

Call for Proposals: Ensemble Grants for Early Career Researchers 2026

Daichi Chiba

Professor

Chairperson of Tohoku University Research Institutes' Director Meeting

Director of International Center for Synchrotron Radiation Innovation Smart, Tohoku University

Kenji Iemura

Assistant Professor

Leader of Tohoku University Research Institutes' Ensemble Project Working Group

Institute of Development, Aging and Cancer, Tohoku University

The Ensemble Project for Early Career Researchers in Tohoku University will fund joint research groups consisting of researchers from several departments in order to promote collaboration among early-career researchers in Tohoku University. The grants are intended to support budding academic research projects that are created through interdepartmental collaboration based on free individual ideas.

Proposals are invited to encourage new research start-ups or attempts at new developments that broaden the scope of existing research. Early-career researchers are welcome to apply, but those who participate in the research group as co-investigators are not required to have any status, as long as they meet the requirements for affiliation described in the guidelines. We welcome applications based on new ideas and perspectives (not only the content of research, but also the use of facilities in other departments to improve research efficiency).

Application guidelines

1. Period of research

From June 1, 2026 (scheduled) to March 31, 2027.

2. What is funded

We will provide research funds up to 500,000 yen for about 18 projects. After a certain period, the grants will be distributed to the departments of the Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers, Tohoku University.

3. Eligible research projects

Collaborative research between multiple departments. The grants are open to research in all fields. Interdisciplinary research is not a prerequisite.

4. Eligible applicants

Applicants (principal investigators) should be postdocs, research assistants, assistant professors, lecturers, and associate professors (including special appointments) who belong to each department of the Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers, Tohoku University. We especially welcome applications from early career researchers. Co-investigators other than the principal investigator are not subject to any restrictions on job title or status, but they are not eligible if it is clear that the group in more than one department will no longer be included in the majority of the research period due to graduation or completion of the course.

- Herein, the “Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers” refers to Institute for Materials Research (IMR), Institute of Development, Aging, and Cancer (IDAC), Institute of Fluid Science (IFS), Research Institute of Electrical Communication (RIEC), Institute of Multidisciplinary Research for Advanced Materials (IMRAM), International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS), Center for Northeast Asian Studies (CNEAS), Frontier Research for Interdisciplinary Sciences (FRIS), Advanced Institute for Materials Research (AIMR), Research Center for Accelerator and Radioisotope Science (RARIS), and New Industry Creation Hatchery Center (NICHe), International Center for Synchrotron Radiation Innovation Smart (hereinafter the same).
- In the case of concurrently serving or concurrently serving (including the mentoring system of the Interdisciplinary Research Institute), it is not considered to be more than one department by itself, even if you are a member of a group with researchers belonging to a department of the Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers, Tohoku University, which is your main activity base. Please refer to “Supplementary material 1 Details of Research Group” and carefully ensure your research members.
- The applicant (principal investigator) must be able to use the university's budget management system at one of the above departments.
- When students are selected as joint researchers, even if the student's affiliation is different from that of the principal investigator, if the main activity base (e.g. laboratory) is in the same department, it will not be considered as multiple departments.
- Only one application per person (including the principal investigator and co-investigator) is allowed.
- As a new rule, the principal investigator and co-investigator who were selected for this or continuing grants last year will be excluded from the selection process.
- In principle, amendments to the application form after submission are not permitted. Please be careful not to make any typos.
- If your application contains false information, you will be excluded from the random selection and no further applications will be accepted.
- If it is difficult to determine whether the composition of the members of the applicant's

representative/associate is eligible for the application, please check with the Young Ensemble Project Working Group (WG) well in advance of the deadline.

5. Selection process

In order to discover budding research and support various research, we will perform a two-stage selection process:

A first-stage will review applications where the principal investigator will present at the Workshop scheduled for May 2026. It will randomly select approximately 30% of effective applications, up to a maximum of 6 projects.

Second-stage selection will consider both applications not applied for first-stage review and those not selected during the first stage. Through this process, we will randomly select a total of approximately 18 projects across both stages combined.

Please note that for both selection stages, the Working Group will screen all applications before proceeding with the random selection process.

After the random selection, the decision will be officially approved by the Tohoku University Research Institutes' Director Meeting. Applications that fall under any of the following categories will not be accepted for screening.

- Applications that do not meet the eligibility and requirement in this guideline.
 - The member composition does not correspond to multiple departments. If the applicant is unable to make a clear judgment by himself/herself, please check with the WG well in advance of the deadline.
 - The applicant is not a postdoctoral researcher, assistant professor, assistant professor, lecturer, or associate professor (including specially-appointed/specified professor) belonging to one of the departments of the Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers.
 - The application is more than two pages long.
 - Applications that are identical or very similar to previously awarded proposals. If you are applying for a research proposal that may be judged to be similar to your own previously accepted research, please indicate the differences from your previous proposal in the "Research period and outline/differences of past selected proposal" section of the application form.
 - Applications that do not show the minimum research content.
 - Applications without justification in the necessary expense breakdown

6. Continuation of research in the next fiscal year

We will conduct a peer review at a symposium to be held around February 2027 by all participants and invited faculty members, and select two or three proposals for continuation in the next fiscal year (April 2027-March 2028, with a maximum research grant of 1,000,000 yen) in April 2027. The same proposal can be continued for up to one year (one year of new proposal plus one year of continuation).

