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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

# Synergy 14

The Knowledge Foundation invites Sweden's new higher education institutions (HEIs) to apply for *Synergy* funding. The *Synergy* programme aims to provide important tools to help HEIs profile and develop their activities through building internationally competitive research programmes to address well-defined questions/problems of relevance to the business sector.

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If you have questions about the call, please contact:

Mats Waltré, Programme Manager  
[mats.waltre@kks.se](mailto:mats.waltre@kks.se) 08-56 64 81 58

Susanne Andersson  
[susanne.andersson@kks.se](mailto:susanne.andersson@kks.se) 08-56 64 81 41

Birgitta Olsson, Project Administrator  
[birgitta.olsson@kks.se](mailto:birgitta.olsson@kks.se) 08-56 64 81 12

**We require your notification  
of interest no later than  
11 November 2014.**

**We require your application  
no later than 3 p.m. (15:00)  
on 2 March 2015**

For technical support, contact:  
[info@kks.se](mailto:info@kks.se)

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## About the Knowledge Foundation

The Knowledge Foundation funds research at Sweden's new universities and HEIs for the purpose of strengthening Sweden's competitiveness. We provide funding when research is conducted in collaboration between academic researchers and business partners.

## Background of the programme

Funds applied for within the HÖG programme have increased in recent years. For instance, three applications were submitted in 2009 that exceeded SEK 4 million, while 17 applications between SEK 4 and 8 million were submitted in 2013.

On one hand, the increasingly extensive grant applications challenge the purpose of the programme, i.e. to join with business partners to conduct a project addressing a well-defined scientific question/problem within a limited period of time. Large grant applications tend to involve more thematic initiatives. On the other hand, the increasingly larger grant applications indicate the growing ambitions of the HEIs and their business partners – an important aspect that should be addressed and encouraged. We recognise that a major step separates applying for funds for an individual research project and applying for funds for profiling multiple research groups. Hence, the Knowledge Foundation is developing *Synergy*, a new type of programme that encompasses several sub-projects that complement each other in responding to a more complex research question.

## Purpose and objective of the programme

The programme aims to serve as an important tool for HEIs seeking to focus the direction of research based on a defined core question.

The programme's objective is for HEIs to systematically concentrate research on a well-defined question/problem (core question) of relevance for the business sector. Synergy can enable an HEI to develop a platform that can become a basis for applying for a subsequent profile grant.

## Programme design

A special feature of *Synergy* is that a single (1) core question serves as the coordinating factor. It is this core question that the sub-projects in a Synergy project must contribute to answer. This distinguishes Synergy from both the HÖG programme (which focuses on the scientific research question/problem) and the Profile programme (which focuses on developing the research area). This feature of Synergy opens up questions that may require expertise from several different scientific disciplines, which should respond to many of the challenges faced by the Swedish business sector.

A Synergy project is defined by a core question.

A grant application for Synergy must include the collective synergy component and at least 3 distinct and defined sub-projects. The application must clearly explain why the sub-projects' contributions are needed to answer the core question. The applicant determines the sub-projects' mutual size and timing (within a given time frame) based on what best addresses the core question for Synergy.

A Synergy project should span 3 to 4 years, and the grant should range from SEK 6-12 million. *Total* funding requested from the Knowledge Foundation must, at least, be matched by business sector contributions. However, each individual sub-project in Synergy does not need to meet this requirement.

The core question determines the design and objectives of the different sub-projects. Hence, the conceptual designs for Synergy may vary widely.

The sub-projects may be sequential or parallel, and their size can vary. Synergy projects are not required to remain within a single (1) scientific discipline. Each sub-project must be justified by the core question that defines the Synergy project.

The project manager plays an essential role in Synergy. Hence, evaluating potential project managers must be given particular attention. The Synergy project manager may also serve as project manager for a sub-project.

To be justified, the individual sub-projects must be necessary to answer the core question. Synergy's core question must also be clearly stated to determine whether a particular sub-project has decisively generated results that answer and/or develop it.

The annual reporting of Synergy projects requires an accounting of how the original plan is progressing towards answering the core question, or if the core question needs to be revised in light of developments in the sub-projects.

## Who may apply?

The call for proposals is intended for Sweden's new higher education institutions (HEIs). The applicant, i.e. vice chancellor is responsible for the application, not the individual researcher or research group.

Only Sweden's new HEIs may apply.

An HEI may submit multiple grant applications.

## How should the funds be used?

Budgeting of funds must be in accordance with the instructions presented in the document *Guidelines on Approved Expenditures* (see [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se)).

