

Open up the Potential of Local Communities and the Horizon of Your Future

Local Vitalization Cooperator Program Handbook



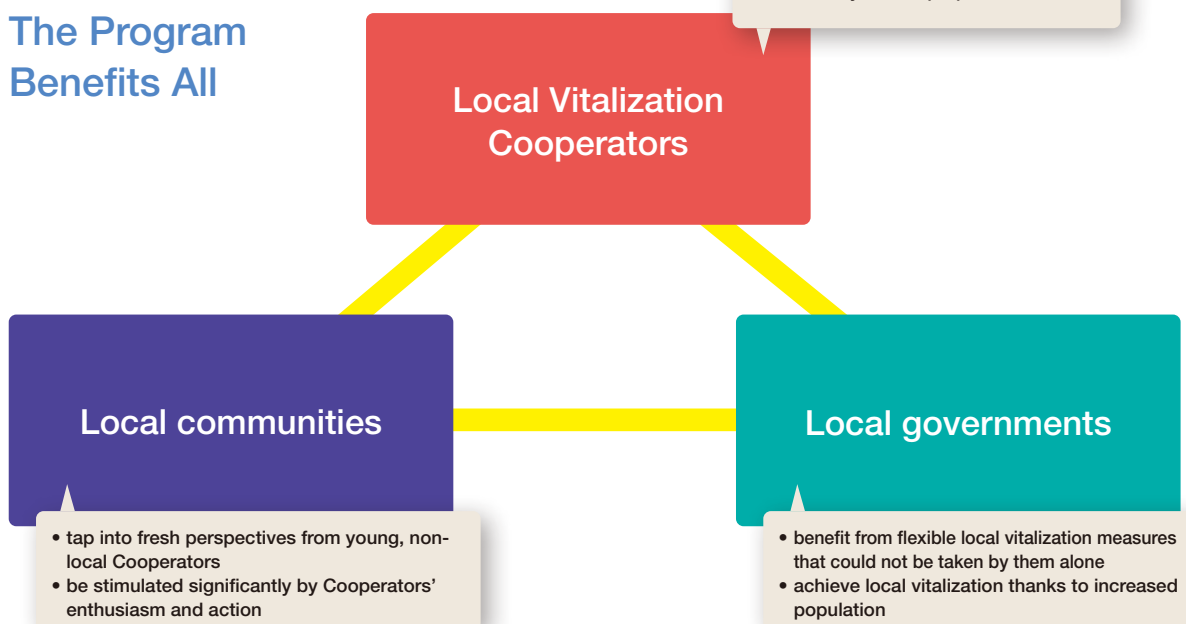
What Is the Local Vitalization Cooperator Program?

The Local Vitalization Cooperator is a program designed to encourage people in urban areas to migrate to and settle in depopulated and other disadvantaged areas while engaging in various local cooperation activities.

The program is operated by local governments, which select and appoint Cooperators from among applicants.

- engage in activities that allow them to demonstrate their talent and abilities
- access opportunities to discover their ideal lifestyles and purpose in life

The Program Benefits All



Point 1 There are opportunities to discover your ideal lifestyle and purpose in life, where you can leverage your experiences and abilities

Local communities offer various jobs that allow you to utilize your creativity, experiences, and abilities. There will also be many opportunities for you to build solid relationships with local people while interacting with them regularly through local cooperation activities.

The job experiences and relationships with local people that you will develop in a local community will become your important assets not just as a Cooperator but also for your life. You may even eventually discover your ideal lifestyle and purpose in life in the local rural community.

