

2026 ASPIRE FOR RISING SCIENTISTS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

I. Aims and Scope

The ASPIRE (Adopting Sustainable Partnerships for Innovative Research Ecosystem) program is an initiative by the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) to develop and strengthen Japan's scientific and technological capabilities through supporting international joint research in scientific and technological fields of strategic priority, while simultaneously promoting researcher mobility in the Japanese research community by connecting top researchers from Japan and other leading countries and regions in scientific research.

Among the ASPIRE programs, the ASPIRE FOR RISING SCIENTISTS provides support for promising Japan-based researchers who are expected to become leaders in the international research community in the future. To achieve this, the ASPIRE FOR RISING SCIENTISTS welcomes proposals for international joint research projects that will enable these researchers to acquire the knowledge, technology and networks through advanced academic degrees or through taking up positions at research institutions in advanced science and technology countries. We welcome proposals from researchers who have already received ample research funding and independent research environment, and who are expected to become top researchers in the future, are eligible.

Support will be provided to research teams that conduct collaborative research with researchers in the applicable fields and partner countries and regions (hereinafter referred as partner country) of this call. Each research team must include at least a researcher who will travel to the partner country to conduct research (outgoing researcher). The outgoing researcher should conduct research activities in the partner country for about one year, while at the same time the Japan-based research team should also host one or several researchers from the partner country/countries in a reciprocal manner.

*Please follow the Call for Proposals and the Application Guidelines when applying.

II. Call Details

Proposals are welcome from Japan-based researchers intending to conduct collaborative research with researchers from an eligible partner country (Call for Japan-based researchers). Researchers in partner countries need to be currently receiving or expecting to receive support from eligible funding agencies and research institutions (hereinafter referred as FAs).

1. Applicable Fields of Research

•AI, Information, and Intelligent Robotics

AI, Information, and Intelligent Robotics research for the realization of Society 5.0* based on the principles of "human understanding and respect," "diversity" and "sustainability".

•Biotechnology

Biotechnology research related to promoting a sustainable bioeconomy across diverse fields including agriculture and the food industry, and contributes to reducing environmental impact.

•Energy

Energy research aimed at realizing carbon neutrality.

•Materials

Research on the development of innovative advanced materials that support the realization of a carbon-neutral and circular economy and strengthen industrial competitiveness.

• Quantum

Research related to quantum computers and quantum technology in general, including on quantum materials with innovative functionality, which contributes to the realization of a productivity revolution.

• Semiconductors

Semiconductor research related to promoting the semiconductor industrial sector.

•Networks and Telecommunications

Research on computer network foundational technologies and next-generation information and communication technologies that support smart society and digital infrastructure, as well as cyber-physical systems and their applications.

*Reference examples of research topics in each field are shown in Appendix 1 at the end of the document.

** Society 5.0 is defined as "A human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems by a system that highly integrates cyberspace and physical space."

2. Partner Research Team

(1) Partner Countries and Regions

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

* Partner Countries and regions (herein after referred as partner country) may be updated without notice. Please refer to the ASPIRE website for the latest information:

<https://www.jst.go.jp/aspire/en/index.html>

*If you wish to apply for an EU country not listed above as your counterpart country, please contact JST by e-mail (aspirers@jst.go.jp).

(2) Partner Principal Investigator (Partner PI) Eligibility

Partner PI needs to meet either criteria (i) or (ii):

- (i) already be receiving research support from FAs in their country; or
- (ii) are currently applying for research support from FAs in their country, with the outcome known by no later than the end of May 2026.

Note: If the partner PI is ultimately unsuccessful in receiving research support, the Japan-side application will be deemed ineligible. Please contact JST by e-mail (aspirers@jst.go.jp) to confirm the eligibility of partner PIs supported by FAs, if needed.

Collaborative research with researchers in multiple countries and regions specified above is also eligible for support. In such cases, all Partner PIs must meet the above conditions.

