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**SUBNATIONAL DIPLOMACY/LOCAL & REGIONAL
EXCHANGE WORKING GROUP**

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

The U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON) is a binational advisory panel that serves to elevate and strengthen the vital cultural and educational foundations of the U.S.-Japan relationship, and to strengthen connections between U.S. and Japan leadership in those fields. It works to ensure that the best new ideas for cultural, educational, and intellectual activity and exchange are implemented as operational programs.

CULCON organizes working groups, whose members consist of CULCON members and private sector and government officials with related expertise, to study issues of shared national interest, identify best practices, and offer recommendations to stakeholders to advance the U.S.-Japan relationship.

CULCON established the Subnational Diplomacy/Local & Regional Exchange Working Group (SND WG) in October 2022. The SND WG brought together participants from both the U.S. and Japan for “exploring the role of subnational diplomacy/regional exchange on the U.S.-Japan partnership, as well as investigating ways to enhance this important form of interaction,” (Final Report of the CULCON Ad Hoc Committee, October 2022). Co-Chairs SATO Yuri and William Tsutsui led discussions between stakeholders from various fields, including diplomacy, academia, local government, and nonprofit organizations, all with expert experience in fostering or sustaining US-Japan subnational diplomatic ties. Discussion covered various aspects of the local and regional exchange of subnational diplomacy, recognizing the broad and varied scope of players and activities in motion. They discovered, in turn, the individual and collective positive impact of these efforts on economic growth, problem-solving, and empowerment of future generations, between and for the United States and Japan.

The SND WG concludes that such initiatives should be supported and enhanced. To best do so, action is needed in “ecosystem,” “human capital,” and “future leaders” to **advance interconnectivity** across multiple stakeholders and **promote relationship sustainability** over time.

The working group agreed to also recommend that CULCON explore establishing a follow-up process to ensure that efforts proceed to strengthen the bilateral relationship through subnational diplomacy.

Subnational Diplomacy: A Positive Impact on the U.S.-Japan Partnership

Although much of the focus of the U.S.-Japan partnership has emphasized national-level diplomatic interactions, subnational diplomacy has formed the bedrock of the U.S.- Japan partnership since its inception. Collaborations such as city-to-city partnerships, business investments, youth and professional activities, and cultural exchanges have enabled the United States and Japan to, “take further steps for a NEW GOLDEN AGE of the ever-growing Japan-U.S. Alliance.”¹ As the global geopolitical environment becomes more complex, enhancing the U.S. – Japan partnership into the 21st Century has never been more important.

The CULCON working group defined subnational diplomacy as all components of U.S. – Japan relations that occur outside of formal national diplomatic channels maintained by the governments of the United States and Japan, with a view to addressing shared challenges and promoting mutual understanding. Key actors include state/prefectural and municipal governments, multinational corporations, local business communities, publicly-sponsored organizations, nonprofit organizations, universities, and local civic groups. One of the most productive and important aspects of subnational diplomacy is its capacity to engage multiple sectors in binational collaborative projects. Another key feature is the way that subnational diplomatic activities generate numerous positive benefits for people, companies, and communities in both the United States and Japan.

US-Japan subnational connections are long-standing, widespread, and active, strengthening economies at the local level. As the Joint Statement between the U.S. and Japan of February 2025 clearly indicates, “As close economic partners, the United States and Japan provide the largest amount of foreign direct investment and create high-quality jobs in each other's countries. Industries of both countries continue to play a vital role for each other's supply chains.” The direct investment of Japan to the U.S. was 819.2 billion USD in 2024, marking Japan as a top-three investor in every one of the 50 states.² Japanese companies produced 529,200 manufacturing positions for Americans in 2024. U.S. companies also invest in key sectors in Japan, with a total sum of 57.5 billion USD in 2024.³ Both the U.S. and Japan contribute to creating vibrant local communities in such areas as protection of environmental sustainability, arts and education programs, and building the capacity of younger generations to build a better future.

In addition to the kinds of personal relationships that form when companies invest in local communities abroad, deeper connections may also form between subnational governments, resulting in more formal city-to-city partnerships or state-prefecture agreements. These relationships create an institutionalized means to develop mutual understanding, friendship, and peace between local communities. There are now over 467 city-to-city/state-to-prefecture

¹ Implementation of the Agreement ~ Toward a NEW GOLDEN AGE for the Japan-U.S. Alliance ~ signed by Prime Minister TAKAICHI Sanae and President Donald J. Trump on October 28, 2025.

² Japan has been the largest foreign direct investor in the U.S. for the past five years (2019-2023).

japans_us_investment_dynamics_2025_v2.pdf

³ The total investment from U.S. to Japan in 2024 was 57.5 billion USD. [Bea: Japan - International Trade and Investment Country Facts](#).

relationships between U.S and Japanese communities.⁴ These partnerships go beyond formal government-to-government ties, spanning culture, education, business, and civic engagement to underscore the wider bilateral relationship. They often facilitate transformative exchange experiences like youth leadership forums, homestays, and collaborative community projects that create lasting friendships across generations.

As technological advancements create more opportunities for subnational ties, stakeholders are finding new ways to work together to foster mutual understanding and economic growth. New technologies are lowering barriers to international engagement and opening new avenues for creative collaboration. Moreover, the increasingly widespread use of Memorandums of Understandings (MOUs), which specify the goals, roles, timelines, and deliverables of binational collaborative projects, has enabled subnational entities to create more complex, multi-actor collaborations that benefit both countries.

In summary, U.S.-Japan subnational relationships are the bedrock of the bilateral relationship. Whether these relations are initiated by individuals, local governments, multinational corporations, local business communities, publicly-sponsored organizations, nonprofit organizations, universities, civic groups, or some combination, these relationships have been forming for more than a century. Such personal connections, joint projects, and institutional collaborations build lasting goodwill, facilitate economic growth, and strengthen bilateral ties in ways that complement and sustain formal diplomatic efforts conducted by national governments.

