



Finding Inspiration | Taking Action

U.S.-Japan Leaders Exchange: Three-Year Training & Networking Program for Leaders in Tohoku's Recovery and Reconstruction 2013–2016

Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, Japan; Louisiana, Ohio, Michigan and New York, USA

In 2013, Japan Society and [ETIC](#) started the *U.S.-Japan Leaders Exchange: Three-Year Training & Networking Program for Leaders in Tohoku's Recovery and Reconstruction*. We partnered on this three-year project because of our shared interest in developing and nurturing the next generation of local leaders working to revive their communities in Tohoku after the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Our goal was to inspire leaders in ways that would take them to the next level of leadership and strengthen their organizations. Through the exchange of ideas, learning from the experience of others, and seeing innovative work first hand, the impact of our programs brought forward new and valuable ways of approaching one's work, the development of new projects, and introductions to new collaborators.

In the first year, eight leaders from Tohoku visited New Orleans, LA, Wilmington, OH and New York, NY (January 2014). That was followed by four Americans traveling to Tohoku and Tokyo (October 2014). Inspired by what they learned, four Japanese undertook a follow-up visit to New Orleans in March 2015 on their own. One participant was asked to return to Tohoku in August 2015. In the final year of the project, eight Japanese returned to the U.S., and four additional leaders, having learned of the project, asked to join us. We couldn't refuse.

Engaging a Younger Generation in Economic Recovery

Every leader from Tohoku is concerned about economic recovery. Without a healthy economy, people won't have jobs, and without jobs, people will have no choice but to move to where they can find opportunity. Our leaders from Japan knew that New Orleans had become known as a place for entrepreneurs after Hurricane Katrina, and that a younger generation has been moving to New Orleans to start businesses and social enterprises. How did that happen? Organizations like [The Idea Village](#) existed before Hurricane Katrina, and new organizations like [Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation](#) were established after. What these two organizations have in common are strong leaders with a clear vision of what they want to achieve and an ability to look at the challenges facing New Orleans—failing



schools, extreme poverty, lack of medical services, poor health, need for affordable housing—and see them as opportunities.



Inspired by the work of Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation and the Idea Village, [Kenichi Bamba](#) organized his first pitch contest for young social entrepreneurs in Fukushima. He decided to work with high schools to get them thinking about how they could make a difference in their communities and to engage them in discussions about risk *early*.

Just as the participants from Japan represent a younger generation of Japanese who have dedicated their lives to the recovery of Tohoku, we met the two young founders of [Energize Clinton](#)

[County \(ECC\)](#) in Wilmington, OH who have brought a similar drive and passion to their own community. An immediate connection was made between the Japanese and Americans, and the idea of a younger generation making a difference and having real impact in their communities was something that the Japanese leaders wanted to develop and nurture in their own communities.

[Taylor Stuckert](#), one of the co-founders of Energize Clinton County (ECC) and Executive Director, Clinton County Regional Planning Commission (OH), was asked to return to Tohoku in August 2015 for follow-up visits in Soma and Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture, Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture, Ofunato and Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture. In each place, Taylor engaged a younger generation of up-and-coming leaders in discussions about recovery. This reminded us of what Andrea Chen, Executive Director, Propeller told us about Propeller: When Propeller started, she wanted to give entrepreneurs a place where they could tell their stories—where they could be heard. Taylor provided the same opportunities to entrepreneurs in Tohoku, such as university students in Odaka working on recovery projects as part of a two-week workshop to think about the future of Fukushima.



In Detroit, we focused on entrepreneurship. The approach of [Ponyride](#) was inspirational. In one very large building, the organization, co-founded by Phil Cooley, supports mission-driven entrepreneurs and artists, while at the same time remaining deeply rooted in the community and committed to the revitalization of Detroit. A number of the Japanese innovators commented that they needed a Ponyride in their community. We also visited [Detroit Venture Partners](#) to learn about the venture fund's role in supporting local start-ups and how a local business leader makes a difference in the local community.

A Eureka Moment

What was our unexpected, unanticipated, but impactful learning experience? Data.

It's not that we weren't aware that data is everywhere. But it hadn't occurred to the leaders how it could be applied so directly to their work. Not only does data let you know where you stand at a given time, it lets you know where you are having success, where you are failing, what you might not have seen, and when there is something new to consider. It helps you measure progress, and when you can measure progress, it can help you raise the funds you need to do your work.

We learned about how many different organizations use the information provided by [The Data Center](#) in New Orleans but we hadn't arranged to meet with anyone at The Data Center. We did the next best thing, and got The Data Center involved in the second year. Allison Plyer has provided invaluable guidance and feedback. [Yosuke Komatsu](#), [Yuji Suzuki](#), Kenichi Bamba and [Kazuhide Oshida](#) have started data projects in Japan.



At [Loveland Technologies](#) in Detroit, we learned about another way in which data can be used to improve communities. Loveland's work to identify every parcel of land in Detroit and beyond was of particular interest to participants in Fukushima. As residents in Fukushima have to make the tough decision on whether to return, it's important for the towns to know the status of all the property—what is occupied, for sale, or abandoned.

Sharing Ideas

The leaders participated in public programs in Sendai and Kesennuma in Miyagi, Tokyo, Wilmington, OH, and New York, NY, as well as smaller conversations in their respective communities.

A day-long program in Sendai allowed us to share our insights, knowledge, and experience with a wider audience of almost 200 people. The program started with a keynote speech by [Flozell Daniels, Jr.](#) on how New Orleans became known as a place for start-ups, and was followed by four workshops looking at the role of community foundations; how to engage the corporate sector in support of nonprofit organizations and social entrepreneurship; the role and use of data in recovery; and engaging the local community and training a younger generation in recovery.



In Kesennuma, ETIC. organized a program entitled “Strategies for Heightening the Resilience of the Region: Strategies for Local Business Recovery from Economic Disaster,” with Taylor Stuckert as keynote speaker, that was attended by ETIC. fellows, NPO leaders, business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce Industry Youth Division, Japan Junior Chamber, and students. These young leaders were interested in how entrepreneurs can help in the recovery process, and how they can create new value and new types of opportunity. Using Wilmington, OH as a case study as presented by Taylor, participants discussed how they might accelerate project development in Kesennuma and nurture new local leadership.

In Tokyo, we brought together almost 100 leaders and executives from corporations, foundations, and organizations that support the recovery of Tohoku to learn about the recovery in New Orleans as a model for the different phases communities go through in recovery and how leaders can use that example to as they determine their next steps in Tohoku.



Fifth Anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake

We also learned how those working on recovery in New Orleans used the milestone fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina to bring people together to review what they had accomplished, to look ahead at what remained to be done, and to come together for a shared vision of the future. As they were approaching their 10th anniversary, our colleagues from New Orleans saw their participation in the project as a way to reflect on their own work as they shared their experiences with the Japanese. Four participants traveled to New Orleans in March 2015 for further discussions. As a result of conversations that took place during the course of three years, Japan Society and ETIC. developed a new project to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake called [THINK TOHOKU 2011-2021](#).