

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS

Research Grants 2025 for Exploratory Projects on “Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport”

VREF invites applications for research grants to support projects that will be implemented 2025 within the VREF program “Walking as a Mode of Transport”. This Call, which is the third one in the program, focuses on one of the core themes of the program: “Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport”.

Deadline for submission of applications is 26 August 2024, 12:00 GMT.

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 facilitate dissemination and implementation of research findings among both university researchers, practitioners, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders, see Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (www.vref.se).

1. The current Call – Exploratory Research Projects

In 2021 VREF launched an initiative for funding research and education on walking as a mode of transport (hereafter referred to as the “Walking program”). The objective of the Walking program is to strengthen international research and research capacity on walking as a mode of transport in ways that can contribute to more equitable access and sustainable mobility in urban transport. The Walking program also seeks to build a broad, international and interdisciplinarity of learning which encompasses both researchers and other stakeholders in this area, as well as to support and contribute to new knowledge among “next generation” scholars in walking research. Finally, the Walking program also aims to strengthen research capacity on walking as a mode of transport in the Global South. For more background to the Walking program, please see **Appendix 1**.

The current Call focuses on small research projects within one core theme of the Walking program, namely “Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport”. Projects will be carried out during a twelve-month period starting early 2025.

The background to the Call’s focus on this theme is the recognition that currently there is relatively little research on planning processes, politics, and power relations that shape governance and policy in the area of walking as a mode of transport. Dominant planning paradigms based on e.g. “predict and provide” or “travel-time reduction”, as well as existing political and institutional structures, may limit actors’ ability to allocate resources for walking. Other factors that may influence policy efforts in walking are interdependencies and interactions (or lack thereof) between priorities and policies on different levels of

governance. Here more research is needed on e.g. the ways in which current planning and policymaking processes influence the walkability of the build environment, as well as how new planning approaches for walking can be developed in inclusive processes that meet the needs of all users. It is also clear that there remain significant barriers to actual implementation of measures that could contribute to developing adequate pedestrian infrastructure in both the Global South and the Global North. For a more in-depth description of relevant issues within this theme, please see **Appendix 2**.

The Call is directed at exploratory research in these and other areas that are relevant to the core theme. This type of research can encompass both the exchange of in-depth knowledge that has already been accumulated over time but has not previously been placed in e.g. a comparative perspective, as well as new, exploratory work on emergent issues or approaches within the thematic area. Projects may also focus on the development of new theoretical perspectives or methodologies for understanding or supporting governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport. VREF particularly welcomes projects that encompass approaches and perspectives from different urban contexts in specific areas in the Global North and the Global South.

VREF foresees that successful research proposals will approach these issues through work that links perspectives and approaches from relevant disciplines or areas within e.g. engineering, social sciences, behavioral sciences, and the humanities. VREF also welcomes projects that engage university scholars who have not previously carried out transport-related research or who have not previously been part of VREF's research network. Project teams are also urged to engage international expertise to complement the core competence of the applicant team(s).

Projects which are funded by VREF are normally expected to result in at least one scientific publication concerning research results, as well as a summary of fundings and reflections on project experiences according to a VREF report template (which will be provided to all project leaders).

2. Criteria for projects

2a. Eligibility criteria

Proposals must fulfill the following eligibility criteria:

- The project leader must be based in an university or a research institute of academic standing¹;
- Projects must be directed at generating new knowledge that clearly addresses issues within the core theme of governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport.

The Walking program particularly welcomes project proposals with the following profiles:

- Projects that engage young scholars as members of the research team
- Projects that reflect gender balance in the work of the research team
- Project teams that consist of researchers from at least two different universities/research institutes (other partners, such as cities, organizations from civil society or NGOs may also be included).

¹ By "research institute of academic standing", VREF means that the institute conducts research of high scientific quality (e.g. resulting in peer-reviewed publications).

