

status 2024



↗ The Volkswagen Foundation
in Figures



Volkswagen**Stiftung**

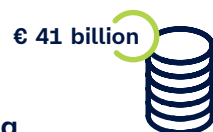
Who we are and what we do

➤ **status 2024** is the annual report of the Volkswagen Foundation

Foundation



The Volkswagen Foundation is the largest private research funding organisation – and one of the largest foundations in Germany. Its purpose is to support research and teaching in the humanities, the social and natural sciences, as well as life and technical sciences. It was established more than 60 years ago by the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony as an independent, non-profit foundation under civil law. The Foundation has its offices in Hanover.



Capital and Funding

The Foundation capital currently amounts to around € 4.1 billion. The amount available for funding comes from the investment of this capital and is mainly used for general funding purposes. In addition, there are profit entitlements (mainly dividends) on 30.2 million Volkswagen trust shares held by the State of Lower Saxony. This funding is allocated to the *zukunft.niedersachsen* programme, which is jointly managed by the Foundation and the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science.

Strategy

The funding portfolio is structured around four profile areas:

- 1 Exploration,
- 2 Social Transformations,
- 3 Understanding Research – Reflecting on and Practice of Science,
- 4 *zukunft.niedersachsen*.

The Foundation also offers various funding opportunities in the field of science communication.

Funding Concept

The Foundation has developed four guidelines for its funding practices.

- ➔ **Providing impetus:** The Foundation aims to play a pioneering role by supporting innovative pilot projects.
- ➔ **Taking risks:** Creating spaces for experimentation – also for talented early career researchers.
- ➔ **Crossing borders:** Transnational, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects are core features of its funding.
- ➔ **Shaping structures:** Funding should trigger lasting impact, a goal which the Foundation systematically analyses and pursues with a view to sharing its expertise with others.

Sustainable investment



The Foundation's asset management has been taking aspects of sustainability into account since 2011. The entire equity and bond portfolio is continuously monitored to ensure that ESG criteria are met. ESG defines a standard that can be used to assess an organisation's economic sustainability. The challenge for the Foundation is to achieve the highest possible level of sustainability with its investment strategy – without jeopardising the mandate set out in its statutes, which is to invest the assets as profitably as possible.

Organisation



The Volkswagen Foundation currently employs 115 people, mainly in the three departments of funding, asset management, finance, and administration. Four staff units report directly to the CEO Dr. Georg Schütte, who heads the Foundation. The supervisory and control body is the Board of Trustees, which comprises 14 individuals from academia and other areas of society.

zukunft.niedersachsen



With their own funding program, the foundation and the state government of Lower Saxony are jointly developing research and teaching in Lower Saxony. The aim of '*zukunft.niedersachsen*' is to make the state significantly more visible as a centre of science in the context of domestic and international competition. The focus is on quality-assured selection processes and the ongoing identification of future-oriented fields of research. Three priority areas are currently being specifically promoted: digitalisation, transformation, and research excellence.

