



“Empowering the Next Generation of Data in the Area” Call for Project Proposals under the ISA-China Joint Training and Research Center.

1. Context

Pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1 and the 1994 Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (UNCLOS), the International Seabed Authority (ISA) is mandated to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area and to coordinate and disseminate the results when available.¹ In addition, ISA has the responsibility to encourage the development of appropriate programmes to strengthen the capacity of developing and technologically less-developed States.²

In 2020, the ISA members adopted an Action Plan on Marine Scientific Research (MSR Action Plan) in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The MSR Action Plan organizes activities across six Strategic Research Priorities. Since its adoption, significant progress has been made across all six priorities, as reported annually by the ISA Secretary-General to the Assembly.³

To support ISA in its MSR and capacity development responsibilities, Section 3 of UNCLOS provides for the establishment of ‘National and Regional Marine Scientific and Technological Centres’.⁴ In this context, the International Seabed Authority - China Joint Training and Research Centre (ISA-China JTRC) was established in 2020 as the first-ever joint national training and research center.⁵

ISA-China JTRC supports the Authority’s responsibilities in capacity-building. Since its inception, over 70 participants from developing States have benefited from training workshops organized under the framework of the MSR Action Plan. Another function of ISA-China JTRC consists of facilitating collaborative research programs to further advance the MSR Action Plan.

This first call for project proposals will bring together research teams from China and developing countries, especially LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, to carry out joint deep-sea research. The first topic is biodiversity. This research project is currently being implemented by a consortium consisting of researchers from the Seabed Minerals Authority of the Cook Islands are advancing biodiversity assessments of the North-West Pacific in collaboration with the Second Institute of Oceanography of China.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, art. 143 (2).

² Capacity-development, training and technical assistance - International Seabed Authority

³ ISBA/27/A/4, ISBA/28/A/8, [ISBA/29/A/5](#)

⁴ PREAMBLE TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA

⁵ ISA-China Joint Training and Research Centre - International Seabed Authority

2. Research topics, activities and outcomes

Recognizing the strategic importance of data as the foundation of scientific research, and informed by both ISA's needs assessment and China's strong expertise in this field, research proposals are now invited focusing on big data. The volume of data released will remain consistent with the available funding to ensure feasibility and realistic work planning.

Historical data scientific analysis, new data processing and machine learning techniques for DeepData.

Proposed Research Activities

- Data cleaning and validation of historical DeepData datasets, in close collaboration with the ISA Data Team.
- Development of statistical models using artificial intelligence methods to analyse validated data sets and generate meaningful scientific insights.

Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced usability of DeepData, including historical datasets cleaned, validated, and ready for scientific analysis.
- Improved data availability, achieved through comprehensive data processing, validation, and advanced statistical modelling.

3. Guidelines for submission of project proposals

- Research consortia:
 - Research consortia applying should comprise of at least two research teams, including one from developing countries and one from China, both with relevant background and expertise. The consortium maybe self-organized, or, if necessary, ISA-China JTRC can assist in its formation. The consortium must designate a project leader responsible for coordinating the research program's implementation, managing scientific progress, overseeing personnel, and handling financial management.
- Eligibility of the proponents:
 - Proposals can be submitted by a Chinese organism on behalf of academic and scientific institutions; non-governmental organizations, whose purposes or activities are related to the work of ISA and private foundations with a scientific mission and scientific team.
- Instructions for submission:
 - All applications must be submitted in English using the forms attached in Annex A and B to the present Call.
 - Proposal must be submitted no later than 4th of September 2026 at jtrc@isa.org.jm and nwouters@isa.org.jm
 - The subject of the email should clearly indicate "Topic 2".
 - Only complete proposals presented through the formats provided will be considered.

4. Selection process

The research proposals will be received by the ISA Secretariat and reviewed for eligibility and admissibility in cooperation with the JTRC Secretariat. Eligible research proposals will then be jointly evaluated according to the following criteria: track record of publications in the field, scientific novelty, proposed methodology, knowledge outputs ambitious and involvement of early-career scientists and gender balance. Previous collaboration among consortium partners will be considered an added value. A ranked list of proposals, based on

these criteria will be provided to the ISA-China Steering Committee that approves the projects.

5. Fund allocation, duration and timeline

The maximum budget for each proposal is approximately about USD 55.000 (RMB 260.000). The funds for research programs may be allocated for procuring experimental materials, acquiring scientific literature, publishing and printing, attending conferences, expert consultations and labor expenses. Additionally, the funds can cover travel expenses, accommodation, communication, and living allowances necessary for international exchanges.

All funding for the research programmes is provided by the China Ocean Development Foundation. The research programs are expected to span maximum 10 months. ISA-China JTRC will initiate the programs and transfer 40% of the research fund of each programs one month after the start of the project. ISA-China JTRC track the progress of joint research project, and transfer the remaining 60% of the research fund based on the progress. By the end of June 2026 at the latest, the research consortium is required to submit a project completion report. Following this, the JTRC will conduct the final project completion assessment to conclude the initiative.

6. Grant agreement and monitoring

The affiliated institutions of the ISA-China JTRC shall sign an agreement with the research consortium as per the decision of the Steering Committee, and allocate research funds to each participating institutions within the research consortium, accordingly.

For further information please visit ISA-China JTRC website or contact jtrc@isa.org.jm or nwouters@isa.org.jm

