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Japan's Strategic Push to Attract U.S. Researchers

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In recent years, research mobility has undergone a profound transformation. Once considered the premier destination for global scientific talent, the United States is now facing turbulence in its academic and research landscape. Significant federal funding cuts, restrictions on international student visas, and broader political pressures have created a climate of uncertainty for many U.S.-based scientists.

Amid this global competition, Japan has positioned itself as a compelling destination for international researchers. Its universities and research institutions are opening their doors to U.S. researchers, offering fellowships, academic positions, and dedicated programs to foster international collaboration. This offers U.S. scientists a supportive environment while advancing Japan's innovation capacity.

Washington CORE explores Japan's evolving research landscape, the programs and policies driving international recruitment, and how these initiatives are reshaping the global competition for scientific talent.

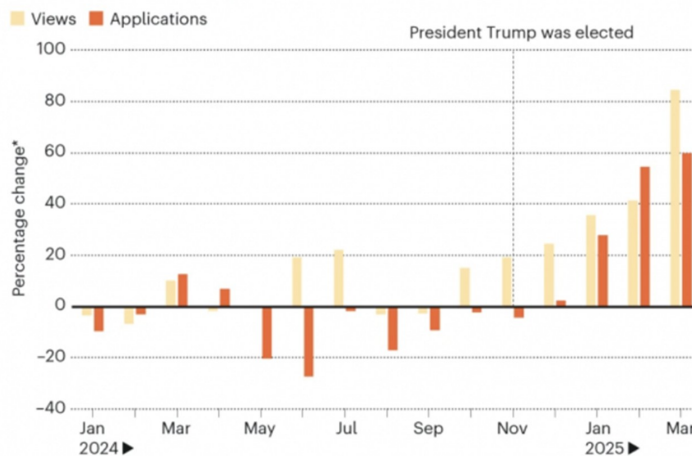


A Shifting Global Landscape: Why Talent Is Moving Abroad

The backdrop to this realignment is the increasingly uncertain research climate in the United States. Since 2025, the Trump administration has announced steep cuts to major scientific agencies, including proposals to reduce the NIH by 40% and the NSF by 55%. Universities have faced hiring freezes, restrictions on international student admissions, and limitations on diversity and inclusion programs. Harvard University, for example, briefly lost the ability to enroll international students before a court injunction reversed the decision.

A Nature poll underscored this instability, revealing that 75 percent of more than 1,600 U.S. scientists were considering opportunities abroad due to funding, a trend particularly acute among early-career researchers. Thousands have already lost jobs or grants, while institutions

in Europe, Canada, and Asia have reported increases in applications from U.S. scholars. Academic freedom, long viewed as a cornerstone of global collaboration, has also been cited as a growing concern.



Source: Nature¹

Japan's Strategic Response: Investment, Reform, and Global Outreach

The shifting research environment in the United States has prompted countries worldwide to step up recruitment efforts. France, Canada, and Australia, for example, have introduced initiatives to attract U.S. researchers. Yet while many of these programs focus on specific disciplines or shorter-term placements, Japan is embedding international recruitment into national policy. With sustained funding, systemic reforms, and a long-term vision for research ecosystems, Japan aims not just to draw talent but to make international researchers a permanent part of its scientific future.

This approach is also shaped by domestic realities. Facing demographic headwinds, most notably an aging population and declining birth rate, Japan has recognized the need to replenish its academic and scientific workforce with global talent. While cultural and language barriers and modest salary scales once limited its appeal, that narrative is evolving as institutions modernize and government support expands.

At the center of this shift lies the J-RISE initiative (Japan Research & Innovation for Scientific Excellence)² launched in June 2025 with a ¥100 billion (USD 700 million) investment. Funded through profits from Japan's ¥10 trillion University Endowment Fund, J-RISE is designed to attract and retain international researchers by integrating recruitment support, structural reforms, and promotional outreach.

Science and Technology Policy Minister Minoru Kiuchi emphasized that the goal is to “fundamentally improve Japan’s research environment and make Japan the most attractive country in the world for researchers.” With sustained funding and clear objectives, J-RISE is aligning ministries and institutions around a shared agenda. Its impact is beginning to take shape, particularly in university hiring initiatives and expanded fellowship opportunities.

