

**World Knowledge
Structural Support for “Rare Subjects”**

Last deadline: 12 April 2021 (postponed from 16 September 2020)

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I. Objectives

The so-called "rare subjects" (Kleine Fächer) often represent a comprehensive, significant and future-oriented canon of knowledge that is highly relevant for interdisciplinarity, internationality, and innovation. Their complex subject matter enables them to address issues from different angles, thereby contributing crucially towards a multi-layered exploration of the world and a holistic "world knowledge". These contributions are increasingly important in the face of current global challenges. At the same time, these subjects are often characterized by precarious structures within universities. Above all, the human resources in these subjects are often scarce; there is a lack of structural sustainability for research and higher education. Moreover, they are particularly vulnerable to changing orientations in higher education policy, but also to socio-political change.

This funding offer aims at a sustainable strengthening of structurally precarious subjects in research and higher education in Germany. We intend to encourage representatives of "rare subjects" to develop innovative ideas for structural strengthening of their fields and to invite the respective university leadership to create sustainable perspectives for "rare subjects". Furthermore, funding is available to support projects that aim at making the wealth of knowledge encompassed by the "rare subjects" better known to politics and the public at large.

II. Funding Opportunities

The funding offer is thematically open and particularly aims at „rare subjects“ with high innovation potential:

The measures that are needed to sustainably strengthen a subject in research and teaching depend largely on the academic environment and the discipline in question. For this reason, this funding offer allows for strategically oriented concepts that aim to strengthen a rare subject using various measures. The proposed measures should lead to a strengthening of the institution beyond the funding period.

Examples for such measures include teaching collaborations, guest lectures by international researchers or non-university experts, networking activities with representatives from within and outside academia, new teaching formats, leave of absence or staff positions for professors or mid-level faculty. Other measures can be integrated into a strategic concept. Single research projects are not eligible for funding.

The concepts may cover a duration of up to seven years and amount up to 1 million Euro. Especially regarding staff positions applied for, we expect significant commitment from the universities involved in a flexible system of "matching funds". The university management should clearly communicate its support for the application and describe a sustainable perspective beyond the funding period. We encourage cooperation with non-university institutions from academic and cultural fields.

Projects will additionally be accompanied by a discussion of the project's perspective about halfway through the funding period. Furthermore, in the context of a flexible monitoring of concept implementation, it is possible to apply for additional funding of up to 250,000 euros.

III. General Conditions

Eligible for funding are tenured professors of "rare subjects" at universities in Germany.

The Foundation deliberately refrains from attempting a clear definition of what constitutes a "rare subject". Please explain the status and potential of your subject as a "rare subject" in your application.

The full proposal must be submitted by an institution in Germany, the participation of researchers from abroad, however, is welcome.

IV. Application and Selection Procedure

Applicants must submit a proposal not exceeding 12 pages, a detailed letter of support from the university management, and a 2-page explanation of their discipline's status as a "rare subject". The application should include an explanation of the strategic objectives as well as a description of the individual funding measures applied for and their contribution towards the intended objectives. The letter of support from the university management should clarify in detail how the planned measures fit into the institution's overall strategy and how the university will support them.

An interdisciplinary panel consisting of experts from the participating subjects as well as experts of the university system will evaluate the proposals. The assessment will be based upon a comparative weighting of the following criteria:

- Does the proposed strategic concept focus on a "rare subject"? Is it about precarious knowledge?
- How important is the strengthening of the respective rare subject at the applying institution, considering the pan-German context?
- Are the proposed measures truly a strategic concept?
- Will this strategic concept lead to a strengthening of the respective rare subject due to its quality, its coherence, etc.?
- Will the strengthening of the respective rare subject be sustainable?
- Does the proposed strategic concept fit the overall strategy of the applying university?
- Is/are the applicant(s) an outstanding researcher/outstanding researchers?

In a second step, positively pre-evaluated applications are requested to present their project to the review panel.

V. Application checklist

Please submit your proposal in electronic form via the Application Portal of the Volkswagen Foundation. The documents must be in English. Information for the use of the portal can be found under this [Link](#). The following documents have to be uploaded as attachments (pdf files) in the Application Portal:

- Cover Letter
- Summary in German and English (max. 1 page each)
- Description of the proposed concept (max. 12 pages; 1.5 line spacing, Arial, min. font size 11)
- Bibliography/References (max. 3 pages)
- CV and Publication List (max. 3 pages per person)
- Working Plan and Time Schedule
- Justification of Budget
- Letters of support from the university management (“Institutional Declarations”)
- Description and justification of „rare subject“ status („Other Enclosures“) (max. 2 pages)
- Other Enclosures (optional)

VI. Contact

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Links to further information

- [Electronic Application](#)
- [Application FAQs](#)
- [What We Do Not Fund](#)