FY2026

Support Project for Securing Human Resources for Starting and Managing R&D Startups／

Human Resources and Entrepreneurship Development Project in the Field of Deep Tech（NEP）／

Pioneering Course

「NEDO－Front-Runner（FR）」Public Call for Proposals

Application period:

Monday, January 5, 2026- Tuesday, February 24, 2026 (noon)

＊Please note that the deadline may be missed due to system overload just before the deadline, so please submit your proposals well in advance.

【Note】

This project will be implemented based on the government budget for fiscal year 2026. Therefore, the content of the call for proposals may be changed or canceled due to changes in the approved budget or government policy.

January 2026

New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO)
Startup Support Department

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Support Project for Securing Human Resources for Starting and Managing R&D Startups／

Human Resources and Entrepreneurship Development Project in the Field of Deep Tech (NEP)／

Pioneering Course「NEDO－Front-Runner（FR）」

The New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO), in accordance with the Basic Plan and Annual Implementation Policy of the " Support Project for Securing Human Resources for Starting and Managing R&D Startups", invites applications for the "NEDO Front-Runner (FR)" to conduct feasibility studies on ideas utilizing technology seeds in the field of deep technology under the " Human Resources and Entrepreneurship Development Project in the Field of Deep Tech (NEP)/Pioneering Course" of the said project as follows.

1. Project overview

Activities and Period of Assignment

FRs will conduct the following activities to investigate the feasibility of their ideas using technology seeds, while receiving hands-on guidance and advice from Accompany Runners (ARs), who have been commissioned by NEDO to support the commercialization of their ideas, with a view to starting their own businesses.

・Exploratory activities on how to utilize technological seeds

・Research and development to deepen technological seeds aligned with market needs and determining their direction

・Business modeling, market research, and prototyping based on ideas

The outline of support and activities are as follows

（1）Outline of Support

Course Name	Human Resources and Entrepreneurship Development Project in the Field of Deep Tech (NEP)/Pioneering Course
Applicants	Pre-entrepreneurial individuals
Activity fee	250,000 yen per month (including tax) x 12 months [up to 3 million yen] ※For details, please refer to "(2) Activities ③Support for Activity Expenses
Period of activity (commission)	From the date designated by NEDO to March 31, 2027 (about 12 months planned)

（2）Activity Details

①Activities of FR

As a person who conducts research activities related to ideas for the utilization of technology, the FR will conduct exploratory activities related to the utilization of technological seeds owned by him/herself or others, conduct R&D activities to deepen the technological seeds aligned with market needs, and work

with AR to build a business model with a view to starting his/her own business, The results of these activities will be compiled into a report on the feasibility of ideas utilizing the technological seeds.

You can belong to a company or a research institute, but in this case, you must meet the following conditions (for details, see 4. (For details, see 4. How to apply)

- Obtain permission from your organization to engage in this activity.
- To be able to devote sufficient effort to carry out the activities.

The main activities of FR are as follows, and in principle you will be expected to do all of them.

- Prepare the FR activity plan [at the beginning of the activity].
- Conduct feasibility studies of ideas and prepare activity reports [monthly]
- Attend training to improve skills (e.g., how to build a business model), etc. [approximately once or twice a month].
- Attend interim reporting meetings (October-November 2026) and final reporting meetings (February-March 2027).
- Attend training camps (2 days and 1 night) (Scheduled for July 4 and 5, 2026; subject to change)
- Participation in social networking events (approximately once)
- Responses to questionnaires for each training session, etc.

※If you are unable to attend in-person training sessions due to unavoidable circumstances, we will arrange follow-up opportunities. You must participate in one of these sessions.

②Hands-on guidance and advice from AR

FRs eligible for this project will be selected after interview screening by ARs, and finally after deliberation by the final selection committee consisting of the project supervisor (SVr) and others. At that time, each selected FR will be assigned an AR according to the FR's background and characteristics.

The main tasks of the assigned AR will be to support the activities of the FR in the following ways.

- Practical guidance and advice (monthly or so)
- Consulting as a wall hopper
- Arranging visits and interviews with potential clients, etc. as needed.
- Advice from "expert catalysts" (e.g. experts in specific technical fields, legal, IP or accounting professionals (e.g., attorneys, patent attorneys, accountants, etc.)) when deemed necessary by AR in its research activities.

③ Support for activity fees

An honorarium is paid at a fixed monthly amount (250,000 yen) as an activity fee for conducting the "Feasibility Study on Technology Application Ideas". This reimbursement will be paid to the individual FR after he/she submits a monthly report to NEDO describing the results of his/her activities as an FR and after NEDO confirms that the activities are in line with the purpose of this project. (Payment will not be made to the corporate account.)

