



TOMODACHI

TOMODACHI
ANNUAL

★
2024
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INITIATIVE
REPORT

ODYSSEY

Leadership in Motion and Cultivating Changemakers

Dear Friends,

Since the launch of its TOMODACHI Initiative in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the U.S.-Japan Council has been cultivating next-generation leaders from across the United States and Japan.

Through the initiative, we have provided life-changing experiences to more than 10,000 young Japanese and Americans. In 2024, 214 future leaders took part in the program. Many of the first cohorts of participants are now entering the workforce, equipped with a global mindset and a determination to improve the world and our ability to respond to calamities.

We saw just this following the devastating earthquake that struck the Noto Peninsula in Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture on January 1, 2024. Several TOMODACHI Initiative alumni have been using the skills they acquired through the program to help in the ongoing recovery of the region. This reminded us that from the tragedy and suffering of any natural disaster springs light and hope.

When wildfires brought widespread destruction to the Hawaiian island of Maui in August 2023, we applied the success of the TOMODACHI Initiative to a new community. Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we introduced the TOMODACHI Kibou for Maui Program in 2024, with 21 Maui high school students visiting Miyagi Prefecture to see first-hand the revitalization of the region and returning home with a sense of hope.

In fact, one of the key organizers of the program had herself experienced the 2011 Tohoku disaster and traveled to Hawaii in 2013 as part of the TOMODACHI Initiative. She spoke about the positive effects of the program at both the TOMODACHI Next Generation Summit and the USJC Annual Conference in Tokyo in the fall.

"I learned the most important life lesson from everyone I've met: To live strongly for those who can no longer live and to become a person who contributes, not one who takes away from others," she said.

In 2024, we launched the Mineta Ambassadors Program (MAP), an education endowment program to support exchange opportunities for American and Japanese high school and university students. Named after the late Norman Mineta, a former cabinet secretary and a champion of U.S.-Japan relations, the pilot program participants traveled between our countries in fall 2024, and in fall of 2025 the first official cohorts will enter the program.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the vision and unfailing support of our founders, supporters, sponsors, and partners—and we will continue in our work to shape a brighter future by encouraging tomorrow's young leaders to support a vibrant U.S.-Japan relationship.

Sincerely,

Daniel Ernst
Minister Counselor for Public Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Tokyo

Audrey Yamamoto
President & CEO
U.S.-Japan Council



"I learned the importance of expressing my opinions and standing up for myself even in difficult situations. I believe that leadership is about recognizing each person's strengths, effectively utilizing the qualities that everyone has, leading others, and contributing to society."

~ Irene Ozono



Our Mission

The TOMODACHI Initiative is a public-private partnership between the U.S.-Japan Council and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, with support from the Government of Japan. Born out of support for Japan's recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, TOMODACHI invests in the next generation of Japanese and American leaders through educational and cultural exchanges, as well as leadership programs.

Our History

In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the United States military and Japan Self-Defense Forces worked together successfully in Operation Tomodachi to provide immediate humanitarian relief to the Tohoku region. Building upon this cooperation and spirit of friendship, the United States and Japan launched the TOMODACHI Initiative. TOMODACHI is led by the United States Embassy in Tokyo and the U.S.-Japan Council, a tax-exempt non-profit organization, and is supported by the Government of Japan, corporations, organizations, and individuals from the United States and Japan.

Our Vision

We seek to foster a "TOMODACHI Generation" of young American and Japanese leaders who are committed to and engaged in strengthening U.S.-Japan relations, appreciate each other's countries and cultures, and possess the global skills and mindsets needed to contribute to and thrive in a more cooperative, prosperous, and secure world.

Our Future

Going forward, the TOMODACHI Initiative will continue to be a model for innovative public-private partnerships. We will develop and design programs that support U.S.-Japan cross-cultural youth leadership development, especially alumni programs that foster the TOMODACHI Generation while enriching and increasing collaboration with U.S.-Japan-related organizations.

Our Programs

Educational Programs provide educational opportunities for students to study abroad and gain exposure to each other's countries.

Cultural Programs in sports, music, and the arts provide gateways for Japanese and Americans to learn about and develop enduring interest in each other's cultures.

Leadership Programs help the next generation of entrepreneurs and young leaders develop skills and expertise that will guide them towards success.

Alumni Programs build upon the initial TOMODACHI experience, and provide TOMODACHI alumni with the skills, opportunities, and confidence to achieve their dreams while becoming the next generation of cross-cultural leaders.