For case studies of good practices, please see a non-exhaustive list in the appendix that highlights how subnational diplomacy supports the bilateral relationship in numerous ways, including enhancing economies (leadership development, technical capacity, business growth), education, arts/culture, and government capacity.

⁴ 467 sister cities: 姉妹提携データ - CLAIR（クレア）一般財団法人自治体国際化協会.

Priority Action Plans

1. Enhancing the ecosystem that promotes subnational diplomacy

To enhance subnational diplomacy initiatives, it is critical to support the organizational ecosystem that sustains and advances long-standing relationships at the regional and local level. Some organizations are well-established, while others are still seeking acknowledgement within larger Japan-U.S. networks; all are seeking opportunities for strategic collaboration. Stakeholders must invest in these organizations and seek to foster engagement opportunities.

Creating and maintaining local information networks for Japan-U.S. coordination are crucial components of this work; this includes promoting resources for building cultural and educational exchanges at the regional level, as well as establishing opportunities for committed professionals to gather, share, and discuss said resources. Leadership summits are a useful tool. In the United States, CULCON-organized summits of U.S.-Japan related organizations have been held in areas of the South and Midwest with strong, localized Japanese business presence. Convening leadership and sharing information in these hubs of subnational engagement strengthens state and inter-state Japan-U.S. connections for collective problem solving as well as greater economic opportunity. In Japan, US-Japan Liaison Meetings, held under the auspices of the America-Japan Societies, also serve to link organizations.

Other initiatives include sister-city summits/leadership summits organized by sister-city organizations of both the U.S. and Japan. A key factor to sustaining sister city relations lies in the existence of an ecosystem consisting of multi-layered intermediary organizations within respective cities. It is critical to expand these opportunities to enhance organizational ecosystems within Japan and the U.S., and bilaterally.

Note on funding: private-sector funding has been vital to subnational engagement in the U.S., while the major source of funding has been the public sector in Japan. It is critical to seek opportunities to balance funding sources in both countries by encouraging more private-sector funding in Japan and more public-sector funding in the U.S. Creating a balanced financial model of private and public funds is beneficial for sustaining long-term partnerships in both countries.

Recommendation	Implementing Actors
A. Sponsor and promote leadership summits of regional organizations and municipal government agencies involved in subnational diplomacy; leadership to gather, share information, strategize for problem-solving, and further organizational collaboration.	Japan: Local Authorities, Grass-root Exchange Organizations, Diplomatic Establishments
	U.S.: Government Agencies (CULCON), Institutions of Higher Education, Non-Profit and Civil Society, Private-sector/Business

B. Promote and enhance access to up-to-date information on Japan-U.S. related organization activities, events, exchange opportunities, and success stories at the local and regional level. Information and resources can include initiatives to showcase: 1. the economic and cultural benefits of subnational diplomacy at the regional level (e.g., cities, states, rural and “flyover country”), including sister-cities connections and notable local Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)s between U.S. and Japanese entities. 2. available tools that facilitate cross-lingual and cross-cultural communication including video communication technologies as well as human coordinators like translators. 3. sustainable operation models to establish and maintain a U.S.-Japan-U.S. local organization 4. existing best practices that detail the relationship-building process, including finding partners and reviving previous partnerships.	Japan: Government Agencies (MOFA), Educational Institutions, Local Authorities, Japan-U.S. Exchange Organizations, Non-Profit and Civil Society U.S.: Institutions of Higher Education (Researchers and Research Initiatives), Businesses and Corporations, Non-Profits and Civil Society (Exchange Program Leadership; Alumni network coordinators), Government Agencies (Federal and Local)
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2. Strategic collaboration for engaged human capital

The Japan-U.S. relationship has a longstanding history of mutual exchange tended by individuals with skills in language and expertise in culture. It is necessary to continue to invest in practical training and professional opportunities for these individuals. This includes sustaining regional and inter-regional networks between institutions of higher education and businesses to create professional opportunities and mobilize talent in the U.S.-Japan space.

Cultivated talent in the right positions advances mutually beneficial growth and innovation at the local and regional level. A ready pool of talent is alumni of Japan-U.S. exchange programs. These individuals are often looking for pathways to maintain their lifelong connections to the Japan-U.S. space. They are also often already in positions to serve as leaders. This is so across sectors, including education, diplomacy, and various businesses in manufacturing, construction, and finance.

In all, training and nurturing engaged human capital fosters multisectoral partnerships that leverage geographical strengths and enhance inter-regional connectivity to the benefit of greater U.S.-Japan relations.

Recommendations	Implementing Actors
C. Identify and promote professional internships based on industries and sectors needed in current economic situations through universities, exchange organizations, and/or sister-cities. This includes but is not limited to the following actions. 1. Identify and invite local businesses (Japanese corporates in U.S./U.S. corporates in Japan) to offer a youth internship program to students from Japan/U.S., or alumni from Japan-U.S. exchange programs. 2. Enhance pathways to Japan-based internships for ready talent pools. For example, JETs finishing their tenure that want to remain engaged in Japan. 3. Create opportunities for youth to participate in exchanges, internships, and leadership programs that focus on Japan-U.S. deepening Japan-U.S. economic cooperation (e.g., Silicon Valley Japan Platforms).	Japan: Private Sectors, Local Authorities, Universities and Educational Institutions, Publicly Supported Exchange Program Organizer. U.S.: Institutions of Higher Education, Businesses and Corporations, Non-Profits and Civil Society (Exchange Program Leadership; Alumni network coordinators), Government Agencies (Federal and Local)
D. Strengthen multi- and cross-sectoral connections and exchange between local leadership in Japan and the U.S. This includes leadership in local government as well as establishing business and cultural partnerships at the regional level such as advocating for or facilitating: 1. The establishment of organizations/agencies dedicated to subnational diplomacy at the local and municipal levels, public and private sector. 2. Professional exchanges between entrepreneurs, education and art institution administrators, and/or leaders in regional governance. 3. Public-private partnerships to establish dedicated funds or micro-grants for subnational diplomacy initiatives. 4. Business-to-business international collaboration on innovative products or	Japan: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, Corporations, Non-Profit and Civil Society, Institutions of Higher Education U.S.: Businesses and Corporations, Non-Profits and Civil Society, Government Agencies (Municipal and Local)

methods. 5. Sports and e-sports exchanges; music, dance, and art exchanges.	
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3. Leveraging interest in each other’s countries to develop future leaders

By collaborating with various sectors such as educational institutions, local communities, and cultural exchange organizations, stakeholders can build from a place of mutual interest between Japan and the United States toward the development of future leaders. Cultivating interest in each other's countries at a young age is especially important, as it shapes future paths and develops into global perspectives.