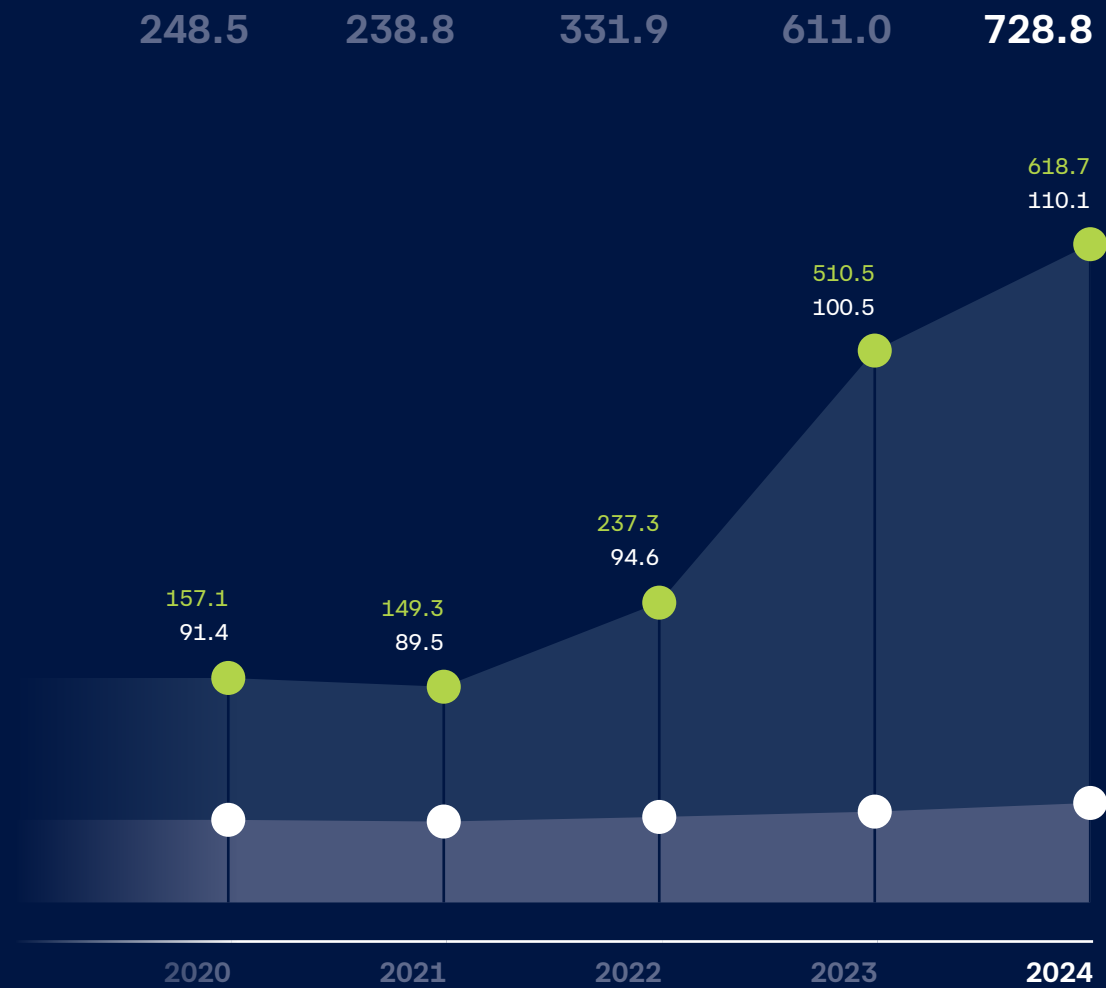
History



The Foundation owes its existence and its name to an agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony concluded in 1961. The Foundation was subsequently established with proceeds generated by the privatisation of the Volkswagen manufacturing company. With seat in Hanover, it started operations in 1962 as an independent, private and charitable foundation under civil law – and not as a corporate foundation.

