

Funding Initiative

“Original – isn’t it?” New Options for the Humanities and Cultural Studies

Next Deadline

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annual calls

Information

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1. What are the objectives?

To quote the renowned sociologist Robert K. Merton, “It is through originality, in greater or smaller increments, that knowledge advances”. The specific nature of the themes belonging to the humanities and cultural studies, though, makes it extremely difficult to say precisely what constitutes “original”, “new”, or “innovative”. It may encompass anything that contradicts the established knowledge or generally accepted intuitions; or just as well the development of a new approach to research, a new hypothesis, a new theory, observation of a new phenomenon, and discovery of knowledge gaps. With this funding initiative the Foundation wishes to encourage scholars in the humanities and cultural studies to embark on projects of groundbreaking originality. The Foundation does not specify what form this originality should take. It is up to the applicants to put forward the arguments that determine what is “new” in their proposed projects. Concepts might be challenged, facts and circumstances analyzed, a surprising synthesis tackled. How the research community responds to this new funding initiative could indeed trigger an inductive process that will make it possible to elucidate more precisely the meaning of the term “originality”.

With this funding initiative the Foundation is also treading new paths concerning the application and selection procedure – in at least three different ways: In order to expedite processing and enable decisions in between 4 to 5 months, the selection procedure has been trimmed and made as straightforward as possible. There is also an innovative review process: In anticipation of a large response due to the funding initiative’s broad appeal, there will be an internal process to draw up a copious shortlist of candidates. Following this, a panel of experts will make the final selection based on an anonymized review of the submitted documents.

2. What does the funding initiative comprise?

Funding Line 1

addresses individual researchers.

Funding up to EUR 80,000
max. 1 year

Funding Line 2

addresses project teams of
up to 4 partners.

Funding up to EUR 150,000
max. 1½ years

Funding Line 1 “Komm! ins Offene...” (Hölderlin)

This funding line takes its title from a Hölderlin poem. It addresses the individual researcher, offering them a possibility to develop a new idea, a new hypothesis or a new topic in the form of an essay or treatise (80-120 pages): In other words, in a genre that reveals the author’s intellectual exploratory thrust and demonstrates the particular suitability of the topic for explorative investigation and new approaches. By virtue of its pointed emphasis, asking for elucidation in such a form and how the accordant arguments and ideas are developed sheds light on the respective persons and their subjectivity. It’s all about unusual, intelligent and comprehensible, clearly formulated insights designed to rivet the attention of the readers – be they experts, members of academia, or of the general public. Apart from scholars in the humanities and cultural studies this funding line is also open for social scientists working on social theories to submit an application. This innovative funding offer, designed from the outset to explore the “new”, has been set up to complement the existing funding initiative “Opus magnum” which aims at the big picture.

Funding Line 2 “Constellations”

The title of this funding line is inspired by Walter Benjamin who used the term in various contexts. It addresses researchers who wish to join in small teams to follow up on new research ideas and put their feasibility to the test in an exploratory phase. Here, too, the main criterion is the potential for groundbreaking originality. The project results are to be gathered in a coauthored publication (article, essay, book) under formulation of a common agenda, including the development of coherent terminologies or (sets of) methods. The number of researchers per group must not exceed four. Teams comprising partners drawn from the social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, or engineering are particularly welcome, although – depending on the respective agenda – this is not in any way a requirement.

3. How many projects will be funded?

A total of approximately 20 projects will be funded per call – depending on the result of the review process. If you are interested in projects that have been granted before within this initiative, please see our website under “Project-Persons-Search”.

4. Who can apply?

The funding initiative is open to scientists at all career levels after the PhD working in the humanities or cultural sciences. Scientists working theoretically in social sciences are also eligible to apply. The main applicant has to be employed at a scientific institution in Germany. Researchers from foreign institutions are welcome to apply as co-applicants in funding line 2.

5. What is the application procedure?

Applications must include a 3-page project description and a 1-page self-assessment in answer to the following questions:

- (1) Where do you see “the originality” or “the new” in your project?
- (2) Why are you applying within the context of this funding initiative and not at your university or another funding organization?
- (3) Are there any difficulties or counter arguments you would like to address from the outset?
- (4) Where do you intend to publish your essay/treatise of 80-120 pages (funding line 1)?
- (5) Where do you intend to publish your coauthored article/book (funding line 2)?

Depending on the working language of the discipline, applications should be written in English or German.

Applications have to be submitted online via the electronic application system portal.volkswagenstiftung.de. At the end of this Information for Applicants (item 11) there is a checklist specifying the documents that must accompany your application. Item 12 contains details of how to apply online.

6. What is the scope of funding?

Funding can be allocated in a flexible manner to cover the costs of resources and staffing. This could include costs arising from the integration of project partners within Germany and abroad, research stays at outside institutions, workshops or the costs of employing a deputy during an additional research semester. Translation costs may also be applied for. In funding line 1 there is no provision for staffing with post-docs other than for the applicants themselves. Funding will be allocated on a lump-sum basis, i.e. there is no need for the individual applicant to adhere to a firm budget plan. This is to enable the funding to develop flexibly in accordance with the course of the project.