The TOMODACHI Journey

TOMODACHI supports cross-cultural youth leadership development throughout a lifetime of experiences.



STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Continued Impact Through Partnerships

The Strategic Partners supporting the TOMODACHI Initiative cultivate diverse leadership skills among young people through unique programs that transform lives.

In 2024, 12 wide-ranging strategic partner programs offered opportunities to learn global experiences and leadership across various fields such as entrepreneurship, regional and tourism development, scholarships, disaster nursing, and sports management. They provide participants with spaces to build lasting relationships and connections. Even after completing the programs, alumni, as part of the “TOMODACHI Generation,” continue to grow and inspire each other through alumni events, workshops, programs and interactions.



TOMODACHI Amway Japan Foundation Tohoku Future Leader Program

This program, launched in 2019, aims to empower next-generation leaders to rediscover the appeal of towns in the Tohoku region and revitalize these areas through tourism. In 2024, 16 participants from Rikuzentakata City in Iwate Prefecture took part in the program, which spanned approximately seven months, including pre-departure training, U.S. training, post-program workshops, and presentations. Participants rediscovered the charm of their hometowns and developed unique community projects through interactions with local U.S. students.



TOMODACHI Boeing Entrepreneurship Seminar

This program fosters talented individuals from high school, college, and graduate students across Japan who can bridge social issues and U.S.-Japan cultural ties. In March 2024, five participants from the 2023 programs attended training in Oahu, Hawaii. Focusing on well-being, the training provided insights that enhanced participants’ projects addressing social challenges. In September, the 14th program began with 21 participants. Through a five-month journey including online sessions, they developed an international perspective, an entrepreneurial mindset, and the ability to carve their own paths.



TOMODACHI-Dow Women’s STEM Leadership and Research Program

This program offers several virtual sessions and a five-week internship experience designed for a diverse cohort of 10 female students majoring in STEM in Japan. The primary goal of the program is to reduce the gender gap in STEM fields in Japan while promoting educational equity. During the internship, hosted and implemented by Rice University, participants explored the intricacies of international collaboration and U.S.-Japan engagement. They also gained hands-on experience with scientific research practices in the U.S. and had opportunities for career exploration, English language development, cultural engagement, and collaboration with American students.



TOMODACHI-U.S. Embassy Go for Gold Sports Leadership Program

This program encourages Japanese university students to become global leaders in sports and apply their U.S. knowledge to the Japanese sports industry. In 2024, 10 participants underwent a four-month program, including a two-week training in Los Angeles and New York. Sessions focused on facility management, community engagement, and the business aspects of sports management. The delegation in its second year made a presentation titled “Japanese Sporting Leagues Forward to the World,” “Increasing the Value of Women’s Sports,” and “Visualizing the Social Impact in Sport.”



TOMODACHI Goldman Sachs Music Outreach Program

This program inspires participants to embrace new challenges and broaden their horizons by interacting with people of different ages, nationalities, statuses, and cultural backgrounds. In August, 29 members of the U.S. nonprofit HEART Global and 72 elementary school to high school students from foster care facilities in Tokyo, Chiba, Kanagawa, and Ibaraki joined singing and dancing workshops alongside facility staff and Goldman Sachs volunteers. Workshops were also held for 560 students at four middle schools in Fukushima and Miyagi Prefectures in October and November.



TOMODACHI J&J Disaster Nursing Training Program

Launched in 2015, this program aims to deepen the understanding of disaster nursing among Japanese nursing students. In 2024, 10 nursing students from across Japan participated in a six-month training program consisting of pre-departure training, U.S. training, post-program workshops, and a final presentation. In August, students visited New York, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. In November, they presented their post-program projects at the 8th International Research Conference of World Society of Disaster Nursing in Hyogo Prefecture, engaging in lively discussions with students from five countries, including Australia and Indonesia.



TOMODACHI MUFG Sustainable Entrepreneurship Program

Initiated in 2024, this program focuses on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aims to inspire Japanese high school students with a passion for creating a better world for people and the planet. In 2024, 16 participants were selected nationwide. During a U.S. training, they visited organizations in Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area, gaining insights into sustainability, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and entrepreneurial practices. Through pre-departure and U.S. training, participants developed the ability to design innovative social systems and the resilience to take on challenges continuously.



Building the TOMODACHI Generation: Morgan Stanley Ambassadors Program

This program focuses on understanding civil society and its role in addressing social issues. In 2024, 9 Japanese university students and 5 American university students participated. The 14 participants learned how nonprofit organizations build cross-sector partnerships with governments and businesses, integrating strengths and resources to develop solutions for critical societal needs. Upon returning to Japan, participants attended a debrief session at Morgan Stanley.

