

Cooperation projects

Transformational Knowledge on Democracies under Change – Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Profile area: Societal Transformations

Deadline: 30 January 2024 (12:00 – noon CET)

This funding program addresses societal challenges caused by processes of change in democratic structures. Researchers and partners from (civil) society address research questions together and develop jointly recommendations for action, based on the research results, for relevant stakeholders in politics, economy or (civil) society.



Humanities, cultural and social sciences (lead); cooperation with natural, life, data and technical sciences possible



Cooperation projects



Inter- und transdisciplinary research groups with researchers and partners from (civil) society, international participation possible



up to 1,3 Mio EUR



5 years

1 Objectives

Democratic forms of government are put under pressure globally, the legitimacy of elected governments is being questioned in some places, and in some democratically governed countries, such as Germany, a growing dissatisfaction with the way democratic institutions currently function, can be observed. Academics and (civil) society alike are engaging in discourses on how various current challenges such as climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, the ongoing digitalization and the current economic and energy crisis are changing the relationship between state and citizens - now and in the future.

So far, however, these different perspectives on transformation processes of democracies have hardly been brought into an exchange with each other. Academic and (civil) societal discourses have largely taken place separately from each other.

With this funding offer, the Foundation aims to bring together academia and (civil) society actors to develop new transformational knowledge about democracies under change. The Foundation encourages researchers and partners from civil society to combine their respective perspectives, ideas and experiences and to address urgent challenges to change processes in democracies together. The interest of all participants engaging in a change of perspective is central to this program. Applicants are asked to develop a new view on change processes in democracies by bringing together different sources of knowledge from academia and (civil) society. In addition to research, this program offers the opportunity to develop concrete recommendations, e.g. for politics, relevant (civil) society stakeholders, the economy, and to contribute to an implementation of these recommendations.

2 Scope of Funding

With a duration of five years, the Foundation offers an experimental space for transdisciplinary research and contributes to the testing of different formats and methods. 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. The focus of the collaboration is on a change of perspective and the integration of new sources of knowledge for all project participants. In addition to the non-academic perspective, the foundation therefore encourages interdisciplinary cooperation on the scientific side. The final phase of the project is explicitly intended for the dissemination of the recommendations for action to relevant representatives from politics, business and society - as well as the implementation of measures to enter into an exchange with these actors about the project results.

As an independent private funding organization, the Foundation attaches great importance to promoting independent, open-ended research. Therefore, the Foundation explicitly asks how applicants plan to deal with the individual interests and agendas of the different actors in the research process. Applicants are therefore asked to justify the project constellation and to reflect on how the interests of the individual partners will be taken into account and continuously reflected in the research project. The Foundation also encourages all applicants to constantly evaluate their own and the joint learning process during the cooperation and, if necessary, to make meaningful adjustments to the research process. In addition, the Foundation suggests in-

volving so-called integration experts in the research process who, as process facilitators, accompany the project from the beginning and incorporate so-called process knowledge into the research process.

2.1 Target group

The funding offer is aimed at researchers with a completed doctorate from the humanities, cultural sciences and social sciences as well as at actors from (civil) society. Cooperation with researchers from the natural, life, data and technical sciences is possible, depending on the issues to be addressed. Partners from (civil) society are employees with at least two years of professional experience, e.g. from non-profit non-governmental organizations, representatives from public authorities and/or government bodies, media representatives, representatives from the field of art and culture who deal with democratic processes.

2.2 Topics

Thematically, projects from the following areas are possible, for example:

- The effect of different **constellations of actors** (from politics, business and society) on democratic (decision-making) processes and social structures (research questions on power, influence, legitimacy of different actors);
- **Understanding and shaping of democracy** within democratic societies with a focus on different population groups - taking into account aspects of political education;
- Impact of **(global) economic developments** on current and future democratic forms of government (e.g. fragility of supply and production chains, planetary challenges, social and economic (in)equality);
- gradual **digitalization** and its impact on democratic structures (e.g. social media, online elections, e-administration).

The foundation explicitly invites to develop **scenarios** for the future design of the democratic state (foresight or future studies) and to organize exchange formats with relevant actors and target groups on these possible scenarios as well as to reflect on possible recommendations for action on this basis.

The foundation welcomes global perspectives (also through the integration of **partners from low- and middle-income countries in other regions of the world**).

2.3 Framework requirements

Project design and und application requirements:

- Interdisciplinary team of two to three researchers and up to three different non-academic partners from (civil) society;
- Lead of the project (main application) by researchers from the humanities, cultural sciences or social sciences;
- Integration of researchers from the natural, technical or life sciences possible;

- International participation from science and/or (civil) society possible (also from low- and middle-income countries in other regions of the world), if this makes sense for the implementation of the project;
- Integration of data science approaches or computational social science possible, depending on the research question.

