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Research Funding in Japan: A Survey Report

Survey Design and Methodology

The survey consisted of 37 questions, divided into 5 broad categorizes as follows:

Question Numbers	Broad Category
1–12	General Information
13–19	International Funding Agencies
20–25	Writing Grant Applications
26–30	Unutilized Grants and Inadequate Grants
31–37	Demographics

The survey was conducted in the following ways:
1. As part of the "Surveys" section in the Center for Research Writing Resources website
2. Newsletter to Editage.jp clients (Editage Tsushin)
3. Newsletter to Center for Research Writing Resources members
4. Through Native Eigo-juku—a popular mail magazine from Editage

Duration of the survey: February 17, 2007 to July 31, 2007

Survey population: Japanese researchers who are members of the Center for Research Writing Resources, clients of the English editing services provided by Editage, or Native Eigo-juku subscribers.

Languages used for the survey: English and Japanese

Issues Covered by the Survey

This survey was designed to understand where and how Japanese researchers apply for grants and the problems they face when applying. The assessment was not done by an external agency, but was done by Japanese researchers themselves, through answering 37 questions in the survey.

This report will help us understand:
1. Whether Japanese researchers apply for grants and for what purpose.
2. The frequency of application for international grants and which funding agencies are considered the best.
3. Which parts of an international grant application Japanese researchers find most difficult to write.
4. How Japanese researchers respond when the funds granted are too much or too little for their requirements.

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Survey Results and Analysis

The survey results and analysis are presented here.

Total number of responses received: 42

General Information

Majority of the researchers who participated in the survey
- work in a university department (50%)
- have obtained grants from Japanese government funding agencies (66%)
- have applied for a grant because university/organization funds are not sufficient (62%)
- have applied for 1–5 grants until now (48%)
- have a success rate of 1% to 25% for obtaining grants through the applications (43%)
- approach a funding agency that is well-known in their field of study (45%)

According to the survey participants, the top three funding agencies in Japan are
- Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)
- Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST)

In response to the question on what problems researchers who have been awarded a grant from a Japanese funding agency have faced, majority researchers (64%) have stated that filling too many forms was a problem.

Majority of the researchers have stated that
- their funding agency does not pay overhead costs to their university/department/laboratory (70%)
- the time they spend on applying for grants interferes with the time they have to set aside for research (80%)
- their funding agencies expect to obtain a report at the end of the research project (68%)
- their main funding agency prefers if they publish abroad, in an English-language journal, with international peer review

International Funding Agencies

Majority of the researchers who participated in the survey (73%) have not applied for a grant from an international/foreign agency. Among these, the majority (64%) did not apply because of lack of knowledge about the availability of international grants in their field of research.

Among the researchers who have applied for a grant from an international/foreign agency (27%), the majority
- applied to an international agency and not a Japanese one because the agency is well-known for funding research in their field of study (50%)
- have stated that difficulty in writing the application in English and in deciding which agency to apply to were the problems they faced while applying to an international funding agency (73%)

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Among the researchers who have been awarded a grant from an international funding agency, the majority (84%) have stated that the problems they faced were as follows: grant did not reach them on time (transfer of funds from abroad took a long time) and language problems (all communication had to be in English).

According to the survey participants, the top three international/foreign funding agencies in Japan are

- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- National Science Foundation (NSF)
- Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP)

Of the 42 survey participants, 53% feel it would be useful to have a bilingual list of Japanese and international funding agencies, with links, on the website of the Center for Research Writing Resources, 16% feel they would not find such a list useful, and 31% feel they would find it useful to have a list that is sorted according to the field of study.

Writing Grant Applications

Among the different parts of the grant application, majority of the researchers (85%) find it most difficult to write the research proposal/narrative. When writing the research narrative, majority of the researchers (85%) find it difficult to state the research question precisely and describe the experimental design briefly but clearly.

According to majority of the researchers (64%), the main reasons for rejection of a grant application are as follows: research proposal/narrative is not well-written and language problems in international grants (written English is not good enough). Further, majority of the researchers (58%) feel that the main reasons for a grant application to succeed are as follows: research proposal/narrative is well-written and the topic for research is of interest to the funding agency.

Of the survey participants, 73% have never needed to write a grant application in English. Among the participants who have written an application in English, 22% have used a professional translation service, 33% have no problem writing in English, and 44% have taken the help of friends/colleagues for translation.

Further, 30% have used a professional editing service, 30% did not feel the need to use a professional editing service, and 40% have taken the help of friends/colleagues to edit their applications.

Unutilized Grants and Inadequate Grants

Of the survey participants, 45% had funds left unutilized toward the end of the grant period and 55% had utilized all the funds. Majority of the participants who had unutilized funds (64%) purchased some book/equipment/materials needed by their laboratory. Of these participants, 24% needed permission from the funding agency in order to finish the unutilized funds and 76% did not need permission.