“I liked the research environment in the U.S. because it was more open with people having free discussions. After the program, now I think about going back to the U.S. in my career more.”

~ Monami Muto

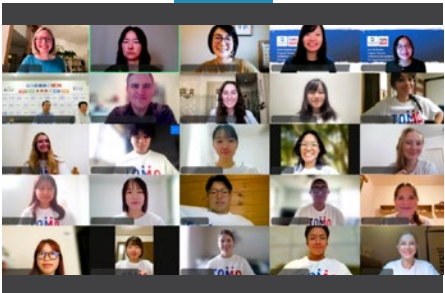




TOMODACHI Sumitomo Corporation Scholarship Program
Since 2014, this program has supported university students' year-long study abroad at U.S. universities. It aims to nurture young leaders with a global perspective who can connect Japan and the U.S. In March 2024, the 2023-24 scholars participated in a training session organized by Sumitomo Corporation of Americas, broadening their global perspectives and leadership skills. 10 scholars were selected for 2024-25 and program alumni attended the U.S.-Japan Council Annual Conference in Tokyo.



TOMODACHI Summer SoftBank Leadership Program 2.0
Based on a program that has trained over 1,000 participants since 2012, this renewed initiative provides leadership opportunities to 12 high school and university students from Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures. In summer 2024, participants spent three weeks at the University of California, Berkeley, learning about community contribution and leadership. They developed and presented action plans to address social issues at a presentation in Sendai City.



TOMODACHI Tanaka Sangyo Agricultural Exchange Initiative: Climate and Food System Awareness Program
Launched in 2024, this program addresses global issues related to climate change and agriculture. 20 students from universities in Niigata Prefecture and Texas participated in the program. The curriculum focused on self-awareness, reflection, sustainability, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to agriculture and climate change. Participants engaged in online and in-person sessions in Japan and the U.S., deepening their understanding of diverse agricultural ecosystems and practices.



TOMODACHI Toshizo Watanabe Leadership Program
This program provides leadership opportunities to high school students across Japan. In August, 20 students visited California for an 11-day program. Participants visited cultural institutions like Japan House, the Museum of Tolerance, and the Japanese American National Museum, deepening their understanding of U.S. history, diverse cultures, and U.S.-Japan relations. They also engaged in homestays with local families and interacted with American high school students during experiential learning sessions.



Nurturing Cross-Cultural Leaders

In 2024, three general fund programs were implemented, supported by donor contributions, enabling educational exchange, and leadership development programs.



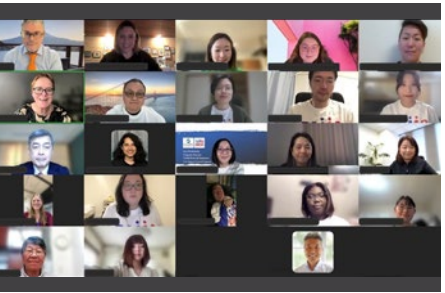
TOMODACHI KAKEHASHI Inouye Scholars Program

This exchange program provides opportunities for Japanese and American university students to learn about each other's countries and cultures. Established in 2014, the program honors the legacy of Senator Daniel K. Inouye. In March 2024, students from Loyola Marymount University and Howard University participated in a 10-day program.



TOMODACHI Kibou for Maui Program

Launched to support high school students affected by the devastating wildfires in Maui, Hawaii, in August 2023, this program connected Maui students with peers in Higashimatsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture. In 2024, 11 students in March and 10 in July spent a week in the Tohoku region, learning about the recovery from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and deepening their connections with local leaders, communities, and TOMODACHI alumni.

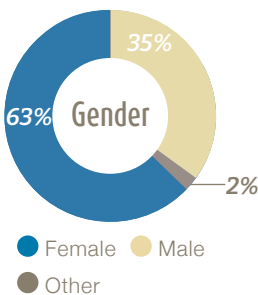


TOMODACHI Story Jam for Youth with Disabilities

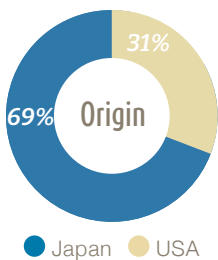
This online program teaches storytelling and leadership to young professionals and students with disabilities from Japan and the U.S. Over nine weeks, eight participants shared experiences, discussing challenges faced, how they overcame them, and ways to bring positive change to their communities. The program concluded with the screening of advocacy story videos created by participants.

