CoARA Action Plan 2022-2027

1. Membership

The 31st October 2022 the CEO of the Knowledge Foundation (KKS) Eva Schelin signed the CoARA agreement. Before that the DORA agreement was signed June 2nd 2022.

2. Purpose and objective

The Knowledge Foundation's CoARA-related work will be based on a long-term national as well as international exchange of knowledge and practices. The overarching goal is to contribute to a change in research culture and reforming the assessment of research and researchers. The short-term aim of the KKS is to implement the CoARA principles in the Foundations processes where it is motivated, and continuously evaluate the effects.

This action plan focus mainly on work acitivities during year 2023. The continuing development work after 2023 and beyond will be planned gradually following the development within the CoARA coalition and in dialogue with its' stakeholders.

For question about this report and CoARA related activities at the Knowledge Foundation: yvonne.fors@kks.se or +46(0)737128158

3. KKS's contribution and prerequisites

Since 1994, the Knowledge Foundation is funding research and higher education (second or third cycle) at Sweden's colleges and newer universities, as it takes place in collaboration with the business sector. All projects that are funded within our programmes must be designed and implemented in close collaboration between academia and business sector, through what we call "co-production".

With 30 years of experience, we have a large portfolio of projects carried out in cooperation between academia and the business sector. These might serve as inspiring examples for best practice and possibly also when elaborating on formulating new qualitative and quantitative indicators for public outreach or societal impact.

An advantage of being a relatively small foundation is the possibility of being more agile. On the other hand, we are rather few in numbers and without specific governmental guidelines or appropriations directions we need to pay extra attention to the development in the surrounding "eco-system". This also means that our goals must be realistic and calibrated to our resources. However, it also strongly motivates our active participation in CoARA as well as other networks

and fora for sharing knowledge and experiences about for example Open Science and other related topics.

Inspired by the recommendation from CoARA to be open and transparent in the mutual sharing of experiences we summarized our activities throughout the year that are related to our CoARA commitment below.

The CoARA on-line *Action Plan Guidelines* invites the signatories to share reflections and focus on the "how" in their approach and initiatives during the first year. Encouraged by this, our ambition was to put together an unpretentious report with a strong focus on our first steps to approach the CoARA commitments, or our view on "the how". This action plan will therefore not follow the standards of an official document but may hopefully serve as an inspiration for other organisations.

3.1 Deliverables 2023: A short list of tasks

The aim of the KKS is to implement the CoARA principles in the Foundations processes and activities, with primary focus on broadened view of research quality and academic merits.

The initial implementation of the CoARA principles started on an internal communication level resulting in the following CoARA related activities.

List of activities:

Activity	Month
Presentations of the CoARA principles and commitment for the KKS management team before the signing.	October 2022
Intermittently presentations of CoARA and our commitments for the KKS staff	Nov 2022– April 2023
Critical internal review of all the programmes calls and written information on the KKS web site.	Feb-March 2023
Critical internal review of appendices of requested information from applicants.	March 2023
Summarizing results and implementation of positive examples from the review to calls.	April-May 2023
Survey of criteria for academic qualification and gender equality used by other funders	May-June 2023
Conference: Open Science-from policy to practice, Swedish National Library	16-17 May 2023
Reformulating criteria for academic qualifications/merits. New instructions for the Qualifications appendices (instructions for CV)	June -Sept 2023
Formulating two new criteria for gender equality under overarching criteria Scientific quality and Implementation	June-Sept 2023
The implementation of the new criteria and new instructions were carried out in discussion with the program managers.	Aug 2023
Presentation of new criteria and instructions for the Qualifications appendices (CV merits) at the KKS annual launching of programs for funding.	6 Sept 2023
More detailed instructions and motivation for the new criteria launched on the KKS web site. Updated information about CoARA commitment on web site.	6 Sept 2023
Updated written instructions to peers and assessment panels.	6 Sept 2023

Evaluate the effects and how the new criteria and instructions have been understood by the applicants and handled by peers and assessors.	April 2024
National meetings and communication about CoARA with Swedish signatures and others.	Jan, April, Dec 2023
Active participation in CoARA General assembly meeting and Working Group Reforming Research Assessment, WP 0, 1, 2 (see below)	2023-2024
An internal workshop with the KKS programme managers: How to address the commitments – planning for next cycle 2024.	May 2024
Overview of external communication when launching the funding programs	June 2024

4. Activities – how we started

4.1 Doing some housekeeping

The KKS signed the CoARA commitment in November 2022. A presentation that outlined the aim and scope of the CoARA was presented for the management team, whereafter the CEO made the decision of signing the agreement.

