Hej!

This guide concerns our joint efforts in working with Sweden’s image and its importance for Sweden’s cooperation with the rest of the world. It is our hope that the guide will provide answers to your most important questions and be of help to you in your work promoting Sweden.

It is primarily aimed at everyone working actively with representing Sweden, but we also think that it is of interest to many others who work with presenting Sweden or part of Sweden abroad.

There is an appendix to the guide that describes how the basic concepts of the platform can be applied in practice step by step. More information is also available at: www.sweden.se/sverigebilden

Brand Sweden
The road to an updated image of Sweden abroad
The road to a new image of Sweden

In a time of increasing globalization and mass communication, a country is dependent to a large extent on how it is perceived abroad.

Political goals, trade, investments, visitors, and exchanges of talent and creativity are all highly dependent on the perceptions of the rest of the world.

Sweden's development and future welfare are contingent on strong relations with the outside world and more active exchanges with other countries in many different fields. This is only possible if more people know about Sweden and become interested in what we are and what we have to offer.

Today, the world's knowledge of Sweden is limited, and its image is often too unclear and out of date. So we need to unite around a clearer, unified image that better reflects contemporary Sweden – an image that is also distinct and relevant to the people we want to reach. The organizations in the Council for the Promotion of Sweden (NSU) have thus developed a common platform for working with Sweden's image. It includes a focused message about Sweden and serves as a practical working tool.

With the platform as our tool, we enhance the impact of our joint as well as individual initiatives.

The country as a brand

The term "brand" is used to emphasize that Sweden's image has a clear value. Every day, millions of decisions are made the world over where this is included in some way.

Almost everything Swedish is identified and valued in relation to the overall image of the country, which can either help or harm it.

The platform

In 2005–2006, the platform was developed in close collaboration between the organizations in the Council for the Promotion of Sweden. In all, some 500–600 people were involved at some stage of the process, both through a number of workshop series and through surveys and studies of Sweden's image. In May 2006, the Council decided to adopt this platform as the foundation to be applied in work with Sweden's image.
A common platform creates a clearer focus

Sweden is a small country if we consider the total population. In order for us to make our voice heard in global contexts, we have to be clear and work together over the long term. With a common platform, we increase our chances of reaching out.

Enhancing Sweden’s image involves creating a clear position for Sweden internationally — a unique place in people’s conscience that distinguishes Sweden from other countries. In order to be clearer, we must find common denominators for Swedish phenomena, and also dare to set priorities among all the associations people make with our country. A key starting point has been that Sweden’s image should be honest. People living in Sweden as well as elsewhere in the world should be able to recognize themselves. The message also has to be both distinct and attractive. We have to find what makes Sweden unique and what attracts people today. It is not enough simply with geographic differences or cultural expressions like food and handcrafts. We also have to show our unique values, our lifestyle and our way of thinking.

The platform for Sweden’s image is designed to work in all operations involving the organizations in the Council for the Promotion of Sweden. It should be used to develop messages and activities for all the different types of target groups we want to reach, no matter whether it is students in Shanghai completing their Master’s degree, trend-conscious weekend visitors from Paris or fund managers in New York. There is a more detailed description in the appendix of how we can create targeted communication based on this platform.

“Enhancing Sweden’s image involves creating a clear position for Sweden internationally — a unique place in people’s conscience that distinguishes Sweden from other countries.”
A meeting. Everyone is invited. Coffee. Everyone has a say. Many ideas and suggestions for solutions. Compromising. And so a tiny step forward... That’s how things work each day everywhere in Sweden. Some people may think it’s slow, but history shows us that this approach has been an important factor in Sweden’s rapid development. It has not been characterized by revolutions but rather by cooperation and a consistently forward-looking attitude that take us forward via participation and solid grounding in society.

“Sweden’s democratic approach puts reason and knowledge ahead of hierarchy and tradition for tradition’s sake.”

A good idea that moves us forward is always valuable, regardless of who and where it comes from. This also creates opportunities for new ways of thinking and an openness to consistently question things and test new solutions – so that we move forward step by step in matters both big and small.

Surveys on global value patterns show that Sweden is not at all a country of “lagom” (a concept that is roughly translated as moderate or just right). Rather, it is the opposite, to a large extent a country that is open to new ways of thinking and focused on development with values that break traditional patterns. The fact that we live according to these values is confirmed and noted in a large number of international studies and media. In the work to develop a representative and credible platform, the following general characteristics have also emerged:

**Unique values produce a unique position**

- **New ways of thinking – a belief in reason and a desire to move forward**
  
  As one of the world’s most developed countries, with advanced expertise in strategic future industries, and as a test market for many of the world’s leading companies, Sweden has a strong position as a country open to new ways of thinking at the cutting edge of development. But Swedish openness to new ways of thinking involves not just our aptitude for technological innovation, world-leading research and an awareness of trends, but also at heart our values and our lifestyle. It involves how we see ourselves, our relations and the world around us.