This activity fee may be used to cover research and development expenses, as well as travel, transportation, and the purchase of supplies for your activities as an FR. (Please note that this activity fee is paid after withholding tax at the time of the monthly payment.＊。

Please note that if NEDO determine that there are issues with your activities as an FR—such as "showing no intention to participate in training or other activities," "failing to carry out activities," or "experiencing a significant decline in activities"—or if NEDO determine that you have submitted false reports, your activity fee may be suspended or you may be required to make a refund.

Furthermore, if NEDO determines that your activity status during the project period is unsatisfactory, you will be required to participate in the "(Provisional Title) Recovery Program." This program involves discussing the reasons for stagnant activity with multiple support staff to explore solutions. Please note that if you are designated for this program but fail to participate, NEDO will take measures to suspend payment of your activity fee.

＊ The withholding tax on the monthly activity fee of 250,000 yen would be 25,525 yen (250,000 ＊ 10.21%), so the payment is expected to be approximately 220,000 yen.
　（reference：https://www.nta.go.jp/taxes/shiraberu/taxanswer/gensen/2798.htm）

2. Requirements, etc.

2.1. Eligibility requirements

Applicants must meet all of the following.

・Reside in Japan and be able to work in Japan during the period of FR activity (commission).

(For foreign nationals, it must be confirmed that they meet the requirements to reside and work in Japan).

※If you are going to work abroad, even temporarily, as a result of other programs or study abroad, please notify us in advance. Even in such a case, the participant should participate in the training programs of this project as much as possible.

・The company must not have commercialized the proposed "idea for use of technology" and must not be operating as a legal entity.

・Must not be a representative of a corporation.

・If the applicant is affiliated with a company, research institute, etc. the applicant must be able to provide a letter of agreement from the head of the institute to engage in this activity.

(The term "head" generally refers to "the leader or head of a team or department to which a particular person belongs.") (The term "head of department" generally refers to "the leader or head of a team or department to which a particular person belongs. If you belong to a company or research institute, please obtain the approval of the head of your department, and if you are a student, please obtain the approval of your laboratory faculty or homeroom teacher).

・If a third party other than the proposer owns the rights to the technical seeds to be used, the proposer must obtain the consent of such third party to conduct activities as an FR using such technical seeds.

・If the applicant is a minor at the time of application, the applicant must be able to provide written consent from a parent or guardian at the time of commissioning as a FR. (Not required at time of application)

・No involvement with antisocial forces or related parties.

2.2. Notes

（1） Technology seeds to be used

・Proposals must be in the field of "deep tech" (artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace, energy, nanotechnology/materials, life sciences, IoT, etc., excluding nuclear energy) and have an R&D component. Proposals based on technology seeds that cannot be considered as part of the "Deep Tech" field or that have a small R&D component will not be considered for interview screening (see 5.2 Screening Methods below).

・Even if the applicant does not own the technological seeds to be used, it is possible to apply using technological seeds to which a third party other than the applicant has the rights. However, since FR is an "individual" activity, the following cases should be noted.

①Individuals who wish to purchase prototypes or other products related to the seeds of the technology from the third party may be denied.

②If an individual wishes to use a facility owned by a third party, he or she may be denied or restricted from doing so.

In light of these possibilities, please coordinate with the appropriate parties prior to your application to ensure that you are able to serve as an FR.

（2）For ideas on how to use the technology
・The term "technology seeds" refers to ideas about what social problems you want to solve or can solve with technology seeds, what kind of impact you can have on society, and how you can bring the technology to the world (how you can make the technology available to the world).
・The project must be different from the commercial projects in which the applicant or his/her institution is already engaged, and must have the potential to create a new business.

（3）Points to keep in mind when conducting research and development
FR activities are conducted as an "individual", please note the following points.
　①In some cases, materials and chemicals required for R&D cannot be purchased by individuals if they are hazardous materials, etc.
　②Individuals may be refused or restricted when they wish to use facilities of universities or research institutes.
　③Engaging in FR activities may cause issues with effort management at your affiliated organization.
In consideration of these possibilities, please make arrangements with the relevant parties in advance and be ready to conduct activities as an FR when applying.

（4）Application for those who are in a team
Individuals in teams may also apply.
In that case, please note the following
・Only applicants are eligible to participate in the interview screening (described below in 5.2 Screening Process). Team members are not allowed to participate.
・If selected as an FR, the honorarium will be paid to only one applicant.
・Team members may divide the activities among themselves. In this case, please describe the division of roles in the activity plan. In this case, please describe the division of roles in the activity plan, and in the activity report, describe who performed which activities and to what extent.

