

# One grant system for all associations



HELSINGBORG

**mucf**

Swedish Agency for  
Youth and Civil Society

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## Foreword

All Swedish municipalities currently work with civil society issues and attempt to strengthen the foundations of civil society organisations in various ways. This is achieved through cooperation, dialogue, advice and support, grants, support in terms of knowledge and more. This publication is part of the work to promote cooperation between public actors and civil society and is intended to serve as inspiration and knowledge support. It describes how Ekerö Municipality has worked with civil society and how they have cooperated locally.

The aim of the publication is to enable civil society organisations to expand their knowledge of how municipalities support and cooperate with civil society. At the same time, the story can inspire other public actors to strengthen their cooperation with civil society.

Multi-level cooperation is needed to meet society's challenges, and best practice and lessons learned are presented here to inspire more people to view cooperation with civil society organisations as an opportunity to come up with creative solutions to future challenges. Civil society organisations also need support to help them carry out and develop their core activities. For example, this may involve reducing the administrative burden; simplifying the conditions for funding; simplifying and clarifying opportunities for support and information; or access to premises.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) is responsible for promoting the achievement of the objectives of civil society policy by developing, collecting and disseminating knowledge. Furthermore, we are tasked with promoting cooperation between public actors and civil society and developing knowledge support for civil society.

The publication was produced by Development Manager Omar Nur of the Knowledge Support Department.

**Lena Nyberg, Director General**

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society

# Introduction

This publication is part of a series of publications and has been produced to illustrate different examples of relationships between municipalities and civil society organisations. Six municipalities in Sweden have been asked to describe how they have worked with civil society issues and how they have supported and cooperated with civil society. Sweden has a civil society policy. Through this policy, the government wishes to highlight the major importance of civil society, develop and clarify the relationship between the state and civil society, and take a comprehensive approach to general issues concerning civil society and its conditions. The aim of civil society policy is to make it easier for civil society to continue playing a key role in democracy – involving people and contributing to the development of society and to welfare. This is to take place in dialogue with civil society organisations.

Civil society consists of a formalised part and a non-formalised part. Within the formalised part of civil society, there are a number of different organisational forms, the most common being non-profit associations, registered faith communities, foundations, economic associations, limited liability companies with a special limitation on dividends, and community and joint ownership associations.

Municipalities emphasise the importance of cooperating with civil society organisations to meet current societal challenges and those they envisage in the future. Improving the conditions of civil society requires a better understanding of its needs and conditions. The publications include several examples that aim to meet civil society's need for knowledge in different ways. It should be possible to use them as inspiration for development and cooperation – both within civil society and between civil society and other sectors of society.

There seems to be a great deal of variation between municipalities on issues of supporting and cooperating with civil society. Although differences may exist between municipalities, there is a clear interest in working more on these issues. There are many different initiatives taken by municipalities that seek to work with civil society to better deliver social benefits. This publication focuses on the City of Helsingborg, but you can also read more about the work of the other municipalities in our series.

## **Borås**

An agreement led to deeper partnership

## **Ekerö**

From global disaster to local cooperation model

## **Linköping**

Gender equality in sport leads to successful development

## **Lund**

Creative culture grants and structuring networks

## **Helsingborg**

One grant system for all associations

## **Jönköping**

The benefits of a well-organised civil society



## Helsingborg: One grant system for all associations

Helsingborg has a wide range of associations with many different actors and many different types of organisations, in terms of both size and type of activity. The local agreement between the associations and the City of Helsingborg is a very important tool for strengthening the ties between the two. But the venues and spaces created by the agreement have highlighted, among other things, the need for simplified systems and procedures when associations apply for financial support.



## The plethora of grants demonstrated the need for simplified systems and procedures

For most associations and organisations, public grants and financial support are crucial to their existence and development. In surveys and dialogues, voices from civil society both locally and nationally have expressed the need for more easily accessible information on what grants are available and how to apply for them.

The City of Helsingborg annually pays out around SEK 40 million in financial support to associations in Helsingborg. The support is mainly approved and administered by five of the city's nine committees (the leisure committee, the cultural committee, the labour market committee, the health and social care committee and the social committee), but other committees, such as the urban planning committee and the environmental committee, also cooperate with associations, which means that the associations receive compensation for certain tasks performed.

In addition to the five committees that distribute financial support in the form of operating grants or subsidies, the school and leisure committee and the health and social care committee also provide start-up grants for newly established associations. The social committee's development grant may also be seen as a form of start-up grant, and the culture committee awards a similar grant called Fast Cash, which can be targeted at more temporary initiatives.

## Important to preserve the distinctive features of associations

Depending on the area of activity of the committees, they have different target groups for the support. It is important to preserve different distinctive features, but often an association has mixed activities, whether cultural, social or sporting. For example, an immigrants' association may carry out both cultural activities and activities aimed at reducing social isolation.

Associations also need to be able to work on a longer-term basis, which means they need more stable rules and conditions, as well as greater opportunities to apply for support for several years at a time, especially if they work on projects that last for an extended period of time. For an association, applying for support from different committees can also be a major administrative burden. Associations will be able to see what support is available to them and they will not need to know which committee distributes which support.

