

Japan NPO Center

Mid-Term Vision 2021-2025



Introduction

Since its establishment in 1996, the Japan NPO Center, as an infrastructure organization for the private nonprofit sector, has carried out various activities with the understanding and cooperation of many stakeholders.

I am proud to say that we have been moving forward toward a better society, always thinking of ways to improve society and sometimes worrying about the accumulation of problems with our mid-term vision prepared every 5 years as our benchmark. In the midst of all this, the new coronavirus has spread across the globe. Society has become a place where people's movement and communication are limited by a small invisible virus, and these limitations have no end in sight. This has not only brought stagnation to many activities that had finally begun to move, but has also confronted us with a situation where anxiety, isolation, discrimination and division have become more serious.

However, at a time when the premises of all our activities are being overturned and the achievements we have made are on the verge of collapse, we the Japan NPO Center have decided to formulate a new mid-term vision with the belief that NPOs should not stop moving forward and should play a role in creating a new future.

With the 25th anniversary giving us momentum, we believe that the challenge of moving forward in the direction indicated by this compass, i.e. our vision, will lead to the understanding and participation of many people we have yet to meet, in addition to those who have supported us so far.

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Japan NPO Center
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I. Reaffirming Our Foundational Vision and Mission

1. What Japan NPO Center Has Been Trying to Achieve

The Japan NPO Center was established 25 years ago, in 1996, through the efforts of a wide range of people involved. We would like to return to a passage in our foundational vision:

Our goal is to create a civil society with diversity and individual autonomy. It is a fair, transparent, and open civil society. In order to build such a relationship, the role of private non-profit organizations (NPOs), which promote voluntary activities based on individual responsibility as well as corporations and governments, is becoming increasingly important.

We have decided to establish the Japan NPO Center in the hope that it will support the rich and vibrant activities of these people and promote the development of NPOs as a whole. As an infrastructure organization for the private nonprofit sector, the Japan NPO Center will strengthen the foundation of NPOs through a wide range of activities, including information exchange, human resource development, research, and policy proposals. We also aim to build new and innovative partnership with government and private sector, encouraging them to act as CO-CREATORS of robust civil society.

In line with this foundational vision, we have created a variety of partnerships through each project in which we engaged. With the cooperation of the people involved, we have promoted the networking among NPO support centers based in local communities and created opportunities for mutual learning within these networks, and have also supported the development of corporate social contribution activities while promoting corporations' collaboration with NPOs and creating opportunities for more participation. Through these efforts, we have encouraged NPOs and shaped the civil sector.

Later, in the "Report from the Taskforce for Thinking about Japan NPO Center's Future" which came out in 2011, we confirmed our focus on revitalizing solidarity, and in [the previous mid-term vision](#) formulated in 2018, we placed value creation at the heart of NPO activities and emphasized that we respect human dignity through our activities.

We will continue to aim at creating a society where diverse NPOs can propose diverse values through their activities while individuals can make their own choices.

2. What Japan NPO Center Has Achieved: The Values We have Created

We have achieved the following:

We have created a mechanism to **collect** voices from all over the country by providing a place where people who make up the civil sector can engage in dialogue across thematic areas and geographic regions. The collected voices have been used to make proposals and to develop new projects. Even if an issue has not received much attention, we have shone a light on it by **uncovering** the activities of various organizations, large and small, and have encouraged new initiatives by **creating** alliances among stakeholders interested in these activities. This process has also provided an opportunity to **nurture** the people responsible for the activities.

The foundation for all of this is our **connecting** function.

Rather than conducting projects independently, we have always collaborated with NPOs on the ground and NPO supporters in different geographic regions and thematic areas, acting as an intermediary that transcends sectors and fostering a network that enables us to develop projects with organizations in diverse positions.