Note: Prior to submitting an application, the Japan-side researcher must reach out to a potential partner PI who is receiving or expecting to receive support from FAs to confirm intention to collaborate. If the proposed partner PI is not receiving research support from eligible FAs, or is later rejected for support, the application will also be rejected.

3. Japan-side Research Team

(1) Requirements

- Researchers who belong to a research institution (university, independent administrative institution, public experimental research institution, public-interest corporation, and company, etc.) in Japan and conduct research at that institution are eligible to apply for this Call for Proposals.
- Researchers and research institutions applying for this Call for Proposals must register with the "Cross-Ministerial Research and Development Management System (e-Rad) " prior to applying.
<https://www.e-rad.go.jp/en/>

(2) Team Organization

The Japan-side team should consist of the following members, led by a Principal Investigator (PI). The team should also include researcher who will travel to the partner country (outgoing researcher). A commissioned research contract is concluded between JST and each of the PI and Co-PIs research institutions.

- Principal Investigator (PI)
The PI is a researcher who is directly supported by JST, represents the overall research team in Japan and is responsible for directing the research project as a whole. The PI must be affiliated with a university or research institution in Japan.
- Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI)
The Co-PI is a researcher who is directly supported by JST and collaborates with the PI in conducting the research project. The Co-PI must be affiliated with university or research

institution in Japan. Including one or several Co-PI is optional.

- **Outgoing Researchers**

In principle, the outgoing researcher should fall under either (i) or (ii) below. Even researchers who are not applied as outgoing researcher and undergraduate students are allowed to travel to the partner country. There is no limit to the number of outgoing researcher and the outgoing researcher can serve as the PI of the project.

(i) Students enrolled in an advanced degree course (i.e. master's or doctoral course)

(ii) Researchers who are conducting research activities at universities, public research institutions, etc. and have been working for less than 15 years after obtaining their final degrees.

Researchers who are enrolled in a master's course, doctoral course or are postdoctoral researchers after completing a doctoral course during the research period should confirm that there are no obstacles to use research funds within the institution and obtain prior approval from the applicant and the research institution to which he/she belongs.

- **Research participants**

Researchers, technicians, research assistants, students*, etc. who will participate in the research project under the direction of the PI or Co-PIs but are not directly supported by JST.

*Students include undergraduate students. But it is limited to the case that the student has basic knowledge and plays an important role in actual research activities, or he/she has special responsibilities that go beyond the normal university curriculum or degree research within the scope of academic studies. Please make appropriate decisions based on the rules of each research institution.

4. Number of Projects

Approx. 17 projects in total across all fields of research will be funded.

III. Program Information

1. Scale of Funding

The maximum total direct cost per proposal for the entire support period is 69 million yen (90 million yen when including indirect costs, which account for 30% of the total direct cost,).

At least about 70% of the total direct cost is expected to be allocated to promoting international researcher mobility and circulation by fostering future generations of researchers and building the foundation for sustainable participation and collaboration in the international research community.

2. Research Period

Approximately 3 years from December 2026 to the end of March 2030 for JST-supported researchers.

3. Eligible Costs

(1) Eligible Direct Costs

Eligible direct costs are those which is directly necessary for accomplishing the research, indicated below.

a. Travel Expenses

Travel and stay expenses for the outgoing researcher and for research participants described in the research plan.

Travel and stay expenses for researchers invited from the partner country.

b. Personnel costs

Personnel expenses for research participants described in the research plan.

Personnel expenses for researchers invited from the partner country.

Personnel expenses of staff necessary to coordinate the researchers' travel and personnel-related procedures for invited researcher.

(PI and Co-PI personnel expenses and teaching buyout policy may apply)

c. Facilities, Equipment and Consumables

Costs of research equipment, purchase of books, reagents, materials and consumables, etc.

Costs of research equipment, materials, consumables, etc. related to research and expenses necessary for daily life during staying at the partner countries.

Costs of research expenses, etc. for researchers invited from the partner country.

d. Miscellaneous

Necessary costs for the research and development (cost for organizing and hosting events for research dissemination, equipment leasing costs, transportation costs for equipment used for the research project).

