



DESIGN INNOVATION AWARD 2026

Sponsored by Kowtow

Fashion & Textiles New Zealand's Circular Design Innovation Programme challenges designers, scientists and innovators to reimagine fashion as circular and design out waste, creating new value for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Grounded in the principles of people, place and nature, the programme brings together creative thinking, scientific innovation, mātauranga Māori and industry knowledge to explore new ways of keeping textiles in use.

Through practical challenges based on real textile waste streams, participants are encouraged to develop solutions that design out waste and pollution, circulate products and materials, and contribute to a more circular and regenerative future.

The programme culminates in two awards:

- **Design Innovation Award** - recognising creative, design-led solutions that transform textile waste into desirable and functional products.
- **Science Innovation Award** - recognising science-led and technical solutions that address textile waste and advance circular material use.

Both awards challenge entrants to develop innovative solutions with the potential to create lasting value for our fashion and textiles sector.

1. Design Innovation Challenge

Reimagine textile waste through circular design.

Design and create an innovative, desirable outfit or accessory using textile waste sourced within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Respond to one of our Challenge Briefs or identify your own textile waste stream, transforming discarded materials into a wearable or usable product that keeps textiles in use.

Your entry should demonstrate creative design, consideration of people, place and nature, and circular design principles that minimise waste and environmental impact throughout the product's lifecycle.

2. Awards and Commendations

1. Design Innovation Award - Clothing

Create an innovative, wearable outfit using waste textiles

2. Design Innovation Award - Accessory

Create an innovative, functional accessory using waste textiles.



Judges' Commendations

*Awarded at Judges discretion. All entries eligible for additional awards unless stated otherwise.

- Rising Talent Award
- Connection to Place Award
- Commercial Potential Award

3. Entry Requirements

To be eligible for the Design Innovation Award, your entry must:

- Be submitted by an individual or collective based in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Respond to one of the Challenge Briefs or identify an alternative textile waste stream.
- Comprise at least 80% waste textiles sourced within Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Be a finished, wearable or usable outfit or accessory.
- Demonstrate circular design principles, including consideration of the product's full lifecycle and end of life.
- Include evidence of the textile waste source and all required submission materials.

Entries may use pre-consumer or post-consumer textile waste, including manufacturing offcuts, unsold or damaged textiles, uniforms, discarded garments and other textile products. A full waste definition is available on our website and in the terms and conditions.

The 80% waste content requirement is calculated by weight, based on the total textile components of the finished entry, including both waste and newly sourced textiles. Non-textile trims are excluded from this calculation but must be disclosed.

All entrants must also meet the programme's [general terms and conditions](#).

4. Entry Process and Key Dates

Stage	Date
1. Register to enter Complete the Entry Form and pay the entry fee by the closing date.	Tuesday 6th October - Sunday 1st November
2. Create your Entry Choose a Challenge Brief or identify your own waste stream, participate in programme learning opportunities, and create your finished outfit or accessory. Challenge briefs shared in October.	October - January
3. Submit your digital entry Digital submissions close at 5pm. Details will be provided closer to the time.	5pm, 31st January 2027
4. Eligibility check and semi-finalist selection Digital submissions are checked for eligibility and assessed against the judging criteria. Semi-finalists are selected and notified.	1st February - 5th February 2027



5. Final judging and final selection Semi-finalists provide their physical entry for final judging. Finalists and Award winners are selected by the judging panel. Winners remain confidential until the Award finale.	12th February - 19th February 2027
6. Showcase & Award finale Circular Design Award finale event in Auckland. Finalists are exhibited and Award winners announced.	early March 2027 (final date to be announced)

5. What to Submit

Initial judging is based on digital submissions only. Your digital submission must provide the information and materials outlined below. You must have completed your finished outfit or accessory by the submission deadline as physical entries will be requested from semi-finalists for final judging.

1. Your finished outfit or accessory

Create a named, wearable or usable outfit or accessory demonstrating your circular design solution. Include 1-3 photographs of the finished entry in your digital submission.

Physical entries will be requested from semi-finalists for final judging and exhibition. FTNZ will provide further details about delivery requirements and timelines.

