VolkswagenStiftung

Artificial Intelligence and the Society of the Future

Next deadline: see website

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I. Objectives

Current developments in the research field of "Artificial Intelligence" have the potential to fundamentally transform society and bring about far-reaching changes on social, political and economic levels. In contrast to major technological upheavals in the past, the changes are distinctive in particular due to their impact on almost all areas of society and social classes, as well as their extremely high and fast accelerating dynamics of change. Against this backdrop, the Volkswagen Foundation's funding initiative focuses **on joint, integrative research approaches in the social and engineering sciences** which deal in a new way with questions in the area of "Artificial Intelligence and the Society of the Future". Somewhat surprisingly for a thematic field of such scientific and social relevance, up to now, only few research cooperations and project constellations have been established to prompt researchers in the field to arrive at new perspectives and fresh solutions. The initiative therefore aims to provide incentives to develop a broader approach to fundamental issues and to allow participating researchers the freedom of scope for explorative research projects that broaden the range of methods and approaches of their respective disciplines. On the basis of a sound analysis, the projects funded should enable new insights into how the future of society and technology can be shaped.

A major challenge and at the same time a special opportunity for the participating disciplines lies in the joint exploration of a specific topic and the associated research issues which through a long-term cooperation will lead to a constructive exchange of knowledge and competence between the different disciplines "at eye level" and the development of accordingly extended competencies and innovative solutions. Excluded from funding are research projects that merely focus on the further development of AI systems without considering the impact on society. It is neither sufficient for a successful application to solely analyze socio-cultural phenomena through new kinds of data and novel AI technologies.

II. Funding Opportunities

The funding initiative addresses **postdoctoral researchers and professors of all career levels** in the social and engineering sciences prepared to devote themselves to <u>interdisciplinary, integrative research networks and, by way of an innovative approach, to the challenges arising from the impact of artificial intelligence on society; adding an international dimension is welcome</u>. The integration of different disciplines of the humanities is possible. In addition to substantial, longer-term project funding, it is also possible to fund upfront an optional one-year planning grant.

1. Planning Grant
In view of the required "new quality" of the interdisciplinary cooperation and the associated challenges for the project partners involved, the Foundation offers the option to apply for a planning grant with a term of **nine to twelve months** and a maximum funding amount of **EUR 150,000** in advance of a full application. The financial support for this "orientation phase" is intended, among other things, to enable the composition of a suitable project team, the identification of a connecting topic, and the preparation as well as formulation of a full proposal. It is possible to apply for PhD positions only if further funding (i. e. beyond the planning grant phase) is guaranteed for the entire duration of the doctoral thesis.

2. Funding of the Full Proposal (Full Grant)
For longer-term work on a research topic developed by the consortium, applicants may apply for a total funding amount of **maximum EUR 1.5 million** for a term of **up to four years** for cooperation projects involving **up to five working groups**. In addition to cooperative projects, the foundation is

open to project proposals from the field of "Artificial Intelligence and Society" which can not be assigned to the two abovementioned offers (e.g. measures of science communication, symposia, public debates, or publications). An application in this case, however, is only possible following prior consultation with the Foundation and at its request.

III. General Conditions

This call targets **postdoctoral researchers and professors at all career levels** who are employed by a university or research institute. The application consortium must have expertise in engineering, social sciences and / or humanities. The full proposal must be submitted by an institution in Germany, the participation of researchers from abroad is welcome. The Foundation covers all project-related costs; however, general overheads cannot be granted. The Foundation can only grant funding to academic institutions.

The Foundation does not process applications that have already been submitted in the same or a similar form to other funding organizations.

IV. Application and Selection Procedure

The applications for both funding lines, "Planning Grant" and "Full Grant", are to be submitted by the resepective deadline (2 p.m.) in electronic form via the Foundation's Application Portal together with the documents listed in Section V (Application Checklist). Applications are to be made jointly by the responsible researchers respectively. Following an internal assessment by the Foundation, an international and interdisciplinary expert panel reviews the quality, potential and originality of the projects and the integrative research approach as well as the qualification of the participating researchers.

There is a one-stage selection procedure for planning grant applications which takes place on a written basis. The final decisions are expected to be communicated within 6 months after submission. Due to the expected number of pre-proposals, the Foundation will not be able to provide feedback on pre-proposals that were not successful.

The application process for **full grants** is organized in two phases: This is a call for pre-proposals. After a first examination regarding formal requirements, they will be reviewed and assessed by an international expert panel which will identify a shortlist of groups who will then be invited to submit a full proposal. Furthermore, shortlisted applicants will be invited to present their project at a review panel meeting in Hanover (2nd stage of the selection process). The final decisions are expected to be communicated after 10 months (5 + 5 month).

Assessment is based on the following points:

- Relevance of the topic, innovative content, quality, and originality
- Need and added value of interdisciplinary cooperation
- Potential for new methodological approaches
- Expected advancement of the existing knowledge base
- Composition of the application team.

V. Application Checklist

Please inform yourself about the electronic application system of the Volkswagen Foundation prior to submitting your application. Information can be found in the document "Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips".

Applications must be submitted in English using the Volkswagen Foundation's electronic application system. Format: Times New Roman or Arial, 11 point, single-line, 1,5 cm for top and bottom margin and 2 cm for left and right margin.The following documents need to be provided as "enclosures" (pdf-files):

1. Planning Grant

- Cover sheet including the following information: Project title, duration and total budget; full name and office address of the main applicant and intended grant administrator

- Summary in German and English (maximum of 200 words each)

- Description of proposed project (up to three pages, without bibliography and CVs)

  - Subject and design of the "orientation phase"

  - Consortium, involved persons / institutions

- Short CVs of all PI's (up to 1 pageper person)

- Budget verification (when appropriate).

2. Full Grant

- Cover sheet including the following information: Project title, duration and total budget; full name and office address of all PI's

- Summary of the project in German and English (maximum of 200 words each)

- Description of proposed research project (up to 5 pages plus bibliography), taking into account the evaluation criteria listed under IV

- Short CVs of all PI's (up to 2 pages per person including details of relevant publications)

- Time and work plan (up to 1 page)

- Budget overview in tabular form separetly for each PI

Information

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Further Informationen

Applications FAQ's
Information for Applicants from Abroad
Personnel Rates for Academic Staff (in Germany)
Link to the website "Artificial Intelligence and the Society of the Future"

Module: Science Communication and Knowledge Transfer

The Volkswagen Foundations offers funding for science communication and knowledge transfer both as an additional part of new proposals and for projects that currently receive funding from the Foundation. This measure aims to support communication formats between academics and non-academics (citizens, journalists, professional communicators etc.). Applicants should always contact the program director in charge before submitting their proposal. For further information about all funding opportunities within the context of science communication, see

www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/sciencecommunication.