2024 Demographics

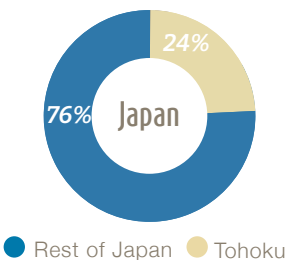
63% Female



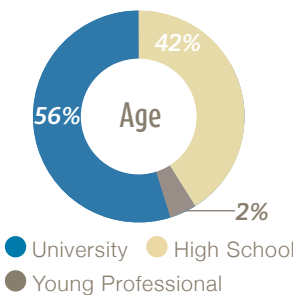
69% Japan



76% Non-Tohoku



56% University



632 event participants



214 program participants

Since the Beginning

386 programs

10,361 program participants

47,740 program and event participants

Ongoing Engagement

The TOMODACHI Generation surpassed 10,000 members in 2023 and continued to grow in 2024. The TOMODACHI experience extends far beyond participating in its programs by fostering long-term engagement even after the programs conclude. The strength of the TOMODACHI Generation lies in its ability to maintain connections with their communities and society as a whole while strongly connecting with deep engagement. Throughout the year, TOMODACHI alumni have gathered at various programs and events held nationwide and regionally, driving positive social change. Initiatives such as the TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Framework, Next Generation Summit, and TOMO-KIN Career Talks exemplify innovative programs designed to inspire and empower. The TOMODACHI Alumni community embodies the unwavering U.S.-Japan commitment to empowering young leaders through people-to-people connections at grassroots levels. Supported by Prudential's generosity, the TOMODACHI Alumni Program continues to pave the way for the next generation of global leaders.

The TOMODACHI Alumni Leadership Program equips the next generation of leaders in both the United States and Japan with the skills and confidence to realize their dreams by leveraging their TOMODACHI experiences. It fosters collaboration among alumni, enabling them to inspire one another and contribute to building a better world.

The TOMODACHI Alumni Leadership Program builds on the initial TOMODACHI experience to inspire and empower the next generation of Japanese and American leaders, providing ongoing engagement, as well as the skills and confidence needed to achieve their dreams, inspire fellow alumni, and contribute to a better world.

Core Values



Workforce Readiness

As leaders of the next generation, we prepare our alumni to become global jinza (global citizens) by providing them with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to thrive with a focus on mentorship and peer-to-peer leadership opportunities.



Critical & Innovative Thinking

Out-of-the-box, critical and innovative thinking provide successful and efficient problem-solving skills that are the keys to prosperity in the twenty-first century, and we aim to arm our alumni with these traits.



Civic Engagement

Building upon the global experiences participants gained through TOMODACHI programs, we hope alumni will make a difference in their communities through the development of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation.



Connectedness & Sustainability

As members of the TOMODACHI Generation, alumni will connect with each other to expand their networks and stay engaged as members and leaders of their communities, and really build on those people-to-people relations.

Engaged and Empowered: Building Alumni Connections

Alumni Highlights



TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Framework

The TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Framework builds and strengthens TOMODACHI communities across various regions. It is supported by U.S. and Japanese consulates and embassies. Within this framework, alumni selected as regional representatives invite others to events focused on networking and business skill development, strengthening their communities and creating opportunities to nurture future leaders. In 2024, 21 regional events were held in New England, Washington D.C., Hawaii, Hokkaido, Kanto, Kansai, Chubu-Hokuriku, Kyushu and Okinawa.



Next Generation Summit

On September 29, a dynamic and diverse group of participants came together for the Next Generation Summit, which featured a career fair type of networking opportunity, panel discussions, pitch contest and alumni reunions. The event revolved around three key themes—TSUNAGARI Hub, TOMO Voice, and Visionary Voices—designed to inspire action and foster meaningful connections. Talks from leaders in various fields highlighted how youth engagement can foster strong international relations. Participants left with a clear vision of how to empower their communities and lead in international relations.



TOMO-KIN Career Talks

This event originated in response to a 2021 alumni survey where participants expressed interest in connecting with other alumni in more casual settings. Initially held as virtual sessions during the pandemic, TOMO-KIN transitioned to in-person events starting in July 2022. In 2024, two in-person events were held, featuring guest speakers who shared career journeys and advice with TOMODACHI alumni. Masaharu Kono, a former diplomat and Senior Advisor at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shared an encouraging message not to be afraid of taking risks with the attendees.