2. Complete the Final Submission Digital Entry Form (google link to be provided)

The Submission Form will ask for:

- **Your concept and design process**
 - Your concept and the textile waste challenge it addresses.
 - The source, type and approximate quantity of textile waste used.
 - How you transformed the waste material and developed your design.
 - The intended user or market for your finished product.
 - How your design incorporates circular design principles to minimise waste and environmental impact, including its care, use and end-of-life pathways.
 - 1–3 photographs of your finished entry, showing how it is worn or used.
 - You may also provide **a video** (maximum 3 minutes) explaining your concept and showing your work to judges.
- **Evidence of waste stream**
 - If you use your own textile waste source, provide details outlining where the textile waste came from and, where reasonably available, its type, composition and approximate quantity. Where exact information is unavailable, entrants should provide the best available information and identify any assumptions made. If the waste is sourced from a Challenge Brief, use the information supplied with the brief.
- **Entrant information** (max 50 words):
 - Provide a short biography and identify all members of your team, where applicable, through the final submission form. Where the design has been developed with an employer, education provider, business or other collaborator, entrants must confirm that they have the necessary permission and rights to submit the work.



6. Judging Criteria

Eligible entries will be assessed by a panel of expert judges against the following four criteria:

Design Innovation Award Judging Criteria	Weighting
Materials and Waste Innovation Innovative use of a viable New Zealand textile waste stream, demonstrating material understanding and creative transformation that retains or creates value from the waste material.	20%
Design and Creativity Originality, design quality and execution, resulting in a resolved design that is desirable, wearable or usable and relevant to its intended user or market.	20%
Connection to Place Meaningful consideration of place through the use of local materials, knowledge, skills or relationships, creating value for people, communities or the region.	20%
Circular Impact Demonstration of circular design principles through material selection, low-impact techniques and processes, waste minimisation, longevity and a credible pathway for reuse, repair, recycling or material recovery. Judges will consider any significant material or process trade-offs identified by the entrant.	40%

Guidance on Circular Design Strategies

Consider the full lifecycle of your entry and how your choices of materials, design and production processes can minimise waste and environmental impact. The following four strategies provide guidance for developing your circular design approach:

1. Design for Low-impact Materials and Processes
2. Design for Longevity
3. Design for Recyclability
4. Design for Low Waste

[Educational content on circular design strategies available here.](#)

7. Assessment Process

1. Eligibility check and semi-finalist selection

FTNZ will review digital submissions to confirm eligibility, and then assess entries against the published judging criteria. Semi-finalists will be selected to progress to the next stage.

2. Finalist selection and final judging

Semi-finalists will be asked to provide their physical entry for final judging. The judging panel may request additional information or clarification where required. Finalists and Award



winners will be selected at this stage, with winners remaining confidential until the Award finale.

3. Award Announcement

Award winners will be determined by the judging panel and announced at the Circular Design Award finale.

8. Finalists and Award Showcase

Finalists will be notified following judging and invited to showcase their finished outfit or accessory at the Circular Design Award finale.

FTNZ will provide further details about the delivery of finished entries, exhibition requirements and participation in the awards event.

FTNZ will work with finalists on the presentation and public communication of their entry in accordance with the programme's confidentiality and publication approval process.

Any queries?

Email: circulardesignaward@fashiontextilesnz.org

<https://fashiontextilesnz.org/circular-design-award/2026-award>



Checklist for Design Innovation Applicants

Before you enter

- ☐ I have selected a Challenge Brief or identified my own eligible textile waste stream.
- ☐ My waste textiles are sourced within Aotearoa New Zealand.
- ☐ My finished entry will contain at least **80% waste textiles by weight**, calculated across all textile components of the finished entry.
- ☐ I can provide evidence of the source of the textile waste, such as supplier details, photographs or other relevant documentation.
- ☐ I have considered the full lifecycle of my design, including material choice, production, care, longevity and what happens at end of life.
- ☐ My entry is a finished, wearable or usable outfit or accessory.
- ☐ My entry meets the eligibility requirements in the General Terms and Conditions, including the rules relating to previous competitions, commercial production and licensing.
- ☐ I have the necessary rights and permissions to submit the work and have acknowledged any collaborators or other rights holders.
- ☐ I have considered whether any part of my entry is confidential, commercially sensitive or subject to intended IP protection, and understand that finalist exhibition and publication will be managed under the programme's approval process.

Your final submission

- ☐ Finished entry
- ☐ Final Submission Digital Entry Form explaining:
 - ☐ The textile waste challenge I am addressing.
 - ☐ The source, type and approximate quantity of textile waste used.
 - ☐ I have included supporting evidence of my textile waste source.
 - ☐ How I transformed the waste and developed the design.
 - ☐ The intended user or market.
 - ☐ How circular design principles have been applied across the product's lifecycle including consideration of your product's end of life.
 - ☐ 1-3 clear photographs showing the finished entry and how it is worn or used.
 - ☐ I have included my entrant biography and identified all team members, where applicable
 - ☐ I understand that if I am selected as a semi-finalist, I will need to provide the physical entry for final judging and exhibition.
- ☐ 3 min Video (optional) presenting my concept, design process and circular approach.