

Who will take on the 'Fin Challenge'?

Twelve ways in which the financial sector
can contribute to a sustainable society



The Fin Challenge in a nutshell

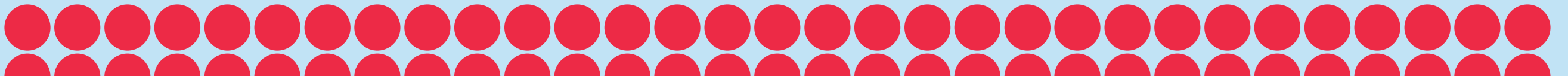
Febelfin Academy organised the fourth edition of the Fin Challenge in Brussels on 3–4 April 2025. This event that takes place every 2 years and is organised in collaboration with Fin Talent – the banking sector's joint training initiative – brings financial professionals together to develop innovative solutions for current challenges in the sector. The Fin Challenge uniquely combines top-quality training with a strategic exercise, from which the entire sector can derive inspiration and concrete solutions.

This edition's theme was 'The financial sector's impact on sustainability'. Over two days, 58 professionals from 16 different banks worked together to come up with ideas and develop new, usable insights. **The highlight of the finale was the presentation of 12 innovative solutions** to help customers live in a more sustainable way. Three of the twelve teams received an honourable mention from the expert jury, but of course there could only be one winner. Among themselves, the colleagues could also vote for an audience award.

The objective?

Banks have a treasure trove of experience and expertise in the form of the wide range of competencies possessed by their employees. In addition to their financial and technical knowledge, motivated and committed employees often have surprisingly original ideas about how the sector can address current challenges in creative and innovative ways. For example, there is the question of what the bank of the future will look like and what services it should provide.

Febelfin Academy's aim is to use the Fin Challenge to explore and map this creative and innovative goldmine of ideas. In addition, we want to stimulate employees to further develop their entrepreneurial and creative mindset. The Fin Challenge is thus a combination of a strategic exercise for the sector together with training in entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation for employees. The Forge, a spin-off from Ghent University that specializes in behavioural sciences, provides professional coaching for the participants.



Diversity rules

The groups participating are not selected on the basis of their experience or level. On the contrary, an ideal group consists of colleagues from different departments within the bank: from front office to legal, risk, marketing, HR, etc. Whether they are experienced or inexperienced, men or women, ordinary office staff, managers or board members – the more diverse, the better. This kind of mix leads to better insights and solutions, and more of them. The only proviso? That everyone is motivated to look together for solutions to this sector-wide challenge.

The methodology and the conscious focus on diversity and difference ensure that the group does not come to a consensus too quickly. The facilitators ensure that there is sufficient room for ‘constructive controversy’. They provide a safe environment where ideas can be tested out and everyone gives and gets constructive feedback on all suggestions. Once the best idea has been chosen, the next challenge is a strong pitch: good ideas also need to be well-packaged. Only then can the battle commence under the watchful eye of the jury. Ready, get set, go!

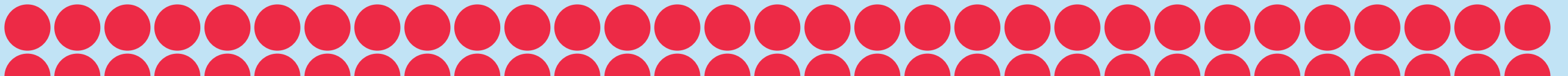
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Collaborating with people from other banks enables many new insights and enjoyable interactions. Here, we come together as colleagues rather than as competitors.

— A participant

Reactions from participants and facilitators

We’re already looking forward to seeing how the many ideas that were presented are going to inspire our sector. And we’re curious as to which ideas we might see being put into effect over the next few years. One thing was clear already: the participants and facilitators were unanimously positive about taking part and will definitely be recommending this competition to their colleagues. We noted a great deal of enthusiastic responses, both throughout the two days and during the closing reception.



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Some get bogged down trying to perfect their idea. We try to help them overcome that hurdle. At a certain point, you have to believe in your idea and sell it. Suppose you're going on a date. Do you immediately start planning the rest of your life? Or do you just make sure you have a good time in any case?

