3rd Call for proposals for Prep Fund Projects – thematic call: “Kohleausstieg” (KA)

Background

The Exploratory Research Space @ RWTH Aachen (ERS) is the central instrument of RWTH to foster interdisciplinary research and to develop emerging fields with the potential to shape the University’s research profile. ERS comprises activities which give a leeway for creativity to both senior and junior researchers and which foster interdisciplinary exchange and discussion. As a new project format, ERS Prep Fund Projects are introduced, varying in size and duration according to the needs of the specific project; the typical duration of a Prep Fund Project is 6 to 24 months. The criteria of Prep Funds are (i) identification of a gap in an area of high strategic importance for RWTH, (ii) definition of project goals to close this gap, (iii) description of tangible deliverables.

1. Description of the research field “Kohleausstieg” at RWTH

Currently, the topic “Kohleausstieg” (coal exit) and the change of structures in the Rhenish coal district are highly relevant to RWTH. Aim of the topic-specific Prep Fund call “Kohleausstieg” is to design interdisciplinary contributions and to initiate projects with which RWTH can contribute to the structural change in the Rhenish mining area. The Prep Fund projects are intended to help overcome current scientific or technical challenges that stand in the way of the medium- to long-term strategic goals of the “Kohleausstieg”. The proposed projects should relate to the topics of mobility, energy, production, medicine, bioeconomics, artificial intelligence and digitisation, space or transformation of the region as defined in the context of the coal phase-out. Projects should already consider societal implications striving for the integration of social science issues into a convergence approach of research.

2. Type and aim of projects:

The proposed projects should identify gaps within this research field “Kohleausstieg” and aim at closing these. They must not already be addressed by national or international public funding programs.

Projects can also be submitted as International Research Space@RWTH Aachen (IRS) proposals. This entails additional funding for collaboration with international partners, who are expected to contribute to the project through matching funds (except in case of capacity building proposals). IRS proposals should elaborate the specific added value of the international cooperation.

3. Selection and evaluation criteria:

The projects will be selected and evaluated by an evaluation group. The selection process may involve external experts.

The selection criteria for submitted proposals will be

- Plausible description of the identified gap in the field of “Kohleausstieg”
- Definition of the goals to close this gap
- Description of tangible deliverables
- Subsidiarity (funding through other sources is not yet possible),
- Qualification of applicant(s),
- Potential impact on the research strategy and structure of RWTH Aachen,
- Adequateness of research approach,
- Adequateness of research data management plan.

Specifically for IRS:
- Coherent implementation of internationalization in line with RWTH internationalization strategy,
- Adequate matching funds from the partner (except for projects on capacity building),
- Added scientific value of the international cooperation.

Major evaluation criteria after project completion will be the quality of obtained research results and the future perspectives of the research topic as described in a final report which has to be provided 18 months after project closure:
- A promising proposed third-party funded follow-up project (DFG, BMBF, EU, …),
- Publications in peer reviewed journals,
- Granted patents or promising patent applications.

In addition, a second report will have to be provided at the end of the project describing the research results and showing how the anticipated deliverables where achieved and how the identified gap was closed.

4. Funding
The budget for a Prep Fund Project is provided by the Excellence Strategy of the German Federal and State Governments and makes allowances to the allocation model aiming for 30 % share of females. The total budget for all new Prep Fund projects is at most 650.000 €. 300.000 € of the funding must be spent in 2020, the rest afterwards. This will require two separate accounts. Funds cannot be transferred from one account to the other.

Eligible costs are: Staff expenses including student assistants, travel and subsistence costs, support for workshops and conferences, consumables and equipment.

Please note: due to the type of funding, in projects with a duration of more than a year funded research staff needs to have a mandatory teaching assignment (Lehrverpflichtung) (4 hours per week for full time non-permanent staff)

5. General conditions
Research Partners: proposals can be applied for individually or as a team.

We encourage the participation of young scientists (junior professor, group leader, research fellow, etc.) who are scientifically independent and are leading a research group.

Joint Proposals with partners from Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ) are welcome. The research topics and the expertise of the FZJ partners must be different from those of the RWTH partners
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and they have to complement each other. The expenses of the partners from FZJ will not be covered by ERS funding.

Each research team (professor with his/her group) can participate in a maximum of 3 Prep Fund Project Proposals.

Progress evaluation: final report

6. Proposal structure and content
Length of proposal: 10 pages max., type size: Arial 11, line spacing: 1.5

- Principle investigator(s)
- Summary
- Description of the identified gap within the research field “Kohleausstieg”
- Goals and approach (methodology) how to close this gap
- Working plan including deliverables
- Financial plan
- Expected long term impact
- Research data management plan
- References

Language: English or German

Please note: Proposals that do not comply with the formal criteria will be excluded from the reviewing process.

7. Deadline for submission: 11th February 2020
8. Project start: June 2020
9. Project duration: up to 24 months
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For additional information on the selection process, please refer to our website: http://www.rwth-aachen.de/ers

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