

# CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

## for forming and leading a VREF African Research Program on Mobility and Access in African Cities (MAC-ARP)

The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) invite researchers at universities (and research institutes of academic standing) to submit Expressions of Interest (Eoi) to establish and lead a VREF African Research Program in the area of "Mobility & Access in African Cities" (ARP-MAC). VREF will fund up to three separate ARP-MACs, one in each of the following thematic areas:

- Equitable, affordable and reliable access to livelihoods, services, and opportunities in sub-Saharan African cities
- Power, planning and governance of mobility in sub-Saharan African cities: institutional arrangements, politics, finance and management
- New service options and business models for efficient, accessible transport in sub-Saharan African cities

The three ARP-MACs are expected to be operational by mid-2024.

The Call is a two-step process. In the first step (2023), VREF invites researchers at universities (and research institutes of academic standing) to submit Expressions of Interest (Eoi) to establish and lead a VREF African Research Program within a thematic area related to "Mobility & Access in African Cities" (ARP-MAC). The Eoi will also serve as an application for a VREF planning grant for preparing a full proposal for an ARP-MAC. VREF aims at approving up to 2-3 planning grants within each thematic area. Each planning grant will result in submission of a full proposal for an ARP MAC within one specific thematic area.

Each Eoi should focus on in-depth work within only one (1) of the above thematic areas, rather than broader work across more than one theme, which is not the intention of this Call. Although eligible researchers may participate in more than one Eoi application, they may not be proposed ARP-MAC consortium leaders for more than one Eoi.

Expressions of Interest within the respective thematic areas should be submitted to VREF no later than 2 October 2023.

*The background and context of the Call are described below, followed by guidelines and instructions for submitting an EoI.*

*VREF strongly recommends all applicants to read carefully the "[MAC Road Map for Program Implementation](#)" for the VREF Program "Mobility & Access in African Cities" (MAC).*

*In the second step of the Call process (early 2024), applicants who have received a planning grant will be invited to submit a full proposal for an ARP- MAC in one of the thematic areas. Besides a full ARP-MAC proposal, the planning grant is also expected to result in a written report in the form of e.g. an academic "think piece" or a review of current knowledge and knowledge gaps within the thematic area that is the focus of the ARP-MAC proposal.*

*The envisaged outcome of the second step is a VREF decision in June 2024 to fund up to three ARP-MACs (that is, one ARP-MAC within each of the three thematic areas that are included in the Call) for a 3-year period 2024 - 2026 with up to 6 MSEK for each ARP-MAC (approx. 535,000 EUR or 570 000 USD).*

## **About the Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF)**

The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) is an independent foundation that inspires, initiates and supports research and educational activities that can contribute to new knowledge on broad issues related to urban mobility and access. VREF's mission is to support the development of research on ideas, approaches and solutions that can contribute to equitable access and sustainable urban mobility in ways that can radically reduce transportation's negative local and global environmental impacts. An important goal is also to support educational programs in these areas, as well as to facilitate dissemination and implementation of research findings among university researchers, practitioners, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders, see Volvo Research and Educational Foundations ([www.vref.se](http://www.vref.se))

## **The VREF program “Mobility & Access in African Cities” (MAC) – background**

The Mobility and Access in African Cities (MAC) program is a VREF-funded initiative with the purpose of increasing the knowledge and capacity base on equitable and sustainable mobility and access in cities in sub-Saharan Africa. The program is being carried out 2019 – 2026 (see [www.vref.se/mac/](http://www.vref.se/mac/)).

The MAC program seeks to contribute to forming a new generation of highly skilled sub-Saharan university researchers and teachers, as well as to engage professionals, policy makers and actors within civil society who are committed to achieving goals of sustainable and equitable urban mobility and access. Since its first Call for research projects in 2019, the MAC program has funded over 40 research projects and studies that have been implemented 2020-2023 (for more information see [www.vref.se](http://www.vref.se)).

An important point of departure for the current Call for Expressions of Interest (Eoi) for preparing full proposals for three-year African Research Programs (ARP) within the overall MAC program is the recognition that there are substantial knowledge gaps concerning numerous urgent issues related to mobility and access in African cities. There is a strong need for more in-depth, long-term research within areas that have strong relevance for the possibility to achieve equitable access and sustainable mobility in sub-Saharan African cities.

