

**Information for
Applicants 119**

Science Communication Cubed – Science of Science Communication Centers

Next Deadline: September 4th, 2020 (12 noon CET)

- I. Objectives**
- II. Funding Opportunities**
- III. General Conditions**
- IV. Application and Selection Procedure**
- V. Application Checklist**
- VI. Information**

I. Objectives

Scientific findings change the world we live in and are fundamental for decisions in politics, economy and society. New media and digitization in all areas of life also influence discourse behavior. The question how science is being negotiated in society requires a revision of current models and practices of science communication. The increasing desire of parts of the population for participation in scientific decision-making processes, doubts about the public welfare orientation of academic endeavours, questions regarding the reliability and independence of scientific research, and the increased emergence of science-critical views and elite criticism in social media are only some of the current and future challenges for science communication.

Against this background, the importance of science communication¹ is repeatedly stressed by various actors from politics, academia and the public. But how does mutual communication between science and society work? How can we strengthen the confidence in scientific methods and findings on controversial issues? The Volkswagen Foundation wants to create room for further development of science communication and the research on science communication to develop answers to these and other socially highly relevant questions.

The funding call „Science Communication Cubed² – Science of Science Communication Centers“ gives (science) communication researchers, scholars of all disciplines, non-academic partners, different stakeholders and multipliers from civil society the opportunity to collaborate over long periods of time and to develop and research new ideas on science communication.

These „centers“ can be of a virtual nature or real collaboration spaces. They should focus on joint learning and developing new ideas via transdisciplinary and international research cooperations, as well as on the ability to connect research results with societal developments. At the same time, the Foundation wants to strengthen science communication research in Germany by building new capacities (early-career researchers, professorships (tenure track) e.g.). Furthermore, the funded projects should contribute to academic and non-academic debates on science and society.

II. Funding Opportunities

The funding offer aims at teams consisting at least of (scientific) communication researchers, scholars of other specific disciplines and non-academic expert communicators, respectively. We encourage these teams to jointly develop and conduct quantitative and qualitative research on current and future issues to (further) develop theories and methods of science communication. The collection and interpretation of the resulting empirical data will provide valuable material for science communication research and will serve as a basis for the development of quality standards and best practices in science communication.

¹ We are using a broader definition of science communication that includes communication by scholars of the humanities and social sciences

² As this call aims at collaborations that investigate issues of science communication from (at least) three different perspectives in order to raise science communication „to a higher level“, we named the call „Science Communication Cubed“ – or in quasi-mathematical terms:

Science Communication x Science Communication x Science Communication = Science Communication Cubed

The science communication research should be based on state of the art theories and methods, the communication topics need to be well-justified in collaboration with the involved scientific experts, and the chosen communication methods should be developed and conducted in collaboration with the non-academic communication experts and stakeholders from society.

Funding is available for 5 years to a maximum of EUR 4 million (total budget) in the first stage. In a second stage, degressive funding for 3 years with up to EUR 2 million (total budget) will be granted after successful evaluation. The funding can be used **in a flexible manner**.

Communication topic

For the start of the first funding phase, the cooperation partners must outline an (initial) project in which the partners would like to conduct and research science communication on a well-justified topic. The justification for the communication topic must also answer the question to which extent the topic requires societal discourse. While climate change and gene technology are obvious examples for such topics, the Foundation explicitly invites applicants to address topics that currently receive only little attention in public debates, and that, from the perspective of the applicants, have a high social relevance. The chosen topic should be regarded as starting point and can be adapted over the five years of the first funding period. The accompanying (science) communication research is essential for these projects and should take place in constant feedback with the academic and non-academic project partners and representatives of a specialist public or a broader public, if applicable.

Team composition/target groups

The team composition can be adapted flexibly. Scholars and scientists with specific expert knowledge, non-academic expert communicators and other stakeholders can also join for shorter time periods within the first funding period. The team composition and the organization of the center should be oriented according to the selected topic (especially concerning the involved expert scientists and scholars) and the selected science communication research project. In line with our capacity building approach, we encourage applicants to also consider the involvement of postdocs, PhD students and undergraduate students.

