

Call for Proposals

Science and Data-Driven Journalism

Closing date

15th June 2015

Information

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Background

Investigative data-driven reporting, direct access to sources, and digital linkage to these sources with the published content – these are the main attributes of data-driven journalism. Such data-driven journalism stands to benefit from an intensive mutual exchange with the research community, which in turn would also receive new impulses for its own methods, approaches, and types of publication. Possibilities to learn from one another arise for example in the following areas:

- reciprocal exchange of information on common issues
- joint research and reporting
- identification of socially relevant issues
- development and programming of reporting tools
- realization of complex data sets
- joint gathering, analysis and processing of data
- application and further development of statistical methods
- linkage of published results with freely accessible sources
- interpretation of results.

Despite their fundamental difference, research and data-driven journalism can both benefit equally from cooperation on individual projects without having to surrender any of their specific qualities. Moreover, the results of such collaboration would provide civil society with opportunities to overcome the challenges presented by “Big Data”, help regain transparency and find adequate answers to the issues involved. The Volkswagen Foundation seeks to promote this kind of cooperation: It believes it would constitute an important contribution towards coping with complex data sets, generating new impulses for techniques and statistical procedures, as well as linking new forms of disseminating results with their original sources. This funding initiative therefore aims at supporting small project groups in which scholars and scientists carry out joint research together with online journalists.

Target group

The funding offer has no thematic restrictions and addresses both researchers and journalists across all disciplines. The sole conditions are that the proposed topic opens up new perspectives for both domains, i.e. academic re-

search and data-driven journalism, and that the methods and approaches applied by the project partners are mutually complementary. This has to be outlined convincingly in the project proposals.

To be eligible for funding, projects must involve at least one person from the area of academic research and one representative of (data-driven) journalism. The number of project participants, however, should not exceed four persons. Academic researchers must already have obtained their doctorate; otherwise applications may be submitted by persons at all stages of their career. In the case of doctoral candidates should be employed in the project it must be ensured that the project does not interfere with working on their dissertations: ideally it should be complementary. Applications for funding must include a statement to this effect. The journalist(s) will already have authored several relevant publications (e.g. in the fields of science, the economy, or social journalism). This also applies for bloggers.

Under certain circumstances, e.g. in order to develop smaller programs for the analysis of complex data sets, it may also be possible to include IT specialists in the project team. However, in such cases this (these) person(s) should work in a research environment (e.g. a university IT center).

Type and scope of funding

Applications must show that the proposed project can be completed within a period of six to maximum nine months and with a budget not exceeding 100,000 euros. Grants may be used to cover the following:

- Personnel costs (e.g. for the project participants themselves)
- Costs incurred due to being released from other duties
- Support staff
- Research and reporter stipends
- Technical assistance (e.g. programmers)
- Travel expenses (e.g. for meetings of project participants or visits to editorial offices)
- Workshops
- Project-related equipment
- Contracts for services

Under certain special circumstances it may be possible to negotiate other conditions. In such cases, applicants should contact the responsible program manager before submitting their proposal.

Funding cannot be made available for the development of graphic presentations that have no connection with the research or reporting topic.

As the statutes of the Volkswagen Foundation prescribe that funding can only be granted to research institutions, proposals must be submitted by the project partner(s) on the academic research side: Grants can only be paid to the research institution to which these applicants belong. It follows that grants are

to be treated in the same way as the usual third-party financing of research projects. Within such a frame it is therefore also possible to include journalists in the project team as research associates. In view of the projects' short duration, it is also possible to apply for funding in the form of research/reporting stipends. Rates of pay are in accordance with the standard rates for research associates or those listed in the salary scales of the German Association of Journalists. Applications for funding are to include details of the rates to be paid. It is also possible to employ project partners from abroad.

The Volkswagen Foundation assumes that editorial offices will release their staff from normal duties for the duration of the project, and that they will still be able to use existing infrastructure (e.g. work stations, computers or servers).

Frame of support

The support begins with a workshop involving all the project tandems, providing a forum for discussing the methods and approaches that will be applied. The workshop will also touch on cross-cutting issues like statistical methods and data protection. It will furthermore serve to clarify the differences between science and data-driven journalism as well as their shared features. The workshop will take place in cooperation with "*Netzwerk Recherche*" and will be held in Dortmund from 22nd to 24th October 2015.

On completion of the projects a second workshop will be held at which the results of all the different projects will be presented and analyzed.

It is expected that all the grantees will participate in both of these 2-day workshops. There will be approximately one year in between, allowing time for completion of all the funded projects.

Assessment of proposals

An international panel of experts comprising representatives of academic research, science and online journalists will evaluate the project proposals on the basis of the submitted written documents. When this is completed, the successful applicants will be invited to attend the first workshop.

Application Portal

Please use the application portal on the homepage of the Volkswagen Foundation under:

<https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de/vwsantrag/login.do>

Do not forget to print out the cover page provided there, to sign and scan it, and then upload it. The portal contains instructions on how it is to be used

Application documents

Applications are to be submitted in English via the Application Portal on the homepage of the Volkswagen Foundation. Applications must include the following documents in the form of separate PDF files:

- Cover letter
- Description of proposed project (maximum six pages) with details of:
 - Objectives
 - Methods
 - Work steps and expected results
 - Illustration of the added value for science/scholarship and data-driven journalism
 - Publication concept
- Statement concerning employment of doctoral candidates (if applicable)
- Participants' CVs with list of (most important) publications
- Schematic working plan and time schedule (maximum two pages)
- Budget plan with itemized explanation
- Miscellaneous

The Foundation assumes that there are no objections to the proposed project on grounds of data-protection. Should there be any doubt about this the proposal is to be examined by the ethics commission at the respective research institution.

Closing date and dates of workshops

Closing date for the submission of applications: June 15, 2015.

The Foundation will notify applicants of its decision around the end of September 2015.

Kick-off workshop in Dortmund from October 22 to 24, 2015.

The date for the second workshop to be held in 2016 will be fixed in subsequent consultation with the grantees.