

UNESCO/Japan Young Researchers' Fellowships Programme Cycle 2026

Application Guide

1. Introduction

The UNESCO/Japan Young Researchers' Fellowship Programme (also known as the UNESCO/Keizo Obuchi Research Fellowships Programme) was established in 2001 under the Japanese Funds-in-Trust for the Capacity-Building of Human Resources, with the aim of strengthening research capacities and fostering knowledge development and exchanges in areas aligned with UNESCO's mandate.

Under the Cycle 2026 of the Programme, UNESCO and the Government of Japan will award 10 fellowships to highly qualified young researchers from Africa, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as Ukraine and Türkiye (see *Annex 1*). These fellowships are intended to support innovative and high-quality postgraduate research related to Heritage Conservation and Management, Sustainable Development, and Artificial Intelligence, with particular attention to interdisciplinary research that connects these themes with specific contexts, methods, areas of application, and social, ethical and governance issues. More specifically, proposals under the 2026 cycle should fall within the following research areas:

- Heritage Conservation and Management;
- AI for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Climate Action;
- Ethical, Inclusive and Human-Centred AI for Sustainable Development;
- AI for Sustainable Cities, Infrastructure and Societal Resilience;
- AI and Education.

Candidates should refer to *Annex 2* for the indicative sub-areas under each research area and select the one that best corresponds to the focus of their proposed research.

Selected fellows will be awarded a fellowship grant of up to **US\$10,000** to support the implementation of their proposed research projects. The research will be carried out in Japanese universities or research institutions for a period ranging from 3 to 9 months, between February 2027 and December 2027, under the supervision of an academic mentor. The grant will be provided as a lump-sum contribution and is expected to cover costs directly related to the research, in accordance with the Programme provisions.

The Programme is implemented by UNESCO in partnership with the Government of Japan, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, and, where appropriate, with the support of relevant host universities and research institutions in Japan.

2. Timeline for Cycle 2026

Procedures	Month/Year
Launch of call for applications	6 July 2026

Deadline for submission of applications	30 September 2026
Evaluation and selection of candidates	October – November 2026
Award of fellowships	December 2026
Fellowship period in Japan	From February 2027 onwards, to be completed no later than December 2027

3. Eligibility Requirements

Candidates applying for the fellowships must meet the following criteria:

- **Nationality:** be nationals of one of the invited Member States or Associate Members listed in Annex 1;
- **Age:** Be no more than forty (40) years old at the time of application;
- **Academic qualifications:** Hold at least a Master's degree (or equivalent) in a field relevant to the proposed research, and demonstrate strong academic and research potential;
- **Language proficiency:** Demonstrate sufficient proficiency in reading and writing in the language of instruction or supervision at the proposed host institution in Japan;
- **Host institution acceptance:** Have obtained acceptance from an academic supervisor at a Japanese university or research institution, who will oversee the proposed research.

4. Required documents

The application must include the following documents:

- 1) **Fellowship application form:** duly completed in English or French, using the official UNESCO fellowship application template (Annex 3).
- 2) **Certified copies of diplomas:** Prospective diploma winners must submit official proof of student status issued by their current educational institution.

Documents submitted in languages other than English or French must be accompanied by a notarized translation in English or French.
- 3) **Academic transcripts:** transcripts in languages other than English or French must be accompanied by a notarized English or French translation.
- 4) **Letter of recommendation** from a referee familiar with the candidate's research or professional work;
- 5) **Letter of acceptance from the host institution**, indicating that the host institution confirms its willingness to receive the candidate and to provide the necessary supervision and research facilities in the proposed field of study.
- 6) **Certificate of language proficiency:** Candidates should provide proof of proficiency in the language of instruction or supervision of the proposed research. This may include an official language proficiency certificate, such as IELTS, TOEFL,

JLPT or other recognized language tests, where applicable. In the absence of such a certificate, candidates must submit the UNESCO Certificate of Language Knowledge (*Annex 5*), duly completed, signed and stamped by a certified language institution or language tutor.

