



Prospects of KAKEHASHI Roundtable Discussion with Experts and Alumni Follow-up Program Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】

Through presentations by representatives of this year's KAKEHASHI Project participants and panel discussions with experts, this event was intended to visualize the results of the KAKEHASHI Project and to obtain suggestions and advice from experts and alumni for future project management.

By bringing U.S. and Canadian alumni together online for networking, the event also served to maintain their interest in Japan, strengthen connections among alumni, and motivate them to become “bridges” between their countries and Japan.

【Participants】 Total: 26 participants – 2 experts, 2 project contributors, 22 alumni

■ Panelists

《Experts》

1. Mr. Jean-Francois Renaud, First Secretary, Public Affairs/Education, Embassy of Canada in Japan
2. Mr. Bruce Batten, Resident Director, Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies

《Project Contributors》

1. Mr. Frank Jannuzi, President and CEO, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation
2. Ms. Siân Jones, Program Manager, KAKEHASHI Project, Central Canada Office, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

《Alumni Representatives》

Total: 4 FY2025 invitation program participants from the U.S. and Canada

1. Mr. Marcus Antonio Grant (Winners of Japanese Speech Contest)
2. Ms. Alejandra Luisa Acosta (Latino American Young Leaders)
3. Mr. Alex Sarkozi (Japanese Language Communication)
4. Mr. Benjamin Faust (Canadian Young Leaders)

■ Total: 18 KAKEHASHI Project alumni (up to FY2025 participants)

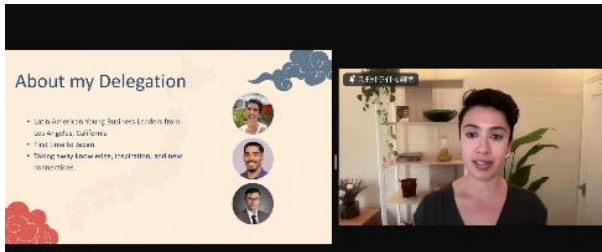
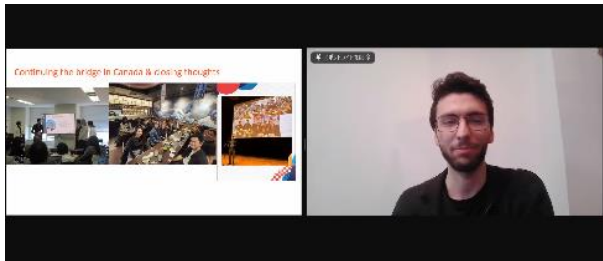
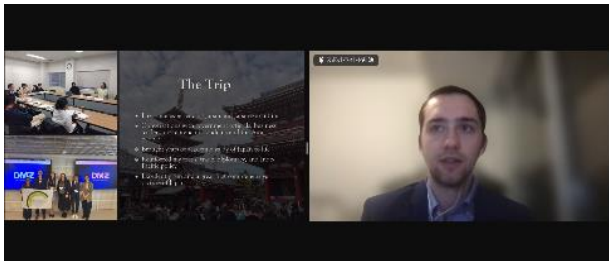
(Breakdown): United States 15 (5 undergraduate and graduate students, and 10 working youths)
Canada 3 (3 undergraduate and graduate students)

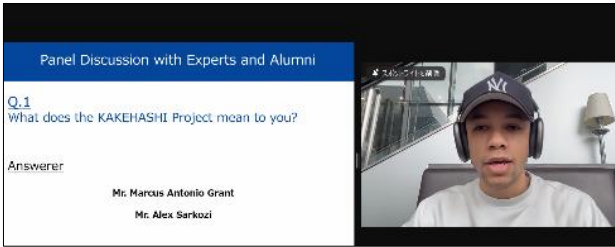
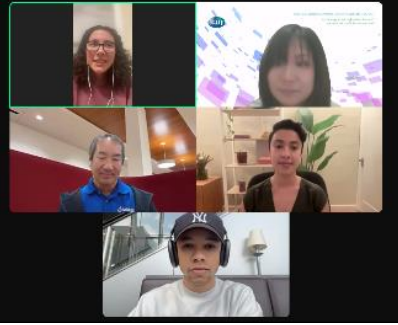
【Schedule】

- Online Expert's Meeting: March 27 (Wed), 2026
- 1. Introduction of Experts and Project Contributors (Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE))
- 2. Address