Of the survey participants, 40% have faced a shortage of funds and 60% have never faced this problem. Majority of the researchers who faced a shortage of funds (50%) requested help from a colleague (who they knew had unutilized funds).

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Demographics

Majority of the survey participants have a permanent, full-time, teaching and research position (36%), followed by participants with a permanent, full-time, mainly research position (26%).

Majority of the survey participants (56%) fall in the age range of 36-45 years, followed by participants in the age range of 26-35 years (28%).

Of the survey participants, 76% have a PhD, 21% have a master's degree, and 3% are involved in postdoctoral work/have a postdoctoral degree.

The survey participants belong to diverse fields such as neuroscience, environmental studies, economics, machinery, and computer science.

The average number of years that the survey participants have been working/doing research after their final degree is 8.

Summary

This survey was undertaken to understand where and how Japanese researchers apply for grants and the problems they face when applying.

Total number of responses received: 42

From the results, we conclude that in the case of Japanese researchers who do not apply for a grant from an international/foreign agency, the main reason is lack of knowledge about the availability of international grants in their field of research.

In the case of Japanese researchers who apply to international funding agencies, difficulty in writing the application in English and in deciding which agency to apply to are the main problems encountered.

Majority of the researchers find writing the research proposal/narrative the most difficult among all the sections of the grant application and feel that the main reasons for rejection are (i) research proposal/narrative is not well-written and (ii) language problems in international grants (written English is not good enough).

It would be easier for Japanese researchers to apply to international funding agencies if they have a list of agencies in their field of study. Japanese researchers would find it easier to write a grant application if they learn how to write the research proposal/narrative effectively.

To that end, we shall be bringing out subject-specific lists of agencies and e-books that will help Japanese researchers in writing an effective grant application.

Questionnaire

Section 1: General Information

1. Where do you perform your research? (You may select more than one option.)

    *   University department
    *   Government research center
    *   Private research center
    *   Hospital
    *   Biotech/Pharma company
    *   Other (please specify)

2. From where do you obtain the funds for your research?

    *   Grant from your University or organization
    *   Grant from Japanese govt. funding agency
    *   Grant from a private Japanese funding agency
    *   Grant from an international funding agency
    *   Combination of grants from University/organization and another source
    *   Other (please specify)

3. Why did you find it necessary to apply for a grant? (You may select more than one option.)

    *   University/organization funds are not sufficient
    *   You need additional funds to support a research assistant/student
    *   Your research project uses very expensive materials for which additional funds are required
    *   You need money for travel (to collect data/present your research)
    *   You need to pay overhead costs to your University/organization for the laboratory you use
    *   Other (please give details below)

4. How many grants have you applied for until now?

    *   None
    *   1-5
    *   6 to 10
    *   More than 10

5. What per cent of your applications were successful in obtaining a grant?

    *   0%
    *   1-25%
    *   26-50%
    *   51-75%
    *   76-100%

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6. How do you find a funding agency?

   - The agency is well-known for funding research in my field of study
   - Through an internet search
   - Recommendation by colleagues who have obtained grants from a particular agency
   - University/Organization provides a list of funding agencies to apply to for grants
   - Other (please specify)

7. In your opinion, which are the top three funding agencies in Japan?

   - 1.
   - 2.
   - 3.

8. If you have been awarded a grant from a Japanese funding agency, what problems have you faced? (You may select mo re than one option.)

   - Delays in receiving funds
   - Too many forms to fill out (i.e., too much paper work)
   - Interference in your research by the funding agency
   - Other (please give details)

9. Does your funding agency pay overhead costs to your University/Department/Laboratory?

   - Yes
   - No

10. Does the time you spend on applying for grants interfere with the time you have set aside for research?

    - Yes
    - No

11. What do funding agencies expect to obtain from you? (You may select more than one option.)

    - Nothing
    - A report at the end of your research project
    - Publication(s) of your research in peer-reviewed journals
    - Presentation of your work in conferences
    - A write-up of your work in the agency's newsletter

12. For your main funding agency, is it better if you publish:

    - locally, in a Japanese-language journal, without peer review
    - abroad, in an English-language journal, with international peer review
    - neither of the above, any publication is acceptable, with or without peer review
    - neither of the above, any peer-reviewed publication is acceptable

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Section 2: International Funding Agencies

13. Have you ever applied for a grant from an international/foreign agency?

   - Yes (Go to questions 14, 15, and 16)
   - No (Go to question 17)

14. Why did you apply to an international agency and not a Japanese one? (You may select more than one option.)

   - The agency is well-known for funding research in my field of study
   - My colleague suggested I apply to this agency
   - There are no Japanese agencies providing funds for the subject I wish to study
   - Obtaining a grant from this particular agency is very prestigious
   - Other (please specify)

15. What problems did you face while applying to an international funding agency? (You may select more than one option.)

   - Language problems (Difficulty in writing the application in English)
   - Application format different from Japanese agencies, found it confusing
   - Difficulty deciding which agency to apply to
   - Difficulty in doing a bibliography search from international journals
   - Could not meet deadlines due to postal/other delays
   - Other (please specify)

16. If you have been awarded a grant from an international funding agency, what problems have you faced? (You may select more than one option.)

