VolkswagenStiftung

Structural funding

Researching Research: Strengthening University Centres

Profile Area: Understanding Research

Deadline: see website

As part of the 'Researching Research' initiative, the Foundation supports the development and implementation of forward-looking strategic concepts at established centres, institutes, or research priority areas in the field of Science Studies at universities and provides funds for structural development.

Research Area: Science Studies

Funding Type: Funds for structural measures

Target Group: Established university centres for Science Studies

up to 1 million EUR

5 years

Joint application with university management

1 Objectives

Through its 'Researching Research' funding programme, the Volkswagen Foundation aims to bring together the various disciplines and communities involved in the study of science. The programme aims to raise the profile of Science Studies in Germany by presenting it as an interdisciplinary, multi-methodological, and internationally orientend research field. It also seeks to provide science policymakers with relevant knowledge.

As part of its 'Strengthening University Centres' funding line, the Foundation supports established centres, institutes and research priority areas in the field of Science Studies at universities in Germany. Due to the highly interdisciplinary nature of Science Studies and the necessary collaboration with other disciplines (such as medicine, engineering or natural sciences), interdisciplinary and cross-faculty organisational structures are crucial. Existing university centres, institutes and research priority areas have detached Science Studies from its embeddedness in a specific discipline, positioning it instead as an interdisciplinary, multi-methodological research field. Building on this momentum is crucial in order to strengthen existing structures, increase international visibility and institutional independence of Science Studies in Germany, and consequently enhance its effectiveness.

The funding program supports established, interdisciplinary, and often cross-faculty centres, institutes, or research priority areas for Science Studies at German universities in developing a forward-looking strategic concept and provides funds for structural development. A cooperation with local non-university research institutions is also possible. It is expected that a targeted vision will be developed together with the university management that outlines the strategic importance of the respective centre within the university, as well as specifying concise goals and criteria for successful and sustainable positioning within the national and international field of Science Studies.

2 Scope of Funding

2.1 Eligibility

Established centres, institutes or research priority areas (defined here as highly visible, long-term structures supported by multiple professorships) for Science Studies at universities in Germany that have verifiably institutionalised and progressed in recent years are eligible to apply. Individual chairs or professorships, as well as non-university centres and research institutions funded by federal or state governments, are not eligible for funding. Science Studies are defined narrowly within the scope of this funding programme. This includes for example sociology of science, philosophy of science, history of science, science and technology studies, scientometrics, psychology of science and related research fields. Centres, institutes or research priority areas focusing on educational research, higher education didactics, research on teaching and

learning, quality development in higher education and teaching, labour market and career research or science management are therefore not eligible to apply.

Please clarify your eligibility with the Foundation at an early stage and arrange a consultation.

2.2 Funding Format and Funds

The implementation of the strategic vision developed jointly with the university management is supported by providing funds for strategic measures that enable, facilitate and deepen interdisciplinary cooperation. These measures also impart the necessary methodological skills in a diverse research field and serve to enhance the international visibility and networking of the centre, institute or research priority area. Furthermore, particular support will be given to measures that facilitate collaboration with practitioners and the application of knowledge through intensive exchange with stakeholders in areas such as science policy or research management.

Funding can be applied for measure such as:

- Initiating and establishing institutional partnerships with Science Studies centres abroad, strategic invitations and visits for exchanges with international cooperation partners, guest researcher programmes.
- Expanding methods training, summer school series or methods workshops at the applying institution.
- Educational programmes for prospective researchers in Science Studies to develop skills beyond their disciplinary background and facilitate interdisciplinary research.
- Policy advice and consultancy in the research sector, administrative advice on integrating research findings into legislative and regulatory processes, cooperation with research management.

These examples illustrate the types of measures that could be supported. Other measures are also possible, particularly the combination of various measures to strategically develop existing structures. The proposed measures are expected to address the associated challenges of international visibility and networking, interdisciplinary cooperation, methodological training, and the transfer of research findings in a convincing manner.

To ensure the smooth implementation of the planned measures, proportional funds may be requested for administrative support and the position of a research coordinator, who would be responsible for developing scientific concepts and organising subject-specific exchanges within the centre. In this context, it is expected that the respective university will commit to providing an appropriate level of staffing for coordination tasks, based on the size and diversity of the centre's, institute's or research priority area’s activities, even after any potential funding ends.

