral change is needed for your solution to work, how will you help drive it?
- **Human centered** - includes demonstrated research and consideration of the user and any affected communities in all aspects of the design

*For a general idea of the judging criteria used throughout the competition, see page 3

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THE PROCESS

PHASE 1: TEAM APPLICATION AND RESEARCH PLAN

Due October 6, 2024

Your first challenge is to **investigate, incubate, and communicate**. Introduce your team, identify the problem you will work to address together, and develop a research plan that will ultimately grow into your full solution. **You do not need to identify and defend a specific solution at this point.** Keep your writing concise, focused on the big picture, and don't hold back on being bold with your intentions—we expect your idea to adjust and grow over the course of the competition!

RESEARCH PLANS INCLUDE ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING:

- Briefly explain the wicked problem your team is interested in addressing.
- Help us understand the systemic nature of the problem. What social, technological, ecological, and other key factors impact the wicked problem your team is interested in addressing?
- How could addressing this wicked problem support the development of a circular economy?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this wicked problem and how would you engage them?
- How do you plan to involve mentors and/or subject matter experts in your design process as you develop your solution?
- How could addressing this wicked problem support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals? *(Choose 1-3 specific goals to focus on)*
- What are your next steps?

SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH PLAN AT
[WEGEPRIZE.ORG/APPLY](https://wegeprize.org/apply)

FEEDBACK LOOP: Teams cleared for Phase 1 will receive feedback from preliminary judges by October 27

PHASE 2: PROJECT SUMMARY - FIRST DRAFT*

Due December 16, 2024

Your next challenge is to consider the judges' feedback as you work to develop your research plan into a concrete circular solution, where stakeholders are engaged throughout the design process. You'll communicate your solution through an informative and visually compelling document that includes the following information:

SOLUTION SUMMARY: A clear and concise [1-2 sentence] summary of the solution your team is proposing.

PROBLEM CONTEXT & SOLUTION OVERVIEW: Help the judges understand the conditions —economic, geographic, social, technological, etc.— surrounding the wicked problem you're proposing to solve. Describe in detail how the solution you are proposing will work, explain how it aligns with the principles of the circular economy, and begin to illustrate the feasibility of your business model.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: Explain how your solution differs from existing solutions. Describe who it benefits and what potential social, economic, environmental, and other impacts it may have.

PROTOTYPING: Detail any tangible steps you have taken to begin prototyping and testing your solution.

BARRIER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Identify challenges preventing your solution from succeeding and your plan to address them.

For complete details, include design requirements and guidelines, visit wegeprize.org/projectsummary.

NOTE: This content is subject to change, so be sure to revisit the webpage in the beginning of Phase 2.

FEEDBACK LOOP: Teams that submit for Phase 2 will receive feedback from core judges by January 12

PHASE 3: PROJECT SUMMARY - SECOND DRAFT*

Due February 23, 2025

Your next challenge has two components: you must first consider the judges' feedback as you revise your Project Summary First Draft to reflect how your solution has developed. You must then expand your document by adding the additional information listed below, supporting your conclusions with hard data.

DETAILED MATERIAL ANALYSIS : Detail the resources and/or materials — technological, biological, capital, or otherwise — incorporated into your solution. Provide justification for their use and illustrate their alignment with the circular economy.

DETAILED ECONOMIC ANALYSIS: Detail the business model that will ensure your solution's economic viability. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your business model as well as risks you may face and how you plan to address them. For information on business model development, visit wegeprize.org/resources.

For complete details, include design requirements and guidelines, visit wegeprize.org/projectssummary

FEEDBACK LOOP: Teams that submit for Phase 3 will receive feedback from core judges by March 16

PHASE 4: FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY + PRESENTATION MATERIALS

Due May 11, 2025

FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY: Consider the judges feedback as you update the aspects of your document that have been developed further or need to be revised based on feedback given. Your Final Project Summary must follow the same organization and design guidelines as the Second Draft.

FINAL PRESENTATION MATERIALS: Finalist teams will present their solution in its entirety by translating their Final Project Summary into a slideshow presentation. Select **one team member** to present and defend your solution in front of the core judges and a global audience at the 2025 Wege Prize Awards event in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA on May 16, 2025*. Each team's presenter will be allotted ten minutes to present, followed by a ten-minute Q+A session with the judges.

*Wege Prize will provide each finalist team with up to \$3,000 USD in travel expense reimbursement

YOUR SUBMISSIONS WILL BE JUDGED BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

DEPTH OF RESEARCH

- To what depth have you identified, studied and analyzed the problem?
- Have you researched existing solutions?
- Have you consulted stakeholders and experts to refine your solution?
- Have you considered how your solution fits into or transforms existing systems?

COLLABORATION

- Have you built a strong and balanced transdisciplinary team?
- Beyond dividing up different tasks, have you worked across disciplinary boundaries and brought your different perspectives together?
- Have you effectively engaged stakeholders, mentors and/or subject matter experts in your design process?

INNOVATION + IMPLEMENTATION

- Does the solution help accelerate a circular economy?
- Is your solution technologically, economically, and financially feasible?
- Is your solution intentionally sensitive to the social and/or cultural context in which it operates?
- Is there a proven need and sufficient motivation for people to use your solution?
- Have you effectively considered what system conditions need to exist to make your solution possible?
- Have you prototyped your solution?

PRESENTATION

- Is your presentation organized and visually appealing?
- Does it deliver a clear message with a compelling and concise narrative?
- Can you provide immediate and thoughtful answers to the judges' questions?

THE TIMELINE

	Judges' Feedback due on Accepted Phase 1 Submissions OCTOBER 27	Judges' Feedback due on Phase 2 Submissions JANUARY 12	Judges' Feedback due on Phase 3 Submissions MARCH 16	FINAL PRESENTATION AND AWARDS EVENT MAY 16
2024	2025			
AUGUST 5 Team Application Period Opens	OCTOBER 6 PHASE 1 DEADLINE Team Application	DECEMBER 16 PHASE 2 DEADLINE Project Summary First Draft	FEBRUARY 23 PHASE 3 DEADLINE: SEMIFINALISTS Project Summary Second Draft	MAY 11 PHASE 4 DEADLINE: FINALISTS Final Project Summary and Presentation Materials

All submissions are due at 11:59pm eastern time on the specified deadline date.

For full timeline details, visit wegeprize.org/timeline

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

UNDERSTANDING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

- Understanding circularity is key to success in all phases of the competition. To better understand the circular economy and plan for your circular solution, visit wegeprize.org/resources#circular-economy.

EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS SUBMISSIONS

- To see examples of previous winners' projects and presentations, visit wegeprize.org/previous-winners
- For examples of previously submitted research plans, visit wegeprize.org/apply.

ELIGIBILITY & CRITERIA

- For complete participation requirements and more details on the general judging criteria, visit wegeprize.org/rules

FAQS

- For frequently asked questions, including information about applying as a business, visit wegeprize.org/faq



Kendall College of Art and Design
of Ferris State University



Wege Prize is organized by Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University's Wege Center for Sustainable Design with the support of The Wege Foundation.

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