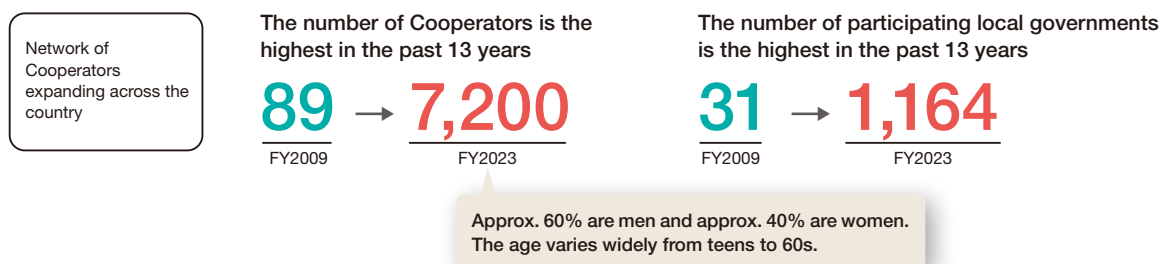
Point 2 You can take plenty of time to settle and prepare for starting business

The term of service for Cooperators is usually one year to three years. You will have plenty of time to find and make ready your job and housing to settle in and prepare for starting business, as well as to develop a network of connections while engaging in diverse activities including agriculture/forestry/fisheries, local community activities, the development and sales of local specialties, and the dissemination of information on the region.

Each Cooperator receives compensation, etc. of up to 3.2 million yen a year and additionally can use up to 2 million yen as expenses necessary for their activities, coordination among those involved, and other tasks undertaken.

Point 3 Extensive support is available

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications provides seamless support for Cooperators which ranges from the collection and compilation of information on the program to support life after Cooperators' term of service. Such support includes consultation for those who are interested in becoming a Cooperator as well as for Cooperators who have finished their service; and training for newly-appointed Cooperators as well as for upgrading skills of mid-term Cooperators.



Mission

Event planning, dissemination of information, and operation of a shared house converted from an abandoned house, for the purpose of livening up the city center

Ono City is a castle town where people can enjoy shopping at a morning market with a history of 400 years and see a beautiful sea of clouds. In May 2023, Ms. Hibiki Yamamoto arrived at the city as a Cooperator. It was her first job after graduating from a graduate school.

Ms. Yamamoto became interested in regional life when she was still a graduate school student. She decided to take a year off from school to stay in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture, to see how what she was learning from school—urban planning, utilization of abandoned houses, and regional community development—was put into practice in the region. And it was during this period that she visited Ono City for the first time.

When she was strolling in the city center, she happened to find the Arashima Hostel. Inside the hostel, there were old signs of local stores displayed near the entrance. She was deeply moved by them. She also met people who love the region very much and are devoting themselves enthusiastically to their businesses which are not big in size nor famous but socially significant. **After returning to school, and even while she was in a job search, she could not forget those “cool” people she had met in the city.** She thought she wanted to work with them. And it was around this time that she found Ono City was inviting applications for its Local Vitalization Cooperators.

She instantly felt that **the city where new and old coexist by caring for each other should give her an opportunity to find something important to live for.** She made up her mind; she went to Ono City upon graduation.

Born in Hiratsuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Ms. Yamamoto studied urban planning, regional community development, and utilization of abandoned houses at a university. While she was at graduate school, she took a one-year leave of absence to stay in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture, to experience regional life. During this period, she visited Ono City, Fukui Prefecture, and encountered unforgettable experiences and people there, which led her to join the city's Local Vitalization Cooperator program in May 2023. Based at the Arashima Hostel, she is diligently working to vitalize the city.

Ms. Yamamoto is working as a sole proprietor and engaging in activities as a Cooperator based on an outsourcing agreement with the city. Her mission is to liven up the city center. More specifically, based at the Arashima Hostel, she is planning events, sharing information through local booklets and other media, operating a shared house converted from an abandoned house, among other undertakings. She has chosen to place herself among the locals, rather than working at the city hall, and is working closely together with private-sector companies. In this way, she has been able to quickly bridge the gap with local people. When she invited her parents in Kanagawa Prefecture to visit Ono City, a man working in the shopping area explained to her parents why she decided to become a Cooperator and how hard she is working every day, ardently on her behalf as if he were her family. She felt very pleased with this personal closeness and realized the preciousness of what she has got from living and working in the region.

She has started a new project called “Machi-no Insatsu-shitsu.” Through this project, she intends to create a printing studio as a place for promoting interaction among people through printing, as well as with a view to her future business after her term of service. Her vision of ideal community, which she envisaged when she became a Cooperator, is already on track to be realized thanks to support from local people.

