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## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### **EARLY ACADEMIC CAREER 26**

- The application should be submitted to the Knowledge Foundation before **15:00 on 25 November 2026**.
  - Funding decisions will be announced in April 2027.
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#### **About the Knowledge Foundation**

*The Knowledge Foundation is a funder with the mission to strengthen Sweden's competitiveness. The foundation funds research and competence development at Sweden's university colleges and newer universities when it takes place in collaboration with the business sector. The Foundation's calls are open to all scientific and artistic subject areas.*

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## The programme *Early academic career*<sup>1</sup>

Today's knowledge-intensive society is in great need of cutting-edge research results and highly educated individuals with both scientific excellence and understanding of conditions in the business sector. One way to meet these needs is to give promising researchers good opportunities for an academic career with links to the business sector. With gained experience and understanding of the needs and conditions of both academia and the business sector expands future career options.

Through funding from the programme *Early academic career*, the Knowledge Foundation offers promising recently doctoral awarded researchers the opportunity for academic career development within a subject area relevant to the business sector.

### Objectives and purpose of the programme

The objective of the programme is for a recently doctoral awarded researcher to, in collaboration with business partners, independently lead a research project with both high scientific quality and relevance for the business sector. The objective is also for the researcher to develop professionally and qualify for a further academic career through career-enhancing activities and career support.

The purpose of the programme is to develop or strengthen the applicant research and education environment within its profile area through a strategic reinforcement in the form of a promising recently doctoral awarded researcher. The purpose is also, in the long term, to strengthen Sweden's competitiveness by offering research and education environments and the business sector the possibility to expand or strengthen its research collaboration and thereby contribute to both scientific development and benefit to the business sector.

### Project design

Within the project, a scientific question will be addressed in collaboration with business partners, but as the objective of the project also is for the project manager to develop professionally and to qualify for a further academic career, career-enhancing activities and career support should be included in the project. Career-enhancing activities may include, for example, teaching, participation in other research projects, duties at the department, network building, internationalisation, skills development in project management or supervision, etc.

For an appropriate balance, the project manager should dedicate 60–80 percent of their working time to the research project and the remaining working time to other career-enhancing activities (the salary costs connected to these activities are paid by the university and are therefore not reported in the project budget).

An additional component of career development is the opportunity to broaden knowledge, widen perspectives and establish new contacts. Therefore, the programme encourages network building and internationalisation during the project period. This could be done, for example, through visits or a period of stay in another academic environment (at the own or another national or international university), at a research institute or in the business sector.

As part of the career support, an academic reference group of at least three academically active researchers should be associated to the project.<sup>2</sup> The reference group should actively assist the project manager with advice and recommendations concerning the scientific project as well as the professional development and should therefore be on a more senior level than the project manager. To ensure good anchoring and integration, two researchers from the applicant research and education environment should be included, of which at least one of them should be at the level of associate

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<sup>1</sup> The programme *Early academic career* has replaced the former programme *Prospekt*.

<sup>2</sup> To develop academic independency the project manager's doctoral supervisor(s) or assistant supervisor(s) cannot be included in the reference group.

professor ('docent') or above.<sup>3</sup> To enable influx of new ideas and a broadened network, an external researcher employed at another university should also be included. If the external researcher is active at a university which is not part of the Foundation's target group (see below), any costs related to their participation cannot be financed by the Knowledge Foundation.

## Terms and conditions

### Applicants

Sweden's university colleges and newer universities<sup>4</sup> (referred to as *universities* throughout the call text) may apply. The Knowledge Foundation welcomes applications within all subject areas. When the application concerns an artistic research domain, the concept *scientific* is to be replaced by *artistic* in the call text.

Several universities within the Foundation's target group may collaborate in the project if this strengthens the application and the project, but only one university may be the main applicant and contracting party vis-à-vis the Knowledge Foundation.

