

Individual Funding

Change! Fellowships and Research Groups

Profile area: Societal Transformations

Deadline: Fellows (early career stages) 28.03.2024, research groups (senior researchers) 24.04.2024. Annual closing date planned.

The Volkswagen Foundation is looking for research personalities who partner up with actors from societal practice to develop knowledge, methods, and scenarios for transformation processes through joint research, initiate such processes in society and anchor transdisciplinary research in science.



Area of research: all research areas



Type of funding: research groups that generate knowledge on transformation processes



Target group: researchers who gained their doctoral degree at least two years ago and who (plan to) work at a research institution in Germany



1.3 to 1.8 m. € (depending on the personal qualification)



Up to 5 years



Involvement of non-academic partners

1 Objectives

We need changes in our society and existing structures to overcome the multitude of crises we are facing today. Science is expected to uncover planetary boundaries and vulnerabilities, research fact-based options for action, and help to find solutions. Thus, we are looking for personalities from science who are researching transformation processes. Together with their non-academic partners they address societal problems and gain knowledge on the factors that support or suppress change and develop strategies to design transformation processes. They aim to actively induce processes of change with the findings and strategies from their joint research activities.

So far knowledge transfer and the collaboration with non-academic partners only plays a minor role or not a role at all among the performance criteria of the scientific system. This funding programme is supposed to foster the standing of transdisciplinary research at research institutions in Germany by the promotion of future leaders and university teachers in these areas of science.

By qualifying scientists in early career stages at the interface of science and societal practice, both areas gain future leaders with knowledge on transformation processes and the ability to transfer knowledge. This bears the potential to evoke sustainable changes in both areas. Moreover, the scientific system receives an impetus to strengthen research on transformation processes and their design and to establish joint approaches with non-academic actors.

This funding initiative is designed for scientists who are focusing on topics from transformation research and who have realised the potential of non-academic sources of knowledge (e.g., professional practice) for research processes and integrate these into their research.

2 Scope of Funding

The funding opportunity is open to postdoctoral researchers who gained their doctoral degree at least two years ago, junior professors, and senior scientist with permanent positions. Applicants can be from all kinds of disciplines if they research on transformation processes or design such in their projects. Additionally, a transdisciplinary approach as well as the involvement of non-academic stakeholders (e.g., networks from civil society, non-governmental organisations, associations, authorities, small businesses, and many more) is mandatory for successful application. Thereby, the Foundation wants to achieve that the findings for transformation processes are translated into recommendations for action and implemented at the appropriate points in society.

The foundation understands transdisciplinary research as joint research at eye level between researchers and non-academics. In this partnership, all actors have equal rights and work together from the development of the research topic and the research question to the implementation of the research results in concrete recommendations for action. It is possible to involve different non-academic partners into different stages of the project. As an independent private funding organisation, the Foundation attaches great importance to promoting independent, open-ended research.

Fellowships are open for postdoctoral researchers and junior professors who gained their doctoral degree at least two years ago.

Funding for postdoctoral researchers includes personnel costs for the own position and for up to three scientific staff members, other recurring and non-recurring costs, and travel costs. The amount of funding is up to 1.8 m. €.

Junior professors can also apply for personnel costs for up to three scientific staff members, other recurring and non-recurring costs, and travel costs. Costs for their own position are only granted in individual cases (e.g., bridge funding for W1 without tenure track). The amount of funding is up to 1.5 m. €.

Research groups are being offered for thematically qualified scientists in permanent positions. The funding opportunity is designed to give long-term structural impetus to the research institutions. Thus, it is not open for scientists who retire during the funding period. Personnel costs for up to two scientific staff members, other recurring and non-recurring costs, and travel costs can be requested for the research groups. The amount of funding is up to 1.3 m. €.

The maximum funding amount does not include the overheads.

Since sustainable career opportunities for early career researchers are important to the Volkswagen Foundation, the applicants must reflect on the career perspectives within and outside academia for their staff, and in case of the Fellows also for themselves, that arise through the qualification in the project.

For all target groups, transdisciplinary approaches and an impact on society should be an integral part of the research agenda. Therefore, funding can also be requested for project-related expenses for non-academic partners.

Funding period is up to 5 years.

In individual cases a second funding period of additional 2 years is possible. The conditions for continuation applications will be announced in due course. A second funding phase is intended as an exception, for example for a pilot implementation of the concepts developed in practice, to bridge the gap in the event of an imminent stabilisation of the research group or as bridging funding for successful applications for a lifetime professorship (listed position) or as a bridge to a permanent position outside academia

Overheads

State and state-recognized universities and universities for applied sciences can apply for 10 % overheads. For more information on overheads, see "Information on lump sum for overheads", which is provided in our [download-section](#).

Open Science

The Foundation is committed to Open Science ([Open Science Policy](#)). It is therefore expected that project results will be published open access and that data collected will be made available for scientific use via recognized repositories (see [NFDIs](#), [re3data](#), and [RIsources](#)). If data collection is intended, the essential information is to be presented in a data management plan ([basic data management plan](#) of the foundation or a more detailed data management plan of the respective discipline). In case no data is generated in the project, this needs to be explicitly stated in the application.

Note: For the later preparation of the project's research data, in the case of a grant, the offer '[Data Reuse - Additional funding for the preparation of research data](#)' is available.