The secretariat was thereafter informed about the decision and the agreement. Since then, several information sessions and discussions meetings about the CoARA have been performed.

The internal CoARA implementation work started out with some "housekeeping shores". As a start an **general overview** was carried out of material for external communication. The first main goal was to identify terminologies that could be considered "CoARA-unfriendly" and replace them with a more accurate or inclusive expressions. Only a few changes were considered necessary. Since the CoARA work is a stepwise learning process, similar overviews are supposed to be done at least annually and in time for launching of the funding programs.

4.2 Reviewing calls, criteria and application requirements

The KKS regular **programme calls** for funding, including written instructions on the web concerning applying for funding were also subjects for extra scrutiny. The Foundation's calls are open to all scientific and artistic research areas, and therefore we are trying to keep our vocabulary research area neutral, which may explain why few changes were made.

Since the Foundation is funding research and higher education activities, when it takes place in collaboration with the business sector, a major part of the projects applying for fundings tend to be societal impact driven and co-funded by the business sector.

According to our experiences, the capacity of the business sector[1] to co-fund projects together with the higher education institutions often seem to be more easily facilitated for companies within the engineer, medicine, and technical sectors.

Apart from the programme calls, also the application forms, instructions to applicants and the information and details requested (required appendices) from applicants were all carefully reviewed.

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[1] From our statues as a foundation, our definition of "business sector" usually include only companies in the private business sector. For further information, see www.kks.se

4.3. New and updated criteria –start with the low hanging fruits

By studying the DORA's *Practical Guide for research evaluators*[2] we identified two "low hanging fruits" (tip number three and four in the DORA Practical Guide) ideally to kick-start the internal work with. This led to updates of both our assessment criteria and the required information from applicants, which were officially presented at the KKS annual launching of the funding programs in September 2023.

Gender equality as quality criteria

As for a Swedish institution our organization was late on including gender equality dimensions in our criteria and assessment. This was a longtime planned addition and update of the KKS criteria, however a task longtime overdue and we took the opportunity to catch up. The **new criteria concerning gender and sex** is applied in two dimensions; project design/content[3] and project organisation[6].

Gender equality perspective in the design and content of projects

A gender equality perspective in the design and content of projects means that gender and sex – when relevant – are parts of the project's design and implementation. This perspective is systematically and actively maintained throughout the project, without necessarily being the main focus of the project. In the application, the project manager must therefore provide an appropriate account for whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant in the design and content of the specific project, and if so, in what way this is included. The gender equality perspective is highlighted under the assessment criterion *Scientific quality*.

Consequently, a new question was formulated to the international peer reviewers reading: *To what extent is there an adequate description of whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant in the project? If considered relevant, are the perspectives appropriately included in the project design and content?*

Gender equality perspective in the project organisation

This means that all participating individuals in the project – both from academia as well as from the business sector and other partners – and their respective level of responsibility and influence in the project, must be as evenly distributed as possible between women and men, based on the prerequisites of the subject area. In the application the project manager must account for how the balance between participating women and men and their respective roles in the project, has been considered in the selection and composition of the project group. This gender equality perspective is highlighted under the assessment criterion *Implementation*.

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[2] https://sfdora.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Responsible-research-assessment-DORA-FNR-1pager.pdf

Table 1. Assessment criteria for the KKS programme Synergi

Strong research and education environment
- To what extent is the project expected to contribute to the short and long-term development of the environment.
- To what extent is there a clear description of the current position for the research and education environment?
- To what extent is there an adequate ambition for the development of the environment?