Specific examples

- [Collect]** Through organizing the NPO National Forum, Civil Sector National Conference, CEO Meeting for Private NPO Support Centers, and the Liaison Committee on NPO/NGO Tax/Incorporation Systems Reform, we have established spaces for discussion and networking among NPO support centers and NPOs on the ground throughout Japan while also making policy proposals.
- [Uncover]** We have taken up social issues that NPOs are tackling and created opportunities to discuss them with stakeholders through Quadai Lab, the NPO and Online Platform Forum on Thinking about Digital Sexual Violence, and the Financial Inclusion in Japanese Society research report.
- [Create]** We have created a variety of unprecedented collaborations, such as promoting partnerships between local children's centers and NPOs through the Collaborative Project for the Children Between Children's Centers and NPOs (also known as the Dondoco Project). The various forms of collaborative projects with the business sector have proven that with the cooperation of local NPO support organizations, we are able to conduct nationwide projects with NPOs of all sizes that take advantage of their regional characteristics and expertise.
- [Nurture]** Through the NPO Support Center Workshop, the Great East Japan Earthquake Local NPO Support Fund, the NPO Capacity Development Project, and other projects to support the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, we have provided the NPOs and NPO supporters with mutual learning opportunities.

II. The World Today as We See It

Today, society is in a period of great change. Due to the spread of the Internet, our sense of distance to the world has changed, and technological innovations such as AI and IoT are shifting the way people live. In many developed countries, stagnation of economic growth has become a constant in recent years, and in Japan, we are experiencing unprecedented conditions such as population decline, increase in regional disparities, and natural disasters occurring one after another. As the economic gap widens and self-help is emphasized, insecurity in daily life is driving the division. Although expectations for NPOs are rising, their reputation as service providers is still emphasized. At a time like this when it is difficult to see how society will further change in the future, there is no greater need for the civil sector's presence because its activities are based on each individual citizen's consciousness and assessment of social problems. When the NPOs implement activities, they are required to play a role not only as service providers who identify social issues and promote efforts to solve them, but also as main players in the realization of a symbiotic society that revitalizes solidarity among people and jointly creates communities and society. Once again, we would like to take this opportunity to organize how we recognize the current social conditions and work together with our stakeholders in tackling problems.

3. Social Conditions Today as We See Them

In [the mid-term vision formulated in 2018](#), we identified six issues and five new developments as the contemporary challenges we faced at the time. These remain to be addressed to this day, but in addition to these issues and new developments, we would like to highlight some of the major changes in society since then as context to our activities, as we believe we must be especially cognizant of them.

① **Online communication tools gaining a foothold and changing the way people connect with each other**

The various measures taken to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus have changed lifestyles dramatically. Online conferencing systems have taken root, allowing people to connect with diverse perspectives and ideas beyond geographical limitations.

② **Increasing borderlessness of social problems and how we try to solve them**

The line between international and domestic issues has become blurred. Problems happening somewhere else in the world are disseminated instantly, and problem-solving efforts that have been established elsewhere can also be spread from elsewhere in the world.

③ **Growing concern over the safety net**

Due to the financial difficulties among local governments and the emphasis on self-reliance, there is widespread concern about the government safety net. The new coronavirus poses a problem that neither the government nor citizens alone can overcome. While NPOs often serve as safety nets, the roles of government and NPOs fundamentally differ, and NPOs alone cannot provide everything. Likewise, government and corporations cannot create a society where no one is left behind on their own, either. Therefore, it is important for diverse entities to work in partnership to create a community that is inclusive of those who are left behind.

④ **Rift arising with the clash of inconsiderate expression of opinions**

Internet services have become more enhanced, and as a result, any individual can now put out information on their own. There are lower barriers to demonstrating one's abilities online if somebody had the opportunity to do so. At the same time, however, there is greater need for the ability to discern and select information that is not professionally edited, and there is an opportunity gap for learning and education. Additionally, emotional responses may create conflict among people, foster hate, close up communities, and create fragmentations.

⑤ **Greater concerns over community sustainability and enhancing efforts to create it**

Many communities are no longer able to maintain the same level of social services as before, and some are sustaining severe damaged from disasters that occur almost every year. While there is a growing awareness of this community sustainability crisis, there is also an increasing number of initiatives that address these issues. As circumstances differ from community to community, it is becoming more and more important for residents to think of responses that suit their own community and to act on them out of their own volition, no matter how small a scale they may be.

4. What Is Expected of the Civil Sector

To respond to the changes in society that we identified in the preceding section, we believe that the following actions are expected of the civil sector.

① Promote participation by communicating the vision of the community and the problems we want to solve

We believe that when diverse NPOs propose a variety of values through their activities, there will be more options available to citizens and it will lead to the creation of a richer community. When we widely communicate and pose questions based on what we see in our activities – such as the problems and challenges or the visions of community and society that we want to realize – and when we create opportunities for more people to participate, we can expand the circle of our activities. When doing this, it is important to encourage those who may be left out of social services to participate in the problem-solving efforts as well.