## The association coordinator has an important role

The first point in the local agreement's action plan was that the City of Helsingborg would appoint an association coordinator. The city's volunteer coordinator was then assigned the function of association coordinator, with the aim of working in an advisory capacity for associations, including on general issues of cooperation with the city and general issues of financial support, as well as working for increased inter-departmental cooperation with civil society.

The association coordinators are part of the city management department and play a general, bridging role within the city in terms of citizens' involvement and cooperation with civil society.

The coordinators are also operationally responsible for the work on the local agreement signed with individual associations. The agreement is very important where cooperation with associations is concerned, as it gives associations joint power to influence the city's work for civil society. Focus areas within the agreement are opportunities for influence and opportunities for dialogue with the city and within civil society, including through an annual conference and thematic dialogue formats.

The agreement creates new spaces and arenas for cooperation, as activities and associations that do not normally work with each other are given opportunities to meet. The work under the agreement is based on an action plan structured around the six principles of autonomy and independence, dialogue, quality, sustainability, openness and transparency, and diversity. A steering group consisting of representatives of both associations and the City of Helsingborg decides on the work on the action plan.

### Coordination of voluntary activities

The association coordinators are also tasked with working with the city's voluntary activities, which provides a logical link to residents' opportunities for involvement within the city and in cooperation with civil society. Changing behaviour in relation to how people choose to get involved affects the opportunities and conditions for non-profit efforts.

The associations experience difficulties in filling their need for non-profit committed people on the board, at the same time there are many who want to get involved through volunteer efforts. This leads to a kind of mismatch between willingness to involve and ability to involve. By also working with the city's voluntary activities, association coordinators can reduce the gap between the associations' need for non-profit involvement and people's willingness to get involved.

### One way in – many ways out

The City of Helsingborg operates based on the concept of 'one way in' for citizens who contact the municipality. Including associations in the same concept is a natural part of the city's efforts to focus on the target group. In dialogue with local civil society, the City of Helsingborg has concluded that there is a need for an equivalent, well-accepted, clear general framework for support for associations operating in the City of Helsingborg which also meets the city's overall objective of cooperation with associations in the city.

The financial support aims to ensure a wide range of associations and increase the quality of life for all of Helsingborg's residents, both now and in the future.

### Guidelines on support for associations

Helsingborg City Council has adopted guidelines for support for associations to be applied along with the specific rules adopted by each committee. The aim is to clearly indicate the democratic conditions that apply to associations that wish to receive the city's financial support for associations and to ensure that public funds are not used for activities not carried out on the basis of democratic principles.

### The following formal conditions apply (information to be provided in the application for support):

- name of the association
- purpose of the association
- corporate identity number
- postal giro/bank account linked to the association's corporate identity number
- adopted statutes
- membership fee
- board/auditors
- approved minutes of the annual meeting
- audit report
- evidence that the association is registered in the city's register of associations (does not apply to newly founded associations)
- affiliation to a national organisation (if any).

The association must mainly carry out its activities in Helsingborg Municipality and must have undergone the city's training for associations or will do so during the year. The application must also be signed by an authorised signatory of the association (can be done digitally).

### Furthermore, a number of qualitative or democratic conditions apply generally to associations applying for financial support:

- The association has open admission of members. The articles of association state who can become a member and how members are admitted.
- The association is inclusive, i.e. combats discrimination in accordance with the Discrimination Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- The association upholds the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals and the principle of the equal worth of all people by adhering to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Through its work, the association promotes understanding of democratic governance.
- The association's activities are conducted with respect for children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The association's activities, where they are aimed at children and young people, must be conducted in an environment free of alcohol, tobacco and gambling.
- The association's activities must not otherwise contravene Swedish law.
- The association must have no outstanding tax debt with either the Swedish Tax Agency or the Swedish Enforcement Authority (minor debts such as for vehicle tax for single vehicles can be accepted).
- The association may not have been declared bankrupt or be the subject of insolvency or liquidation proceedings.

” The City of Helsingborg operates based on the concept of ‘one way in’ for citizens who contact the municipality. ”

The City of Helsingborg strives for a high level of cooperation with civil society in many different ways. The ‘one way in’ concept for associations makes it easier for them to apply for financial support, but it is also a gateway for associations and civil society to get advice and support from the city’s association coordinators. Parallel to the new grants system, Helsingborg is working to enhance cooperation between civil society and the city. This is done through Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnerships (VSOPPs) and by civil society and the city building a common platform for cooperation on major societal challenges. The platform’s approach is shaped by the specific area of cooperation. The initiative comes from civil society and active participants include Sensus and Save the Children Sweden.

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“In Helsingborg, it should be easy to run and be active in an association. You shouldn’t need to know the municipality’s organisation to get help. With ‘one way in’ we make it easy for those who generate so much benefit – our associations.”

**Marcus Friberg – Helsingborg municipal commissioner (Green Party)**



**HELSINGBORG**

## WE MAKE KNOWLEDGE GROW

At the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the focus is on the conditions of young people and civil society. This is where knowledge grows that decision-makers use when deciding which initiatives for young people and civil society to prioritise. We pass on this knowledge in our encounters with people at national and European levels. We also distribute government grants that enable organisations large and small to carry out their activities. This also gives young people the opportunity to volunteer, study or do an internship in another European country.

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