3. In activities as a FR

3.1. Preparation of activity plans and Activity reports, Payment of rewards

After the kick-off meeting (around April), those selected as FRs will be asked to prepare an "activity plan" outlining what they plan to do during the period of their activities as FRs, based on discussions with the ARs. After NEDO confirms the submitted Activity Plan, an honorarium for the preparation of the Activity Plan will be paid, and the FR activities will begin.

Based on the Activity Plan, the AR must submit a monthly "Activity Report" summarizing the results of his or her activities (the report, etc., must be reviewed by the AR before submission). (The AR is also asked to review the reports prior to submission.) In general, after reviewing the submitted reports, etc., the AR will pay the activity fee as an honorarium in the month following the month of the activity results (e.g., an honorarium for the August activity results will be paid in September).

Please be sure to submit the activity plan and activity report by the deadline, following the format specified by the secretariat, and be sure to fill in all the necessary information. Please note that failure to submit the report or failure to correct any errors pointed out by the secretariat will result in the report not being recognized as an achievement and the payment of rewards will not be possible.

3.2. Items to be prepared and submitted during the period of activity

In the FR, the following documents must be prepared and submitted with guidance and advice from the AR during the activity period.

Preparation of activity plans	A summary of the activities for the feasibility study of the idea of using the technology and the plan for payment of the necessary expenses. (In the case of major changes to the idea, such as a change in the technology to be used, the AR must be consulted and the Secretariat notified).
Activity reports	A summary of the details of the monthly activity performance, hours of activity, and actual payment of expenses for the duration of the activity (in addition, submit any other additional materials as necessary).
Pitch materials for debriefing sessions	Materials for interim and results debriefing meetings during the Activity period.
Report of Results	A summary of the results of the activities during the Activity Period and the results obtained through the activities (a report on the feasibility of the idea using the technological seeds) (to be submitted by the end of the Activity Period).
Surveys	Questionnaires regarding training and other activities during the activity period.

4. How to apply

4.1. Preparation of application documents

Applicants must prepare the following documents (maximum of 3 items) in Japanese in accordance with these guidelines and submit them via the upload address listed in "4.2. Documents that are not submitted or do not contain the required information will not be accepted.

Please note that applicants may apply concurrently to both the Pioneering Course and its sister program, the Rising Star Course, which primarily targets the Kyushu region and women. However, participation in both programs simultaneously is not permitted. Upon selection, you will be required to choose participation in one program only.

（１） Applicants' "Profile Sheet" [required for all applicants]
　　　・Please fill in all fields according to the format.

（２） Explanatory materials for "Ideas for the use of technology" considered by the applicant [required for all applicants]
　　　・There is no format, but please include all of the following items on the documents.
　　　・Please submit in PDF format. (Maximum of 30 pieces *Please note that points may be deducted if the number of pieces exceeds the limit).
　　　・During the interview review described in "5.2. Method of Review", you will be asked to provide a 3-minute explanation of your proposal using this document. (It is not necessary to use all of this document during the explanation.)

Items to be included in explanatory materials such as "Ideas for Technology Applications	
items mentioned	Contents of description
① Applicant information	・Name of applicant (representative), affiliation, field of expertise, and name of the theme to be implemented ・(If there are team members, the role of each team member) Reason for application, past efforts ・What you would like AR to do
② Technology seeds to be utilized	Please provide a brief description of the technological seeds you plan to use (e.g., what deep-tech field they fall into, what R&D elements they involve, etc.) so that non-specialists can understand them. If the applicant does not own the technological seeds, please describe the technological seeds to be used and how the applicant will seek ways to use them.
③Ideas for using the technology at this time	Using technological seeds, ・What social issues do we want to solve and how can we solve them? ・What is the potential impact on society? ・How will the technology be introduced to the world?
④Activities as FR	・Main activity location

	・Rough activity plan (overcoming development issues related to technological seeds, actions to realize ideas for technology utilization, etc.) ・Breakdown of necessary expenses (rough estimate is fine)
⑤Enthusiasm for working as a FR , Self-Promotion	Please feel free to describe your proposal without limitation.

（3）If the applicant belongs to a company, research institute, etc., a letter of approval from the head of the institute. [Only if applicable]

4.2. Where and How to Submit

Please complete the basic application information and questionnaire via the online form below, then upload your application documents.

