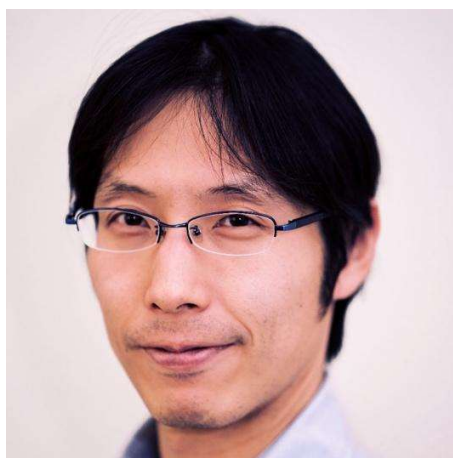


## Interview with Featured Boston Mentor: Hiroto Kambara



**Hiroto Kambara**  
Principal Scientist  
[Atlas Venture NewCo](#)

**Q1: Currently, you are working as Principal Scientist at Atlas Venture. How did you get into your current work?**

I used to work on a relatively new target molecule in inflammation at Harvard Medical School/Boston Children's Hospital, trying to understand the molecular mechanism of immune response. Interestingly, an Atlas Venture-backed biotech company called Quench Bio was trying to develop small-molecule drugs that inhibit the same target molecule that I was working on. Eventually, I had a chance to meet the founders of Quench Bio, and after talking to them, I decided to join the company. After 2 years, unfortunately, Quench Bio decided to shut down operations due to a difficulty of drugging the target, and I lost my job. Fortunately, a brand-new biotech company was founded by Atlas Venture at that time, and I was offered a position as a Principal Scientist at the new company.

**Q2: Are you originally from the Boston area? What is your impression of Boston as a city to be an entrepreneur?**

I am originally from Japan and came to the US in 2012. Initially, I lived in Cleveland, Ohio, for 2 years, then moved to Boston in 2014. Compared to Japan and Ohio, my first impression of Boston was full of opportunity. The city is surrounded by world's top-ranked universities such as Harvard and MIT, and big pharma and many small biotech companies. There are also co-working spaces like CIC and shared laboratory spaces. The ecosystem in Boston is well established, and it is a very supportive environment to be an entrepreneur.

**Q3: What projects are you working on currently?**

As a principal scientist at an early-stage biotech company, my role is to deliver one or more preclinical drug candidates by leading drug discovery programs. Our company's proprietary platform enables us to find various "undruggable" target molecules. With the help of this

platform, we identified high-value targets and narrowed down the focus to key disease proteins. The goal is to find promising drug candidates that inhibit the protein's function, which hopefully will reflect therapeutic response in certain diseases. (Currently our company is in the "stealth mode," where public information is not available, but it will be available soon!)

**Q4: How has your experience been mentoring Japanese startups through CIC's partnership with JETRO?**

This is my first time mentoring a Japanese startup. It has been only about 2 months, but so far it has been a great experience. The company has a unique technology and product, and more importantly, I can feel the company's passion for the business. I think the JETRO acceleration program is a great opportunity for Japanese startups that are ready to take their business to the next level in the US. It is comprehensive and has great courses with practical advice from professional mentors who have years of experience in the biotech industry.

**Q5: What do you think are the challenges facing a Japanese startup that is trying to expand its business in the Boston area?**

Personally, I think the challenges for Japanese startups are language and cultural differences in business. Science in Japan is one of the top-ranked in the world, and I do believe some of the technologies in Japan are very advanced. However, it needs to be delivered in a way that non-Japanese can appreciate and buy into. People in Japan are generally not exposed to English and US culture. These can be hurdles to effective communication and prevent them from having the opportunities in the US/Boston.

**Q6: What advice do you have for Japanese startups that are exploring business opportunities in the Boston area?**

I would not have had a chance to work at biotech startups in Boston if I had not been here in the US in the first place. Build your professional network outside of Japan. Pandemic has made it easy to access people all over the world via online tools. There are many startup incubators and accelerators in Boston, where Japanese startups could get their business to "take root" in Boston. (Take advantage of the JETRO accelerator program as well!)