Ono City, Fukui Prefecture

Developing a Culture of Creating Vibrancy in the City I Love and Have Chosen to Live in

Active
Cooperator

Ms. Hibiki Yamamoto
Local Vitalization Cooperator for Ono City



In addition to the Arashima Hostel, a new base of her activities has been created by renovating an abandoned house located in the shopping area, where she has recently launched the “Machi-no Insatsu-shitsu” project. The printing studio is equipped with a lithography printer and intended to become a place for exchanging information and interacting with others by attracting shop owners and other people who have information to share.



Active
Cooperator

Mr. Ryo Takasugi
Local Vitalization Cooperator for Matsusaka City

Matsusaka City, Mie Prefecture

Devoted to Running a Café and Supporting New Settlers —Activities that Liven “Myself” up Will Lead to Changing the Community for the Better

Mr. Ryo Takasugi stroke out on his own as a designer at the age of 31 and was running his office in Nagoya City. But he began to worry about his future, asking himself whether he can really continue his business for the next decades in a tough business environment with a lot of ups and downs. A turning point came about seven years ago when he visited a hilly and mountainous area in Matsusaka City, Mie Prefecture, with his client. **There he felt charm and potential of living in an environment abundant with the nature and having a down-to-earth life.**

Mr. Takasugi purchased an old traditional house in Matsusaka City and started a confectionery production business. When he placed posts about his business on social networks, they attracted attention of city government staff. Mr. Takasugi and the staff met, and during the talk, he realized that the city was inviting applications for its Local Vitalization Cooperators. Because he had been thinking about moving to Matsusaka City sooner or later, where his wife's parents' home is located, and because he thought that by becoming a Cooperator he can fit himself in the local community more quickly, he and his family moved to and started living in the litaka region in October 2020.

Among his many undertakings in the region, there are two particularly large projects. One is Okumatsusaka, which is a lodging and café he opened by renovating a 120-year old traditional house in January 2023. “To vitalize the region, I thought we need a space like a living room where everyone can come and feel at home,”

Okumatsusaka, a lodging and café, is located about one-hour drive away from the city center. The name Okumatsusaka, which means “the back of Matsusaka,” reflects Mr. Takasugi's desire to connect the urban area and its suburban hilly and mountainous areas. In the café, which is filled with his creative ideas, people can enjoy meals prepared with local ingredients.



says Mr. Takasugi. The café offers meals prepared with lots of local ingredients, which he hopes will support the region through food. The café attracts many people from in and outside the region and functions as a place for their interaction.

The other large project is the establishment of a cooperative for regional development. The objective of this project is to introduce both housing and work to those who wish to move to the region in collaboration with the city government and local businesses. The cooperative takes a proactive approach to supporting new settlers through this matching service that connects them to businesses.

“Similarly to other regions, it is expected that litaka will be depopulated and more houses will be abandoned. We need to take more aggressive action to attract people who want to pursue new challenges, in order to give vibrancy to the region,” says Mr. Takasugi.

Mr. Takasugi himself is pursuing a new challenge; he has decided to extend his term of service as a Cooperator and is planning to open a lodging facility named “STAY Okumatsusaka” and a patisserie. “I want to make my life more exciting. This will eventually lead to changing the region for the better,” says Mr. Takasugi. He has made a renewed start toward the new goal of creating a community where he himself and everyone else can live and work vibrantly.

Mission

Opening of café and lodging facilities, development of local specialties, establishment of an intermediary organization, and dissemination of attractiveness of the region, for the purpose of livening up hilly and mountainous areas

After graduating from a high school in Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture, Mr. Takasugi engaged in public relations and design at a restaurant and a food company before starting his own design office in 2011. In October 2020, he moved to the litaka region in Matsusaka City. He continued his career as a designer while working as a Cooperator. His term of service as a Cooperator is scheduled to end in March 2024.

Current work

Creation of botanical candles that convey new charms of Fukushima and provision of workshops

After working for a large manufacturer, Ms. Miyu Otsuki learned candle making, which she had been enjoying as a hobby, seriously and started her career as a candle artist. She made candles on weekdays at her house in Fukushima City and sold them at a market on weekends. When she was leading such life, she met Ms. Asami Nihei, who was a Cooperator for Iitate Village and invited to join the team in the village where floriculture was thriving.