## **What is a VREF African Research Program on Mobility & Access in African Cities (ARP-MAC)?**

The African Research Programs on Mobility & Access in African Cities (ARP-MAC) in the three thematic areas will be at the center of the MAC program, carrying out most of the research under the program's knowledge building pillar and allocated a major share of the MAC program budget (see below).

The ARP-MAC should be understood as a cohesive, multi-year university research

program, under which a selection of research projects will be implemented in multi-university consortiums.

Each ARP-MAC will be lead and coordinated by a university/research institute partner, where projects will be implemented by the lead partner in close cooperation with at least 2-3 research partners in different countries and/or regions in sub-Saharan Africa.

Each ARP-MAC should focus on conducting state-of-the-art research, facilitating exchanges among researchers and other experts, and contributing to reducing gaps in scholarly knowledge within its thematic area. To support continuity in the research in a rapidly changing environment and enable the consortium to support talented staff for a longer period, each ARP-MAC will run for three years. This time frame allows the consortium not only to establish cross-country and interdisciplinary research, but also provides a base for the engaged partners to potentially seek complementary funding to build a broader sustained network over time. Hence the ARP-MAC is encouraged to position itself as the “go-to place” for both academic and non-academic actors when seeking and discussing knowledge in the thematic area of the ARP-MAC.

Each ARP-MAC should also contribute to strengthening scientific networks, exchanges and collaborations within the MAC area through online webinars and workshops and other types of scholarly activities. Leading representatives of each ARP-MAC are expected to participate in and contribute to the organization of VREF MAC workshops (or its equivalent). Further, each ARP-MAC is expected to contribute to supporting VREF’s next generation scholars pillar (see below) by engaging Ph.D. students and early career researchers affiliated with the ARP-MAC researchers in research projects and other academic capacity-building activities.

It is envisaged that each ARP-MAC, through state-of-the-art research and increasing strong international recognition, should enable the partners to position themselves to be able to supplement their funding from sources outside VREF. Co-funding/external funding is therefore encouraged, as this would allow the program to extend its research, capacity-building, recognition, and impact.

Each ARP-MAC will operate without any scientific steering from VREF. However, the ARP-MACs will be part of the broader MAC program and are expected to consult VREF in matters of strategic and/or long-term interest.

The annual funding for a fully operational ARP-MAC will normally be in the order of SEK 2 million (approximately 175,00 EUR or 187,000 USD). The total funding of each ARP-MAC over the three-year period (2024-2026) will be SEK 6 million (approx. 525,000 EUR or 561,000 USD). Each ARP-MAC consortium should keep a minimum of 15% of the annual budget flexible to respond to upcoming ideas and initiatives either

within the consortium or through external, potential new associated partners. The major part of VREF funding to the ARP-MAC will be allocated to the program's knowledge building pillar.

**VREF particularly encourages programs with the following profiles:**

- a) High ambitions for scientific publishing of research results from the consortium
- b) Geographical focus on Sub-Saharan Africa
- c) Focus on carrying out comparative studies between different contexts
- d) Extensive collaboration and exchange among researchers within the African continent and internationally beyond Africa
- e) Interdisciplinary approaches in knowledge building, education and capacity building
- f) Active engagement of young scholars (particularly Ph.D. candidates and early career scholars) and gender balance in the research program
- g) Interactions with a wider range of stakeholders to ensure broad uptake of research findings

**Expressions of Interest for submitting an ARP-MAC proposal – three thematic areas**

The focus of the current Call is on Expressions of Interest (Eoi) for preparing and submitting a full proposal for an ARP-MAC within one of the following thematic areas. Each Eoi should focus on no more than one (1) of these thematic areas. The themes are defined to ensure focus within a specific thematic area but at the same time provide flexibility for researchers to define the content and scope of the proposed research.

- *Equitable, affordable and reliable access to livelihoods, services, and opportunities in sub-Saharan African cities*  
Urban areas in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa are currently characterized by inadequate transport provision that severely limits broad access to affordable, reliable and efficient modes of travel to workplaces or schools, health care services, places for leisure or family activities, and other core opportunities or commitments of everyday life. Many groups encounter significant challenges in gaining access to mobility options that are viable in relation to their lived experiences, preferences and restrictions – challenges that are especially heightened among disadvantaged groups and which often contribute to transport-related social exclusion. Here it is important to understand the intertwining socio-demographics, everyday mobility practices and urban infrastructural constraints that may restrict access to efficient and affordable transport, as well as possible research-based approaches, concepts and strategies for strengthening equitable access in areas with significant spatial and social inequalities.

