

Fiscal 2007 Plan
National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA)

I. Basic Guidelines

The “Important Policy of Administrative Reform” passed by the Cabinet on December 24, 2005 stipulated a number of measures to be taken by the National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA). With respect to projects, NIRA “will specialize in pioneering and interdisciplinary policy-related research which is of clear public benefit and which will be of medium- and long-term importance for the central and local governments.” In addition, NIRA “will establish an internal committee consisting of academic specialists to review research plans and evaluate research results, and will make the results of these evaluations public.” In terms of organizational structure, NIRA “will become an incorporated foundation. Contributions from the central government will be converted to interest-free loans, which NIRA will repay in installments after a specified period.” In accordance with these guidelines, NIRA intends to reorganize into an incorporated foundation before the end of fiscal 2007.

Japan currently faces the task of making the transition from a centralized, bureaucratic policy-making process to one which is decentralized and propelled by political parties rather than the bureaucracy. In addition, it is essential for the nation to reform the policy-making process to enable universities, NPOs and think tanks to analyze and evaluate policies and propose alternatives, in order to increase the range of choice available to citizens.

NIRA will commence a fundamental review of its research projects in fiscal 2007 in accordance with the following guidelines with the intention of becoming an institution – an intellectual hub – able to make a greater contribution to the policy-making process.

II. New Guidelines for Research Projects

1. Style of Research: Four Reforms

(1) NIRA will access human resources from outside the institute, and will conduct research as the core of a multi-disciplinary knowledge network.

1) When implementing research on themes relevant to national politics and international relations in particular, we will seek the cooperation of highly-regarded researchers outside the institute, and will organize project teams in which these researchers will play a central role.

2) We will utilize young researchers from outside the institute as much as possible in order to expand the range of participants in policy debate.

(2) NIRA will make information available in a rapid and timely manner and an easily understandable form.

1) We will endeavor to accelerate research and produce results in a shorter period.

2) We will present information at appropriate times during the research process.

3) We will present research results in an easily understandable form.

(3) Results will become research “capital”

1) NIRA will establish an improved infrastructure for policy research and policy study. As part of this, we will compile policy case studies in order to enhance intellectual assets.

(4) Cooperation with regional areas will be enhanced.

1) When researching themes of relevance to regional areas, NIRA will consider the research needs in these areas and obtain cooperation from major local entities (including local governments, think tanks, universities, and NPOs) as much as possible, in order to enable us to conduct more practical research and make a greater contribution to Japan’s regions.

2. Research Themes: Three Fields

In response to the “Important Policy of Administrative Reform,” we will endeavor to conduct “pioneering and interdisciplinary policy-related research which is of clear public benefit and which will be of medium- and long-term importance for the central and local governments.” In doing so, the institute will systematically organize major policy issues into the three fields of “national politics,” “international relations” and “regional areas.”

In considering important issues in the fields of national politics and international relations, in its “Project on Issues Facing Japan,” we will formulate position papers in three areas – “Medium and Long-term Vision for Japan and Relevant

Policy Issues,” “Immediate Policy Issues Facing Japan,” and “Foreign Policy Strategies.” These papers will be continuously formulated, and will function as “task lists” that provide a “bird’s-eye view” of policy issues. We will also conduct detailed research on issues of particular importance among the issues discussed in these position papers, and will present policy recommendations concerning them.

1) Issues related to national politics

(Medium and Long-term Vision for Japan and Relevant Policy Issues)

Japan’s society is aging rapidly, making it necessary for the nation to adopt measures to ensure its future socioeconomic vitality. Japan will also be required to respond to the rapid advance of globalization. The nation will therefore be required to make further progress in reforming its socioeconomic structures.

Based on this awareness, NIRA will assign the “environmental” factors affecting Japan’s economy and society, including globalization, a declining birthrate and an increasing proportion of elderly citizens, and risk factors such as energy, food and the environment, to the area “Medium and Long-term Vision for Japan and Relevant Policy Issues,” and will consider directions for structural reforms to respond to changes in environmental factors.

The following are examples of subjects relevant to this research field:

- a) Measures to realize an efficient social security system in a situation of declining birthrates, the aging of society and restraint of financial expenditure.
- b) Changes to industrial structure to maintain economic growth, and in particular to ensure technological innovation, job security and increasing productivity in individual industries.
- c) Direction of fiscal structural reform. Measures to increase government efficiency, such as thorough reduction of expenditure and the achievement of a balance between income and expenditure.
- d) Promotion of recovery and revitalization of regional economies by means of a transition to policies that exploit the individual characteristics of regions and promote regional initiative, originality and ingenuity. Promotion of decentralization to this end.

With regard to medium- and long-term policy issues, NIRA will address a number of important issues over the next several years. In this process, the institute will give further consideration to basic concepts that have been the subjects of its research

program, such as the pursuit of decentralization and greater diversity, enhancement of Japan's soft power, and the achievement of a balance between fairness and efficiency, in order to increase the persuasiveness of its vision of a future Japanese society.

