Institutions for Open Societies

Utrecht University strategic theme

‘Seed Money’ eighth round

October 16th 2017
Institutions for Open Societies (IOS)

‘Seed money’ round 8

Institutions for Open Societies

Institutions are the formal and informal rules of human interaction. They may involve laws as well as networks, norms, values, customs or habits. In Utrecht, specialists from various fields, including economists, lawyers, sociologists, historians, public administrators and geographers, focus on the central question of how these institutions contribute to a resilient and open society. Why are some societies more successful than others when it comes to achieving sustainable prosperity, equality, beneficial cooperation and democracy? To what extent are these differences attributable to elements such as citizenship, voluntary cooperation and the market structure? And why is it so difficult to avoid negative side effects such as social polarisation, alienation and environmental pollution?

Research in Utrecht is based on five main themes, each of which highlights particular aspects of institutions: Cooperation, Self-regulation and Collective Action; Sustainability and Resilience; Innovation and Prosperity; Equality, Inclusion and Social Mobility; and Democratic Governance, Citizenship and Trust.

The seed money research proposals, the design and application of which are supported by the Strategic Theme of Institutions, must meet the following conditions:

- Innovative and of a high academic quality;
- Interdisciplinary and preferably interfaculty (Humanities, Law, Economics and Governance, Social and Behavioural Sciences and Geosciences);
- Positioned at the heart of the Strategic Theme of Institutions with regard to at least one of the five main themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust);
- Acquire external funding (the ‘fly-wheel effect’);
- Social impact.

Research proposals for ‘seed money’ aim to:

1. Encourage larger grant applications and establish strategic consortia
2. Encourage postdocs
TIMELINE
Application: Opens Monday October 16th 2017, submissions can be made to Peter van der Mees (institutions.gw@uu.nl)
Closing: Friday November 24th 2017 at 17.00 hours
Decision-making: as soon as possible, but no later than mid December 2017

PRACTICAL DEMANDS / PROCEDURE
A proposal at this first stage of the call consists of a **maximum of three pages** and provides a concise impression of the subject and the research question, the researchers involved (or, as the case may be, the interdisciplinary team represented by the applicant), the concrete aim (What type of research proposal will follow from this?), the anticipated interdisciplinarity, the academic relevance and possibly the social relevance (principally in the case of applications used for contract funding). Furthermore, it should be indicated which of the five main research themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust) fits the application and for which action (see below) the grant is requested.

The proposal should also include a concise budget plan (what will the requested money be put towards? When will it be used?). The amount of the seed money grant is approximately €15,000 to €25,000. As an exception funding can be higher, depending on the scope of the application. Seed money can be redeemed until January 1, 2021, naturally if coordinated with the relevant business coordinator.

Furthermore, it is important to realize that IOS seed money is intended to prepare an application for research funding and not to carry out the investigation itself.

*Please note:* Proper coordination prior to submission is very important for the purpose of educational planning (short term buy out of educational obligations) and/or the appointment policy of postdocs (Work and Security Act). To ensure that the applicant has discussed this with the managers concerned, the application must be signed by the head of the department, research director or managing director.

The Programme Team will strive to approve the maximum number of proposals that meet the above written conditions. If the Programme Team receives more proposals than it can approve, it will have to prioritise. In such cases, the Programme Team will take advice from experts within the Strategic Theme or from external experts.

**CATEGORY 1: PROMOTING LARGER GRANT APPLICATIONS AND FORMING OF STRATEGIC CONSORTIA**

Releasing permanent staff from different disciplines

*Target group:* This action applies to permanent staff members, including professors, who are capable of delivering quality research and have an interest in interdisciplinarity. Judging by the meetings of the Strategic Theme to date, this group is exceptionally motivated to conduct interdisciplinary research in the field of the Strategic Theme but does not get round to doing it, enough or at all, due to their teaching and administrative commitments. New in this round is the possibility to request funding for other services, such as research assistance and the space to do pilot experiments.
Content and organisation: With the aid of strategic seed money, permanent members of staff can be partially relieved of their teaching and administrative tasks for a period of three months. Together, the ‘exempted’ members of staff members form an interdisciplinary team. Each team comprises an average of three staff members, each with a different disciplinary background. Post-docs may be added to the team (see Actions 5 and 6).

Results: The interdisciplinary team studies its chosen subject and prepares a project application. The immediate result of this cooperation will be an application submitted either to NWO or an international equivalent of NWO, or to the European Union, or it will be a project proposal to be financed via contract funding (trade and industry / government).

Funding: In all, the seed money grant will finance a number of teams comprising three members of staff. Each team will exist for three months. Costs for travel and accommodation expenses or cost for the organisation of conferences etc., are not eligible for seed money. The projects must fall within one of the five main themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust). Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 20,000.

