Funding Initiative

Momentum – Funding for Recently Tenured Professors

Next Deadline: see website

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I. Objectives

Here, “momentum” is meant as an impulse to keep something moving or developing dynamically after it has started. In this sense, the initiative addresses academics at an early stage after being appointed to their first tenured professorship, i.e. the phase in which they have settled in the German academic system. The goal is to open up opportunities in this phase of their career to advance the content and strategic development of their professorship. They should get the opportunity to “rethink” their professorship; their research should gain in “momentum”. In the increasingly fast pace of academic activities, they should be offered the scope to develop new approaches in research and research-based teaching beyond the routine of university life. A willingness to innovation and risk, coupled with the courage to explore unknown terrain, are the most important prerequisites for achieving scientific breakthroughs. The focus of “momentum”, therefore — contrary to the increasingly widespread specialization — is to strengthen the diversity of research and the creativity of research personalities at universities as well as the strategic development of their professorships.

II. Funding Opportunities

The funding offer is open to all disciplines and is aimed equally at the humanities, cultural and social sciences as well as natural sciences, life sciences, and engineering. Likewise, the offer is open to professors of all nationalities. Prerequisite is that they hold a tenured professorship at a university in Germany. Traditional research projects are not eligible for funding but the strategic development of professorships.

The funding duration can be from five to seven years, and the amount applied for can be up to one million euro, depending on the specific requirements of the field in question. The funds will only be awarded in addition to the basic financing ensured by the university and may not be used to make up for gaps in this core funding. It is envisaged to fund up to eight concepts per selection round.

The precise measures with which a professorship can be supported in the implementation of its strategic and content-related further development are very specific to the particular discipline and may also depend on the scientific environment or location. For this reason, and in order to be able to respond to dynamic changes, the offer is flexible. For example, funding may be made available for:

- Equipment and non-personnel costs other than those covered by the basic financing,
- Human resources,
- Funds for trial and establishment of new research-based teaching formats,
- Stays abroad,

The measures mentioned are to be seen as examples only. A combination of different funding instruments is possible, or other measures can be applied for which the applicant may deem necessary for the reorientation of the professorship. However, the goal of considerably broadening perspectives in research and, if applicable, research-based teaching and how this is to be achieved must be clearly addressed in each case.
III. General Conditions

The initiative targets outstanding professors three to five years after taking up their first tenured professorship. At the start of the grant, they should not have a fixed-term contract of employment.

The initiative aims at broadening of perspectives, therefore classical research projects (including positions for doctoral candidates) cannot be funded. Nevertheless, successful applicants may request funding for human resources such as postdoctoral fellows or technical staff and research assistants. Equipment may be financed up to a purchase value of 200,000 euro. In exceptional cases, the costs for large equipment can be applied for. The Foundation would, however, possibly only be able to contribute 50% of such costs.

It is not possible for successful applicants to be completely released from their teaching duties; their teaching load may, however, be handled flexibly. A partial substitution can be provided for up to two years. In the event of longer periods of up to two semesters spent abroad, it is possible to apply for a full-time teaching substitute. This person should be an early-career researcher who does not yet have a permanent position. The substitute should not come from the institutional or personal environment of the applicant, and the last qualification phase should not be longer than two to three years ago.

The application must be accompanied by a binding statement of the faculty / department / center and / or the university management setting out the institutional parameters and how the proposed concept fits in with the overall strategy for research and / or teaching of the respective organizational unit. Depending on the concept, the Foundation expects that the necessary basic resources as well as substantial in-house services will be made available. Any necessary construction measures should be taken over as well as any (even partial) leaves of absence. If necessary, sustainability is to be ensured by means of assuming any permanently incurred costs.

Excluded from funding are:

- Non-university institutions, and therefore also researchers in a double-affiliation
- Tenure-track professorships
- Research projects
- Positions for doctoral students.

IV. Application and Selection Procedure

Applications must be written in English. The application should not comprise more than five pages, on which the concept is to be outlined only. The application must clearly state the motivation for the broadening of perspectives strived for and the goals that should be achieved after the funding is ceased. With regard to the conceptual design no own preliminary work is required. Any relevant previous publications, lectures, third-party funding, prizes, teaching, academic self-government etc. must be documented in supplementary documents.

It is planned to issue annual calls for proposals. The respective deadlines will be announced on the Foundation's website.
The Foundation examines the applications submitted in a two-stage comparative assessment process carried out by an interdisciplinary and international expert committee. In the first step, the applications are discussed in the panel of reviewers and the selected applicants will be invited to present their concept in a second step to the evaluation committee.

The assessment is performed i.a. according to the following criteria:

- Scholarly excellence of the applicant
- Applicant’s creative potential
- The motivation of the applicant to strategically develop the professorship
- Sustainability of the concept
- Innovation of the concept also in relation to applicant’s previous research focus
- Significance of the concept for the respective scientific field
- Classification of the concept in the strategy of the university or organizational unit
- Please note, that in case of a rejection it is not possible to submit a revised version of the concept. If you are still entitled to applying, you may possibly submit a concept with a new focus after consultation with the foundation

V. Application Checklist

Please submit all application documents besides the German summary in English via the Foundation’s application portal (https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de). Instructions can be found online. The following information and documents (pdf files) are required:

- Completed online forms (in the application portal) with details of the applicant, title, budget plan and legal declaration
- Attachments (in the sequence contained in the application portal):
  - Cover letter
  - Summary in German and English (max. one page each)
  - Proposal (no more than 5 pages, 12 pt, 1.5 lines), in which the innovative content and the originality of the concept, the strategic development of the professorship, as well as the realization of the goals and the future prospects are presented
  - Statement about how the proposal differs from the applicant’s previous research focus (please upload under “Other Enclosures”)
  - CV, publication list, lectures, third-party funds, prizes, teaching, academic self-governance etc. (max. ten pages)
- Publications (please upload individually)
  - In the natural sciences, life sciences and engineering: up to three of the most important publications
  - For the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences: up to three examples of work, for monograph excerpts incl. table of contents (altogether no more than 70 pages)
• Price offers for equipment (if possible, only as a pdf-file)

• Statement of the institution with information on the framework conditions and how the concept could be adapted to fit the overall strategy for research and / or teaching of the respective organizational unit. If applicable, details of provision of the necessary basic equipment as well as substantial own contribution or binding commitments for possibly required construction measures or (partial) leaves of absence or sustainability in the form of assumption of permanently incurred costs.

• Justification of the individual budget items

Information

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