



SWEDISH FOUNDATION *for*
STRATEGIC RESEARCH

2026-08-28

Call for Proposals

Research Institute Doctoral Student 2026

The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research (SSF) is allocating SEK 26 million in a programme for research institute doctoral students. Each grant in the programme provides funding for research and postgraduate studies for a doctoral student who is employed at a Swedish research institute, in collaboration with academia. The grant runs for four to five years and shall result in a doctorate exam (PhD). SSF expects to fund eight projects at SEK 3.25 million each (including indirect costs) in this call for proposals.

Introduction

Research institutes play an important role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and technology in society, as well as in driving innovations. According to its statutes, SSF supports the development of strong research environments with high strategic relevance, supports postgraduate education, and promotes mobility of researchers between universities, institutes, and companies. To achieve the above, SSF has a number of support tools, including Strategic Mobility (SM), Industry Doctoral Student (ID), and this programme to support doctoral students active at a research institute; Research Institute Doctoral Students (FID).

The purpose of the programme is to support excellent research within SSF's areas of activity, to foster cross-fertilization between different sectors, and to contribute to the training of strategically competitive PhDs.

How the programme works

The programme is aimed at persons who have not yet been admitted to a doctoral studies programme. The doctoral student must have at least 80 percent employment at the research institute for the entire period of the grant. Two qualified persons shall serve as supervisors for the doctoral student during the period of the grant – one at the higher education institution (HEI) and one at the research institute. The supervisors shall be employed at least 80 percent at their respective sector. The supervisor at the research institute is the applicant

(who submits the application and ensures that it meets the requirements) and assumes the role of project leader (responsible for reporting to SSF) if the project is granted funding. The institute where the project leader is employed is the administering organisation (receives and administers the grant). There shall be a steering group consisting of, at least, the two supervisors for the project. To strengthen the application a co-supervisor can also be appointed at a collaborating company or clinic (if applicable).

The application shall include a project description defining the planned research. The project description must be formulated jointly by the research institute and the HEI. The project description shall also describe planned ways to facilitate an exchange of knowledge between the institute and the HEI and dissemination of this knowledge to industry and society, for example the fact that the doctoral student works in both environments, joint seminars, etc. On submission of the application, declarations of intent shall be provided by both the HEI (department head or equivalent) and the institute (research director, department head or equivalent). Both of these parties shall confirm the need for knowledge exchange and knowledge acquisition, and also ensure that the necessary practical arrangements are made for the execution of the project. The parties shall furthermore state that the supervisors both have a mandate and time allocated for this purpose.

The institute doctoral student who is the intended recipient of the grant shall meet the requirements for admission to the doctoral programme and be employed at the institute before the project begins. The doctoral student shall devote the equivalent of four years full-time to the project, and is expected to share his or her time between the university and the institute. Beyond that, up to 20 percent of the doctoral student's working hours can be devoted to other activities such as departmental duties or project management, if this work is funded by the HEI or the institute. During the period of the grant, the doctoral student shall pursue research and his or her own postgraduate studies in natural sciences, engineering or medicine.

The HEI must be located in Sweden. The institute shall be well-established and must have sufficient competence to be able to both contribute to and benefit from the research findings. The institute shall be registered in Sweden, have research and innovation as its main task and be an approved administrative organisation by SSF. Project collaboration with industry and/or the health care sector is a merit. Such collaboration shall be clearly described in the application. The parties are jointly responsible for framing agreements on how IPR-related matters are to be handled.

The grant is SEK 3.25 million, expected to cover about half of what a doctoral project normally costs, in particular the doctoral student's salary and operating costs. The institute and the HEI have to provide whatever additional funds are required for a smoothly functioning project.

The grant may not be used for supervisors' salaries, but solely for costs directly related to the institute doctoral student's project. Representatives of the parties shall attest at the time of application that they are agreed on the total cost of the project and how the costs are to be shared between them. Indirect costs (overheads) may only be paid from the grant up to the equivalent of a surcharge of 25 percent on the direct costs. The grant may not be used to cover costs for unspecified "bench fees" for the doctoral student.

The grant shall result in a doctoral exam. 25 percent of the grant will be withheld until a final report has been submitted, including a copy of the PhD certificate, and approved by SSF. If a

doctorate has not been obtained within the appointed time, 25 percent of the grant must be returned to SSF (with reservation for extensions on account of parental leave or illness).

An applicant from the research institute may only submit one application. An applicant who already has an ongoing SSF research institute doctoral student grant is not eligible to apply if there is an overlap in the grant period between the two grants.

SSF strives for an equal gender distribution in the awarded grants and therefore encourages the research institutes to work for an equal gender distribution amongst the applying Principal Investigators. Underrepresented gender will be used as a boundary condition by the evaluation committee in the prioritization process, which means that in cases where two applications are considered to be of equivalent quality, the applicant of underrepresented gender will be prioritized.

Definition of a research institute

SSF's definition of a research institute is that:

- it is an organization that is run as an institute and has research as its own main business.
- the organization is largely grant-funded and therefore not mainly financed directly via a principal.

Please notice that by this definition, *e.g.*, Karolinska Institute is defined as a HEI and not as a research institute and neither SMHI nor the Swedish Police authority are regarded as research institutes but rather government agencies. In case of uncertainty, please contact the SSF office for clarification.

Evaluation criteria

The applications will be reviewed and prioritized by a for the purpose appointed evaluation committee. The following criteria will be taken into account in the review and prioritization process:

- The quality of the proposed research project, in relation to scientific state of the art
- Strategic relevance and intersectorial co-operation
- Mutuality (regarding needs and engagement) in the declarations of intent from both parties, including development plan for the institute doctoral student
- Qualifications of steering group/supervisors.

Submission of proposals

The applicant is a project leader and a supervisor at the research institute. The entire application, including appendices, is filled out electronically at [https:// strategiska.se/apply](https://strategiska.se/apply)

and shall include a complete application form consisting mainly of the following (in addition to what is stated in the portal):

- Research plan, including a description of scientific state of the art
- CV and list of publications for both supervisors
- Declarations of intent from the academic party and the institute describing the need for the project (signed by a department head or equivalent at the university and the research director, head of unit or equivalent at the institute)
- Brief description and required qualifications of a prospective doctoral student (education and experience)
- Strategic relevance and expected societal impact, including a description of how intellectual property rights (IPRs) are to be handled contractually between the parties, as well as a clear description of the intersectorial co-operation.
- Budget
- Description of the institute with specifics such as corporate ID number, number of employees, net turnover and main activities
- Description of any and all dependency relationships (past or present) between the institute, the doctoral student, the HEI and the supervisors or with other actors and stakeholders in the project.
- Form of employment and position of the person at the institute who is to be a PhD student

The application must be written in English.

The deadline for applications is November 30, 2026, at 14.00. The estimated time for decision by SSF is April and the project shall start between **August 1, 2027** and **December 31, 2027**.

Note that all Foundation records are open to the public (offentlighetsprincipen). For this reason, do not send material that may not be made public at the present time, if for instance, it might jeopardize patenting.

Contact persons at the Foundation:

Johan Nilsson, Scientific Secretary. +46 (0)8 505 816 74, joan.nilsson@strategiska.se

Joakim Amorim, Research Programmes Manager, +46 (0)8 505 816 65, joakim.amorim@strategiska.se