

International Leading Research Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (FAQs)

This English version is provided for convenience of prospective KAKENHI applicants who experience difficulty in reading the Japanese original, which should be referred to, in case of dispute.

[Application Requirements, Organization of the Project Team]

Q1 How does JSPS determine the Principal Investigator's eligibility criteria of whether his/her paper is ranked "Top 10% international joint papers"?

A1 We plan to use commercial databases, analysis tools, etc. in determining whether your paper is a top 10% international joint paper. You should specify at your discretion which databases and other tools to use and/or your own definition of Top 10% (such as subject area, applicable year, date of search, etc.) in the Research Proposal Document, accompanied by evidence (e.g., by attaching screen shot images, etc. to the Research Proposal Document) to enable the reviewers to acknowledge that your paper is a top 10% international joint papers. The international co-authors of your paper do not have to be the Overseas Joint Researchers of this proposal. Note that if you fail to provide evidence or if the definition of Top 10% is extremely arbitrary, reviewers may determine that you are not eligible.

Q2 "Top 10% international joint paper" is not a common indicator in my research area. How does JSPS determine whether a researcher is a "Japanese researcher who has a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network"?

A2 If your research area does not use Top 10% international joint paper as an indicator, you should describe your achievements and results, accompanied by evidence (to prove that such achievements and results actually exist) in the Research Proposal Documents to enable the reviewers to acknowledge that you are a "Japanese researcher who has a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network" in your research area. Your eligibility will also be judged in the review. When providing information available on the web as evidence, please be sure to attach screen shot images and other evidence in addition to the URL links.

Q3 For “internationally outstanding research achievements,” can I present achievements and results other than corresponding authorship of top 10% most highly cited paper, experience as a representative of a large international collaboration, and authorship of prominent academic books that are published abroad and highly appraised within the international research community?

A3 For “internationally outstanding research achievements,” you could, based on the characteristics of your research area, present achievements and results that will enable the reviewers to acknowledge that you are a “Japanese researcher who has a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network” in your research area. Your eligibility will also be judged in the review.

Q4 I will be reaching my retirement age in 5 years. Can I still apply for the International Leading Research? Can the research period be shorter than 7 years?

A4 You cannot propose a research plan with a duration of shorter than 7 years. You must be able to continue the research for at least 7 years to be eligible. So, if you anticipate that you will still be eligible for receiving KAKENHI grant after retirement and will be able to continue the research, you can submit your proposal even if you are scheduled to retire in the middle of the research period.

Q5 Due to the long duration of the research period, the Principal Investigator and Overseas Joint Researchers may need to be replaced. Can we plan for changes in members during the project?

A5 As a general rule, we expect the Principal Investigator and Overseas Joint Researchers at the time of application to continue engaging in the project throughout the entire research period. However, if the Principal Investigator and/or Overseas Joint Researchers may need to be replaced due to unavoidable occurrences, such as absence of the Principal Investigator, we will judge the situation in the interim assessment, etc. to determine whether the project should continue under the new organization.

Q6 The requirement calls for a research team consisting of 20-40 researchers. Will our application be accepted with a smaller or larger team?

A6 Although Japanese research teams are expected to be organized with 20-40 researchers, the optimum size of a research team may vary depending on the area of research, so applications with a research team of less than 20 members or more than 40 members will be accepted. The appropriateness of the organization of the research team will be judged in the review. Note that Overseas Joint Researchers and their research groups are not included in these numbers, and you can have other Research Collaborators in

addition to these 20-40 researchers.

Q7 Should a Japanese research team be organized consisting only of researchers from a single research institution, or of researchers from several research institutions?

A7 Either way is acceptable, a single research institution or multiple research institutions (without limitation to the number). Be sure to include a Co-Investigator in the research team even if your team is organized with researchers from only one research institution.

Q8 Do the PDs and DCs need Japanese citizenship to participate in the Japanese research team? Can foreign exchange students become a member?

