

neue forschung

Pro*Niedersachsen – Research Projects in the Humanities, Cultural Studies and Social Sciences

Application Deadline: 15 October of the year prior to project start

The analysis of historical, cultural and social contexts promotes an understanding of the past, sharpens our perspective on the present and provides impetus for the development of modern societies. Through the programme 'Pro*Niedersachsen – Research Projects in the Humanities, Cultural Studies and Social Sciences', Lower Saxony provides targeted support for research in these fields.

Projects that place contexts in Lower Saxony within an international research framework are also welcome, but not a prerequisite. Funding supports highly original research projects that deliver substantial disciplinary insights while unlocking clear avenues for the inter- and transdisciplinary development of relevant research questions and methodologies.

📅 **Disciplines: Humanities, cultural studies and social sciences**

💡 **Type of funding: Research projects**

📄 **Target group: Eligible to apply are universities in the State of Lower Saxony in accordance with Section 2 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG), as well as non-university research institutions funded by the state. Universities of applied sciences may also submit applications.**

€ **Funding amount: up to 400,000 EUR / consortia up to 800,000 EUR**

📅 **Funding period: max. four years / consortia max. five years**

⚠️ **Annual deadline; call for proposals with an internationalisation module**

1. Objective

The humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences are of particular significance to society. The analysis of historical, cultural, and social contexts fosters an understanding of the past, sharpens our perspective on the present, and provides impetus for the development of modern societies. Through its programme 'Pro*Niedersachsen – Research Projects in the Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Social Sciences', the State of Lower Saxony supports scientifically outstanding research initiatives. Funding supports projects characterised by an exceptionally high degree of originality, scientific relevance, and clear potential for national or international visibility. Projects that place contexts in Lower Saxony within an international research framework are also welcome. The programme welcomes research proposals that offer new insights for their respective disciplines or actively advance the inter- and transdisciplinary development of relevant research questions and methodologies.

The Academic Advisory Commission of Lower Saxony (WKN) published the report 'Recommendations of the Working Group for the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Cultural Studies' in 2023. This emphasises the particular importance of the 'Pro*Niedersachsen' funding line and, at the same time, provides valuable insights into potential areas of development in Lower Saxony. Furthermore, the report offers researchers in Lower Saxony guidelines on how to support thematically or strategically compatible collaborations.

2. Funding Opportunities

I. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are the higher education institutions of the State of Lower Saxony in accordance with Section 2 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG), as well as non-university research institutions funded by the State. Institutions of applied sciences are also able to submit applications.

The researcher submitting the application must hold a PhD. Through evidence of relevant prior scientific work, applicants should demonstrate that they have already established a visible track record in the proposed field of research. Applicants may not submit more than one application per call for proposals.

II. Funding amount, duration and start date

The total funding allocation amounts to 3.6 million euros per year. Projects can receive funding of up to 400,000 euros over a period of four years.

Up to two projects may be funded over a period of five years with a total funding amount of up to 800,000 euros over a period of five years, provided that two or more applicants from different institutions form a consortium and the research area corresponds to one of the priority areas in Lower Saxony defined by WKN in its report **'Recommendations of the Working Group on Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies'** ^[3] ,:

- (Digital) editorial studies, (Digital) Humanities, (Digital) collection research,
- Early Modern History,
- Cultural Heritage, Provenance Research,
- Migration Studies,
- Research on research, research ethics

Funding supports collaborative projects in which at least two legally independent institutions based in Lower Saxony jointly pursue an overarching research objective. The partners must structure work packages that are interdependent in terms of content and generate demonstrable added value through their collaboration. A prerequisite for funding is that the project can only be implemented meaningfully and efficiently within the framework of a consortium. The expected scientific, technological or societal added value of the collaboration must be clearly set out in the application. Merely working in parallel on similar research questions, or grouping together individual sub-projects without close scientific integration, does not meet the requirements for a collaborative project. When applying for a collaborative project, a concept

is required that clarifies the follow-up goals the consortium aims to pursue after the end of state funding (max. 2 pages). It must be demonstrated how the preparatory work and the results of the project can facilitate the acquisition of further third-party funding (DFG, BMBF, EU, etc.). Projects whose focus lies on the development or profiling of individual research sites or research groups are not eligible for funding; such proposals should be submitted under the 'Boost Research' funding scheme.

Funding for projects, whether collaborative or individual, may be awarded from 1 October of the year following the application at the earliest and must be utilised within six months of approval at the latest.

Under the **Internationalisation Module**, additional funding of up to 10 per cent of the total grant amount may be applied for to facilitate the involvement of international cooperation partners. **More information here** [↗](#).

III. Use of funds

Funds may be used for personnel resources, operating costs and investment in equipment. In the case of cooperation with a research institution outside Lower Saxony, up to 10 per cent of the funding may be allocated to that institution.

The following items are eligible for funding:

- Funding for PhD candidates (up to 100 per cent of a full-time equivalent position in pay grade 13 of the TV-L for a maximum of four or five years; PhD candidates should, as a rule, be integrated into a structured PhD programme),
- Funding for postdocs (up to 100 per cent of a full-time equivalent position in pay grade 14 of the TV-L for four or five years),
- Funding to enable 'research leave' for professors through a teaching substitution of up to one year,
- Funding for research assistants and student or research support staff.
- Reasonable expense allowances for research participants are eligible for funding, provided there are compelling and scientifically sound methodological reasons for the conduct of the research project. **Please note the following** [↗](#).