(2) Eligible Indirect Costs

Indirect costs refer to funds which go directly to the research institution for administrative overhead costs.

(3) Points of Caution

At least about 70% of the total direct expenses must be used for the purpose of fostering early-career researchers who are expected to become the next generation of top researchers by building and expanding international networks that will lead to the advanced research and development, promoting researchers' mobility between Japan and the partner country, and providing them opportunities for top-level international research collaboration.

This includes the cost of holding workshops to strengthen connections among researchers, travel expenses for early career researchers to the partner country and expenses incurred after the trip, and personnel expenses for staff to coordinate the researcher's travel and personnel-related procedures for invited researcher.

Please note that employment, purchase of equipment, etc. purely for the purpose of conducting

research should not be counted as a part of the 70%.

IV Application Procedure

1. Proposal and Review Schedule

The schedule for the submission and evaluation of research proposals for FY2026 is as indicated in the table below and is subject to change. Interviews will be conducted via online for those applicants who pass the document review and the date and time of which will be communicated to applicants on an individual basis.

Application via e-Rad system deadline	May 19 (Tue), 2026, 12:00PM JST
Document review	Late May to August 2026
Interview of applicants who pass the document review	August to September, 2026
Notification of results	October 2026
Start of research	December 2026

* The above details are subject to change.

2. Application Documents

Applications should be prepared in accordance with the instructions in the provided application form (2026_ASPIRE_RS_form.docx). The Confirmation Form requires a stamp of an institutional representative of the research institution. Note that in the case of a university or college, this representative is typically the president, not a department head or similar. The official seal of the institution can be omitted if this is in accordance with the organization's own rules, in which case the appropriate approval reference number should be included in its stead.

Applications should include a Letter of Intent (LoI) which indicates prior agreement from the partner PI to conduct joint research and international researcher mobility and circulation. A sample template for the LoI is provided on the ASPIRE Call for Proposals webpage. The documents should include a statement of the partner PI's intention to accept the researcher from the Japan-side team. Information about what research support the researcher is receiving or expecting to receive should be outlined as well. If an institution that is different from the affiliated institution of the partner PI accepts the Japan-side researcher, an LoI from that institution is also required.

It is possible for the outgoing researcher to visit several research institutions other than the one to which the partner PI belongs. In this case, it is not necessary to submit a LoI for each of the institutions visited.

3. Application Submission

An application must be submitted via The Cross-Ministerial Research and Development Management System (e-Rad).

<https://www.e-rad.go.jp/en/index.html>

Call title (Japanese) : 2026 年度「次世代のための ASPIRE」
Call title (English) : 2026 ASPIRE FOR RISING SCIENTISTS
Deadline : 12:00 PM (noon), Tuesday May 19, 2026

Proposals should be prepared well in advance, as submission through e-Rad may take time. Applications not submitted by the deadline will not be considered.

4. Results Notification

(1) Document Review Results

Interviews will be held for those applicants who pass the document review. Applicants who proceed to the interview stage will be notified of the date and time to the e-mail in the application form.

(2) Results Announcement

Results to all proposals will be sent to the e-mail address which is indicated on the application form by e-mail in October 2026.

5. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

(1) Relevance and quality of the research content and plan

- Does the proposal adequately correspond to the purpose of the call?
- Are the proposed research activities of a high standard in the research field/area concerned?
- Are synergy effects expected from conducting international joint research as a part of this project?

(2) Quality of plans to promote international researcher mobility

- Are the research and exchange activity plans of the outgoing researcher in the partner country appropriate and detailed in a concrete manner?
- Are the plans for fostering the early career researchers appropriate and sufficiently described in detail?
- Are the plans for international and sustainable participation in the research community specific and appropriate?

(3) Appropriateness and level of detail of travel and invitation plans

- Is the role of the outgoing researcher in the partner country clear and sufficiently detailed?
- Is the research environment in the partner country sufficient for the activities of the outgoing researcher?
- Is the role of the researcher to be invited to Japan clear at the host institution?
- Is the research environment at the Japan-side host institution sufficient for the activities of the incoming researcher?
- Is the exchange plan feasible, with concrete preparations made involving sufficient coordination with the involved parties in Japan and partner country?