A8 There is no nationality requirement for PDs and DCs participating in the Japanese research team. However, be sure to incorporate plans on dispatching researchers and implementing international exchange in view of the aim “to foster researchers who can play leading roles in our country and the international research community.”

Q9 Could we have temporary increase or decrease in members of the Japanese research team?

A9 As graduate students are included in the number of team members and as the research period continues for a long duration, the team organization may temporarily divert from the original plan, provided that measures are to be taken so as not to impact the performance of the research project.

Q10 Do we need to enter the actual names of early-career researchers when formulating the dispatch plan? We cannot plan for researchers to be sent off three years and five years ahead.

A10 In addition to the case in the question, you may be recruiting and hiring PDs after the project has been adopted. We understand that it would be difficult to give actual names of all researchers at the time of submitting the proposal, so just be as specific as possible at this point.

Q11 Do you have to be a postdoctoral fellow or a graduate student (doctoral course) to become a Research Collaborator?

A11 You can have other researchers who are not postdoctoral fellows or graduate students (doctoral course) apart from the 20-40 members of the Japanese research team to participate in the project as Research Collaborators.

Q12 May people of other nationalities become the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigators?

A12 Anyone, regardless of nationality, can become a Principal Investigator or Co-Investigators so long as he/she satisfies the eligibility requirements for KAKENHI application.

[Research Proposal Document, Research Content]

Q13 What information must be provided in the Research Proposal Document under the framework of international joint research?

A13 Some of the information that we plan to ask for in your Research Proposal Document might include:

- (1) Applicant's achievements and/or experience in international collaboration;
- (2) global trends in the research domain/field, etc. of your proposal;
- (3) level of advancement and future potential of the research domain/field, etc. of your proposal;
- (4) superiority of the Applicant's research group;
- (5) roles that the Applicant's group might play and prospects of the project making a scientific contribution to the research domain.;
- (6) roles and research capabilities of the Overseas Joint Researchers;
- (7) necessity, importance, and urgency of large-scale, long-term support;
- (8) state of preparation for the international joint research project;
- (9) initiatives for the participation of PDs and other early-career researchers.

In addition, as stated on Page 10 of the document "Establishment of Fund for the Promotion of Joint International Research (International Leading Research)" [https://www.jsps.go.jp/j-grantsinaid/35_kokusai/05_sendou/data/sendou_sousetsu.pdf], some of the documents must be prepared in English. For more detail, please be sure to check the Application Procedures to be released in March.

Q14 Must my research be relevant in the content to the evidence provided in the Research Proposal Document to show that I am a "Japanese researcher who has a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network"?

A14 No, the evidence is to confirm that you have a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network. So your research does not necessarily have to be relevant to the evidence provided. There are no restrictions as to the content of the research.

Q15 What kind of a Letter of Intent should we prepare?

A15 You must submit a Letter of Intent, each prepared and signed by the key Overseas Joint Researchers (1-3 researchers) who will participate in the international joint research at the time of application. Some of the information that we plan to ask for in the Letter of Intent might include:

- (1) outline of the international joint research project, your role, and detailed description;
- (2) motivation for conducting this international joint research project with the Applicant;
- (3) state of preparation for this international joint research project (including availability of support of research funds, space for research, acceptance/dispatch of researchers, permission to use the research facility/equipment, etc.);
- (4) curriculum vitae.

The Letters must be signed in person by the Overseas Joint Researchers. For more detail, please be sure to check the Application Procedures to be released in March.

[Participation of Early-career Researchers (PDs, DCs)]

Q16 On Page 6 of the document “Establishment of Fund for the Promotion of Joint International Research (International Leading Research)” [https://www.jsps.go.jp/j-grantsinaid/35_kokusai/05_sendou/data/sendou_sousetsu.pdf], there is a mandatory requirement to include “Plans to dispatch PDs and DCs abroad and to implement international exchange with the group of Overseas Joint Researchers (mainly for 2-3 years).” However, this may impact the research activities in Japan considering the team organization after these researchers are dispatched. Is dispatch of researchers mandatory regardless of these conditions?