— Michael Van Damme, the Forge

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It's difficult to think outside the box, especially in a sector bound by rules and procedures. Here, I've really learned a method that can help me to sell my ideas.

— a participant

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I personally facilitate these kinds of exercises at my bank. Typically, you gather ideas on post-it notes and then continue working in groups. I find this methodology really interesting and will definitely adopt some parts of it myself.

— a participant

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My main concern was the final pitch to the jury. But even before we agreed on a single idea within the group, I had to critically evaluate my own ideas and try to pitch them. That was quite scary.

— a participant

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The exercise consists in daring to jump far enough. It really does have to be a new idea. In addition to that, it's also an exercise in presentation: a good idea also needs to be sold convincingly.

— a facilitator

Categories

The participants also came up with solutions tailored to various levels. Because banks, of course, don't exist in a vacuum. Depending on the target group and partners, different solutions were developed. The three levels:

Local government

Sustainability is often at its most tangible at the local level. That's why five teams tried to find sustainable solutions in which cities and municipalities, together with banks, can get the local residents involved.

SMEs

Small and medium-size businesses are the engine of the Belgian economy. Three teams looked for ways in which banks can help these organisations showcase their sustainable profile. In this way, the sustainable option becomes the most obvious choice.

Sector

By integrating processes and validating residual streams, even sectors that seem difficult to make sustainable on first sight can take significant steps forward. Three teams tackled a sector-wide issue.

The candidates didn't have to start from a completely blank sheet. In addition to intensive guidance in support of their creative process, they also received contextual input from various specialists: Febelauto aims for a circular economic model both for vehicles at the end of their useful life and for the batteries of hybrid and electric vehicles. **Matthieu Pannier** from **Autohandel Didier** came to share a real-life example. **Kris Verbeeck** from **Sustinera** has been facilitating companies in their sustainability strategies for a quarter of a century and helped the candidates gain insight into sustainable business choices. **Thijs Theunis** from **Gramitherm** shares the story of a start-up that turns green waste from municipal authorities into eco-friendly insulation. Jury member **Sara Cherifi**, sustainability consultant at KPMG, gave several examples of do's and don'ts in sustainability thinking.



The jury's verdict

All of the teams' proposals were pitched to a critical jury of specialists. This time around the specialists were: Elke Maes, general coordinator for the services and finance sector at ACV Puls, Karine Vandenberghe, ESG specialist with over 30 years of experience, Annemie Ooghe, director Corporate Banking and Lease, and Isaac De Coster, a Sustainable Finance specialist, both from Febelfin. Ann Vanlommel, Managing Director of Febelfin Academy, took on the role of chairperson of the expert jury. After the standard three-minute pitch, a Q&A session followed in which the teams were grilled on the financing, feasibility, and growth potential of their proposals. In other words, this was the perfect opportunity for the participants to demonstrate their presentation skills after two days of intensive collaboration and prove their ability to stay calm under pressure.

Feedback from the jury

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Over and above technical knowledge, it's important to promote softer skills as well. At Febelfin Academy, we're responsible for training over 20,000 persons. It's therefore vital to stimulate innovation and collaboration, linked to current issues.

— Ann Vanlommel, CEO Febelfin Academy

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As a trade union, we are responsible for the well-being of the entire sector. It is therefore a conscious decision for us to participate in a programme that brings colleagues from different banks together and focuses on creativity and innovation.

— Elke Maes, general coordinator for the services and finance sector at ACV Puls

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I see several interesting projects, including ones that, in addition to the ecological aspect, also gave due attention to the social aspect. This was particularly the case for the winners, who excelled in this regard.

— Karine Vandenberghe, jury member



And the winners are...

Agents 007: Many large, outdated houses in our cities are underutilised, for example when the children have left home. Moreover, the – sometimes mandatory – renovation costs are beyond the means of the residents.

That's why the 007s want to turn them into co-housing projects. An interbank start-up would bring together specialists, architects, as well as tenants and municipalities to renovate the buildings as efficiently as possible. The banks would look after the financing.

This forward-looking project was praised by the jury because it offers an answer to a real challenge for today and tomorrow. It's also a joint venture in which all banks can participate. Moreover, this proposal is scalable and involves the various aspects of ESG.

