

Call for Applications

Theme Week “The (De)tabooing of Science and Research”

Date: September 17 – 19, 2025

Deadline: February 11, 2025, 2 pm CET

In its "Theme Weeks", the Volkswagen Foundation supports scientific symposia on various pre-determined topics. The symposia are carried out in the same week at the Xplanatorium Schloss Herrenhausen conference center in Hanover and accompanied by a supporting program organized by the Foundation.



area of research: Humanities, Cultural and Social Sciences, Life, Health and Technical Sciences



type of funding: Organization of a scientific symposium



target group: Researchers at German universities and research institutions, optionally international co-applicants

1 Objectives

Taboos shape the way we live together in many ways – in society, academia, culture and everyday life. They fulfil various functions: Taboos can be an expression of cultural values or a means of social control. The Duden dictionary distinguishes between the original concept of taboo in ethnology and religious studies and a meaning that refers to unspoken social rules. In the current political and media debate, "taboo" is increasingly used negatively in the sense of "outdated", while terms such as "taboo-free" have positive connotations. As society, its norms and practices change over time, so do taboos.

As part of the theme week "(De)tabooing of Science and Research" (September 17-19, 2025), the Volkswagen Foundation would like to support events that deal with the emergence of new taboos, their consolidation mechanisms and the dissolution of old taboo topics. A particular focus will be on the taboos in academic inquiry that exist despite the fundamental academic freedom.

The symposia can focus on the following topics, for example:

- Construction of taboos in academia: How and why do taboos arise in different scientific disciplines? What role do social, cultural and historical factors play in the establishment of scientific taboos? What are the latest taboos in academia and are there signs of emerging future taboo topics?
- Consolidation and dissolution of taboos: What mechanisms contribute to the entrenchment and persistence of taboos in research over long periods? What strategies and approaches can be developed to question, dismantle, or reevaluate these taboos?
- Intercultural differences: How do taboos differ in different cultures and scientific traditions? What role do taboos play in international scientific cooperation and how can these differences be used productively?
- Effects of taboos in academia: What effects do taboos have on scientific innovation, publications and discourse? To what extent do they influence the career paths of researchers?

The funded symposia will be accompanied by a joint program that offers time for exchange among the participants of all symposia and fosters networking.

2 Scope of Funding

Symposia funded by the Foundation take place at the Xplanatorium Herrenhausen Palace, Hannover, Germany, within the framework of the Volkswagen Foundation's funding program "Theme Weeks". The venue offers meeting and conference rooms of different size as well as a professional organizational and technical infrastructure. In addition to the provision of this infrastructure and handling of organizational tasks, symposia are supported with funds covering personnel, non-personnel, and publication costs. The foundation funds symposia with up to 50 participants.

Funds may be requested to cover the following costs:

Personnel costs

- Funds for student assistants during preparation, running and follow-up of the event in an amount not exceeding 7,000 EUR.

Travel costs

- Expenses for accommodation for all participants (please estimate 140 EUR per night/person).
- Travel expenses for all participants. Please also refer to the Volkswagen Foundation's Recommendations for sustainable traveling (see section 6). Please estimate the following sums per participant in the cost plan for travel to and from the event in total (please note that only costs actually incurred can be settled with the Foundation after the event):
 - Participants from Germany: 250 EUR
 - Participants from the rest of Europe: 500 EUR
 - Participants from the east coast of the USA: 1,000 EUR
 - Participants from the rest of the world: 1,500 EUR

Non-personnel costs, e.g.

- Expense allowances for freelancers (e.g. journalists or moderators), who are actively involved in the symposium.
- Consumables in an amount not exceeding 500 EUR.
- Funds for childcare costs, e.g. travel expenses, accommodation costs or allowances for caregivers. If you apply for funds for childcare, please briefly explain how it is planned and how the costs are composed.

Publication expenses. The Foundation expects that the results of the symposia will be published online and open access. Typical conference proceedings and pure print publications will not be funded.

As part of the grant, the following services are provided by the Volkswagen Foundation:

- hotel reservations (please do not make any bookings yourself),
- provision of conference equipment at the Xplanatorium Herrenhausen Palace, Hanover/Germany,
- catering at the Xplanatorium Herrenhausen Palace, Hanover/Germany.

Joint Program

Applicants are requested to include the following slots into their program in order to foster exchange and networking of the participants of all symposia among each other and with representatives of the Foundation:

- Wednesday, September 17th: 9:30 am – 1 pm (welcome, get-together, introduction to and overview of the symposia, lunch),
- Thursday, September 18th: after 4:00 pm (joint activity and dinner),
- Friday, September 19th: 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm (joint closing, lunch).

Please note that the joint program will be in English if the working language of at least one of the funded symposia is English.

Open Science

The Foundation supports [Open Science](#). For planned publications of the conference results, the Foundation expects them to be published open access.

General information

The Foundation cannot be held responsible for any obligations entered into prior to the receipt of grant approval.

Applications that have been or are intended to be submitted in this or a similar form to another funding organization will not be processed by the Foundation. Applications that do not meet the formal requirements will not be submitted for review. The Foundation can only award funds to scientific institutions.

3 Application and Selection Procedure

Eligible to apply are researchers from all fields and at all career levels after the PhD, who are employed at a scientific institution in Germany. Researchers from foreign institutions can be involved as co-applicants. Applications can be submitted in German or English.

3.1 Review Procedure

A decision is usually made within two months of the deadline. In addition to the objectives of the respective theme week described in section 1, the scientific quality of the event, the use of innovative and interactive event formats, and the conclusiveness of the overall concept are decisive factors in the review process. The Foundation also expects active participation of PhD students and postdocs as well as a significant inclusion of female scientists among both the speakers and the participants.

4 Application Checklist

Applications must be submitted via the Volkswagen Foundation's new electronic application system, which is expected to be available from mid-January 2025. If you are submitting your application together with other researchers, please make sure that all applicants register in the application portal and assign themselves to the application. Please note that there is a maximum of four co-applicants per application.

4.1 Electronic Application – Instructions

The foundation is switching its funding management system to a new provider at the turn of the year 2024/2025. As part of this change, the electronic application system will also be fundamentally revised and optimised. The change will bring a number of improvements that will make the application process more efficient and user-friendly.

Please note that it is currently not possible to prepare and submit applications for this call via the electronic application system. The new system is expected to be available from mid-January 2025. From that date, you will be able to register on the new system and submit applications for this call via the new application portal.

Please check the Foundation's website and the guidelines for this call in January 2025. We will inform you of any changes there.

4.2 Application documents

The following documents are required:

4.2.1 Proposal Text

Please use the [template](#), which is also provided at the end of section 6 and on our homepage.

4.2.2 Planned Program

Upload the planned program in free format as a PDF or Word file in the portal under "Other attachments".

4.2.3 Short CVs of all Applicants

Please submit your scientific career in tabular-narrative form. A [template](#) is available on the funding initiative's website for this purpose.

4.2.4 Budget Plan

Please enter a budget plan directly in the application system. Please note that funding is only granted to one institution, which is why you should submit a joint budget plan even in case of multiple applicants.

5 Contact

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6 Further Information

- [Theme Week „The \(De\)tabooing of Science and Research”](#)
- [Template Proposal \(download\)](#)
- [CV - Template \(download\)](#)
- [FAQs for applicants](#)
- [Useful Information and downloads](#)
- [Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)