

Japan NPO Center Mid-Term Vision 2018-2022
Placing Value Creation at the Heart of NPO
Activities



Introduction

Placing value creation at the heart of NPO activities, the Japan NPO Center Mid-term Vision for 2018-2022, is the latest 5-year vision for the organization. While it is intended for Japan NPO Center's current members first and foremost (which include individuals, organizations, and corporations), we also hope to reach those who find significance in a diversity of nonprofit efforts as well as those who wish to support these activities in the future.

We are currently working on a five-year management plan that will fulfill this vision. This management plan, which will demonstrate exactly how we may implement activities in line with the vision, will be periodically revised during the time that we work towards the fulfillment of the vision.

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) heighten awareness and perspectives on various problems in today's society, and they hold the power to lead us to solutions. Furthermore, NPOs present opportunities for people to get involved in the problem-solving process, and offer spaces for them to take a leading role in solving issues as citizens. It is our hope that those who sympathize with and support this mid-term vision will be proactively involved in carrying out these actions. We would also appreciate your active participation in Japan NPO Center's efforts. Join us in our endeavors so that we can welcome each of you as one of us!

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Mid-Term Vision Map



I: Reaffirming Our Foundational Vision and Mission

1. What Japan NPO Center Started with 20 Years Ago

At Japan NPO Center, we have been creating a mid-term vision every five years. Since we celebrated our 20th anniversary in 2016, this is the first post-anniversary mid-term vision. 2018 also marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (NPO Law) in Japan. Today, with 20 years behind us, we wanted to return to a passage in our foundational vision which states, “We find it necessary to re-visit the values of our everyday lives and to create a new wave for reconfiguring society based on how everyday persons envision it.” We have also noted how this foundational vision defines an ideal society, stating that “the society we aim for is a civil society with diversity and individual autonomy; one that is just, transparent, and open.” Within the past 20 years, the social conditions that surround us have changed significantly. However, the importance of reconfiguring society and of conceptualizing a civil society with diversity and individual autonomy not only remains a firm commitment of ours but has become an even greater priority amidst these new social conditions.

In the “Report from the Taskforce for Thinking about Japan NPO Center’s Future,” which came out in 2011, it is written that we consider *community* and *solidarity* to be key words in our endeavors. Furthermore, the report pointed out that “Japan NPO Center will not be especially concerned with terms like *sector* or *NPO*, as we aim to connect all individuals and organizations involved in civic activities as a broad network, bring their thoughts and wishes together, and strive to become an opinion leader who can address the larger society with our thoughts and ideas.” These ideals have been carried forth into this mid-term vision as well.

Today, the Japanese media uses the term *NPO* quite regularly. Yet, we must admit that the impact of the values NPOs advocate is not as large as we would like. We begin our mid-term vision with the humble awareness of this realization, as we think about the role of our organization as an “infrastructure organization for the private nonprofit sector. We reaffirm that we aim to strengthen the social infrastructure of NPOs and to establish new partnerships with businesses and governments as collaborators who bear the joint responsibility for developing civic society.”

II: The World Today as We See It

2. NPOs Create Values

When we use the term NPO, we use it broadly beyond the legal definition of NPO Corporations (Specified Nonprofit Corporations) to include nonprofit organizations and civic activity groups in general. Today, NPOs are vaguely recognized among the Japanese public. According to the Cabinet Office study “2016 Survey on Citizens’ Social Contributions,” only 37% of those surveyed answered that they are interested in NPOs.

For many people, NPOs are an assortment of groups that provides services to meet the needs of people who are not reached by the government or businesses. While more and more people recognize NPOs in this way, many in the public are still unaware that through the services they provide, NPOs acquire a sense that “something is amiss” with how society is run. From this starting point, NPOs weave together various people’s thoughts, enabling them to serve as agents, catalysts, and attendants in creating social change.

NPOs create values in this manner. This process of value creation is not limited to novel or large-scale endeavors. We believe that working within communities or neighborhoods to bring forth small changes in people’s behavior patterns, introducing new ways of thinking or reintroducing traditional wisdom into contemporary lifestyles, and other efforts to encourage tiny shifts within previously unquestioned ways of doing things can all be considered meaningful initiatives in value creation.

