

Wits ENERGISE Centre Call for Participation

Shaping the Future of Energy in South Africa: Sustainable Business Model Competition for Just Energy Transition

Turn your ideas into impact – and present them at the ENERGISE Symposium 2026 amongst local and international competitors!

Are you passionate about sustainability, innovation, and real-world impact? Do you want to develop a real energy solution and pitch it in front of a local and international audience?

Join the ENERGISE Sustainable Business Model Competition 2026 and embark on guided academic training embedded in an international flagship project on the Just Energy Transition (JET) for the African-German Centre of Excellence held at Wits. Through iterative idea development, mentoring, and international exchange, participants co-develop application-oriented business model concepts addressing practical South African energy transition challenges in collaboration with German partners, with solutions designed to be scalable to comparable contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Context

Just Energy Transition in South Africa

South Africa is facing a profound energy transition challenge. An aging coal-based energy system, recurring power shortages, and high socio-economic inequality underline the urgency of a Just Energy Transition (JET). Within the framework of international JET Partnerships, stakeholders in South Africa aim to decarbonize its energy system while fostering economic development, social inclusion, and job creation. The ENERGISE Sustainable Business Model Competition is embedded in this tangible transformation process and invites Wits Master students to jointly develop solutions that respond to these concrete issues.

The ENERGISE Centre

ENERGISE (“ENabling a Just Energy Transition through Renewable Energy, Governance, and Innovative Sustainable Entrepreneurship”) is an African-German Center funded through the DAAD program “African Excellence Centers”. The Centre brings together Wits, Technical University of Munich (TUM) and three other South African partner universities to develop integrated solutions that combine engineering, energy policy and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Objectives

The competition aims to:

- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among students across engineering, policy, entrepreneurship, and sustainability disciplines
- Promote the development of innovative and sustainable solutions contributing to a Just Energy Transition in South Africa
- Foster international collaboration and knowledge exchange among ENERGISE partner universities
- Strengthen practical problem-solving skills through real-world energy transition challenges
- Support the development of future leaders capable of addressing Just Energy Transition challenges through engineering, policy, and entrepreneurship perspectives
- Facilitate knowledge transfer between academia, industry, government, and society
- Identify concepts with potential for future implementation through ENERGISE Living Labs and related project activities

With funding from the:



Federal Foreign Office



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Competition format: a structured learning journey in two stages

The competition is designed as a structured learning journey consisting of two stages:

Stage 1 - Local competition (Home University)

Teams develop initial ideas and submit business model concepts at their home university. The **two best concepts** are selected by their university's ENERGISE Centre. These two teams will be offered coaching to refine their proposals for participation in the final competition round.

Stage 2 – ENERGISE Final round (Symposium at Wits, Sept. 2026)

The final presentation pitches take place during the ENERGISE Symposium at Wits. The two winning teams from each ENERGISE Partner University compete in a pitch event (10 teams in total). An international jury selects the 3 most promising concepts with potential for further development.

Timeline / Key Dates

Q&A session:	20 July 2026 (13:00-14:00) Online MS teams link
Submission deadline local stage:	17 August 2026
Announcement of local winning teams:	TBA
Mentoring session for refining proposal:	TBA
Competition Stage 2 (Finals):	14-18 September 2026

Competition tracks

Teams choose one primary focus:

- **Engineering:** Technology-based solutions
- **Policy:** Governance and regulatory approaches
- **Entrepreneurship:** Market-based solutions, business models, and scalable ventures

Interdisciplinary approaches across tracks are strongly encouraged.

Who can apply?

- Master's students currently enrolled at Wits
- Students from all relevant disciplines, including:
 - ✓ Engineering and energy-related fields
 - ✓ Management, entrepreneurship, and economics
 - ✓ Policy studies, sustainability, and social sciences

Team Setup

- Teams of 2–4 Master's students

Interdisciplinary teams are strongly encouraged and will be positively considered during evaluation.

With funding from the:

Key requirements & evaluation criteria

Teams submit a written concept of the sustainable business model in English, using [this template](#) for the proposal! Please access using your Wits login details.

The submitted concept will be evaluated against the background of the following four **criteria**:

- 1. Innovation and Creativity of the Sustainable Business Model**
- 2. Feasibility and Scalability of the Sustainable Business Model**
- 3. Relevance to the Just Energy Transition in South Africa**
- 4. Potential Environmental and Social Impact**

Winning teams

The top-performing **two WITS teams from the local stage** will:

- ✓ Receive coaching and mentoring from ENERGISE experts
- ✓ Participate in the fully sponsored ENERGISE Symposium at Wits in mid-September 2026, including cultural program
- ✓ Gain international visibility
- ✓ Network with researchers, policymakers, industry representatives, entrepreneurs, and practitioners
- ✓ Present their concepts to a national and international audience
- ✓ Become part of the ENERGISE innovation network

3 Final round winners will:

- ✓ Receive certificate awards for the top 3 business models (1st, 2nd, 3rd place)
- ✓ Receive mentoring support for further development of their concepts
- ✓ Become part of the ENERGISE academic and innovation network, contributing actively to further development of the ENERGISE project and activities

Registration Form to indicate interest and receive updates from organisers:

[Wits ENERGISE Centre - Business Model Competition 2026 – Fill in form](#)

Submission deadline: 17 August 2026

For questions, please contact Dr Muhammed Aswat (Email: muhammed.aswat1@wits.ac.za)