To enable young people to deepen their understanding of the other country's language, history, and society, and connect that knowledge to future careers and community engagement, it is vital to sustain and expand the fields of Japan Studies in the United States and American Studies in Japan. These efforts go beyond simply sparking intellectual curiosity—it is intended to foster human resources that are the “on-the-ground contributors” of the wider Japan-U.S. network.

In the case of Japan Studies in the United States, it is important to establish endowments to hire and retain scholars/researchers at prominent universities for long-term, sustainable support and development of youth-in-training. Scholars/researchers in these positions not only provide practical training but also inspire by illuminating professional and educational career pathways. Combining financial sustainability with intellectual leadership cultivates the fertile ground for raising the next generation of experts that will become the future teachers of generations yet to come. This ensures a global understanding of Japan for decades.

Educational institutions that employ U.S.-Japan specialists and train future U.S.-Japan leaders also become regional hubs of Japan-U.S. networks. In the United States, especially in the Midwest and the South, Japanese companies operating at the local and regional level often benefit from individuals with useful skillsets and cultural understanding, developing and growing their businesses further to the benefit of local communities. It is important to recognize and expand on the regional hub function of educational institutions for the advancement of U.S.-Japan regional connections.

Recommendation	Implementing Actors
E. Establish, expand, and sustain Japan-U.S. educational exchanges for youth and teachers, encouraging unique initiatives around language learning and research, in two specific ways. 1. Encourage sister-cities organizations, Japan-U.S. exchange organizations, corporations,	Japan: Middle Schools, Local Authorities, Government Agencies, Private Sectors
	U.S.: Business and Corporations, Non-Profits and Civil Society, Public

international schools, and universities to share resources, such as exchange-know-how and teaching language skills and tools, where possible. 2. Considering that Middle-School exchanges are particularly effective in gaining life-changing experiences and interest in global affairs, invite stakeholders in Japan to expand Middle-School Level Exchanges between Japan and the U.S., in addition to existing exchange programs for high school and university students.	Sectors (Local and State)
F. Support Japan Studies and American Studies in universities and think tanks. 1. Create endowments to establish Japan Chairs and tenure-track professorships to strengthen Japan Studies in multiple universities and think tanks in the U.S., thereby supporting the establishment and long-term development of educational positions and career pathways and ensuring the continuous offering of high-quality courses and programs on Japan and related fields. 2. Develop support programs that help Japanese researchers participate in international symposiums and conferences, thereby supporting active engagement in scholarly dialogue and intellectual exchange.	Japan: Universities and Educational Institutions, Think tanks, Private Sectors, Government Agencies, Diplomatic Establishments U.S.: Institutions of Higher Education, Businesses and Corporations, Non-Profits and Civil Society, Government Agencies

Call-to-Action for Japan-U.S. Related Agencies, **Organizations, and Other Stakeholders**

1. Enhancing the ecosystem that maintains subnational diplomacy

1. Invite Japan-U.S. related organizations and managers of Japan-U.S. exchange opportunities to create or strengthen alumni networks (e.g., Japan Alumni Community of US Exchange Program (JAC-US), Japan -US military Program (JUMP)).
2. Identify or establish a Point of Contact in institutions of higher learning to engage local communities and Japan- U.S. related organizations.
3. Leverage existing relationships and programs (e.g., sister city, adult exchange) to create follow-on opportunities such as volunteering to help sustain programs.
4. Encourage volunteers who will oversee the exchange programs/take care of participants and homestays to keep exchange programs sustainable.
5. Create and maintain a list of existing youth exchange programs and scholarships for Japan-U.S. interested students and extol good practices. For example, the JUSFC Summer Institute, KAKEHASHI Project, the U.S.-Japan Council (MAP), The Bridging Foundation, J-LEAP, JOI, and ALLEX program.
6. Highlight the impact and importance of maintaining national-level programs that build local Japan-U.S. connections, such as the binational Fulbright program (including the Fulbright Foreign Language Assistantship (FLTA), the Rotary Foundation, the JET Program, Japan Foundation Japanese Studies Fellows, and U.S.-Japan Network for the Future Program. Encourage continued research and information sharing to keep data on impact up-to-date and accessible.

2. Strategic collaboration for engaged human capital

1. Offer awards and recognition events for alumni of exchange programs like university study abroad programs or JET that are doing important U.S.-Japan work. This will highlight grassroots connections that develop and sustain human capital pathways.
2. Create mentorship opportunities for alumni of exchange programs. For example, alumni run pre-departure programs and post-departure programs. This will help promote the careers and activities of notable alumni by highlighting their roles.
3. Promote or enhance existing career forums in Japan and in the US that support individuals seeking Japan-U.S. related employment.
4. Create or offer training opportunities for individuals who have experience and skills gained abroad to translate their abilities into those relevant to job hunting and career development in their respective countries.

5. Connect the business community and relevant government organizations in Japan and the U.S. to Japan-U.S. exchange program alumni as a talent pool to draw from; can leverage young professional groups such as Japan-America Society Young Professionals (JAS-YP) groups.
6. Leverage sister-city networks for training opportunities for young professionals in various industries.
7. Distribute next step information about pathways to become language teachers for returnees from exchange programs (e.g., JET, J-LEAP, JOI, or Fulbright FLTA).
8. Facilitate interactions among various institutions to create new pathways for language learners. For example, The Japan Foundation may send a Japanese Studies Fellow to IUC to provide student opportunity to engage with Japan scholar.