A16 As it is the aim of this research category to foster excellent researchers who can compete on a global level, it is vital that you send off early-career researchers abroad for as long a term as possible and enable them to be exposed to as much opportunities as possible. As such, it is mandatory that you plan for these initiatives as much as possible in the plan. However, the program does not prohibit early-career researchers from returning home during their dispatch/exchange periods, and allows the project to expend costs to hire Research Collaborators that it needs in order to maintain the Japanese team organization, so please take these advantages into consideration in planning the dispatch/exchange plans.

Q17 What is the definition of “Postdoctoral fellow” in the application requirements?

A17 “Postdoctoral fellow” as used in the application requirements is not a job title name, but rather refers to early-career researchers who are not engaged in full-time research

activities; for example, an individual who is age 39 or under and does not have a Ph.D. degree, or who has acquired his/her Ph.D. degree within the past 8 years (but excluding periods of maternity and/or childcare leave, etc.). Those who belong to research institutions other than those of the Principal Investigators/Co-Investigators are also eligible to participate.

Q18 May we double-count PDs who are participating as Co-Investigators as PDs participating as Research Collaborators?

A18 PDs participating as Co-Investigators should be counted as Co-Investigators only, and should not be included as Research Collaborators. You should plan your project assuming that those PDs will serve the role of Co-Investigators.

Q19 Can the Principal Investigator go abroad for a long period of time? Also, if we plan to appoint a PD as Co-Investigator and dispatch that PD abroad for a long period of time, would such plan be acceptable?

A19 We plan to accept the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators to go abroad for a long period, provided that he/she does not lose eligibility for KAKENHI during that period, and further provided that he/she can carry out the research plan effectively. Regardless, you must still incorporate plans to dispatch early-career researchers abroad for as long a term. Note that PDs serving as Co-Investigators may also spend over a year abroad.

Q20 Must all early-career researchers participating in the project go abroad?

A20 No, we do not require all early-career researchers participating in the project to go abroad. Please formulate an optimal plan to foster early-career researchers, in combination with the supports for their self-reliance in conducting research.

Q21 Can we dispatch PDs of other institutions abroad using this grant?

A21 Yes, you may do so as long as the affiliated research institutions agree. Make sure that you coordinate closely with their affiliated research institutions, the overseas research institutions accepting them, etc. when you dispatch them.

Q22 Sending graduate students (doctoral students) abroad for 2-3 years might be unrealistic. Can we set shorter dispatch periods and/or implement online measures?

A22 While it is still important for graduate students to spend time abroad for as long as possible and gain various experiences, we will accept plans to include short- and medium-term stays and/or multiple stays as the case may be. We also expect you to utilize online means to carry out your international joint research efficiently. However, in this research category, from the perspective of fostering early-career researchers, we believe it essential

for early-career researchers to physically go overseas and gain research experience. Therefore, to the extent possible, you should plan the research project so that the works in which early-career researchers will be involved are mainly conducted abroad.

Q23 Can graduate students in the master's course participate as early-career researchers?

A23 Only postdoctoral fellows and graduate students in the doctoral course should be considered Research Collaborators in the "Japanese Research Team." You can still engage master's course students as other Research Collaborators and dispatch them abroad or elsewhere using the research grant you receive under this research category (provided, you cannot use the grant to dispatch them for academic purposes that are unrelated to this research project.)

Q24 May we engage early-career researchers that are hired under different research expenditures?

Q24 Yes, so long as there are no restrictions under such other research expenditures, you may include early-career researchers who are hired under different expenditures in the Japanese Research Team that you organize under this research category.

[Overseas Joint Researchers]

Q25 Are there any requirements in inviting Overseas Joint Researchers to participate in the research project?