Grant Approvals

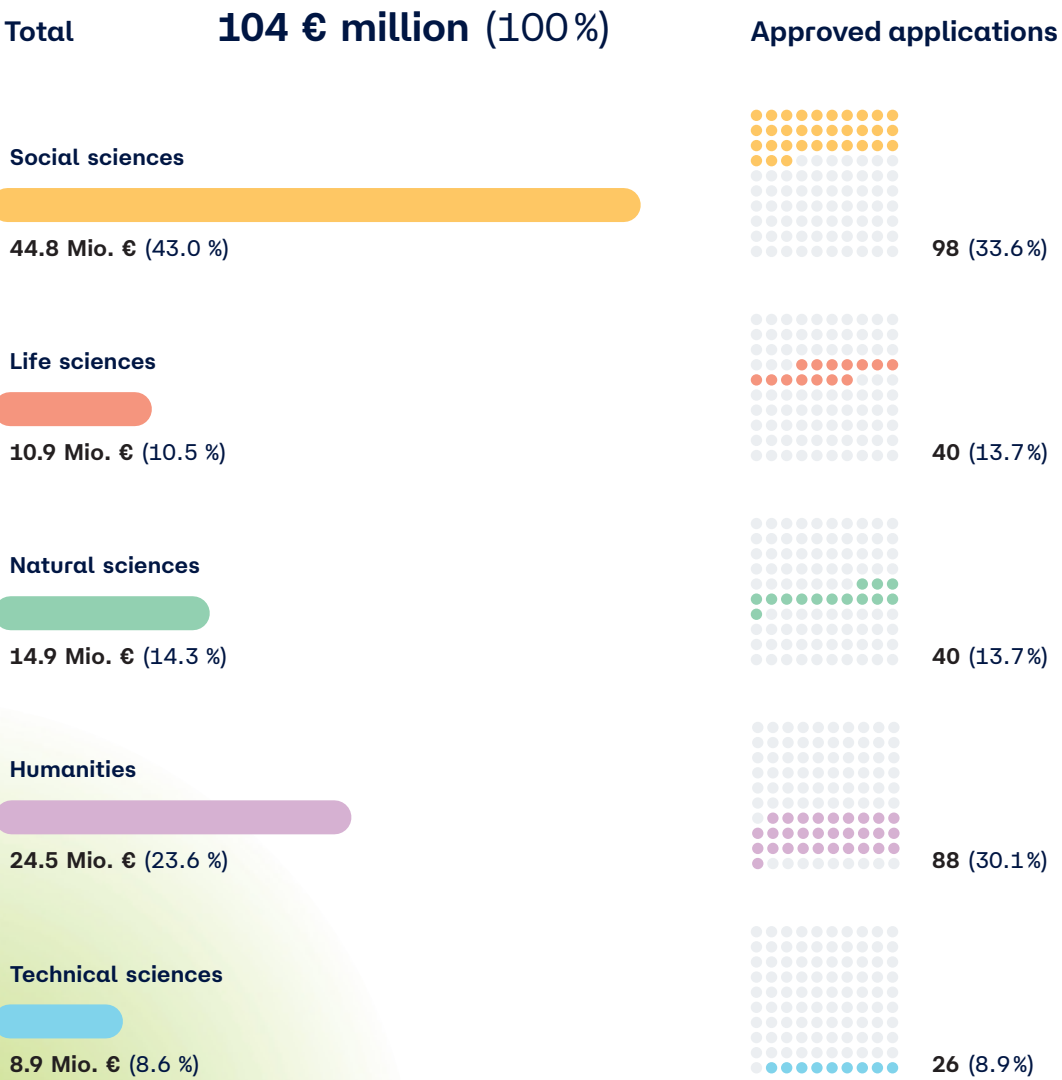
Grant approvals 2020 to 2024
in € millions



