

### Task forces

# Transformational Knowledge on Democracies under Change – Transdisciplinary Perspectives

**Profile area:** Societal Transformations

**Next deadline:** 19 September 2023 (12:00 - noon CET)



Humanities, cultural and social sciences (lead); cooperation with natural, life, data and technical sciences possible



Task forces



Inter- und transdisciplinary research groups with researchers and partners from (civil)society, international participation possible



up to 180,000 EUR



up to one year

# 1 Objectives

Democratic forms of government get under pressure globally, the legitimacy of elected governments is questioned in some places and in some democratically governed countries, e.g. Germany, we can observe a growing dissatisfaction with the way in which democratic institutions are functioning right now. Both researchers and (civil) society actors take part in discussions on how the different current challenges for democracies like climate change, COVID-19, the digitalization process and the economic and energy crises are changing the relationship between citizens and the state – now and in the future.

So far, however, these different perspectives on transformation processes of democracies have hardly been brought into an exchange with each other. Academic and (civil) societal discourses have largely taken place separately from each other.

With this funding offer, the Foundation aims to bring together academia and (civil) society actors in order to develop new transformation knowledge about democracies in transition. The Foundation encourages academics and partners from (civil) society to bring together their respective perspectives, ideas and experiences and to work together on urgent challenges to processes of change in democracies. In addition to research, this program offers the opportunity to develop concrete recommendations, e.g. for politics, relevant social actors or the economy, and to contribute to the implementation of these recommendations.

## 2 Scope of Funding

With a duration of one year, the focus of the task forces is on the rapid development of research results on an urgent, clearly definable issue that addresses concrete challenges to democracy in Germany or at the EU level. With the task forces, the Foundation offers a space for experimentation in which academics and actors from (civil) society work together on a concrete research question, develop approaches to solutions and work on the dissemination of these recommendations for action to relevant actors.

### 2.1. Target group

The funding offer is aimed at academics with a completed Ph.D. from the humanities, cultural and social sciences as well as actors from (civil) society. Cooperation with researchers from natural, life, data and technical sciences is possible, depending on the issues to be addressed. It addresses employees from (civil) society who have a background of at least two years of professional experience, e.g., from non-profit non-governmental organizations, representatives from public authorities and/or government bodies, media representatives, representatives from the field of art and culture who deal with democracy processes.

As an independent private funding organization, the Foundation attaches great importance to promoting independent, open-ended research. The Foundation therefore explicitly asks how applicants plan to deal with the individual interests and agendas of the different actors in the research process. Applicants are therefore asked to justify the project constellation and to reflect on how the interests of the individual partners will be considered and continuously reflected upon in the research project. The Foundation also encourages all applicants to constantly evaluate their own and the joint **learning process** during the cooperation and, if necessary, to make meaningful adjustments to the research process.

## 2.3 Thematic topics

Thematically, projects from the following areas are possible:

1. analysis of conditions under which democracies change
2. analysis of processes through which socio-cultural processes in democracies are (re)shaped
3. transformation of the ‚infrastructure‘ of democracies (methods/instruments/formats of democracy).

The presentation of a concrete and acute challenge for democratic structures, focussing on Germany or on the EU level, is decisive for the review process. Comparisons with cases in other countries (worldwide) are possible, provided they serve the research question and are feasible within the term of one year. The Foundation invites you to also address challenges that are only emerging but will soon play a role in changing democratic structures.

## 2.4 General conditions

### Project design and application requirements:

- Up to two researchers from different disciplines with different non-academic partners from (civil) society;
- The project (main application) is led by researchers from the humanities, cultural sciences or social sciences;
- Integration of scientists from the natural, life, technical or life sciences is possible;
- International participation from science and/or (civil) society is possible, if this is relevant for the implementation of the project;
- Integration of data science approaches or computational social science is possible, depending on the research question.

The Foundation explicitly encourages the applicant teams to take **scientific risks** and think **'out-of-the-box'** when selecting their topics and methods. The focus of the task forces is on the publication of **concrete recommendations** for action in the form of policy papers or similar formats. Scientific publications are also possible if they are relevant for the specific project and can be implemented within the framework of the funding.

In order to promote dialogue with the relevant decision-makers, the Foundation invites the applicants to consider accompanying **creative formats** such as podcasts, science slams, theater plays or similar. Applicant teams should therefore include a concept containing ideas on how recommendations for actions based on research results should be made known to relevant actors (**science communication**).

The task forces use a format in which actors from (civil) society are already actively involved in the development of the research concept and in the creation and dissemination of the recommendations for action.