3. What Kinds of Values Are NPOs Creating?

The visions and methods of NPOs are as diverse as the causes they serve. Still, we believe that there are underlying common threads in the consciousness and attitudes of people involved in NPO work. These may include:

- Siding with and working with those pushed to the bottom or the margins of society;
- Paying active attention to latent needs and risks in society;
- Making social problems visible by recognizing them while they are still in a formative stage;
- Utilizing empathy and such feelings as “I can’t leave them/that alone,” “I don’t think this is right,” and “I want to do something about it” as the driving force for activism;
- Making decisions and creating movements based on participation, and making sure people’s voices are recognized within these decisions and movements;
- Respecting the voices of those directly affected, while also providing leadership when working on a problem.

The foundation of all these attitudes and actions is respect for human rights through the *valuing of human dignity*. These attitudes also align with our 2011 Report, which emphasized the revitalization of *solidarity*. We believe that these attitudes, when put together, lead to spontaneous actions large and small, and can help visualize and solve social problems or promote changes in policies and systems. This means that insights which can deconstruct the social structure shall be valued.

In the ideal “civil society with diversity and individual autonomy” that we outlined in the foundational vision, the importance of these attitudes would be widely accepted. And we believe that NPOs form an important collective space where these values are created and accumulated.

4. Contemporary Issues

Today, the world is undergoing a whirlwind of changes. At the cross section of our current times, the following trends and phenomena exist for today's NPOs in Japan to confront:

- ▶ As an indication that we live in a *society of uncertainty*, there is a prevalence of *inwardness* (or the tendency to be more domestically focused and less interested in global affairs or in international cooperation) and of pandering to populist discourse, both within and outside of Japan;
- ▶ As is evident in the increasing amount of attention paid to *childhood poverty* in Japan, social inequality and stratification have had ramifications in all social arenas, and distortions and strains in society are becoming more apparent;
- ▶ We have entered an era in which issues that pose a threat to regional sustainability – such as decrease in birth rate and aging of the population, or depopulation and local industrial decline – are not news and have become normalized, and these trends are accelerating;
- ▶ While women's entrance into and promotion within the workforce have been touted loudly, international comparisons reveal that fixed notions of normative gender roles have a strong foothold in Japan, and awareness of and improvements to women's positions in society and protection of women's human rights have been very slow to progress;
- ▶ Climate change has become a huge risk factor in the global community as evident in frequent natural disasters, and vulnerable populations have been forced into a position where they are the most susceptible to its damages; and
- ▶ When we look to the global community, in both the developed and developing worlds, there has been a rise in legislation and regulations that limit civic activities such as freedom of speech and assembly, and political narratives that strengthen such trends have also become more prominent.

In the midst of the above, we also see other trends:

- ▶ Having experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, people within and outside of the directly affected regions have become more aware of the fact that uneventful everyday life is in fact irreplaceable and precious;
- ▶ Disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction efforts have highlighted not only the importance of daily preparedness but also the value of being connected to neighbors in local communities;
- ▶ An orientation toward social problem-solving has spread throughout society, whereby not only the government and NPOs but also social enterprises and other likeminded businesses, individuals with various occupational skills, and others across sectors have become aware that they have an indispensable role to play in solving problems;
- ▶ With advancements in information technology, we have entered an era in which technological responses can be considered for every aspect of the issues NPOs must tackle; and
- ▶ There is heightened interest in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations established in 2015, both within Japan and internationally, and there is a stronger drive toward gaining a comprehensive understanding regional and societal sustainability and for accelerating efforts that align with the SDGs.

III: Our Initiatives

5. Placing Value Creation at the Heart of NPO Activities

Building on all of the discussions above, we have decided that the principal objective of our next five years will be *Placing value creation at the heart of NPO activities*. We will be even more conscious of the fact that values are continuously created through problem-solving activities, and we will convey the significance of this process.

The following activities serve as good examples of what we consider to be value creation by NPOs:

- ▶ Activities that allow NPOs to foresee and anticipate the manifestation of certain social problems, and to work to change the social structure that causes them
- ▶ Activities that are implemented through valuing people's empathy and their participatory processes
- ▶ Activities in which the process for problem definition and evaluation of issues is shared among different stakeholders, which can then facilitate the explicit identification of specific challenges

In order to communicate the significance of NPOs' value creation, we must start by paying attention to each individual NPO's activities and showing the world examples of how values are created. We must also deepen our collaborative ties with individuals and organizations who create values. In the next five years, we will develop our project plans and implement them with the goal of presenting as many examples as possible of NPOs working on solving problems while simultaneously creating values.

