



TOMODACHI EXCHANGE BETWEEN
MATSUE & NEW ORLEANS
FINAL REPORT

How did the program empower the next generation of Japanese and American thinkers and leaders? How well did the program achieve each of its goals?

One of the challenges of the Friendship City relationship between New Orleans and Matsue is a lack of awareness of the relationship, and of each other's cultures, so we used this as an opportunity to work on outreach, both short term and long term.

In the short term, the exchange provided an opportunity for the Participants from New Orleans to directly experience Matsue's customs and culture and to interact with the local community through home stays, receptions and parties, a high school visit, and Matsue Little Mardi Gras, an event attended by the general public which is focused on spreading the culture of New Orleans to Matsue and to Japan at large. In the long term, the Participants are now equipped with **knowledge, material, and resources** to educate their students, friends and families, and audiences about Matsue.

The Participants arrived back in New Orleans with a new found appreciation for Japan, Shimane Prefecture and, particularly, Matsue. The program by Matsue City was a well rounded program, while compact in time, helping to deepen the understanding between New Orleans and Matsue. It inspired a new generation of both Japanese and American young professionals to work together to achieve a better understanding of our cities, our countries and to develop plans to lead projects that help strengthen these ties in the future.

How did the program promote cross-cultural exchange between the U.S. and Japan?

Participants from Matsue on 2014's exchange program in New Orleans took the lead in planning the activities for this year's program in Matsue. When planning the events, they paid special attention to providing a deeper experience of Japan and the local culture than simply visiting tourism facilities. A strong emphasis was placed on teaching through experience and creating opportunities for building friendship between the youth of New



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Orleans and the youth of Matsue, including those who may not have been affected directly by the 2014 exchange. They took building human connections very seriously, and wanted to give a balanced and authentic rather than contrived experience of Japan to the Participants.

Each day in Matsue had a different theme, and the participants from New Orleans experienced the local culture in a way that they could confidently speak of their experiences and knowledge of Matsue to their respective communities in New Orleans. Many of the Participants collected material (everything from videos and photo to notes and impressions) throughout the trip to be able to make classroom and media presentations about their impressions.

Did the program develop local capacity, and if so, how?

The exchange also facilitated discussions between the Japan Society of New Orleans and the Matsue New Orleans Club regarding cooperation in ongoing exchanges, especially in regard to future Matsue Little Mardi Gras events, as well as between the city governments of Matsue and New Orleans. We believe that we built local capacity by discussing **conceptual framework, vision, and strategy for future exchanges**, as well as creating action items for organization structure and ensuring continuity.

Japan Society of New Orleans used the TOMODACHI Exchange to recruit the next generation of members and leaders of the Society. This recruiting process went well beyond the actual participants, as the TOMODACHI Exchange generated a lot of excitement and energy among young professionals in the New Orleans area. The membership demographic in Japan Society of New Orleans has taken a decidedly younger turn.



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How did the program impact individuals who would otherwise not have had the opportunity?

As the New Orleans Selection Committee worked through its selection process, members specifically looked for individuals for whom this program would have maximum impact and offer a life changing experience. Over half of the selectees had not been to Japan before and in most cases, would not have had the means to visit Japan in the near term. The TOMODACHI Exchange offered them an opportunity to fulfill significant life goals, potentially changing the course of their lives.

In Matsue, many locals beyond the directly involved Executive Committee and host families, especially children and youth, were impacted in large or small, but equally memorable ways. Students at Shonan High School enjoyed learning about New Orleans and conversing with the Participants, and spectators at Matsue Little Mardi Gras experienced a more authentic taste of Mardi Gras thanks to the influence of the Participants, who brought costumes and prizes not usually found in Japan, like classic Doubloons, to hand out directly.

How will program impact be sustained?

In Matsue, the next planned citizen or official delegation is from Matsue to New Orleans in 2018 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the City of New Orleans, as well as the 25th anniversary of the Friendship City relationship they share. Until that time, plans are underway to focus on media-based exchange with messages for the people of New Orleans, and outreach projects in Matsue to educate more of the local citizens and Japan at large about the culture of New Orleans through gumbo cooking classes and informational workshops in combination with Matsue Little Mardi Gras. The 2014 TOMODACHI exchange participants will be instrumental in these projects. The Matsue New Orleans Club, when putting on future Matsue Little Mardi Gras, looks forward to cooperation from the Japan Society of New Orleans in providing items like bead necklaces to hand out to spectators.