- Are the amount requested and use of funds based on the content of the international joint research reasonable and sufficient to effectively carry out the plan?
- (4) Relevance and diversity of the research system
- Does the research team have a well-balanced composition of expertise, given the objectives of the proposal?
- (5) Qualification of the PIs of the research team in Japan and in the partner country, as well as the outgoing researcher and researcher to be invited to the Japan-side host institution.
- Does the PI have sufficient qualifications, research environment, and resources (funds, human and material resources, etc.) to carry out the research activities in accordance with the proposal and purpose of this call?
 - Does the background (academic background, professional background, achievements, etc.) of the outgoing researcher and researcher to be invited to the Japan-side host institution have sufficient qualifications to carry out research activities, and are they expected to contribute to promote international researcher mobility and circulation in the future?

V Points of Note

1. Restrictions on Multiple Applications to ASPIRE Programs

Applicants (whether as PI and Co-PI) may only apply to one of the ASPIRE 2026 Call for Japan Based Researchers. Please note that applicants may be selected as PI or Co-PI only one for the ASPIRE 2026 Call including the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (AMED) ASPIRE 2026 Call for Proposals. For applications from PIs or Co-PIs currently supported by ASPIRE, please refer to Appendix 2.

2. Safety Management Responsibilities

(1) Safety Management for Researchers

The institution to which the outgoing researcher belongs and the PI should ensure that safety measures are sufficiently taken, including at the destination. In addition to ensuring that they have overseas travel accident insurance which covers emergency transportation services, etc., in case of unexpected injuries and similar. Consideration should be given to safety management, including support for necessary vaccinations and the establishment of an emergency contact system.

(2) Travel Procedures

The research institution to which the outgoing researcher belongs should take full responsibility for travel procedures, including visa matters, arrangements and similar as necessary, for both the outgoing and incoming (visiting) researchers.

Every effort should be taken to ensure the safety of the outgoing researcher in accordance with information and guidance provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including necessary procedures such as submitting a notification of residence and registering with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 「たびレジ」 (<https://www.ezairyu.mofa.go.jp/index.html>).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs travel information:

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/visa/index.html>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan overseas safety Information:

<https://www.anzen.mofa.go.jp/riskmap/>

3. Measures for Ensuring Research Security

In the “(Tentative Translated Title) Procedural Manual for Measures to Ensure Research Security” (Cabinet Office, December 2025) 「研究セキュリティの確保に関する取組のための手順書」(令和7年12月内閣府研究セキュリティと研究インテグリティの確保に関する有識者会議), it is stated that ensuring research security is necessary not only to meet Japan’s economic security requirements, but also to build mutual trust with G7 and other like-minded countries’, and thereby to conduct international collaborative research and so on smoothly. For further details, please refer to the Cabinet Office website (「研究セキュリティの確保に関する取組のための手順書」https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/kokusaiteki/integrity/yushikisha/guidelines_v1.pdf). In this call, research security measures will be implemented in all research fields. For details, please refer to Appendix 3.

4. JST-funded Research Organization Responsibilities

- (1) Research organizations will, if funded, need to conclude a commissioned research contract with JST and must follow the stipulations of this contract. Intellectual property rights such as patents derived from the research will in principle belong to the research institution, provided that the organization complies with Article 17 of the Industrial Technology Enhancement Act (Japanese equivalent of the Bayh-Dole Act) as stipulated in the research contract. Note that this does not apply to overseas partner institutions. (See Section 3.2 in Application Guidelines).
- (2) If the research institution is a national or local government (including organizations under the jurisdiction of MEXT) body lacking a juridical personality such as that of a national university, it is the responsibility of the contracted research organization to carry out the necessary budgetary measures and other relevant procedures in advance of entering into the contract. In such cases, please contact JST in advance of making an application (See Section 3.5 in Application Guidelines).
- (3) To ensure that there are no hindrances to the proper implementation of research and the utilization of research results, a joint agreement with participating institutions regarding the handling of intellectual property rights and confidentiality is required to the extent that it does not conflict with the research contract with JST. (See Section 3.5 in Application Guidelines).
- (4) In conducting research, please comply with the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act (No. 228 of 1949), as well as national laws, guidelines, and notifications. (See Section 4.5 Application Guidelines).