- *Power, planning and governance of mobility in sub-Saharan African cities: institutional arrangements, politics, finance and management*

The planning and governance of urban transport is embedded in politics, power relations, and institutional frameworks that are expressed in both formal regulations and informal norms, beliefs and value systems.

Institutional and political arrangements do not only govern what actors can do and how service provision can be organized, they often affect actors' ability to manage economic risks and finance investments, where governance, politics, and institutions are often closely intertwined in negotiations between actors. Currently there is relatively little work on governance processes, politics, power relations and barriers that shape transport planning and governance processes in urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as potentials for transformative change in ways that could lead to more sustainable and equitable urban transport systems. While traditional frameworks for transport planning have often focused solely on processes within public transport systems, recent research points to the need for in-depth knowledge on all modes of transport, as well as on more participatory approaches that entail inclusive planning or coproduction among all relevant stakeholders.

- *New service options and business models for efficient, accessible transport in sub-Saharan African cities*

In many urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa, informal operators provide the bulk of mobility services that are offered, particularly among low-income populations. The informal services sector has proven to be robust over time and flexible in organization, with services provided in a wide variety of forms (e.g. minibuses, bicycles, motorcycle taxis, scooters). This large variation across the continent offers significant potential for learning from experiences in various contexts, for exploring new combinations of service options and for applying new innovations through e.g. ICT-applications, formal-informal hybrids, or other new approaches to mobility services. There is a need for new knowledge that identifies, compares and evaluates the many different business models that are currently emerging in different contexts, as well as the ways in which public policies might further develop these services. Also, analysis of varying "cultures of service provision" could provide new insights on perspectives, practices and challenges among operators, owners, drivers and passengers in ways that could contribute to more viable, innovative and sustainable provision of services.

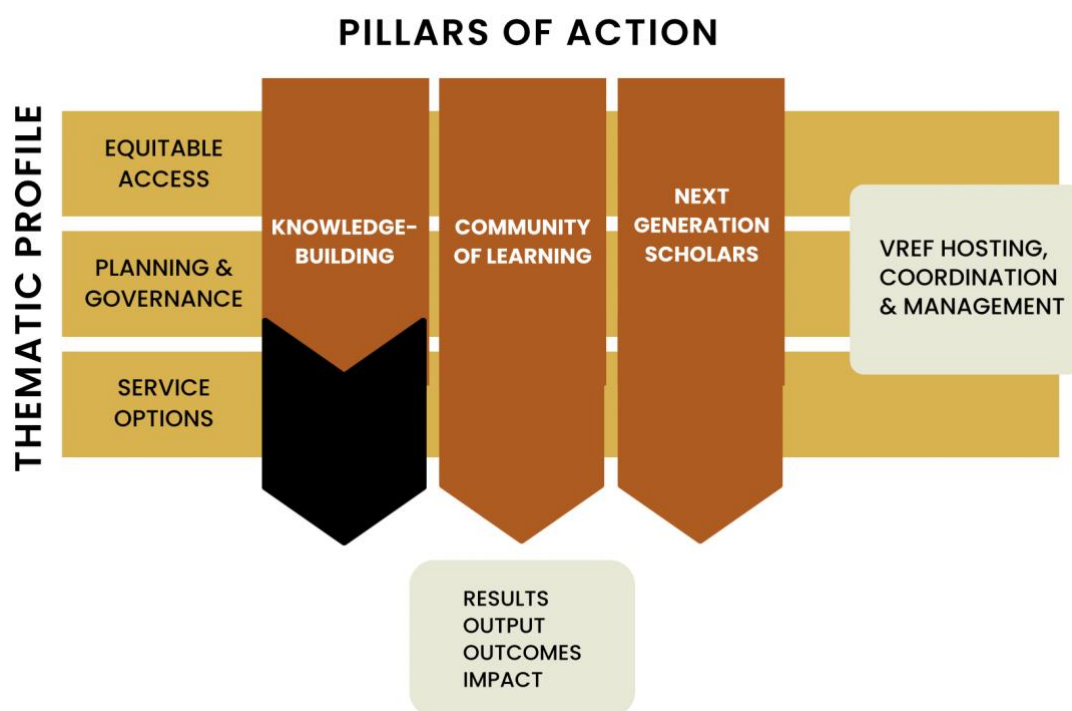
Please note: While digitalization, electrification or other technological innovation can be a crucial factor for improving mobility services, under this call for an ARP-MAC, VREF will not support technology development, including development of new applications or services. Exceptions can be made for developing tools for non-commercial, scientific use (for example tools for

data collection or other methodological use in research).