The Synergy grant application must present a budget (appendix form) consisting of the aggregate budgets of the different sub-projects and the operational costs for Synergy itself (project management, articles/publication of Synergy results, etc).

The funds applied for should not include overhead. This will be calculated and included in the grant upon approval of the application by the Knowledge Foundation.

Funding from the Knowledge Foundation may be used only to finance research at Sweden's new HEIs.

## HEI involvement

The HEI must provide the organisational framework enabling Synergy to achieve the objectives presented in the grant application.

The Knowledge Foundation welcomes, but does not formally require, co-financing from the HEI. Any co-financing by the HEI must comply with the instructions presented in the document *Guidelines on Approved Expenditures* (see [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se)).

## Business sector involvement

Projects must be co-produced with business partners. Co-production means that the academic and business together, and from their respective perspectives, must formulate and address a scientific question/problem. For more information on co-production, see [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se).

By “business sector”, the Knowledge Foundation refers primarily to private companies. The concept, however, may include companies under public ownership that are active in competitive markets and where the company finances its operations in the same manner as private companies. Hence, public subsidies or fees may not constitute a significant part of the company’s revenues. None of the organisations may be solely administrative enterprises. Primarily they must produce goods or services. The companies must operate in Sweden to the extent that their input provides value for co-production and they have the potential to integrate the results from co-production into their organisation here.

At least two independent (non-affiliated) companies must co-finance each Synergy sub-project. The co-financing should be balanced between the participating companies. Overall, the business partners must contribute resources to the Synergy project that, at minimum, correspond the funding requested from the Knowledge Foundation. However, each individual sub-project does not need to meet this requirement.

As regards companies with fewer than 10 employees or less than SEK 10 million in annual turnover (based on the most recent annual report), their capacity for co-production in the project must be very clearly described.

If any economic or personal links exist between the involved companies, between any company and HEI, or between any company and individual researcher(s), this must be disclosed. The project plan must clearly indicate any personal conflicts of interest, and the individual’s various roles in the company or HEI must be fully described.

## Formal requirements

An application must meet the following requirements before the Knowledge Foundation will consider it for evaluation. If the application does not meet the following requirements, it will be rejected without further evaluation.

- The project must be in line with the purpose and objective of the call.

- If any economic or personal links exists between the involved companies, between any company and HEI, or between any company and individual researcher(s), this must be disclosed on the application form. For example, ownership of shares, board memberships, employment/consultant work should be specified.
- Budgeting of funds must be in accordance with the instructions presented in the document *Guidelines on Approved Expenditures* (see [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se)).
- The earliest starting date for the project: 2015-09-01. The latest starting date for the project: 2015-11-01.
- Senior researchers must account for at least 50% of the research time financed by the Knowledge Foundation.
- The application must specify the co-financing from participating companies in accordance with the requirements established in the call for proposals.
- The vice-chancellor must sign the application.

## Evaluation

The secretariat of the Knowledge Foundation will review the applications to determine if the application complies with the formal requirements. Funding decisions are made by the board of the Knowledge Foundation based on recommendations from the CEO. The Knowledge Foundation's external evaluation panel reviews Synergy proposals. The individual Synergy sub-projects are peer reviewed by international experts. The Knowledge Foundation's external evaluation panel conducts a hearing with those applicants found to have the fundamental prerequisites to implement a Synergy programme. Thereafter, an overall assessment is completed and the panel submits its recommendation to the CEO of the Knowledge Foundation.

The evaluation process does not allow for any additions or modifications.

### Evaluation criteria

#### **Scientific quality**

##### *Synergy*

- How well does the core question address relevant, cutting-edge research?
- What is the scientific contribution of each individual sub-project to Synergy (how well does the scientific question/problem address Synergy objectives)?

*Per sub-project*

- How strong is the knowledge about relevant research? How well does the scientific question/problem address this?
- How clear and realistic are the scientific objectives?
- How clear and relevant are the scientific methods?
- How high is the level of scientific expertise in the project group?

**Benefits to the business partners**

*Synergy*

- How relevant is the core question in relation to the needs of the business partners?

*Per sub-project*

- How do business partners benefit from their participation in the individual sub-projects?

**Expected results and effects**

*Synergy*

- To what extent is Synergy expected to contribute towards positioning the research at the HEI?
- To what extent is Synergy expected to contribute to development and renewal of the research area?
- To what degree will Synergy generate scientific results of good quality (e.g. scientific publications)?

**Implementation**

*Synergy*

- Well defined core question and objectives of the project.
- Clarity in how each individual sub-project is formulated based on the need to answer the core question.
- Project management.
- Realistic project plan (overall).