Note on personnel resources:

The average rates set by the Lower Saxony Ministry of Finance are decisive for the calculation of personnel resources. If a specific individual has already been designated to work on the project at the time of application, this must be stated in the application. In this case, the funding must be determined as accurately as possible on the basis of the individual's personal details. The financial plan in the application must specify which positions are being applied for. It is mandatory to state the pay grade, the scope of the position and its duration. If applicants are applying for funding for a position within their own organisation, this must be clearly indicated. If applications are made for academic positions in pay grades E13 or E14 with a working time of less than 100 per cent, the reasons for this must be stated in the application. Incomplete information may lead to the application being rejected on formal grounds.

If the applicant is employed on a fixed-term contract, the application must be accompanied by a statement from the applicant's institution confirming that the project can be carried out at that institution, that the institution, as the grant recipient, will administer the funds, and that the project's continuation at that institution is guaranteed should the applicant leave.

- Non-personnel and travel funds. Travel expenses are eligible for reimbursement in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Travel Expenses Act (BRK), in conjunction with the provisions of the Lower Saxony Travel Expenses Regulation (NRKVO) and the Administrative Regulations relating to the NRKVO (VV-NRKVO) dated 10 January 2017, as currently in force (Please note: Eligible expenses are those necessary for journeys using the most cost-effective regular public transport services).
- Printing and publication costs for the publication of research results (up to 20,000 euros). The results should preferably be made available as open access. If further funding is sought from open access schemes, a separate condition of approval may apply.
- Scientific equipment. Applications for such equipment may be submitted provided it is required for the implementation of the project and does not fall under the category of basic institutional



equipment. When applying, the equipment must be described in detail and its price, including all ancillary costs, must be specified. Ongoing expenditure on scientific equipment, e.g. for energy consumption, insurance, maintenance, repairs and spare parts, is not eligible for funding. It must be confirmed that the proper use, storage and maintenance of the equipment, as well as the coverage of ongoing expenditure, are ensured.

The following are not eligible for funding:

- Indirect expenditure, i.e. expenditure on infrastructure used (e.g. room or energy costs; see also the notes on scientific equipment),
- expenditure on hospitality,
- funds for the acquisition of land and buildings, and building maintenance.

Lump sum for administrative and infrastructure expenditure (VIAP)

The funding is subject to the payment of a 10 per cent lump sum for administrative and infrastructure expenditure (VIAP). This is automatically added to the expenditure items in the submitted financial plan.

Please note: Please enter only the funds directly required for the project in the **Cost Plan**[☞]. The VIAP will be calculated upon approval by the MWK.

3. Application and selection process

I. Timetable/Application deadline

The funding application must be submitted by 15 October of the year prior to project start.

II. Procedure

When submitting the application, you must also provide confirmation that the university management of your higher education institution has taken note of and supports the application.

Funding applications must be submitted electronically (as a single PDF file, max. 10 MB including the attachments requested in the form), in accordance with VV 3.1 relating to Section 44 of the State Budget Regulations, using the application form „**Application for funding of research projects**[☞]“, to the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture:

Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture,
Division 12,
Andreas.Stuhlmacher@MWK.niedersachsen.de[☞]

The annual selection process is organised by the Academic Advisory Commission of Lower Saxony (WKN). The procedure consists of two stages: taking into account external expert assessments, a multidisciplinary review panel ranks the applications according to their eligibility for funding. The selection process is usually completed by the end of the second quarter each year. The MWK generally makes its funding decision in July of each year on the basis of the selection committee's recommendations and decides at its discretion within the limits of the available funds.

Under this call for proposals and the administrative regulations relating to Sections 23 and 44 of the State Budget Regulations, applicants may receive funding in the form of project grants as non-repayable grants based on expenditure. There is no legal entitlement to funding.

In the event of funding being granted to recipients, the General Ancillary Provisions for Project Funding Grants (ANBestP) shall form an integral part of the grant award notice.

During the course of the project, an interim report (2 pages) must be submitted, and upon completion of the project, a final report (3–5 pages) must also be submitted, providing information on the progress of the project, any deviations from the originally planned work and time schedule, as well as the key findings in the context of the initial questions and objectives, the publications produced, and any follow-up projects

4. Application

The application form requires information on the following points. These also constitute the assessment criteria:

Research interest:

- Research area(s),
- specific research question(s),
- scientific relevance of the project,
- methodological and/or innovative character of the project,
- for collaborative applications: description of the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary focus of the project.

Objectives:

- scientific objectives and expected scientific findings,
 - identification of structure-building measures within the research project,
 - possible follow-up projects following completion of the project,
 - involvement of early-career researchers,
 - planned publication of the results,
- the contribution to social, cultural or political discourses must be presented in a clear and comprehensible manner. General references to social relevance without a concrete transfer strategy will not be viewed favourably in the selection process (science communication).

State of the art:

- Current state of research and how the project builds on this,
- the current status of the applicant's own relevant preliminary work.

Data and methods:

- data/corpora to be analysed,
- research methods,
- planned measures for data management and re-use of the research data obtained.

Work programme and expenditure:

- Work plan and time schedule
- Cost estimate.

Information on the relevance of gender and diversity

- The composition of the project team must be determined in accordance with the **DFG's equality and diversity standards** . Applicants must explain the role that gender and diversity dimensions play in the research process (methods, work programme, objectives) and in the transfer/translation process. The relevant information will be taken into account during the peer review process.

5. Contact

If you have any questions regarding the programme call, please contact:

Lower Saxony Ministry for Science and Culture

E-Mail: Pro.Niedersachsen@MWK.niedersachsen.de 

As of October 2026