Scientific quality
- How is the Synergi core question contributing to development within relevant research front?
- How well-defined is the scientific question (Synergi core question), and how well does the subprojects contribute to the Synergi core question?
- How clear and realistic are the scientific objectives?
- How clear and relevant are the scientific methods?
- *[3]To what extent is there an adequate description of whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant in the project? If considered relevant, are the perspectives appropriately included in the project design and content?*
- To what degree are the subprojects, as well as the overarching Synergi work, expected to generate results of high academic or artistic quality (e.g. scientific publications or documented artistic research)?
- *[4]Is the level of scientific expertise of the project group adequate to address the scientific questions?*

Benefits to the business partners
- How relevant is the core question to meet the needs of the participating business partners?
- To what extent is the overall project expected to contribute to the development of the participating business partners?

Implementation
Synergi
- How clear is the Synergi project plan in relation to the project objective?
- How realistic is the project plan in relation to available resources?
- *[5]How well on an aggregated level are the merits and experiences of the project group fulfilling the requirements for an adequate project implementation?*
- *[6]To what extent is there an adequate description of how gender equality aspects have been considered in the composition of the project group?*

Per subproject
- To what extent are each subproject clearly formulated in order to address the core question in a sufficient and necessary way?
- How well planned and organized is the work of the subprojects, with particular focus on the expected contribution of each subproject?

Assessment criteria of the Knowledge Foundation

The Knowledge Foundation evaluation process focus on the following assessment criteria, which are applied in all KKS programmes for funding:

- Strong research and educational environment
- Scientific/artistic quality
- Benefits for business partners
- Implementation

In turn, the four criteria headings have sub-criteria for each programme, which share basic similarities but with few alterations to match the aim and objective of each programme. As an example, the full assessment criteria for the programme Synergi are presented in Table 1.

4.4 Broadened review of academic merits

Further, two sub-criteria[4,5] were updated to address a broadened view of academic merits, as a step towards more advanced assessment of researchers. As for the main criteria *Scientific quality* and *Implementation* relatively small updates were required. The sub-criteria *Scientific quality* f*: Is the level of scientific expertise of the **project group adequate** to address the scientific questions*. The focus of this criteria is altered to focus more on the **merits on group level**, rather than focus on the individual scientist. Also, the criteria highlight whether the same merits combined are **adequate** for the intended projects, instead of a strong focus on individual metrics, h-index etc.

Consequently, a question to the international peer reviewers was slightly reformulated: *How well is the scientific expertise of the project group aligned with the research agenda?*

However, the major change concerned the formulation of instructions for *Appendix 3: Qualifications* (requested merits from the applicants). Up to this point the KKS did not provide the applicants with any instructions for composing their CV. The intention was that the applicants themselves should choose the merits they considered most relevant for project for which fundings were applied. Since most of the calls from the Knowledge foundation requires cooperation and co-funding from the business sector, business relevant merits are generally expected, but this has otherwise been implicit.

Having the statement from CoARA in mind, that the conduct and instructions of the funders tend to become normative for the research community, the KKS from the autumn 2023 require that the applicants present a *selection* of following headings in their list of qualifications (See Table 2. For more detailed instructions, go to www.kks.se).

To make the applicants focus on the most relevant merits for the project, the individual CV submitted is to be **maximum one A4 sheet**. Other than unload the reviewers, it makes it easier to compare qualifications when designed in similar layout. The limitation was also made to even out the competition between young career and senior scientist by forcing them to focus on the **most relevant outputs**. This also had a gender dimension since women are tending to do more "academic housekeeping activities" than their male colleagues.