3. Leveraging interest in each other's countries to develop future leaders

1. Research what type of programming, activities, platforms, and approaches are attractive to the next generation; utilize this information to inform engagement opportunities regarding international exchange and study abroad for the purpose of counteracting sustainability concerns and challenges.
2. Fund and promote grassroots programming that leverages interests outside of language and school/university, like sports, arts, and popular media.
3. Fund and support public libraries for collecting manga, anime, and Japanese novels in the U.S., and American studies materials in Japan, to attract more young people to Japan Studies and American Studies.
4. Establish awards or recognition/achievement procedures for the best educational content about Japan-U.S. relations from content creators, including producers of a variety of media (e.g., videos, games, blogs, online activities, etc.).
5. Promote Japanese/English language and immersion programs in K-12 educational institutions. (e.g., Mori-no-Ike in Concordia Language Villages in MN, and Japanese Immersion School in Portland, OR and Los Angeles County, CA).
6. Facilitate connections between faculty and established digital content creators that introduce their followings to information on Japan / U.S. or the Japan-U.S. partnership.
7. Facilitate interregional school/university collaborations so that students without language classes in their home institutions can take them at other local schools or universities; create scholarships or pathways to support such collaborations

Good Practices, Case Studies

The case studies collected in this report illustrate some of the many ways that subnational diplomacy, facilitated by new developments in technology, undergirds the U.S.-Japan partnership. Decades-long partnerships are flourishing and evolving, and new opportunities are developing for collaboration that were not possible before. The following examples are organized into three categories: Keystone Organizations, Subnational Governmental Relationships, Multisectoral Subnational Relationships.

Keystone Organizations

Keystone organizations perform vital roles in promoting U.S.-Japan subnational diplomacy and local/regional exchanges. These organizations have supported a wide range of U.S.-Japan subnational collaborations over many years, so their institutional memory and administrative skills enable new and inexperienced individuals, communities, and organizations begin and maintain partnerships with counterparts in the other country. To use technical language, these keystone organizations “reduce barriers of entry” and “lower transaction costs” in U.S.-Japan subnational diplomacy, dramatically enhancing the number and range of entities able to engage in U.S.-Japan collaboration.

❖ **CLAIR&JETAA – Creating a powerful network to support Japan–U.S. relations**

An important program that fosters cultural exchange, The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, invites professionals from the U.S. and other countries to work in Japanese schools and local government offices as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs). The program’s primary goal is to promote grassroots mutual understanding between Japan and other nations through direct interactive engagement in communities throughout Japan. Over the program’s 39-year-long history, as of July 2025, it has invited over 80,000 participants to Japan from 82 countries, with over half of the participants from the U.S. JET Program participants, whether they served as CIRs, ALTs or SEAs, not only gained professional experience through their work teaching English to Japanese children and supporting internationalization efforts in Japanese local government, but they also accumulated valuable cultural literacy, language skills and professional etiquette while living and working in Japan. These experiences prompt future careers and volunteer work that continue to foster subnational diplomacy, grassroots exchanges, and cross-border collaborations and problem-solving between the US and Japan.

The Government of Japan works to ensure that the relationships built between JET Program participants and Japan do not end when they leave the program, supporting JET alumni to become lifelong “bridges” between Japan and their home countries. As of December 2024, there are 55 JET Alumni Association (JETAA) chapters worldwide, engaging in various efforts to promote Japanese culture and encourage ongoing exchange with Japan. The U.S. has the largest number of chapters of any single country, numbering 19 JETAA chapters covering more than 45,000 alumni spread across the entire country. Many alumni maintain relationships with their Japanese host communities after leaving the program, continuing to foster U.S. Japan ties through professional

and personal contributions long after their time on the program concludes. Many JET alumni create sister city relationships between their host community in Japan and their hometown, relationships that can grow to include additional youth and cultural exchanges, local government partnerships, and business collaborations. New JETs are also often placed in sister-city communities in Japan as a way to deepen the connections between the two local communities. JETs who served Japanese local governments as CIRs sometimes return to local governments in the United States, helping them to internationalize and forming an especially strong capacity for those local governments to grow their connections to Japan. For example, the current Director of International Affairs for the City of Seattle and the Manager of International Relations and Protocol for the Port of Seattle both served as CIRs in Kobe (Seattle's sister city), giving them an early foundation in US-Japan subnational diplomacy. In this way, the people serving on the JET program, both while they are in Japan as a JET and after they return to the United States as alumni, contribute to and lead local international exchange activities and organizations in both countries, enrich and direct binational business partnerships, serve as informal ambassadors, and help support, organize and oversee sister-city programs, educational initiatives, and cultural events. The JET alumni community is a powerful, multigenerational network of professionals who play key roles in leading, advocating, and supporting Japan-U.S. relations across a wide range of fields.

To support JET participants and alumni in their post-JET Program careers, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) hosts various JET-exclusive career support events. One is the annual "JET Program Career Fair" in the Tokyo metropolitan area and Osaka, that aim to connect Japanese companies and organizations with JET program participants. CLAIR also introduces internship opportunities at domestic companies and organizations to JET participants each year. Furthermore, CLAIR provides multifaceted career support through initiatives such as the "Career Vision Conference," which includes sessions on job-hunting in Japan as well as breakout sessions by industry (e.g., translation/interpretation, travel/tourism, education), offering practical information and guidance for career development from fellow JET alumni.

Additionally, the Japanese Embassy and the Consulates General in the United States host networking events with representatives from Japanese companies in the U.S., which also serve as welcome receptions for returning JET participants and provide career support opportunities.

USJETAA, the national nonprofit that supports JET alumni in the USA, also runs robust and extensive programming to support and encourage JET alumni in their endeavors to build careers that integrate their Japan experience and passion into their professional pathways, thus further strengthening the alliance across a wide variety of industries and fields. USJETAA along with the 19 JETAA chapters throughout the USA create a far-reaching, interactive JET network that fosters the current and next generation of US-Japan leadership, helping to ensure that subnational diplomacy between the two countries remains strong, active, and impactful.