② Expanding the network of those involved in addressing social issues and creating partnerships

In promoting sustainable regional development, it is difficult for any single entity to solve various social problems alone. Therefore, we need to reach out to a variety of people who are working with an awareness of the issues in the community, regardless of what the organization's incorporation status is or to which sector they belong. We must create connections with them, share various initiatives in other communities as case studies, however large or small those initiatives may be, and promote mutual learning across geographic regions and thematic areas.

③ Transforming the way business is created and conducted

The spread of the Internet has created an environment where significantly more people have the ability to receive as well as put out information, while not feeling that there is physical distance between us at the same time. Consequently, we can connect with people across geographic regions and thematic areas and have access to a wider range of options, and there is a need to take full advantage of these advantages and create a new style of business.

④ Responding to changes in the flow of funds

The market is becoming more and more globalized and the world economy more integrated. Investments focusing on social issues have also begun to spread. In the civil sector, crowdfunding has taken root, lowering the bar for individual donations to show support for causes. In local communities, community funds have gained a foothold, attention to local currencies is increasing again, and a mechanism for local money to flow locally is being put in place. We need to capture these changes in the flow of funds and utilize them in our efforts to solve problems.

5. Japan NPO Center's Vision for the Civil Sector

To realize a fair, transparent, and open civil society with diversity and individual autonomy, our aim is to have achieved the following for individual NPOs and the civil sector in five years.

① **Value of participation is conveyed to a wide range of people working to solve social problems**

When NPOs promote participation among diverse people and provide them with opportunities to participate in the problem-solving process, people can take ownership of the problem-solving process as citizens. At the same time, for NPOs that value information disclosure, they will be able to operate more openly, which will help ensure their credibility.

As those involved in solving social problems further diversify, we hope that the value of participation will be conveyed to a wider range of people and organizations as a core value of the civil sector itself.

② **Value of NPOs is more recognized in society across regions**

Diverse NPOs are active in local communities. While the size of these organizations and the scale of their activities may vary, organizations engaged in community-based activities are essential for the future of society if we want to increase the variety of options. Therefore, we aim to create an environment in which it is widely recognized that a wide variety of NPOs exist in the civil sector and that such NPOs play an important role in the community.

③ **An environment for sharing knowledge and learning, both domestically and internationally, is created**

NPOs can further develop and deepen their activities by sharing knowledge and learning among each other across geographic regions and thematic areas. In addition, thanks to the spread of the Internet, the amount of knowledge and learning shared with NPOs in other countries has significantly increased.

By promoting this kind of collaboration both domestically and internationally, we aim to create an environment in which NPOs can exchange information regularly across geographic regions and thematic areas. This will also help further enhance the connections within the civil sector.

④ **Dialogue and collaboration between NPOs and the corporate and government sectors advance in many places**

When we can communicate with a wide audience and raise awareness of issues that NPOs notice through their activities as well as the community and societal visions NPOs want to realize, we believe the value of NPOs will be more widely recognized by various entities. This will result in more dialogues and collaborations among various entities and potential new challenges to be taken on in the process of solving problems.

Our goal is to create these new relationships and to set up an environment where the civil sector can engage in dialogue with other sectors on an equal footing.

6. What We Expect of the Diverse Stakeholders

To realize a fair, transparent, and open civil society with diversity and individual autonomy, it is necessary not only for the members of the civil sector to make individual efforts but also for us to work together with stakeholders. Therefore, to promote participation among citizens and the movement to create society together, we will work in cooperation with our diverse stakeholders.

① Expectations for the business community

To realize a society where no one is left behind, it is necessary to pay attention to problems that cannot be solved by the market. As exemplified by the rise of ESG investing, economic activities are no longer possible without businesses being socially conscious. Efforts to solve social issues can be accelerated through collaboration beyond regular corporate activities, especially through partnerships with NPOs that know the field and are close to the people involved. It is our hope that the business community place social issues at the center and work together with diverse stakeholders on an equal footing that transcends interests.

