

## 4<sup>th</sup> Call for proposals for Prep Fund Projects to strengthen initiatives for future “Clusters of Excellence”

### 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. Within the ongoing funding phase of the Excellence Strategy, **ERS Prep Fund Projects** were 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.

Just as for the ongoing funding phase of the Excellence Strategy, also for the next phase a special focus will be on the format of the Clusters of Excellence (EXC). The acquisition of at least two Clusters of Excellence will be a prerequisite to continue being an excellence University.

### 1. Type and aim of projects:

The aim of the Prep Fund Projects is to strengthen the ongoing initiatives for future Clusters of Excellence. So, the proposed projects should identify research needs within new / additional concepts and help to close these gaps. Projects with partners from non-university research institutions are explicitly welcome.

### 2. Selection and evaluation criteria:

The projects will be selected and evaluated by an evaluation group comprising the ERS Steering Committee and further experts to assess the relevance of the proposals with regard to the RWTH strategy. The selection process may involve external experts.

The selection criteria for submitted proposals will be

- Plausible description of the identified gap to prepare a draft proposal for a Cluster of Excellence,
- Measures to close this gap,
- Qualification of applicants,
- 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 the (draft) proposal for a Cluster of Excellence.

The progress of work will have to be presented in a symposium involving an evaluation group, both at midterm and at project end.

In addition, a report will have to be provided at the end of the project describing the research results, showing how the anticipated deliverables were achieved, how the identified gap was closed and informing on publications in peer reviewed journals.

### 3. 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 1.000.000 €. 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)

### 4. General conditions

Research Partners: proposals can be applied for only 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) or other non-university research institutions are welcome.

The research topics and the expertise of the non-university research partners must be different from those of the RWTH partners and they have to complement each other. The expenses of the non-university research partners will not be covered by ERS funding.

Progress evaluation: - Midterm evaluation by an evaluation group in a symposium  
- Evaluation by an evaluation group in a symposium at project end  
- Final Report

### 5. Proposal structure and content

Length of proposal: 10 pages **max.**, type size: Arial 11, line spacing: 1.5

- Principle investigators
- Summary
- Description of the identified gap to prepare a proposal for a Cluster of Excellence
- Goals and approach (methodology) how to close this gap
- Working plan
- Financial plan
- 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.

6. **Deadline for submission: February 1, 2022**
7. **Project start: mid May 2022**
8. **Project duration: 6 to 24 months**
9. **Please apply at: <http://portal.ers.rwth-aachen.de>**  
**Call: Prep Fund 2022**

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

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