

Informal and Shared Mobility

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

For establishing a VREF International Research Program “Informal and Shared Mobility in Low- and Middle-income Countries”

The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) invites researchers at universities (and research institutes of academic standing) to submit an Expression of Interest (Eoi) to establish and lead a VREF International Research Program in the area of informal and shared mobility in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The Expression of Interest will also serve as an application for a VREF planning grant for preparing a full proposal for the International Research Program (IRP).

The call is a two-step process. In the first step (2022), VREF aims at approving 3-5 planning grants for submitting a full proposal. In the second step (2023), applicants who have received a planning grant will be invited to submit a full proposal for an IRP. The envisaged outcome of the second step is a VREF decision in June 2023 to finance one IRP for a first 3,5-year period with up to 17 MSEK (approx. 1,5 MEUR/ 1,7 MUSD).

Expressions of Interest should be submitted to VREF no later than 1 October 2022.

The background and context of the Call is described below, followed by guidelines and instructions for submitting an Eoi.

VREF strongly recommends all applicants to read carefully [the “Road Map for Program Implementation”](#) for the new VREF Program “Informal and Shared Mobility in Low- and Middle-income Countries”

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 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).

The VREF program “Informal and Shared Mobility in Low- and Middle-income Countries”

VREF has recently launched a new initiative for funding research and education on informal and shared mobility in low- and middle-income countries, LMIC¹ (hereafter referred to as the “ISM program”). The primary objective of the ISM program is to contribute to strengthening equity and sustainability in urban transport by supporting research that creates new knowledge to better inform stakeholders to govern, design or develop informal and shared mobility, thereby contributing to better access to goods and services for all.

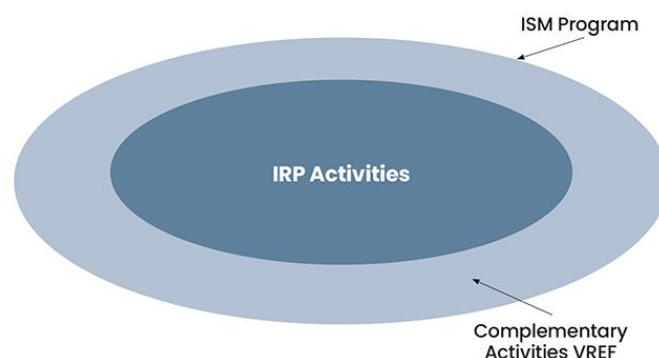
An important point of departure for the new program are indications from VREF’s preparatory work that there are substantial knowledge gaps in numerous areas related to informal and shared mobility. While there is increased research interest as shown in a growing number of published papers and other activities, the preparatory work indicates that there is no established international research network or any dedicated global event that could provide a focused exchange of knowledge and ideas in this area. While the ISM program will primarily support research on informal and shared mobility in LMICs, VREF will also seek to strengthen broader international collaboration by ensuring the integration of HIC based universities in program activities.

In summary, the program will be characterized by:

- A geographical focus on LMICs
- Comparative studies between different urban contexts
- Collaboration and exchange among researchers globally, in LMICs as well as in HICs
- Interdisciplinary approaches in knowledge building, education and learning

The ISM program will be carried out in three program phases consisting of an initial, preparatory phase 2021-2022, a first program implementation phase 2023-2026, and a potential second program implementation phase 2027-2029.

The implementation of the ISM program will be carried out through two complementary modes of operation: an **International Research Program (IRP)** that is a cohesive, multi-year research program, under which a selection of research projects will be implemented in multi-country collaboration, and complementary activities managed by VREF. See figure 1 below.



¹ This call for EoI is using the common concepts Low-, Middle- and High-Income Countries, based on the World Bank’s classification (LIC, MIC, HIC respectively). In some cases, such as in the VREF ISM program, low- and middle-income countries are grouped together as LMICs. The classification is updated each year on July 1. The latest classification can be found here: [World Bank Country and Lending Groups – World Bank Data Help Desk](#)

Figure 1 Complementary modes of operation in the ISM program

NB. This call for Expressions of Interest refers specifically to the International Research Program.