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As far as sustaining impact in New Orleans, 2015 TOMODACHI Participants have agreed to remain members of Japan Society of New Orleans through at a minimum of 2017 and to be available to participate in various community outreach projects. Participants have formed a committee and selected a committee chair to initiate and plan these outreach projects. They have also energized the Society as a whole by speaking about their TOMODACHI experience at the 12 November 2015 Annual Meeting of the Society. This has inspired a number of Society members to assist in outreach projects and become more involved in other Society activities.

How did the program contribute to participant growth across five development areas (personal, intercultural, academic, professional, and leadership).

We are convinced that this TOMODACHI Exchange offered a significant opportunity for personal growth, deepening intercultural understanding between our two cities and further developing and expanding the leadership capabilities of our Participants. By interfacing with the host families on a deep level and having the opportunity for an in depth visit to Matsue and Shimane Prefecture, all of our participants came away with a much deeper understanding and appreciation of local culture and developed relationships that will last a lifetime.

On a personal level, profound friendships developed, not only between the participants and their hosts and guides in Japan, but also amongst the Participants themselves. Inter-culturally, the Participants participated in a series of pre-departure cultural orientations that helped them better understand cultural differences they might encounter. During their visit, they were able to explore those differences and help answer questions people in Japan had about New Orleans and American culture. Academically, one Participant who teaches at a local university has begun incorporating information learned on the trip into her lectures and introducing her students to Matsue and Japan. Several Participants have started taking Japanese lessons to improve their language ability and some are planning to take next year's Japanese Language Proficiency Test to get a credential that may open additional opportunities for future work,



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study, and exchange. Professionally, three Participants have started to seek future employment opportunities in Japan through the JET Program. One Participant has begun partnering through her non-profit with other local organizations to bring Japanese artists and musicians to the New Orleans area. Leadership is being demonstrated by participants who are taking on roles as new Board Members of Japan Society and in chairing the new Tomodachi Committee that will organize initiatives going forward.

There were few dry eyes among the Participants and their host families at the airport. One of the Participants, when saying goodbye to his host family, was choked with emotion and told them that his experience with them made him rethink what family means to him. Both his host parents cried and hugged him in response.

Describe the division of roles between your organization and any partner organization(s), and note your observations about any partner organization(s)

The City of Matsue (in particular, the International Relations Section of the International Tourism Division) took main responsibility for the exchange events and coordination, and an organizational role in the Executive Committee. The rest of the Executive Committee was made up the 2014 TOMODACHI Exchange Participants, and the President of the Matsue New Orleans Club. Many of the excursions were based on ideas from the 2014 Participants, who took responsibility for coordinating them.

From the New Orleans side, the TOMODACHI Exchange program served to deepen relationships with other Japanese organizations in New Orleans. Japan Club of New Orleans, Japan Garden Foundation and the local JET Alumni Association were all represented and engaged on the Selection Committee. TOMODACHI greatly enhanced the Society's visibility in the greater New Orleans community by offering opportunities for interviews both on local television and print outlets.



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Describe any obstacles encountered. How did you overcome them or how would you overcome them if you did the program again?

One of the obstacles encountered was in the selection process of the Participants. In order to lessen the anticipated time burden of reviewing application packets and conducting interviews, responsibilities were divided amongst the selection committee members. The result was that each member had insight into a segment of the applicant pool, but no one had a big picture of all the applicants and it was difficult to make decisions about applicants about whom committee members did not have familiarity. The time needed for application review and interviews was not as intensive as estimated and it would benefit the program in the future to have selection committee members read all application packets and sit in all interviews. It would also be beneficial to have a social component of the application process to be able to see how potential exchange members interact with their peers as a part of the evaluation process.

During the planning process, there was frank discussion between organizers in New Orleans and Matsue about any special needs or concerns of Participants. We determine that it was more beneficial to plan on these contingencies instead addressing them on an as needed basis. Being proactive and knowing about health issues and dietary needs ahead of time enabled a positive and smooth Exchange.

Another area we felt could have presented obstacles was inexperience on cultural matters on either side. We were able to overcome this by having a very experienced JET CIR (from the US) embedded in the Matsue Division of International Tourism and the chaperone that lived in Japan for two years as a JET. This enabled both sides to be culturally sensitive to both American and Japanese needs. The JET CIR, Brittany Partin, played a critical role in communication and facilitation of both the 2014 TOMDODACHI Exchange to New Orleans and the 2015 visit to Matsue. Through her extraordinary efforts, both exchanges went smoothly, both in planning and execution and we owe her a debt of gratitude for her efforts.