1st Call for proposals for International Seed Fund Projects: Open Topic Seed Funds with the University of Alberta

Background

The International Research Space @ RWTH Aachen (IRS) is a new measure within the Excellence Strategy of RWTH Aachen University to support scientific cooperation with international partners of strategic interest to RWTH including emerging and developing scientific communities. Within the IRS, one activity is the funding of Seed Fund Projects together with international research partners. The partners are expected to contribute to the project through matching funds. The typical duration of a Seed Fund Project is 6 to 12 months.

1. Description of partner University of this call: University of Alberta

The University of Alberta in Edmonton is one of Canada's top teaching and research universities, with an international reputation for excellence across the humanities, sciences, creative arts, business, engineering and health sciences. It has 18 faculties on five campuses—four in Edmonton, one in Camrose, including Canada’s 2nd biggest research library, the largest academic based nanotech facility in Canada and a multi-use cell therapy manufacturing and training facility. The University of Alberta community committed developing a portfolio of signature research and teaching areas where the university is or will be recognized as a global leader. The first three signature areas to be endorsed by Deans’ Council are: Precision Health, Energy Systems, and Research at the Intersections of Gender. The University of Alberta attracts over $500 million annually from various research funders and partners including federal and provincial government, industry, foundations and other organizations. In 2017, a strategic partnership was established with RWTH Aachen. Since then, joint activities and the exchange numbers of students and researchers grew exponentially. Since the University of Alberta and RWTH Aachen are characterized by many joint research focuses, there is still an enormous potential to establish new cooperations and to strengthen existing ties. Current core topics include energy/smart grids, biofuels, medical technology, and data science. Cooperations in chemistry, process engineering, social sciences and the humanities are on the rise as well.

Type and aim of projects:

The proposed projects should identify and explore new research fields or develop new methods and methodologies between research partners from the University of Alberta and RWTH Aachen. The topics should be new, creative and can be of high risk. They must not already be addressed by national or international public funding programs. IRS proposals should elaborate the specific added value of the international cooperation for research at RWTH Aachen University.

2. 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
- Originality (new, creative, explorative),
- Internationality (participation of researchers from Aachen and Alberta)
  o Coherent implementation of internationalization in line with RWTH internationalization strategy,
  o Adequate matching funds from the partner (The provision of matching funds must be confirmed by the partner from the University of Alberta),
  o Added scientific value of the international cooperation,
- Subsidiarity (funding through other sources is not yet possible),
- Team structure (senior and/or high-potential young researchers),
- Potential impact on the research strategy and structure of RWTH Aachen,
- Adequateness of research approach,
- Adequateness of research data management plan.

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.

3. Funding
The budget for a Seed 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 International Seed Fund projects with the University of Alberta is at most 170.000 €. At least 100.000 € of the funding must be spent in 2020, the rest in 2021. This will require two separate accounts. Funds cannot be transferred from one account to the other. The partners from the University of Alberta are expected to contribute to the project through matching funds. Matching can be provided in-kind, e.g. personnel, laboratory capacity, teaching, publications.

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

4. General conditions
Research Partners: typically 2-3 researchers, at least one from RWTH Aachen University and one from University of Alberta each.
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 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 Seed Fund Project Proposals with the University of Alberta.

Progress evaluation: final report

5. Proposal structure and content
Length of proposal: 10 pages max., type size: Arial 11, line spacing: 1.5
- Project partners and principle investigators
- Summary
- Current State-of-the-Art
- Relevant work of the applicants
- Goals and approach (methodology)
- Working plan
- Financial plan
- Expected long term impact (targeted third party funding, implementation of new scientific infrastructure, new significantly visible, interdisciplinary competences, action plan to achieve these strategic goals)
- Expected impact on internationalization of RWTH in general and the Strategic Partnership RWTH-UoA in particular
- Research data management plan
- References

Language: English

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

6. Deadline for submission: April 21, 2020
7. Project start: August 2020
8. Project duration: 6 to 12 months
   Call: Seed Fund 2020 – IRS with University of Alberta

For additional information on the selection process, please refer to our website:
http://www.rwth-aachen.de/ers

For further information, please contact:
Dipl.-Des.(FH) Susanne Römmer  Dr.-Ing. Vera Eckers
Exploratory Research Space  Exploratory Research Space
Templergraben 59  Wüllnerstr. 5b
Fon: +49 241 80 20794  Fon: +49 241 80 90492
Mail: ers@ers.rwth-aachen.de or Mail: ers@ers.rwth-aachen.de or
susanne.roemmer@zhv.rwth-aachen.de  vera.eckers@zhv.rwth-aachen.de