

## Funding Initiative

## ‘Freigeist’ Fellowships

## Deadline

October 13, 2016

October 12, 2017

## Information

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## 1. What does it take to be a ‘Freigeist’ Fellow?

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.

The ‘Freigeist’ scheme is deliberately open to all disciplines and topics. The main focus is on outstanding junior researchers who wish to carry out research at the boundaries between established fields of research.

## 2. What are the objectives of this funding initiative?

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.

## 3. What are the general conditions?

The initial five-year funding period focuses on developing the grantee’s research profile and proficiency in independent research. The funding scheme is financially flexible and can be adjusted according to the course of the project and the personal development of the grantee. A second funding period of up to three years can be applied for in the fourth year of funding. The purpose of this extension is to secure a permanent position for the fellow at an academic institution in Germany. A clear strategy to establish a permanent position for the fellow must be part of the application for the second funding period. There is a high degree of flexibility here, too, since the program also

foresees the possibility of moving to another institution for the second funding phase.

#### 4. How many Fellowships are available?

Ten to fifteen Fellowships will be awarded per year.

#### 5. Who can apply?

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 five years previously (with regard to the date of the defense relative to the deadline of the initiative).
- The Fellowship must from the outset 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.

**Please take note** that by the time the next call is announced (application deadline: October 12, **2017**) **at least one year and no more than four years** should have elapsed since award of the applicant's doctorate (reference dates are the date of doctoral examination and the application deadline.)

#### 6. What is the scope of funding?

The initial funding period is five years; depending on the field of research and career experience, projects in a total amount of up to 1,000,000 Euro can be applied for:

- The Fellow's position (salary scale TV-L 14, comparable to similar junior research group leaders)
- Positions for scientific personnel (doctoral students, PostDocs)
- Non-personnel costs relevant to the project (e. g. consumables, travel expenses, equipment)

**IMPORTANT:** The Foundations does not grant any overheads.

In case the maximum amount of funding has not been fully taken up with the initial application, additional funds (so called modules) can be applied for during the course of the Fellowship to provide flexible support (e. g. for personnel, resources, sojourns abroad, cooperation measures, translations, workshops, stays at institutions representing other research fields). Applications for these modules should be submitted – if possible – within the context of annual reporting on the funded project.

A second funding period of up to three years may be provided. This requires a positive evaluation (by the Foundation), generally at the end of the fourth year, and a clear perspective for a permanent position for the Fellow at the host institution. The maximum funding for this second period amounts up to 400,000 Euro.

## **7. Is teaching also involved?**

It is expected that Fellows will 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.

## **8. What does the host institution provide?**

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.

For the possible second phase of funding it is expected that the host institution (if applicable) provides funding for personnel – and in all cases the prospect of offering the Fellow a permanent position.

## **9. In which language should the application be submitted?**

Applications have to be submitted in English, as the review panel is recruited internationally.

## **10. Is there an application deadline?**

The next deadlines for applications are October 13, 2016, and October 12, 2017.

## **11. What is the selection and review procedure?**

All applications are subject to an interdisciplinary two-step review process. In a first step, the members of a review panel submit their expert opinions on the applications in a comparative way. This results in a selection of candidates who are invited to present their project proposals to the review panel in person. The panel comprises members who are chosen for their specific disciplinary expertise as well as for their ability to assess the interdisciplinary character of the proposed projects. Proposals will be selected on a comparative basis by a panel of reviewers. Thus, generally no individual written assessments are requested for each project.

In the fourth year (provided a second phase of funding is applied for), an evaluation is carried out under the inclusion of external experts appointed by the Foundation.

## **12. What are the 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 funding 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](#).

## **13. How long will applicants have to wait for a decision?**

The Foundation envisages to come 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 in due course after the first review panel meeting. In consideration of the high number of applications it is in these cases not possible to give reasons for the decision or to communicate comments from the reviewers.

## 14. Can one re-apply following a negative assessment?

Unfortunately, that is not possible. It is also not possible to submit a revised version of the original proposal. We therefore recommend applicants first to obtain advice regarding their proposal as well as the most favorable time to apply.

## Information regarding parallel applications

We do not accept simultaneous applications for the Foundation's two funding initiatives addressing junior researchers ('Freigeist' Fellowships and 'Lichtenberg Professorships'). Proposals may also be submitted to other funding organizations, but this must be indicated in applications to the Foundation.

## Attachment: Checklist for the Electronic Application System

### Electronic Application System

Please use the Volkswagen Foundation's Electronic Application System:

<https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de/vwsantrag/login.do>

Do not forget to print the cover sheet you will find there. Please scan the signed version and upload it as attachment. You will find instructions on how to proceed online.

Applications must be submitted via the Foundation's Electronic Application System. Instructions on how to proceed can be found online.

Applications must be accompanied by the following information and documents (pdf-files; in English unless otherwise specified):

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 and the general guidelines for requesting personnel costs as outlined in the [FAQ](#).

### Enclosures

1. Cover letter, stating your personal motivation
2. Summary of the project in **German** (max. one page)
3. Summary of the project in **English** (max. one page)
4. Illustrative and creative presentation of the project in layman's terms (e.g. video, podcast, newspaper article etc., max. 2 minutes/1 page)
5. Self-assessment: "Why Freigeist?" – Explanation of how the proposal fits with the aims and character of the funding initiative. Refer to the FAQs (max. one page)

6. Project proposal (6.1 – 6.5 in sum not more than 15 pages, 12 pt, 1.5 lines) containing:
  - 6.1 Project description detailing objectives, statement of reasons, the potential for innovation in respect of the current status of research, details of methods, quality assurance measures (where appropriate), structure and course of the project
  - 6.2 Teaching concept, including details of hours involved (minimum two, maximum four weekly hours per semester)
  - 6.3 Reasons for choosing the host institution and description of research infrastructure
  - 6.4 Details of cooperation partners (domestic and international)
  - 6.5 Information, if this or a similar application has been or will be sent to other funding organizations
7. Schematic working plan and time schedule (e. g. as table, chart, synopsis; max. two pages)
8. List of references/bibliography
9. Justification of budget (explanation for costs applied for) including host institution's contribution
10. Where applicable, quotations for equipment costing more than 10,000 Euro (one pdf-file if possible; German or English). Offers must clearly refer to the items listed in the budget plan.
11. CV (including date of thesis defense or doctoral viva) and list of publications
12. Optionally: up to three publications/manuscripts authored by the applicant (as separate pdf-files)
13. Copy of doctoral degree award/PhD certificate (in German or English)
14. Cover sheet generated by the Electronic Application System and signed by the applicant
15. Declaration on the part of a **mentor** (not one of the PhD supervisors or a member of the proposed host institution) to the effect that – in the event the application is successful – he or she is prepared to offer advice and guidance
16. Binding declaration on the part of the host institution (preferably in English)

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 host institution has to declare

- to host the applicant in the event that the Foundation's funding is made available, and to enter into a contract of employment with him/her (and other persons where applicable) for the duration of the approved funding period. The Foundation expects that the Fellow will be ranked as junior research group leader and will be treated according to the correspondent regulations of the institution. The fellow shall have the right to award a doctorate (as far as funds for doctoral students are applied for).
- to provide an own contribution ([see point 8](#)) as well as making the respective rooms and resources available,
- to implement the lecture courses planned by the applicant and (where applicable) integrating respective doctoral candidates.
- the institutional and operational integration of the fellow and his/her group (cooperation partner, colloquia, graduate school etc.)