Professors and post-doctoral researchers from all disciplines are eligible to apply. Post-doctoral researchers may apply for funding of their own position but they must be employed by the applying research institution or university at the beginning of the funding. Only an academic institution in Germany can act as main applicant. Cross-regional consortia within Germany are possible, but the center must be institutionally located at one of the research institutions involved. Furthermore, it is possible and explicitly welcome to attract (scientific) communication researchers from abroad (e.g. post-doctoral students) or to enter into international collaborations with other scholars.

For the purpose of this funding offer, non-academic communication experts and stakeholders are experts and institutions that are interested in communicating scientific and scholarly content and jointly implementing and testing communication formats, and who are **not** affiliated with universities and research institutions. These can be journalists, NGO representatives, employees of museums and science centers etc. All non-academic communication experts must ensure that their involvement in these centers takes place in compliance with their professional obligations (compliance with the press code, ethical principles, etc.).

Collaboration between these centers and the involved institutions' own PR departments is welcome, but the centers must remain permanently independent of the institutions' own PR and should not take over any tasks of the PR departments. PR departments can therefore not function as co-applicants.

Eligible costs

A budget plan is needed for internal assessments and the review process itself. This budget plan needs to be structured according to the budget positions below and the individual expense items need to be justified. Please be aware that the Volkswagen Foundation does not cover overhead costs. All project relevant costs can be covered. Some examples for eligible costs are given below:

- **Scientific personnel:**

For example:

- Initial funding of new professorships or junior professorships in science communication research (tenure track)
- funding of a teaching replacements, research sabbaticals or similar for project management and substantially involved professors, usually in the form of a temporary (part-time) position for a qualified substitute
- staff positions for research and project coordination, e.g. for post-docs
- PhD positions (e.g. in the context of graduate programs)
- Student and research assistants
- Guest funds for temporarily employed academics or fellows (in the case of scholarships, please explain the calculation base for the required funds)

Personnel positions are available for (science) communication researchers as well as for scholars and scientists from other disciplines. For scholars/scientists from other disciplines, the position can only be financed up to a maximum of 50% FTE. Only the part of their research time that directly flows into the centers can be applied for; their (non-communication) research itself will not be funded. Scholarships can be awarded within the framework of guest researcher programmes or for non-academic experts who would like to work at the applicant research institution for a certain period of time (e.g. "journalists in residence").

Personnel resources for employees from the institutions' PR departments cannot be requested. The involvement of non-academic experts and other stakeholders can be arranged in various ways, for example within the framework of service contracts (see recurring non-personnel expenses).

- **Recurring non-personnel expenses:**

Please indicate separately travel expenses and other recurring non-personnel expenses. Speaking fees for events can only be granted for freelance participants.

Examples are:

- travel expenses for events organised by the centers, e.g. scientific symposia, workshops with stakeholders and partners, summer schools, travel grants or the organisation of ideas competitions, if applicable

- travel expenses for project management and staff, e.g. for conference fees, visits for international exchange, invitations for visiting researchers
 - consumables for the organisation and implementation of graduate programmes, labs, summer schools, development of teaching formats, exchange of ideas for the development of best practice examples
 - consumables for the implementation of science communication projects such as citizen science activities, videos, public exchanges, etc.
 - Software licenses, user fees (e.g. lab fees)
 - Service contracts incl. VAT, e.g. for the integration of non-academic partners, for assessments, etc.
- **Non-recurrent expenses:**

Please differentiate non-recurrent expenses into publication costs on the one hand and other non-recurrent expenses. Examples are:

- publication costs for the academic publication of results of scientific communication research (e.g. in peer-reviewed journals, open-access formats) as well as costs for communication activities aimed at a broader public
- Equipment
- Data archiving in suitable repositories, literature procurement etc.

III. General Conditions

Support from the management of the research institution/university

In all cases, the Foundation expects the applicant institution(s) to contribute to the costs of the project. These contributions may consist of financial support for the centers or of non-financial measures (e.g. rooms, equipment, secretarial services, etc.). For the application of a second funding phase, the Foundation expects that the applicant research institution or university is committed in further employing those researchers that acted as main applicants and applied for their own position. If, among other things, a professorship is to be established with this funding, the Foundation expects co-financing (matching funds) from the applicant research institution from the beginning. The supporting letter from the management of the respective research organisation should include the following points:

- the endorsement of the application
- a description of the envisaged institutional integration of the center
- a description of a sustainable perspective for the center beyond the funding period
- description of the (financial) contribution of the university/research institution

As independent interdisciplinary research centers, they primarily serve to strengthen scientifically reflected science communication in Germany. We expect the centers to acquire further third-party funding once they are established.