For more information on these thematic areas, please read the relevant scientific “position papers” by leading researchers within the MAC program that were released by VREF in 2020, see [Volvo Research and Education Foundations – Publications](#).

### **VREF Program Structure and ARP-MAC Roles**

Each ARP-MAC will be an integral part of the general VREF program structure that consists of three pillars: Knowledge building, Community of Learning, and Next generation scholars (see figure 1 below). However, the focus of each ARP-MAC will be on the knowledge building pillar, which will be centered around research and education, see also below.



*Figure 1 Structure of VREF MAC Program*

The Knowledge Building Pillar of each ARP-MAC should focus on state-of-the-art research and in-depth knowledge creation within the relevant thematic area through conceptual development, comparative case studies, syntheses and other scholarly activities) Contributing to new knowledge and research-based insights within one of the three thematic areas through research and other related activities is the primarily focus, role and responsibility of each ARP-MAC.

The Community of Learning pillar will focus on dialogues, exchange and learning activities among a network of researchers and other experts, framed around the research activities and findings of the ARP-MAC research. This pillar will also

strengthen the outreach and communication of research findings beyond academic channels and establish a community of interested individuals, groups and organizations within each thematic area. On a broader level, responsibility for initiating and carrying out many communication activities within the pillar will largely be the responsibility of the VREF secretariat in cooperation with each ARP-MAC.

Each ARP-MAC is, however, expected to initiate, lead and carry out communication activities that stimulate exchanges and learning within the consortium and within relevant communities of researchers and stakeholders with interests in the ARP-MACs area. For example, each ARP-MAC will be expected to initiate and carry out regular online activities to inform and engage senior and junior researchers, stakeholders and others regarding relevant issues and findings from ongoing work within the consortium. Each ARP-MAC is also expected to participate in (and cooperate with VREF in planning of) an annual MAC workshop.

The overall aim of the Next Generation Scholars pillar is to support and enhance the re-growth and renewal of academic capacity in broad areas related to mobility and access in sub-Saharan African cities through capacity building, training in academic skills and tools, and career development for young scholars (e.g. advanced master students, Ph.D. candidates, early career researchers). Activities within this pillar might also include curriculum development and other educational activities on master and Ph.D. levels.

Each ARP-MAC is expected to contribute to this pillar by significantly engaging Ph.D. students and early career researchers affiliated with the ARP-MAC partners in consortium research, allocating funds for study visit grants or other relevant exchanges between next generation scholars at different universities within (and beyond) the consortium, and strengthening academic capacity among next gen scholars in other relevant ways.

### **What is a VREF planning grant for preparing and submitting an ARP-MAC proposal?**

The planning grant is intended to facilitate the preparation and submission of a full ARP-MAC proposal within one of the three thematic areas of the Call. The amount of the grant will be a maximum of SEK 200,000 (approximately 17,500 EUR or 18,000 USD). The planning grant can be either used solely by the lead applicant or distributed among the consortium partners.

Besides a full ARP-MAC proposal, the planning grant is also expected to result in a written report in the form of e.g. a scholarly, reflective “think piece” on relevant issues within the theme or a review of current knowledge and knowledge gaps within the area that is the focus of the ARP-MAC proposal.



## Who can apply?

An ARP-MAC will typically be established as a consortium of reputable, well-established research groups/researchers acting in concert to address central issues within the framework of the MAC program with a specific focus on one thematic area of the Call. VREF particularly encourages universities/research institutes with an established track record in the relevant thematic area, but also welcomes emergent research groups in this area to take part in the consortium. It is foreseen that each ARP-MAC consortium will primarily be a partnership between researchers from 3-4 universities/research institutes. It is also foreseen that each ARP-MAC consortium may engage, as needed, individual researchers from universities that are not formally institutionally affiliated to the consortium. The consortium may also include associated partners such as cities, businesses, and not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations which contribute to the work or support the uptake of research findings, thereby scaling the societal impact.

The EoI should be submitted by an individual researcher (here called main applicant, see guidelines below), who is representing the consortium behind the proposed ARP-MAC. While individual researchers may be included in more than one ARP-MAC, researchers are only eligible to serve as consortium leaders for one EoI for preparing and submitting an ARP-MAC, specifically within one (1) thematic area.