The ISM Program will follow the general VREF program structure (See figure 2 below), combining a thematic profile with three pillars of action: Knowledge Building, Community of Learning and Next Generation Scholars, which will be supported by continuous program coordination.

Structure of the ISM program

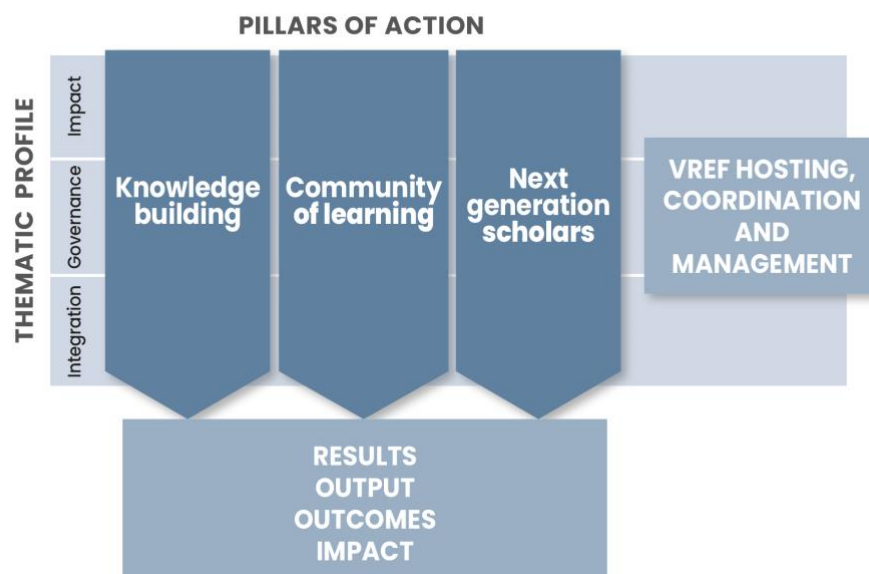


Figure 2 Generic Structure of VREF Programs.

The three pillars of action will complement each other to meet the objectives of the program.

The Knowledge Building pillar will focus on research and further knowledge creation through the International Research Program, research projects, special studies, research papers, think pieces, knowledge synthesis etc.

The Community of Learning (CoL) pillar will focus on communication, exchange and learning activities among a network of researchers and other experts, framed around the findings of research. This pillar will also strengthen the outreach and communication of research findings beyond academic channels and establish a community of interested individuals and organizations.

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.

What is a VREF International Research Program?

The International Research Program (IRP) will be at the center of the program, carrying out most of the research under the Knowledge Building pillar and allocated a major share of the ISM program budget. The IRP should be understood as **a cohesive, multi-year research program**, under which a **selection of research projects will be implemented in multi-country collaboration**.

The program will be **lead and coordinated by a university/research institute partner**, and projects will be implemented by the leading partner in close cooperation with at least 3-4 research partners in different countries and regions of the world. As the program will focus on LMICs, VREF strongly encourages a strong LMIC representation in the consortium.

The IRP will also contribute to strengthening scientific networks, exchange and collaboration within the ISM area through an annual ISM Research Forum, which will be organized in cooperation with VREF under the Community of Learning pillar. Further, the IRP will contribute to supporting the Next Generation Scholars pillar by involving Ph.D. students and early career researchers affiliated with the IRP partners in research projects and other academic capacity building activities.

The IRP should focus on conducting state-of-the-art research, facilitating, exchanges among researchers and other experts, and contributing to reducing gaps in knowledge related to ISM. To ensure the longevity of the research in a rapidly changing environment and enable international partners to support talented staff for a longer period, the IRP will run for a minimum of three years with the opportunity for extension, following an in-depth review, for three more years. This timeframe allows the consortium not only to establish cross-country and interdisciplinary research, but also the potential option to build a wider network over time, e.g., through establishing an annual Research Forum as well as identifying additional associated partners (see also below).