A25 An Overseas Joint Researcher must belong to an overseas research institution, and must agree to carrying out the proposed international joint research project in collaboration with the Japanese researchers, but there are no eligibility requirements such as those for Japanese researchers. JSPS will determine whether an Overseas Joint Researcher has excellent research achievements in the review by referencing his/her CV to be submitted as part of the Letter of Intent. Because the Overseas Joint Researchers (and researchers in their group) are not eligible for KAKENHI grant applications, they must be categorized as Research Collaborators under the KAKENHI program. This means that they cannot participate as Co-Investigators (therefore, they are not allowed to receive any share of the grant).

Q26 As Overseas Joint Researchers are required to secure their own funding, specifically how much matching funds or other funding do we need them to obtain?

A26 One of the critical roles of Overseas Joint Researchers in this research category is to accept Japanese PDs and DCs in carrying out the international joint research. Therefore, we anticipate that there are various cases where the project will have to rely financially upon Overseas Joint Researchers in order to build the research environment, which may include in-kind contribution, for example, securing research space for the accepted Japanese researchers and permission to use the research facilities/equipment. So, “securing their own funding” in this context does not necessarily mean they have to obtain cash such as matching funds. We will not set a bar for costs to be incurred by the Overseas Joint Researchers, so you should make estimations based on what they might need in carrying out the proposed research project.

Q27 Do we need to coordinate in advance with the affiliated research institutions of the Overseas Joint Researchers?

A27 There is probably only so much you can do before the adoption of your proposal, but there are certain matters that you might need to coordinate with the affiliated research institutions of the Overseas Joint Researchers before submitting your application, such as preparations necessary to accept Japanese researchers and ownership of the results (intellectual properties, in particular) of the international joint research. Please discuss in detail in advance with the Overseas Joint Researchers and make necessary arrangements in a timely manner.

Q28 If we plan the research project on the premise that the Overseas Joint Researchers will obtain a matching fund in the future, might we have to terminate the project or otherwise if they fail to obtain such funding?

A28 You do not need to terminate the project immediately, but you must find an alternative means or take measures to carry out the research plan. We will check the status of burden, etc. of the Overseas Joint Researchers in the interim assessment, and if we find that you are having difficulty in continuing on with the research plan (including securing necessary alternative measures), we may determine at that point whether the project should be terminated or otherwise.

Q29 Can we have the participation of multiple Overseas Joint Researchers? Must their research team be equivalent to the Japanese team in terms of scale (20-40 members), etc.?

A29 There are no restrictions on the number of Overseas Joint Researcher engagements or number of affiliated research institutions. However, we will accept up to three researchers for the submission of the Letters of Intent. There are no requirements as to their status (affiliated research institutions, job titles, etc.) or the number or ages of overseas

researchers who will be participating in the project with the Overseas Joint Researchers, so please organize your project team so as to effectively carry out the international joint research.

Q30 Must our research institutions in Japan accept the Overseas Joint Researchers or early-career researchers in their research group? In such case, can we cover those expenses with this grant?

A30 It is not a mandatory requirement, but, bidirectional human exchange could contribute to fostering of future researchers in the relevant research community. This grant can be used for expenditures directly necessary for the implementation of the research plan, as with other KAKENHI grants.

Q31 In view of ensuring economic and other security, are there any countries that are inappropriate as countries of the Overseas Joint Researchers?

A31 In implementing research projects funded with KAKENHI, research institutions are required to take measures for ensuring research integrity and strict implementation of security export control policy (coping with technology leakage overseas) and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2321 (for details, please refer to the Application Procedures). This grant is no exception. You are required to take the same precautions in selecting the Overseas Joint Researchers and in the actual implementation of the international joint research.

[Support by Research Institutions]

Q32 What level of support is expected as a research institution?

