

# **Application Guideline for J-StarX AI Program**

## **Purpose**

The "J-StarX AI Program" aims to foster the growth of AI-based startups in Japan and facilitate their expansion into international markets, focusing on the United States. This program will provide specialized AI mentors to support selected startups. The startups will participate in a structured program that includes mentoring and travel to the US for key AI conferences and events, facilitating connections with potential partners, investors, advisory boards, customers, and joint venture partners (hereafter referred to as **Partners**) to establish a strong foundation for product-market fit and customer discovery.

## **Program outline**

JETRO will provide an acceleration program up to 15 startups in cooperation with the Accelerator partner(s). The program structure and schedule may be flexibly adjusted based on the wishes of the Accelerator(s).

Main Program: November 2025 to March 2026

Immersion Program: 5-10 business days

Including...

- 1-2 days Demo Day (in Japan and in the US)
- Tokyo Workshop (in person)
- Workshops & Mentoring
- Immersion Program in the US
- Presentation & PR Support

## **Participants**

JETRO will make an open call for this program and will accept applications from startup companies. Accelerator(s) will be involved in selecting suitable startups to participate in the program together with JETRO. During the selection process, time for interviews with applicants (optional) will be scheduled. Accelerator will be required to customize the Program based on the qualified startups' products, services, and needs. The eligible companies will be Seed to Series A\*.

\*Note: Seed to Series A is based on funding received in Japan by mostly Japanese investors. As such, these rounds tend to be much less than Silicon Valley startups.

## **Service Description**

### **a. Initial Startup Selection**

- JETRO will organize and collect pitch decks from AI startups interested in joining the program.
- The contractor/JETRO will conduct a document screening and an interview process to select 10-15 AI startups to participate in the program.
- The screening and interview process will involve:
  1. Reviewing the pitch decks provided by JETRO
  2. Evaluating startups based on criteria such as:
    - Innovation and uniqueness of AI technology
    - Market potential and scalability
    - Team capabilities and experience
    - Alignment with program goals
  3. Collaborating with JETRO to finalize the selection

b. Japan in-person Program (November 2025) For 10-15 startups

- The contractor will organize an AI-specific 3-5day Accelerator Workshop.
- The contractor will provide a list of potential AI experts, mentors, and investors, and together with JETRO, select some experts to participate in the event.
- A Custom Playbook will be developed for each startup.
- The contractor will organize travel arrangements for themselves and mentors, including accommodation, travel, and event attendance in Japan.

c. Mentoring For 10-15 startups

- The contractor will assign a lead mentor for each startup and charge on a per-unit basis, with up to 20 hours of mentoring per startup during this period.
- Mentoring will emphasize the latest AI market trends, key requirements, competitive environments, and hands-on preparation for the demo day.
- Mentors will advise startups on refining their approaches, pitch decks, and messaging for effective communication with potential partners.
- Mentoring can be conducted online or in person, as per the mentor's and startup's preference.

d. Online session (February 2026) For 10-15 startups

- 1-2 seminars or interactive group sessions should be included each week. The session length is about 60 to 90 minutes including discussions.
- Centering on the execution of Customer Discovery and the Go-to-Market strategy, the mentors shall appropriately examine and design the content in line with the needs and growth stage of each selected company.

e. Entrepreneur Meetup and Mentoring in Tokyo (February 2026) For 10-15 startups

- The contractor will return to Japan to participate in the program demo-day.
- This will include a one-day Demo Day preparation session and a half-day Demo Day event.
- Additional AI tech investors outside the mentors will participate in the Demo Day.
- During the demo-day, JETRO/Investor/Contractor will select the top 3-5 startups to advance to the Bay Area segment of the program.
- The contractor will organize travel arrangements for themselves and investors, including accommodation, travel, and event attendance in Japan.

#### f. Immersion Program in the US (March 2026) For 3-5 startups

- The purpose is to optimize networking opportunities and engagement with potential partners and stakeholders in the US AI ecosystem.
- The selected startups and their mentors will travel to San Francisco for a 1–2 week immersion program.
- The contractor will organize workshops/sessions on AI startup scaling in the US area.
- The contractor will organize 2 informal VC dinners for startups with at least 6 VCs.
- Mentors will facilitate schedule arrangements during this period, including participation in key AI conferences, events, and meetings, with a target of 10 to 20 key appointments per startup.
- 6 new AI Tech experts in the Bay Area will provide additional mentoring to the startups.
- Online meetings may be arranged as needed to complement in-person interactions.

#### g. Travel Arrangements

- The contractor will coordinate logistics for accommodations, travel, and event attendance for the lead mentors providing in-person support to startups in the US.
- The contractor will also coordinate logistics for startups attending events and setting up booths during their travel period in the US.

### **Language**

English.

## **Program Schedule**

The contractor will propose a tentative schedule for the above services. Upon contract execution, the contractor will work with JETRO to finalize the schedule leading up to the start of the program.

## **Budget**

Maximum US\$485,575.00

Please specify the pricing for each program in the proposal.

①Japan in-person program (5days) US\$---

②Mentoring (2 months, 20 hours per startups) minimum 10 startups US\$---

\*Plus US\$---per each additional startup, up to 15 startups in total. (Including the cost of the selection process.)

③Online session (8 weeks) minimum 10 startups US\$---

\*Plus US\$---per each additional startup, up to 15 startups in total. (Including the cost of the selection process.)

④Immersion program (2 weeks for 3-5 startups) US\$---

## **Term of contract**

The term of the contract is from the contract start date through March 30, 2026. The Accelerator(s) is required to regularly report on each company's business progress to JETRO. JETRO demands the submission of two official reports aimed at facilitating payments—one interim and one final. These reports must include detailed descriptions of the program structure, evaluations, delivery specifics, achievements and feedback from the participating companies, the impact of Demo Day, and promotional activities. The format will be provided by JETRO.

## **Conditions for the Contractor(s) engaged in the project**

- a. Has an established organizational structure and capabilities to manage and complete the project properly. Has a global network, and knowledge necessary for the implementation of the project.
- b. Can promptly share any changes or updates that might impact the arrangement process.
- c. Will conduct regular internal meetings with JETRO to report on the business progress of each participating company.
- d. Has broad and effective experience of implementation of acceleration programs in the world. Has experience of building unicorns in the past five years (desirable).
- e. Has investment arms or has close connections with world top tier VCs.
- f. Can adhere to JETRO's requests, as well as report to, communicate with, and consult with JETRO in an adequate manner. Can present efficient data for the

- program evaluation.
- g. Has knowledge and systems/tools for handling confidential and/or personal information accordingly.
  - h. Can comply with applicable laws and regulations, especially the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and state unfair competition laws.

## **Payment**

In compensation for the services to be provided by Accelerator(s) to JETRO, JETRO shall pay a total amount to Accelerator(s) in three payments.

The first payment will be 40% of proposed price and made by JETRO to Accelerator(s) upon execution of this agreement. The second payment will be 30% of proposed price and made by JETRO to Accelerator(s) after the selection of companies for the immersion program

The third payment shall be made by JETRO to the Accelerator(s) upon completion of the program and upon receipt of the final report and invoice from the Accelerator(s).

The amount of such payment shall be the actual value minus the total amount already paid by JETRO to the Accelerator(s). Payment will be made by wire transfer to Accelerator(s) bank account designated by Accelerator(s) in writing.

Necessary adjustments will be made according to the number of participants.

## **About JETRO**

JETRO is a government organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping Japanese startups and scaleups maximize their global potential.