   - Grant did not reach me on time (transfer of funds from abroad took a long time)
   - Too much paperwork required for release of funds
   - Language problems (all communication had to be in English)
   - Other (please specify)

17. If you have never applied for grant from an international funding agency, please tell us why. (You may select more than one option.)

   - Did not know which international grants were available in my field of research
   - No international grants are available in my field of research
   - Did not feel comfortable writing the application in English
   - I don't think I can get a international grant as my work is too Japan-focused
   - Only very senior researchers get foreign grants
   - Other (please specify)

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18. In your opinion, which are the top 3 international/foreign funding agencies?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

19. Would you find it useful to have a bilingual list of Japanese and international funding agencies, with links, on the website of the Center for Research Writing Resources?

- Yes
- No
- Yes, if sorted according to field of study

Section 3: Writing Grant Applications

20. Which part of the grant application do you find the most difficult to write?

- Cover letter
- Title
- Research proposal/narrative
- Bibliography
- Curriculum Vitae
- Correspondence with foreign co-applicants, while preparing the grant application

21. When writing the "Research narrative" for the grant application, which of the following do you find difficult? (You may select more than one option.)

- Creating a descriptive title for the proposed study
- Stating your research question precisely
- Explaining your hypothesis clearly
- Describing your experimental design briefly but clearly
- Staying within the word limit
- Other (please specify)

22. What do you think are the main reasons for rejection of a grant application? (You may select more than one option.)

- Research proposal/narrative is not well-written
- Bibliography is not well-researched
- The funding agency does not fund your specific area of research (inappropriate selection of agency)
- International agencies are not interested in Japan-focused research
- Language problems in international grants (written English is not good enough)
- Ethical concerns have not been addressed
- Other (please specify)

23. Please tell us what you think are the main reasons for a grant application to succeed. (You may select more than one option.)

- Research proposal/narrative is well-written
- Appropriate selection of funding agency
- The topic for research is of interest to the funding agency
- Well-researched bibliography
- Past research/publications of the applicant
- Other (please specify)

24. When writing a grant application in English, have you ever used a professional translation service?

- Yes
- No, I have no problem writing in English
- No, my friends/colleagues help me translate the application
- Never needed to write a grant application in English

25. When writing a grant application in English, have you ever used a professional editing service?

- Yes
- No, I do not need to
- No, my friends/colleagues edit my application for me
- Never needed to write a grant application in English

Section 4: Unutilized Grants and Inadequate Grants

26. Have you ever had funds left unutilized towards the end of your grant period?

- Yes
- No

27. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please tell us what you did with the unutilized portion of the grant. (You may select more than one option.)

- Returned the money to the funding agency
- Used the money for another project I was doing
- Passed on the money to a colleague who was facing a shortage of funds
- Bought some book/equipment/materials needed by my laboratory
- Used the money to cover publication expenses associated with the project
- Other (please specify)

28. In order to finish the unutilized funds as you have just explained, did you need permission from the funding agency?

- Yes
- No

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29. Have you ever faced a shortage of funds for research?

- Yes
- No

30. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please tell us how you solved this problem. (You may select more than one option.)

- Requested help from a colleague (who you knew had unutilized funds)
- Asked for more funds from your primary funding agency
- Obtained a short-term grant from another agency
- Other (please specify)

Section 5: Demographics

To make this survey more accurate, please tell us about yourself through your responses to the questions below. You are not required to enter your name or address.

31. What kind of work position do you have?

- Doctoral research
- Postdoctoral research
- Limited research contact (not postdoctoral)
- Permanent, part-time, teaching and research
- Permanent, part-time, mainly teaching
- Permanent, part-time, mainly research
- Permanent, full-time, teaching and research
- Permanent, full-time, mainly teaching
- Permanent, full-time, mainly research
- Other (please specify)

32. Which city are you located in?

33. Which age range do you fall into.

- 25 years or under
- 26-35 years
- 36-45 years
- 46-55 years
- 56-65 years
- over 65 years

34. What is the highest degree you hold in your subject?

- Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA/BSc)
- Master's degree (e.g., MA/MSc)
- PhD
- Postdoctoral work/degree
- Other (please specify)

35. What is your field of study?

36. For how many years have you been working/doing research after your final degree?

37. Please enter your e-mail address here, if you would like to receive a copy of the survey report.