PRESS RELEASE

Inviting startups to apply for the NINJA Business Plan Competition in response to COVID-19

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the implementing agency of Official Development Assistance from the Japanese government, announces the launch of the NINJA Business Plan Competition for businesses emerging during the COVID-19 outbreak. NINJA is short for Next Innovation with Japan; the project was launched this year (https://weetracker.com/2020/03/03/japan-launches-project-ninja-for-startups/).

I- Target and sectors

The NINJA Business Plan Competition will target startups and organizations from 19 African countries, including Mauritius. The application is open for startups/organizations in all sectors with a specific focus on emerging businesses in COVID-19-related fields including, but not limited to:

1. Health: Online healthcare support; disease-testing solutions; medical data sharing and privacy protection solutions; distribution of drugs and medical equipment; IoT, including 3D printers, in the medical field
2. Disaster management: Geo-tracking during disasters; emergency information dissemination
3. Business services: Support for remote workers; efficient management/operation of online events
4. Education sector: Remote learning support
5. Food and agriculture: Efficient food/commodity distribution technology
6. Finance: Contactless transactions/payment; lending/insurance services to SMEs and individuals
7. Logistics: delivery service, urban mobility management
8. Other: Substituting imported goods with local innovative technology
II- Eligibility Criteria
To take part in JICA’s NINJA Business Plan Competition, startups must:
- Have their head office or a branch in one of the target countries.
- Be a profit/non-profit organization registered as an independent legal entity. Proposals from individuals will not be considered.
- Have a very strong management team of at least 2 people.
- Have innovative product(s) or service(s) in response or adoptable to the Pandemic and post-Pandemic society OR have a feasible business plan to create prototypes (MVP).

III- Tentative Schedule
- Application deadline: July 29, 2020
- Interview of selected startups: Mid-Late August, 2020
- Final selection: September, 2020
- Contract with JICA

IV- Note
- The proposal should introduce some level of innovation in terms of a business model, a new product or service that can be more actively used, and/or profitability in the current and post COVID-19 era.
- Proposals should be as commercially-oriented as possible.
- JICA may cover the budget of the activities up to USD 30,000. The use of proceeds will cover costs associated with the proposed activities including, 1) remuneration of staffs, 2) other expenses, and 3) Value added taxes.
- JICA’s finance is not equity nor debt. However, successful applicants will be obliged to report the progress of their activities, by which JICA will make disbursement.
- JICA may establish an evaluation board with outside evaluator experts under strict confidentiality to evaluate proposals.
- JICA will request the startups invited to be interviewed online to submit additional documents/a pitch deck if necessary
<Contract with JICA>
- When applying, each company is to submit a business plan with KPIs that can be achieved within about 6 months.
Before the contract, JICA examines the proposed activity and the validity of the budget (each expense item) and JICA may request the additional documents to determine the detailed activity in the contract.

After the contract is signed, startups/organizations must submit monthly reports about the KPIs to JICA. (The duration of the contract will be about 6 months.)

JICA will make payments based on the progress of the proposed activities and the submission of the progress reports and/or the expense report with receipt.

The payment schedule will be determined by JICA and no advance payment at the commencement of the contract.

<JICA’s consideration about the follow-up support related to this competition>
- A final competition among the successful applicants from each country
- Matching events to connect the successful applicants with investors/business partners
- Visit to Japan, as a part of investment/business matching

To apply for the NINJA Business Plan Competition, please click here: https://forms.gle/8E5RQuchUsU5P8Jt7

For any queries about the competition, please get in touch with us at the following email address: edgps@jica.go.jp