### Participation of the university

The project must have a project manager who is operationally responsible for the implementation of the project. In *Early academic career*, the project manager must be a *recently doctoral awarded researcher*, which means that they must not have been academically active for more than three years by the closing date of the call. Thus, the project manager must have a doctoral degree<sup>5</sup> with a degree date<sup>6</sup> no earlier than 25 November 2023. Any deductible time<sup>7</sup> when the project manager has not been academically active may be excluded – this must be clearly indicated in the CV. The project manager must, at the latest by the project's starting date, be employed full-time by the university where the project will be conducted.

At the university, there must also be an appointed project owner. The project owner, who must have staff and budget authority at a senior level at the university, is responsible for ensuring proper conditions for the implementation of the project, and for monitoring the implementation. For an optimal fulfilment of the objectives within *Early academic career*, it is important that the project manager receives active and adequate support from the project owner. The project owner should have the right of delegation to conclude agreements with the Knowledge Foundation. The project manager and the project owner should not be the same person.

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<sup>3</sup> To ensure adequate opportunities for good academic anchoring and integration into the environment, the members of the reference group cannot hold adjunct positions at the university ('adjungerad tjänst').

<sup>4</sup> Blekinge Institute of Technology, Dalarna University, Halmstad University, Jönköping University, Karlstad University, Konstfack, Kristianstad University, Linnaeus University, Malmö University, Mid Sweden University, Mälardalen University, Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm University of the Arts, Swedish Defence University, Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, Södertörn University, University of Borås, University of Gävle, University of Skövde, University West, Örebro University.

<sup>5</sup> Doctoral degree on scientific or artistic grounds.

<sup>6</sup> For Swedish doctoral degrees, the degree date is the date registered in 'Ladok'. For foreign doctoral degrees, it is the date on which the doctoral degree was awarded by the university, usually verified by the university's stamp.

<sup>7</sup> Work in the business sector, parental leave, long-term illness (sick leave or care of children/close relative), military service, positions of trust in political organisations, trade unions or student organisations. Unemployment or vacation does not count as deductible time.

## Participation of the business sector and other partners

The project must be conducted in co-production with the business sector. For more information on the Foundation's view on co-production, go to [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>8</sup>.

At least two mutually independent business actors should co-finance the project. Clarification of the criteria for co-financing business actors can be found on [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>9</sup>.

The business actors' total co-financing, primarily through in-kind contributions, must correspond to at least the amount requested from the Knowledge Foundation. For an appropriate balance in the co-production, a single business actor may not account for more than 70 percent of the total co-financing.

All co-financing business actors must attach signed letters of intent describing expected results and benefits of the participation, as well as how the collaboration in the project will take place. The letters of intent must also clearly describe the organisation's financial and resource conditions for meeting the obligations described in the project plan and budget.

Swedish universities outside the Foundation's target group as well as other relevant partners, who cannot be counted as co-financing business actors, may participate in the project if they strengthen the application and the project. These partners should also attach signed letters of intent where the contributions to the project are described and motivated, but they bear their own costs in the project, and these costs cannot be counted as co-financing.

Any connections, such as financial or personal links, between for example participating partners, between any partner and university, or between any partner and individual project participant(s), must be stated and clarified in the application form and the project plan. Any dual roles must be clarified and will be reviewed by the Knowledge Foundation. Specify, for example, company connections, share ownership, board positions, employment, or consulting activities.

## Project duration

The project duration should be 2-3 years. Projects may start no earlier than 1 June 2027, and no later than 1 October 2027.

## Financial framework and budgeting

The programme refers to the funding of a research project conducted in collaboration with the business sector. The amount to be requested from the Knowledge Foundation may not exceed the sum of SEK 2.5 million.

The funds from the Foundation should primarily be used for salary costs related to working time within the project for the project manager employed by the applicant university. Salary costs for additional project participant(s) may be included, given that the work effort constitutes a limited part of the project (e.g. collection of material, testing, etc.). The work effort should be clearly described and justified in the project plan and the person should be listed in the appendix *Staff in the project*. In addition to salary costs, other direct costs arising within the project at the applying university can be included in the budget.