② Expectations for municipal governments

While there are vast differences in geographic and economic circumstances between large cities and mountainous communities or remote islands, many communities nonetheless face the same challenge where there is an increase in issues that require community-based efforts such as for regional development or support for needy community members. It is difficult for government entities alone to tackle these issues, and collaboration and dialogue with NPOs whose activities involve citizen participation are essential to policy formulations that can help maintain prosperity for the community. We hope to see governments promote dialogue and collaboration with NPOs in their communities from a long-term perspective, and

for departments in charge of NPOs, in particular, to play the liaison role between NPOs and other departments within their government entity.

③ **Expectations for legislators, parliament, and politics**

Collaboration is essential between NPOs working to solve problems across the country and legislators working in politics as representatives of citizens. Due to changes in the social structure, there are more and more people whose needs are not met through conventional policies. At the local level, we hope that local legislators will spend more time talking with NPOs and create policies that reflect the voices of the people on the ground. As for legislators at the national level, it is our hope that they take advantage of online tools to engage in dialogue with NPOs across party lines and help connect local issues to national politics.

④ **Expectations for universities and other research institutions**

We hope that academic and research institutions provide scientific evidence to support and encourage NPO efforts on the ground. To shed light on the social issues that NPOs face, accelerate NPOs' activities, and to link them to policymaking, it is essential to have evidence-based support from academia in their respective fields as well as in the management of NPOs. To this end, we ourselves would also like to play a role in connecting NPOs and research institutions by engaging in joint research initiatives.

⑤ **Expectations for the media**

We would appreciate having cooperation from the media on spreading awareness of and illuminating social issues that NPOs come into contact through their activities. Understanding and support of NPO activities among the citizens is crucial to the enrichment of society. We hope that when media outlets report on social issues, they actively feature comments from NPOs.

⑥ **Expectations for international organizations**

As social problems become increasingly borderless (see Section II.-3.-②), successful cases from around the world and directions that have been set through international discussions can provide hints for solving issues domestically. Additionally, when we can relativize issues that exist in Japan by knowing how they look from a more globalized point of view, there will be more awareness of social issues in Japanese society. As we work towards the realization of the SDGs, it will be particularly useful for international organizations that set international norms for each of the 17 goals to provide advice and recommendations based on the actual

situation in Japan. We hope that international organizations, including these actors in the field of international cooperation, will further build and strengthen relationships so that cases and information can be shared mutually.

III. Future Initiatives of the Japan NPO Center

7. Main Focus of Our Initiatives for the Next Five Years

The Japan NPO Center connects diverse stakeholders to promote dialogue and partnership. We encourage this kind of dialogue to take place in each community because this is an era in which the local community plays a leading role. We support NPOs in responding to changing environments and gaining the trust of diverse stakeholders through their activities. We will also disseminate diverse values that each organization holds to society at large, both in Japan and abroad. To support these efforts, we will conduct research on social issues and the NPO activities that address them, and exchange information with the civil sector in Japan and abroad.

8. Confirmation of Our Core Values

In the report of the *Task Force on the Future of the Japan NPO Center* issued in 2011, JNPOC set forth the following stances to be constantly aware of in its organizational management and business promotion. These are our core organizational values that we continue to uphold.

- ▶ To be close to those who are excluded and oppressed
- ▶ To value the participation and awareness of citizens
- ▶ To cut into the structure of society while foreseeing the changes of the times
- ▶ To consider the reality of the situation as a starting point
- ▶ To respect diversity and minority opinions
- ▶ To fulfill accountability by disclosing information

9. Our Initiatives for the Next Five Years

Based on what we listed in *II. Our Recognition of the Current Situation* and the values set forth in our core values, we will focus on the following areas over the next five years.

① Information dissemination

Communication through the Internet has become increasingly important. We will actively disseminate information on local voluntary efforts both in Japan and abroad, and provide

opportunities for more people to be exposed to the values expressed by NPOs. We will also actively introduce overseas initiatives to Japan to promote more interactions.

- ▶ Supporting information dissemination so that the efforts of NPOs can reach a wider audience
- ▶ Providing information about the social issues NPOs in Japan address and their activities overseas
- ▶ Introduce information on civil society overseas to Japan

② **Consultation and coordination**

We promote dialogue and partnership across geographical and thematic areas to facilitate solutions to complex and intertwined social issues.