The following costs cannot be considered:

- Overheads
- Financing of doctoral studies
- Child care

7. Review and selection procedure

The selection procedure is designed as a two-stage process. First, in anticipation of the large numbers of applications to be dealt with, all the submitted short proposals will be reviewed internally by the Foundation in order to arrive at a comprehensive shortlist. This initial selection process encompasses verification that the formal prerequisites have been met, as well as a review of

the critical self-assessment and, last but not least, the short proposals. The final selection will be carried out by a jury comprising international researchers drawn from different disciplines. To ensure that the originality of the project remains the sole criterion and that the reputation of an applicant is not taken into account, the members of the jury will receive the application documents in anonymized form (excluding CV).

8. What are the selection criteria?

- Potential for groundbreaking originality: What is the aspect of surprise? What is the aspect that rivets the eye?
- Relevance of the topic for science, the general public and society as a whole
- How the project fits in with the funding format
- Appeal of the expected results for the respective target groups
- Lack of funds at applicants' own institutions or possibilities of funding from other sources.

9. How long will I have to wait for a decision?

The selection process will be completed 4 to 5 months after the application deadline. In view of the short processing time and the anticipated large number of applications it is, unfortunately, not possible to give reasons for the rejection of proposals or to obtain feedback from the jury. It is a condition that projects should commence within 4 months of allocation of funding.

10. When and how are the findings to be presented?

Following a period of one year and prior to submission for publication, the grantees of both funding lines are to present their project results at a forum to be held in Herrenhausen Palace. Every project is invited to present their preliminary findings in the form of a talk and/or poster presentation.

On this occasion, grantees in funding line 2 will have the opportunity to put forward proposals for the possible prolongation of their projects. In these particular cases, the Foundation is open to proposals for a variety of implementation forms (series of events, call for application for a cooperative project, preparation of open calls etc.), to be discussed with the attending experts. Grantees will be notified accordingly.

Electronic Application

Please use the Volkswagen Foundation's online application system: <https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de>

Please remember to print the **cover sheet** provided, sign, scan and upload it. Instructions on the electronic application system are provided online and under item 12.

11. Application checklist

Submit a short proposal online via the Volkswagen Foundation's electronic application system (see item 12), where you can upload the following information as attachments (pdf files):

- Short proposal (max. 1,200 words in all, approx. 3 pages, see 'Short Proposal')
 - clear and focused research questions, e.g. illustrated with an example
 - current state of international research with 5 to 10 bibliographical references

The proposal itself should be anonymous and omit the applicant's name, their institute's name, and any references by the applicant's group

- Self-assessment answering the following questions (max. 300 words, approx. 1 page, see 'Self-assessment sheet'):
 - 1) Where do you perceive "the originality" and "the new" in your proposed project?
 - 2) Why are you applying within the context of this funding initiative and not at your university or another funding organization?
 - 3) Are there any difficulties or counter arguments you would like to address at the outset?
 - 4) Where do you intend to publish your essay/treatise (funding line 1)?
Where do you intend to publish your article/book (funding line 2)?

Your self-assessment should also take into account the anonymity of the evaluation process.

- Short CV (max. 2 pages), including the position you hold at your institution, and a list of five selected publications (in funding line 2, please submit all CVs in one file).

The CV will only be used for the internal pre-selection process and will NOT be made accessible to members of the jury.

- Cover sheet downloaded from the application system
 - in funding line 1: Signed by the applicant.
 - in funding line 2: Signed by all applicants. In the event of applications from different institutions or locations, it is possible to use more than one cover sheet. All the cover sheets must be uploaded, duly signed.

- Miscellaneous (optional)

Any other documents that may be submitted will NOT be made accessible to members of the jury.

12. Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips

The VolkswagenStiftung accepts applications via its electronic application system portal.volkswagenstiftung.de. Please note that only registered users have access to application data and are able to submit applications and receive corresponding e-mail messages. Hence, it is required for all applicants with project responsibility to register themselves or to ask a co-worker to register in their name with the proper e-mail address. Please note: Your e-mail address – and not your name – is your identification for the application system.

Please follow the steps below to compile and submit your application:

- If you are a new user please **register** with your name, your e-mail address and your own password. When registering you will be asked about your work address details. Subsequently, you must **activate** your account using the link sent by e-mail. If you already have a user account you can immediately **login** using your e-mail address and password.
- The function **new application** starts the selection of the corresponding funding initiative (here: “Original – isn’t it?”), the funding line (1 or 2), the grant-receiving institution, and the language.
- Now – and later on – you can interrupt the completion of your application at any time. You can logout and login again as often as required.
- Please check whether the pre-filled data of the applicant are correct. If you have chosen funding line 2 please **invite** all co-applicants. Furthermore, we need application data (e. g. project title, duration) and the preliminary budget. You are asked to enter all information in the respective forms.
- Please note that the **save button** does not transfer any data to the Foundation. You are able to revise all data until the **submission** of your application.
- Please keep in mind to read and **accept the legal statement**.
- If you wish you can generate a PDF of the filled-in forms for verification and for your filing.
- Under “**enclosures**” you are able to **upload files** as required according to the checklist on the preceding page in the “Information for Applicants”. Only PDF files are accepted. Before submission all files can be exchanged for new versions.
- Prior to submission, a PDF generation of a signature sheet is required. Please sign the hardcopy, scan it and upload it as ‘Signature sheet’. Any co-applicants from other locations are welcome to generate and upload separate signature sheets for their original signatures.
- In the course of processing your application the Foundation might request additional information. The function **new supplement** can be used to upload and submit the respective files.

Technical assistance

support@volkswagenstiftung.de