

Circular Sports Equipment Challenge



Wanted: entrepreneurs keen to develop ideas for circular sports equipment and/or new business models for sports equipment

Challenge – Innovation goal:

Imagine how many hockey sticks or tennis rackets are thrown away each season by our 800,000 members. Or the training balls worn out by the 200,000 volleyball and handball players each year. Not to mention the football uniforms of the 60,000 teams which regularly have to be thrown out when a new sponsor takes over. In short, millions of kilos of sports equipment end up at the rubbish dump every year. If we keep buying, using and throwing away new products, this is bound to have a negative impact on the planet.

The Netherlands alone is home to around 23,000 sports clubs with over 4.3 million members. Plus the three million people who visit the gym club every week and consume all kinds of raw materials in the products they train with. The sports sector has drawn up a [Roadmap for Sustainable Sport](#), complete with circular objectives. The ultimate goal is to prevent adverse effects on the climate and environment.

In these challenges, the following circularity principles are key:

- Products can be used for a longer period of time (increased durability);
- Used products can be dismantled, repaired if possible and reused or repurposed;
- Today's products can serve as the raw materials of tomorrow, and raw materials should preferably be recoverable and/or renewable (e.g. bio-based residual streams or micro-organisms);
- Products and the materials they are made of should have a minimal negative impact on climate and the environment.

Sport can play an important part in achieving sustainability goals and raising popular awareness of circularity (sport as a launching customer). Taking a circular approach also offers great opportunities for businesses. That's why Sportinnovator is challenging the market to develop circular sports equipment and/or services. Do you have a solution? Or can you contribute to one? Sign up to take part in our CIRCO Circular Sports Equipment Track and you could win a development budget of up to €25,000.

About us:

Sportinnovator

Sportinnovator is a flagship programme for innovation and research run by the Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, designed to boost the return on innovation in sport and help create a healthier, more vital society. Through a national network of 17 Sports Innovator centres, government, scientists, sports professionals and entrepreneurs work together on ground-breaking innovations that promote achievement in top-flight and grassroots sport, and encourage people to pursue a more active lifestyle. The Sportinnovator programme is run by the Top Team for Sport and backed by ZonMw and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

CIRCO

The circular economy is not going to develop all by itself. CIRCO aims to set a brand-new market in motion. It's an approach that can count on support from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. As a programme that is part of CLICKNL, CIRCO activates production companies and creative professionals to get started with circular design. In many cases, designing and redesigning products, services and business models is all it takes to make circular entrepreneurship a reality. To this end, CIRCO has developed its own method, which has been tried and tested since 2015 together with 1000+ companies in the Netherlands alone.



What are we looking for:

We are looking for companies that want to develop product solutions for circular sports equipment and/or circular business opportunities for sports equipment.

What do we mean by sports equipment?

In the context of this challenge, sports equipment means all products that are used when practising a sport. These include balls, hockey sticks, tennis rackets and other training equipment, but also sportswear and protective clothing. Sports shoes are excluded from participation in this challenge. The same applies to proposals that focus on infrastructure (sports facilities, flooring, artificial grass etc).

Examples

Below you can find a number of ideas of the kind of solutions or improvements that we are looking for as regards circular products, services and/or business models. The CIRCO Track focuses on the equipment itself, the logistics of return and reuse, and the business model. Projects might include:

- A golf ball made of biodegradable material;
- A collection and recycling model for training balls at sports clubs;
- A road bike as a service;
- A football made from an alternative to leather, produced from bacteria, fungi or plants.

Who are we looking for?

The following types of companies in the sports equipment chain are welcome to participate:

- Producers of sports equipment or startups with an innovative (preferably bio-based) material that can be used to develop a circular sports product;
- Suppliers of materials, components and adhesives;
- Sports brands;
- Sports retailers and wholesalers;
- Logistics service providers, collectors, sorters, recyclers;
- Service providers for repair and maintenance.

What do we stand to win?