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 submitted for review. The Foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

3.1 Time schedule

Processing time ca. 9 months:

- Deadlines to submit proposals:
 - for Fellowships: March 2024
 - for research groups: April 2024
- Initial selection through the Volkswagen Foundation offices
- June/July 2024 evaluation of the proposals by an external scientific committee
- September 2024 selection workshop on competencies and leadership skills
- December 2024 notification on the decision

The Volkswagen Foundation will offer webinars in advance of the deadline for questions about the application process. The dates will be announced via the funding opportunity website and the participation is recommended.

3.2 Procedure

The proposal is to be submitted in English via the online application system of the Volkswagen Foundation. Please note the review criteria and the required application documents listed below.

An initial selection will be made by the Volkswagen Foundation based on the formal requirements and the criteria listed below. Preselected proposals will be reviewed by an external scientific committee. The candidates which are being positively evaluated by the committee will be invited to a second selection step. Herein, we aim to identify the personalities which show good leadership skills and have the highest potential of being “Change Agents” in fostering transdisciplinary research and inducing transformation processes. The final decision will be made by the board of trustees of the Volkswagen Foundation based on the recommendations from the preceding selection steps.

Review criteria:

- Genuineness and scientific quality of the transdisciplinary research
 - Potential to gain new knowledge on transformation processes and the design of such and of recommendations for action
 - Conclusiveness of the project design and methods, open-ended approach
 - Fit accuracy with the funding opportunity
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- Outstanding qualification and scientific independence of the applicant
 - Relevant expertise and target-oriented choice of the non-academic partners involved
 - Career opportunities inside and outside academia for the involved staff through their work within the project
 - Suitable evidence of the applicant's involvement in non-scientific networks relevant to the project
- or
- Proven experience of the applicant in transdisciplinary research, i.e. involvement in research projects with non-scientific stakeholder groups
 - Convincing reflection, integration, and learning processes in the project

Since different individual logics and interests of stakeholder groups are meeting in transdisciplinary research, the applicant is asked to describe how they will act on the individual interests of the involved partners in the research process. The partner constellation of the project should be explained, and it should be discussed how individual interests are being considered in the progress of the project.

4 Application Checklist

4.1 Electronic Application – Instructions

Please read the information about the electronic application system on the website of the Volkswagen Foundation prior to submitting your application. Information can be found in the document "[Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)". It is important that applicants register all involved parties early on in the process. Without a user profile it is not possible to invite co-applicants or to submit an application.

If you have technical questions about using the electronic application system, please contact support@volkswagenstiftung.de.

4.2 Application documents

Please submit all the listed application documents in English.

4.2.1 Proposal according to the template file

A template for the application is provided on our website. Applications that exceed the specified word count cannot be reviewed for reasons of fairness.

4.2.2 Budget plan

All cost items, including those for the non-academic partners, must be managed by the applicant university or non-university research institution. Non-academic partners must submit their own budget plans in the application portal.

The following costs can be applied for:

- For Fellowships: own position (as a rule TVL-E14; please calculate the real costs)
- Personnel costs for up 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). Briefly explain which tasks are performed for each position and which qualifications and disciplines are required for this
- Other recurring costs (consumables and the like, fees, software, licenses, contracts for work and services etc.)
- Non-recurring costs (equipment/devices, other non-recurring acquisitions: Literature, e-books, data procurement)
- Travel costs (project meetings, conference visits, research stays, workshops etc.)
- Publication costs (Open Access)
- For the personnel, (non-recurring), and travel costs for the non-academic partners an additional administration fee of up to 10% can be applied for, with a maximum of 12,000 €

Universities or universities of applied sciences can apply for additional overheads of 10% towards the funding amount applied for.

4.2.3 Curriculum Vitae of every applicant

Please submit your academic career in tabular-narrative form. A [template](#) is available on the funding initiative's website for this purpose.

Non-academic partners should also submit their CV in form of the template provided for them.

4.2.4 Template: Further Information on the Application

The Volkswagen Foundation aims to promote good working conditions in academia. Please submit a personnel concept using the template [Further Information on the Application](#) and upload the completed template to the Volkswagen Foundation's application portal in the category "Other enclosures". Information on the personnel concept as well as on funding for personnel in general can be found [here](#).

4.2.5 Further application documents

Summary of your project in German and English with 200 words each

Data management plan

Personnel concept (please use the provided template and upload it under "Other Enclosures" in the application system)

Binding declaration of the host institution (please upload under "Institutional Declarations"):

- Commitment to employ the Fellow in case of a positive outcome of the application
- Details of the university's contribution and the resources and facilities provided (e.g., workshops/ laboratories, archives, instruments)

Declaration of the non-academic partners:

- Who will be involved for how many hours in the project and what kind of expertise is brought to the project by them?
- What resources are additionally brought to the project?

5 Contact

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6 More Information

- [Website VolkswagenStiftung \(Initiativseite\)](#)
- [Template proposal](#)
- [Template CV](#)
- [Template personnel concept](#)
- [FAQs for applicants](#)
- [Application System](#)
- [Electronic application made easy - instructions and tips](#)
- [Useful Information and downloads](#)
- [Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)
- [Funding diversity](#)
- [Influence of generative models of text and image creation in research and in the funding activities of the Volkswagen Foundation](#)