"In the future, I want to create spaces where others can feel confident and know they belong in a welcoming environment. Who I am doesn't matter as much as how I use who I am to navigate the world and help others do the same. I hope to encourage others to move through life without holding themselves back because of their identity."

~ Nia Floyd





Chiaki Nakawatari

“The TOMODACHI program’s U.S. training helped me gain confidence, as I was recognized by others regardless of my age or gender.”

Chiaki Nakawatari is an alumna of the TOMODACHI Amway Japan Foundation Tohoku Future Leader Program and is currently a high school student living in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture. She aims to contribute to regional revitalization in Rikuzentakata through entrepreneurship and to spread the city’s appeal to a wider audience.

Q. What led you to participate in the TOMODACHI program?

Rikuzentakata, my hometown, has many attractions, such as rich nature, community solidarity after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and warm-hearted people. I love Rikuzentakata, but, compared to urban areas, there are limited opportunities to promote its appeal. With the goal of contributing to regional revitalization through entrepreneurship in areas where there are no established precedents, I decided to apply for this program.

Q. What was the most impressive part of the TOMODACHI program?

During the study abroad experience, we visited the “National 9/11 Memorial & Museum” and the “D.C. Central Kitchen.” I was deeply impressed by the way the museum offered guides in various languages, ensuring that all visitors could understand. This made me consider the challenges we face at the “Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami Memorial Museum.” The Central Kitchen is known as a place where people can walk into their “second life.” Since many people in my hometown lost their “place” after the earthquake, I gained many insights into how we might support such individuals.

Q. Has anything changed for you since participating in the TOMODACHI program?

During the U.S. training, I was the only first-year high school student so I was initially anxious. However, I was inspired by my peers who boldly asked questions and I began to gain confidence. I actively participated by asking questions and giving a representative greeting during visits. The TOMODACHI program helped me gain confidence, as I was recognized by others regardless of my age or gender.

Q. What is your dream for the future?

Currently, I am the student council president at my high school, and I aim to create a school environment that is both a “place” for students and for teachers. In the future, I want to create jobs in my Rikuzentakata, through entrepreneurship, providing people with a “place” and contributing to the revitalization of the region.



Felix Garcia

“TOMODACHI represents ‘community.’ It is a place where people from diverse cultural backgrounds can share their passion for intercultural exchange.”

Felix Garcia is an alumnus of the TOMODACHI Daiwa House Student Leadership Conference and is currently serving as the TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Representative of the New England Region. He also works at a technology startup, using technology to promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

Q. What led you to become involved with the TOMODACHI community as an alumni?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I reconnected with TOMODACHI alumni and joined the TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Framework. Additionally, the racial justice and civil rights movements sparked by the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020 led me to participate in the U.S.-Japan Council’s Critical Conversations series. Through these experiences, I became more deeply involved with the TOMODACHI community.

Q. What does TOMODACHI mean to you?

To me, TOMODACHI represents “community.” It is a place where people from diverse cultural backgrounds can share their passion for intercultural exchange. I believe that being deeply involved with TOMODACHI is an investment in the next generation and a way to continue strengthening the U.S.-Japan relations.

Q. How has your experience as the TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Representative helped you?

Through my activities as a representative, I have been able to improve my networking and relationship-building skills. I have also had the opportunity to connect with many professionals and organizations, not just other alumni. I find great fulfillment in supporting connections between others in this role.

Q. Reflecting on your involvement with TOMODACHI, what advice would you give to fellow alumni?

I have personally been greatly inspired by the people I met through the program, so maintaining connections with them is important. I would also recommend keeping an eye on TOMODACHI’s news and announcements. By participating in events, you’ll meet wonderful people and open up new possibilities. Make sure to subscribe to the newsletter, follow social media accounts, and reach out to alumni. Participating in events and conferences will lead to new opportunities.



Ryo Inoue

“The TOMODACHI experience validated feelings that were never understood in my hometown and encouraged me to chase after my goals, which is why I am who I am today.”

Ryo Inoue is an alumnus of the TOMODACHI Microsoft iLEAP Social Innovation and Leadership Program, and he is currently active as the TOMODACHI Alumni Regional Representative of the Kyushu Region. He has established an educational venture in Hirokawa Town, Yame District, Fukuoka Prefecture, with the goal of creating an environment where children can pursue their future goals and ambitions.

Q. How did you first come across the TOMODACHI program?

At the age of 24, after having aspired to be a professional soccer player since childhood, I made the decision to quit soccer. Having been so focused on soccer up until that point, I no longer knew what I wanted to do and was filled with uncertainty about my future. In the midst of this, I summoned the courage to join the program.