2b. VREF's review criteria

All proposals which fulfil the eligibility criteria will be evaluated with regard to the following criteria:

- Originality and potential of the project idea
- Scientific quality and scientific relevance
- Project design and methodology
- Capacity and organization of the proposing team
- Outcomes and outreach

3. Budget and timeframe

The total budget for this Call is 3 million Swedish crowns (SEK). VREF envisages supporting up to six projects, each with a grant up to 500,000 SEK. The project grant can be used to cover costs for salaries, travel, equipment, possible workshops/project meetings and other costs directly linked to project implementation.

Within the budget framework, the equivalent of 25,000 SEK should be allocated to cover costs of participation in VREF in-person workshops or similar events (travel and other expenses; work time) during the project period. The budget framework should also cover costs for working time for participation in up to two VREF online events (presentations/discussions of projects, approx. 2-3 working days).

The VREF grant is intended to support the project fully or partly, depending on the total volume of the project and the possibilities for co-funding. The VREF thus welcomes additional funding to projects from other sources.

The projects supported under this Call are expected to start in early 2025 and be finalized within 12 consecutive months from the starting date.

4. VREF's review and decision-making process: timeframe

All qualifying applications will be reviewed both by international reviewers and the VREF Scientific Council. The VREF Board will make a formal decision on project grants. VREF will inform all applicants on the outcome of the process in December 2024.

An application for a project grant must be submitted by e-mail to secretariat@vref.se and received no later than **26 August 2024, 12:00 GMT**.

VREF will confirm receipt of each application by e-mail to the main applicant.

Please see the next section "Application guidelines and instructions" for detailed instructions for how to apply. Applicants are welcome to contact VREF by e-mail: secretariat@vref.se for further information or for clarification regarding the requirements for applications.

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

5. Application guidelines and instructions

All applications for research funding within this Call must:

- be structured and delineated in accordance with the guidelines stated below;
- be written in English;
- be delivered according to the following technical specifications:
 - consist of a maximum of 10 single pages, excluding short CVs for key researchers in the project
 - be saved in PDF file format (of ready-to-print quality)
 - be laid out in European A4 paper format, with a minimum font size of 12 pt and margins of at least 25 mm;

Applications exceeding the specified maximum number of pages will be rejected. Detailed instructions on the content and format of the application are provided below.

5.1 Information to be given on the front page

(NB that the front page and appendixes are not included in the 10 pages' limit)

Project title

- The title should be concise and informative, preferably including keywords characterizing the content and direction of the project.
- **Name and contact details of main applicant**
The main applicant (project leader) must be an individual. Please note that only one person shall be the main applicant. State name, title and function, affiliation and all contact information.
- **Names and addresses of project team members**
List the names and affiliations of all project team members, plus contact information.
- **Executive Summary (max 300 words)**
The summary should consist of a brief outline of the problem, the objective(s) and general approach of the project, indicating the factors that give an added value of the project to existing work in the field.

5.2 Structure of the Application

The application should be structured around the following elements:

- **Background and motivation to the project (including theoretical framework and state- of-the-art research that informs the work)**
Provide a clear statement of the problem to be addressed, as well as the background, context and challenges of the issues to be addressed in the project.
- **Objectives**
Identify the research question(s) to be addressed, as well as the main objective(s) that will be achieved over the duration of the project.
- **Project design/methodology**
Describe the overall project design, methodology, working methods and detailed program of work. This section should also include descriptions of the main activities, foreseen deliverables and a time schedule.
- **Project participants and organization**
The application should give information on how the project will be organized, who will be responsible for different parts of the work, how these parts will be interlinked, and how the

project will be managed and coordinated. The VREF accepts that there may be further considerations and recruiting of staff for the project after the funding decision by VREF; however, all key participants in the project must be identified in the application.

