



AGENCY EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Executive Summary

1) Agency Name and Mission - JAPAN-U.S. FRIENDSHIP COMMISSION

The Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission (JUSFC) was established as an independent federal agency (P.L. 94-118) in 1975. JUSFC is a grant-making agency that supports research, education, public affairs, and exchange with Japan. Its mission is to promote partnerships that advance common interests between Japan and the United States. The agency also serves to maintain expertise on Japan Studies throughout the United States and is committed to developing a diverse and inclusive community where contributions from underrepresented scholars and practitioners support the U.S.-Japan partnership.

The U.S.-Japan partnership has developed through a deep and broad array of people-to-people relationships and experiences, of students, professionals, academics, and government officials, forming the building blocks of meaningful engagement. JUSFC is proud of the role it has played for the last 46 years and continues to play in supporting and sustaining this partnership.

JUSFC is comprised of a highly diverse staff of four full-time employees. The agency is led by an African American female, and the staff includes one Indian-American female, one Caucasian female and one disabled veteran Filipino-American male. The expertise and experiences of JUSFC's diverse staff and commissioners inform the agency's approach to promote equity within the agency and within the U.S.-Japan community. Demographic homogeneity within the established U.S.-Japan field poses a potential barrier to not only equitable grant making, but also the future of the field. Broadly speaking, the U.S.-Japan field is male dominated. Since the 1950s, individuals leading U.S.-Japan relations have included White men--elite academics, business leaders, and retired members of the military and diplomatic corps who had been involved in the post-war rebuilding of Japan. The generation that came after were largely the protégés of these leaders, whether in diplomacy, academia, or business.

U.S. Ambassadors to Japan have been prominent statesmen such as Senator Mike Mansfield, Vice President Walter Mondale, Speaker Tom Foley, and Senator Howard Baker. Notably, Ambassador Caroline Kennedy was the United States' first woman Ambassador to Japan. During Japan's economic growth, Japan became a sought-after venue for U.S. business investors--predominantly White men, although women found success in this industry as well. In Japan, stewards of bilateral relations have been influential male members of Japanese society. They were graduates of U.S. preparatory schools, Ivy League institutions, and prestigious Japanese universities.

This historic context, coupled with Japan's relative homogeneity and resulting comfort with White American men, has led to a lack of equitable gender, racial, and ethnic representation in U.S.-Japan relations. Amongst marginalized and underrepresented communities, the study of Japan or the Japanese language can be viewed as a "luxury area of study" without apparent economic prospects. It carries the potential to limit academic interest in, and professional engagement with Japan among underrepresented groups, specifically those of African and Hispanic/Latino heritage. JUSFC is working to create opportunities that would remove barriers and facilitate participation in the field across gender, racial, and ethnic lines. This would also present an opportunity to promote an image of U.S. diversity in Japan. Similarly, supporting programs that highlight the ethnic and racial minorities of Japan is an opportunity to counter the narrative of homogeneity within Japan itself.



2) Summary of Early Accomplishments

Equity Study Sessions: Beginning summer 2020, JUSFC convened a series of eight two-hour internal deliberations to understand why certain areas of academia, business and society lack diversity, and what obstacles marginalized groups seeking access to certain fields experience. Sessions focused on best practices to motivate and support underrepresented populations in a variety of fields. They resulted in the conceptualization of priority outcomes, barriers to those outcomes and recommended actions to address those barriers. JUSFC also invited Japan Studies practitioners, whose efforts would help the agency promote equity and create a more diverse and equitable Japan community in the United States.

Design and Funding for the JUSFC U.S.-Japan Summer Institute: The most ambitious program resulting from the equity study sessions is the creation of a barrier-free U.S.-Japan Summer Institute for underrepresented students. This program has been designed by JUSFC and is expected to be launched by the agency in Summer 2023. This is an important step in ensuring a diverse and inclusive community where contributions from underrepresented scholars and practitioners support and sustain the U.S.-Japan partnership. The program will cover costs for up to 10 students per year. The Summer Institute will support language training, mentorship, and two weeks in Japan.

External Evaluation of JUSFC's Longstanding U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Fellowship Program to Identify Opportunities for Equity: After more than 40 years of sponsoring an artist residency in Japan for U.S. artists, JUSFC commissioners decided to assess the program's impact on U.S.-Japan artistic exchange and U.S.-Japan relations. The assessment found the Program operates in a unique space - as grantmaker, cultural exchange platform and artist residency. It also found barriers to access exist. As a result of this independent assessment, JUSFC in consultation with program partner the National Endowment for the Arts is reimagining the program from an equity and diversity lens in the context of U.S.-Japan relations.

