

## Individual Funding

# Change! Fellowships

**Profile Area:** Societal Transformations

**Deadline:** April 16, 2026 (2pm CEST)

The Volkswagen Foundation is looking for personalities in science who, together with partners outside of academia, join forces to develop knowledge, methods and scenarios for transformation processes, initiate and advance such processes in society, and anchor transdisciplinarity in science.



Research Area: All disciplines



Funding Type: Research groups that generate knowledge on transformation processes



Target Group: Postdocs (2 to 15 years after receiving their doctoral degree, reference point: due date of the call for proposals), junior professors and professors up to 3 years after taking up their first tenured professorship



1.5 m to 1.8 m EUR (depending on personal qualification)



4-5 years



Involvement of at least 1 to max. 3 partners from outside of academia obligatory

# 1 Objectives

We are currently facing multiple crises that can only be overcome by transforming society and existing systems. The scientific community is called upon to identify social vulnerabilities and planetary boundaries to explore evidence-based options for action, and to help shape creative solutions. For these changes, we are looking for scientific personalities who conduct research on societal transformation processes. Together with partners outside of academia, they will identify and address societal problems. Throughout the whole research process, they jointly generate knowledge about the factors that support or hinder change and develop strategies to shape transformation processes. They aim to use the knowledge and strategies gained from the joint research to actively bring about change.

To date, knowledge transfer and collaboration with partners outside of academia are not, or only to a very limited extent, accounted for as evaluation criteria in academia. Therefore, this funding initiative aims at contributing to the development of future leaders and university lecturers in these fields and to improve the institutionalisation of transdisciplinary research at research institutions in Germany.

By qualifying scientists in early career stages at the interface of science and societal practice, the initiative aims to train future leaders with in-depth knowledge on transformation processes and the ability to transfer knowledge for both areas, thus achieving sustainable change. In addition, it will provide an impetus to the scientific community to strengthen research on transformation processes and their design, and to establish joint approaches with partners outside of academia.

The initiative targets scientists who aim for excellent, high-quality research, are interested in topics of transformation research and who have recognized the potential of knowledge resources outside of academia (e.g., from professional practice) for the research process and want to integrate them into their research.

# 2 Scope of Funding

The funding initiative targets postdoctoral researchers (2-15 years after receiving their doctoral degree), junior professors and professors up to 3 years after taking up their first tenured professorship. Researchers who are employed at a German research institution at the start of the project are eligible to apply. It is mandatory to previously have worked with the partner outside of academia, or to have gained practical or transdisciplinary experience in the relevant field. The initiative is open to topics from all disciplines, given that the content of the project focuses on societal transformation processes and includes transdisciplinary research approaches. Projects dealing with technological developments must be linked to questions of societal change. The involvement of (inter)national partners outside of academia – including non-profit non-governmental organisations, public authorities or government agencies, media representatives, and freelancers from the arts and culture – in the entire research process is a prerequisite. In this way, the foundation aims to ensure that the knowledge gained about transformation processes is translated into recommendations for action and sustainably implemented in relevant areas of society.

The foundation understands transdisciplinary research as joint research of high scientific quality conducted by scientists and partners outside of academia on equal footing. In this partnership, all participants equally bring in their expertise – from identifying the research question and developing the research topic to translating the research results into concrete recommendations

for action. It is possible to involve different partners from practice in different project phases with at least one main partner from outside of academia partaking throughout the duration of the project. In addition to following a transdisciplinary research approach, it is also possible to include an interdisciplinary perspective, but in contrast to transdisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity is not mandatory for a successful application.

Postdoctoral researchers can apply for funding of their own position, for two to three scientific staff (PhD and Postdoc level, 100% fulltime equivalent), and for necessary material and travel expenses. The funding can amount up to 1.8 million euros.

Junior professors and recently tenured professors can also apply for funding for two to three research assistants (PhD and Postdoc level, 100% fulltime equivalent) and for the necessary material and travel expenses. If the position of the project leader is not financially secured for the whole period of the project, it is mandatory to apply for money to close that gap (e.g. to bridge the gap in the case of a non-tenure track W1 professorship). The amount of funding can be up to 1.5 million euros.

In addition, project-related staff, travel expenses and other research funds for partners outside of academia can be requested within the specified budget.

The above indicated financial limits include the lump sum 'administration costs' for the partners outside of academia; overheads for eligible research institutions are granted in addition.