A32 While this research category is designed to support research activities conducted by individual researchers, aggressive cooperation of research institutions is crucial for the smooth implementation of international joint research. In particular, we expect research institutions to effectively provide: support in the appropriate and smooth administration of research grants for researchers dispatched and staying abroad; coordination of the handling of intellectual property rights; administrative procedures for the dispatch of PDs and DCs; development of systems and environment to accept researchers from abroad; conclusion of agreements between research institutions; and other unique support to facilitate the implementation of international joint research. Also, research institutions in this context are intended to mean the research institutions to which the PI and Co-Is belong, but may include other research institutions that dispatching Research Collaborators belong to. Note that the affiliated research institutions of Overseas Joint Researchers are not included.

Q33 Should the research institutions prepare the section on the support by research institutions in the application, or should we present some sort of commitment from the research institutions? Also, on what level should the support be provided, institutional level or disciplinary level?

A33 In this context, support by research institutions is intended to include those described in A32 above, but in the Research Proposal Document, we plan to have the Applicant enter the items of support in relation to the research plan that he/she anticipates to receive under the current situation or when the proposal is adopted (if necessary, please check with your affiliated research institution on the items you have anticipated before submitting your proposal). So, there are no documents or letters that must be prepared by your research institution. There is no designation of the level of support.

Q34 What aspects of the support by research institutions will be assessed?

A34 The proposals to the International Leading Research category will be reviewed comprehensively based on four rating elements: [A. Significance and necessity of international joint research (conformity of the proposal with the purpose and funding target of the category); B. Rating elements relevant to the content of the research plan; C. Adequacy of fostering early-career researchers; D. Effectiveness of support by research institutions and ideas on feeding back to research institutions]. Research institutions are expected to provide adequate support for the effective implementation of the international joint research if the proposal is adopted.

Q35 What, in specific, are “ideas on feeding back to research institutions” in one of the rating elements?

A35 We expect Principal Investigators to share, not only with those around them but also within their affiliated research institutions, the know-hows and experience gained in implementing the joint international research (including: how the Overseas Joint Researchers and their affiliated research institutions implement the joint international research, content and progress of advance negotiations, handling of intellectual properties, acceptance of dispatched researchers from Japan and preparation needed to accept researchers from abroad, etc.), and not limited to the foregoing, anything that could contribute to the internationalization of research institutions through the performance of the research project.

[Review Process]

Q36 How are the reviews conducted?

A36 If we receive a large number of applications, we will conduct a preliminary screening.

Then, based on the review comments from the domestic and overseas reviewers, a document review, panel review, and interview will be conducted to select the proposals to be adopted.

Q37 How are overseas reviews conducted?

A37 We will select researchers belonging to overseas research institutions (overseas reviewers) depending on the content of the research proposal, and based on a portion of the Research Proposal Document (the portion written in English), ask them to provide review comments on the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal from a global perspective and also to assign an overall score. As the review will be made from an international viewpoint, proposals that receive extremely low marks in the overseas reviews will not be adopted.

[Other Questions]

Q38 Will the “environmental expenses” and “start-up expenses” to be provided in addition to the research grant, be provided to the research institutions like the indirect expense?

A38 As both expenses are to be provided as expenditures necessary for the implementation of the research plan, they will be allocated to the Principal Investigator. Details are yet to be decided, but the “environmental expenses” are intended to be used as start-up expenditures of the Japanese research team, covering costs to set up the research lab to kick off the research, etc. The “start-up expenses” are intended to be allocated as a share of the grant to PDs who are hired by the research institution as researchers with tenure (including tenure-track position) during the research period, by adding them to the project team as Co-Investigators.

Q39 In what form will the “environmental expenses” and “start-up expenses” to be provided in addition to the research grant be delivered? What are the approximate amounts?

A39 Under this research category, we plan to provide “environmental expenses” and “start-up expenses” in addition to the research grant, but details on amounts, usage, and method of allocation are currently under determination. Details will be notified separately to the adopted Principal Investigators.

Q40 Do we have to include the content of “environmental expenses” and “start-up expenses” in the Research Proposal Document?

