CALL FOR PROPOSALS

EARLY ACADEMIC CAREER 25

- The application should be submitted to the Knowledge Foundation before **15:00 on 26 November 2025.**
- Funding decisions will be announced in April 2026.

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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.

Contents

The programme Early academic career

The programme *Early academic career* replaces the former programme *Prospekt* as of this year's call.

Today's knowledge-intensive society is in great need of cutting-edge research results and people with academic excellence. One way to meet these needs is to offer promising researchers good opportunities for an academic career. In an open, competitive allocation of research funds, where the applicant's previous research experience is often awarded, early career researchers are to a large extent outcompeted, and many of them thus early abandon thoughts of a career in academia.

However, the Knowledge Foundation sees advantages in offering promising early career researchers the opportunity at an early stage to independently pursue a research project of high scientific quality and thereby develop professionally and therefore offers funding through the programme *Early academic career*.

Objectives of the programme

The objectives of the programme *Early academic career* are for an early career researcher to develop professionally and qualify for a further academic career. This is realised by the researcher conducting a research project together with relevant business partners, where a well-defined and delimited scientific question is addressed that contributes both to the scientific development and creates benefits for the business sector.

The programme's purpose and contribution to development of strong research and education environments

The Knowledge Foundation seeks to support the building of strong research and education environments that create value for academia, business sector, and society. All the Knowledge Foundation's programmes contribute in various ways to enabling environments to establish and maintain a strong national and international scientific or artistic position in the long term, which also constitutes a profile area for the university. For more information on the Knowledge Foundation's view on strong research and education environments, go to the Foundation's website[1].

The specific purpose of the programme *Early academic career* is to develop and/or renew the research and education environment within its scientific profile area through a strategic recruitment of a promising early career researcher. Through *Early academic career*, the environment may also expand or strengthen its collaboration with the business sector within the profile area.

Project design

The research project will address a scientific question together with business partners, but as the main objective of the project is to develop the project manager professionally and to qualify for a further academic career, career-enhancing activities and career support should be included in the project. Career-enhancing activities could be, 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 his/her working time to the research project and the reaming working time to other career-enhancing activities (the salary costs associated with 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

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[1] https://www.kks.se/en/funding-and-assessment/strong-research-and-educational-environments/

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. 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 applicant. [2] To ensure good anchoring and integration, two researchers from the applying environment should be included, of which at least one of them should be at the level of associate professor ('docent') or above. [3] 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[4], any costs related to his/her participation cannot be financed by the Knowledge Foundation.

Terms and conditions

Applicants

Sweden's university colleges and newer universities[4] (hereafter referred to as *universities* in 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

A project manager employed by the university should be operationally responsible for the implementation of the project. To apply for funding within *Early academic career*, the project manager must be an *early career 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[5] with a graduation date[6] no earlier than 26 November 2022. Any deductible time[7] when the project manager has not been academically active may be excluded – this must be clearly indicated in the CV.

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[2] To develop academic independency the project manager's doctoral supervisor(s) or assistant supervisor(s) cannot be included in the reference group.

[3] 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').

[4] 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.

[5] Doctoral degree on scientific or artistic grounds.

[6] For Swedish doctoral degrees, the degree 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.

[7] 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.

The project manager may at the time of application be employed by another university, by a research institute or in the business sector, but must, at the latest at 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. In this programme, where the application does not need to be signed by the vice-chancellor, 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.

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[8].

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[9].

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 co-operation 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. 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 2026, and no later than 1 October 2026.

Financial framework and budgeting

The programme *Early academic career* refers to the funding of a research project conducted in co-operation with the business sector. The amount to be requested from the Knowledge Foundation may not exceed the sum of SEK 2.5 million.

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[8] https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/
[9] https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/what-does-the-business-sector-mean/

The funds from the Foundation should primarily be used for salary costs related to working hours 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 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 allocated under the budget items *Training/Course* and *Travel costs* and will be included in the assessment of the application.

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[10]. 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[11]. 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, and single line spacing.

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

Maximum 2 pages, see instructions below if several environments apply jointly. To be uploaded under *Appendix 1. The project's contribution to the research and education environment(s).*

This appendix should be written jointly by the head of the research and education environment and the project manager. Emanate from the group or environment where the project has its closest context. Frame the description based on the below headings.

If a project is applied for jointly by several environments, all environments must be described. However, the appendix may only be extended by a maximum of half a page per additional environment.

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[10] https://www.kks.se/en/funding-and-assessment/general-terms-and-conditions-for-projects/
[11] https://www.kks.se/en/apply-and-report/

1.1. The research and education environment(s) where the project will be conducted
- Describe the environment's current status and results of the last five years, including, for example, scope and focus of research and education, staff composition, scientific output, development of educations, funding, collaborations.
- Describe the ambition and objectives for the further development of the environment.

1.2. The project's contribution to the development of the research and education environment(s)
- Describe how the project will contribute to the development of the research and education environment and its activities. The connection to the objectives and purpose of the call must be clearly stated. It must be made clear 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 contributes 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[12]).
- Describe the scientific competence of the project manager in relation to the project content.
- Describe how the scientific questions relate to needs of 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 practically implemented and how the planned implementation will lead to the fulfilment of the project objectives.
- Describe how the work in the project is planned and organised so that the work distribution of the partners is clarified, and also how the collaboration between the partners will take place.
- 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. 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[13]).
- Describe and justify the costs included in the budget table so that it is clear what the budget items consist of and how they relate to the project objectives and planned activities.
- 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.
- If the university has previously been rejected on a similar application (within the program *Prospekt*), this must be stated along with comments on how the assessment panel's previous remarks are being considered in the current application. This should be included within the page limit of the project plan and should not be longer than about half a page.

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[12] https://www.kks.se/en/gender-equality-perspective-an-added-value-for-research-and-innovation/
[13] https://www.kks.se/en/gender-equality-perspective-an-added-value-for-research-and-innovation/

- **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[14], 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.*

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. 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 the programme *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[15]). 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:

- **Degrees**
- **Positions**
- **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.
- **Educational activities:** 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 his/her 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

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[14] https://www.kks.se/en/documents/

[15] https://www.kks.se/en/broadened-review-of-academic-merits-and-advanced-assessment/

<u>university's official decision</u> 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

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[16]. 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 his/her 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 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.[17]

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[16] https://www.kks.se/en/documents/

[17] More information on the Foundation's website: https://www.kks.se/en/co-production/what-does-the-business-sector-mean/.

- 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 2026, and no later than 1 October 2026.
- The application must be signed by the project owner and the project manager.

Assessment criteria

Contribution to the development of the research and education environment

- To what degree is there a clear description of the current state of the research and education environment?
- To what degree is there an adequate ambition for the development of the research and education environment?
- To what extent is the project expected to contribute to the development of the research and education environment in the short and long term?

Scientific quality[18]

- 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 well planned and organised is the work in the project, particularly regarding work distribution and collaboration between the partners?
- 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

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[18] When the application concerns an artistic research domain, the concept *scientific* is replaced by *artistic* in the call.

expected to promote the project manager's professional development and the possibility to become an independent researcher?