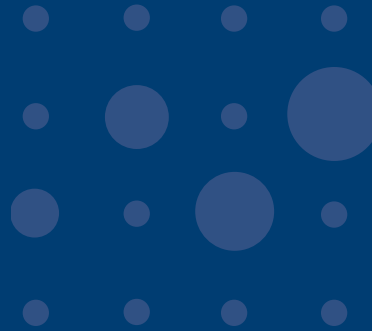


## Office

At present 90 members of staff are responsible for processing and submitting proposals to the Board of Trustees and subsequently executing their decisions. The Board of Trustees appoints the Secretary General, who heads the Office. Together with the Executive Management team he runs the affairs of the Foundation.

For further information please see [www.volkswagenstiftung.de](http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de).

## Guide to Peer Review



A Foundation  
of Knowledge



VolkswagenStiftung

## History

The Volkswagen Foundation (VolkswagenStiftung) is a non-profit-making foundation established under private law based in Hanover. Its objective is to support science, the humanities and technology in research and university teaching. The Foundation owes its existence to a treaty between the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony, which settled a controversy over the ownership of the Volkswagen-factories after the War. As a result a “Stiftung Volkswagenwerk” (as the Foundation was called at that time) was set up in 1961.

The Foundation is not affiliated to the car manufacturer of the same name.

VolkswagenStiftung  
Kastanienallee 35  
30519 Hannover  
Germany

Phone +49(0)5 11/83 81-0  
Fax +49(0)5 11/83 81-344

[mail@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:mail@volkswagenstiftung.de)  
[www.volkswagenstiftung.de](http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de)



The Volkswagen Foundation's seat is Hanover; its office is located at Kastanienallee 35 on the southside of the city.

## The Foundation and its activities

The Volkswagen Foundation's mission is to support the humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology in research and higher education. Support is given under the terms of funding initiatives with different objectives, funding mechanisms and time-scales. As a rule, proposals will only be considered if they fit within the guidelines of one of these initiatives, but for "extraordinary projects" the Foundation may also provide funding outside this scope. Decisions are taken by the Foundation's Board which meets three times a year. The Board is composed of fourteen honorary members and being committed only to the Foundation's statutes. Between Board meetings proposals are being decided upon in writing, or within a financially defined frame by the Secretary General.

## Peer review as basis for decisions

As a rule, the Volkswagen Foundation bases its decisions on external peer review. Depending on the respective funding initiative and the accordant review procedure, the Foundation may request a number of experts to submit their individual written assessments of single applications. Another procedure involves peer review by a group of experts sitting on an expert panel. In this case all the applications for one initiative submitted by a given deadline are subjected to a comparative review process. There is no permanent stock of experts, rather they are selected from various disciplines, universities and institutes, also from the non-university sector and from abroad, in accordance with the requirements called for by the individual applications and funding initiatives.

## Criteria

Experts should not feel restricted through this guide. Rather you should feel encouraged to formulate your personal recommendation frankly and freely. Details on focal points of the respective funding initiative are given in the "Information for Applicants" leaflet available for each initiative. Please do also consider the Foundation's commitment to the realization of equal opportunities in the area of science and higher education. The aspects below are regarded to be crucial for a strict assessment oriented towards the development of research in an international context:

### Contribution to the further development of research

What place does the proposal take within the framework of the scientific development in the respective area? What is new and original in the approach? What will be the benefit in terms of new knowledge to be acquired?

### Clear-cut description and consistency

Does the project proposal reflect the present state of the art? Are the objectives clearly defined and attainable? Are the proposed methods and the working scheme adequate in order to achieve the project goals?

### Personal qualification

What about the competence of the project staff, their publication record (also in consideration of their biography, e.g. family phase) and the preparatory work for the project?

### Adequate extent of time, staff and consumables

Are the estimated time, staff, and consumables really required to achieve the proposed objectives? On which budget items could savings be made or funds be re-allocated?

### Recommendations on the realization

Can you think of any special point that could be helpful in conducting the project and of which the applicant should therefore be informed anonymously?

### **Length of and time-limit for reviews**

Normally, experts' votes and their justification should not be longer than one or two pages. They may even take less than one page, if the proposal concerned does not offer any problem. Rarely will a review – even in complicated cases – require more than three pages.

The Foundation would be grateful to receive the report within six weeks (also by fax or e-mail). Experts who are unable to provide the requested review – for personal or other reasons – should inform the Foundation as early as possible.

### **Participation in expert panels**

The application documents are sent to the members of expert panels about one month prior to the date the panel convenes to discuss the merits of individual applications. Normally, the Foundation does not require a detailed written review. At the meeting different views will be discussed in detail and a recommendation prepared. The composition of expert panels is changed from time to time. This is done on the one hand to avoid undue pressure on the participants' time, and on the other hand to prevent panels becoming too set in their ways.

### **Final recommendation**

Written reports as well as results of verbal consultation should end up with a clear statement. If an expert recommends the project to be supported subject to certain conditions, the latter should be clearly defined, thus providing the basis for further considerations.

### **Confidentiality**

Peer review at the Volkswagen Foundation is subject to strict confidentiality in order to allow for a straightforward vote, particularly in difficult cases. If in individual cases excerpts from expert reports are forwarded, they will be anonymous.

### **Review process Code of Practice**

Experts acting in an advisory capacity for the Foundation agree to be bound by the following Code of Practice. Should you fear being in breach of this Code of Practice, participation in the review process in question must be declined. This may ensue without the need to give grounds. A written agreement with the code is not necessary.

- (1) Peer review follows the rules of good research practice and academic integrity. All statements must be truthful and in no way impinge on the intellectual property of others, nor must they constrain the research activities of others.
- (2) Acceptance of an invitation to participate in a peer review process is a declaration of competence in important aspects of the application in question. Should experts feel insufficiently competent to join in the assessment process, they must inform the Foundation correspondingly and destroy any documentation concerning the application in question.
- (3) Should reviewers feel they may be in any way biased, they must withdraw from the peer review process and destroy any pertinent documentation in their possession. This shall also be the case in the event of a potential conflict of interest.
- (4) Experts acting in an advisory panel for the Foundation agree not to submit any applications on their own behalf for the duration of their participation in the peer review process and not to become involved in other applications which may be submitted to the Foundation by third parties.
- (5) Besides scientific considerations, both negative as well as positive appraisals are to take into account the requirements, objectives, and constraints set out in the "Information for Applicants" for the respective funding initiative.
- (6) Experts acting in an advisory capacity for the Foundation agree to treat applications in strict confidentiality and not to pass any details or documents on to third parties.