- **Gradual change – continuous renewal through participation and a shared heritage**
  
  Development in Sweden is not tumultuous but gradual. Sweden is not a country characterized by revolutions. Rather, Sweden has been shaped over the last few centuries by a consistent forward-looking attitude and the drive to work together for a better future via participation and solid grounding in society. It is a question of pragmatic progress, continually building on Sweden’s heritage, its values and what works well.

- **An ethical foundation – development that puts people and the environment at the center**
  
  Sweden has a unique position in the world as an innovative country, at the cutting edge that is open to new ways of thinking, while also being caring and promoting strong ethical values such as equality between men and women, sustainable development and human rights. As a result, an inclusive society is created, one where the goal is to ensure that everyone has a place and where development goes hand in hand with environmental sustainability.

- **The desire for balance – part of the Swedish character**
  
  A feature that is unique to Sweden is its clear desire for balance, a feature that has given rise to the Swedish notion of “lagom” (moderate or just right). The humane, ethical side of Sweden is balanced by innovative, pioneering ways of thinking. The consequences of progress are balanced by people’s needs and environmental conditions. The drive for participation, equality and consensus also create balance in society. This gradual, pragmatic and open-minded way of working balances the old and the new and allows foreign phenomena and knowledge to be easily adopted and mixed with what is traditionally Swedish.
So Sweden’s image is based on a combination of shared values that stand out in an international perspective. They give Sweden a unique, attractive position that is firmly grounded in Swedish history and the present day.

The country’s gradual change, with an emphasis on openness to new ways of thinking and ethical values, together with the drive for balance, can be summarized by saying Sweden is a country focused on development based on people’s needs and environmental conditions. This in turn can be summarized by the term progressive.

**World Values Survey**

Surveys of global values patterns, including the leading World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org), show that Sweden’s values are unique from an international perspective. To a very high degree, Sweden is an open country focused on development and new ways of thinking. The fact that we live according to these values is confirmed and noted in a large number of international studies and media.

In the Nation Brands Index, a survey of country brands which is sent to 26,000 people around the world, Sweden places at the top as a progressive, open country focused on development that balances development with people’s needs and environmental conditions.

**Definitions of progressive/ progressivity**

“Positive to change and progress/ Entailing progression/ Advancement” (Norstedts)

“A philosophy of progress and reform and the protection of civil liberties” (Thesaurus)
Our degree of progressivity is what distinguishes Sweden from other countries and thus what makes us interesting to others. It is a summary of what we as a group believe to a high degree and what we thus offer the world. It is the basis for our work to create a new, contemporary image of Sweden.
Progressivity – a desire to improve

Sweden can thus best be described as a country focused on development based on people’s needs and environmental conditions – a progressive country that strives for balanced development.

On a comprehensive level, progressivity means having strong faith in the future and a desire to gradually make the world a slightly better place. It means having faith in the creative force of people and the ability to take responsibility for one’s life. Working together and being open to the rest of the world and to the future in order to take advantage of its opportunities.

There are four traits that together are particularly important in explaining what we mean by being progressive. These are Innovative, Open, Caring and Authentic. We call these our core values.

“On a comprehensive level, progressivity means having strong faith in the future and a desire to gradually make the world a slightly better place.”

By using these as the signposts in our communication and actions, we help establish a progressive image of Sweden for the rest of the world.

Core values

Together with the Progressive position, the core values describe Sweden’s overall distinctive features, the values and behavior that stand out, and which are thus what we have to offer. They are used as internal signposts, for instance as a checklist for what projects we want to support and what communication we want to have. The core values should be seen as a whole, which together describe our position as a progressive country.
Innovative

Innovative means new ways of thinking. Seeing things from a new perspective, seeing opportunities and solutions and having faith in a better future. Not allowing oneself to be limited by engrained opinions or traditions. Examples of Swedish new ways of thinking:

- Knowledge-intensive business and society
- Paternity leave, the Cohabitees Act and registered partnerships
- Pioneering design, fashion and popular culture
- A strong tradition of inventions
Open

Open means having a positive attitude to free thinking and to differences between people, cultures and lifestyles. It involves being curious and being sensitive to others as well as giving people space and creating exchanges. Space for the ideas and views of individuals as well as physical space to move freely without obstacles, fences or crowding in our readily accessible countryside, in cities and in places in between.