The Foundation explicitly encourages the applicant teams to take **scientific risks** and think **'out-of-the-box'** when selecting their topics and methods. Both scientific publications and **concrete recommendations for action** in the form of policy papers or similar formats are expected as project results.

In order to promote dialogue with the relevant decision-makers, the Foundation strongly recommends that accompanying creative formats of science communication (podcasts, science slams, theater plays, etc.) are to be considered for the phase of developing and implementing recommendations for action.

Note: For larger science communication projects going beyond this format, the offer "[Additional Funding for Science Communication](#)" is available in case of funding.

The foundation invites all funded projects to a kick-off event and, during the further course of the project, to a symposium to present the results.

Overheads

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



3.2 Procedure

Processing approx. 5-7 months:

- Submission of applications (English) by the deadline via the application portal;
- Formal review by the administrative office;
- Review by an inter- and transdisciplinary as well as international review panel;
- Decision.

The Foundation offers webinars in advance of the deadline for questions regarding the application process. The dates will be announced via the funding opportunity website. Attendance at one of the dates offered is strongly recommended. For follow-up consultation appointments beyond this, please make a phone appointment.

Review criteria:

- Relevance of the research question to democracies under change;
- Originality and quality of the concept for transdisciplinary research;
- Suitability for the format of collaborative projects;
- Interdisciplinary composition on the side of the researchers;
- Design of the cooperation between science and (civil) society at the same level;
- Conclusiveness of project design and methodology;
- Scientific qualification or proven expertise as a non-academic actor;
- Development of transformation knowledge by translating research into concrete recommendations for action.
- Convincing reflection, integration and learning process in 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

All subsequent application documents must be submitted in English.

4.2.1 Proposal according to the template file

A template is available on the funding initiative website for submitting the application text.

4.2.2 Budget Plan

Researchers at non-profit research institutions are listed as co-applicants if they apply for their own costs (separate budget plans). If the costs are to be divided among several researchers, please indicate this accordingly in the application portal with separate budget plans for each scientific co-applicant. For partners from (civil) society, separate funds can also be planned for, but these funds must be listed in the budget plan of the researchers and will be managed by the respective research institution and forwarded to the partners. The framework conditions for the forwarding are determined by the respective research institution.

All costs must be justified as part of the application and separately in the budget plan form of the application portal (for positions with reference to subject area, tasks, qualification (with/without doctorate), also applies to actors from (civil) society).

You can apply for the following costs:

- Funds for scientific personnel, travel expenses, current material costs (consumables, etc.), equipment (e.g. for interviews, field research, etc.), event costs (workshops, etc.), possibly open access publication costs, software licenses, funds for science communication measures, funds for the implementation of recommendations for action;
- Funds for actors from (civil) society (personnel, travel expenses, running costs, equipment, software licenses, funds for science communication measures), funds for the implementation of recommendations for action, to be listed as a separate item;
- Funds for support by professional communicator(s) for activities in the field of science communication;
- Funds for so-called integration experts (for process support/mediation/facilitation, etc.).

Funds for scientific personnel, travel expenses, recurrent nonpersonnel costs (consumables, etc.), equipment (e.g. for interviews, field research, etc.), event costs. A teaching buy-out or teaching substitute (project-related sabbatical) runs under scientific personnel. Travel expenses can also be feasible for short research stays/hospitalizations at a non-academic actor or at a scientific research institution.

4.2.3 Curriculum vitae of every applicant

We require a tabular and narrative career history from all applicants. Templates for this curriculum vitae format are available on the funding initiative website (different templates for researchers and partners from (civil) society).

4.2.4 Further application documents

- Please submit a generally understandable summary in German and English with approx. 200 words each.
- Please upload a short video presentation of the project in English (also possible in German with English subtitles) of max. 90 seconds and please describe the team constellation and the joint reflection, integration and learning process. (Parameters: Length: max. 90 seconds; File types: MPEG 1 – 4; Bitrate: Audio = 192, Video = 2.500; Codec with variable frame rate)
- If research data will be generated, please upload a data management plan.

5 Contact

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6 More Information

- [Website Initiative](#)
- [Template Project \(Download\)](#)
- [Template CV Researchers \(Download\)](#)
- [Template CV Society \(Download\)](#)
- [General FAQs about application and funding](#)
- [Application System of the VolkswagenStiftung](#)
- [Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)
- [Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)

- [Information on lump sum for overheads](#)