The research should follow the thematic profile of the ISM as described in appendix 1, in particular by strengthening research around informal and shared mobility in LMICs.

VREF will allocate a major share of the IRP grant to research institutions in LMICs. At the same time, one of the goals of VREF is to support global activities, and therefore researchers in HIC are also encouraged to participate. The opportunity for global collaboration between institutions in HICs and LMICs will foster a better understanding of different situations as well as enable joint learning about the different dimensions, conditions and factors influencing informal and shared mobility.

Activities carried out by the IRP include, but are not limited to:

- Knowledge building: research projects, comparative research, case studies, peer reviewed papers, etc.
- Community of learning: ISM Research Forum (in cooperation with VREF), seminars, webinars, and other scientific meetings
- Next generation scholars: Academic capacity building embedded in IRP activities, e.g. engaging Ph.D. students and early career researchers in research

The IRP is expected, over time, to assume a leading role in international research on informal and shared mobility in LMICs, becoming a "go-to-place" for scientific references and information on topics of high relevance to practice and policymaking in the area. Therefore, close interaction with non-university stakeholders is welcomed.

It is envisaged that the IRP, through state-of-the-art research and growing strong recognition, should enable the partners to position themselves 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, recognition, and impact.

The IRP will operate without any scientific steering from VREF. However, the IRP will be part of the broader ISM program and is expected to consult VREF in matters of strategic interest.

The annual funding for a fully operational IRP will normally be in the order of SEK 5 million (approximately EUR 450, 000 or USD 500,000), however it is recommended to consider a start-up phase at lower cost level before the program is fully operational. The total funding of the IRP over the first program period (2023–2026) will not exceed SEK 17 million (approx. EUR 1,5 million or USD 1,7 million). The IRP consortium should also keep a minimum of 15% of the annual IRP budget flexible to respond to upcoming ideas and initiatives either within the consortium or through external potential new associated partners. The major part of the VREF funding to the IRP will be allocated to the Knowledge Building pillar.

VREF particularly encourages programs seeking to

- a) Have a geographical focus on LMICs
- b) Carry out comparative studies between different contexts
- c) Facilitate collaboration and exchange among researchers globally, in LMIC as well as in HIC
- d) Prioritize interdisciplinary approaches in knowledge building, education and learning
- e) Combine the three pillars of action in the overall ISM program: Knowledge building – Community of learning – Next generation scholars
- f) Interact with a wider range of stakeholders to ensure broad uptake of research findings

What is a VREF Planning grant?

The planning grant is intended to facilitate the preparation and production of the full IRP proposal. The amount of the grant will be maximum SEK 200,000 (approximately EUR 18k/USD 20k). The planning grant can be either used solely by the lead applicant or distributed among the consortium partners.

Who can apply?

A VREF International Research Program will typically be established as a consortium of reputable, well-established research groups/researchers acting in concert, addressing central issues within the framework of the ISM program. VREF particularly encourages universities/research institutes with an established track record in the research field, but also welcomes emerging research groups in the area to take part in the consortium. It is foreseen that the IRP consortium will primarily be a partnership between 3–5 universities/research institutes. The consortium can also include associated partners such as cities, businesses, and not-for-profit- and non-governmental organizations, to support the uptake of research findings and thereby scale the impact.

The EoI should be submitted by an individual researcher (here called main applicant, see guidelines below), who is representing the whole consortium. For legal reasons, VREF grantees must be universities or research institutes of academic standing. 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 and received **no later than 1 October 2022**.

The Eol must

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

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

Please e-mail secretariat@vref.se for further information on the call for Eols or for clarification regarding the requirements for application.

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 2022. A maximum of five planning grants will be approved by the VREF board in December 2022. VREF will inform all applicants on the outcome of the process before **22 December 2022**.

Consortia that have been awarded planning grants will be invited to submit a full proposal for an IRP in April 2023. The full proposal will be reviewed both by international external reviewers and the VREF Scientific Council. In June 2023, the VREF board will make a formal decision to approve one IRP to become operational in August/September 2023.

