I. General concept

In the public debate surrounding the future of modern societies the call for innovativeness plays a key role. In this context the term “innovation” is used as frequently as indeterminately in order to indicate the need for technological, economic and social changes. The ability to innovate should permit us to keep up with the increasingly fast pace of change in nearly all areas of society. At the same time, innovative capacity is in itself an integral component, as well as engine and result of comprehensive innovation processes.

The meaning of innovation within the context of this funding initiative therefore reaches far beyond the development of new products and processes within technology and economy. It encompasses the entire field of innovation processes inasmuch as these are not limited to marginal variations of the given, but rather are connected to fundamental modifications and reorientation – both in technology and economy, as well as in politics and society.

Such an approach reveals the increasing complexity of the innovation phenomenon: the focus no longer lies on a linear process – such as from the invention or discovery during the course of basic scientific research, through applied research and development, up to market implementation – but rather on the inter- and counteraction of various structural conditions, factors, and actors on different levels. It is widely recognised that the innovation potential of modern societies is dependent on these highly complex interrelations between governmental, societal, entrepreneurial and scientific parameters.

II. Objectives

The Volkswagen Foundation intends to support projects that explore innovation processes in their complex and diverse setting of social, economic and scientific-technological conditions, factors, and actors. Special attention should be given to both the enabling as well as the risk factors impacting on the innovation processes. Important aspects in this context are the counteraction and interplay between actors in government, society, enterprises and science, the technical, social, organisational, political, and cultural prerequisites and determinants of innovation processes, as well as the effects and consequences of these processes on culture, economy, politics, and society. Ambivalent effects as well as the non-intended consequences of innovation processes should also be taken into account. Furthermore comparisons between different processes as well as historical analyses are welcome.
III. Scope of funding

Funding is available for all disciplines that can contribute to the exploration of innovation processes in economy and society in an interdisciplinary manner. This especially includes business management studies and economics, the social sciences and jurisprudence, but also history, psychology and ethnology.

International collaboration for the cross-border networking of experts, scholars and scientists is also desirable.

IV. Funding possibilities

Interdisciplinary research projects as well as symposia and summer schools may be funded. Within the framework of a project several interdisciplinary dissertations may be combined. Furthermore junior scientists may wish to consider extended research stays in collaborating research institutions at home and abroad. Professors in Germany who contribute substantially to a project funded within this initiative may apply for a six to twenty-four months research sabbatical (research professorship).

Symposia with participant numbers not exceeding sixty individuals, including junior scientists, may be funded also for the preparation of research projects and for discussion of their results. Summer schools for the qualification of junior scientists may also be eligible for funding. Should institutional initiatives, such as the establishment of international research groups or the starting capital of centers be considered, applicants should first consult with the foundation on the basis of an appropriate outline.

The Foundation may provide funding for personnel costs, travel expenses, and non-personnel costs, also for partners outside Germany.

V. Applications

Before filing a formal application it is advisable to submit a pre-proposal describing the subject, the research plan, the timeframe and the anticipated costs. In this context personnel consultation by the foundation staff may be available.

Since proposals will be scrutinised by an international panel of experts, all applications are to be submitted in English. A German summary has to be included.

The Foundation can provide funds only to academic institutions. Applicants who are not members of universities or known research institutions should also supply details on legal status, statutes, trustees and boards, charitable status, budgeting and auditing of the respective institution. If available, applicants are required to supply an annual report or a general description of their institutions.

Applications from abroad will be treated in the same way as those from German applicants. They must include a detailed information on a defined collaboration with scientific institutions in Germany.

Detailed information on application procedures can be found in the enclosed checklist.

The foundation is unable to process applications that have been submitted in identical or similar form to another funding body.

Please submit your application electronically by E-Mail and also in hard copy.

VI. Enquiries

For further information please apply to the office of the Volkswagen Foundation in Hanover.

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Checklist for Applications

“Innovation Processes in Economy and Society”

Applications written in English with a German summary may be addressed to Volkswagen Foundation without any particular formal requirements.

Project applications should submit in hard copy and also electronically by e-mail and contain the following information:

- Brief and concise title of the project.
- Summary of objectives, substantiation and implementation on one page.
- Detailed description (concept and process of innovation to be investigated, objectives of the investigation, substantiation, methods, hypotheses if applicable, and expected results).
- Assessment of the topic and object of research within the international state of the art.
- Name of the key researchers, their qualifications, field of activities, and previous work on the subject.
- Detailed information on proposed interdisciplinary and international collaboration and on essential contacts for the implementation of the project.
- Stages of research, including working schedule and timing.
- Listing and justification of required personnel and running costs (travel, postage, telephone, copies, etc.), and non-recurring costs (equipment, literature).
- Information concerning the submission of the application or thematically similar applications to other funding bodies.
- Intended recipient of funding (institution, name, address).

The application should not exceed twenty pages. Lists of references, curricula vitae and publication lists, as well as for the subject relevant publications by the applicants may be included in an appendix.

Applications for the funding of scientific meetings (workshops, symposia, and summer schools) should additionally provide information on:

- Venue, date and duration.
- The scientific programme and timetable.

The names of intended, or invited participants, together with information on their selection and confirmations already received.

Special information can be requested with regard to applications for project related sabbaticals (research professorships).