The Foundation will invite all grantees to a virtual kick-off and organize a forum to present the results.

If **data** is used, newly collected and/or processed in the project, the application should include the relevant information on the handling of this data, in particular **ethical aspects**. For this purpose, please either complete the data management plan of an already identified target repository or provide information in the Foundation's Basic Data Management Plan form. If your project does not use or generate any data to a relevant extent, please state this explicitly.

### Costs and duration:

A binding budget plan does not have to be submitted. An estimated cost breakdown is required in the online application system (total application amount and rough breakdown into the predefined categories). **Researchers** at non-profit research institutions are listed as co-applicants if they apply for their own costs. If the costs are to be divided among several researchers, please indicate this in the online application systems with own budget plans for each individual researcher. **Partners from the (civil) society** may also plan their own funds, but these funds will be listed in the budget plan of the researchers and will be forwarded to the partners by the respective research institutions. The framework conditions for the transfer are determined by the respective research institution (e.g. contracts for work and services, commissioning via tenders, subcontracting, etc.).

- Overall project amount max. 180,000 euros (excluding overheads);
- Duration 1 year;

The funds can be used flexibly for all personnel and material costs incurred. This includes, for example

- The involvement of cooperation partners from science and (civil) society in Germany and abroad;
- Short research stays at other institutions, invitation of guest researchers;
- Funds for a substitute for a sabbatical
- Workshops or work meetings and other travel expenses
- Science communication
- Equipment (for interviews, field research, etc.)

### 2.5 Timeline



## 2.6 Procedure

Timeline: approximately 5 months:

- Applications in English
- Submission by the deadline via the application portal;
- Formal review by Foundation staff;
- Review by an interdisciplinary and international review panel;
- Decision.

The Foundation will hold webinars in advance of the deadline for questions about the application process. The dates will be announced via the funding opportunity website. For consultation appointments beyond this offer, please make a phone appointment.

Review Criteria:

- Relevance of the research question to democracies under change;
- Suitability for the task force format;
- Interdisciplinary composition on the side of the scientists;
- Design of the cooperation between science and (civil) society;
- Conclusiveness of project design and methodology;
- Scientific qualification or proven expertise as a non-academic actor;
- Development of transformation knowledge by translating research into concrete recommendations for action.
- Convincing reflection and learning process in the project.

## 3 Checklist for the Application

Templates are available on the website of the funding initiative for the proposal presentation and the curriculum vitae (CV). There are no outline guidelines for the other documents. The application is to be submitted in English via the online application system of the Volkswagen Foundation. Please select the appropriate application in the online application system.

**Application checklist** (pdf upload)

- Generally understandable abstract - German, English (approx. 200 words);
- Application presentation with references (Arial 11 pt, outline according to template);
- A short video presentation of the project (max. 90 seconds) in which the applicants describe the team constellation and the joint reflection and learning process;
- Tabular career curriculum vitae (CV) of all applicants (separate template for actors from (civil) society (max. 4 pages, structure like template));
- Brief budget plan justification for all positions, using the budget plan form in the online application system, for staff positions with area of expertise, tasks, qualification (with/without doctorate), also applies to actors from (civil) society;

- If research data are generated: data management plan;

### 3.1 Explanations on the online application system

Before submitting an application, please inform yourself about the VolkswagenStiftung's online application system in the document "Electronic application made easy - instructions and tips". Early personal registration of all applicants in the portal is important. Without a user account, neither co-applicants can be invited to the application nor can the application be submitted.

Applications that basically fit into thematic programs of other funding organizations such as DFG, BMBF, Horizon Europe etc. will not be reviewed by the Foundation. Please delimit your topic if necessary.

## 4 Contact

### **Dr. Cora Schaffert-Ziegenbalg**

E-mail: [schaffert-ziegenbalg@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:schaffert-ziegenbalg@volkswagenstiftung.de)

Tel.: +49 511 83 81 - 276

For organizational/administrative questions and phone appointments:

### **Nicole Richter**

E-Mail: [richter@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:richter@volkswagenstiftung.de)

Tel.: +49 511 83 81 – 243

VolkswagenStiftung  
Kastanienallee 35  
30519 HANNOVER  
GERMANY

<http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de>

## 5 Additional Information

- [Link Webseite Transformational Knowledge on Democracies under Change](#)
- [General FAQs about application and funding](#)
- [Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)
- [Application System of the VolkswagenStiftung](#)
- [Download: Personnel rates](#)
- [Download: Data management plan](#)
- [Download: Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)
- [Information on lump sum for overheads](#)
- [Information on Open Science Policy](#)
- [Link Webseite Science Communication](#)