7. Application form and submission

Please prepare the application form using the distributed application form, convert it to PDF, and the prepared application should be submitted by the principal investigator using the web form below by the deadline. Submissions in a different format or overdue will not be accepted.

<https://forms.gle/SkUXtD4JAaFygFPn7>

Deadline: Wednesday, June 3, 2026

8. Reporting

At the end of the research period, the grant awardees are **required** to submit a report of their research results in the prescribed format (the contents of the report are available on the website

of the Ensemble Project for internal use only). They are also invited to present their research ideas and results at a symposium to be held during this fiscal year. When you publish your results, please indicate that they were supported by this program.

Please note that if you do not submit an achievement report or make a presentation at the workshop, you will have a disadvantage in judging continuing research and next grants.

9. Change affiliated institution of the representative or co-researchers

If the affiliation of the representative or co-researchers changes during the research period, please contact Tohoku University Research Institutes' Ensemble Project Working Group as soon as possible. Please hesitate to apply if you have already known that the affiliation of the representative or co-researchers will change during the research period before the application.

10. Changes research period

Extensions of the research period due to the principal investigator's overseas assignment or vacation etc. are not permitted. However, we will respond flexibly, such as by changing the principal investigator, please contact the Young Ensemble Project Working Group (WG).

11. Management

You are expected to conduct your research in accordance with all the rules and instructions of the university and your department regarding safety and health management, network management, prevention of research fraud, and legal compliance. Please note that we will discontinue the support if it is judged that you have deviated from the above.

12. Notes

In the event of discrepancy between the English version and the Japanese version of the application guidelines, the Japanese version shall prevail.

If you have any questions about the application guidelines, please contact us.

Tohoku University Research Institutes' Ensemble Project Working Group
ensemble_secretariat [at] grp.tohoku.ac.jp

(Supplementary material 1) Details of research group

The research group must consist of the researcher affiliated with the departments of “Alliance of Research Institutes and Centers, Tohoku University” as the principal investigator and the researcher(s) from multiple departments within Tohoku University. If the principal activity departments of all members are same, it is not considered as a multi-departmental group. If they meet the above criteria, members from other universities may be included. There is no limit to the number of members.

• Examples of research group

	NG	OK
e.g.	Principal investigator (RIEC)	Principal investigator (RIEC)
	Co-investigator1 (RIEC)	Co-investigator1 (IMR)
Reason	The group is not composed of multiple departments.	The group is composed of multiple departments.

	NG	OK
e.g.	Principal investigator (RIEC)	Principal investigator (RIEC)
	Co-investigator1 (RIEC)	Co-investigator1 (Graduate School of Engineering)
	Co-investigator2 (Other university)	Co-investigator2 (Other university)
Reason	The group is not composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.	The group is composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.

	NG	OK
e.g.	Principal investigator (RIEC)	Principal investigator (RIEC)
	Co-investigator (including students) (Graduate School of Engineering /RIEC)	Co-investigator (including students) (Graduate School of Engineering /IFS)
Reason	The group is not composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.	The group is composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.

	NG	OK
e.g.	Principal investigator (RIEC, XX lab.)	Principal investigator (RIEC, XX lab.)
	Co-investigator (including students) (Graduate School of Engineering /XX lab.)	Co-investigator (including students) (Graduate School of Engineering /YY lab.)
Reason	The principal activity departments of all members are same, and the group is not composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.	The group is composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.

	NG
e.g.	Principal investigator (RIEC)
	Co-investigator1 (IMR, RIEC) ※The principal activity departments is RIEC
	Co-investigator2 (AIMR, RIEC) ※The principal activity departments is RIEC
Reason	The principal activity departments of all members are same, and the group is not composed of multiple departments in Tohoku University.

- The case of research group members affiliated with FRIS

The project working group consider that the “mentor department” of researchers affiliated with FRIS is as principal activity departments. Please note that even if their mentor departments are different, groups consisting of researchers belonging to only FRIS are not eligible.

	NG
e.g.	Principal investigator (FRIS) ※The mentor department is Graduate School of Engineering
	Co-investigator1 (Graduate School of Engineering)
Reason	The group is not composed of multiple departments.

	NG
e.g.	Principal investigator (FRIS) ※The mentor department is Graduate School of Engineering
	Co-investigator1 (FRIS) ※The mentor department is Graduate School of Science
Reason	The group is not composed of multiple departments.

How to prepare the application

The application form should be one or two pages.

1. Research group

- The research group should be composed of faculty, researchers, and technical staff members belonging to multiple departments of Tohoku University (research institutes, centers, laboratory, graduate schools, etc.). In addition to the above, external members may be included as co-investigators. Please add © in front of the principal investigator's name.
- If the department to which you belong and the department in which you are mainly active are different (e.g., if you hold concurrent positions in multiple departments), please list both the department to which you belong and the department in which you are mainly active.

