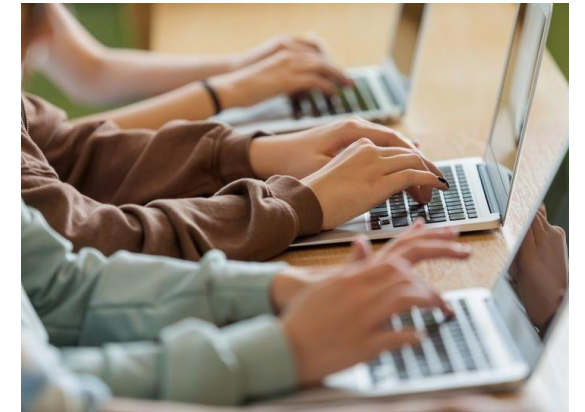


AI Research Groups Lower Saxony

Call 2026/2027

Online Questions and Answers Session
6 October 2026 | 11:00 – 12:00 CEST



Dr. Ida Retter, Programme Director



Niedersächsisches Ministerium
für Wissenschaft und Kultur



Volkswagen**Stiftung**

Agenda

1. Introduction to the team
2. Introduction to the call for proposals
3. Your questions and our answers

Introduction to the team

The team



Review process:

Dr. Karsten Fritsch
VolkswagenStiftung



Expenditure plan:

Elisabeth Heyer
Nds. Ministerium für
Wissenschaft und Kultur



Funding platform:

Diana Schumacher
VolkswagenStiftung

Introduction to the call

Objectives

- **Attract outstanding (early-career) researchers** to further expand the development and application of artificial intelligence (AI) in Lower Saxony.
- **Develop AI methods and/or data-driven applications**
- Applicants must demonstrate **in-depth knowledge of the AI methods used** in the proposed project.
- No further subject-specific restrictions apply.

Scope of Funding

Up to EUR 2 million, up to 5 years

Eligible cost categories:

- Staff, including own position of the applicant
- Equipment & materials
- Travel, conferences, OA publication and data management costs
- Typical group: Applicant (PI) + 3–4 PhDs
- PI commitment and own position in the budget at least 50%

Total call volume: EUR 10 million → Five proposals can be funded.

Internationalisation module: optional **additional** budget of 10% → **in total: up to EUR 2.2 million**

Eligibility

- **researchers with PhD completed before 1 Sept 2025**
 - relevant is the date on the PhD certificate
 - no upper limit of time since PhD completion
- establishing group at an **eligible Lower Saxony research institution**
- At the time of application, applicants may be outside Lower Saxony and already permanently employed.
- **Excluded: permanent professors and tenure-track professors.**

Evaluation Criteria

- How excellent is the applicant (relative to career stage and field norms) regarding scientific track record, independence, and potential to lead a research group?
- How innovative/original is the proposed project (questions and/or AI methods), compared to the state of the art? How big is its academic or societal impact?
- How plausible is the integration into the research environment?
- How plausible is the work plan, the budget and the structure of the research group?
- How plausible is timely access to and usability of the required data (quality, rights, documentation) and availability of required software/compute and expertise?
- To what extent are gender and diversity equity aspects and, where applicable, aspects of ecological sustainability adequately considered?

Preparation of your application

- Read the **Information for Applicants** and the **Guide for Proposal Documents** carefully.
- Download and use the provided templates.
- Contact your intended host institution to negotiate the hosting conditions described in the host institution letter.
- Prepare all required documents and any optional letters of intent.
- Upload the complete application and all required information to the funding portal before the deadline.

Information on the call:

<https://zukunft.niedersachsen.de/en/funding-offers/ai-research-groups-lower-saxony/>



Application portal
(funding platform) for
proposal submission:

<https://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de/authentication/login>



Timeline

28 Jan 2027, 12:00 CET: Deadline for proposals

The following timeline is indicative and may be subject to change:

Feb–May 2027: Review with subsequent notifications of results

Jun 2027: Oral Presentations of a small selection of applicants (10-15)

~ Aug 2027: Approval and project start (flexible within one year after approval)

Questions and answers

Frequently asked questions

Can cooperation partners be funded? → Yes, to a limited amount:

- No formal percentage limit applies, but the focus and coherence of the research group must remain convincing.
- International partners: may receive additional funding through the optional internationalisation module.
- Commercial enterprises, including startups: cannot receive funding.

Is there a limit of proposals per host institution? → No.

Can previous 2025 applicants reapply? → Only if invited to resubmit.

Must all documents be in English? → Yes.

Which projects from the 2025 call are funded? → See [zukunft.niedersachsen.de](https://www.zukunft.niedersachsen.de)



Any further questions?

Contact:



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