7) **Research proposal:** A detailed description of the proposed research work, including the budget, must be submitted in English or French, using the Research Proposal Template (*Annex 4*), and should not exceed 3 pages. It must meet the following requirements:

- **Content of the proposal:** Candidates should refer to the guidance in the template and provide clear and relevant information on their proposed research, including a description of the research, the expected results and outcomes, the research implementation plan, and the proposed budget.
- **Research area and sub-area:** A primary research area and the corresponding sub-area from Annex 2 that best reflect the main focus of the proposed research should be specified in the research proposal.
- **Duration:** The duration of the fellowship must be no less than 3 months and no more than 9 months. Applicants are encouraged to ensure that the proposed duration is realistic in relation to the level of funding provided under the Programme.
- **Budget:** The budget must present a clear and realistic estimate of the costs associated with the proposed research and must be expressed in **United States dollars (USD)**. The total amount requested must not exceed the maximum fellowship grant of **US\$10,000**, which is intended to cover exclusively costs related to international and domestic travel for the approved itinerary, accommodation, medical insurance and personal subsistence in Japan (including meals, local transportation and incidental expenses), as well as other research-related expenses, where applicable. However, costs such as tuition, the purchase of equipment (including computers), publication costs, and participation in conferences are not eligible under the Programme, unless such participation can be clearly justified as an integral part of the research and makes a direct and significant contribution to the project.
- **Medical insurance:** Medical insurance is mandatory for all selected fellows and will be arranged by UNESCO on their behalf. The cost of medical insurance is included within the fellowship grant and will be deducted from the total fellowship amount prior to disbursement. Fellows will therefore receive the balance of the fellowship grant after deduction of the medical insurance cost. Applicants should take the cost of medical insurance into account when estimating the funds available for their fellowship in Japan. For indicative purposes, the cost of medical insurance is estimated at approximately US\$75 per month, with a total cost ranging from US\$225 to US\$675, depending on the proposed duration of the fellowship.

5. Submission of Applications

Applications must be submitted through the National Commissions for UNESCO of the candidates' respective countries. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact their National Commissions in advance to enquire about the submission and pre-selection procedures at the national level. Only applications endorsed by the National Commissions for UNESCO of the invited Member States will be considered by UNESCO.

Endorsed applications, including the letter of nomination and all required supporting documents, must be submitted by email to keizoobuchi.fellowships@unesco.org, no later than 30 September 2026 (midnight, Paris time).

Each invited Member State or Associate Member may submit a maximum of two (2) candidates, of whom at least one should be woman.

Incomplete applications or applications received after the deadline will not be considered. Candidates who do not meet the eligibility requirements will not be considered in the selection process.

6. Selection of Fellowship Recipients

The evaluation of applications will be conducted by a Selection Committee composed of experts from UNESCO and the Government of Japan in the relevant fields, taking into account the merits of the candidates, as well as the quality, relevance and originality of their proposed research. The final decision of selection will be made by the Japanese authorities, based on the recommendation of the committee, with due consideration to gender equality and diversity.

The results of the selection will be communicated to successful candidates through an official Letter of Award issued by UNESCO. Candidates who have not been notified of the outcome of their application by 31 January 2027 should consider that their application unsuccessful.

7. Dissemination of Research Results

Fellows are encouraged to disseminate the results of their research upon completion of the fellowship. Where appropriate, research results and related communication materials may also be shared through the Unit of National Commissions and Fellowships through relevant communication channels. No prior approval from UNESCO is required for the publication of scholarly work arising from research conducted under the Programme. In all such publications, fellows are expected to acknowledge the support of UNESCO, UNESCO/Japan Young Researchers' Fellowships Programme, and the Government of Japan. A copy of any resulting publication should be transmitted to UNESCO for information.

Fellows will also be required to submit an interim report and a final report, at the halfway point and at the end of their fellowship respectively, outlining the progress and outcomes of their research. In addition, a one-page summary of the research outcomes at the end of their fellowship shall be provided for communication purposes by UNESCO.

UNESCO does not undertake to publish the research outputs, and no financial support will be provided for publication purposes.