Further information on VREF is available on the VREF web site at www.vref.se

Guidelines for the Expression of Interest (Eol)

Detailed guidelines on drafting the Eol 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 Eol 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 Eol are referred to as *consortium partners*. Please note that the main applicant is an individual, while consortium partners should be universities, represented in the Eol by a contact person.

----- Page 1 -----

Front page

Title of the proposed IRP

The title should be concise and informative, preferably including keywords characterising the IRP.

Main applicant

The main applicant shall be a person, not an organisation. Please note that only one person shall be the main applicant. To ensure prompt communication, it is important to state

- (i) the name of the applicant;
- (ii) the applicant's university affiliation;
- (iii) the 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. The host institution can come from an HIC as well an LMIC. Please state:

- (i) the full name of the university, and the department (if applicable)
- (ii) the name and contact details (e-mail address, post address and telephone number) of a contact person for the university (for administrative purposes)

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, policy and practical background, as well as current activities, will be presented later in the proposal).

----- Page 2 -----

Summary

This should consist of a brief outline of the problems, challenges and opportunities, and the objective(s) and general approach of the IRP, indicating the factors that give the program a competitive edge.

----- Page 3 -----

Background

This should provide a summary of your view of

- (i) the most important problems, challenges and opportunities for ISM that can be served by knowledge building and learning;
- (ii) current knowledge (or the absence thereof) relating to the program area, and the work of the main international research teams active in the area.
- (iii) current status of policy and practice in the area, with particular reference to aspects of interest in the context of the VREF initiative.

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Potential and vision of the IRP

Describe your long-term vision, objectives/goals, thematic profile and potential contributions and impact of the proposed IRP.

Vision

Formulate a long-term vision for the IRP in a few sentences.

Objectives/goals

List the main objective(s)/goal(s) that can be achieved over the first (3-3,5-years) duration period of the IRP.

Thematic profile of the IRP

Describe the thematic profile and priorities you envisage for the proposed IRP, within the overall thematic framework of the VREF ISM Program: Impact – Governance – Integration. Further topics beyond the thematic framework will be accepted, but would require additional justification (see appendix 1).

Contributions and impact

Describe potential contributions of the proposed IRP to academic research, knowledge building, education and academic capacity building, and potential to inform and have an impact in policy and practice.

----- Page 5 and 6 -----

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 aspects you have considered important. The contributions and roles of the various consortium partners, as well as the interaction envisaged between them as part of the program, should also be described. Given that the majority of the allocation will be provided to LMICs, it is encouraged to consider to have more than one partner from an LMIC.

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

This should include a summary of the main applicant's scientific background and other achievements/experience relevant to the success of the proposed research. Current activities will be of particular interest. A summary CV should also be provided in an annex.

Backgrounds and current activities of consortium partners

A brief summary of the scientific backgrounds and other achievements/experience of the partners in the consortium, as considered relevant to the success of the proposed research, should be provided under this heading.

Cooperation beyond the consortium

Describe the consortium partner's most important cooperation and interaction beyond the consortium, and in particular partner's roles and positions in relation to non-academic organisations and activities in the area of ISM. This could include local as well as national and international contexts.

Factors giving the project a competitive edge

Factors that give the IRP a competitive edge in the international arena should be listed here. Although this overlaps partly with *the information given above in this section*, other factors, such as the actual problem formulation, access to unique model systems and/or methods for research purposes, partners' experience and existing networks, may also be of relevance.

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Approaches and methodologies in the implementation of the IRP

Scientific and methodological profile and approach

Describe the scientific and methodological profile and approach in the proposed IRP. Ensure that at least part of your research plan has a comparative element with research in multiple countries. It can include comparative research between HIC and LMICs countries including shared mobility.

Educational aspects and content

It is envisaged that the IRP also has direct connections to university education as a means of disseminating new scientific findings. Educational activities include courses, seminars, workshops and graduate student training. Describe the current connections between research and education at the host institution as well as the consortium partners, and how the key researchers in the IRP are engaged in university education. Further, describe your ideas for making IRP findings useful in educational activities.

