

**Information for
Applicants 99**

Freigeist-Fellowships

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I. Objectives

The Freigeist funding initiative provides an opportunity for outstandingly qualified, creative and independent early career researchers to conduct their own research. It aims to encourage **exceptional research personalities** to embark on visionary, risk-taking research projects at the intersections between established fields of research. The flexible funding scheme and clear time frame are designed to ensure maximum support for their self-chosen research topic and thus help them develop an entirely independent research profile.

A 'Freigeist' Fellow: for the Volkswagen Foundation this means a young researcher with a strong personality, a creative mind, an ability to identify and use freedom, dedicated to overcoming obstacles. A 'Freigeist' Fellow opens up new horizons and combines critical analysis with imagination and innovative solutions.

II. Funding Opportunities

The Freigeist Fellowships are deliberately kept thematically open. They focus on postdoctoral researchers from all disciplines who strive for scientific independence early on after their doctoral studies and whose research moves between established fields. The funding initiative is to enable them to carry out an extraordinary research project and set up their own research group at a research institution in Germany.

The funding offer encompasses two funding phases with a maximum funding period of eight years and funding of up to 2.2 million euro. The special character of Freigeist projects calls for a high degree of flexibility. Depending on the subject-specific characteristics and level of experience of the applicants, the duration of the funding phases and the financial resources made available can be adapted to the requirements of the respective project. In the first funding phase, priority is placed on the development of independence and a specific research profile, while a second funding phase serves to sustainably establish the position of the Freigeist Fellow at a research institution in Germany.

Every year, 10 to 15 Freigeist Fellowships are awarded. The number of grants depends on the quality of the applications and the project match to the aims of the funding initiative.

III. General Conditions

Anyone can apply who identifies with the goals of a 'Freigeist' Fellowship and whose proposed research project fits in with the aims pursued by the Freigeist initiative. Candidates must, however, conform to the **following conditions**:

- Their doctorate must have been obtained **not longer than four years but at least one year previously** (with regard to the date of the defense relative to the deadline of the initiative).
- The Fellowship must be integrated within a university or an extra-mural research institution **in Germany**.
- Candidates must already have **changed their academic environment** and moved to a new location – at the latest when starting the Fellowship. A return to the working context of the doctorate will only be accepted under exceptional circumstances.

- A previously completed **research sojourn abroad**, at the latest integrated in the proposed research project.

Our [FAQ](#) provide further information about the general conditions and requirements of an application.

Since every Freigeist project has a completely individual design and involves its own specific challenges, the scope of funding is kept flexible. Each applicant tailors the financial resources and funding period to the subject-specific features and requirements of the particular project. The scope of funding foresees a funding period of up to eight years in two funding phases (5 + 3 years or 6 + 2 years) with total funding of up to 2.2 million euro. The resources applied for within this framework must be justified in the application.

Initial Funding Period

The first funding phase can encompass either five or six years. This also allows the Fellow to be hired as a W1 Junior Professor for the duration of the grant. Depending on project requirements, research field and career stage, funding may be requested for:

- The Fellow's position (salary scale TV-L 15 or W1-junior professorship)
- Positions for scientific personnel (doctoral students, postdocs)
- Non-personnel costs relevant to the project (e.g. consumables, travel expenses, equipment)

The maximum amount applied for in the first funding phase should be based on the requirements of the respective project and should not exceed 1.8 million euro. There are no upper or lower limits related to the field of research or to the discipline. Experience has shown that projects in the humanities and social sciences require resources from 0.5 to 1 million euro in the first funding phase, while projects in the natural and engineering sciences and in medicine may require a higher financial volume.

In principle, it is expected that the initial application will present an overall concept for the first funding phase of the project. Staff positions (PhDs, postdocs) should be requested at this time; this also applies in the event that the posts are to be filled only after the start of the main project or in the course of the project period. The amount of funding requested has no bearing on the decision to grant funding, the decisive factor being the logical consistency of the proposal and the submitted cost calculation.

Second Funding Period

A second funding period of two or three years is possible, whereby the total funding period (including the first funding phase) must not exceed eight years. The prerequisite is a positive evaluation carried out by the Foundation and a clear perspective for the continuation of the Freigeist Fellow's position on the part of the host institution. Here, too, flexibility is ensured by allowing a change to another institution for the second phase. Depending on project-specific requirements, the funding amount for the second funding phase ranges between 0.5 and 1 million euro. Total funding for both funding periods must not exceed 2.2 million euro.

Financial Contribution of the Host Institution

During the first five-year period of funding, a substantial contribution is expected of the host institution/university (rooms, IT infrastructure and computers, research assistants, resources). **Extra-mural research institutions** such as Max-Planck-Institutes or Helmholtz Centers are to contribute 50 percent of the total amount of the project costs (only project-specific costs, overheads may not be included in the calculation). A lower contribution may be acceptable for other research institutions.

