

### Call for Applications

## Theme Week “(Tackling) Loneliness”

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

**Deadline:** 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2024

In its "Theme Weeks", the Volkswagen Foundation funds scientific symposia on various pre-determined topics. All symposia take place during the same week at the Xplanatorium Herrenhausen Palace, Hanover/Germany and are accompanied by a supporting program organized by the Foundation.



Humanities, cultural and social sciences, life, health and technical sciences



Organization of a scientific symposium



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

# 1 Objectives

Loneliness and social isolation have been problematized for several decades in the context of demographic change, urbanization, individualization, and digitalization. Yet, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the respective discussions have become more virulent and relevant. Additionally, they are increasingly focusing on three new aspects: Loneliness is understood as a universal problem affecting the population in general and regardless of age. Further, loneliness is increasingly being discussed as a public health issue due to its health consequences – including Alzheimer's disease, cardiovascular disorders, and psychiatric illnesses – and is being addressed accordingly in medical/neuroscientific research. Finally, loneliness is being discussed as a societal rather than an individual problem, which is based on far-reaching societal transformation processes, and which requires political action. This is the starting point of the German government's new loneliness strategy, which is based on similar strategies such as the ones in the UK and Japan.

Based on these discussions and developments, the Volkswagen foundation aims with the theme week "(Tackling) Loneliness" (June 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025) at looking at the phenomena of loneliness and social isolation from a multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, and intersectional perspective. The Foundation explicitly intends to bring together scientists and non-scientific actors to jointly determine the status quo of loneliness and social isolation, develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena and discuss possible solutions to tackle loneliness and social isolation. International and comparative perspectives are particularly welcome.

The funded symposia will be accompanied by a joint program that offers time for exchange among the participants of all symposia and serves to promote 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 can 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 we cannot pay lumpsums, but only reimburse costs that actually incurred):

- 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 meeting 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, June 11<sup>th</sup>: 9:30am – 1pm (welcome, get-together, introduction to and overview over the symposia, lunch)
- Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup>: 12:00pm – 1pm (lunch) and after 4:00pm (joint activity, dinner, and public event on loneliness and social isolation),
- Friday, June 13<sup>th</sup>: 12:00pm – 1:00pm (closing remarks, 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.

**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 online via the Volkswagen Foundation's electronic application system. 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**

Please read the information about the electronic application system on the website of the Volkswagen Foundation prior to submitting your application. Information can be found in the document "[Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)". It is important that applicants register all involved parties early on in the process. Without a user profile it is not possible to invite co-applicants or to submit an application.

If you have technical questions about using the electronic application system, please contact [support@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:support@volkswagenstiftung.de).

#### **4.2 Application documents**

The following documents are required:

##### **4.2.1 Proposal Text**

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

#### 4.2.2 Planned Program

#### 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 "\(Tackling\) Loneliness"](#)
- [Template Proposal \(download\)](#)
- [CV - Template \(download\)](#)
- [FAQs for applicants](#)
- [Application System](#)
- [Electronic application made easy - instructions and tips](#)
- [Useful Information and downloads](#)
- [Recommendations for sustainable traveling](#)