Ms. Otsuki, who creates botanical candles using flowers produced in Fukushima Prefecture, already had visited Iitate Village before she was invited by Ms. Nihei, and had a good impression about the village, which she thought was a beautiful place with kind people, abundant with the nature, and full of seasonal flowers. Because of this impression, and also because she had been interested in activities that support a particular region since when she was a university student, she decided to take on the new challenge. She thought that, by becoming a Cooperator, she would get a chance to fulfill her desire to support a region as well as to make a new step forward as a candle artist.

She started her activities as a Cooperator in April 2020. To know more about the village and get locals to know about her, she visited various local people. **"Because I was a Cooperator, I was easily accepted and able to settle into the village smoothly,"** says Ms. Otsuki.

Born in Fukushima Prefecture, Ms. Otsuki worked for a large household goods manufacturer after graduating from Tohoku University of Art & Design. She became a candle artist in 2019 and moved to Iitate Village as a Cooperator in April 2020. In May the following year, she opened Atelier Myrtle. She continues her activities in the village after her term of service as a Cooperator ended in March 2023.

She rented an old traditional house in the village and gradually renovated it by herself to turn it into her studio. In May 2021, she opened Atelier Myrtle. The studio also has a gallery to attract as many people as possible to visit the village. She also holds candle making workshops and other events in which anyone can participate light-heartedly.

Even after her term of service as a Cooperator ended, she continues her activities in the village. Many distant customers, as well as village people, visit her gallery. The Iitate Flower Candle, which she created, was also selected as a gift given to those who made hometown tax donations to the village. Her network is expanding. She says, **"The Local Vitalization Cooperator is a reliable and supportive program for those who want to challenge themselves to do or have a dream to do something. I hope many people will join us to help vitalize the village while pursuing their dreams in the village blessed with natural resources."**

Iitate Village, Fukushima Prefecture

Disseminating New Charms of the Region through Candles that Make the Most of the Beauty of Fukushima's Flowers

Ex-Local
Vitalization
Cooperator

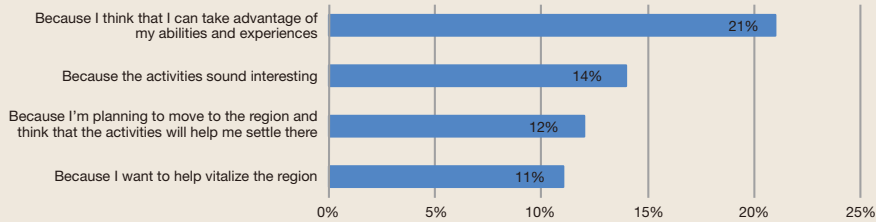
Ms. Miyu Otsuki
Atelier Myrtle



Atelier Myrtle, which colorfully displays beautiful candles made with flowers grown in Fukushima Prefecture and dried flowers. "I want to communicate charms of Fukushima through my creation that takes advantage of local resources," says Ms. Otsuki.

Major Reasons for Applying

- The most cited reason for applying for a Cooperator is because the applicant thinks that they can take advantage of their abilities and experiences. This is followed by “Because the activities sound interesting,” “Because I want to help vitalize the region,” and other reasons concerning the applicant’s desire to actively involve in regional vitalization and pursue their self-realization.



Activities

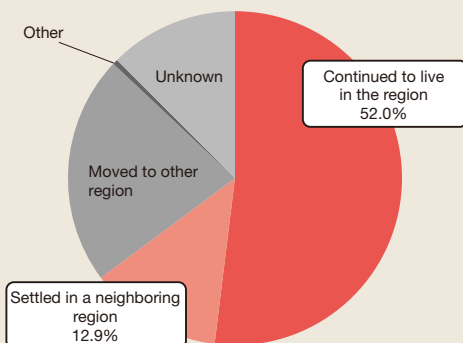
The program encompasses a wide variety of support activities including working in agriculture/forestry/fisheries; involvement in local community activities; production, processing and development of local specialties; and dissemination of information on and publication of the region and local specialties. Through these activities, many Cooperators have achieved their self-realization and succeeded in shaping their lives in a way that suits them better.