Providing Greater Access to the JUSFC Internship Program: JUSFC is deeply invested in its internship program as a direct means to cultivate the next generation of U.S.-Japan professionals. Interns develop professionally, build their resumes, network, and benefit from individual mentorship from JUSFC staff and practitioners in the field. For many years the JUSFC internship was unpaid, but since FY20 JUSFC has changed its policy to compensate its interns with a fair wage for their work. This allows access to those students who are not able to accept an unpaid internship for financial reasons and greatly broadens the fields of eligible students, especially minority and underserved students. The agency follows all civil rights-related aspects in this program and continues to work with its interns and intern alumni to expand program outreach and awareness.

Diversity in the Makeup of Commissioners: [A board of 18 Commissioners](#) makes decisions on the expenditure of JUSFC's earnings. Nine of the 18 JUSFC commissioners represent a range of non-governmental interests. In its most recent process to nominate and appoint three of those commissioners, JUSFC prioritized diversifying the voices of the commissioners themselves so that leadership would bring different perspectives for policy and grantmaking. The current makeup of these commissioners includes the first female Chair in JUSFC's history; four women and five men comprised of three Caucasian and one African American women, one Japanese-American, one Black and two Caucasian men.



3) Equity Action Plan

Action #1: Establish U.S.-Japan Summer Institute

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: As explained earlier in the report, in the field of Japan Studies' lack of diversity within the field and unawareness about the possible careers in U.S.-Japan affairs pose a barrier for the development of young, underrepresented people of color to gain the skills necessary to be the next leaders to support the U.S.-Japan Alliance. The reasons for these outcomes include financial cost; lack of resources; family hesitancy about overseas travel; limited or no family awareness of economic potential related to studying about Japan; to name a few.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: JUSFC will aid in the development of the next generation of diverse U.S.-Japan professionals by establishing a U.S.-Japan Summer Institute. The Institute will offer training and mentoring to underrepresented students and providing them with a barrier-free opportunity to gain requisite skills to be competitive in the marketplace and learn about different careers in the field of U.S.-Japan relations. The program will provide robust opportunities for mentorship.

Tracking Progress: JUSFC will work with partner institutions that serve students from marginalized communities. These partnerships will allow JUSFC to track progress by monitoring the quantity of applications and reviews by students and mentors. JUSFC is working with its Equity Advisory Committee to develop program evaluation methodology.

Accountability: The Equity Action Plan will be a regular agenda item at semi-annual meetings of the JUSFC commissioners and staff will report on progress for each action item. JUSFC also expects to develop accountability structures with its grantee partners, future applicants, and other stakeholders.

Action #2: Revise Institutional Grant Guidelines

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: Lack of familiarity with JUSFC funding opportunities may be a barrier to increasing the diversity of the applicant pool and new program participants. JUSFC typically annually receives 47-60 grant applications from various institutions in the United States and Japan. Through recent applications received, JUSFC has noticed not all applicants are familiar with the application guidelines or grantmaking priorities. Similarly, not all applicants provide a detailed account of their specific equity actions related to the proposed program. Additionally, formal not-for-profit 501(c)3 status is a primary funding criterion for several grantmaking agencies, including JUSFC. There are many organizations that are providing meaningful services but have not yet achieved official not-for-profit status. This poses a barrier by rendering them ineligible for most funding opportunities. In the past three years, JUSFC has encountered two such examples, both with African American leadership and membership.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: JUSFC offers one or more Grant Information Session annually, to answer questions and to guide potential applicants through the process. The agency head and deputy are also available to answer questions and provide feedback on draft proposals. Since the signing of EO13985, JUSFC has met with its repeat/core grantee partners to advise them on the federal mandate to enhance diversity and equity. Through these conversations, JUSFC has provided access to DEI trainers as well as minority-owned businesses. JUSFC will survey peer grantmaking institutions to determine potential impact of requesting applicants provide Notice of Code of Conduct, or an equity plan. JUSFC understands many of its grantee partners and applicants are small organizations with limited human and financial resources. It will be important to balance the need to promote equity against imposing new barriers to assess.



It is anticipated that more precise DEI prompts and specific equity-related prompts will increase opportunities for underrepresented participants and raise awareness about the value of diversity in the U.S.-Japan community. JUSFC's ongoing outreach effort will include the LGBTQ+ community, and institutions with projects pertaining to LGBTQ+ issues – a sorely underrepresented group thus far. In the Japanese context, efforts towards diversity tend to exclude the LGBTQ+ community; therefore, such representation supported by JUSFC could have a positive impact on equity and visibility in both the U.S. and Japanese sides of the field. JUSFC will work with its partners in Japan to organize listening sessions as appropriate. JUSFC can offer links to specific resources, including access to forms and *pro bono* legal help to de-mystify the potentially onerous process of applying for official non-profit status.