Within *Early academic career*, it is also possible to include costs for, for example, an appropriate project management or supervisor training, or costs associated with networking and internationalisation. These costs must be clearly described in the application and appropriately allocated under the budget items *Training/Course* and *Travel expenses* in the application form.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/what-does-the-business-sector-mean/>

Information on approved costs and instructions for budgeting of funds are available in the document *General terms and conditions for projects funded by the Knowledge Foundation*, which can be found on [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>10</sup>. The application should not include overhead costs (OH). An OH surcharge of 20 percent will be added by the Foundation if the application is granted.

## Application

The application should be submitted via the project manager's account in the Knowledge Foundation's application system *SBS Manager* via [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>11</sup>. Supplementing the application after the closing date of the call is not possible (however, see authorised exemption for doctoral degree certificates under *Appendix 5*).

## Appendices to the application

The following appendices (as PDF files) should be attached to the application in the same order as below. The structure of the appendices must follow the headings specified for each appendix. Under each heading, the main characteristics of the information that the Foundation expects are stated. However, applicants may provide supplementary information that is deemed appropriate based on the direction of the call.

Application appendices must be written in English to allow for international peer review (however, letters of intent may be written in Swedish). Note that all body text in Appendices 1 and 2 must follow the format font Arial, font size 11 pt, single line spacing, and normal margins (2,5 cm for all margins).

### Appendix 1. The project's contribution to the development of the research and education environment

Maximum 2 pages. If a project is applied for jointly by several research and education environments, all environments must be described according to the instructions below (the appendix may be extended by a maximum of half a page per additional environment). To be uploaded under *Appendix 1. The project's contribution to the research and education environment(s)*.

All the Knowledge Foundation's programmes contribute in different ways to supporting the development of strong research and education environments that create value for academia, the business sector, and society. Therefore, all projects applied for must be situated within a context in which they contribute to strengthening the development and profile of the research and education environment. In this way, the environment can also become a long-term and valuable partner for the business sector. For more information on what the Knowledge Foundation means by strong research and education environments, and how such an environment can be defined, go to [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>12</sup>.

This appendix should be based on the group (research and education environment) within which the project will be conducted and should be prepared jointly by the management of the research and education environment and the project manager.

#### *1.1. The research and education environment where the project will be conducted*

Briefly describe the research and education environment in which the project will be conducted. Tailor the description to what is most relevant in relation to the programme and the project.

#### *1.2. The project's contribution to the development of the research and education environment*

Describe the ambitions and objectives of the research and education environment for becoming a stronger environment. Justify how the project and the project manager will contribute to the

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/funding-and-assessment/general-terms-and-conditions-for-projects/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/apply-and-report/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/funding-and-assessment/strong-research-and-educational-environments/>

environment's desired development in the short and long term. Also describe in what way the project adds value in relation to previous and ongoing projects within the environment.

### Appendix 2. Project plan

Maximum 8 pages (including any references) + 2 pages *Plan for professional development* to be inserted at the end of the Project plan under a separate heading. Page numbered. To be uploaded under *Appendix 2. Project plan*.