General Funding including Foundation-own events
zukunft.niedersachsen

Use of Funds*

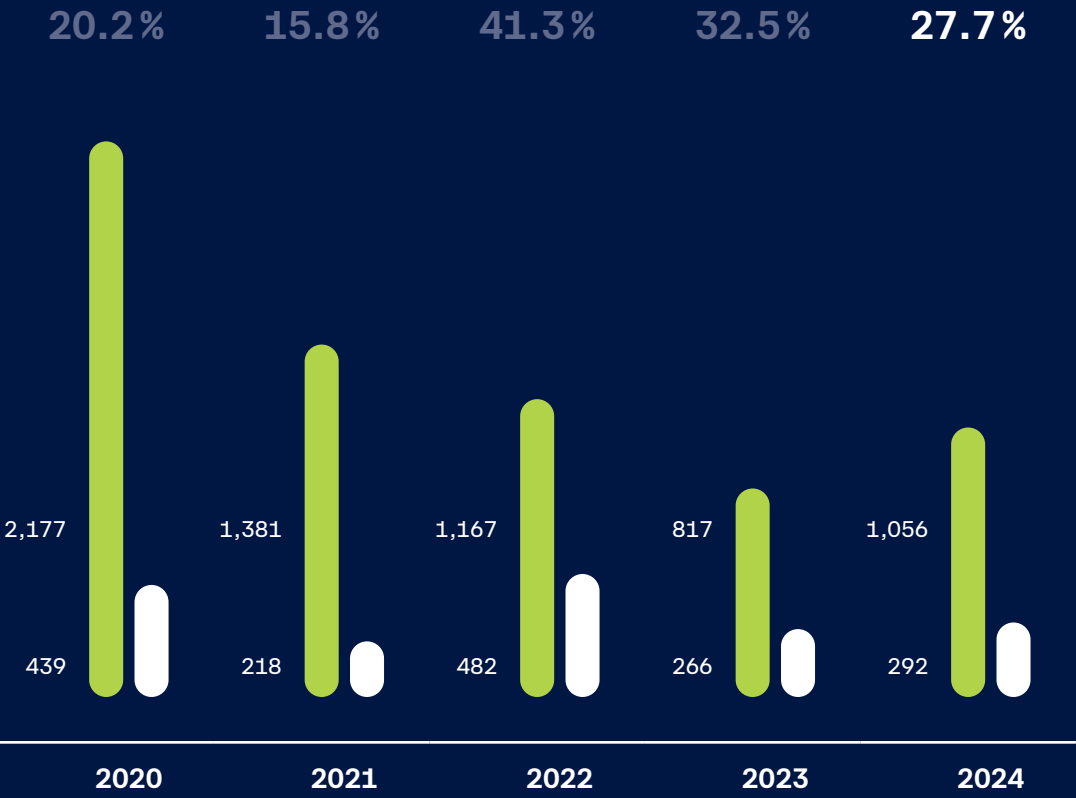
Funding approvals in the area of General Funding (total 292), broken down by scientific field, number, and funding amount, and share of total grants and funding amount (in percent). In 2024, there were 186 grant approvals in the humanities and social sciences and 106 approvals in the life sciences, natural and technical sciences.



*Not including General Funding and Foundation-own events.

Grant Approvals in General Funding*

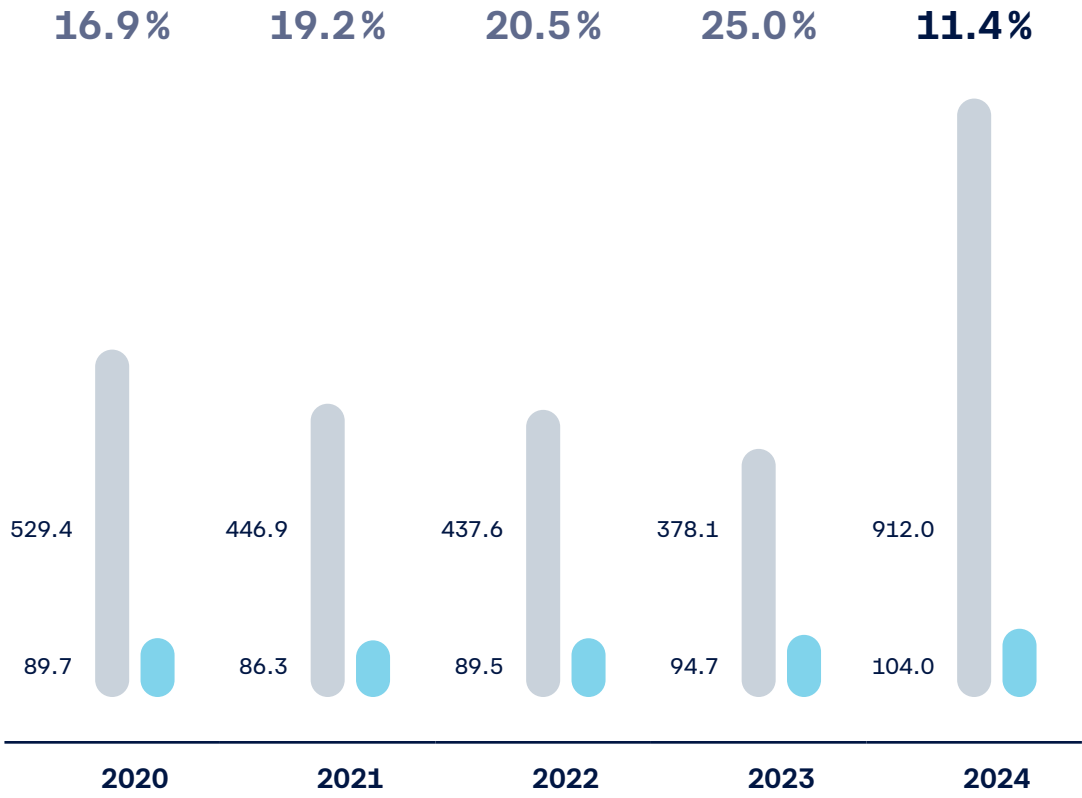
Number of applications and grant approvals from 2020 to 2024: total and annual quota (in percent)



