

Funding Initiative

Opus Magnum

Profile Area: Understanding Research

Deadline: November 18, 2026 (01:00 pm)

The aim of the initiative is to provide professors from the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences who have distinguished themselves through (initial) outstanding work with more freedom to write a comprehensive scholarly treatise.



Research Area: humanities, cultural studies and social sciences



Funding Type: funding for a substitute professorship



Target Group: professors who want to write an extensive scholarly treatise



up to 220,000 EUR



up to 18 months



Prerequisite: permanent position as a professor at a German university

1 Objectives

This funding initiative aims at providing established professors of the humanities, cultural studies, and the social sciences at German universities with the opportunity to concentrate full-time on the writing of an extensive scholarly treatise – an Opus Magnum with an outreach beyond their own specific academic field. This funding opportunity entails release from their official teaching and administrative duties.

2 Scope of Funding

The funding offer consists of leave of absence from 6 to a maximum of 18 months, which is granted in addition to the regular sabbatical semester. The Opus Magnum is to be completed within this period.

What is an Opus Magnum?

Under Opus Magnum, we understand a book of fundamental significance, which owing to its special quality, originality and outreach sets itself apart from a regular academic book. For example, a work that

- constitutes a first comprehensive review of a research field that refers in detail to the state of research in neighboring disciplines,
- sheds completely new light on a subject area via a critical examination of common interpretation patterns and thereby opens up a new field of research,
- innovatively links up preparatory research of different kinds and provenance, generating new insights via such a synthesis,
- radiates beyond the respective academic community and exhibits a sustainable significance for a comprehensive research field.

Funding is not available for editing volumes, translations, textbooks, manuals, commentaries, and advice literature.

Who can apply?

This program addresses all full professors in the humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences at German universities. In exceptional cases, interested professors may also be considered from other disciplines; please contact the Foundation before submitting an application. Applying professors have to be at least five years before retirement at the time of application (senior professorships are not considered). Extraordinary professors (apl. Prof.) are not eligible to apply.

Funding period

As a rule, the leave of absence can be granted for periods ranging from 6 to a maximum of 18 months. It is assumed that applicants will be released from their duties by their university and

continue to draw their salaries. The foundation will finance a substitute professorship for the respective period of leave. The fellowship is to be understood as an additional funding and may not be taken into account when granting regular leaves of absence according to the terms of the applicant's regular contract. Further funding for a time extension of the grant is excluded.

It is expected that the Opus Magnum will be completed within the funding period and that afterwards the work will only need to be prepared for publication. For this reason, it is only possible to fund projects that are at a very advanced stage, with extensive preparatory work already in place. The data collection, archive and research work must be largely completed. An application for funding should only be submitted if the funding can be started in a timely manner if approved. The Foundation expects project starts usually 6 months or, at the latest, 12 months after approval, otherwise the Foundation reserves the right to cancel the approval.

Moreover, it is expected that no additional larger (research) projects will be carried out during the funding period.

Substitute Professorship

Following a positive funding decision, the Opus Magnum grantees nominate the substitute professor.

It is expected that the "Opus Magnum" grantee will mentor the substitute professor and support to his/her best ability their embedment in the respective institution's structures and training measures for early career academics.

Funding Amount

The following funds can be applied for:

- Personnel funds (average rate) for the substitute professor calculated on the base salary of the applicant's W2- or W3-classification:
substitute W2: EUR 60,000 per semester
substitute W3: EUR 65,000 per semester
If more money will be needed for the substitute professorship, the shortfall will be granted on the basis of the final statement of accounts.
- Lump sum of EUR 5,000 per semester for (student/research) assistants as well as recurring non-personnel and non-recurrent material expenses.
- Publication funds: In addition to the lump sum for materials, the foundation does not cover traditional printing costs. However, as the Foundation supports Open Science ([Open Science Policy](#)), Book Processing Charges (BPC) of up to a maximum of EUR 10,000 can be applied for. If approved, these funds may only be used as a publication cost subsidy for the open access publication and may not be reallocated.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

Online applications can be submitted either in German or in English via the Foundation's electronic Application Portal.

Applications are reviewed by a committee of experienced representatives drawn from different disciplines. The reviewers are appointed with regard to the applications' disciplines. If necessary, additional written assessments by external experts are considered. Funding is available for up to ten successful candidates per year.

Selection is based on the following criteria:

- 1 Is the applicant considered to be outstanding in his/her field?
- 2 What is the scientific quality of the planned publication project and how relevant and significant is it for the field?
- 3 Will the planned publication actually have the character of an Opus Magnum and possibly also be perceived beyond the specialist scientific community?
- 4 Is it (still) necessary to write this book in view of the preparatory work already done? Is the writing of the publication realistically planned in relation to the preparatory work?

The decision is expected to be made in summer. Therefore, the Opus Magnum project can start in the following winter semester.

In the event of approval, the funds for the substitute professorship are approved according to the average rates. The approved funds initially remain completely blocked. The release of funds is subject to:

- the official notification of leave of absence from the university for the envisaged period (the exemption should be in addition to the regular semester of exemption granted)
- nomination of the proposed substitute professor (submission of CV and list of publications)
- the submission and review of the substitute professor's individual salary calculation (gross employer costs for the entire funding period)

Following a negative decision, a new application will only be possible with a completely different project.

4 Information on the Application

4.1 Our Funding Platform

Applications have to be submitted via the Volkswagen Foundation's [funding platform](#). Please scroll down the overview and select this call.

For further support please contact support@volkswagenstiftung.de.

4.2 Information on Enclosures

Unless otherwise specified below, please use only the template available for download at the funding platform or on the website for the respective programme announcement.

4.2.1 Project Description

Please observe the specifications in the template regarding the maximum number of pages as well as the other formal requirements.

4.2.2 Expenditure Plan

Please use the Excel template only available for download at the funding platform. It is not possible to upload and use other Excel sheets.

4.2.3 Curricula Vitae

Please submit the applicant's CV in tabular/narrative form using the template available for download on the website of the respective call or in the funding platform.

4.2.4 Equal Opportunity Funds

To support equal opportunities and diversity in the research system, the Volkswagen Foundation offers the possibility to apply for equal opportunity funds. These funds – granted in addition to the maximum funding sum – support measures that serve to compensate for disadvantages at an individual level and/or aim to strengthen diversity in the education and research system in general. Equal Opportunity Funds can be applied for 1% of the total application amount (excluding overheads).

For further information please refer to our [website](#).

4.2.5 Further Enclosures

The following additional enclosure (.pdf) is required:

- Statement/letter of support: Written expression of interest from a publisher for the publication of the Opus Magnum

4.3 Further Information

4.3.1 General Information

The foundation cannot be held responsible for any obligations entered into prior to the receipt of grant approval.

Applications that have been or are intended to be submitted in this or a similar form to another funding organization will not be processed by the foundation. Applications that do not meet the formal requirements will not be considered for review. The foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

5 Contact

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6 Further Information

- [Website VolkswagenStiftung](#)
- [Website Opus Magnum](#)
- [FAQ and Service \(including download section\)](#)
- [Influence of Generative AI on Research and the Volkswagen Foundation's Funding Activities](#)
- [Recommendations for Sustainable Travel](#)