

**Information for  
Applicants 113**

## **World Knowledge Structural Support for “Rare Subjects”**

**Closing dates: [see homepage](#)**

- I. Objectives**
- II. The Funding Offer**
- III. Framework Conditions**
- IV. Application and Selection Procedure**
- V. Notes for Applicants**

## I. Objectives

The so-called "rare subjects" („kleine Fächer“) often represent a comprehensive, significant and future-oriented canon of knowledge of high relevance for interdisciplinarity, internationality, and innovation. Their complex subject matter enables them to address issues from a multiperspectival view, thereby contributing in a crucial way towards a multi-layered exploration of the world and a holistic “world knowledge”. At the same time, these knowledge domains are often characterized by precarious structures inside the universities. Above all, the human resources in these subjects are often scarce. There is a lack of structural sustainability for research and teaching. They are particularly prone to changing orientations in higher education policy, but also to socio-political change. For this reason, the funding offer aims at a sustainable strengthening of structurally precarious knowledge domains in research and teaching. It is intended to encourage the representatives to develop innovative ideas for structurally strengthening their fields, as well as to invite the respective university leadership to create sustainable perspectives for the said “rare subjects”. In addition, funding can be allocated to support measures aimed at making the wealth of knowledge encompassed by the “rare subjects” better known to politics and the public at large.

## II. The Funding Offer

The funding offer is aimed in particular at those “rare subjects” with a high potential for innovation that wish to pursue or strive for interdisciplinary and international networking. It is thematically open and consists of two funding lines:

### **Funding line 1: Strategic Concepts for Structural Strengthening**

The measures that can be used to sustainably strengthen a subject in research and teaching depend to a large extent on its location and the discipline in question. For this reason, proposals may be submitted in the form of strategically oriented concepts comprising different funding measures. The aim here is to promote the development of cross-institutional international networks that are to form the basis for cooperative ventures beyond the funding period.

Exemplary measures in this respect include: teaching collaborations, guest lectures by international researchers or non-university experts, networking activities with actors external to the academic field, new teaching formats, leave of absence or also staff positions for mid-level faculty or professors. Other meaningful measures can be integrated into the strategic concept. Single individual measures are not eligible for funding.

The concepts can cover a duration of up to seven years and be funded in an amount of up to 1 million euros. Furthermore, in the context of a flexible monitoring of concept implementation, it may be possible to submit proposals for additional funding of modules up to 250,000 euros. It is expected – particularly with regard to funding staff positions – that the universities concerned will also participate financially in a flexible system of “matching funds”. Funding line 2: Science Communication

The knowledge encompassed by many structurally small subjects is of high relevance for today’s societal and technical challenges. Therefore, the Foundation wants to encourage representatives of the “rare subjects” to try out innovative measures of communication in which researchers and the public enter into a mutual dialogue. Such activities should reach beyond well-known formats such as

events and publications. It is also of central importance that the measures target groups clearly outside the academic context and that, as far as possible, different age groups are addressed. Projects can be funded to a maximum amount of 100,000 euros.

### **III. Framework Conditions**

Eligible for funding are tenured professors of the "rare subjects", together with representatives of the respective university management (funding line 1), professors, post-docs, or other academic staff of institutes (funding line 2). Here, we deliberately refrain from attempting a clear definition of what constitutes a "rare subject". In your application, please explain the potential and status of your subject as a "rare subject". Support for the application and also a sustainable perspective must be clearly communicated by the university leadership. Cooperation with non-university institutions from the academic or cultural sphere is expressly wished for. There will be a discussion of the project's perspectives approximately halfway through the funding in line 1.

### **IV. Application and Selection Procedure**

#### **Funding line 1:**

Applicants should submit a concept outline not exceeding 5 pages, a detailed letter of support from the university leadership, together with a 2-page explanation of the status as a "rare subject". In terms of content, the outline should include an explanation of the strategic objectives as well as a description of the individual funding measures applied for and their orientation towards the intended objectives. The letter of support from the university management should clarify how the planned measures fit into the institution's overall strategy and how they are supported by the university.

The evaluation is carried out by an interdisciplinary panel of experts, which includes competencies from the participating specialist subjects as well as structural aspects of the university system. The assessment is based on a comparative weighting of the following criteria:

- Scientific relevance and societal significance of the knowledge in question
- Quality of the planned individual measures and coherence of the overall concept
- How the measures fit into the scientific environment and the overall strategy of the university concerned
- Prospects for establishing the targeted measures over the longer term
- Academic and personal qualifications of the applicant(s) and participants

In a second step, the authors of positively assessed concept outlines are invited to submit a full application. In view of the usually low number of staff in the "rare subjects", applicants may apply for a support of 10,000 euros for preparing a full proposal.

Evaluation of the applications include a due consideration of the project presentation made in front of the expert panel.

**Funding line 2:**

Applications for science communication can initially be submitted within the framework of the ideas competition “Rare Subjects Mediate World Knowledge” (see Information for Applicants 113a). This funding line will be opened in 2019.

**V. Notes for Applicants**

Please submit your documents in electronic form via the Application Portal of the Volkswagen Foundation. The documents must be in English. The following information is to be uploaded as attachments (pdf files) in the Application Portal:

**Funding line 1:**

- Concept outline (max. 5 pages)
  - A precise description of the planned measures, including the proposed individual measures in context of the national and international situation of the subject in question
- Time and work schedule
- Budget (for preparing a full proposal and for the strategic concept)
- Budget Justification
- Letter of support from the university leadership (“institutional declaration”)
- Explanation of status as a “rare subject” (max. 2 pages) (“other enclosure”)
- CVs of the scholars involved, with a list of up to 5 publications per person
- Cover sheet from the Application Portal with signatures
- Other enclosures (optional)

**Funding line 2:**

- See Information for Applicants 113a “Ideas Competition: Rare Subjects Mediate World Knowledge”

**Please contact the appropriate program director prior to submitting your application.**

## Contact Persons

Dr. Adelheid Wessler (on maternity leave until 28.2.2018)

Dr. Vera Szöllösi-Brenig

Phone: 0511 8381 218

Fax: 0511 8381 4 218

email: szoelloesi@volkswagenstiftung.de

VolkswagenStiftung

Kastanienallee 35

30519 HANNOVER

GERMANY

www.volkswagenstiftung.de

## Links to further information

- [Electronic Application](#)
- [Application FAQs](#)
- [What We Do Not Fund](#)
- [ProcessChart: Evaluation procedure for the ideas competition "Rare Subjects Mediate World Knowledge"](#)