*Not including General Funding and Foundation-own events.

■ Number of applications
■ Grants

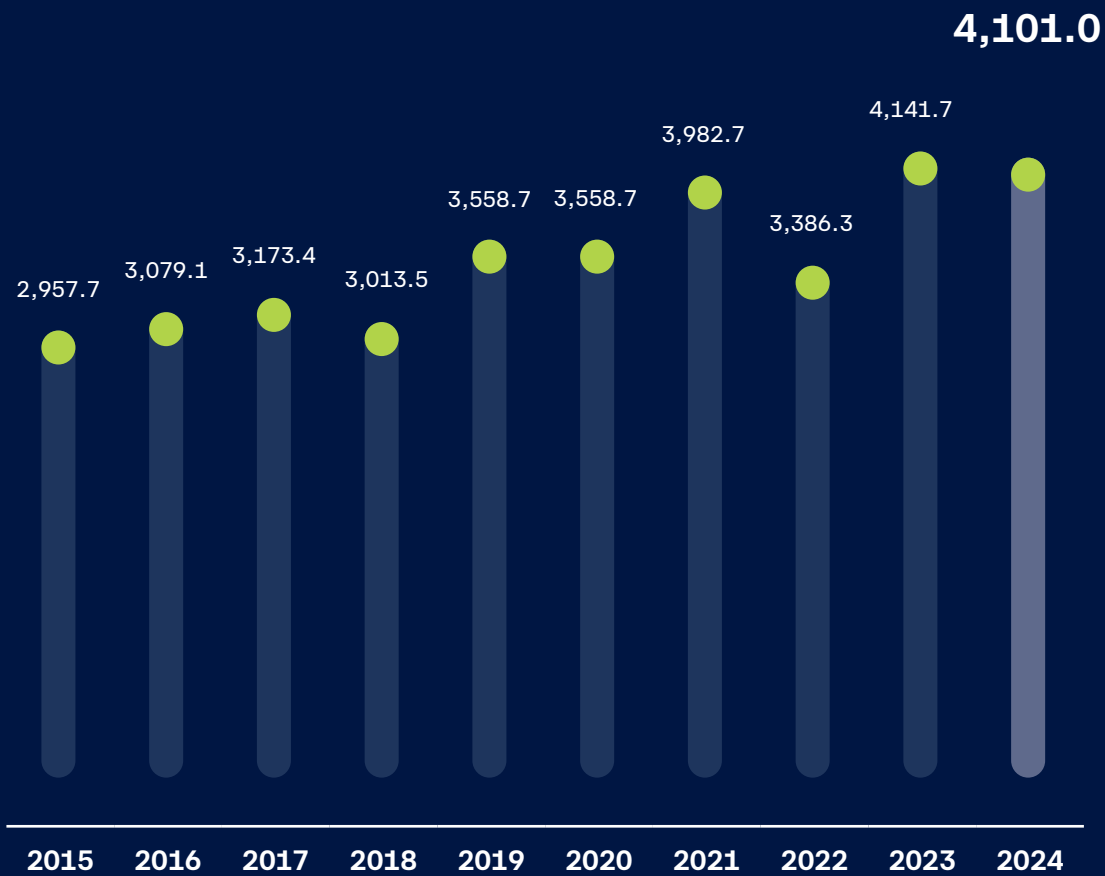
Application and approval amounts in € million from 2020 to 2024: total and annual quota (in percent)



■ Requested amount
■ Grant amount

Development of Foundation assets

In € millions



Asset classes in Asset Management

10.2%

Real estate

38.8%

Interest-bearing securities

50.4%

Shares

0.6%

Alternative investments

The people we support

➤ We regularly publish reports on our grant recipients and their work: exceptional individuals with surprising perspectives on research and methods. Here you can read excerpts from three exemplary researcher profiles. The QR codes will take you to the full articles on our homepage.