A40 Because the “environmental expenses” and “start-up expenses” are to be provided separately from the research grant, you do not have to include them in your Research

Proposal Document, nor do you have to include them in the total amount of funding.

Q41 Should we prepare our application taking into consideration the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?

A41 This research category calls for long-term research plans that will be conducted over a period of seven years. It will be difficult to anticipate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the entire research period, so you should prepare your application based on what is foreseeable at the time of submission. We are planning to encourage reviewers not to put excessive focus on the impacts of the pandemic.

Q42 Can I apply in parallel for international collaboration programs of JSPS?

A42 Yes, you can apply for other KAKENHI grants so long as you comply with the restrictions on parallel grant application/receipt of other KAKENHI categories, not only international collaborations. For other competitive funding schemes, you should check to make sure that you do not fall under “Unreasonable Duplication and Excessive Overconcentration in Grant Allocation” before you submit your applications.

Q43 Can I add the “cost of replacement staff” as permitted in the Fostering Joint International Research (A) to secure substitutes while the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigators are staying abroad for a long period?

A43 Because this research category does not require the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigators to travel abroad, you are not allowed to add the “cost of replacement staff” which is permitted in the Fostering Joint International Research (A). However, you can utilize the buyout expenses. Please consider using the buyout system if you need a substitute for educational duties.

Q44 Do you have restrictions on the breakdown of research expenditure, for example, a requirement to use more than 50% of the expenditure for travel expenses?

A44 No, we do not plan to have any restrictions on the breakdown of how you use the expenses. You may determine the balance of each expense appropriately according to the content of your research plan.

Q45 Can we dispatch PDs or other researchers as Research Collaborators abroad even if they are not initial members of the research project? If so, is there any special procedure to follow?

A45 Yes, you can dispatch non-initial members. Their statuses are the same as those of ordinary Research Collaborators, so there is no special procedure.

Q46 What is the definition of “large” with respect to the eligibility “experience as a representative of a large international collaboration”? Also, are there any restrictions as to how far back I can go in terms of listing my experience?

A46 As “large” could vary depending on the area or content of research, we do not give a specific definition. Please make your own judgment based on the situation in your area of research. There are no restrictions as to when the experience was gained.

Q47 Instead of the requirement of authorship of top 10% international joint paper to show that I have “a record of excellent research achievements and an international research network” can I provide a “top 1% paper which was not internationally co-authored” as a record of excellent research achievements, and “an international joint paper that is not ranked top 10%” that would evidence my international research network?

A47 When achievements other than a top 10% international joint paper are presented, we will judge in the review whether each such evidence meet the eligibility criteria. You may provide multiple items of evidence instead of a top 10% international joint paper, but you should limit the volume of information within the given number of pages.

Q48 When planning the joint research with overseas joint researchers for the application, if the countries of the overseas joint researchers have travel restrictions, etc., do we need to coordinate the content of the research proposal with assumptions that the joint research will be conducted after restrictions on entry and departure are lifted?

A48 This research category seeks for research projects that are conducted over a period of seven years. While it is difficult to foresee the situation, etc. of the country of the overseas joint researchers throughout the research period, please prepare your research proposal, in coordination with the overseas joint researchers, with the best possible assumptions based on the situation of the travel restrictions, etc. of the countries of the overseas joint researchers at the time of the application, and provide detailed plans to dispatch early-career researchers abroad on a long-term basis. Note that proposals will be assessed comprehensively in terms of the significance and necessity of the joint international research and feasibility of the research project, including the status of preparation.

Q49 Does a researcher who is “engaged in full-time research activities” as set forth on Page 17 of the Application Procedures mean a researcher who has a full-time job position?

A49 In this context, a researcher who is “engaged in full-time research activities” is a person holding a job position of an indefinite term appointment like a permanent position or tenure post, for example, a professor, associate professor, or assistant professor. It does not refer to his/her working arrangement such as full-time or part-time working hours.