

Information on the Gottfried and Vera Weiss Science Foundation

History of the foundation

Dr. Vera Weiss, who passed away in April 2013, requested in her last will and testament that all of her assets should be vested in a science foundation, and that all of the income from those assets (primarily real estate) should be made available in order to support research in two scientific disciplines: meteorology and anaesthesiology. These two disciplines were chosen on the basis of Vera Weiss' scientific career and that of her late husband, Dr. Gottfried Weiss.

The donors¹

Both Vera and Gottfried Weiss started their careers "at the very bottom" during the difficult years after World War II. However, their high enthusiasm and great personal dedication catapulted them to the top of their fields. With a doctorate in meteorology, Gottfried Weiss enjoyed a successful career in public service in Vienna, after which he became head of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in Geneva, a specialised agency within the United Nations system. The organisation's objectives include promoting research and education in the field of meteorology and related disciplines as well as taking on an active role in the coordination of international aspects of research and education projects in the field. Vera Weiss served as the head of anaesthesiology in the women's clinic at the regional hospital in Geneva, one of the world's most renowned hospitals at the time. Working with patients was her top priority, but she still maintained close links to research; in her younger years, she had conducted scientific work thanks to a generous grant from a pharmaceuticals company.

As they did not have any legal heirs, the couple decided in the late 1980s to bequeath their entire fortune to science and research in their respective fields of specialisation after their deaths.

Objectives of the foundation²

In order to enable the further education of trained meteorologists and anaesthesiologists at the highest level and to promote junior researchers in those fields, the foundation is to support research and study trips to outstanding, scientifically recognised institutions in Austria or abroad for scientists working at Austrian research/educational institutions or in relevant professional positions. The theme of the call is to alternate between anaesthesiology and meteorology each year. In order to serve the common good, the grant recipients should then make the insights gained in the course of those research and study trips available to the public in a form appropriate to the relevant subject area.

¹ This text was taken from an interview with Dr. Rudolf Bauer, the foundation trustee appointed by Vera Weiss, in the FWF's Info magazine (2/14).

² According to the statutes of the foundation

Relationship between the foundation and the FWF

- The FWF possesses the expertise necessary to handle both scientific disciplines (meteorology and anaesthesiology) under one roof, thus ensuring a uniform procedure for grant awards.
- In addition, the FWF also has many years of experience with both of the funding instruments mentioned in Dr. Weiss' last will ("study trips to high-quality institutions" and "prize[s] for outstanding scientific achievements") and already has similar programmes in its funding portfolio.
- The use of public calls for grant applications ensures that the calls reach all relevant research institutions in Austria and that only the most qualified applicants are awarded the funds; the selection procedure used for this purpose is widely recognised, free of interventions, transparent and dedicated exclusively to scientific quality.
- The FWF's international position ensures that the study trips involve only the highest-quality research institutions.
- The FWF provides its support for these prizes free of charge, meaning that all of the income from the foundation's assets is used for the benefit of scientific research.

Cooperation between the FWF and the foundation

- The cooperation arrangement between these two organisations is based on a long-term trustee agreement under which the FWF acts on behalf of the Weiss Foundation.
- The FWF's responsibilities are as follows:
 - Annual calls for the prize (alternating between meteorology and anaesthesiology); candidates can apply for stand-alone projects or Erwin Schrödinger fellowships according to the generally applicable guidelines.
 - Evaluation of projects submitted by applicants on the basis of international peer reviews
 - Preparation of recommendations for one or more awards (issued by the FWF Board)
 - Accompanying services (reviewing use of funds, reports)
 - Announcement of prizes and public presentation of prize winners
- The foundation's responsibilities are as follows:
 - Management of the foundation's assets, which mainly consists of real estate (apartment buildings in prime locations in Vienna) as well as optimising the earnings from those assets
 - Binding notification of the FWF as to the volume of funding available each year
 - Response to the FWF Board's funding recommendations within a period of 4 weeks

Additional information on the call

(http://www.fwf.ac.at/fileadmin/files/Dokumente/Antragstellung/Weiss-Preis/gvwp_additional-information.pdf):

- Research disciplines:

The alternating themes (scientific disciplines) of the call are to be interpreted in as broad a manner as possible in order to permit applications from scientists in directly related disciplines which are relevant to improvements and advances in anaesthesiology and meteorology. If there are any doubts as to whether the research topic submitted is in line with the specifications of the call, the FWF Executive Board will make the decision on the basis of a review and assessment by the relevant scientific project officers at the FWF. If a project is deemed ineligible for the Weiss Prize, it will be processed and reviewed under the FWF's usual procedures.

- Decision-making process:

On the basis of the peer reviews, the FWF Board is to identify the projects which can be considered worthy of funding. In cases where there are more qualifying projects than the foundation's budget can cover, the FWF Board decides which projects should be recommended to the foundation for funding. In this process, the FWF makes every effort to strike an optimal balance between the quantity and quality of projects when distributing the budget between the two project types (stand-alone projects and Schrödinger grants). Projects which are considered worthy of funding but cannot be covered by the foundation will be handled using the FWF's usual procedures along with the other projects which received excellent reviews.

In cases where a project is recommended by the FWF Board but does not receive funding from the foundation, the applicant may request that the project be reviewed and decided on once again during the next FWF Board meeting.