*Per sub-project*

- Clarity in how each individual sub-project decisively generates results to answer the core question.



- How well planned and organised is the work of the sub-projects, with particular focus on the expected contributions of the different sub-projects?
- How well does the budget reflect the project plan?

## Notification of interest

Higher education institutions (HEIs) that intend to submit an application for funding of a Synergy programme must notify the Knowledge Foundation via a *notification of interest*. The notification of interest is a prerequisite for submitting a full application.

- The notification of interest must not exceed 2 pages and must be submitted to [info@kks.se](mailto:info@kks.se) no later than 2014-11-11.
- The intended project manager's CV must be attached to the notification of interest.
- The vice-chancellor must sign the notification of interest.

Since Synergy 14 is the first call for this programme, the Knowledge Foundation will hold a special informational meeting on 20 November. This informational meeting is intended for those who have submitted a notification of interest.

A notification of interest does not serve as a basis for evaluating a project.

## Application

The Knowledge Foundation uses an online application process. Applicants go to the Foundation's website, [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se), complete the application form and appendices, and submit the application online to the Foundation.

To submit an application online, applicants must create a user account, or use a pre-existing account with the Knowledge Foundation.

Application documents consist of electronic forms and appendices that can be uploaded online. Special forms must be used for some appendices. The forms can be downloaded from the Foundation's website, [www.kks.se](http://www.kks.se), or via the application portal.

Applications should be written in English to enable international peer review of Synergy and its sub-projects.

To facilitate scientific peer review of the application, the applicant is requested to suggest names of at least two international experts qualified to evaluate the Synergy core question and at least two international experts per sub-project. The applicant must assert that suggested experts are free from conflict of interest.

In addition to the application form itself, the application must include 4 appendices, 2 of which use a special template.

The appendices must include the following:

## **1. Description of Synergy (max 30 pages)**

### *1.1 Synergy project's core question (approx. 2 pages)*

- Describe the core question for Synergy and its relevance to business partners.
- Explain and justify the contribution of the different sub-projects towards answering the core question.

### *1.2 Objectives (max 1 page)*

- Formulate the objectives of the Synergy project.
- Formulate the objectives of the sub-projects and how these objectives relate to and support the objective of the Synergy project.

### *1.3 Organisation, strategy, risk analysis (approx. 5 pages)*

- Describe the organisation of the Synergy project (project management, steering committee, administration, and scientific leadership).
- Describe the organisation and scientific management of relevant research environments. If Synergy involves more than one (1) research environment also describe these.
- Describe how the Synergy application fits in with the HEI's strategy.
- Describe the co-financing, over time, of the Synergy project and sub-projects by the HEI, business partners, and the Knowledge Foundation.
- Present a risk analysis.

### *1.4 Presentation of sub-projects (max 18 pages, approx. 6 pages per sub-project, incl. list of publications)*

- Describe the research in the respective projects in relation to corresponding research in Sweden and abroad.
- Present project plans for the individual projects (question/problem, methods, resources, timetable, etc.).
- List the publications that the application intends to cite. Maximum of 3 publications per researcher.

- Describe the business relevance of the sub-projects. Describe the companies' inputs, needs, and benefits.
- Describe how co-production between the companies and HEI will take place.

#### *1.5 Overall project plan (max 3 pages)*

- Present the project plan (incl. timetable) for the entire Synergy project and describe how implementation of the different sub-projects relates to the whole and to answering the core question.

## **2. Qualifications**

- Include CVs from key individuals in the project, from both the HEI and the business partners (max 2 pages per person, including relevant publications in the area).

## **3. Project budget (appendix form, only the Foundation's appendix form can be accepted)**

## **4. Signatures from the HEI (appendix form)**

- The vice chancellor must sign the application.

## Timetable and decisions

- The Knowledge Foundation must receive the notification of interest no later than 2014-11-11.
- For HEIs that have submitted a notification of interest, the Knowledge Foundation will arrange an informational meeting on 2014-11-20.
- The Knowledge Foundation must receive the application no later than 3 p.m. (15:00) on 2015-03-02.
- Soon thereafter, all applications will be reviewed for compliance with formal requirements. In February the CEO of the Knowledge Foundation will determine whether an application should be rejected due to non-compliance with formal requirements.
- International experts will review the scientific quality of applications during the spring of 2015.
- After an initial evaluation by an external evaluation panel, a hearing will be held late in the spring of 2015.
- Thereafter, the external evaluation panel will submit its final recommendation to the CEO of the Knowledge Foundation.

- In June 2015, the Knowledge Foundation's Board of Directors/CEO will render the decision regarding funding.