

Collaborative projects

NEXT – “Dual Use” of Ideas and Concepts from the Humanities and Social Sciences

Profile Area: Exploration

Deadline: 6 October 2026 (2 pm CEST)

Concepts from the humanities and social sciences often have an impact far beyond academia. But what happens when theories and conceptual frameworks are decontextualised and used for purposes other than those originally intended? Through this call for proposals, the Foundation supports research on such “dual use” effects and explores how the transfer of ideas from academia into political and ideological contexts takes place.

This call for proposals is part of the “NEXT” funding framework, which serves as an overarching umbrella for various thematic calls, all of which aim to stimulate progress in the academic landscape and focus attention on what might come next. Within this framework, the Volkswagen Foundation intends to address new or previously under-researched topics and approaches that demonstrate high knowledge potential and relevance for the future.



Research Area: Humanities and Cultural Studies, Social Sciences, Research on Science



Funding Type: Collaborative projects; funding for a teaching substitute, dedicated positions for postdoctoral researchers



Target Group: Project teams of 2 to 3 researchers in Germany; international collaborations possible



Max.: EUR 450,000 or 650,000



Max.: 2 years

1 Objectives

Dual use – i.e. the dual applicability of research results, technologies or software for civilian and military purposes – has been a well-known and common phenomenon for over 20 years, particularly in the life sciences, natural sciences and engineering. In view of increasing geopolitical tensions and rapidly advancing technological change, the boundaries between civilian innovations and their potential for military application are currently becoming increasingly blurred. In research and science policy, the distinction between military and civilian research is recently being deliberately called into question.

While the term “dual use” is well defined in other disciplines, little research has been conducted into the extent to which this phenomenon also affects research in the humanities and social sciences. In the humanities and social sciences, “dual use” is understood here to mean unintended effects of research in these fields. Such effects and modes of operation can be diverse and need not always be ideologically motivated.

This call for proposals focuses specifically on the anti-liberal, anti-scientific and anti-democratic appropriation of concepts, theories and modes of thought from the humanities and social sciences. These are detached from their original context, adopted selectively, exaggerated, and employed deliberately for specific purposes, such as deception, manipulation, or disinformation. 'Knowledge is socially constructed' becomes 'every truth is merely an opinion'. This statement can be used to delegitimise science, the media and institutions, for example. Central ideas of poststructuralism in the broader sense, such as the notion that meanings are fluid and identities are formed through language and habits, are detached from their original epistemological and ethical context and employed as rhetorical tools.

The Foundation's aim with this call for proposals is, firstly, to support exploratory and interdisciplinary basic research examining the occurrence, mechanisms and conditions of repurposing concepts, theories and research findings from the humanities and social sciences. Secondly, the aim is to create space for reflection on the philosophy of science, and to develop reception-sensitive forms of theory-building which consider the tension between potential instrumentalisation and the freedom of research and teaching. Thirdly, the call for proposals aims to generate knowledge for the responsible handling of findings from research in the humanities and social sciences, as well as providing impetus for reflective science communication. This raises the question of how the adoption and impact of such concepts and modes of thought in unexpected contexts relates to the growing demand for the social relevance and impact of the humanities and social sciences.

2 Scope of Funding

Funding is available for (interdisciplinary) project teams from the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences, consisting of two to three researchers (one PI and up to two Co-PIs), with a maximum of € 450,000 (for 2 PIs) or € 650,000 (for 3 PIs) in total funding over a funding period of up to two years.

The call for proposals is aimed at researchers with a PhD who are employed at German universities and research institutions. Researchers with a PhD from international research institutions may participate as Co-PIs.

Applications may be submitted for the following project funding, for example:

- Research staff (substitute teaching staff, dedicated positions for postdoctoral researchers, research assistants). Funding cannot be requested for doctoral positions.
- Travel expenses and other research funds (such as travel and conference expenses, costs for involving project partners in Germany and abroad, research visits to other institutions, workshops, etc.)
- Publication costs (Open Access)

A kick-off meeting at Herrenhausen Palace in Hanover, organised by the Volkswagen Foundation, is intended to facilitate exchange and networking among grant recipients at the start of the funding period. It is assumed that the project will commence shortly thereafter.

Research on the following topics is eligible for funding:

- The occurrence, nature and manifestations of a specific ‘dual use’ of concepts and theories in the humanities and social sciences, which differs from deliberate disinformation or merely a simplified reception. What are its characteristic practices?
- Characteristics of theories and concepts in the humanities and social sciences that facilitate their ideologically motivated repurposing. What might a reception-sensitive approach to theory-building look like without restricting the freedom of research and teaching?
- Pathways of transfer and networks of actors through which ideas from the humanities and social sciences move from academic contexts into political, ideological or digital public spheres.
- Conditions under which such reinterpretations have a particular impact – for example, in the interplay of academic debates, media dynamics and political interests.
- Consequences arising from this for science communication in the humanities and social sciences. How can complex or critical concepts be communicated without them being easily oversimplified, misunderstood or ideologically exploited in public debates?

3 Application and Selection Procedure

3.1 Overview

- Online consultation sessions on the funding opportunity: 11 August 2026 (German) and 8 September 2026 (English), 10 am to 11.30 am (CEST)
- Deadline for applications: 6 October 2026, 2 pm (CEST)
- Final decisions: April 2027

3.2 Procedure

- Applications will be assessed in a single-stage review process by an interdisciplinary panel from the humanities and social sciences.

- In the run-up to the deadline, the Foundation will offer **online consultation sessions** to answer questions regarding the application process (see section 3.1). Attending one of these sessions is strongly recommended. To arrange a telephone consultation appointment, please email us.

Review criteria

- The relevance of the research question to investigating 'dual-use' effects in the humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences
- Innovative, exploratory and risk-taking nature of the research approach
- Coherence of the project design and methodology
- The academic qualifications of the project team and its synergies with regard to the feasibility and implementation of 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, expenditure plan, 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 on 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.

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 observe the specifications in the template regarding the maximum number of pages as well as the other formal requirements.

4.2.2 Expenditure Plan

Please use the Excel template only 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.

Detailed information on applying for staff funding can be found in [the information sheet on applying for staff funding](#).

4.2.3 Curricula Vitae

Please submit the curricula vitae of all applicants in tabular, narrative form. Please use the Foundation's template for this.

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](#).

4.3 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 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 you intend to generate or reuse data, please provide the relevant information in the appropriate section of the project description template. Clearly state here if you do not intend to generate or reuse any 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 Support for Science Communication

The Foundation encourages researchers to engage in science communication as part of their projects funded by the Foundation. As a general rule, the budget for science communication activities may not exceed 5% of the total direct project costs requested (excluding overhead costs, e.g. for a total of € 500,000 = max. € 25,000).

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. The foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

5 Contact

Dr. Pierre Schwidlinski

Email: schwidlinski@volkswagenstiftung.de

Phone: +49 511 83 81 - 228

Dr. Victoria Abakumovski

Email: abakumovski@volkswagenstiftung.de

Phone: +49 511 83 81 - 285

For administrative/organisational issues and telephone appointments:

Tajana Peters

Email: peters@volkswagenstiftung.de

Phone: +49 511 83 81 - 397

VolkswagenStiftung

Kastanienallee 35

30519 Hannover, GERMANY

6 Further Information

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