Sustainable career opportunities for all team members are very important to the Volkswagen Foundation. Therefore, we expect applicants to reflect on the career prospects within and outside of academia for themselves and all team members. Please note that all research staff positions (PhD and Postdoc) will have to be 100% fulltime equivalent.

We also ask applicants to provide a publication concept and to list an (inter)national scientific advisory board.

The funding period is 4 to 5 years.

## 3 Application and Selection Procedure

### 3.1 Overview

Processing time approx. 10 months:

- Deadline to submit proposals: April 16, 2026 (2pm CEST)
- Initial selection (formal and considering the fit for the initiative) by the Volkswagen Foundation
- Approx. June/July 2026 evaluation of the proposals by an external expert committee
- Approx. September 2026 selection workshop (scientific excellence and individual competences)
- Early 2027, the latest: Final decision and notification

Please note: If necessary, the Foundation reserves the right to use a lottery element to select projects with controversial votings in case of a high number of applications. Further information will be provided in the webinars.

The Volkswagen Foundation will offer **webinars** in advance of the deadline for questions about  
As of: February 2026

the application process. The dates will be announced via our website, and the participation is **highly recommended**.

### 3.2 Procedure

Please submit your application by the deadline via the application portal. The application is to be submitted in English. Please note the evaluation criteria and application documents to be submitted below.

The foundation will conduct an internal pre-selection based on the formal requirements and the fit for the initiative. Due to the expected high number of proposals, a lottery element may be added to the procedure for cases with controversial votings (see above). Subsequently, the pre-selected applications will be reviewed by an external expert panel. In the further selection process, in addition to examining professional qualification, criteria such as leadership and communication skills, as well as conflict management will play a role to identify the individuals who can act as 'change agents' for advancing transdisciplinarity and transformation processes. The final funding decision will be made by the Board of Trustees of the Volkswagen Foundation on the basis of the recommendations from the previous selection steps.

The following criteria are relevant for the review process:

- Originality and very strong scientific quality
- Potential for generating new knowledge on societal transformation processes and how to shape them as well as for developing recommendations for action as concrete as possible for project-specific target groups
- Coherence of project design, theoretical approach and methodology, openness of the approach
- Outstanding qualifications and scientific independence of the applicants
- Fitting transdisciplinary research design
- Relevant expertise and targeted composition of the partners outside of academia
- Career prospects within and outside of academia for all team members through their work on the project
- Proven engagement of the applicant in project-relevant networks outside of academia or existing experience in transdisciplinary research (see CV-template)
- Convincing reflection, integration and learning process in the project

In the transdisciplinary research process, different logics and interests of the participating groups of actors, including science, come together. Therefore, the application should explain how the applicants plan to deal with the individual interests of the different partners in the research process. Applicants are asked to explain the rationale for the project constellation and to reflect on how the interests of the individual partners are taken into account and continuously reflected upon in the project.

## 4 Information on the Application

### 4.1 Our Funding Platform

Applications and short proposals have to be submitted via the Volkswagen Foundation's [funding platform](#). All templates (CV, letter of intent, etc.) are available for download on the funding platform and on the website for the respective programme announcement. Please only use the templates available for download there when submitting your application.

In the case of international participation, the partner at the German research institution must create the application in the funding platform and be defined as PI. Otherwise, PI and Co-PI are equal partners.

**It is important that all applicants (PI, Co-PIs, etc.) register early in the process.** Co-applicant(s) can only be invited to work on an application if they have registered.

For further support please contact [support@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:support@volkswagenstiftung.de).

### 4.2 Information on Enclosures

Unless otherwise specified below, please use only the template available for download at the funding platform or on the website for the respective programme announcement.

#### 4.2.1 Project Description

Please use the template available for download at the funding platform or on the website for the respective programme announcement. Please adhere to the page respectively word limit. The template also includes tables to list the publication concept and scientific advisory board.

#### 4.2.2 Expenditure Plan

Please use the Excel template available for download at the funding platform. It is not possible to upload and use other Excel sheets. For instructions on how to fill in the template, please refer to the respective help sheet.

Please note: Each Co-PI has to submit an individual expenditure plan.

All types of costs, including those for the partners outside of academia, must be managed by the applicant university or non-university research institution.

