

Collaborative Projects

Open Up – New Research Spaces for the Humanities and Cultural Studies

Profile Area: Exploration

Deadline: April 3, 2025 (14:00 CET)

To 'open up' something is associated with the curiosity to take the first step into something new and unknown. In this sense, we are looking for projects that not only offer new perspectives on already known research subjects, but also explore entirely new research spaces and topics. The funding offer assumes that these topics are currently characterized by a particular complexity and require a multi-perspective approach in order to reveal and understand this complexity.

We therefore aim to support researchers who open up new areas of research and knowledge in the humanities and cultural studies by jointly exploring complex and hitherto unexplored research topics. By funding collaborations between two or three researchers, the Foundation intends to facilitate the full creative potential of the interaction of different expertise and perspectives.



Research Area: Humanities, cultural studies, theoretical social sciences



Funding Type: Collaborative research projects, funding of a teaching substitute



Target Group: Research teams of two or three researchers (main applicant must be affiliated to a German university/research institution)



Max.: 300,000 or 400,000 Euro for two or three partners respectively



Max.: 1,5 years



Short proposal, anonymized application process, distributed peer review

1 Objectives

The funding program is aimed at teams of two or three researchers who wish to explore new and original areas of research. In particular, we are looking for projects with a high degree of exploration, which may be accompanied by an appropriate level of risk - the possibility of not achieving the intended project outcomes is therefore not a reason for rejecting a project.

At this point, we would like to invite you to consider whether your project fits into the 'Open Up' funding initiative. In the view of the Volkswagen Foundation, a project does not fit 'Open Up' if there are already:

- recurring courses on the topic of your project,
- numerous articles on the topic of your project,
- journals on the topic of your project,
- expert associations on the topic of your project,
- discussions / debates on the topic in the supplements / feuilletons.

2 Scope of Funding

The funding initiative is open to

- **teams of two or three researchers** from the humanities, cultural studies and theoretical social sciences who wish to explore new and original areas of research. Projects consisting solely of empirical research, such as fieldwork, data collection or interviews, cannot be funded under this program;
- researchers of **all career levels** after the PhD;
- researchers from foreign institutions are welcome to apply as co-applicants.

The **total budget** is limited to **€300,000** for projects with two partners and **€400,000** for projects with three partners (excluding overheads). The maximum project duration is 1.5 years.

An essential part of the funding is the discussion of (preliminary) results at a **workshop** or **small conference** in the **last third of the funding period**. On the one hand, this is intended to facilitate the transfer of research results to the respective scientific communities, which, due to the explorative nature of the projects, may be difficult to communicate via common forms of scientific publication. On the other hand, it is intended to create an opportunity for critical reflection on ongoing research processes, both with scientists and, where appropriate, with non-academic actors (e.g. from the cultural, arts or business sectors), and to incorporate this into the final project work.

An additional **kick-off meeting** at the **Xplanatorium Herrenhausen in Hanover**, organized by the Volkswagen Foundation, will facilitate exchange and networking of the grantees at the beginning of the funding period.

A timely start of the project is assumed.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

Please note that you cannot submit more than one proposal as PI or Co-PI.

3.1 Overview

21 February 2025, 10:00 to 11:30 CET	Online consultation (German)
28 February 2025, 10:00 to 11:30 CET	Online consultation (English)
3 April 2025, 14:00 CET	Submission deadline
July 2025	All proposals, that are formally correct, will be sent to reviewers, disclosure of conflicts of interest, at least 6 weeks to complete the reviews
15 August 2025	DPR: Volkswagen Foundation receives assessment reports.
September 2025	PRP: Panel review meeting
November 2025	Board of Trustees makes final decision.
Mid December	Decisions are communicated. Feedback from DPR is provided to applicants.
January 2026 onwards	Follow-up interviews with participants and qualitative analysis.
4 - 5 March 2026	Kick-Off Meeting for grant recipients.

3.2 Procedure

Within the framework of this call, the Volkswagen Foundation will continue its **experiment with Distributed Peer Review (DPR) in parallel to the Panel Review Procedure (PRP)**, which is the standard procedure for 'Open Up'. In DPR, applicants for funding review each other's proposals.

By submitting a proposal, **the applicants (PI and all Co-PIs)** accept the following terms and conditions:

- all applicants (PI and Co-PIs) will receive on average 5 proposals to review;
- failing to provide the reviews by the deadline will lead to the automatic rejection of the proposal submitted by the given applicant/co-applicant;
- the reviewer is expected to carefully read all the assigned proposals, rate them and provide feedback to the applicants following the rules and guidelines.

This means that all proposals that are formally correct will go through DPR and PRP. In the **conventional PRP**, all submitted proposals are screened and shortlisted by the Foundation's funding department. The resulting shortlist is then evaluated by an interdisciplinary jury in a double-blind process, i.e. only using the anonymized documents.

In contrast to the PRP, where only a pre-selected shortlist is evaluated by an interdisciplinary jury, the **DPR evaluates all formally correct proposals**. The final ranking is determined by the average of the overall scores. In the unlikely event of a tie in the final ranking of two or more proposals, a lottery will be used.

The Foundation has made funds available to fund proposals selected through both the conventional panel review and DPR mechanisms. This ensures that no applicant or discipline will be disadvantaged by the trial. Due to our trial of DPR, up to 20 projects may be funded (up to 10 through the traditional selection process and up to 10 through DPR). Please note that there are no quotas for subject areas. The grants will be awarded to the best proposals from all submissions.

The process and outcomes will be formally evaluated, with the support of researchers from The Research on Research Institute, to enable comparisons and provide evidence on how research funding can be made more efficient, effective and equitable.

Detailed information on the implementation and handling of the DPR can be found in our DPR Rules and Guidelines (PDF).

3.3 Review criteria

The same review criteria apply for the conventional panel review and for the DPR:

- Opening of a new research space (exploratory nature and novelty of the topic)
- Added value of the chosen multi-perspective approach to explore the research object
- Originality of the research project
- Scientific quality of the project

Anonymized (double-blind) evaluation is intended to ensure that only the exploratory nature and quality of the research idea is taken into account.

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, template for short proposal incl. self-assessment) 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.

It is important that all applicants (PI, co-PIs, etc.) register on the funding platform 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

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 specified page or word limit.

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.

The budget can be freely structured according to the needs of the project. Funding will be provided on a lump sum basis to allow for flexible reallocation of funds as the project progresses. Funding may be provided to cover the following costs:

- personnel costs (own position or teaching substitute, but no additional scientific staff)
- non-personnel costs (such as travel and conference expenses, costs arising from the involvement of project partners within Germany and abroad, research stays at other institutions, workshops, translation costs etc.)
- mid-term workshop (a lump sum of €10,000 should be budgeted for planning and implementing this workshop).

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.

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. The funds are calculated based on staffing tableau and project duration.

To apply, please use the template equal opportunity funds available for download at our funding platform and indicate the correct lump sum in the expenditure plan at the corresponding position. 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 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 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

Dr. Pierre Schwidlinski
Email: schwidlinski@volkswagenstiftung.de
Phone: +49 511 83 81 – 228

For administrative/organisational issues and telephone appointments:
Barbara Neubauer
Email: neubauer@volkswagenstiftung.de
Phone: +49 511 83 81 - 232

VolkswagenStiftung
Kastanienallee 35
30519 HANNOVER, GERMANY

6 Further Information

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