In individual cases, (proportionally) financing a professorship in Science Studies may also be part of the measures applied for, if this involves an early replacement or a strategically motivated appointment, for example. In this case, the university management must provide a binding commitment to take over the professorship in full if funding is granted, and after funding from the Foundation ends.

As the funding is intended to promote the strategic development of the centres and the implementation of structural measures rather than the conduct of research projects, it is not possible to apply for qualification or research positions.

The maximum funding amount is 1 million EUR for a period of five years.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

3.1 Schedule

Applications can be submitted at two deadlines (early summer 2026 / early summer 2027) and decisions will be made by the end of the respective calendar year. There will be no deadline beyond 2027.

3.2 Application Procedure

Applications must be submitted by the head of the relevant centre, institute or research priority area for Science Studies, in consultation with the university management. As well as describing the proposed measures, the application must outline the centre's vision for strategic development during and beyond the funding period. The application should therefore demonstrate how the funding will contribute to the long-term establishment of Science Studies at the respective university, as well as how it will raise the centre’s profile within the national and international scientific community. It should also explain how the centre will pursue sustainable development beyond the funding period.

3.3 Review Procedure

Following a formal review by the Foundation’s office to establish whether the application requirements have been met, the applications are evaluated by an international, interdisciplinary panel of experts. The following criteria are relevant in the evaluation process:

- The quality of the academic work and centre’s transformation dynamics, both currently and in previous years.
- The quality and coherence of the proposed measures for achieving the outlined strategic vision.
- The centre’s integration into the scientific environment and the university's overall strategy.
- Future prospects and the sustainability of the strategic concept with regard to the local scientific environment.
- Institutional and financial support for the centre from the university management (even after funding ends).

- The centre’s contribution to establishing Science Studies as an interdisciplinary, multi-methodological and internationally oriented research field.

Leading applicants from the relevant centres, institutes or research priority areas for Science Studies will be invited to present their strategic concept to the review committee (online). It is expected that a representative of the university management will participate. The date will be communicated to invitees in due course.

It is not possible to reapply following a negative decision.

3.4 Commencement of Funding

The Foundation expects funding to commence within six months of a positive funding decision and no later than twelve months thereafter. Otherwise, the Foundation reserves the right to cancel the grant.

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. To find the relevant call for proposals relating to these guidelines, please refer to the overview within the funding platform.

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.

Please name at least two and no more than three professors from the management committee of the center, institute, or research priority area as PI or Co-PIs.

Please note that representatives of the university management are not registered as PIs or Co-PIs. The university management's involvement in the application is documented by the relevant statement.

For further support please contact support@volkswagenstiftung.de.

4.2 Information on Enclosements

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.

All application documents must be submitted in English.

4.2.1 Project Description

Please familiarize yourself with the specifications in the template regarding the maximum number of pages, as well as the other formal requirements. The template can be downloaded from the funding platform or from the website of the respective programme announcement.

4.2.2 Expenditure Plan

Please use only 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 provide a breakdown of the total costs (one cost plan) and assign it to the PI. Please set the budget for the Co-PIs to 0 Euro.

The following costs will not be covered:

- Funds for qualification and research positions.
- Funds for partnering non-university research institutions.

The maximum amount requested is 1 million EUR for a period of five years.

4.2.3 Curricula Vitae

Please submit the curricula vitae of the PI and all Co-PIs in tabular, narrative form. The template can be downloaded from the funding platform or from the website of the respective programme announcement. Please do not submit CVs for other project participants.

4.2.4 Statement from the University Management

In addition to describing the institutional embedding and strategic importance of the centre, institute or research priority area for Science Studies at the respective university, the university management's statement should include any necessary commitments, such as additional matching funds or the continuation of any professorship or coordination/administration positions that have been applied for. It should also include statements on financial support that is already in place or has been promised for the future.

No template is provided for this statement.

Letter of intent (optional)

If you are planning to cooperate with specific institutions or networks as part of the implementation of the strategic concept, please submit a letter of intent.

Not template ist provide for a letter of intent.

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. For more information on overheads, see 'Information on Lump Sum for Overheads', which is provided at our download section.

4.3.2 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.

The foundation reserves the right not to process applications that do not meet the formal requirements or are incomplete.

5 Contact

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6 Further Information

- Website VolkswagenStiftung
- Website "Researching Research: Strenghtening University Centres"
- FAQ and Service (including download section)

- Influence of Generative AI on Research and the Volkswagen Foundation’s Funding Activities
- Recommendations for Sustainable Travel