Minoru Kiuchi, Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy, explaining the J-RISE Initiative



Source: JST³

Expanding Academic Pathways: University Initiatives and the JREC-IN Portal

Japan's universities have taken up this call with major international recruitment drives. Tohoku University has committed ¥30 billion (USD 209 million) to recruit 500 researchers over the next five years, signaling no fixed salary

cap to compete directly with U.S. and European institutions. Osaka University announced in May 2025 that it would host up to 100 young U.S. medical researchers, backed by up to ¥1 billion in funding for one-year posts aimed at early-career continuity. The University of Tokyo and Kyoto University have likewise earmarked new budgets for international hiring.⁴

To connect talent with opportunities, Japan has centralized recruitment through the JREC-IN Portal, managed by the Japan Science and Technology Agency. It is the country's largest academic job database, offering a bilingual interface where applicants can filter positions by field, institution, or appointment type. Beyond postings, the portal provides information on eligibility requirements and institutional contacts, helping reduce barriers for international scholars. In 2024 alone, it listed more than 45,000 positions, many open to overseas applicants.

Together, these initiatives and the JREC-IN platform are making recruitment more transparent and accessible, ensuring that global talent can navigate Japan's academic ecosystem.



Source: JREC-IN⁵

Fellowships: Flexible Pathways for International Researchers

Alongside university hiring, Japan offers fellowships that draw researchers at every career stage into its academic system. The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) runs the flagship International Fellowships for Research in Japan,⁶ covering the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Programs include the Invitational Fellowships, which provides opportunities to spend anywhere from two months to nearly a year in Japan, working alongside host institutions on collaborative projects, the Standard Postdoctoral Fellowship which offers one- to two-year appointments that allow foreign scientists to establish deeper collaborations, often serving as a platform to longer-term positions in Japanese academia, and shorter programs, such as the two-month Summer Program, available to citizens of the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Canada, and Sweden and the Short-Term Fellowship, which provides one- to two-month placements for U.S. and European researchers seeking focused projects with leading Japanese labs.

In addition, the Hitachi International Affairs Fellowship, administered by the Council on Foreign Relations,⁷ allows U.S.

professionals to spend three to twelve months in Japan on policy research. Together, these programs expand networks, deepen ties, and offer entry points into Japan's research ecosystem.

Success Stories: U.S. Researchers in Japan

Behind the policies and funding figures are the experiences of researchers whose careers have been reshaped in Japan. According to JSPS, short-term placements frequently lead to longer collaborations, with many fellows returning for successive programs or moving into permanent roles.

One JSPS alumnus emphasized that securing his own funding gave him autonomy comparable to prestigious U.S. or EU grants, while also providing institutional support such as guest housing and English-speaking administration. Another highlighted the flexibility of JSPS programs, noting that her fellowship sparked collaborations with colleagues at Osaka Metropolitan University and enabled her to pursue research in Kenya alongside Japanese partners.

Beyond professional gains, alumni also point to lifestyle and cultural strengths that enriched their stay. They noted that Japan's efficient public transit and safe urban environments, strong international networks fostered through JSPS programs, and the chance to immerse themselves in a culture that values organization, collaboration, and respect for research made daily life easier and encouraged longer stays.

By combining autonomy, supportive infrastructure, and pathways to collaboration, JSPS programs have provided U.S. researchers with opportunities to build lasting collaborations and, in some cases, long-term careers in Japan.

Japan as a Rising Advocate for Science

Japan has been steadily building a research model aimed at long-term global competitiveness. Through large-scale funding, targeted recruitment, and world-class fellowships, it is demonstrating a serious commitment to international collaboration. Its advantages are reinforced by measurable strengths, such as R&D spending exceeding 3% of GDP, among the highest in the OECD, flagship institutions such as RIKEN, which employs thousands of scientists with an annual budget of about ¥88 billion, and \$200 billion in annual R&D expenditures, ranking third globally.

Japan is thus transitioning from a passive to a proactive player in global science. For scholars seeking stability, resources, and global connectivity, it is increasingly recognized as one of the world's most compelling destinations for scientific discovery and long-term careers in research.

End note

¹ <https://www.hpcwire.com/2025/04/24/nature-reports-a-u-s-science-brain-drain-has-begun/>

² <https://pitmc.go.jp/>

³ <https://sj.jst.go.jp/news/202507/n0711-02k.html>

⁴ <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20250610134526796>

⁵ <https://jrecin.jst.go.jp/seek/SeekTop?ln=1>

⁶ https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-inv_researchers/index.html

⁷ <https://www.cfr.org/fellowships/international-affairs-fellowship-japan>

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