As the JET program approaches its 40th anniversary, the Japanese Government, CLAIR, and the wider JET and JET alumni community look forward to celebrating its legacy and further strengthening its efforts for the future.

❖ **Sister Cities International (SCI)/Japan-U.S. Sister Cities Association (JUSSCA) – Connecting Communities to build a shared future**

Two additional keystone organizations supporting U.S.-Japan subnational diplomacy are Sister Cities International (SCI) and Japan- U.S. Sister City Association. Sister City International was established in 1956 as a non-governmental organization to support people-to-people diplomacy worldwide. As soon as the international organization was established, local communities in the United States and Japan began using it as a way to institutionalize their relationships and to form new ones. Today, U.S. communities have formed more sister cities with communities in Japan than with any country other than Mexico. The connections are so strong that The Japan-U.S. Sister-Cities Association (JUSSCA) was established in 2022 in Japan to support sister-city partnerships between Japan and the U.S. in particular.

Sister Cities International (SCI), the oldest and largest citizen diplomacy network in the United States, organized the “2025 U.S.-Japan Sister Cities Summit” in Izumisano City, Osaka, from September 16th to 19th, 2025, celebrating the 170th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and the United States. Under the theme of “Celebrating Our Legacies, Empowering Our Future,” the summit aimed to strengthen the 460 U.S.-Japan sister city relationships by deepening cultural ties, addressing shared challenges, reactivating partnerships paused due to COVID-19, and promoting subnational diplomacy as a catalyst for social impact. A total of 546 participants from both countries, including diplomats, sister-city representatives, local government leaders, citizen diplomats, and volunteers, gathered to discuss expanding collaboration, developing next partnerships, and empowering the next generation of global leaders.

For The Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, held from April 13th to October 13th, 2025 in Yumeshima, Konohana-ku, Osaka, with participation from 158 countries and regions, SCI recruited Youth Ambassadors (aged 19-27) from across the United States to serve as guides at the U.S. Pavilion. In conjunction with the summits, SCI also launched the “Hajimari Project,” which highlighted 26 case studies of U.S.-Japan sister city relationships and documented the origins of these exchanges in a booklet titled “U.S.-Japan Sister Cities: Stories of Their Beginnings”. SCI plans to expand the number of case studies and evolve the project to include current activities and developments in these partnerships.

JUSSCA, Japan’s first national network organization dedicated to U.S.-Japan sister city relationships, hosted the “The U.S.-Japan Leadership Summit” from October 6th to 10th, 2025. This brought together sixteen California mayors, county officials, and civic leaders with Japanese governors, mayors, and policymakers for a five-day Smart Cities tour and bilateral conference exploring the theme “AI & Smart Cities for a SustAInable World.” The program, co-organized by JUSSCA and California Sister Cities with sponsorship from the United States–Japan Foundation, and the United Nations University (UNU) and CULCON, showcased subnational diplomacy in action through study visits, government dialogues, and policy exchanges in Osaka, Shizuoka, Yamanashi, and Tokyo.

The Summit resulted in strengthened sister-city and prefectural partnerships and new discussions on expanded collaboration on hydrogen innovation, youth exchange, digital transformation, and climate resilience. At UNU, keynote speakers Tokyo Governor KOIKE Yuriko,

former Minister KONO Taro, renowned architects Mr. BAN Shigeru and Mr. Paul Tange, and UNU Rector Dr. Tshilidzi Marwala joined U.S. civic leaders in affirming shared goals toward a carbon-neutral and inclusive future. On October 9th, Ambassador SASAE Kenichiro, Chair of CULCON Japan, delivered remarks during an evening CULCON Salon reception at UNU, and the Summit concluded on October 10th, 2025, with a Sayonara Reception at UNU featuring a kimono show and live performances, symbolizing the renewed commitment of U.S. and Japanese leaders to deepen local partnerships for a sustainable and inclusive future.

❖ **Japan-America Societies – Anchoring and innovating multisectoral collaborations**

Japan-America Societies (over 40 in the U.S in 2025) in the U.S. play a vital role in fostering ties between local communities, cities, and states beyond formal government channels. Founded and managed entirely by local citizens as non-profits, JAS form the largest network of private organizations supporting any bilateral relationship of the US. JAS contributions include but are not limited to: cultural exchange (festivals, lectures, and exhibitions that promote Japanese culture, language, and traditions—deepening mutual understanding), business networking (connecting local U.S. businesses with Japanese companies, encouraging investment, trade and innovation at the regional level), educational outreach (Japanese language classes, student exchange programs, and scholarships cultivating the next generation of Japan-U.S. leaders), and policy dialogue (forums and roundtables that bring together local officials, academics, and business leaders to discuss bilateral issues from a diverse perspectives and offer Japanese experts access to audiences other than Washington D.C.) In Japan, there are over 28 America-Japan Societies performing a similar function of encouraging subnational diplomacy at the local level. The America-Japan Society of Tokyo, founded in 1917, is the oldest private organization in Japan dedicated to U.S.–Japan exchange. It has played a key role in deepening the bilateral relationship through a wide range of activities, including educational programs, cultural events, people-to-people exchange, and intellectual dialogue

A recent example of a binational collaboration that supported U.S.-Japan art and culture exchange is the “Digital Replicas of Traditional Art in Japan” introduced in 2023. With funding from the United States-Japan Foundation, and in cooperation with the Kyoto Culture Association and Canon Inc. (a prominent Japanese company known for its cameras), eight talks were hosted by JAS member societies that featured curators and conservators discussing artworks selected by area experts from the image archive of Canon's “Tsuzuri” Cultural Heritage Inheritance Project. The “Tsuzuri Project” is an effort of The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art (NMAA), Canon, Inc., and the Kyoto Culture Association to create high-resolution reproductions of famous Japanese painted folding screens in the collections of Charles Lang Freer. Using a combination of advanced technology and traditional craft, the Tsuzuri Project created facsimiles of screens that cannot be removed from the NMAA. These facsimiles traveled to locations in Japan, including Kenji Temple in Kyoto, and beyond. This was an institution-to-institution effort that deepened binational ties through art and cultural exchange, deepening mutual respect and understanding.