The following costs can be applied for:

- Research staff
  - For postdocs (in exceptional cases also for junior-professors): Own position (as a rule TVL-E14; please calculate the real costs)
  - Funding for two to three scientific staff members (please calculate the real costs, in case the candidates are already known, and use the average personnel rates provided by Volkswagen Foundation otherwise; please note that scientific staff positions (PhD and Postdoc) have to be 100% fulltime equivalent)
- Other staff (optional, please see help sheet in expenditure plan)
- Travel expenses
- Equipment/ instrumentation (> 10,000 EUR)

- Other research funds
- Publication costs (Open Access)
- Overheads (in case of eligibility for application, basis of calculation are the project costs of the scientific institution, see also 4.3.1)
- Lump sum administration costs for partners outside of academia (of up to 10% of the direct project costs, with a maximum of 12,000 €. The administration fee is part of the total funding sum)
- Equal opportunity funds (see 4.2.5)
- Sustainability funds (see 4.2.6)

Please note: Partners outside of academia can also apply for project related personnel, further and travel costs.

#### 4.2.3 Curricula Vitae

Please submit the curricula vitae of all applicants in tabular, narrative form, using the template available for download at the funding platform or on the website for the respective programme announcement.

Partners outside of academia should also provide information on their affiliation and CV in form of the template provided for them.

#### 4.2.4 Equal Opportunity Funds

To support equal opportunities and diversity in the research system, the Volkswagen Foundation offers the possibility to apply for equal opportunity funds. These funds – granted in addition to the maximum funding sum – support measures that serve to compensate for disadvantages at an individual level and/or aim to strengthen diversity in the education and research system in general. Equal Opportunity Funds can be applied for as lump sum of 1% of the total application amount (excluding overheads). Please indicate in the expenditure plan if you would like to apply for Equal Opportunity Funds; no further documents are required. For further information please refer to our [website](#).

#### 4.2.5 Sustainability Funds

The Volkswagen Foundation is committed to sustainability, and in particular resource-efficient research processes. It therefore provides funds to certify research laboratories involved in the research project via providers such as [LEAF](#) or [mygreenlab](#) as sustainable. These funds – granted in addition to the maximum funding sum – amount to a lump sum of up to 3,000 EUR per laboratory. Laboratories are eligible if at least one of the PI/co-PIs conduct the respective research there. To apply, please indicate the correct lump sum in the expenditure plan at the corresponding position.

#### 4.2.6 Further Enclosures

Institutional declaration (**scientific institution**). Please use the provided template.

- Commitment to employ the fellow and to manage the overall grant in case of approval of the application

- Details on the university's contribution and the resources and facilities provided (e.g., workshops/ laboratories, archives, instruments)

Letter of intent (organisation/ institution/ company **outside of academia**). Please use the provided template.

- Commitment to support personnel involved in the project
- Details on the non-personnel contribution and the resources and facilities provided

## 4.3 Further Information

### 4.3.1 Overheads

With the exception of Max Planck, Leibniz, Fraunhofer and Helmholtz institutes, public or non-profit scientific institutions in Germany can apply for up to 10% overheads in addition to the direct project costs. The same applies to comparable scientific institutions abroad. For more information on overheads, see 'Information on Lump Sum for Overheads', which is provided at our [download section](#).

### 4.3.2 Open Science

The foundation is committed to Open Science ([Open Science Policy](#)). Thus, we expect that results will be published open access and that data generated will be made available for scientific use following the FAIR principles via recognized repositories (see [NFDIs](#), [re3data](#), and [RI-sources](#)). If data generation is intended, please submit a data management plan provided by the foundation ([Basic Data Management Plan](#)). Alternatively, you can submit a more detailed, discipline specific data management plan. Please clearly state in your application if you don't intend to generate data.

Note: The Volkswagen Foundation offers the module 'Data Reuse - Additional funding for the preparation of research data' for funded projects to prepare research data. You can apply for the module during or up to six months after the project duration.

### 4.3.3 Animal Studies

If animal studies are planned, please explain their role within the overall methodology, which standards have been followed in the planning of the experiment (e.g. PREPARE/ARRIVE guidelines), which refinement measures are planned and whether pre-registration of the experiment is intended. Please describe the extent to which the 3R principle (replace – reduce – refine) is applied in a particularly innovative way and state the budget reserved for this purpose. The foundation also encourages applicants to use non-animal laboratory materials (e.g. recombinant antibodies, non-animal sera and gels) in their experiments. The costs of these materials can be included in the expenditure plan as non-recurrent expenses.

### 4.3.4 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 considered for review. The foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

## 5 Contact

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## 6 Further Information

- [Website VolkswagenStiftung](#)
- [Website Change! Fellowships](#)
- [FAQ and Service \(including download section\)](#)
- [Influence of Generative AI on Research and the Volkswagen Foundation's Funding Activities](#)
- [Recommendations for Sustainable Travel](#)