5. Responsibilities of Principal Investigators

- (1) If the PI, Co-PI, or the counterpart PI is unable to continue the research, the project will

undergo a re-assessment, including a review of the resource allocation and research plans.

(2) The Japan-side PI must have completed a designated online course on research ethics. A failure to demonstrate evidence of the completion of such a course will be considered as grounds for the researcher being ineligible for receiving research support (See Section 4.2 in Application Guidelines).

(3) Annual Research Report

The PI is required to submit an annual research report promptly according to the form provided by JST. In addition, the Japanese research institution which has concluded a contract research agreement with JST is required to submit an accounting report of the support expenses to JST promptly after the end of each fiscal year.

(4) Final Research Report

The PI is required to submit a Final Research Report to JST promptly after the end of the research period for the joint research. JST will contact the PI about the form, submission deadline, etc. at an appropriate time.

(5) Post-Evaluation

A post-evaluation of the proposal will be conducted at the end of the research.

VI Inquiries

Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST)

Department of International Affairs

ASPIRE for Rising Scientists: aspirers@jst.go.jp

Applicable Fields of Research Examples for Reference

For reference, examples of research in each field are shown below, but proposals are welcome in other related areas as well.

•**AI, Information, and Intelligent Robotics**

AI, Information, and Intelligent Robotics research for the realization of Society 5.0* based on the principles of "human understanding and respect," "diversity" and "sustainability".

Examples: Comprehensive studies in informatics—including artificial intelligence, fundamental information science, computational infrastructure, and human information science—together with various applied domains. Research related to AI and advanced robot technologies such as robot intelligence, autonomous systems, real-world information processing, physical agents, agent-based AI, and physical AI, etc.

•**Biotechnology**

Biotechnology research related to promoting a sustainable bioeconomy across diverse fields including agriculture and the food industry, and contributes to reducing environmental impact.

Examples: Cross-disciplinary research encompassing engineering, chemistry, physics, agriculture, biology and bioinformatics, etc.

For example, bio-sensing and measurement technologies, engineering biology, predictive biology, future-oriented food production, bio-DX, smart agriculture, and bio-eco sensing, etc.

•**Energy**

Energy research aimed at realizing carbon neutrality.

Examples: Next generation solar cells, storage batteries, hydrogen production by water electrolysis, hydrogen utilization technology (fuel cells, etc.), research related to energy conservation, renewable energy research, , power grid stabilization and the advancement of energy infrastructure, and research on integrated evaluation methods such as life cycle assessment (LCA), etc.

•**Materials**

Research on the development of innovative advanced materials that support the realization of a carbon-neutral and circular economy and strengthen industrial competitiveness.

Examples: Foundational studies for the development of ultimate metal/inorganic and organic/polymer materials; creation of materials for a carbon-neutral and circular economy; development of low-environmental-impact processes; manufacturing technologies using materials informatics; and applied research toward social implementation of these technologies , etc.

•Quantum

Research related to quantum computers and quantum technology in general, including on quantum materials with innovative functionality, which contributes to the realization of a productivity revolution.

Examples: Quantum technology contributing to ultra-high-speed parallel information processing, higher-performing measurement technology, higher-performance materials, etc.

•Semiconductors

Semiconductor research related to promoting the semiconductor industrial sector.

Examples: Architecture related to innovative AI chips, circuit technology, semiconductor devices, design automation technology, etc.

•Networks and Telecommunications

Research on computer network foundational technologies and next-generation information and communication technologies that support smart society and digital infrastructure, as well as cyber-physical systems and their applications.