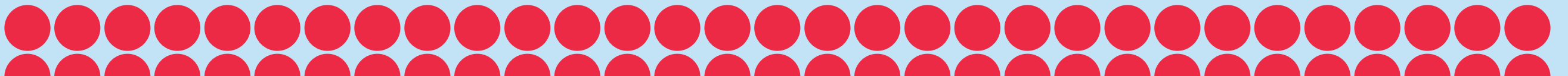
Dare&Durability and **Bank4cars** also got an honourable mention from the jury.

According to **Dare&Durability**, money does indeed grow on trees. Studies show that each euro invested in green initiatives can yield up to eight euros in benefits. In addition to improved resilience

against floods or droughts, it also facilitates mental and physical well-being. The investments made by local authorities could be offset by a levy of one percent on the sale price in property transactions. The property itself would also increase in value due to the investments.

Bank4Car came up with the innovative **Circular Car Bonds** idea. These bonds can ensure that, at the end of their life cycle, cars are given a new purpose. Car companies invest in SMEs that promote reuse within the sector. And this is just the beginning: in the future, this system can be applied to other sectors.

The audience was also given the opportunity to voice its opinion based on the presentations. The Fin Challenge 2025 public prize was awarded to **Good Vibes**. This team is launching the **ECO citizen Green Bond**, an innovative public/private partnership in which local governments and residents jointly finance sustainable projects. This bond initiates projects that would otherwise be delayed due to budget shortages or a lack of expertise. And because residents participate in the investment, it obviates the NIMBY (not in my backyard) effect.



The business cases of the other teams

All the hard work and good ideas from the other teams and participants also deserve their fair share of recognition. For that reason, their business cases are described in brief below as well.

High Five: High Five aims to set up a sustainable database in collaboration with Febelfin. Very often, price is still the main factor in public tenders. By collaborating with local authorities, we can help retail customers make conscious choices, for which banks in turn will reward them with a lower interest rate. This makes sustainability an obvious choice.

The Big Five came up with the **Greenwatch** proposal: the ultimate win-win-win structured product with ESG credentials. “Through crowdfunding, we raise funds in the long term, fully guaranteed by local authorities. Together, we invest in sustainable companies and build a better future. Opt for Greenwatch and be part of a sustainable revolution!”

The Sustainability Angels want to bring together a green community in order to highlight SMEs that are truly committed to sustainability. Through the Voluntary Sustainability Reporting Standard for SMEs (VSME) standard, an objective certification can be created, allowing customers who wish to renovate to make an informed choice from approximately 160,000 SMEs.

Trans4Financers lets you eat healthier with the **Savings4Health savings account**. You can exchange the interest on this savings account for credits in organic shops. Customers can also donate part of their interest to food banks, so that even the less well-off in society have access to healthy and balanced nutrition.

FYK – Fleet Yield Knowledge leads the revolution in the world of car leasing via **Secondary Circular Lease**. Why should a lease car be replaced after 4 years? Why can't we update the existing lease car in order to substantially extend the lease period?

The Mobility Lab: left the mobility sector behind and came up with a **local SME Private Equity initiative**: “It allows customers to invest in the local fabric, so that not every municipality becomes a chain of multinationals. Given the sustainability data that is now available, it's possible to deploy long-term capital for local impact.”

Sustainability Globetrotters wants to provide investment funds with an **ecological Nutri-Score**: currently, funds are labelled too vaguely. Either they're green or not. For example, the Towards Sustainability fund could incorporate a more visual element, ranging from dark red through orange to dark green, to make the efforts of investment funds even more transparent.

Sunflower proposes **battery leasing** as a way to address the imbalance in the market. Many of the batteries for electric cars are currently imported. If banks were to connect utility companies and recycling companies, the use of batteries could receive a significant short-term boost.





To be continued...

It goes without saying that the sector is constantly evolving and growing. That's why we'll be organising 2027's Fin Challenge around a new theme. For more information, you can contact bart.corthouts@febelfin-academy.be or take a look at www.finchallenge.be.

In the meantime, would you like to bring your soft skills up to the next level or give the innovation culture within your organisation a bit of impetus? Of course for that, you don't have to wait until 2027. You can find all of our courses on Febelfin Academy's website. You can follow them individually, or they can also be offered customized for your organisation.

www.febelfin-academy.be