For legal reasons, VREF grantees must be universities or research institutes of academic standing<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the main applicant must be associated with and supported by a university or research institute of academic standing.

## Submission of an Expression of Interest

An EoI must be submitted by e-mail to [secretariat@vref.se](mailto:secretariat@vref.se) and received no later than 2 October 2023.

### The EoI must:

- be structured and delineated in accordance with the guidelines stated below;
- be written in English;
- consist of a maximum of eight (8) single pages, not including CV's and references;
- be laid out in European A4 paper format, with a minimum font size of 12 pt and margins of at least 25 mm;
- be saved in PDF file format (of ready-to-print quality).

EoIs exceeding the specified maximum number of pages will be rejected.

Please e-mail [secretariat@vref.se](mailto:secretariat@vref.se) for further information on the call for EoIs or for clarification regarding the requirements for application.

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<sup>1</sup> By "research institute of academic standing", VREF means that the institute is conducting research of high scientific quality (e.g. resulting in peer-reviewed publications).

NB. To ensure maximum transparency in the recruitment process, all questions, and VREF's answers to them, will be published in a Q&A page on the VREF web site.

### **Review and decision-making process**

All qualifying applications will be reviewed by the VREF Scientific Council in October–November 2023. A maximum of 9 planning grants (up to 3 within each thematic area) will be approved by the VREF board in December 2023. VREF will inform all applicants on the outcome of the process before 31 December 2023. Each consortium that has been awarded planning grants will be invited to submit a full proposal for one thematic ARC-MAC around 1 April 2024 (exact date will be given with the invitation to submit a full proposal). Full proposals will be reviewed both by international external reviewers and the VREF Scientific Council. In June 2024, the VREF board will make a formal decision to approve up to three ARP-MACs, which are expected to become operational in August/September 2024.

### **Guidelines for the Expression of Interest (Eoi)**

Detailed guidelines on drafting the Eoi follow below. The page numbers shown in the guidelines indicate the numbering to be used in the final document. In guidelines, the person submitting the Eoi is referred to as the main applicant. The main applicant's university affiliation is envisaged to act as host institution for the Planning grant, if awarded. Other participants in the consortium behind the Eoi are referred to as consortium partners. Please note that the main applicant is an individual, while consortium partners should be universities or research institutes of academic standing, represented in the Eoi by a contact person.

.....PAGE 1.....

#### **FRONT PAGE**

**Title of the proposed ARP-MAC** The title should be concise and informative, preferably including keywords characterizing the ARP-MAC

#### **Main applicant**

- (i) The main applicant must be a person, not an organization. Please note that only one person can be the main applicant. To ensure prompt communication, it is important to state the name of the main applicant
- (ii) the main applicant's university affiliation
- (iii) the main applicant's e-mail address, post address and telephone number

**Host institution** The host institution should be a university or a research institute of academic standing in sub-Saharan Africa. Please state:  
the full name of the university, as well as the department (if applicable) the name and

contact details (e-mail address, post address and telephone number) of an administrative contact person for the university

**Consortium partners** University, names and addresses of contact persons. List the names of all consortium partners (universities etc), including the names and e-mail addresses of each partner's contact person (whose scientific and other professional background, as well as current activities, will be presented later in the proposal).

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## SUMMARY

This should consist of a brief outline of the problems, challenges and opportunities, and the objective(s) and general approach of the MAC-ARP, indicating the factors that give the program a unique profile or competitive edge.

.....PAGE 3.....

## BACKGROUND

This should provide a summary of the consortium's view of

- i. the most important issues, problems, challenges and opportunities that can be served by knowledge building and learning within the thematic area
- ii. current knowledge (or the absence thereof) relating to the thematic area, as well as the work of the main researcher active in this area
- iii. current status of policy and practice in the area, with particular reference to aspects of interest in the context of the VREF MAC program

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## POTENTIAL AND VISION OF THE ARP-MAC

**Describe the long-term objectives/goals, thematic profile and potential contributions and impact of the proposed ARC-MAC.**

**Vision** Formulate a long-term vision for the ARC-MAC in a few sentences.

**Objectives/goals** List the main objective(s)/goal(s) that can be achieved over the duration (3 years) of the ARP-MAC.

**Thematic profile of the ARP-MAC** Describe the thematic profile and priorities you envisage for the proposed ARP-MAC within the relevant thematic area, as well as the overall thematic framework of the VREF MAC Program.