Examples: AI-native technologies, computer networks, cloud networks, distributed cloud, digital-twin networks, wired/wireless network systems and devices, radio/optical/quantum communications, network devices, network security, and related foundational and applied research for smart society, such as networked robots and ITS (Intelligent Transport Systems). Also includes cross-disciplinary research with information engineering and information science, etc.

* Society 5.0 is defined as "a human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems by a system that highly integrates cyberspace and physical space."

Applications from PIs or Co-PIs currently supported by ASPIRE

1. Applications from PIs

PIs currently supported by ASPIRE are subject to the following restrictions:

		Category of New Application	
		ASPIRE for Top Scientists	ASPIRE for Rising Scientists
Category of Supported Project	ASPIRE for Top Scientists	Only eligible if the final year of support (No applicable projects for FY2026)	Not eligible
	ASPIRE for Rising Scientists	Eligible	Only eligible if FY2026 is the final year of support
	ASPIRE Joint Call	Not eligible	Not eligible

2. Applications from Co-PIs

Co-PIs currently supported by the ASPIRE Call for Japan Based Researchers may submit an application. However, if their proposal is selected, they must withdraw from their existing ASPIRE-supported project. The project that the Co-PI withdrew from will undergo a re-assessment, including a review of the resource allocation and research plans.

Notes

- If PIs currently supported by the ASPIRE Call for Japan Based Researchers are selected in this call, the existing ASPIRE-supported project will be terminated.
- If you are a PI or Co-PI currently supported by ASPIRE and are considering submitting an application, please contact JST via email (aspirers@jst.go.jp) in advance.

Measures to Ensure Research Security

In this call, measures to ensure research security will be implemented in all research fields as described below. The contents described here should be sufficiently shared with relevant departments of the research organizations to which the PI and Co-PIs belong prior to proposal submission.

(i) Research Security Initiatives in the ASPIRE Standalone Call

In this call, from the perspective of ensuring research security, research organizations to which PIs and Co-PIs belong are required to implement risk mitigation measures based on the “(Tentative Translated Title) Procedural Manual for Measures to Ensure Research Security.

*Scope of Application of These Measures

Target Fields: All research fields

Target Institutions: Research institutions recognized as “universities, etc.” or “companies, etc.” under the commissioned research contract

(ii) Specific Content of Risk Management

The risk management to be implemented shall be based on the “(Tentative Translated Title) Procedural Manual for Measures to Ensure Research Security.” Specifically, decisions will be made through consultations among JST, the PI, and the research organization, based on responses to the “Research Security Questionnaire” that will be sent separately to the PI of projects subject to risk management.

(iii) Submission Deadline for Responses to the “Research Security Questionnaire”

If a project is subject to risk management, the PI is requested to submit responses to the above-mentioned “Research Security Questionnaire” by the submission deadline separately specified by JST, after having obtained the consent of Co-PIs and confirmation from the relevant departments of the research organizations to which the PI and Co-PIs belong (including departments responsible for research security and research integrity, if such departments are established).

(iv) Confirmation of Risk Management Results

JST and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) will review the submitted responses. As a result of this review, they may, if necessary, request the implementation of additional risk mitigation measures from the research organizations to which the PI and Co-PIs belong.

(v) Handling of Personal Information

Personal information of researchers and others that is provided may be used, within the necessary scope, for the purpose of implementing risk management aimed at ensuring research security, by JST as well as by government agencies such as MEXT and the Cabinet Office that receive such personal information from JST.

(vi) Measures in the Case of Violations of the Procedural Manual

Based on the "Procedural Manual for Measures to Ensure Research Security," acts that constitute violations of the manual may, in light of the maliciousness of the act and the seriousness of the consequences caused, be treated as acts of improper receipt of research funds under the "Guidelines for the Proper Use of Competitive Research Funds" (agreement of the Inter-Ministerial Liaison Conference on Competitive Research Funds dated September 9, 2005). In such cases, measures such as restrictions on applications to this program and other programs may be imposed on the researcher who committed the improper receipt of research funds and any researchers who conspired in the act.