Tracking Progress: JUSFC will annually monitor its pool of applicants to determine the extent to which responses result in more diverse grantees and program participants. JUSFC does not request racially or otherwise identifying information from its grant applicants. The agency will adhere to relevant civil rights laws intended to protect against any form of discrimination. JUSFC will need to seek guidance from OMB on the legality of posing questions related to race and ethnicity.

Accountability: JUSFC management will report progress to JUSFC commissioners prior to the September 2022 grant making meeting. In addition, the Equity Action Plan will be a regular agenda item on semi-annual meetings of the JUSFC commissioners and staff will report on progress for each action item. When advising on 501c3 and other procedures, JUSFC will remind applicants of civil rights provisions.

Action #3: U.S.-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship Program: Develop New Outreach Partnerships and Recruitment Strategies for a Diverse Cohort of Participants

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: The current selection criteria for the U.S.-Japan Creative Artist fellowship prioritizes artistic recognition through traditional venues. It also offers a narrow approach to recruitment by targeting its majority White alumni network and related organizations. Using alumni as the central connectors to future artists replicates the demographics of past cohorts.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: Through the external evaluation of the U.S.-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship program, JUSFC has learned this Fellowship has the potential to exemplify the power of creative exchange. By intentionally engaging artists who have been historically marginalized and who can bring a wider, more diverse range of creative inquiries and perspectives, the program can stimulate new and critical conversations. The external evaluation process has resulted in the following recommended actions for a more equitable program: Develop new outreach partnerships with partners that have long running fellowship programs in communities that are diverse. Retool eligibility guidelines and selection criteria to create opportunities for artists to participate whose creative practice, lived experiences, and racial/cultural identities may have dynamic intersections with Japanese culture. Intentionally engage Black artists, immigrant artists, disabled artists, LGBTQ+ artists and other artists currently underrepresented in Japanese exchange programs and the artist residency field at large.

Tracking Progress: In partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the International House of Japan, JUSFC will track progress by monitoring the diversity of both the applicant pool and the cohort of artists chosen to participate in the program.

Accountability: The U.S.-Japan Creative Artists Program continues to be a regular agenda item on semi-annual meetings of the JUSFC commissioners. JUSFC will also routinely inform its stakeholders the NEA and the International House of Japan as well as the U.S.-Japan community on its progress.



Action #4: Provide Diverse Mentors on Nichibe Connect www.nichibeconnect.com

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: JUSFC has identified lack of guidance or resources regarding a career path involving Japan as a barrier to equitable participation in U.S.-Japan relations. This includes, limited or no awareness about funding opportunities as well as lack of equitable gender, racial, and ethnic representation in U.S.-Japan relations.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: JUSFC has broadened its Mentorship Section to include ethnic and professional diversity as well as gender balance amongst U.S.-Japan professionals. JUSFC has also established a partnership with NABEA, National Association of Black Engagement with Asia. Studies show that, “It’s hard to be what you can’t see,” and underrepresented students do not see themselves represented in the field as it is today. JUSFC is working with NABEA to identify potential mentors and identify areas of interest among the targeted audience. This will provide inspiration to underrepresented students to pursue their interest in U.S.-Japan relations. Users will also have means to contact potential mentors. JUSFC will also research and identify other such institutions as partners.

Tracking Progress: JUSFC will track progress by monitoring NichiBei Connect analytics to determine the percentage of underrepresented students interviewed for the Mentorship section. JUSFC will also explore the possibility of designing a survey of students of color to determine their awareness of the site and usage.

Accountability: JUSFC will routinely inform the U.S.-Japan community about mentorship opportunities on NichiBei Connect.

Action #5: Engage Vendors and Consultants Using an Equity Lens

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: As a “nano” agency, JUSFC contracts with Federal Shared Services Providers (FSSP) for personnel, human resources, and financial services. Hence, the agency does not have hiring independence in those areas. Thus far, the agency has not monitored the hiring and contracting trends of its grantees.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: JUSFC has always ensured that its vendors and contractors who do not fall under the FSSP category are carefully sourced under federal contracting guidelines and using equitable opportunities. Currently, JUSFC provides opportunities by contracting with the following non FSSP vendors and contractors.

- i. IT Services: LGBTQ+ owned
- ii. Communications Consultants: Woman-owned; Black-owned
- iii. Audit Contractor: 8(a) Program Company

In its revised grant guidelines, JUSFC will include a reminder to potential applicants regarding specific Equity related practices in their hiring and contracting practices. JUSFC will also communicate expectations of compliance with civil rights provisions to grantee partners and staff responsible for procurement.

Tracking Progress: JUSFC will track the equitable opportunities it provides to the non FSSP vendors and contractors it engages.

Accountability: The Equity Action Plan will be a regular agenda item at semi-annual meetings of the JUSFC commissioners and staff will report on progress for each action item.