IV. Application and Selection Procedure

The **two-stage** review process will be carried out by an interdisciplinary and international expert panel. The project teams with the most promising proposals will be asked to present their concepts to the panel during the selection process. Funding for the concepts proposed for approval will be granted from mid 2021 at the earliest.

The expert panel will review all applications according to the following **requirements and criteria**:

- Realistic description of the organizational structure of the center, the cooperation of the involved partners, international cooperations and the integration into the applicant institution
- Conclusive explanation of the social relevance of the selected topic
- Convincing science communication research project
- Strong presentation of the planned activities for capacity building in the field of science communication research
- Convincing concept for academic and non-academic communication of the contents of the proposed projects
- Plausible description of future perspectives, including potential future topics and cooperations that can take place within the centers
- Clear statements regarding support and perpetuation by the university management
- Realistic time and cost schedules
- Quality of the project team and appropriate selection of scientific and non-scientific parties.

V. Application Checklist

Please submit your applications via the Volkswagen Foundation portal before the deadline. All documents must be submitted in English and Arial 11pt, 1.5 line. Please provide the following documents:

- Cover letter (applicant(s), title, duration, total amount applied for)
- Summaries in German and English (max. one page each)
- Project description: overall concept for the center regarding content and structure (max. 20 pages) including:

Content Concept:

- Research project from science communication research (incl. state-of-the-art)
- Presentation of the selected topic (including reasons for selection)
- Science communication formats to be used and researched in the first phase
- Outlook incl. future research questions, topics, collaborations, science communication and knowledge transfer activities that may be conducted in a second funding period or after the end of the funding

Structure:

- Detailed description of the cooperation between the parties involved in the center (including sustainability of the concept)
 - Concepts for capacity building
 - Communication and transfer ideas (within and outside academia)
 - Description of the fiscal resp. non-fiscal contribution of the institute management to the continuation, independence and sustainability of the centers
 - Clarification of the role of the institution's own PR, if involved
-
- Bibliography (max. 3 pages)
 - Time and work schedule (max. 2 pages)
 - CVs of all involved (science) communication researchers, researchers of other disciplines and non-academic partners incl. publications (max. 2 pages per partner)
 - Institutional statements and letters of support from all involved institutions
 - Total budget (broken down into personnel resources, recurring expenses, non-recurrent expenses)
 - Explanations of the individual budget items
 - Commitments from practice partners regarding cooperation in the context of the initial topic, including a brief statement on compliance with ethical principles and professional codes
 - If several research institutions are involved in the consortium: a precise description of the tasks and contributions of each institution and a designation of one institution as the headquarters of the center (max. 2 pages)

VI. Information

In the period leading up to the deadline, an information and networking event for potential applicants will be held in Berlin on 12 May 2020. During this event, there will be the opportunity to discuss questions regarding the call with representatives of the Volkswagen Foundation. Participation in this event is not a prerequisite for submitting an application for the call "Science Communication Cubed".

Please find further information on this event and the conditions of participation on our [website](#).

If you have any questions regarding the application conditions, please feel free to send them by email to the contact persons listed below.

Dr. Cora Schaffert-Ziegenbalg

Email: schaffert-ziegenbalg@volkswagenstiftung.de

Dr. Selahattin Danisman

Email: danisman@volkswagenstiftung.de

For administrative and organisational questions and if you would like an appointment for a telephone consultation, please contact:

Ronja Kinas

Telefon: +49 511 8381 385

Email: kinas@volkswagenstiftung.de

VolkswagenStiftung

Kastanienallee 35

30519 HANNOVER

GERMANY

www.volkswagenstiftung.de

Further Information

[FAQs for Applicants from Abroad](#)

[Electronic Application System](#)

[Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)

[Personnel Rates for Academic Staff](#) (in Germany)