【 Web input form for applications】

https://sys-startup.nedo.go.jp/form/pub/nedo04/kaitaku2026

- Uploaded files should be in a single zip file (5MB or less).
- Other submission methods (e.g., mail, fax, email, etc.) will not be accepted.
- A receipt number will be assigned at the time of submission.
- This number will be used to announce the results of the judging. Please make sure you have your number handy.
- If you are resubmitting your application due to changes or additions, please enter the receipt number from your previous submission in the WEB input form.
- In the case of a resubmission, you will be asked to resubmit all documents.
- If you resubmit your application, the review results will be announced using the resubmission receipt number. Therefore, please be sure to keep a record of the receipt number from your final submission.
- If multiple submissions are received from the same applicant, only the last submission will be considered valid.
- If the submission deadline is exceeded during the entry or upload process, the application will not be accepted.
- Please note that it may take some time to enter or upload the information, depending on communication traffic. Please be sure to submit your application well in advance of the submission deadline.

4.3. Application period

Monday, January 5, 2026 - Tuesday, February 24, 2026(noon)

Proposals not submitted by the deadline or incomplete documentation will not be accepted.

4.4． Notes on Application
（1）Prior coordination with affiliated organizations, interested parties, etc.

Applicants are responsible for confirming and coordinating in advance with the organization (company, research institution, university, etc.) to which the applicant (representative) and team members belong, as well as with any other interested organizations or parties, that the activities as FR will not violate the rights of third parties (intellectual property rights, use of research facilities and equipment, etc.).

（2）Incomplete application documents, etc.

- ・ If an applicant does not meet the eligibility requirements, or if an applicant fails to correct and resubmit an incomplete application by the deadline, the application itself will be deemed ineligible.

- ・ Proposals that do not fall within the Deep Tech area or that focus on a small R&D element will not be considered for interview review.

- ・ Submitted applications will not be returned.

（3）Confidentiality and handling of personal information

- ・ NEDO will keep the application documents for a certain period of time under strict control in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Guidelines for the Management of Administrative Documents under the Law on the Management of Public Records and Other Documents.

- ・ The application materials will be used for screening purposes. For this purpose, the application documents may be sent to external experts (evaluators) by mail, etc.

- ・ Personal information obtained at this time will be used only for screening purposes related to the selection process, except as required by law, etc., but may be used for statistical materials, etc., that do not identify specific individuals. NEDO and those whom NEDO deems necessary may also use the information to send information and materials for presentations, seminars, symposia, and other events. NEDO and those deemed necessary by NEDO may also use the information and materials to send information about seminars, symposia, etc.

- ・ NEDO may provide the application documents and information obtained at the time of application to the management corporation separately commissioned by NEDO and to other parties deemed necessary by NEDO to carry out the project.

5． Selection process

5.1． Flow from Application to Start of Activities

NEDO will select the applicants who satisfy "2.1. Eligibility requirement" on the basis of "5.2. Screening Method" and "5.3. Screening Criteria" below, and finally the final selection committee consisting of the SVr of the project and others will deliberate and decide the FR.

5.2. Method of Review

The review will consist of a written review and an interview review. The "interview review" will be conducted as follows。

- Screening method: online interview
- Interview time: approximately 20 minutes per applicant
- Implementation date: Mid to late March 2026 (tentative)

  ※Please be sure to check the NEDO website for the announcement of the fixed interview time by the secretariat. In principle, changes to the interview time are not permitted. In the unlikely event that you are unable to accommodate a change, please contact the secretariat with the reason for the change.

  ※If you do not show up for the interview 5 minutes after the start of the interview time, you will be considered to have declined the interview and no further arrangements will be made.

  ※Please prepare a stable internet connection and suitable surroundings that allow you to participate in the online interview with your camera on for Q&A.

  ※In the event that an interview cannot proceed smoothly due to the proposer's inadequate preparation of their communication environment or surrounding conditions on the day of the interview, we will generally not conduct a follow-up interview.
   (Except in cases of force majeure such as natural disasters.)

- Interview response: Interviews will be conducted with several ARs and others for each applicant.
- Content of interview: Confirmation items from the secretariat, self-introduction, explanation of proposal, Q&A, etc. (Applicants may be interviewed in Japanese or English)

  (Applicants may conduct interviews in Japanese or English.)

All screening will be conducted in private. We will not respond to inquiries regarding the specific details of the screening, including the progress of the screening. Please note that interviews may be recorded for the records of the secretariat.

5.3. Screening criteria

The judging will focus on personal qualities. The screening will be conducted mainly from the following perspectives.

