

Call for Collaborators to Conduct Case Studies

under

IRCI Project ‘Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ecosystems’ (FY 2026–2027)

IRCI will launch a new project titled ‘Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ecosystems’ (FY 2026–2027) and is inviting collaborators to conduct case studies within the framework of this project. Each case study should be a collaborative effort with local communities, aiming to design and implement pilot programs for safeguarding the community’s heritage by mobilizing intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

*Application should be submitted to IRCI by **30 January 2026**.*

Background

Despite its close connection with local environments and communities, ICH remains underrecognized and underutilized in the context of SDGs. In SDG target 11.4, which calls for safeguarding the world’s cultural and natural heritage, the role of ICH is often overlooked. Similarly, a vast body of local and indigenous knowledge and practices contributing to the protection of ecosystems and environment are not fully acknowledged in the goals such as SDGs 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land).

To address these challenges, IRCI initially examined how ICH has contributed to the safeguarding of tangible cultural heritage, cultural landscapes, and related contexts.¹ Over time, this focus expanded to include the conservation of ecological environments and landscapes, which has shaped its current initiative. IRCI has conducted a preliminary study on the safeguarding of ICH and Ecosystems to explore the complex relationship between ICH and environmental sustainability. The study reinforced the understanding that safeguarding approaches need to be community-based and implemented through comprehensive initiatives encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects as well as culture and nature.

Drawing on this preliminary study and related efforts, IRCI will launch a new project, *Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ecosystems*.

¹ *Research on ICH Contributing to SDGs: Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities* (FY 2022–2024). Project report is available at: https://www.irci.jp/wp_files/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/IRCI_Intangible-Cultural-Heritage-and-Sustainable-Communities-in-the-Asia-Pacific-Region.pdf

Objectives for implementing case studies

In this project, case studies will be conducted on practical initiatives for heritage safeguarding in landscapes recognized for natural heritage or protected ecosystems (including UNESCO-designated sites such as Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks). These initiatives should be designed and implemented in collaboration with communities in the Asia-Pacific region to identify and test strategies for integrating ICH into efforts to conserve natural heritage and other environmental resources. Through these case studies, IRCI seeks to deepen understanding of the interconnections between ICH, ecosystems, and environmental heritage, and to reframe the relationship between tangible and intangible, natural and cultural dimensions. Ultimately, this will provide a basis for developing new approaches to heritage safeguarding that are more holistic and inclusive.

In this regard, IRCI is calling for collaborators to conduct case studies in the Asia-Pacific region. The case studies should be designed to gather sufficient information and insights to address the challenges mentioned above.

Specifically, case studies should address the following points:

1. Clarify the mechanisms of interaction between the safeguarding of ICH and ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems in designated environmental conservation areas.
2. Explore ways to incorporate the safeguarding of ICH into the community's heritage management strategies.
3. Empower local communities to take a leading role in designing and implementing effective heritage safeguarding initiatives.

To achieve these objectives, active collaboration with local communities from the earliest design stage of each initiative is essential. This participatory approach ensures that strategies are context-sensitive, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

Who can apply?

IRCI invites partners and researchers to collaborate on case studies that contribute to our new project. Applications are open to individual researchers, site managers, relevant organizations, and research institutions who have experience in the fields of heritage safeguarding or environmental conservation efforts. Those currently working on natural sites or environmental conservation areas in the Asia-Pacific region who wish to integrate ICH are also welcome to apply.

The case studies will adopt an action research approach, engaging local communities in the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives that leverage ICH to safeguard ecosystems. Having a basic understanding of the target communities and their culture, as well as the capacity to conduct community-based research, would be critical for conducting such research.

How to apply?

Please download the [application form](#) from the link below, complete all sections, and submit it as an email attachment to IRCI (irci@nich.go.jp) by **30 January 2026**.

Download the application form here: https://www.irci.jp/wp_files/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ApplicationFormICHandecosystems.docx



IRCI will review and evaluate submitted proposals comprehensively, in consideration of various factors such as the research focus, methodologies, and geographical balance. Please ensure that your research plan is clear, specific, and concrete.

Funding and payment conditions

IRCI will provide financial support for selected case studies in the amount of approximately 500,000–900,000 JPY per year (equivalent to 3,235–5,823 USD as of 14 November 2025). The exact amount will be determined later. Please note that the amount will be provided as an honorarium AFTER the case study report has been submitted.

Given that the financial support that IRCI can provide is limited, IRCI welcomes proposals that build upon existing or ongoing programmes and efforts, adding action research with ICH dimensions.

Upcoming schedule

30 January 2026	Application deadline
February 2026	Review of proposals at IRCI *Notification will be sent to selected applicants by 20 February 2026.
March 2026	Online workshop to present proposals *Specific date is to be determined.
April 2026	Launch of the project *Selected collaborators will start their research

They are also expected to actively engage in all other activities under this project, which runs until the end of March 2028. In addition to case studies, various activities such as international conferences and workshops are scheduled to take place during the project. Several additional online or in-person meetings may also be organized to monitor the implementation of case studies.

Enquiries

For further information or any questions regarding this call, please contact the project coordinator.

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