- Describe the scientific questions to be addressed in the project, and how they relate and contribute to the current research frontier.
- Describe the scientific objectives of the project and the methods to be used to achieve them.
- Account for whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant in the project's scientific content and in the design of the project, and if so, how these perspectives are included (more information on [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>13</sup>).
- Describe the scientific competence of the project manager in relation to the project content.
- Describe how the scientific questions relate to needs of the participating business actors, and the extent to which they are potentially applicable to a wider business sector.
- Indicate how the research project is expected to contribute to the development of participating business actors, and to possible development in the wider business sector.
- Describe how the project will be implemented and how the implementation will lead to the fulfilment of the project objectives.
- Describe the work distribution between the project partners and how the partners will collaborate.
- Describe and justify the project's organisation, management, and staffing. Account for the competence, role, and work contribution of key individuals, including individuals from participating partners and the academic reference group. The description should relate to information provided in the budget, the appendix *Staff in the project*, and CVs.
- Account for how gender equality aspects have been considered in the composition of the project group (more information on [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>14</sup>).
- Describe and justify the costs included in the budget so it is clear what the costs consist of, why they are relevant to the project, and which partner will cover the costs.
- Include a schematic time and activity plan. Also include a brief risk analysis regarding the project's ability to be carried out according to plan.
- **Plan for professional development.** Describe how the professional development of the project manager and the possibility to become an independent researcher is promoted by the project: Describe the career development objectives and the career-enhancing activities that will lead to the fulfilment of the objectives. State the composition of the reference group, how the collaboration will take place, and how the group will support the research project as well as the professional development.

### Appendix 3. Project participants

Appendix template for project participants (*Staff in the project*) is downloaded as an Excel file from [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>15</sup>, but must be converted and attached to the application as a PDF file (ensure that the entire Excel spreadsheet fits on one PDF page). To be uploaded under *Appendix 3. Staff in the project*.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/gender-equality-perspective-an-added-value-for-research-and-innovation/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/gender-equality-perspective-an-added-value-for-research-and-innovation/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/documents/>

Enter information on all planned project participants from the university (or universities) in the table. From other participating partners, only key participants need to be entered.

#### Appendix 4. Qualifications

Maximum 1 page per person (with the exception of the project manager, whose CV must not exceed 2 pages). To be uploaded under *Other appendices*.

Attach CVs for all individuals in the project group who are crucial for the implementation of the project, which within *Early academic career* also includes the members of the academic reference group.

The Foundation applies a broadened review of academic merits (more information on [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>16</sup>). Thus, all academically active participants should present a selection of the merits and experiences that are most relevant to the project and the programme form. *For example*, emanate from the following categories:

- **Education and degrees**
- **Employment and assignments**
- **Research output:** select at most ten (10) research results/outputs. In addition to scientific publications, this could be for example: documented artistic merits, instrumental or product development, data set, software, patent, process or policy development, as well as implementation of research results.
- **Teaching:** pedagogical qualification including, for example, teaching, training and supervision, education development including development of open teaching resources and learning objects (learning and teaching materials).
- **Cooperation:** with academia, business sector, or other societal actors, as well as communication efforts.
- **Management:** project management, organisational development, assessment assignments, centre management, department assignments, granted funding.

#### Appendix 5. Doctoral degree certificate

To be uploaded under *Other appendices*.

A copy of the degree certificate for the project manager's doctoral degree must be attached. For Swedish doctoral degrees, attach an extract from 'Ladok'. For foreign doctoral degrees, attach a copy of the degree certificate (usually verified by the university's stamp).

If the project manager at the time of application has not yet defended their doctoral thesis – but is very close to dissertation – the doctoral degree certificate may be submitted after the closing date of the call. In this case, the dissertation date must have been set by the university, which should be certified by attaching the university's official decision on the dissertation to the application. The date for the dissertation must be before the start date of the project.

#### Appendix 6. Letters of intent

Approximately 1 page per partner. To be uploaded under *Other appendices*.

Signed letter of intent from each of the participating partners must be attached. Each letter of intent must include

- expected results and benefits of the participation
- contributions and participation in the implementation of the project
- ability to contribute in accordance with the project plan and budget

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/broadened-review-of-academic-merits-and-advanced-assessment/>

Letters of intent should either be signed manually or electronically by, for example, GetAccept, ebox, or similar systems.

### **Appendix 7. Signatures from the university**

Appendix template for signatures is downloaded from [the Foundation's website](#)<sup>17</sup>. To be uploaded under *Other appendices*.

