

IMPACT ORIENTATION AT STIFTUNG MERCATOR

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FUNDING PHILOSOPHY

Stiftung Mercator follows a strategic approach when awarding its grants: first and foremost, the projects we support are selected according to whether they will help us achieve the socio-political objectives to which we are committed as a foundation. This approach continues even after a grant has been awarded, indeed for as long as the project in question is underway. We regard our funding as a partnership with our grant recipients, which is why we support and accompany projects from the moment the application is prepared until the project is brought to a conclusion. Expertise on questions of project and financial management, on how to prepare and stage events, and on issues relating to strategic public relations is made available to our project partners by the project managers and staff at Stiftung Mercator.

IMPACT ORIENTATION

In our thematic clusters (climate change, integration, cultural education, Europe) and fields of action (e.g. European migration policy, the promotion of diversity, higher education success), we have selected socio-political objectives that we wish to promote through our activities. Consequently, only such projects that can contribute to achieving these objectives will be considered for Stiftung Mercator funding. This requires applicants to base the individual projects on their understanding of the project's impact. A project's intended impact (What does the project hope to achieve through which measures/activities?) must be made clear at the application stage, i.e. at the latest when the full application is submitted. (There are many different understandings of and approaches to impact. Stiftung Mercator project partners are free to choose which of these approaches to follow. Practical tips about how to develop an impact model is available free of charge from the organization [PHINEO](#).)

The application must therefore contain and define the following:

- the starting situation (relevance to the existing field of research/thematic area, indication of framework conditions and desiderata),
- the project objectives (What is the project supposed to achieve? What contribution will it make in practice or to the political debate? Which impact model is it based upon?),
- project description (What exactly is planned? How is the project to be structured and how will it proceed? Which approach/methods/instruments will be chosen? How is the target group defined? How does the project differ from existing projects?),

- the project's concrete output (i.e. the direct result of the project-related activities and processes; e.g. number and type of publications or events, number of participants or applicants etc.),
- the project's indirect outcome (i.e. the consequences of the output for the system or target group in question; in many cases, effects can only be identified indirectly or in terms of how they relate to a comparison group; e.g. change in personal attitudes, acquisition of new skills, networking of target groups, reception of research results in the target groups, changes to discourse) and
- key project milestones (a rough timetable that outlines the most important steps and results, e.g. the completion of a project phase, calls for proposals, interim conference)

IMPACT ORIENTATION IN OUR RESEARCH FUNDING

Our research funding is also based on the focus on our defined social objectives as outlined above. We therefore select the research projects we support on the basis of how well they fit in with our strategy and their potential contribution to achieving the socio-political objectives defined therein. To obtain funding from Stiftung Mercator, it is therefore not sufficient for the topic of a research project to be related to one of the foundation's thematic clusters. Instead, it must be made clear how the project will be received outside the academic world and how the findings gained during the course of the project can help reach the defined social objectives. This means that research projects – no matter how open they may be in terms of their outcome – should also be impact-oriented and based on a defined understanding of their impact. Since research projects tend only to have social impact if the research findings are also received outside the academic world, it is important for Stiftung Mercator to see how the research results will be successfully transferred to politicians and society. Applicants therefore need a clear understanding of who outside the academic community will find their research results potentially relevant and which formats can be used to reach these target groups.

A high level of academic research quality with respect to the methods used and adherence to the usual standards of good academic practice are fundamental prerequisites for funding from Stiftung Mercator. However, we also judge the success of research on the basis of its relevance to social discourse and the contribution it makes to solving problems or achieving goals. It is therefore of vital importance for applications for research funding – besides containing a description of content and methods – to give convincing answers to the following questions:

- To whom are the results relevant?
(e.g. organized civil society, media/journalists, parliament, ministries, lower-level authorities)

- Which political level is to be addressed?
(e.g. municipal, state, federal, EU)
- Which hierarchical level is to be addressed?
(e.g. ministers/directors, division/department heads, section heads)
- Did the target group express a need for the research results?
- What are the objectives of the project?
(e.g. sensitization, indication of different courses of action, development of scenarios with the respective consequences, development of recommendations)
- What is the concrete goal of the knowledge transfer?
(e.g. to change the attitude of target group to topic X)
- Which (communicative) measures are to be used to achieve this? (e.g. bilateral talks, policy briefs, workshops)
- Which (material and/or staff) resources are needed for communication and public relations work?
- At which point(s) will target groups be involved? Is their knowledge and experience to be fed into the research process?
- When will the knowledge transfer be deemed successful? / What is supposed to change on which level after the transfer? (e.g. in the applicant's own everyday practice, within the expert community or in the system)