①Is the person consistent with the purpose of the project?	・ Does the applicant have the will and ability to take positive action to solve specific social problems by utilizing the seeds of technology? ・ Do you need guidance and advice from AR and others?
②Is he or she a person to be trained?	・ Can you explain the contents of the technological seeds to be utilized and the action plan you are considering in a logical manner? ・ Do they have leadership, flexibility of thought, and cooperative spirit? ・ Are the planned activities appropriate for the realization of the idea of utilizing technology?
③Are the technological seeds to be utilized appropriate?	・ Are the technological seeds in the field of deep technology able to approach the solution of technological issues? ・ Are the technological seeds of potential, have an R&D element, and are they considered superior to competitors?
④Are ideas for the use of technology, etc. appropriate?	・ Is the idea unique and competitive? ・ Is the target market feasible?
⑤Other	・ If the applicant is under 40 years old at the time of application, a certain number of points will be given in the main screening process. ・ If the applicant is a NEDO award winner at a regional pitch event sponsored by NEDO, etc., certain preferential treatment will be given to the applicant during the screening process. ・ Applicants who are university students (including master's and doctoral programs) or technical college students at the time of application will receive a certain preferential treatment in the main review. ・ Submissions exceeding the specified page limit may be penalized.

5.4. Notification of selection results

（1） Results of documentary judgment

The date and time of the interview screening will be announced on NEDO's website together with the date and time of the interview screening using the application number listed in "4.2.

（2） Selection Results (for adoption or rejection)

NEDO will notify the relevant applicants. In the case of adoption, the AR in charge will be notified at the same time.

（3）Procedures after selection

Upon notification of the selection results, the selected candidates will be appointed as FRs. They will then prepare an activity plan with guidance and advice from the AR, submit the plan to NEDO, and can begin full-fledged activities as FRs when the plan is approved by NEDO (the period between the notification of the selection results and the approval date of the activity plan is considered "provisional activities").

5.5. Notification and Publication

For the selected FRs, the name of the FR, the name of the topic to be implemented, and the name of the AR in charge will be announced on the NEDO website. If, due to individual circumstances, it is not appropriate to announce the name of the selected person at this time, the announcement will be temporarily withheld and made public promptly and at an appropriate time after the start of the activity.

In the case of rejection, the name of the applicant will not be made public.

However, if NEDO deems it appropriate to respond to a request or inquiry from a relevant ministry or agency, it may disclose the applicant's name, etc., to the relevant agency for the limited purpose of use.

5.6. Schedule (tentative)

Year 2026

January 5: Open call for applications

February 24, noon: Deadline for applications

Late February - Early March: Document review

Mid-March to late March: Interview screening (final selection committee)

Late March: Determination of selected applicants

Early April to mid-April: Commissioning procedures as a FR

Late April: Preparation of activity plan

Late April: Commencement of activities in accordance with the activity plan

Year 2027

March 31: Project completion

6. Other notes

6.1. Tax returns

In general, the honoraria paid to FRs in this project are treated as miscellaneous income, and a tax return is required for the period in which the honoraria is paid.

However, the expenses used for FR activities may be treated as necessary expenses instead of income. (If your income is less than ¥200,000, you are not required to file a tax return.) To be considered as necessary expenses, the expenses used for personal use and those used for FR activities must be clearly separated, and receipts must be kept.

In addition, depending on the amount of income reported on the tax return, the following year's resident tax may be affected and current dependents may be disqualified from receiving support.

Please contact your local tax office for more detailed information on filing tax returns.

6.2. Revocation of FR

If the application documents and activity reports are found to be false, or if the SVr/AR/NEDO deems the activities as an FR to be inappropriate, the SVr/AR/NEDO may cancel the appointment as an FR and demand a refund of the fee paid, even after the appointment has been made.

6.3. FAQ

Please check the FAQs on NEDO's website (on the Call for Proposals page) for questions and specific examples of projects after the call for proposals and adoption, before applying.

6.4. Disclaimer

NEDO, the Operational Management Corporation, AR and SVr shall not be liable for any damages, etc. incurred by FR in the implementation of the project, except in the case of intent or gross negligence.

7. Briefing sessions

Several information sessions will be held online.

Please refer to the NEDO website (on the Call for Proposals page) for details of the dates and other information.

8. Contact details

Enquiries on this matter can <u>only be made by email</u>. Please contact the following address for further information. However, <u>enquiries concerning the selection process, reasons for rejection, etc. will not be accepted.</u>

＜Contact details＞

New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization

(NEDO)

NEP Secretariat, Startup Support Department

E-mail address: NEP@nedo.go.jp

This English version of the Public Call for Proposals has been prepared for reference purposes in cases where it is difficult to understand the Japanese version as it stands.

The Japanese version shall be considered the correct version.

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