

INNOVATION SPRINT



FAQ and usage policy: Application and project management Innovation Sprint

The Innovation Sprint, developed as part of the "Excellence Start-up Center.NRW" (ESC), helps to raise the start-up and growth potential of RWTH Aachen University (RWTH for short), which is strong in research and transfer. With the financial funding, researchers with a start-up idea are offered the opportunity to validate the commercialisability of their research results.

With this document, we would like to provide you the background information and the rules for spending the funds. The aim is to use the Innovation Sprint funds in accordance with the ESC guidelines. Compliance with the spending guidelines and reporting requirements is mandatory for both internal monitoring and external reporting to the Project Management Organisation Jülich and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalisation and Energy (MWIDE).

1) 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.

2) 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.

Examples of material expenditure can be financed (please consider the financial plan):

- Investments, (e.g., PC, special equipment for the project)
- Special technical devices and equipment, e.g., measuring instruments, experimental equipment, components for the prototype or comparable elements
- Material costs: all consumables required for the realisation of the prototype construction
- Project-related contracts with external companies for prototype construction
- Consulting services related to prototype development or the start-up project that are not covered by the RWTH's range of services.

Not eligible for funding:

- Basic equipment of the university/research institution (e.g. rent, office equipment, standard software, telephones, etc.)
- Personnel funds for research assistants (Hiwis) Assistants (Hiwis)
- Services within the university/research institution (funding recipients)
- Direct start-up fees or expenses (business registration, lawyer's or notary's fees, preparation of shareholder agreement and general terms and conditions)
- Classic business expenses (e.g., CRM or accounting software), product or company advertising)
- entertainment costs
- Individual further training without reference to start-up
- Preparation of business plan by third parties
- Travel between home and project location as well as city trips at the project location
- Additional guarantees (e.g., Apple Care)
- Material expenses that will no longer be effective in the remaining term of the project
- Comfort equipment (e.g., oversized monitors and computers)
- Equipment or travel expenses for support staff or non-funded team members

In the case of uncertainty as to whether a procurement directly related to the Innovation Sprint is eligible for funding, please consult the project management (innovationsprint@rwth-innovation.de) immediately. Ineligible costs or unrecognised costs that are objected to by the project management or higher-level auditing authorities must be covered by the chair/by the institute.

The total value of the procurements may not exceed the total approval sum specified in the approval notification. If the budget specified in the letter of approval is exceeded, the chair/institute must pay from its own financial resources.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) 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.

6) 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](#).

7) 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.

8) 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)

9) 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.

10) 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.

11) 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.

Attention: In accordance with the funding conditions of the Excellence Start-Up Center. NRW project, it is possible to charge fees for interest on unspent funds if they remain in the respective account after the end of the funding year (end of the year). The review will be made by higher-level review bodies. In such a case, any additional costs arising from an interest calculation must be paid by the respective RWTH institute/chair!

12) 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/the 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.

13) Inventory

Investments are inventoried via the chair/institute and are therefore initially the property of RWTH Aachen University or the chair/institute. These can be transferred via de minimis regulation after completion of the project and foundation.

14) Which procurement policy is applied?

For awards of contracts for supplies and services below the EU threshold (221,000 euros net as of 2019), the Sub-Threshold Award Regulations (UVgO) in conjunction with the Award Guidelines for Universities pursuant to Section 8 of the Higher Education Management Regulations (HWFVO) apply.

15) 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.

The final report should not exceed three pages and include the following points:

- Knowledge gained from the Innovation Sprint
- Successful procurements and use in prototype construction
- Any problems encountered during the course of the project, deviations from the planned procedure
- Any changes in the team composition, possibly justification of the need for additional team members
- Future perspective (e.g., perspective of spin-off, application for further funding programmes))

16) Account closure and remaining funds

The chair/institute must apply for the account to be closed. To close the account, all income must have been received or all transfers must have been completed.

17) 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. However, depending on the previous reasons for rejection, consideration should be given to whether it makes sense to reapply (e.g. for conceptual reasons, already founded, etc.).

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