Q. What did you learn through the TOMODACHI program?

Thanks to the mentors and peers I met, I became convinced that “if you do what you truly want to do and give it your all, even if it means taking on entirely new challenges in the future, as long as you keep acting with passion, you can absolutely change your future.” The TOMODACHI experience validated feelings that were never understood in my hometown and encouraged me to chase after my goals, which is why I am who I am today.

Q. How are you applying the lessons from the TOMODACHI program?

I founded a modern-day version of a Terakoya (traditional learning hall) called “irodori Study Lab,” where elementary to high school students learn together in Hirokawa Town, Yame District, Fukuoka Prefecture. With the mission “Bringing the world to Yame, and Yame to the world,” we conduct inquiry-based, dialogue-driven activities that broaden the children’s horizons, even while living in a rural area.

Q. What led to the establishment of “irodori Study Lab”?

During my journey to become a soccer player, I was told things like, “You can’t make a living as a soccer player,” and I felt the pressure of societal expectations and the limitations of the local community. These frustrating experiences made me want to create a place where I could wholeheartedly support children in rural areas who are trying to challenge themselves, just like I was, by encouraging them to take their “first step”.

Q. As an alumni leader in the Kyushu Region, how do you want to contribute to your community?

Many of the members who participated in the TOMODACHI program at the time are now working professionals. As a leader in the Kyushu region, I want to contribute to the community by sharing my experiences with young people who may not have yet been reached by the TOMODACHI program.



Shiori Ogino

“Even if things don’t go as planned, that is still an important ‘piece’ of the puzzle. That’s why I want you to cherish the feeling of curiosity, even if it’s just a little, and take on challenges.”

Shiori Ogino participated in the TOMODACHI-STEM Women’s Leadership and Research Program. She aspires to become a researcher in academia and is currently studying the relationship between aging and lifespan from a neuroscience perspective in her graduate master’s program.

Q. What made you decide to participate in the TOMODACHI program?

I was drawn to the program because it offered an opportunity to conduct research at a foreign university, and because it targeted female university students, which meant I could meet like-minded peers.

Q. What was the most impressive part of the TOMODACHI program?

Above all, I really enjoyed the research. In American universities, each student had a unique background, and because of that, everyone had different research themes and ways of thinking, which was very stimulating. Furthermore, I enjoyed everyday conversations outside of research as well, and learned a lot from interacting with them.

Q. Has anything changed for you since you participated in the TOMODACHI program?

Before participating in the program, many people told me that if I wanted to become a researcher, it would be better to go abroad as a postdoc after obtaining a PhD. However, after experiencing the research internship in the U.S., my desire to study abroad as soon as I can grew stronger. Through this program, I became confident about pursuing a PhD abroad.

Q. How are you connected with the alumni of the TOMODACHI program?

Yukina Chiba, an alumna of the same program and also a senior from my university, helped me learn about the program’s appeal from the application stage. Additionally, Yukina, who is studying for a PhD at an American graduate school, has been a source of great support, providing realistic insight on research in the U.S. and advising me about my future career path.

Q. What message would you like to send to the juniors who are thinking about participating in the program?

If you feel even slightly interested in this program or in studying in the U.S., or if you simply have the desire to challenge yourself, I encourage you to take the leap without fearing for the consequences or bad outcomes. Even if things don’t go as planned, this experience will still be an important piece of your life. That’s why I want you to cherish the curiosity that you feel, even if it’s just a little, and take on challenges.

Sharing Stories

The 2024 U.S.-Japan Council Annual Conference was held in Tokyo, where TOMODACHI alumni shared their impactful experiences with an audience of over 700 people.

Miku Narisawa, an alumna of the TOMODACHI Rainbow for Japan Kids and founder of Odyssey Nature Japan, shared her experience with the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and how it led her to establish a program supporting students affected by the Lahaina wildfires.

"I learned the most important life lesson I have ever encountered: to live stronger for those who couldn't make it and be a person who contributes rather than takes away from others"

When the wildfires occurred in Hawaii last year, she felt it was her turn to "pay it forward". Recognizing the anxiety among students from Maui mirrored her own after the earthquake, she resolved to see them not as survivors but as "leaders of a brighter future". Through her program, she hopes to empower them to carve out their futures with compassion and purpose. She concluded her speech with the message that cross-border connections and the strength of younger generations can change the world.



