

Funding Initiative

PIONEER PROJECTS – IMPETUS FOR THE GERMAN RESEARCH SYSTEM

Profile area: Understanding Research

Deadline: 15 October 2024 (11:59 PM CET)

The Volkswagen Foundation aims to promote practice-oriented projects that lead to pragmatic and focused improvements in the science system. The aim is to ensure that resources are used more efficiently and that constructive and trusting cooperation between science and administration is promoted. The projects should be structurally formative in accordance with the Foundation's guidelines, provide a new type of impetus, be scalable and be able to be continued without long-term support of Foundation.



All disciplines



Flexibel, no research projects



Zielgruppe / target group



Project related max. 500.00 EUR plus overheads



up to 3 years

1 Objectives

With this funding offer, the foundation pursues the goal of influencing structures of the German research system to such an extent that

- the system becomes **more adaptable** to current events or can even initiate new developments;
- resources are used more efficiently;
- science and administration work trustfully hand in hand in order to design the future of the system together.

Thus, this funding offer addresses researchers and academic administrators who share these goals and who want to provide new impetus and shape structures with a focused pioneer project innovations in governance, administration, research, teaching, or transfer in a specific area of the German research system.

2 Scope of Funding

The funding offer addresses active researchers as well as academic administrators at research institutions in Germany, who would like to explore a project idea for the further development (of a specific area) of the German research system. A project can relate to any aspect of the research system, such as governance, administration, research, teaching or transfer. The funding should help to create a space for experimentation in order to try out new concepts without the pressure of being successful at all costs. **The project should pursue practical improvements; research projects are not eligible for funding.** The Foundation expects the knowledge gained during the projects to be shared with interested stakeholders.

In addition to the **qualification** of the applicants for the implementation of the project as well as the **feasibility** of the project planning (including time and cost planning), the following **criteria** are important for the review of the proposals:

1. The project addresses an existing **problem** in the (German) research landscape;
2. The project provides an **impetus** towards change and new structures are created;
3. The project is **decisively novel**, not simply the next incremental improvement;
4. The project can continue **without long-term support from the Foundation** and, ideally, be scaled up if successful. The stakeholders directly relevant for upscaling should therefore be involved from the onset of the project.

Overheads

Universities and universities for applied sciences can apply for 10 % overheads. For more information on overheads, see "Information on lump sum for overheads", which is provided in our [download-section](#).

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 submitted for review. The Foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

Researchers with a PhD, professors and academic administrators at research institutes and universities in Germany are eligible for funding.

3.1 Time schedule



3.2 Procedure

Projects are recommended for funding after a two-stage selection process:

The first stage is to submit a project outline. This outline serves to establish a basic understanding of whether the content of the project is suitable for this funding programme. The structuring by means of a form available on the Volkswagen Foundation website and the additional information contained therein serve to simplify, complete and clarify the communication, not for formal control. The form includes a description of the problem and the proposed solution, a strategy for continuation and scaling, a list of cooperation partners, if applicable, and a budget outline (see outline template).

The first stage is not a peer review. The Foundations office assesses the submitted project outlines comparatively with focus on the main idea.

The project idea will be assessed under the following aspects:

- Match with the goals of the funding program;
- A well thought out implementation and solution strategy;

- An adequate and realistic goal for a pioneer project.

The most interesting and promising projects, from the Foundation's point of view, will be invited to submit an application.

In the second stage, the full proposals submitted by a second deadline are reviewed by a panel of experts. The main criteria for this selection phase are

- The quality of the project and the strategy to solve the addressed problem,
- The degree of novelty of the project,
- The qualification of the applicant(s) for this specific project,
- The adequacy of a private foundation as funder for this project and the lack of other funding sources,
- An adequate strategy for the communication of project results,
- Ideas and strategies for the continuation and scaling of the project in case of success,
- The adequacy of the requested budget.

The Board of Trustees of the Volkswagen Foundation decides on the funding based on the experts' recommendations.

Please note that the Volkswagen Foundation will only accept and review concepts once. Modified or revised versions of project that have already been rejected cannot be submitted at later date.

3.3 Budget

The budget should be in the range of 50,000 to 500,000 EUR and appropriate to the proposed project. Universities as well as universities for applied sciences may apply for an additional 10% of overhead costs.

The chances of funding depend on the content of a project, not on its cost or size. The budget can include any type of staff positions, with the exception of personnel funds for

- a) the main applicants' own position and
- b) PhD positions,

both of which cannot be applied for.

There are no other restrictions to the cost plan, as it is determined by the requirements of the project in question. The duration of the project also depends on the specific requirements - as a rule, the Foundation assumes that pioneer projects require a duration of between one and three years.

Both academic and non-academic cooperation partners may be involved in a project. However, a proposal must always have one main applicant who acts as coordinator and main contact for the Foundation.

4 Application Checklist

All documents must be submitted via the Foundation's application portal.

4.1 Electronic Application – Instructions

The foundation is switching its funding management system to a new provider at the turn of the year. As part of this change, the electronic application system will also be fundamentally revised and optimised. The change will bring a number of improvements that will make the application process more efficient and user-friendly.

The new system is expected to be available from mid-January 2025. From that date, you will only be able to register on the new system and submit applications for this call via the new application portal.

If your project outline is selected for a full application, we will inform you about the current status and the use of the new application portal with the invitation.

4.2 Application documents e.g.

The **project outline** (first stage): please use the template available on the Volkswagen Foundation website. This is the only document that has to be submitted at the first stage of the assessment process. The project outline can be written in English or German.

If you are invited to submit a **full proposal**, please submit the following documents by the deadline communicated in the invitation:

- Summary in German (max. 1 page)
- Summary in English (max. 1 page)
- Main text of the proposal in English or German (max. 10 pages)
 - including impact strategy and strategy for continuation
 - Statement on why the project is not eligible for funding from other sources

4.2.1 Budget

- Total sum max. 500,000 Euro (overheads not included)
- Universities and universities of applied sciences may apply for an additional 10% overheads
- Budget explanation

For collaborations between applicants from different institutions, please provide a separate budget for each participating institution and divide the total amount of funding between the institutions. In this way, the overheads for each participating institution can be calculated. Of course, individuals and groups may be involved in a project without necessarily receiving a budget from the grant - in this case, no separate budget is required.

4.2.2 Curriculum Vitae of every applicant

Please submit your academic career in tabular-narrative form. A [template](#) is available on the website of the funding initiative..

4.2.3 Template: Further Information on the Application

The Volkswagen Foundation aims to promote good working conditions in academia. Please submit a personnel concept using the template [Further Information on the Application](#) and upload the completed template to the Volkswagen Foundation's application portal in the category "Other enclosures". Information on the personnel concept as well as on funding for personnel in general can be found [here](#).

5 Contact

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6 More Information

- [Website VolkswagenStiftung](#)
- [FAQs for applicants](#)
- [Useful Information and downloads](#)
- [Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)
- [Influence of generative models of text and image creation in research and in the funding activities of the Volkswagen Foundation](#)