Participation in Academic Teaching

It is expected that Fellows participate in academic teaching (including examinations), involving generally a teaching load of between two and four weekly hours per semester. They are also expected to participate in academic self-administration. This holds also good for Fellows affiliated to extra-mural research institutions. The Fellows are granted the right to award a doctoral degree and assume responsibility for the supervision and examination of doctoral candidates in their projects. In the opinion of the Foundation, these rights and duties are important for the establishment and leadership of an independent junior research group and contribute significantly to the development of the Fellow's individual research profile.

IV. Application and Selection Procedure

Applications have to be submitted **in English**, as the review panel is recruited internationally. The Foundation processes the applications submitted in a multi-stage, interdisciplinary and comparative assessment procedure. First, written reviews are obtained. Subsequently, a panel of experts considers the applications and selects the candidates who will be invited to present their plans to the reviewers. The review panel is composed in such a way that it satisfies both the subject-specific requirements as well as the interdisciplinary character of the projects.

Selection Criteria

- the applicant's personal **qualifications**
- the scientific **quality and originality** of the project
- **accuracy** of fit between the project proposal, applicant's personal profile, and aims of the **fund-ing initiative**
- a capability for **independent research**
- the **potential** for breakthroughs, new methodological approaches, interdisciplinary cooperation
- a constructive **approach** to possible **risks**

Further details of selection criteria can be found in our list of [FAQ](#).

Normally the Foundation comes to a decision within nine months after the respective application deadline. Candidates who – due to the reviewers' assessment of the written application – will not be invited to present their projects, will receive a notice approximately 6 months after the deadline.

V. Application Checklist

Please submit your application via the Foundation's. The following information is required:

Applicants must complete the **forms** posted in the Electronic Application System, providing details on the applicant, the recipient of funds (future host institution), title, project time schedule, and legally binding declaration. There is also a form for the budget that has to be completed online. Please notice the provided pdf-file with information on the average costs for scientific personnel.

The following documents need to be uploaded as attachments (pdf-files; **in English** unless otherwise specified) within the Electronic Application System.

- **Cover letter** including Self-Assessment: "Why Freigeist?" (max. two pages)
- **Summary** of the project in **German** (max. one page)
- **Summary** of the project in **English** (max. one page)
- Illustrative and **creative presentation of the project** in layman's terms, e.g. video, podcast, newspaper article etc. (max. 2 minutes/1 page).

Advice: Please use [CryptShare](#) if you would like to submit a video or podcast. Please make sure to upload a PDF within the section "Newspaper Article" additionally (text "Video/Podcast sent by cryptshare"), otherwise the system blocks your submission. Please send your video or podcast to krueger@volkswagenstiftung.de.

- **Project proposal** (in sum **not more than** 15 pages, 12 pt, 1.5 lines) containing:
 - Project description
 - Teaching concept
 - Reasons for choosing the host institution and description of research infrastructure
 - Details of cooperation partners
 - Information, if this or a similar application has been or will be sent to other funding organizations
 - Schematic working plan and time schedule
- List of **references/bibliography**
- **Justification of budget** (explanation for costs applied for) including host institution's contribution
- Where applicable, **quotations for equipment** costing more than 10,000 Euro (one pdf-file if possible)
- **CV** (including date of thesis defense or doctoral viva) and **list of publications**
- **Copy of doctoral degree award/PhD certificate**
- **Binding declaration on the part of the host institution** (English if possible)

In any case (university/university of applied sciences/extra-mural research institution) a binding declaration on the part of the proposed host institution is mandatory. In the event that the proposed host institution is a university/university of applied sciences the binding declaration should be issued by the hosting **faculty/institute** (where necessary supplemented with a declaration of the institution's management).

The declaration should confirm the following:

- The institution hosts the applicant in the event that the Foundation's funding is made available and enters into a contract of employment with him/her (and other persons where applicable) for the duration of the approved funding period. The fellow will be ranked as a junior research group leader and has the right to award a doctorate (as far as funds for doctoral students are applied for). He/she will be treated according to the correspondent regulations of the institution.
- Explanation of the institution's own contribution as well as the respective rooms and resources.
- Implementation of the lecture courses planned by the applicant and integration of the respective doctoral candidates (where applicable).
- Institutional and operational integration of the applicant and his/her group (e.g. cooperation partner, colloquia, graduate school).

- **Optionally: up to three publications/manuscripts** authored by the applicant (as separate pdf-files)

Please inform yourself about the [Foundation's Electronic Application System](#) prior to submitting your application. Information can be found in the document „[Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)“.

VI. Information

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Additional Information

- [Freigeist-Fellowships – FAQ](#)
- [Personnel Rates for Academic Staff](#)
- [Personnel Rates Non-Academic Staff](#)
- [Family-Related Benefits](#)
- [Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)