The application must be signed by the project manager and the project owner. The project manager's signature implies responsibility for the described implementation. The project owner assures through their signature that the university approves the project and will be involved according to the project description. The project owner should have the right of delegation to conclude agreements with the Knowledge Foundation.

The signature appendix should either be signed manually or electronically by, for example, eduSign, GetAccept, ebox, or similar systems.

## **Preparation and assessment**

The application will be reviewed by the secretariat of the Knowledge Foundation to ensure that the formal requirements are met. If these are met, an assessment of the project's scientific quality will be performed by international scientific experts (peer review). Thereafter, an external assessment panel will conduct an overall assessment based on the assessment criteria below. Funding decisions are made by the Foundation's CEO after recommendation by the external assessment panel.

### **Formal requirements**

The following requirements must be met for the application to be considered for evaluation by the Knowledge Foundation. Applications that do not meet the requirements, will be rejected for formal reasons.

- The applicant university must belong to the Knowledge Foundation's target group.
- The project manager must have a doctoral degree<sup>18</sup> and be employed by the university at the latest at the start of the project.
- The project manager must not have been academically active for more than 3 years after the doctoral degree, which must be clearly shown in the CV.
- The application must include appendices according to the call instructions.
- At least two business actors must co-finance the project.
- Co-financing business actors must fulfil the criteria set by the Knowledge Foundation.<sup>19</sup>
- The business actors' total co-financing, primarily through in-kind contributions, must correspond to at least the amount requested from the Knowledge Foundation.
- Signed letters of intent from all participating partners must be attached.
- Funds requested from the Knowledge Foundation may not exceed SEK 2.5 million (excl. OH costs).
- The project duration must be 2–3 years.
- Projects may start no earlier than 1 June 2027, and no later than 1 October 2027.
- The application must be signed by the project owner and the project manager.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.kks.se/en/documents/>

<sup>18</sup> Doctoral degree on scientific or artistic grounds.

<sup>19</sup> More information on the Foundation's website: <https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/what-does-the-business-sector-mean/>.

## Assessment criteria

### Contribution to the development of the research and education environment<sup>20</sup>

- To what extent are there clear and relevant descriptions of the current state of the research and education environment, as well as its ambitions and objectives for strengthening the environment?
- How well justified is the project's and the project manager's contribution to the desired development of the research and education environment in the short and long term?

### Scientific quality<sup>21</sup>

- How well do the scientific questions relate and contribute to the current knowledge frontier?
- How clear and realistic are the scientific objectives?
- How clear and relevant are the scientific methods?
- To what extent is there an adequate description of whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant in the project's scientific content and in the design of the project? If so, are these perspectives adequately included?
- How appropriate is the project manager's scientific competence in relation to the project content?

### Benefit to the business sector

- How relevant are the scientific questions to the needs of the participating business actors, and to what extent are they possibly applicable to a wider business sector?
- To what extent is the project expected to contribute to the development of participating business actors, and to possible development of a wider business sector?

### Implementation

- To what extent is the project implementation adequate in relation to the project objectives?
- How clearly is the work distribution between the partners described, and how appropriate is the planned collaboration?
- How well do the combined merits and experiences of the project group fulfil the needs of the project implementation?
- To what extent is there an adequate description of how gender equality aspects have been considered in the composition of the project group?
- How well is the budget described and justified in the project plan and is the project plan realistic in relation to available resources?
- How appropriate and realistic is the time and activity plan and the risk analysis?
- To what extent is the research project and the career-enhancing activities (described in the professional development plan), and the collaboration with the academic reference group expected to promote the project manager's professional development and the possibility to become an independent researcher?

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<sup>20</sup> In cases where several research and education environments submit a joint application, the assessment criterion applies to each of the environments.

<sup>21</sup> When the application concerns an artistic research domain, the concept *scientific* is replaced by *artistic* in the call.