MJee Abara, an alumnus of the TOMODACHI Kibou for Maui Program, spoke about the 2023 wildfires in Hawaii and the resilience he learned from the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake in Tohoku. The wildfires in Lahaina, Maui, left many without homes or loved ones, and MJee struggled with survivor's guilt. However, his connections with peers in Tohoku inspired him as he witnessed their hope and contributions to their communities.

Through the program, MJee clarified his mission as a next generation leader in Lahaina: to preserve the community through art and culture, prioritize environmental and mental well-being, and balance safety with tradition. He aspires to work as an Emergency Medical Technician in Lahaina, contributing to the community and ensuring no one else suffers the despair he experienced during disasters.

"We were inspired by those we met at Tohoku and wanted to bring it back as hope for Lahaina's future."



The closing plenary featured three alumni as panelists.



Miku Hayashida

Miku Hayashida, an alumna of the 2021 TOMODACHI Story Jam for Youth with Disabilities, is a social worker supporting employment for people with disabilities. She advocates for a society where everyone can be themselves, drawing from her experience as a wheelchair user.



Hikari Igarashi

Hikari Igarashi, an alumna of the 2014-2015 TOMODACHI MetLife Women's Leadership Program, is the Executive Director of Women's Eye. She launched a P-to-P sharing app using blockchain technology to ensure everyone can access the resources they need to move forward confidently.



Shotaro Abe

Shotaro Abe, an alumnus of the 2022 TOMODACHI Boeing Entrepreneur Seminar, founded an orchestra in his hometown of Kamakura, filling all 600 seats for its first concert. He uses this experience to advise startups and support business development.

The U.S.-Japan Council (U.S.) and the U.S.-Japan Council (Japan) work in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to implement the TOMODACHI Initiative as a public-private partnership. Implementation includes program development and oversight, communications and outreach, marketing, fundraising, donor relations and management, and operations.

The U.S.-Japan Council is a non-profit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., with staff across the United States, and Tokyo. The Council is dedicated to strengthening people-to-people connections among Japanese and Americans of all generations. The Tokyo-based U.S.-Japan Council (Japan) is a Public Interest Corporation, Koeki Zaidan Hojin. The two organizations are separate entities, each governed by an independent Board of Directors, which work closely together in the administration of TOMODACHI.

Board of Directors

(as of December 31, 2024)

Board Officers

Audrey Yamamoto
Representative Director
President & CEO, U.S.-Japan Council

Henry Seiichi Takata
Representative Director
Representative Director, SynTech Japan Co., Ltd.

Norie Iwamoto
Internal Auditor
PricewaterhouseCoopers Japan LLC Partner

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Representative Director,
Takako Ebata Office

Ayako Kameda
Executive Officer, Senior General
Manager of Green Energy Division
Obayashi Corporation

Takashi Ohde
Advisor, Gakushuin Women's College
Institute of International Studies

Jenifer Rogers
General Counsel Asia,
Asurion Japan Holdings G.K.

Miyuki Tani
Representative Director,
PEREGRINE CONSULTING K.K.

Board of Councilors

(as of December 31, 2024)

Board Officer

Scott Sato, Chair
Chairman and President,
Circlace K.K.