Subnational Governmental Relationships

These examples have diverse, multifaceted relationships that touch on diverse stakeholders, industries, human capital, and developing future leaders. All are uniquely and organically

developed, giving them creativity, strength, and the ability to adapt to changing global and local conditions.

❖ **Boston and Kyoto – East Coast cities promoting art, education, and technology**

Boston has robust subnational relationships with Kyoto stemming back to 1843. The first Japanese person to graduate from a U.S. university was Nijima Jo, who graduated from Amherst College in 1870. He returned to Japan to found Doshisha University in Kyoto. The first Japan-American Society was founded in Boston in 1904, and Boston and Kyoto formed one of the earliest Sister-City relationships in 1959. The Showa Boston Institute in 1988, and Japan established a consulate in Boston in 1989. Outside of educational and cultural exchange, the strongest US-Japan connection is in the medical field and related sectors of biotech and robotics. In 1987, the Eisai medical research company established the Eisai Research Institute of Boston, and other Japanese pharmaceutical and technology firms followed Eisai's lead: Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratory opened in Cambridge in 1991. Asahi Kasei Pharma acquired Artisan Pharma in 2011. Canon opened its Healthcare Optics Research Laboratory in 2013. In 2014, Japan's National Cancer Center signed an MOU with Boston Medical Center, and Kanagawa Prefecture's MOU with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts committed to expanding the "innovation economy, with a focus on growing jobs and opportunities in the areas of life sciences, big data, clean energy, robotics and health care information technology." In 2018, the Japanese Consul General in Boston opened a "Pop Up" office in the Cambridge Innovation Center—a start-up incubator space located adjacent to the MIT campus in Kendall Square. The same year, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) launched its Global Acceleration Hub in five US cities, including Boston. In 2019, global pharmaceutical giant Takeda Pharmaceuticals acquired Shire to become the largest life science employer in the Commonwealth, and Nikon BioImaging Lab opened a new office in Cambridge. In October 2020, as the covid pandemic was spreading, Cambridge Innovation Center opened Japan's largest innovation center in Tokyo. The collaborations have just continued to grow—In 2023, Takeda and Nikon expanded their operations in greater Boston, and Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry selected Cambridge Innovation Center and MassChallenge to create and operate an entrepreneur development program for Japanese startups.

❖ **Maryland and Kanagawa – Sister states/prefectures promoting youth engagement and healthy aging**

Initially inspired by the common geographic features of the two regions—both have mountains, beaches, a large bay, and are in proximity to their respective nation's capital—recent years have seen the connection turn toward binational collaboration to address public health measures. This included a 2022 seminar titled, "New Frontiers in Healthcare Management," examining innovative approaches to an aging society; the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, UMBC, partnered with the government of Japan's Kanagawa prefecture to host it. Kanagawa Governor Yūji Kuroiwa was invited to speak as a panelist, as he had implemented the Kanagawa Prefecture's Healthcare New Frontier health policy package in 2017 to address the myriad needs of this aging population by embracing past and present methods of proactive healthcare management; he and other seminar participants from Japan shared how their local policies can inform the future management of aging societies and the development of impactful life science technologies globally, with Maryland as a

leading partner. In June 2024, eleven students from The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) and The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) visited Kanagawa Prefecture to study the country's approach to healthy aging and elder care. The trip was led by faculty such as Taka Yamashita from the Global Health Aging department. The group included students studying gerontology, medicine, palliative care, social work, neuroscience, and emergency and integrative health. During their time in Japan, they visited academic research centers, businesses, health care facilities, government offices, and cultural sites to gain a comprehensive understanding of aging in Japan.

❖ Findlay, Ohio and Saitama – City-Prefecture collaborations prepare youth for future industries

Findlay, OH has strong business and educational ties to Japan, and the University of Findlay (UF) serves as a hub and facilitator of various programs. The city of Findlay is home to several Japanese companies, including Roki, Hitachi Astemo, Sanoh, Molten, and GSW Manufacturing, as well as a German/Japanese joint venture, Freudenberg-NOK. UF has a longstanding, immersive Japanese Studies program that trains students in Japanese language and cultural fluency. Many students from UF go on to work in Japanese companies in the area. The city of Findlay, OH has particularly strong regional ties with public and private institutions in Saitama and Fukui Prefectures. The Saitama connection dates to 1984, when the city of Findlay sought out financing to expand the city's water treatment plant from Dai-Kangyo Bank in Kawaguchi City, Saitama Prefecture, Japan. This relationship developed further when the state of Ohio and Saitama Prefecture became sister-states in 1990, and a scholarship exchange program was established in 1992 called the Ohio Saitama University Scholarship (OSUS); it is open to any college student in Saitama Prefecture. Every year, UF supports three Saitama students, including two mechanical engineering students. Japanese exchange students intern at a Japanese manufacturing company in the area during their tenure. Sanoh, for example, has been hosting interns through UF since 1993. The former Saitama Governor Ueda visited Findlay twice; Findlay has also hosted a delegation of elected officials from Japan. In 2018, Findlay signed an agreement to become a "Friendship City" with Kawaguchi, the second largest city in Saitama. This includes welcoming two Kawaguchi high school students to Findlay City Schools every other year. In 2022, the virtual Ohio-Saitama Global Speaker Program was hosted in partnership with UF to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the sister-states relationship. Findlay also has a relationship with Fukui Prefecture. Since 2006, UF has offered a scholarship to one student from Fukui. Local history states that the roots of the program go back to 1947, when UF president emeritus DeBow Freed visited Fukui Prefecture while serving as an officer in the United States Army. UF also hosts a Fukui Prefectural University (FPU) Exchange, through which UF nursing and physician assistant students travel to Fukui to conduct training in the region. Fukui has hosted delegations from Findlay, including government and business representatives, since 2015. Fukui Prefecture, the City of Findlay, and UF jointly host a workforce development program called the Fukui/Findlay Business Seminar, where young professionals from Fukui spend ten days in Findlay. These professionals receive lessons on small talk and ethics from the program, as well as give presentations in English to high school and college students. They also interact with business professionals by visiting local companies.