- Working in agriculture/forestry/fisheries
- Local community activities
- Production, processing, development, distribution, sales, and marketing of local specialties
- Dissemination of information on and publication of the region and local specialties
- Planning and development of tourism resources
- Operation of tourism and lodging facilities
- Promotion for people in urban areas, etc. to move to the region and interact with locals
- Support for education and learning
- Planning and operation of events and publicity for attracting participants
- Promotion of culture and sports
- Measures to address the issue of abandoned houses and shops, utilization of real properties
- Environmental conservation, nature preservation, wildlife management
- Passing on of local traditional industries and techniques
- Research and study on regional resources and development
- Support and watching out for elderly people's lives
- Administrative work, finance/management
- Medical care, healthcare
- Local crime prevention, disaster management, and security
- Other

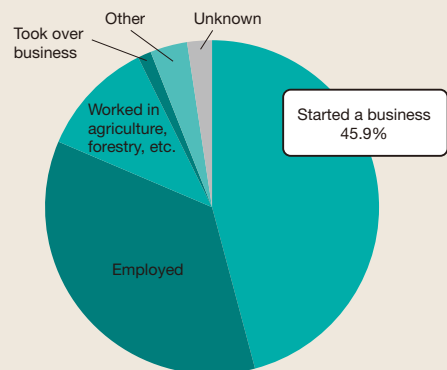
Percentage of Cooperators Settling in the Region and Their Career Choice after Their Term of Service

After their term of service, approx. 65% continued to live in the municipality they had worked for as a Cooperator or in a neighboring region. Of those who settled in the same municipality as they had worked as a Cooperator, approx. 46% started a business, such as traditional house café, farmer’s restaurant, or other eating and drinking services, or guesthouse or other accommodations. Of those who were employed, many obtained a position in a local government or other administrative agencies, or continued to work for the region in such fields as tourism, agriculture/forestry/fisheries, and support for community renovation and development. Many ex-Cooperators have set their roots in the region and are still playing a leading role in its vitalization.

Approx. 65% continued to live in the region they had worked for as a Cooperator



Approx. 46% of those settled in the same municipality started a business



Career choice of Cooperators* after their term of service ended

(*Cooperators who finished their service during the past five years (between April 1, 2018 and March 31, 2023) and settled in the same municipality as they had worked for)

Started a business

Eating and drinking services (279), accommodation (198), artist (208), retailing (176), sixth industry (113), tourism (106), support for community development (79), etc.

Employed

Administrative agency (392), tourism (171), agriculture/forestry/fisheries (131), support for community renovation and development (107), medical care/welfare (68), retailing (71), education (73), manufacturing (55), sixth industry (45), etc.

Worked in agriculture, forestry, etc.

Agriculture (403), forestry (55), animal husbandry (21), fisheries (15), etc.

Took over business

Sake brewing, operation of an inn, etc. (56)

Note: The figures in parentheses are the number of Cooperators engaged in each business, including those who are making preparations or receiving training for their respective jobs.

Source: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' FY2023 report on activities, etc. of Local Vitalization Cooperators published on April 5, 2024

How to Become a Local Vitalization Cooperator

1

Check information on the recruitment of Cooperators!

Local Vitalization Cooperators are selected and recruited by local governments. Activities, working conditions, form of employment, and other terms vary depending on the local government. Check the portal site of Japan Organization for Internal Migration (JOIN) for information on recruitment.

2

Apply to the local government of the municipality you are interested in*

When you find a municipality offering activities, working conditions, lives, etc. that are favorable for you, apply to the local government!

* There are certain restrictions regarding where you can move to and where you can move from. Please refer to the geographical restrictions on the assignment of Local Vitalization Cooperators on the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' website.

3

Screening and selection by the local government

The local government will screen your application and decide whether or not to appoint you as a Cooperator.