- **Expected outcomes, deliverables and outreach including contributions to new knowledge**
Describe briefly the expected research results, outcomes and possible impact on research, education, policy and/or practice in the project area. This section may also include identifying new research issues and methodological approaches that should be further explored, as well as discussing possible future engagements with various stakeholders in exploring these issues.
- **Budget**
The application should include a detailed budget for the project, including distribution of costs (e.g. salaries, overhead, other costs (such as travel, specific equipment, material, Open Access costs, etc) among participating researchers/universities and others.
- NB all overheads, VAT and similar costs must be included in the budget. Please indicate in the budget if the project will be partly funded (co-funded) by other sources than VREF.
- VREF advises applicants to present the project budget according to the template below:

Please state the below funding and costs				
Total project cost				
Requested VREF Funding				
Other expected project funding (if any)				
<u>Distribution of project costs</u>	Host Institution	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C, etc.
Distribution of total project costs between the project partners				
Staff costs				
Other project costs				
University/research inst. overheads				

Appendices

In addition to the application's main document (max 10 pages), the following two appendices should be added:

++ Bibliography/References

++ Short CVs (maximum 3 pages) for core researchers in the project, including maximum 10 references

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS

Research Grants 2025 for Exploratory Projects on “Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport”

Appendix 1

VREF Program “Walking as a Mode of Transport” - background

In 2021 VREF launched an initiative for funding research and education on walking as a mode of transport (hereafter referred to as the “Walking program”). The objective of the Walking program is to strengthen international research and research capacity on walking as a mode of transport in ways that can contribute to more equitable access and sustainable mobility in urban transport. The Walking program also seeks to build a broad, international and interdisciplinarity of learning which encompasses both researchers and other stakeholders in this area, as well as to support and contribute to new knowledge among “next generation” scholars in walking research. Finally, an additional aim of the Walking program is to strengthen research capacity on walking as a mode of transport in the Global South.

An important point of departure for VREF’s initiative are the indications that despite its ubiquitous presence in everyday life (particularly in the Global South), walking as a mode of transport has not received extensive research or policy attention to date. In addition, while walking has been a research topic in certain academic contexts for many years, work on walking as a mode of transport has not yet developed into a cogent research direction, area or subject in itself.

The Walking program consists of research and other initiatives that focus on walking both in itself and as part of a travel chain that also includes other modes of transport, such as public transport. The program as a whole encompasses four core themes:

CORE THEME 1 Conceptualizing and critically appraising walking as a mode of transport

CORE THEME 2 Walking as transport in everyday urban life; equity issues

CORE THEME 3 Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport

CORE THEME 4 Services, tools and business models to facilitate walking as a mode of transport

The Walking program is implemented through three pillars of action:

1. Knowledge building
2. Community of learning
3. Next generation scholars

Through the “Knowledge building” pillar, VREF aims to provide resources for supporting initiatives and opportunities for creating new knowledge, particularly focusing on comparative work and international research collaboration among university scholars.

The Community of Learning pillar focuses on communication, exchange and learning activities among a network of researchers and other experts, framed around the findings of research, as well as strengthen the outreach and communication of research findings beyond academic channels.

The overall aim of the Next Generation Scholars pillar is to support and enhance the regrowth and renewal of academic capacity in the field through capacity building and career development for young scholars, as well as improved education on bachelor, master and Ph.D. levels .

The overall structure of the program is presented in the figure below, as represented by a combination of the four core themes and the three pillars of action.



The program is carried out in three phases of development 2023-2029. For more information on the Walking program see www.vref.se

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS

Research Grants 2025 for Exploratory Projects on “Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport”

Appendix 2

Research Focus of this Call

Governance, policy and urban planning for walking as a mode of transport

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of walking for achieving societal goals such as sustainable urban transport, walking remains largely invisible in planning processes, policy and investment plans both nationally and locally in many areas. There are several factors that contribute to this situation.