❖ Rikuzentakata/Iwate and Crescent City/California—Kamome ties friendship across the Pacific Ocean

What began as a connection rooted in shared experiences of natural disasters has since grown significantly, evolving into a multifaceted partnership that spans various fields. The initial connection between both cities was a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. A small boat called KAMOME belonging to Takata High School in Rikuzentakata was swept out to sea and reached the shores of Crescent City two years later. Students of Del Norte High School cleaned the boat and sent it back to Takata High School. That was the start of a relationship between the two schools. They have engaged in a student exchange program supported by the TOMODACHI Initiative and became sister schools in 2017. The connection developed, and Crescent City/Del Norte County and Rikuzentakata formally established a sister city relationship in 2018. To commemorate this partnership, local businesses in Crescent City have created unique products that celebrate the connection. Seaquake Brewing, a local craft brewery, produces *Kamome Ale*, while Rumiano Cheese Company manufactures *KAMOME DRY JACK*, a cheese made using salt from Rikuzentakata. Both companies donate a portion of their sales to the Kamome Foundation, which helps subsidize travel expenses for Crescent City citizens visiting Rikuzentakata. In 2019, with support from the U.S. Embassy in Japan grant program, 35 residents of Rikuzentakata visited Crescent City. During this visit, one participant toured Seaquake Brewing and received technical guidance on craft beer production, which led to the creation of Rikuzentakata Microbrewery. Later, the two companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for further collaboration.

As part of a broader initiative to revitalize tsunami-affected low-lying areas unsuitable for housing, Rikuzentakata also launched an industry–government–academia partnership project. In 2017, Rikuzentakata City, the University of Tokyo (Institute of Industrial Science and Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences), and Salon de Royal Co., Ltd. (a Japanese chocolate confectionery company) signed a joint research agreement and cooperation MOU for the Pecan Nut Project. This project aims to expand the distribution of North American pecans in Japan. Using reconstruction funds, the Rikuzentakata Pecan Nut Industry Revitalization Facility was built. In 2021, 550 pecan saplings imported from the U.S. were planted in Rikuzentakata. Since pecan trees typically take seven years to bear fruit, products will initially use pecans from Arizona, transitioning to locally grown pecans once the trees mature. Rikuzentakata aims to establish itself as a pecan-producing region, leveraging this crop to revitalize agriculture, create jobs, foster regional development, and address social challenges associated with an aging population.

❖ **Portland and Sapporo – West Coast Cities fostering friendships, nature, and innovative urban policy**

The cities of Portland and Sapporo established a sister city relationship in 1959, making them pioneers in Japan-U.S. sister city exchanges. Both cities are located at nearly the same latitude and share similar climates. They are also central cities in their respective regions, with comparable economies and industries. With a focus on nurturing the next generation, both cities actively promote short-term exchange programs for elementary, junior high, and high school students. Each June, ten elementary school students from Portland visit Sapporo and participate in exchange activities at public elementary schools in the city. Similarly, sixteen high school students from Sapporo travel to Portland every June to engage in exchange programs at local high schools. Economic exchanges between the two cities have led to tangible outcomes. For example, Sapporo has hosted exhibitions of local products in Portland, and Columbia Outdoor gear maker, headquartered in Portland, developed an outdoor shoe called “Sapland”—a coined term combining

Sapporo and Portland. Furthermore, the two cities collaborate by sharing experiences and knowledge to address urban challenges such as city planning, redevelopment, and public transportation. As a result of these longstanding exchanges, interest in Japanese language learning has grown in Portland, where K-12 Japanese immersion education is actively implemented. A key factor behind this vibrant sister city relationship is the presence of intermediary organizations. On the Portland side, the Portland-Sapporo Sister City Association (PSSCA) and OYANOKAI (Parent Association) play proactive roles. On the Sapporo side, the School Master's Association contributes to the exchange efforts. While challenges such as generational shifts within organizations and engaging younger participants exist, the two cities have maintained their sister city relationship for 66 years, serving as a model example of Japan-U.S. sister city exchange.

Multisectoral Subnational Relationships

Cities and local authorities are not the only key players in subnational diplomacy. Private companies, educational institutions, and multi-stakeholder collaborations can drive innovation, generate economic impact, and nurture regional talent. The following example illustrates how these actors contribute to strengthening local communities

❖ Sumitomo Corporation of Americas and Houston, TX – Company-city collaborations enhance cultural literacy, job readiness, and economic development

One of many Japanese companies in the area, Sumitomo opened its Houston office in 1965, the same year as the reopened Japanese Consulate following its closure in World War II. At the time, the growth of the oil industry was spurring Houston's economic development, and Japanese businesses began establishing offices in the area. Perhaps as a result, Houston and Chiba began a sister city relationship in 1972 with the goal of creating and strengthening economic and cultural ties. Sumitomo is a significant contributor of volunteer labor and financial support to US-Japan programming in the area. They are a benefactor of the Japan-America Society of Houston (JASH); one of Sumitomo's General Managers even served on the JASH Voting Board for FY22-23. Their contributions support JASH's Sister City program and their cultural exchange programs, such as Japanese speech contests. Sumitomo is also a member of the Japan Business Association (JBA) of Houston, advancing economic development in the city and creating opportunities for the next generation of U.S.-Japan talent. For example, JBA Houston is the primary funder for the Japanese Language Supplementary School of Houston, which hosts Japanese and Japanese American students, including the children of Sumitomo employees. Sumitomo is a sponsor of various other local programs, including Japan Fest and TOMODACHI, through which Japanese students can study abroad in Texas. According to their presentation for the Japan Currents Houston Conference, Sumitomo has invested three billion dollars into the Texas economy since 2002.

