What is the Innovation Sprint?

The Innovation Sprint provides start-up teams with the financial resources they need to effectively and rapidly validate the commercial viability of their research results at an early stage of development. The goal of this step is to make the targeted product tangible and/or optimise it through the production or further development of an initial prototype in order to increase the Technological Readiness Level (TRL) of the project. Up to €90,000 gross is eligible for funding, depending on the size of the project.

What can the funding be used for?

The primary objective of the funding is the construction of a prototype. The prototype may be self-designed and/or self-constructed, or be manufactured by external companies on behalf of RWTH Aachen University. Investments, consumables and consulting services can be financed. Labour costs or costs for student assistants, are not part of the Innovation Sprint and therefore cannot be financed. The open call as well as the financial plan will include a detailed list of eligible costs.

Who will be funded?

The programme is primarily aimed at teams with a concrete intention to found a start-up. In the context of the project, no company may have been founded that has already taken up an economic activity. Mere research projects are not funded. If a company is founded at a later date after completion of the Innovation Sprint, the option of participation for RWTH Aachen University in the context of its technology transfer will be evaluated together with the team to ensure the longevity of the projects. Appropriate consensual participation scenarios are developed with the founding team during the Innovation Sprint.
How does the application procedure work?

The applications received are checked for completeness and formalities and then reviewed and evaluated by an external, honorary jury of experts. Based on their evaluation, the teams to be funded are proposed. In all cases, the final approval is given by the Rectorate of RWTH Aachen University. The approved projects will be notified by e-mail after the final evaluation. The project can practically be started from this point on.

Our team is already in the EXIST programme or would like to apply for EXIST. Is (simultaneous) participation in the Innovation Sprint possible?

Simultaneous use of funding programmes should be avoided. The Innovation Sprint should be run through before claiming further funds under funding programmes such as EXIST. The Innovation Sprint is to be understood as a preliminary stage to an EXIST programme and should therefore be completed beforehand. The construction of the prototype in the Innovation Sprint can help with a further application for further funding.

Is there an application template?

There is no template for the application to be submitted. The application should be guided by the formal and specific points mentioned in the open call. A template for the financing plan and other required documents will be made available at the time of the call or can be downloaded using this link.

In which language must the application be submitted?

The application may be submitted in English or German.

All further content-related and formal criteria for the application can be found in the respective Open Call - information on application and participation requirements.

What is the scope of the application?

- Application (project description) (max. 5 pages)
- Executive summary, max. 1 DIN A4 page
- Detailed financial plan of the start-up project including indicative price quotations (required template will be provided with the call)
- Declaration of the RWTH institute/chair
- Video pitch (60 up to max. 90 seconds)

How do I participate in the Ideation Program (conditions of participation)?

By participating in the Ideation Program, the start-up teams are taught all the necessary basics for developing a viable business model. Registration is possible at any time using this link – under “Current need for consultation” please enter “Innovation Sprint”. If the start-up team has already gone through the Ideation Program with the identical project, there is no obligation to register. Each team can start participating in the Ideation Program at the earliest after submitting the application. The selected teams have to start the Ideation Program at the latest when the acceptance of the Innovation Sprint is announced.
When does the project start?

The start period of the project is always in the first quarter of the following year at the time of application. The contact persons of the approved projects will be notified by e-mail with the approval notification. After the account has been set up, the project can be started. The approval letter contains the regulations to be followed and the approved funding amount.

What must be taken into consideration when spending the funds?

The funding is subject to the regulations of the public project Exzellenz Start-up Center.NRW and is subject to annuality. It is absolutely necessary to spend the funds by the end of the year at the latest. More precisely, this means that all deliveries must be made and invoices paid by the end of the year. Accordingly, delivery times for procurement measures should be planned in advance.

How are the approved grants allocated?

A separate account (PSP element) is set up at the cooperating RWTH chair/institute. The account will be initiated by Division 4.2 - Management of Third Party Funds RWTH Aachen. The team must also document the procurement procedure and the use of the funds. The teams receive further information in this regard upon approval. All procurements are carried out in accordance with the university's guidelines. Accordingly, the connection to the RWTH chair/institute is essential.

The approved funds will be authorised for spending by the chair/institute by notice. Only services, items and devices as specified in the financial plan may be procured. The maximum amount from the submitted financial plan may not be exceeded. Deviations from the financial plan due to changed requirements or price changes must be coordinated in advance with the Innovation Sprint project management and Division 4.2 - Management of Third-Party Funds of RWTH Aachen University.

The items and devices procured in the context of the funding are inventoried by the RWTH chair/institute, but can be transferred to the start-up after its foundation at normal market conditions or as “de-minimis” aid.

What happens after the completion of the Innovation Sprint and is a project report required?

The project is designed for implementation in the respective financial year and should be completed with the finished prototype by the end of the year. Finally, the Technology and Market Readiness Levels can be evaluated together with a start-up coach. A project report is to be written at the end of the project (end of year) and 18 months after the end of the project. Here the main results and the course of the project can be explained.

Is it possible to apply again after a previous rejection?

A new application is possible. The documents will be re-evaluated. Please note the new and possibly changed conditions of participation listed in the open call. If the Ideation Program has already been run through and completed with the project from the application, please inform us briefly by e-mail and consult with your Ideation Program coach.
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