Establishing strategic consortia
Target group: Staff members can use seed money to relieve themselves of teaching and administrative tasks over a prolonged period of time and focus instead on the creation of large long-term consortia, for example to work on applications under the Gravitation (‘Zwaartekracht’) program, large H2020/European projects or applications of comparable scope.

Content and organisation: the interdisciplinary team explores the selected research subject and prepares a project proposal.

Funding: Creating really large consortia for large-scale applications and hiring external experts will take more (strategic) time. This means that the funding amounts can be higher and can be used for hiring (or purchasing the services of) consultants, community representatives, reviewers etc. as well as for exempting staff members. Furthermore, within this action costs for travel, accommodation expenses and costs for the organisation of conferences are eligible for seed money. Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 25,000.

Development of an European Training Networks (ETN) request
Target: Staff members can use seed money to relieve themselves of teaching and administrative tasks to build a training consortium in ETN or similar networks.

Content and organisation: It is important to have a strong content alliance with IOS, interdisciplinarity and clear added value compared to the existing PhD programs.

Funding: In addition to the buy-out of staff, the grant can be used for travel and subsistence expenses for
Encouraging ‘embryonic’ research (a maximum of two proposals will be approved this round)

**Target**: Staff members can use seed money to relieve themselves of teaching and administrative tasks and focus on developing research that is important to IOS, but that only is in an embryonic stage.

**Content and organisation**: The project will not lead to externally funded projects in the short term, but will on a longer term. Funding available for this type of projects is limited to two proposals, therefore these proposals will need to be focused on the creation of ambitions central to IOS, for instance, strengthening of a global perspective or increasing methodological interdisciplinarity. Therefore, a clear visibility of the thinking process within IOS in necessary, for instance through workshops etc.

**Funding**: Stimulating this type of research takes time, therefore, funding can be higher. In addition, travel and subsistence costs for the organisation of meetings is eligible for seed money. Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 25,000.

**CATEGORY 2: ENCOURAGING POSTDOCS**

**Extending post-doctoral contracts**

**Target group**: This action applies to talented post-docs employed with one of the participating research groups and who have proven academic ability. This group deserves to be selected for a further research track, in this case an interdisciplinary track, but the Strategic Theme often lacks sufficient means to organise this.

**Content and organisation**: With the aid of seed money, these post-docs can have their contracts extended by three to five months. During this period they will participate in one of the interdisciplinary teams mentioned under Action 1.

**Results**: The post-doc prepares a project application. This may be the application mentioned under Action 1 or an appropriate but independent proposal that can be submitted to NWO or an international equivalent of NWO. If the application is successful, the post-doc will lead the ensuing project.

**Funding**: Post-docs are financed for a period of three to five months to conduct work within one of the main themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust). Costs for travel and accommodation expenses or cost for the organisation of conferences etc., are not eligible for seed money. Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 17,250.

**Recruiting external post-docs**

**Target group**: This action applies to post-docs who are employed with other organisations (external post-docs). This action has arisen because the groups participating in the Strategic Theme are frequently approached by promising external researchers who wish to work as post-docs at Utrecht University. In addition, they frequently come across talented external post-docs who would fit well within the
interdisciplinary model of the Strategic Theme. At present there is little or no opportunity to start these external post-docs on an academic career, enabling them to start and successfully complete a research application. This action will facilitate an active talent scouting policy for IOS.

Content and organisation: With the aid of the seed money, the external post-docs are offered a three-month contract. During this period, they will participate in one of the interdisciplinary teams mentioned under Action 1. They will be housed at one of the participating groups.

Results: The post-doc prepares a project application. This may be the application mentioned under Action 1 or an appropriate but independent proposal that can be submitted to NWO or an equivalent of NWO. If the application is successful, the post-doc will lead the ensuing project.

Funding: The post-docs are financed for a period of three to five months to conduct work within one of the main themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust). Costs for travel and accommodation expenses or cost for the organisation of conferences etc., are not eligible for seed money. Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 17,250.

Temporary contracts for recent PhD graduates

Target group: This action applies to recent PhD graduates and to those who have completed their thesis and will soon to be graduating. In addition, these persons must have a proven interest in and talent for interdisciplinary research.

Content and organisation: They will be employed for a period of three to five months in one of the participating research groups and work together with another discipline.

Results: The PhD candidate or graduate prepares a VENI or Rubicon or similar application that can be submitted to NWO.

Funding: The PhD holders and candidates are financed for a period of three to five months to conduct work within one of the main themes (Cooperation, Sustainability, Innovation, Equality and Trust). Costs for travel and accommodation expenses or cost for the organisation of conferences etc., are not eligible for seed money. Maximum funding, including overhead, is € 12,250.