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SWEDISH FOUNDATION *for*
STRATEGIC RESEARCH

Call for Proposals

Industrial Doctoral Student 2026

The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research (SSF) announces SEK 39 million in this annual call for proposals for Industrial Doctoral Student funding. The grant provides funding for research and postgraduate studies for an industrial doctoral student, in collaboration between industry and academia. The grant covers a period of four to five years and shall result in a doctoral degree (PhD). SSF intends to fund 12 projects of SEK 3.25 million each (including indirect costs).

Aim

The purpose of the program is to contribute to demand-driven excellent research within SSF's areas of activity, to foster cross-fertilization between academia and industry and to contribute to the training of strategically relevant and industrially competitive PhD's.

Eligibility

The grant provides funding for research and postgraduate studies within natural science, engineering, or medicine for an industrial doctoral student, in collaboration between industry and academia. At least two qualified persons shall serve as main supervisors for the doctoral student during the entire grant period - one at a higher education institution (HEI) and one at a company. The supervisors shall be well established within their respective organizations. The two supervisors in unity constitute the steering group for the project.

The HEI where the main applicant is employed administers the grant. The HEI must be Swedish.

The main applicant is the main supervisor of the doctoral student at the HEI and is responsible for reporting to SSF. The main applicant must be employed and active to at least 80 percent at the HEI during the entire grant period.

The company must be commercially sound with respect to the responsibility for the doctoral student's work over several years and possess enough competence to both

contribute to and benefit from the knowledge gained in the project over short and long term. The company shall normally be registered in Sweden or close enough to Sweden that the exchange is feasible and can be justified strategically for Sweden. Furthermore, there must be no questionable personal ownership relationship between academia and business. Instead of a company, the industrial party may also be a hospital if the project involves clinical research. Industrial research institutes or similar organizations may not represent neither the academic nor the industrial party in this call for proposals. In order to be eligible, the company must have at least 10 full-time employees.

The co-applicant is the supervisor at the company. The co-applicant must be employed and active to at least 80 percent at the company during the entire grant period.

The industrial doctoral student must not be admitted to doctoral studies at the time of application. The industrial doctoral student does not need to be identified at the time of application but must be admitted to the industrial doctoral program and be employed at the company before the start of this project. The doctoral student must be to at least 80 percent employed by the company during the entire grant period. The doctoral student shall devote the equivalent of four years of full-time work to the project and is expected to share her or his time between the university and the company. Beyond that, up to 20 percent of the doctoral students working hours can be devoted to other activities such as departmental duties if this work is funded by the HEI.

An applicant may only submit one application, this applies to both main applicant and co-applicant. A main applicant who has an ongoing SSF industrial doctoral student grant is not eligible to apply if there is a grant period overlap between the two grants.

The grant

The grant amounts to SEK 3.25 million, which is expected to cover about half of what a doctoral student project normally costs. The company and the HEI are expected to provide any additional funds that are required for a successful project. The grant may not be used for supervisors' salaries, but solely for costs directly related to the student's project. Representatives of the parties shall attest at the time of application that they agree on the total cost of the project and how the costs are to be shared between them. Indirect costs (overheads) are only permitted for the part of the grant that is spent at the HEI, equivalent to a surcharge of 25 percent on the direct costs. The grant does not cover any bench fees, supervision costs or other unwarranted costs.

The project shall result in a doctoral degree. 25 percent of the grant will be withheld until the final report is approved and a PhD certificate can be presented. If a doctoral degree is never obtained, this part of the grant will be kept by SSF.

The project should be started at the earliest 2027-01-01 and no later than 2027-06-30.

Proposal and submission

All applications must be submitted by 14:00 hours (2:00 pm CEST) on May 13, 2026. No additional material will be considered after this deadline.

The application shall be written in English and is submitted by the main applicant via the SSF application portal: <http://apply.strategiska.se>. The industrial supervisor is the (only) co-applicant added in the portal form, other involved personal can be described in the uploaded research plan. The application must include (in addition to other information specified in the portal):

- Research plan, including scientific state of the art (5 pages). It must be formulated jointly by the company and the HEI and include planned activities between the company and the HEI.
- CV and list of publications for both applicants.
- Letters of intent from both the academic and the industrial party, describing the commitment for the project, written by the department head (or equivalent) at the HEI and the research director (or equivalent) at the company. In the letter of intent from the industrial partner the number of employees holding full time (100%) employment should clearly be stated. Both parties shall ensure that the necessary practical arrangements are in place. In addition, it should be certified that the supervisors have the support and time allocated for this purpose
- Brief description and required qualifications of the prospective doctoral student.
- Strategic relevance and expected societal impact in a 10-15-year timeframe.
- Description of how intellectual property rights contractually will be handled.
- Budget.
- Description of the company with details such as corporate ID number, number of employees, net/gross turnover in MSEK, business activities and a link to webpage.
- Description of any dependencies (current or former) between the company, the doctoral student, the HEI and the supervisors.

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, for example because it might risk future patenting.

Evaluation

The applications will be reviewed by an evaluation committee consisting of external experts from both academia and industry. The following evaluation criteria will be applied:

- Scientific quality of the proposed research project.
- Strategic relevance and expected industrial/societal impact.
- Mutuality (regarding needs and commitment) in the declarations of intent from both parties.
- The qualifications of the supervisors.
- Relations, e. g. that there are no inappropriate financial or personal dependencies between the company, the doctoral student, the HEI and the supervisors.

SSF has the aim of allocating a balanced number of grants between its research areas, whilst maintaining the excellent level of scientific quality and strategic relevance.

The foundation strives for an equal gender distribution of the awarded grants. Underrepresented gender will be applied as a boundary condition when grants are of otherwise equivalent quality.

For a company that participates in several applications or that already have approved SSF Industrial PhD grants, amplified requirements of the relevance criteria will apply. SSF will at maximum approve two projects per company in each annual call for proposals.

Time schedule

- February 13, 2026	Call for proposals opens
- May 13, 2026, 14.00 CEST	Application deadline
- October, 2026	Decision by the SSF board
- January 1 - June 30, 2027	Project start

Contact at SSF

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