(Immediate Policy Issues Facing Japan)

NIRA will prepare position papers summarizing the outlines of immediate policy issues facing Japan.

The following can be indicated as immediate policy issues:

- a) Policy issues related to promoting Japan's economic growth, in particular, structural reform in the service industry
- b) Standpoint on issues of economic disparity
- c) Policy issues concerning the reform of the social security system
- d) Fiscal structural reform, presentation of scenarios for the reduction of fiscal deficit, and issues concerning expenditure and revenue
- e) The possibility of promoting decentralization and introducing the *doshusei* system, issues concerning recovery and revitalization of regional economies
- f) Issues including ensuring human capacity in an era of declining birthrate and rapid aging of society

2) Issues relevant to international relations

In the area of international relations, NIRA will primarily address issues relating to East Asia (ASEAN10 + China, Japan and South Korea, sometimes including India). In the "Project on Issues Facing Japan," the institute will present, in an easily comprehensible form, the important issues immediately facing East Asia (in some cases, individual nations in the region) and the impact that these issues will have on Japan, study trends and important issues in East Asia as a whole, and formulate appropriate directions for Japan's foreign policy in the region. In doing so, NIRA will base itself on the perspective of researchers from East Asian countries.

3) Issues related to regional areas

With regard to issues concerning regional areas, NIRA will consider research needs in these areas and encourage as much as possible the cooperation of a variety of regional actors, in order to conduct research of greater relevance to the regions.

In terms of specific measures, we will hold the Urban Administrative

Evaluation Network Conference¹, conduct joint research and co-host policy forums with local governments. In addition, we will address issues related to regional areas in case studies and dialogues. These activities will enable us to increase our contribution to Japan's regions.

To better understand the research needs of regional areas, NIRA will conduct questionnaire surveys of local governments and use the results in selecting issues to be addressed in joint research and policy forums.

3. Research Activities: Four Pillars

NIRA's role and mission following its reorganization as an incorporated foundation will be to reinvigorate policy discussion and contribute to the policy-making process. The importance of broadening public awareness of the issues that are relevant to policy and the problems that Japan must overcome is increasing. At the same time, we must maintain the transparency and comprehensibility that are essential in policy discussion. NIRA will therefore make information available on individual policy issues on the basis of the four principles shown below, which will function as the "pillars" of its research activities.

We will focus even more closely on issues of particular importance among those addressed in the Project on Issues Facing Japan, and make effective use of the various modes of information dissemination discussed below (monographs, policy reviews, policy forums and case studies) in order to provide timely and readily comprehensible research results.

(1) NIRA will analyze and evaluate policies and make policy proposals.

1) Even during the research process, we will actively release monographs (reports of approximately 50 pages) and working papers that report on results.

2) Following the completion of a research project, we will publish definitive results in

¹ Established in November 2005 as a platform for city administrations to conduct administrative evaluations using the Benchmark Model, and to discuss and exchange opinions regarding administrative evaluation (in cooperation with the Council of Local Think Tanks and the Japan Center for Cities; general affairs are overseen by NIRA). The number of participating cities has increased from 15 at the time of its inauguration to 42 as of November 2006.

print form to provide a lasting resource. At the same time, we will release Policy Briefs that present summaries of the essential points of analyses, evaluations and policy proposals.

(2) We will focus closely on the problematic areas of policy issues and provide information on their essential points in a readily comprehensible manner.

1) Policy Reviews: These will provide brief summaries in non-specialist language of points of contention in policy issues and the opinions of a number of specialists in the field with regard to these points of contention.

2) Dialogue Series: Important policy issues will be delineated and their essential points clarified in dialogues between NIRA's President and individuals active in a variety of fields.

(3) NIRA will provide opportunities for policy discussions to improve the quality of policy analysis in Japan.

1) Policy Forums: NIRA will hold Policy Forums to enable individuals involved in lawmaking and administration at the national and regional government levels and academic specialists to frankly exchange opinions on policy issues in order to promote knowledge creation (outlines of the Forums will be published on NIRA's homepage). When these Forums are held in regional areas, they will be co-hosted with local governments and research institutes.

2) Electronic think tank concept: In an attempt to open up new directions and explore the shape of new types of think tank, NIRA will consider the orientation, potential and specific content of "electronic think tanks"².

(4) NIRA will develop infrastructure for policy research.

1) Case studies: In the field of academic research, new projects are conducted based on the accumulated results of prior research. This is, however, not necessarily true in the

² The image here is that a space on NIRA's website will be provided for the discussion of various topics; it will be something like an SNS that involves research projects that utilize the Internet and the participation of specific experts. This method of procedure makes the process of discussion visible, and is also effective in generating results. It will also enable NIRA to collect opinions on various topics and conduct questionnaire surveys.

case of policy research. NIRA will therefore attempt to collect and compile case studies relating to a broad range of policies within Japan and overseas, in order to provide an infrastructure to assist in the consideration of new policies.