A few examples of Swedish openness:

- International business and a test market for products sensitive to changing trends
- Broad-minded people that like to travel
- A tradition of adult education and active organizational life
- Public access to official records and the right of access to private land
Caring means safeguarding every individual. Providing safety and security as well as respecting and including all people. It means feeling empathy and sharing with those who are most vulnerable. Becoming involved with others and trying to see to the needs of every individual. Examples of Swedish caring:

- The drive for equality between men and women and participation in decision-making
- The ombudsman system
- A broad commitment to the environment
- Life-long learning for everyone
- International involvement with active work for peace and development aid
Authentic means being natural and unaffected. It means being reliable, honest and informal. It also involves being straightforward, unpretentious and clear and standing up for one’s values even when it is not very comfortable. To be authentic means to be in touch with your pasty and your roots and open to the future. Some examples of Swedish authenticity:

- A strong tradition of quality
- Living traditions and cultural heritage
- Informal style and trustworthiness in business
- Lifestyle in close symbiosis with nature and the changing seasons; the last wilderness in northern Europe
- High ethical standards on food and animal husbandry
“Our experience shows us that change and improvement are possible and that this provides opportunities for both individuals and society.”
Swedish progressivity
in practice

In the 20th century, Sweden underwent a rapid social transformation – from an agricultural to an industrial society, from an industrial society to an information and knowledge society. This took place without revolutions, through steady movement forward. Development has meant a continually rising standard of living with greater security for Swedes. It has given people the chance to get an education and develop, which resulted early on in a population that was well-educated and aware.

“Our positive experience of change has allowed us to dare to believe in the future and to believe that development is in essence something positive.”

Our experience shows us that change and improvement are possible and that this provides opportunities for both individuals and society. New technology and new products improve our everyday lives and make them easier while at the same time they are better for the environment. Progress in research and medicine gives us a better quality of life. Reforms in society, such as paternal leave, give us greater equality between men and women and opportunities to combine a career and a family. We have learned that it is possible to solve problems that accompany development, for instance, pertaining to the environment, even though that places great demands on new ways of thinking. So achieving sustainable development that takes into consideration both people and the environment seems realistic.

Our positive experience of change has allowed us to dare to believe in the future and to believe that development is in essence something positive. We believe the future holds many answers to today’s problems, and that it means positive development both in Sweden and in the rest of the world.

Some examples of Swedish progressivity are:

• Made in Sweden – high-tech international trade and industry
• Equality – modern non-hierarchical relations
• The open society – the principle of public access to official records, freedom of speech and the right of public access to the countryside
• Share the future – openness and involvement in the global village
• Freedom without fear – advanced welfare and security for everyone
• With the future in mind – and sustainability as the goal
Swedish progressivity in practice

Equality – modern non-hierarchical relations
Swedish progressivity in practice

The open society – the principle of public access to official records, freedom of speech and the right of public access to the countryside
Swedish progressivity in practice

Share the future – openness and involvement in the global village
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Freedom without fear – advanced welfare and security for everyone
Swedish progressivity in practice

With the future in mind –
and sustainability as the goal
An attractive position in a time of change

In a time of revolutionary global change, the progressive approach is an attractive asset. An openness to new ways of thinking and an ability to adapt are of considerable importance in keeping up with development. At the same time, there has to be an ability to guard against and handle the downsides that rapid development can entail, such as environmental damage, social tensions and welfare problems.

“Development and this art of living with continuous change that takes into consideration both people and the environment are something that people throughout the world strive for.”

Development and this art of living with continuous change that takes into consideration both people and the environment are something that people throughout the world strive for. This means it is strategic to “own” the position as a progressive country, and Sweden can be credible as this owner. The new ways of thinking and open-mindedness of Sweden and Swedes have also been at the heart of international interest in our country, which is an advantage in our future work as well.

What are we offering?

Sweden as a collaborative partner and source of inspiration. Inspiring others and being inspired by them. Of course, Sweden does not have all the answers, but we are often on the cutting edge of development and we are open to sharing our experience with the rest of the world – working together and sharing the future.
In order to successfully convey an image of Sweden as a country focused on development, one that puts people's needs and environmental conditions at the center, we have to give the people we meet a progressive experience. That applies to our communication and every encounter with the world beyond Sweden. Using our core values as our basis, we increase our chances of success.

There is a more detailed description of how we can apply the basic concepts of the platform in practice in the appendix. To find out more, go to: www.sweden.se/sverigebilden.

Good luck!
This guide concerns our joint efforts in working with Sweden’s image and its importance for Sweden’s cooperation with the rest of the world. It is our hope that the guide will provide answers to your most important questions and be of help in your work representing and promoting Sweden. There is also an appendix to the guide that describes the way to create communication about Sweden in practice step by step based on the common platform.

The Council for the Promotion of Sweden Abroad (NSU), which includes the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swedish Institute, Swedish Trade Council, Invest in Sweden Agency, Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications and VisitSweden, has developed a common brand platform for Sweden. It provides the basis for an updated and more forceful presentation of Sweden abroad and is to serve as support in our different activities. The platform is also a natural starting point for closer collaboration with other Swedish parties who have interests outside Sweden.