Table 2. Instructions for CV

> **Appendix 3. Qualifications** (may not exceed 1 page per person)
> To be uploaded under Attachment in accordance with the call and in the same order as stated in the call.
>
> Attach CVs for individuals crucial for the implementation of the project. Include merits *of relevance* in relation to the project using the following selection of headings[7]:
>
> - **Degrees**
> - **Positions**
> - **Research output:** select at most ten (10) research results/outputs. In addition to scientific publications, this could be for example: documented artistic merits, instrumental or product development, data set, software, patent, process or policy contributions, and implementation of research results.
> - **Teaching:** the full diversity of academic teaching, training and supervision activities, education development including open teaching resources.
> - **Cooperation:** with academia, business and other societal actors including communication efforts
> - **Leadership:** project management, activity development, assessment assignments, center management, department assignments, etc.
>
> Please describe earlier experiences of project management or project coordination of suggested project manager."

4.5 Instruction to peers and assessors

The KKS overall assessment cycle includes international peer reviewers (only research applications), individual assessments and panel assessments. Information material has been developed to inform peer reviewers and assessment panels that the KKS has signed the CoARA, and how this commitment has influenced our new criteria. In all programs, the individual assessments are proceeded by a pre-meeting with the panels to provide guiding to the assessment procedure. This year pre-meetings will include an update on the new criteria and information about broadening view on merits. The outcome of the 2023 call cycle is to be evaluated with focus on how both the applicants and the panels were addressing the new criteria and guidelines.

5. Swedish National Chapter

The KKS support the Swedish National Chapter submitted by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) and agree to participate in the work tasks of that is arranged within that national framework.

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[7] The instruction in further detail at www.kks.se: "*In addition to degrees, positions and publications, other academic merits and skills to the project should be presented. This opens for a more equivalent assessment of applications and merits within the different programs. Therefore, make a selection of the merits with most relevance for the intended project and programme*."

6. Participation in CoARA Work Group

The Knowledge Foundation are members of the CoARA Working Group: *Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals*. The Foundation is active participants in the Work Packages WP 0; WP1, WP 2 (also co-chair) and WP 3.

- **WP 0: Bibliographic analysis and horizon scanning**
- **WP 1.1: Criteria for the selection of research projects**
- **WP 1.2: Processes for the selection of research projects**
- **WP 2: Selection and guidance to reviewers on responsible research assessment practices**
- **WP3: Information requested from applicants**

The mutual work and progress of these working packages can be followed at the CoARA website: Working Groups - CoARA

7. CoARA-related activities 2024-2027

Continued learning and sharing

- The internal regular evaluations on the call cycle 2023 and application assessment will focus on how the new criteria and Qualification guidelines were met by the higher education institutions, the applicants as well as the peer reviewers and assessment panels. There are always room for improvements.
- Continued work to make our assessment process more transparent. This will mainly be presented at our web site where we in further details explain our internal processes, such as tools and instructions to the assessors and peers. By explaining how the application appendices and its' content are used as basis for assessment, this will hopefully make our motivations for requesting that material more comprehensible for the applicants.
- We have for many years had an outspoken ambition to achieve more balanced assessment panels (in terms of gender, nationality, affiliation, age, etc.) and the pool of peer reviewers we engage. However, our ambition is to make this work efforts more systematic and traceable.
- Workshops with all KKS' programme managers to break down and prioritize among the ten CoARA commitments to evaluate how the KKS evaluation processes can be improved further in upcoming call cycles.
- Any changes in upcoming assessment procedures will be communicated with the higher education institutions, CoARA and national stakeholders.
- One theme close to heart is for example how the Foundation can use our extensive experience of research in co-production and make that material accessible and useful for stakeholders to inspire from. Our long-term ambition is to contribute to the development of qualitative and quantitative indicators for co-operation/collaboration to be recognized and eligible as relevant research outputs. We believe that this may lead to a broadening view on research quality.
- Continued meetings and networking on national level with other Swedish CoARA signatories and supporter of the Swedish National Chapter. Through these networks, it has recently come to our attention that several Swedish higher education institutions at the moment are scrutinizing their Higher Education Ordinance and the appointments procedure of applicant. This is one example of development on national level that KKS

will follow this closely, since this might have consequences for some of our programmes, mainly Rekryteringar and Prospekt, which concerns financing of academic recruitments.

- Continued participation in the COARA working group *Improving assessment*.
- Following the development within the sector through the different international and national CoARA networks.