

### Funding Initiative

## Opus Magnum

**Profile Area:** Understanding Research

**Next Deadline:** 4 November 2025 (11.59 pm)

The initiative aims at providing more freedom for writing a comprehensive scholarly treatise to professors from the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences who have already achieved a degree of renown by virtue of (a first) outstanding research performance.



humanities, cultural studies and social sciences



funding of a substitute professorship



professors who want to write an extensive scholarly treatise



up to 195,000 EUR



up to 18 months



prerequisite: permanent position as a professor at a German university

## 1. Objectives

This funding initiative aims at providing established professors of the humanities, cultural studies, and the social sciences at German universities with the opportunity to concentrate full-time on the writing of an extensive scholarly treatise – an Opus Magnum with an outreach beyond their own specific academic field. This funding opportunity entails release from their official teaching and administrative duties. Since the funding is mainly to cover the costs of a substitute professorship, the initiative serves at the same time to provide a career perspective for young academics.

## 2. Scope of Funding

The funding offer consists of leave of absence from 6 to a maximum of 18 months, which is granted in addition to the regular sabbatical semester. The Opus Magnum is to be completed within this period.

### What is an Opus Magnum?

Under Opus Magnum, we understand a book of fundamental significance, which owing to its special quality, originality and outreach sets itself apart from a regular academic book. For example, a work that

- constitutes a first comprehensive review of a research field that refers in detail to the state of research in neighboring disciplines,
- sheds completely new light on a subject area via a critical examination of common interpretation patterns and thereby opens up a new field of research,
- innovatively links up preparatory research of different kinds and provenance, generating new insights via such a synthesis,
- radiates beyond the respective academic community and exhibits a sustainable significance for a comprehensive research field.

Funding is not available for editing volumes, translations, textbooks, manuals, commentaries, and advice literature.

### Who can apply?

This program addresses all full professors in the humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences at German universities. In exceptional cases, interested professors may also be considered from other disciplines. (Please contact the Foundation before submitting an application.) Applying professors have to be at least five years before retirement at the time of application (senior professorships not considered). Extraordinary professors (apl. Prof.) are not eligible for applying.

### **Funding period**

As a rule, the leave of absence can be granted for periods ranging from 6 to a maximum of 18 months. It is assumed that applicants will be released from their duties by their university and continue to draw their salaries. The foundation will finance a substitute professorship for the respective period of leave. The fellowship is to be understood as an additional funding and may not be taken into account when granting regular leaves of absence according to the terms of the applicant's regular contract. Further funding for a time extension of the grant is excluded.

It is expected that the Opus Magnum will be completed within the funding period and that it will only remain to have the work prepared for publishing. With this in mind, it is only possible to fund projects that are at a very advanced stage, with extensive preparatory work already in place. The data collection, archive and research work must be largely completed. Moreover, it is expected that no additional larger (research) projects will be carried out during the funding period.

### **Substitute Professorship**

The parties shall wait until confirmation that funding has been granted before entering into negotiations concerning a substitute professorship with the Foundation.

It is expected that the "Opus Magnum" grantee will mentor the substitute professor and support to his/her best ability their embedment in the respective institution's structures and training measures for early career academics.

### **Funding Amount**

Per semester:

- Personnel funds (average rate) for the substitute professor calculated on the base salary of the applicant's W2- or W3-classification:  
substitute W2: EUR 60,000  
substitute W3: EUR 65,000  
If more money will be needed for the substitute professorship, the shortfall will be granted on the basis of the final statement of accounts.
- Lump sum of EUR 5,000 for (student/research) assistants as well as recurring non-personnel and non-recurrent expenses.

An application for book processing charges (open access publication) may be submitted during the funding period.

## **3. Application and Selection Procedure**

Online applications can be submitted either in German or in English via the Foundation's electronic Application Portal.

Applications are reviewed by a committee of experienced representatives drawn from different disciplines. The reviewers are appointed with regard to the applications' disciplines. If necessary, additional written assessments by external experts are considered. Funding is available for up to ten successful candidates per year.

**Selection is based on the following criteria:**

1. Is the applicant considered to be outstanding in his/her field?
2. How to assess the scientific quality of the planned publication project and its relevance and significance for the field?
3. Will the planned publication actually have the character of an Opus Magnum and possibly also be perceived beyond the specialist scientific community?
4. Is it (still) necessary to write this book in view of the preparatory work already done? Is the writing of the publication realistically planned in relation to the preparatory work?

The decision will be made in autumn. Therefore, the Opus Magnum project can start in the following spring at the earliest.

In the event of approval, funds will be blocked. The release of funds is subject to

- the official notification of leave of absence
- the CV of the proposed substitute professor
- the submission and examination of the substitute professor's individual salary calculation

Following a negative decision, a new application will only be possible relating to a completely different project.

## 4. Application Checklist

Please submit your application using the Foundation's electronic Application Portal ([portal.volkswagenstiftung.de](https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de)). Forms must be filled out with details on the applicant, the institution (recipient of funds) as well as the project (title, duration, and total funding amount) and budget plan. Additional information must be submitted in the form of "attachments" (pdf). A guide to the application portal can be found online (<https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de/vwsantrag/tipps.do>).

**The following should be attached as PDF documents:**

1. Cover letter
2. Lay summary in English and German (each max. 1,200 characters, including spaces)
3. A detailed project description (total max. 12 pages: Arial, font size 12 pt, 1.5 spaced)
  - Project description with grounds and details of objectives, innovation potential in respect of the current state of research
  - Description of the preliminary/preparatory work including reference list

4. [Applicant's CV](#) and list of publications (total max. 5 pages)
5. Time and work plan, including a statement on the compatibility of the Opus Magnum-project with ongoing research activities
6. Other attachments: [Self-assessment sheet](#)
7. Other enclosure: Letter of interest by a publishing company

Please note: The Foundation rejects applications which have been submitted at the same time in the same or similar form to other funding organizations.

## 5. Contact

Silvia Birck  
Telefon: +49 511 8381-226  
E-Mail: [birck@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:birck@volkswagenstiftung.de)

VolkswagenStiftung  
Kastanienallee 35  
30519 HANNOVER  
GERMANY  
[www.volkswagenstiftung.de/](http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/)

## 6. More Information

- [Self-assessment sheet](#)
- [Application FAQs](#)
- [Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)
- [Webpage Opus Magnum](#)