2. Research expenses breakdown

- Research expenses are limited to equipment, supplies, travel expenses, honoraria, and personnel expenses necessary to carry out this research. (Expenditures that are considered appropriate for running a laboratory or for other research projects are not allowed.)
- Regarding expenses related to construction costs for research equipment, etc., we will ask you to submit a statement of reasons in advance to the Young Ensemble Project Working Group (WG).

3. Plan of research

- If you are applying for a research proposal that may be judged to be similar to your own previously accepted research, please indicate the differences from your previous proposal in the "Research period and outline/differences of past selected proposal" section of the application form.
- Please describe the plan for one year, not assuming continuation.

4. Other research grant applications

- This grant does not restrict duplicate applications with other research funds, but if there are restrictions on other research funds, please apply with consideration.

Procedures for random selection of proposals

1. All applications will be assigned entry numbers 1, 2, 3, ..., N , starting from 1 and increasing by 1, in the order in which the applications are received.
 - The entry number will be assigned at the time the application is first submitted, even if the application is resubmitted within the period or withdrawn after submission.
 - The entry number will be notified to the applicant at the time of acceptance or closing of the call.
2. Screening of applications will be done by the WG based on the application guidelines. The WG determines M , the number of proposals to be adopted ($M \sim 15$). If the number of proposals that pass the screening does not significantly exceed 15, all proposals may be accepted after adjusting the amount. The screening and the decision on the number of proposals to be adopted will be made by June 9, 2026.
3. The entry numbers of the applications that passed the screening will be randomly ranked using the attached Python script (Python 3.7), and the top M applications will be accepted.
 - 3.1. Let the sum of the block hashes of the first five blocks in the Bitcoin blockchain after 8:00 a.m. (Japan time) on June 10, 2026, be the random seed S . Initialize the random number with `random.seed(S)`.
 - 3.2. Prepare a list `ENTRIES` with the entry numbers in ascending order.
 - 3.3. Shuffle the order of the presentation numbers `ENTRIES` by `number_order = random.sample(ENTRIES, len(ENTRIES))`.
 - 3.4. In the order of `number_order`, M proposals will be accepted.
4. The list of entry numbers that have passed the screening in 2. and the random number seed used in 3.1 will be made public when the approved proposals are decided and notified.

Notes

1. A new Bitcoin block is created approximately every 10 minutes. Each time a block is created, the block height is increased by one, and the block-specific hash value (a 32-byte number) is determined. The block hash value is suitable as a random seed for random selection because it has the following properties
 - It is very difficult to know the block hash to be generated in the future and to set it to the desired value (virtually impossible due to the cost of tens of millions of yen). Therefore, it is (virtually) impossible to predict or manipulate the results of random selection before the deadline.
 - Once the block hash is determined, its value can be obtained by anyone. Therefore, anyone can verify later that the random selection process is not fraudulent or erroneous by using a random seed calculated from the block hash value.
2. The attached Python script shows an example of using "the sum of five block hashes of bitcoin block height 629530-629534" as a random seed.
 - The block hash value can be obtained from [https://www.blockchain.com/explorer/blocks/btc/\[block height\]](https://www.blockchain.com/explorer/blocks/btc/[block height]) (e.g., for block height 629530, see <https://www.blockchain.com/explorer/blocks/btc/629530>).
 - When you run the Python script, you will get the following results. As long as the random number seed is the same, the same result is obtained no matter how many times the script is run.

```
Entries: [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17,
18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 31, 33] (26 in total)
Random seed:
3328922384685780924223003444097241387041554684534517140
```

```
Result
Selected entries: [1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23,
25]
```

Python script for random selection : <https://ideone.com/IrZVK5>

```
import random
import platform

assert platform.python_version()[0:3] == "3.7", "Python version 3.7 must be used."

# The number of selections
NUM_SELECTED = 15
# Entry numbers that passed the screening process (example is shown)
ENTRIES = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 31, 33]
assert NUM_SELECTED < len(ENTRIES), "Selection must happen"

# Block hashes from certain block heights that were previously announced:
# Below is the example by block heights 629530-629534.
hashes = [
    0x000000000000000000000000000000006F349AA480F67A2B603496DA07FD0F566680293B2D3E4,
    0x00000000000000000000000000000000E4BF1CA971D88B29D31B84751AE6BDF8F2F5F25E5D99E,
    0x000000000000000000000000000000003A91B8D6D37940269AE8DE9219176DCD6BA448CE0AC75,
    0x00000000000000000000000000000000137A2AC232E19D2163A4A28B2F1F49CCD35052579451E,
    0x000000000000000000000000000000008A17371C0F62112227C28B83DD88C5218CAD648484E7F,
]

seed = sum(hashes)
random.seed(seed)
print("Entries:", ENTRIES, "(%d in total)" % len(ENTRIES)) print("Random seed: %d" % seed)
print()

number_order = sorted(random.sample(ENTRIES, len(ENTRIES))[0:NUM_SELECTED])

print("Result")
print("Selected entries:", number_order)
```