➤ **Hilke Marit Berger** is an urban researcher at Hafen City University Hamburg and heads the project 'Sinking cities: cultural heritage as a transformational resource'.

Hilke Marit Berger's 30-strong transdisciplinary team consists of experts in urban planning, architecture, sociology, computer science and philosophy. In cooperation with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a network of international, nation-wide, and local experts from the areas of science, business, and NGOs, they are researching innovative solutions to the problems of growing cities. One of the projects is the two-year pioneering project 'Sinking Cities', which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation with 500,000 euros. The art and science project wants to find out how residents of the three coastal cities of

Jakarta, Alexandria and Bremen are coping with the consequences of global warming. While Jakarta is slowly sinking into the sea, water is crashing against the walls of houses in Alexandria, and Bremen is experiencing increasingly severe storm surges. The aim of the project is to draw on the intangible cultural heritage of these cities to gain knowledge for sustainable and socially integrated climate adaptation.



➤ **Helge Schwiertz**, sociologist at the University of Hamburg, heads the research project 'Enacting citizenship and solidarity in Europe from below'.

Housing shortage, care crisis, and migrants in need: for three years, a team led by Helge Schwiertz has been looking at how people affected by these problems are coping. These people are not at the helm of politics, but are small cogs in the wheel of society trying to alleviate hardship with solidarity – both collectively as well as independently. Schwiertz explains: 'What we want to develop is a concept of horizontal citizenship.' This means that citizens beyond state structures, beyond government agencies and their hierarchies, can be political subjects. In academia, this is referred to as prefigurati-

ve politics. In relation to the initiatives, this means 'that they do not just make radical political demands and then wait for the state to respond and solve their problems. Instead, they seize the initiative themselves to create structures that already provide solutions when the state either fails to do so – or only provides inadequately.'



➤ **Anika Kaiser** is a PhD candidate at the Department of General Rhetoric at the University of Tübingen. She supervises the practical project 'Citizens' Assembly on AI and Freedom' within RHET AI (Center for Rhetorical Science Communication Research on Artificial Intelligence), a centre for science communication research funded by the foundation.

Anika Kaiser is researching an aspect that is essential to our democracy: How can people have their say when it comes to the major issues of our time? How can we succeed in making the views of the population visible alongside scientific per-

spectives? Specifically, on the topic of artificial intelligence (AI). AI fascinates, but it also triggers fears. Many millions of euros are invested in AI research every year. In politics, AI is considered a crucial technology of the future that should be developed in a 'value-oriented' manner. However, it often remains unclear what this means. 'That's why it makes sense to better understand people's experiences with AI applications, the consequences of using AI technologies in different contexts, and how these shape people's worldviews and values,' says Anika Kaiser. AI research and politics can only address societal needs if these are also made fully visible.

'What "value-oriented" AI research actually is can only be meaningfully determined in a democracy together with the people.'



Foundation News

New Funding Offers (2024)

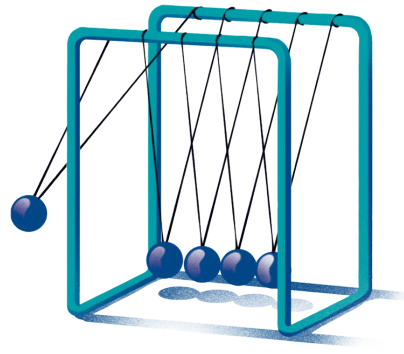
- **Night Science – Space for creative thinking** Interdisciplinary tandems comprising two scientists will have the opportunity to join forces in a research context to develop unconventional ideas and hypotheses
- **Open Up – New Research Spaces for the Humanities and Cultural Studies** We are looking for projects that explore entirely new research spaces and topics
- **The (De)tabooing of Science and Research** How taboos arise in science, manage to persist, and may also be dissolved (theme week on this topic from 17 to 19 September 2025 in Hanover)
- **NEXT – Quantum Biology** Proving the existence of quantum effects in biological systems (one-time call for proposals; closed)