4. Policy Evaluation Committee

NIRA will establish an internal committee made up of academic specialists, which will review research plans as they are being prepared and evaluate research results. The results of these evaluations will be made public.

5. Selectivity and Focus

NIRA will continue to make available the valuable information that only it can provide (information on domestic and international think tanks and their research projects).

The requirement to focus our research resources has made it necessary for NIRA to cease providing research grants and hosting and co-hosting international conferences held to promote research exchange. In addition, we will close our library, and cease operating our awards program (the Okita Commemorative Award for Policy Research) and education program (the NIRA Public Policy Seminar).

III. Research Activities for FY 2007

NIRA will follow these guidelines in conducting the activities discussed below in fiscal 2007. While maintaining its commitment to consistency in its research program, NIRA will constantly review specific research themes and respond rapidly to any changes in the policy environment.

(1) Research Activities

1) Issues related to national politics

NIRA will commence the “Project on Issues Facing Japan” in fiscal 2007 and prepare position papers concerning the “Medium- and Long-term Vision for Japan and Relevant Policy Issues” and “Immediate Policy Issues Facing Japan.”

We will also focus attention on particularly important issues among those indicated in the position papers, and will make effective use of monographs, policy reviews, policy forums and case studies in order to disseminate information in a rapid, timely and readily comprehensible manner.

2) Issues relevant to international relations

(“Asian Issues and Japan” (tentative name))

The “Project on Issues Facing Japan” will formulate position papers recommending optimum strategies for Japan’s relations with other countries. Focusing on the most important of the issues indicated in the position papers, NIRA will formulate and publish monographs under the general title of “Asian Issues and Japan.”

We will establish a group of specialists in Asian studies to coordinate this project effectively, and will also examine ways in which we can incorporate the opinions of scholars from other Asian countries.

(Research on the promotion of economic integration among Japan, China and South Korea and medium- and long-term economic cooperation)

Fiscal 2007 will be the final year of the joint research project among Japan, China and South Korea, and the results of the research conducted in this project will be summarized.

3) Issues related to regional areas

(Understanding of research needs in local areas)

In selecting research issues related to local areas, NIRA will take into account local needs, i.e. the issues facing local areas. To enable us to grasp these needs, we will utilize the results of a questionnaire survey of local governments that we conducted in November 2006.

(Joint research with local governments)

NIRA will continue to conduct a joint research project on “Characteristics of Foreign Tourists and International Tourism Strategies of Local Areas” in fiscal 2007. In addition, we will utilize the results of the above-mentioned questionnaire in implementing new joint research projects with local governments.

(Urban Administrative Evaluation Network Conference)

The Urban Administrative Evaluation Network Conference will provide a forum for reports of analyses and exchanges of opinion concerning administrative evaluation tailored to the specific characteristics of different regional areas, in order to support the efforts of local governments to reform administrative management and enable us to improve the NIRA Benchmark Model.

4) Collection and Archiving of Case Studies

NIRA will begin collecting and archiving case studies relating to a broad range of policies within Japan and overseas, in order to provide an infrastructure to assist in the consideration of new policies.³

5) Electronic Think Tank Concept

In an attempt to open up new directions and explore new types of think tanks, NIRA will consider the direction, potential and specific characteristics of electronic think tanks in fiscal 2007.

6) Provision of Policy Research Information

a) NIRA provides information on Japanese think tanks, organizational and research information in the *Almanac of Think Tanks in Japan*. As for overseas think tanks, NIRA develops *NIRA's World Directory of Think Tanks (NWDTT)* and *Policy Research Watch (PRW)*. PRW offers bibliographic information on the publications of selected overseas think tanks. These databases are provided by database search system through NIRA's website.

b) NIRA provides the *Policy Research Index*, which analyzes policy research activities by overseas think tanks on its website. The *Index* is introduced in a NIRA e-mail magazine. The *Index* selects themes of current interest to the Japanese policy-making and policy research community and lists and summarizes recent papers and policy briefs listed in the PRW database.

(2) Public Relations

1) Public Relations

³ Subjects of case studies include cases of success and failure in regional recovery and revitalization, local financial issues, issues relating to foreigners in local areas, administrative evaluations by local governments, and overseas examples.

a) NIRA introduces its activities to a wide range of interested parties through its website, its e-mail magazine and *NIRA News*. We also intend to modify our website to make it more user-friendly.

b) NIRA publishes a quarterly magazine called *NIRA Policy Research* that contains overviews of research results (summaries of the Dialogue Series, case studies, and Policy Forums, etc.).

2) Looking towards its transformation into an incorporated foundation, NIRA will establish internal regulations regarding its endowment and other matters, and will simplify and promote increased efficiency in its general affairs and financial management.