4

Issue of a letter of appointment by the local government

When the local government decides to recruit you as a Cooperator, it will issue a letter of appointment. You are now officially appointed as a Cooperator!

5

Move your address to the municipality you will work for and start activities!

When you are appointed as a Cooperator, relocate your resident registration from the current address to the new address in the municipality you will work for. Start your new life as a Cooperator!

Notes: • From FY2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications provides financial support of up to 5.2 million yen including compensation, etc. of—as a general rule—3.2 million yen for each Cooperator.
• The form of employment varies depending on the local government. Cooperators may be employed as a part-time civil servant, based on an outsourcing agreement with the local government, or in any other forms.

Period:
Basically two
nights and
three days

Local Vitalization Cooperator Trial Stay

No requirement to move to the region

Purpose: To experience Cooperator's actual activities on a trial basis

Activities: Meeting with concerned locals, seeing around the region, networking event, experiencing Cooperator's actual activities, etc.

Period:
Two weeks to
three months

Local Vitalization Cooperator Internship

No requirement to move to the region

Purpose: To get an idea of what Cooperator's life will be like

Activities: Engaging in local support activities like actual Cooperators do

You can try experiencing Cooperator's activities and life!

For those who are interested in becoming a Cooperator but wish to try Cooperator's activities and life before applying, two opportunities are offered. One is the Local Vitalization Cooperator Trial Stay, which allows participants to experience Cooperator's activities during their stay (basically three days) in the region you desire to work for, and the other is the Local Vitalization Cooperator Internship program, which gives participants a chance to involve in local cooperation activities for a period from two weeks to three months. Since participation requirements vary depending on the local government, please check their website, etc. before applying.

Check Information on Social Networks and Portal Site!

Portal site listing more than 3,500 currently available openings

The Japan Organization for Internal Migration (JOIN) is a general incorporated association established to encourage people in urban areas to move to rural areas and promote exchanges between cities and agricultural, mountain, and fishery villages. The organization shares information on trends associated with internal migration and drives collaboration between businesses and local governments. The Local Vitalization Cooperator portal site operated by the JOIN offers a list of currently available openings for those who wish to start working as a Cooperator. Search by region and category is possible.

Inquiry regarding the portal site

Japan Organization for Internal Migration (JOIN)
Administration Office
Phone: 03-3510-6581
E-mail: info@iju-koryu.jp



Local Vitalization Cooperator Support Desk

If you are interested in becoming a Local Vitalization Cooperator, contact the Support Desk.

The Local Vitalization Support Desk offers consultation services for those who are interested in joining the team as well as for Cooperators currently in service either on the phone, via e-mail, or face-to-face.

Consultation
on the phone

03- 6225-2318

- Phone number specifically for consultation (Consultation is free of charge, but call charges are borne by the caller.)
- Opening hours: 11:00 to 19:00 on weekdays (Closed on weekends, national holidays, and year-end and New Year holidays)
- There is no limit to the number of times or length of time you can use the service.

E-mail
(web)
consultation



- Send your message via the dedicated address (web form), which is accepted at any time throughout the year.
- You will receive a reply from a consultant, in principle, within five business days.
- There is no limit to the number of times or length of time you can use the service.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' Local Vitalization Cooperator social network sites

The ministry uses three social network platforms to provide information on events, training, and other activities related to the Local Vitalization Cooperator organized by the ministry. The sites also show activities of Cooperators and ex-Cooperators.

[The ministry's official Instagram for the Local Vitalization Cooperator]

The Instagram presents photos taken by Cooperators across the country according to a specific theme set for each month. Please follow the Instagram to see Cooperators' activities and each region's charms!



[The ministry's official Facebook page for the Local Vitalization Cooperator]

Information on events and available openings for Cooperators at local governments nationwide, as well as photos of Cooperators' activities, are posted. Please follow the Facebook page!



[The ministry's official YouTube channel for the Local Vitalization Cooperator]

The channel shows interviews with Cooperators talking about their activities and video created by Cooperators that won video contests. Please subscribe to the channel!



Inquiry:

Regional Self-support Promotion Division, Group for Regional Vitalization, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
Phone: 03-5253-5394