Among else, dominant planning paradigms based on e.g. “predict and provide”, “travel-time reduction” or “transit-oriented development” tend to overlook walking (Sagaris et. al., 2022), and in many areas planners lack evidence-based tools that are needed to support policy initiatives for walking (Tight, 2022). Little knowledge exists about the effectiveness of various measures, a deficiency which is compounded by problems of transferability and the need for policies that are suitable to the circumstances of a specific place and time (Tight, 2022). Finally, there is also a strong need for research on new approaches based on broad, inclusive collaborative planning processes that meet the needs of broad groups, reflect equitable distribution of interventions (ibid.) and prioritize walking as an important social and cultural phenomenon.

Further, as noted earlier, walking risks being “no one’s responsibility” – it is (in theory) an option available for almost everyone and it has no particular business sector or financial interest backing it. This situation risks resulting in walking receiving too little attention or interest from political organizations, groups within civic society, or NGOs. However, the landscape of relevant stakeholders for walking, including their interests and motivations (or lack thereof), is a topic deserving further attention and scrutiny.

It has also been pointed out (Allen, 2021) that even when walking is explicitly mentioned as “important” in planning documents, there remain significant barriers to actual implementation of measures and strategies (such as dedicated plans and tools for walking) that could contribute to developing adequate pedestrian infrastructure in urban areas, particularly in the Global South. Plans and strategies for “sustainable” or “active” mobility might often prioritize cycling or public transport before walking. Further, policies and strategies on a national level might be poorly suited for dealing with local circumstances, needs or goals with regard to walking, while local plans and strategies might not mirror or resonate with strategies, goals or metrics on the (inter-) national level.

Here it is important to identify and understand the interdependencies and interactions (or lack thereof) between priorities, planning processes and policies on different levels of governance, sometimes referred to as multi-level governance. Existing institutional structures may limit actors’ ability to allocate resources

for walking; it is also clear that governance is embedded in power relations that can influence planning and decision-making processes. At the same time, there is currently little research on dynamics, paradigms and processes that shape transport planning and politics for walking specifically, as well as how the “policy cycle” might play out for walking policy (Marsden and Reardon, 2017). Findings and “lessons learned” from other transport modes cannot automatically be translated to walking. There is also a need to broaden the understanding of policy for walking beyond the rational planning paradigm or the use of “best practice” (Lindelöw et al. 2016).

Examples of issues that could be examined within this theme include (but are not limited to):

- What power dimensions, stakeholders or barriers have significance for the institutional capacity of urban planners to develop and implement policy measures to explicitly promote walking in urban spaces? What groups of stakeholders (e.g. public, private, NGOs) are influential in shaping decisions, processes and outcomes regarding policies for walking? What are their respective goals, incentives and interests?
- What is the status of walking in urban planning and decision-making processes in specific urban areas, e.g. to what extent are guidelines and methods for walking planning actually applied and implemented and why/not why in specific contexts? To what extent is planning for walking integrated and coordinated with other policy areas, e.g. planning for public transport or public health? How are policies and strategies at different scales coordinated (or not)?
- How might new approaches, standards, and tools for urban planning and governance of walking be further developed in ways that are based on both broad, collaborative planning and equity considerations? Further, how can theories of policy (and policy processes) heighten our understanding of governance, policy and planning for walking as a mode of transport?

References

Allen, H. (2021). Walking and cycling gaps in transport research – an international overview. (available at www.vref.se)

Lindelöw, D., Koglin, T., & Svensson, Å. (2016). Pedestrian planning and the challenges of instrumental rationality in transport planning: emerging strategies in three Swedish municipalities. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 17(3), 405-420.

Marsden, G., & Reardon, L. (2017). Questions of governance: Rethinking the study of transportation policy. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 101, 238-251.

Sagaris, L., Costa-Roldan, I., Rimbaud, A., Jennings, G. (2022). Walking, the invisible transport mode? Research on Walking and Walkability today. (available at www.vref.se (pdf))

Tight, M. (2022). Walking as a mode of transport: Review for VREF. (available at www.vref.se (pdf))