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 ISM program initiated under the responsibility of VREF, the applicant may express some ideas of how they intend to reach out to broader circles beyond the academic community.

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Budget estimate for preparing a full proposal

Present an estimated budget for the activities to prepare a full proposal for the IRP. The budget should be presented according to the below budget template, including distribution of costs, e.g. staff cost, overhead, other costs (such as travel, material, 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.

Please state the below funding and costs in SEK (1SEK = approx.. 0,09 Euros or 0,10 USD)				
Total project cost				
Requested VREF funding				
Other expected project funding (if any)				
Distribution of project costs	Host institution	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C, etc
Staff costs				
Other project costs				
University/research institute overheads				
Total project cost per partner				

Annex 1

Summary CVs of main applicant and contact persons at consortium partners

Annex 2

Relevant literature and key references (maximum three pages)

List the most important publications of relevance to the proposed project, originating both from 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.

Appendix 1

Summary of the thematic profile of the ISM program

In the following, a general thematic profile for the ISM program is presented, whilst avoiding being too prescriptive and detailed. Therefore, the thematic areas are purposefully wide and open to interpretation. Nevertheless, they build on the preparatory studies as well as other activities such as expert workshops and interviews.

There was a strong commonality among the preparatory studies, which could be summarized into three broad thematic areas:

- Impact;
- Governance;
- Integration.

While the three thematic areas are very broad, certain aspects are seen as crucial and therefore highlighted in the following paragraphs:

1) IMPACT

All studies highlighted the importance of improving understanding of the impact of shared mobility as well as informal transport in terms of access, equity, economic, environmental aspects. While there is some research on the social, economic and environmental impact of shared mobility systems in HIC, this draws a rather incoherent picture of the current services from a sustainability perspective. There is also a huge gap in the understanding of the impacts of the current informal and shared mobility services in LMICs. A key aspect highlighted in all studies is the need for more research on equity. Often informal and shared mobility services do not provide access to areas where the most deprived people live. Also, the environmental and economic impacts are unknown, so research could help to improve the impact of services in the future.

2) GOVERNANCE

Under the term of governance, all authors highlighted the lack of knowledge when it comes to the role of policy to manage, regulate and integrate the service. This is of particular relevance to the uncertain impact of the current services. The thematic area of governance includes research on impacts of regulation (e.g., pricing, environmental and safety standards). In many places there is a tendency to abandon services while establishing new services like BRT. Research could help to gain a better understanding of the impact of the transformation of urban mobility services.

3) INTEGRATION

Shared mobility and informal transport are a key but currently mostly disconnected part of the urban transport system around the world. Research defining the potential role and impact of shared mobility and informal transport services could help to shape better physical as well as digital integration such as: better integration of last-mile options; feeder services to mass transport; fare integration; and digital integration in app-based offers, amongst others, could enable a better service in cities.

The research focus on **“Impact, Governance and Integration”** will cover the most important challenges the system is facing in becoming more equitable and sustainable. Certain research themes, such as “business models”, can play a key role as a cross-cutting theme. For example, the trend of large-scale international investment and the development of super-apps would

benefit from research into the impact of such models, as well as the way to regulate such finance as well as how this might contribute to strengthen the integration of mobility services. In addition, the themes are purposefully very broadly defined to ensure some guidance, but at the same time provide enough flexibility for the researchers to define the scope of the research. These identified themes **should not per se exclude other topics suggested by researchers** in the next phase, but would require additional justification for the need and its applicable knowledge to improve current practice.

While technology is a crucial factor for the mobility services, the focus of future research supported by the ISM Program, will not be of direct technical or technology development nature. The Program will not provide any funding for entrepreneurial activities outside academia. The Program will also not support research for new applications or services. Nevertheless, it will encourage looking into the impact of such technology and services, including topics such as the impact of a digital divide in LMICs.