**Contributions and impact** Describe potential contributions of the proposed ARP-MAC

to academic research, knowledge building, education and academic capacity building, as well as the potential to inform and impact upon policy and practice.

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## **CONSORTIUM**

### **Composition of the consortium**

Present the consortium and the approach behind how you have composed your consortium, i.e. how the partners complement each other in terms of scientific profiles, geographic scope, and other dimensions that are important for the consortium's capacity to address the thematic area. The contributions and roles of the various consortium partners, as well as the interactions envisaged between them as part of the program, should also be described.

### **Description of main applicant's scientific background and current activities, with brief CV.**

This description should include a summary of the main applicant's scientific background and other achievements/experiences relevant to the success of the proposed research. Current activities will be of particular interest, and a summary CV (max 3 pages) should also be provided in an annex. The annex should also include a selection of maximum 10 references (publications or other references). The proposal should also include short CVs (max 3 pages) and references (maximum 10) for other core researchers and other participants in the program.

### **Backgrounds and current activities of consortium researchers and other partners.**

A brief summary of the scientific backgrounds and other achievements/experiences of the engaged researchers and other possible partners in the consortium, as considered relevant to the success of the proposed research, should be provided.

### **Cooperation beyond the consortium**

Describe the consortium's most important cooperations and interactions within and beyond the consortium, both within the research community and in relation to non-academic organizations and other stakeholders within the thematic area. This could include local as well as national and international contexts.

### **Factors giving the project a competitive edge**

Indicate the factors that give the ARP-MAC an unique profile and a competitive edge in research and research-related activities within the thematic area. Although this topic overlaps partly with the summary information above, other relevant dimensions such as the actual problem perspective/formulation, access to unique resources or experiences related to e.g. research methods, consortium researchers' experience and existing networks may also be noted.

## APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ARP-MAC

### Scientific and methodological profile and approach

Describe the scientific and methodological profile and approach of the proposed ARP-MAC. Ensure that at least part of the research plan has a comparative element that includes research in multiple countries.

### Educational dimensions; capacity building among next generation scholars

It is envisaged that the ARP-MAC also has direct connections to university education as a means renewing curriculum offerings, enhancing capacity among next generation scholars and disseminating new scientific findings. Describe the current connections between research and education at the host institution and among consortium researchers, as well as how key researchers in the ARP-MAC are engaged in university education and curriculum development. Further, describe the consortium’s ideas for significantly involving Ph.D. students and early career researchers affiliated with the RP MAC partners in consortium research, facilitating and funding study visit grants or other relevant exchanges between Next Gen scholars at different universities within the consortium, and strengthening academic capacity among Next Gen scholars in other active ways.

### Dissemination and communication of findings beyond the academic community

While dissemination and communication beyond the global academic community is mainly embedded in complementary activities in the MAC program that will be the responsibility of VREF, the applicant may express some ideas of how the consortium intends to reach out to communicate research findings among broader circles beyond the academic community. Also describe the consortium’s plans for initiating and carrying out regular Research Forums and/or other activities to inform and engage researchers, stakeholders and others regarding relevant issues and findings from ongoing work within the consortium.

### **Plan for first publication**

Besides a full ARP-MAC proposal, the planning grant is also expected to result in a written report in the form of e.g. an academic “think piece” or a review of current knowledge and knowledge gaps within the area that is the focus of the ARP-MAC proposal. The proposal should present a plan for producing this report.

### **Budget estimate for preparing a full proposal**

Present an estimated budget for the planned activities to prepare a full proposal for an ARP-MAC. The budget should be presented according to the budget template

below, including distribution of costs, e.g. staff cost, overhead, other costs (such as travel, materials, etc) among participating researchers/universities and others. Please indicate in the budget if the work to prepare a full proposal will be partly funded (co-funded) by other sources than VREF.

NB. All overheads, VAT and similar costs must be included in the provisional budget.

<b>Please state the below funding and costs in SEK (1 SEK = approx.. 0,09 Euros or 0,10 USD)</b>				
Total project cost				
Requested VREF Funding				
Other expected project funding (if any)				
	Host Institution	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C, etc.
Distribution of project costs				

**Annex 1**

Summary CVs (max 3 pages) of main applicant, key researchers and other key participants in the proposed ARP-MAC.

**Annex 2**

**Relevant literature and key references (maximum three pages)**

List the most important publications of relevance to the proposed program, originating both from within your consortium and from other sources. In the case of scientific publications from your own consortium, externally reviewed publications from the last 3 years will be of main interest