6. Adherence to Our Core Values

Based on the 2011 Report, in the five-year vision of 2013, we at Japan NPO Center made a commitment to always be mindful of the following values in our organizational activities. We are determined to uphold these values as our organization's *core values* beyond the initially intended five-year period.

- ▶ Always be on the side of the excluded and oppressed, and express solidarity with them
- ▶ Respect the views of the directly affected
- ▶ Look into root causes and tackle larger structural issues of society
- ▶ Give the highest priority to the lived realities of those on the ground
- ▶ Respect diversity and minority opinions
- ▶ Be transparent and accountable
- ▶ Create a platform for open dialogue

7. Our Initiatives for the Next Five Years

At Japan NPO Center, we implement our programs and activities based on our organization's status as a national infrastructure organization for the nonprofit sector. Our mission is to strengthen the social infrastructure of NPOs and to establish new partnerships with businesses and the government as collaborators with a shared responsibility for developing civil society. During the next five years, we will take on the following goals and tasks:

We will strengthen our system to increase and to develop actors for NPOs.

- ▶ We will communicate how NPOs create values and how significant this process is. We will create a system that greatly increases the number of people who engage in value creation.
- ▶ We will identify and nurture those who can effectively support NPOs, starting with various NPO support organizations nationwide.
- ▶ We will build the capacity of NPOs that can nurture people who are perceptive of societal needs, who can anticipate what is to come, and who take part in bringing about social change.

We will strengthen our collaborative ties with various partners.

- ▶ In response to the heightened interest in SDGs among businesses, we will strengthen our ties and collaborative working relationships with them. Emphasizing the SDGs' tenet of "leaving no one behind," we will bring the nonprofit community's perspectives and strengths to the forefront and share our values with the businesses.
- ▶ In response to the growing trend of using business methods to create social change, we will seek ways to connect and collaborate with those who are engaged in such efforts.
- ▶ It is necessary to strengthen the collaborative ties between local community organizations and civic activities, and we will work on concrete measures to strengthen these relationships.
- ▶ We will work on building collaborative working relationships with nonprofit organizations and cooperatives other than NPOs. These organizations have social status and influence and can work with us on creating values.
- ▶ We will engage in more information and opinion exchange and deepen our collaboration with civil society within and outside of Japan. We will promote opportunities for raising awareness of and learning about shared challenges and problems in this globalized world.

We will learn from the efforts made in regions affected by disasters such as the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, and carry out programming based on our learning.

- ▶ We will revisit the diversity of efforts put forth in areas affected by disasters such as the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. We will share the lessons learned, and come up with an outlook on how these lessons can be applied to help the Japanese civic sector grow.
- ▶ We will draw up a plan for how we can continue to support organizations that were created in direct response to disasters. We will act to implement the plan.

We will expand our research and policy work, and address issues in the public systems and structures that influence the entire NPO sector.

- ▶ We will take the lead in research and advocacy work that *comes from the grassroots efforts of citizens* and takes a drastic approach to changing the social structures that breed contemporary social problems. We will encourage these endeavors in different areas.
- ▶ We will convey to the public the significance and value of NPOs undertaking such research and advocacy work. We will work towards expanding these efforts, including increased funding.
- ▶ We will carefully observe national legislation and local ordinances or practices that can affect the nonprofit sector as a whole. We will express our opinions to the public in collaboration with NPO support centers and others nationwide.

We will work on developing symbolic practices and projects where NPOs are offering insights into social problems and/or solving them.

- ▶ In order to make sure that more people can better understand concrete examples of how NPOs develop insights into social problems and contribute to solving them, we will support progressive initiatives and collaborative relationships, and put our efforts into the development of leading practices and projects.
- ▶ For example, in the context of frequent natural disasters, we will treat disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction efforts as a gateway to the cross-sectional initiatives that take us beyond local social problems, and explore the roles NPOs play in such cross-sectional efforts in different regional contexts.

We will strengthen our partnerships with NPO support organizations nationwide, and support active local initiatives.

- ▶ We will further clarify Japan NPO Center's dual position vis-à-vis NPO support organizations nationwide as both a lead runner and a pacesetter.
- ▶ We will support active local initiatives by local people tackling local problems, and serve to assist local NPO support organizations so that these organizations can thrive as local intermediaries.

8. Making the Most of Our Members' Participation

At Japan NPO Center, we will present a path to engaging with the social problems and policies in which our members are interested, considering these issues as targets for organization's projects, and including them in our programming. To enable this process, we will strive to strengthen our individual membership system so that every individual can participate in Japan NPO Center's activities regardless of professional status or position.