Scoping Workshops

Intensive exchange of views is at the forefront of this experimental event format. In intensive scoping workshops, around 30 participants develop options for advancing their joint fields of research and creating new impact. The scoping workshops take place in Hanover, and the dates are set by the Foundation. The topics are chosen by the applicants.



For all current offers in
General Funding



Impact Monitoring

Over a two-year period, the funding department has developed a concept for impact monitoring tailored to its own specific needs. The Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI) is the Foundation's partner in this process. The objectives are to enhance support for strategic decision-making through providing more empirical evidence and enabling structured tracking to verify whether funding offers are achieving their defined goals.



The Foundation provides information about its approach to impact monitoring in two separate brochures (2024, 2025).

Reform of the Statutes

A revised form of the Foundation's statutes has been in effect since March 2025. This was prompted by recommendations resulting from an overall evaluation of the Foundation, an audit carried out by the Federal Audit Office, and the reform of foundation law. One of the changes is that the Board of Trustees will now act as a supervisory and control body, while a new CEO is now anchored in the statutes and will be responsible for the management. This role will be taken on by the current Secretary General, Dr Georg Schütte. From 1 January 2028, the statutes provide for an Executive Board consisting of at least two persons.



Foundation statutes in
the new version
dated 6 March 2025



Administration of Funding

At the turn of the year 2024/25, the Foundation launched its new digital system in the area of Funding Administration. The transition from the old to the new system took a great deal of time and effort, so it is all the more gratifying to know that we now have a tool that makes many things much easier for both employees and applicants, such as the electronic submission of applications, project outlines and cost projection. In the future, funding requests and expenditure reports will also be handled via the funding portal.



Go to the funding portal

Statement of income and allocation of funds

↗ in € thousands

	2024	2023
Income from asset management	459.276	997.583
Cost of asset management	20.393	16.619
Surplus from asset management	438.883	980.964
Grants for funding purposes	-	-
Administrative expenses	16.563	17.667
Annual yield	422.320	963.297
Costs of the fulfillment of the Foundation's purpose	706.897	603.611
Net loss/surplus for the year	-284.577	359.686
Funds carried forward from the previous year	116.262	68.262
Allocation to revenue reserves	300.000	-300.000
Allocation to the reallocation reserve	-34.575	-11.686
Amounts carried forward to the following year	97.110	116.262

↗ Audit

The auditing firm BDO AG, Hanover, has audited the annual financial statements 2024 of the Volkswagen Foundation and issued an unqualified audit opinion.

Balance

↗ in € thousands

Aktiva	2024	2023
A. Claims ¹	76.694	76.694
B. Non-current assets		
I. Intangible assets	1.295	380
II. Fixed assets	1.375	1.448
III. Financial assets	4.002.927	3.944.314
C. Current assets		
I. Receivables and other assets	25.928	24.333
II. Securities	84.784	23.975
III. Cash and cash equivalents	188.343	255.717
D. Prepaid expenses and deferred charges	238	275
Balance sheet total assets	4.381.584	4.327.136

Liabilities	2024	2023
A. Equity		
I. Share capital	1.324.707	1.324.707
II. Revenue reserves	777.896	1.077.896
III. Reclassification results	654.301	619.726
IV. Funds carried forward	97.110	116.262
	2.854.014	3.138.591
B. Project reserve ²	3.302	3.266
C. Provisions	49.206	49.468
D. Liabilities	1.475.062	1.135.811
Balance sheet total liabilities	4.381.584	4.327.136

¹ against the State of Lower Saxony pursuant to Section 4 (1b) of the Articles of Association

² in accordance with Section 62 (1) No. 1 of the German Fiscal Code (AO)

We Endow Knowledge



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