Sports Innovator offers 8 to 12 companies the opportunity to participate in a 3-day CIRCO Track with a cash value of €2000. Two individuals can participate per company. Preferably, they should be a two-person team consisting of a designer/engineer and a business developer who knows the market, customers and stakeholders. They will not be paid for the time they invest in the CIRCO Track.

If over 12 companies sign up, a reserve list will be made. If the number of registrations allows (i.e. 20 or more), a second CIRCO track will be organised later in 2022.

CIRCO Circular Sports Equipment Track

On the CIRCO track you will:

- explore circular business opportunities with partners in the chain and develop one into a concrete plan that your company can achieve in the short term;
- find solutions for extending the products lifetime or making products more efficient;
- discover which revenue models suit your approach.

Read more about [the CIRCO Circular Sports Equipment Track here](#).



Development budget

A development budget of €100,000 is available for the first CIRCO Track, with a maximum of €25,000 per company. The maximum duration of the project is 12 months.

An independent jury will advise Sportinnovator on how the development budget should be spent. At the end of the 3-day CIRCO Track, participants pitch their plans to an independent jury. The jury then looks at the feasibility of achieving concrete results within 12 months, for example in the form of a prototype and/or newly implemented business model. The jury also gauges the potential impact of the plans and the extent to which proposals help raise awareness of the importance of circular sports equipment among athletes.

If the jury gives a positive recommendation, Sportinnovator invites the CIRCO Track participants to present their proposal and budget. The budget for these plans is a maximum of €25,000. The jury then assesses the project proposals. The highest scoring projects are eligible for funding until the total development budget is exhausted.

The development budget is a form of pre-commercial procurement. Companies receive a development budget in line with market conditions with the obligation to produce a minimal viable product or validate a concept. Sports Innovator thus provides an impetus for innovation. At the end of the project, the executing company makes an independent effort to further scale up and market the product. We will use our network to help participants achieve this goal.

What are we not looking for?

- We are not looking for ideas that focus on the development of circular sports facilities and flooring.
- We are not looking for ideas that focus on the development of circular sports shoes. A separate CIRCO Track was recently set up for footwear.

Your registration (max. 1 page/4 slides)

- [Subscribe here for the CIRCO track Circulair Sports Equipment](#)
- **Description of the intended concept**
Give a short description of the intended concept and/or ambition, and how this contributes to the goal of this challenge.
- **Motivation**
Explain why you want to take part in these Circular Sports Equipment challenges.
- **Team and partners**
Give a brief description of the company, the team that wants to participate in the CIRCO Track and the chain partners you intend to involve.

The application may be presented in free format (presentation/slide deck, letter) but must be uploaded as a PDF file (landscape or portrait A4, max. 30 MB).

Timeline for the challenge



Phase	Date
Start of challenge	10 November 2021
Inspirational meeting and explanation of the CIRCO method, plus Q&A about the Circular Sports Equipment challenge.	8 December 2021, 15.00-16.30
Presentation deadline for CIRCO track registration	3 February 2022
Invitations sent to CIRCO track participants	17 February 2022 at the latest
CIRCO track, Day 1	9 March 2022
CIRCO track, Day 2	30 March 2022
CIRCO+ track Day 3 + pitch plan	13 April 2022
When Sports Innovator activates the development budget, the following schedule applies	
Final deadline for written questions at info@sportinnovator.nl	18 April 2022
Publication of Information Memorandum by ZonMw	22 April 2022
Presentation of project proposals + budget at info@sportinnovator.nl	2 May 2022
Sending of award notification	1 June 2022 at the latest
Window for objecting to award decision	10 calendar days
Sending of engagement letter	1 July 2022 at the latest
Planned start of implementation	1 September 2021 at the latest

Background information

More information

- [CIRCO Circular Sports Equipment Track flyer](#)
- www.duurzamesportsector.nl
- www.sportinnovator.nl
- <https://www.circonl.nl>
- [National Sports Agreement - sub-agreement on sustainable sports infrastructure](#)