❖ IBM Japan and Kwansei Gakuin University in Osaka – To nurture IT talent in local communities

The Japanese government established the AI Strategy 2019 as a crucial national policy. It seeks to foster AI literacy in 500,000 university and technical college students and 1 million working adults every year in order to produce sufficiently trained human talent in an age of accelerated digital

transformation. In response, IBM developed a clear roadmap with more than 170 new academic and industry partnerships around the world. IBM committed to providing 30 million people with new skills by 2030 through various efforts and initiatives, including using its “SkillsBuild” program to do so. “SkillsBuild” is an AI-technologies talent development program jointly developed in 2017 by IBM Japan and Kwansei Gakuin University, based in Osaka. The program aims to train individuals in AI technologies and data science in order to solve real-world problems using these skills. It emphasizes practical activities, incorporating Kwansei Gakuin University’s academic expertise and IBM Japan consultants’ and data scientists’ diverse case studies of AI implementation in society. From 2021, IBM Japan began providing “SkillsBuild” free of charge as part of Osaka City’s DX workforce employment support model, “OSAKA Youth Re-Skilling Partners.” This was in collaboration with Osaka Prefecture and the Osaka Labor Association (a general incorporated association). In 2024, the Osaka Labor Association began offering IBM SkillsBuild services through its online platform “Hatanavi+ (Plus)” for university students and faculty members in Osaka City. IBM Japan helps advance workforce IT training and supports job creation in local communities.

❖ **Tsuruoka Science Park, Yamagata – Economic Innovation through Startups partnered with a U.S. company**

In 2001, Keio University established the Institute for Advanced Biosciences (IAB) within Tsuruoka Science Park, a collaborative initiative supported by Yamagata Prefecture and Tsuruoka City that brings together research institutions, educational organizations, private companies, and local citizens. Over the past two decades, the park has evolved into a world-class biotech hub, and fosters startups that reshape global industries.

One of the most notable success stories is Spiber Inc., a unicorn company born from IAB. Founded in 2007 by two IAB students, Spiber pioneered Brewed Protein™, a biodegradable, non-animal-derived protein material, developed through advanced synthetic biology and materials science. The leap from laboratory innovation to global impact was made possible through collaboration with the U.S. company, Archer-Daniels-Midland Company (ADM), one of the world’s largest agricultural processors and food ingredient suppliers headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. ADM is responsible for fermentation operations and contributes engineering and operational expertise. The Brewed Protein™ produced in the U.S. is transported to Spiber’s processing facilities, where it is transformed into fibers, resins, and films for use in apparel materials and automotive components. The implication of this partnership extends far beyond business. Humans consume over 100 billion tons of materials annually, with more than 90% ending up incinerated or landfilled without recycling. Transitioning from this linear economic model to a circular society is estimated to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 39%. Due to its potential social impact, Spiber was ranked 22nd in TIME magazine’s “World’s Top Green Tech Companies of 2025.” Spiber employees frequently give lectures at local high schools and participate in regional educational programs, contributing to both the influx of external talent and the development of local human resources.

Tsuruoka Science Park has an impact that also resonates locally, creating over 400 jobs, with a consistent increase in the 25–34 age demographic. At the BIO International Convention 2025 in Boston, the Japan Innovation Night featured ten Japanese biotech startups, including Spiber, promoting expansion into the U.S. market and collaborative research. Tsuruoka City has proposed

a direct flight route to Boston, aiming to strengthen Japan–U.S. ties and accelerate innovation across society

❖ **Adirondack Balloon Festival and Saga International Balloon Fiesta – Launching joy into the sky**

Both Saga (Saga Prefecture, Japan) and Glens Falls (Warren County, New York) are known for their respective hot-air balloon festivals, each established in the 1970s. In 1986, balloonists from Glens Falls participated in Saga’s fiesta and afterwards encouraged local officials to establish a relationship with Saga. An official sister-cities relationship was established in 1988. Since then, at least four balloon teams from Glens Falls have visited Saga City, and fourteen teams from Saga have visited Glens Falls. Apart from the hot-air balloon festivals, the sister-cities relationship has led to significant student exchange. These cities count over six hundred middle and high school students who have been involved in the Glens Falls-Saga exchange program, as well as more than two hundred college students. Delegations of elected officials and community leaders travel regularly to affirm the relationship, including the Mayors and City Council members. In 1996, the cities also established a formal “Sister Libraries” partnership between their libraries after the director of The Crandall Public Library (which serves Glens Falls) traveled to Saga as part of a delegation to celebrate the opening of a new public library. The Crandall Public Library has established a permanent exhibit in the Folklife Gallery dedicated to the relationship with Saga. In 2021, Crandall Public Library hosted an exhibit highlighting crafts from Saga to celebrate 33 years of the sister city relationship. The library has also long hosted delegations from Saga and welcomed another as recently as 2023, during which the library staff provided tours. In April 2023, Mayor Bill Collins of Glens Falls recognized the similar industries in the city and that the cultural and educational exchanges have contributed to economic growth

Appendices

A. Membership of CULCON Subnational Diplomacy Local & Regional Exchange Working Group (alphabetical)

Japan CULCON Members:

- ❖ SATO Yuri, Advisor (Japanese Studies, Global Partnerships, Branding and Communication) , The Japan Foundation; Working Group Co-Chair

U.S. CULCON Members:

- ❖ Bill Tsutsui, Chancellor and Professor of History, Ottawa University; WG Co-Chair
- ❖ Cynthia Matson, President, San Jose State University

Japan WG Members/Resource Persons:

- ❖ KITANO Mitsuru, Executive Adviser, Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR)
- ❖ KOYAMADA Shin, Founder and Chair, Japan-United States Sister City Association (JUSSCA)

U.S. WG Members/Resource Persons:

- ❖ Mary Alice Haddad, John E. Andrus Professor of Government; Professor of Environmental Studies and East Asian Studies, Wesleyan University
- ❖ Peter Kelley, Former President, National Association of Japan America Societies (NAJAS)
- ❖ Jessyca Livingston, Executive Director, U.S.-Japan Exchange & Teaching Programme Alumni Association (USJETAA)

B. Membership of CULCON

U.S. CULCON

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