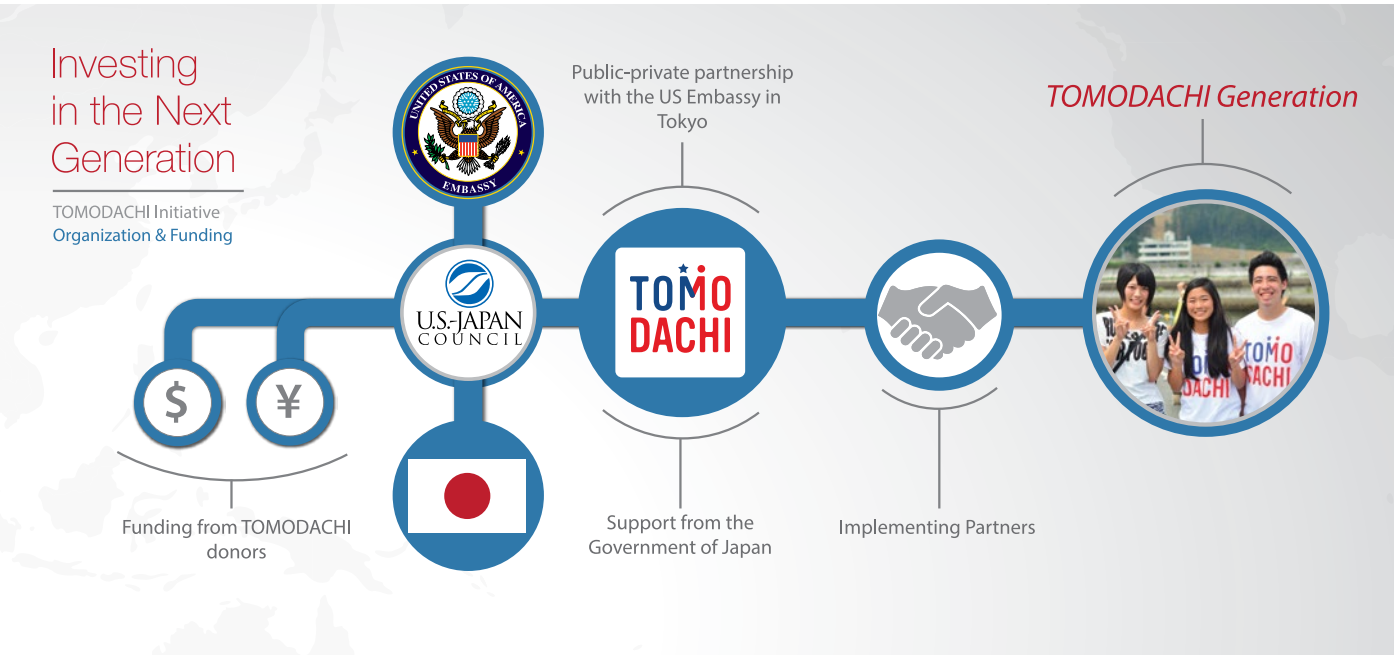
Board Members

Merle Aiko Okawara
Founder and Senior Advisor,
DELSOLE, Corporation

Miki Tsusaka
President and Representative Director,
Microsoft Japan Co., Ltd.

Russell K Kawahara
Partner,
Atsumi & Sakai

Our appreciation to the Board of Directors and Councilors of the U.S.-Japan Council in the U.S. for their support. Their names are found at: <https://www.usjapancouncil.org/board-of-directors-us>



Thank You

Founding Strategic Partners (\$1,000,000 or more, with initial donation in 2012)



Strategic Partners (\$1,000,000 or more)



“This program gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn what the devastated area from 3.11 went through so that we can take their knowledge and experiences back to Lahaina. We really appreciate the hospitality and kindness.”
~ Noa Gordon



Sponsors (\$100,000 - \$1,000,000)



Supporters (\$10,000 - \$100,000)

All Nippon Airways Co., Ltd. | Cheerio Corporation | ExxonMobil Japan | Imperial Hotel, Ltd. | Hayasaka Tax Accountants' Office Co., Ltd. | Japan Association of Charitable Organizations | NEC Corporation | Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP | Tricor K.K.

TOMODACHI in the Spotlight

We thank our many corporate partners for raising the profile of the TOMODACHI Initiative and spreading the word about the importance of U.S.-Japan youth exchange.



ANA airplanes display the TOMODACHI logo



TOMODACHI signage throughout Haneda Airport

Implementing Partners

TOMODACHI works with many partners in order to make these life-changing experiences possible for young people. In 2023, the following partners helped the TOMODACHI implement programs.

Asuenokibou | Children's National Hospital | Global Seed | IMPACT Foundation Japan (INTILAQ Tohoku Innovation Center) | Japan International Cooperation Center | Japanese Association for Sport Management (JASM) | Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i | Jibun Mirai Club | LA84 Foundation | Laurasian Institution | LeadOff Sports | Lehigh University | ODYSSEY NATURE JAPAN | Rice University | RootSpring | SFC Forum Foundation of Keio University Shonan Fujisawa Campus | General Incorporated Association Tonarino | University of California, Berkeley | University of Massachusetts Foundation, Inc. | The Washington Center | World in You

Financial

Cumulative TOMODACHI Commitments by Year (USD)
U.S.-Japan Council (Consolidated)

TOMODACHI CONTRIBUTIONS AND PLEDGES	2011-2023	2024	2024-26 (committed)	TOTAL
USJC (Japan)	\$37,971,608	\$1,713,668	\$0	\$39,685,276
USJC (U.S.)	24,906,107	235,000	80,000	25,221,107
Total Contributions and Pledges	62,877,715	1,948,668	80,000	64,906,383
In-kind Donations (U.S.-Japan)	5,239,611	0	0	5,239,611
Total Contributions and Pledges	\$68,117,326	\$1,948,668	\$80,000	\$70,145,994




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