- ▶ Connecting stakeholders from other sectors to NPOs' efforts to tackle social problems
- ▶ Creating opportunities for discussion with diverse entities that can become partners in solving social problems
- ▶ Providing accompanying support to individual NPOs with partners such as NPO support organizations, NPO support providers, and companies
- ▶ Supporting NPOs that are trying to transform their organizations and businesses through the use of IT

③ **Exchange and training**

JNPOC will create opportunities and mechanisms for training and exchange to increase the number of people who take the lead in civil society and to enable sustainable organizational management. In doing so, we will be conscious of the organic use of online and offline resources to maximize their effectiveness.

- ▶ Identifying and training people who can effectively carry out activities to support NPOs, such as staff of NPO support organizations and network organizations, and individuals who provide NPO support
- ▶ Training coordinators who can connect people working in different sectors

- ▶ Creating opportunities for JNPOC members and others involved in building a civil society to interact with each other and share knowledge
- ▶ Providing opportunities for NPO actors to grow within the network so that more NPOs can respond to changing environments with an emphasis on participation

④ **Research and policy proposals**

We will research and actively disseminate information on social issues and initiatives in Japan, and make policy recommendations on legislation and tax systems in order to create an environment that facilitates the activities of NPOs.

- ▶ Advancing collaboration with academic institutions to promote research and study
- ▶ Undertaking research on domestic social issues in cooperation with various NPOs and disseminate it both domestically and internationally
- ▶ Making policy proposals on NPO-related laws, taxation systems, and other measures to support NPOs
- ▶ Actively engaging in policy proposals to solve social issues, regardless of thematic area

⑤ **Networking**

We will expand the network of civic activists and their supporters, both in Japan and abroad.

- ▶ Advancing solidarity with civil society around the world and working together on global issues
- ▶ Enhancing networking among NPO supporters, including NPO support organizations, network organizations, and individual NPO supporters
- ▶ Establishing a national network to support the activities of local NPOs in preparation for frequent disasters
- ▶ Creating opportunities for networking among diverse stakeholders in the region

10. State of the Our Organization

In order to realize the points set forth in this vision, we will operate our organization with the following considerations in mind. Although some require a long-term perspective, they are presented here as future-oriented initiatives.

① **Securing stable financial resources and aiming for a high percentage of self-financing**

- ▶ In addition to aiming for a financial resource structure appropriate for a certified specified nonprofit corporation, we will secure financial resources that will enable us to develop flexible and timely projects.
- ▶ With the decrease in the number of programs to support the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, JNPOC may experience a drop-in income from donations, but we will take this into consideration and examine business plans that can be sustained by membership fees as well as donations.

② **Actively reorganizing the organizational structure and promoting business collaboration for effective business promotion**

- ▶ We will reorganize our organizational structure by restructuring the ways in which our staff work, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of our business promotion. We will also consider more efficient designation of tasks and other aspects of our business, and put in place a structure at the appropriate time.
- ▶ We will carefully examine our business activities and flexibly consider the project structure in order to maximize the outcomes as a network rather than a single organization, including project alliances with other organizations where possible.

③ **Promoting the participation of a wide range of people and organizations and fostering effective communication**

- ▶ We will maintain the culture of *participation* that we have cherished and cultivated over the years, and actively create opportunities for dialogue with our members and stakeholders in order to continue to be an organization where diverse people can participate in our activities.

- ▶ In order to realize creative dialogues, our board members and staff will also pursue training to become high-quality communication practitioners.

④ Establishing a mechanism for promoting the participation of board members in projects and actively appointing them

- ▶ We will aim to become a sustainable organization by creating opportunities for board members, who are responsible for management and operation, to make more active business commitments.
- ▶ We will actively promote individuals who are active in their respective fields and regions to become board members based on a set of rules.

⑤ Clarification of staff development guidelines and establishment of specific training mechanisms

- ▶ We will arrange and clarify the method of staff development through both on and off the job training; we will develop and clarify the environment in which staff can improve themselves on a daily basis.
- ▶ We will train staff through a combination of opportunities such as personnel exchange, joint projects with other organizations, training reimbursements, joint training, and interviews.

⑥ Establishing a system for staff's diverse work styles and effective staff allocation

- ▶ In light of the fact that the activities of JNPOC are spreading across the country and the IT infrastructure is developing rapidly, we will build a mechanism that can guarantee a variety of working styles for our staff members.
- ▶ In addition to the telecommuting work style that has gained momentum during the response to COVID-19, we will consider securing regional bases (including employment of local personnel) with a view to strengthening our contact with the local community.