Mr. HARADA Seitaro, Researcher, North America Exchange Division, North American Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
- 3. KAKEHASHI Project Overview and Report on this Fiscal Year's Projects (JICE)
- 4. Presentation by Alumni Representatives / Q&A Session / Comments from the Experts and Project Contributors
- 5. Panel Discussion
 - 1) What does the KAKEHASHI Project mean to you?
 - 2) What will be necessary and how to strengthen the alumni network in the future?
 - 3) As global dynamics continue to change significantly, in which areas do you believe cooperation among US-Canada-Japan should be strengthened going forward?
 - 4) What role do you think young individuals can play in improving US-Canada-Japan relations?
- 6. General Review/Comments from the Experts and Project Contributors
- 7. Commemorative Photo
- 8. Closing Remarks
- 9. 【Exchange】 Networking with KAKEHASHI Alumni

2. Program Photos

	
【Presentation by Alumni Representatives】 Mr. Marcus Antonio Grant – Q&A session	【Presentation by Alumni Representatives】 Ms. Alejandra Luisa Acosta
	
【Presentation by Alumni Representatives】 Mr. Alex Sarkozi	【Presentation by Alumni Representatives】 Mr. Benjamin Faust

	
【Panel Discussion】 Experts and alumni	【Panel Discussion】 Experts and alumni
	
【Commemorative Photo】	【Exchange】 Networking with KAKEHASHI alumni

3. Comments from the Panel Discussion (excerpt)

1) What does the KAKEHASHI Project mean to you?

- To me, the KAKEHASHI Project represents the creation of truly long-term connections between people, as well as between organizations. It is not simply about visiting Japan, but about gaining an understanding of different perspectives and values, nurturing those relationships over time, and learning as much as possible through the experience. I also believe that serving as a bridge between different subcultures and continuing to take on new challenges is an important and meaningful aspect of this project.
- I feel that the KAKEHASHI Project is an initiative that builds bridges between two different countries and among people from diverse backgrounds. Especially in situations where significant differences exist and harmony is difficult to achieve, I believe the most important element is a genuine willingness to understand one another. It is this mutual understanding that forms the foundation for sustainable and meaningful relationships.

2) What will be necessary and how to strengthen the alumni network in the future?

- I highly value the fact that many participants are able to engage online and that social media provides a space where experiences and perspectives from a wide range of individuals are shared. I believe that continuing these efforts is extremely beneficial.

While I am not certain whether such a resource currently exists, I believe that a newsletter could serve as a valuable tool for identifying opportunities to begin building bridges among the United States, Canada, and Japan from various regions. Many of you are already supporting the early stages of engagement with Japan, and I believe that continuing to assist participants in finding opportunities to build these connections would be highly valuable.

In addition, I see potential in leveraging sister-city relationships in the United States and Canada as another way to identify and create such opportunities.

- My experience with the alumni network has been extremely positive. I believe it would be wonderful to have a newsletter as a platform for sharing information. Based on my own experience, after returning home I was often asked by many people about various opportunities, and I made every effort to share what I could; however, with a newsletter, I believe even more information could be shared more effectively.

I also believe that digital events organized by the Asia Pacific Foundation Canada in Toronto—where alumni can connect with one another in ways that resemble interaction—are essential for building long-term connections and sustaining Japan–Canada relations over time. In addition, I see great value in continuing to host similar events in the United States as well.

3) As global dynamics continue to change significantly, in which areas do you believe cooperation among US-Canada-Japan should be strengthened going forward?

- First, following the visit of the Canadian Prime Minister to Japan this March, bilateral relations between Japan and Canada were elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This new partnership clearly identifies areas in which cooperation should be further strengthened, particularly in the fields of security and defense.

At present, the geopolitical environment is changing rapidly due to rising tensions and increasing pressure on the rules-based international order, making the need to enhance preparedness in security and defense more pressing than ever. I believe this is a critical area in which Japan, Canada, and the United States share common priorities and can work together to promote stability both regionally and globally.

Second, there is the further strengthening of cooperation in the economic sphere. To ensure the prosperity of Japan, Canada, and the United States, it is essential to build supply chains that are resilient, do not hinder innovation, and are grounded in trust-based partnerships. In a recent interview, the Canadian Prime Minister emphasized the intention of Japan and Canada to develop secure and sustainable supply chains as long-term, reliable partners supporting Japan's energy transition. This, too, is an area in which trilateral cooperation including the United States can be further expanded.

Finally, there is the area of people-to-people connections and cultural exchange. As the centennial of diplomatic relations between Japan and Canada approaches, people-to-people exchange programs such as the KAKEHASHI Project play a vital role in building the true foundation of trilateral cooperation. I believe that fostering mutual understanding and friendship through these cultural and human exchanges leads to the long-term relationships that make the strategic cooperation mentioned earlier possible.

- Until today, I had not fully realized just how comprehensive and well-designed the KAKEHASHI Project is, and I was deeply impressed today. It reaffirmed for me the importance of youth exchange, and I sincerely hope that this program will continue to expand.

I have spent most of my career in higher education, mainly mentoring undergraduate and graduate

students. From both a professional and personal perspective, I know how profoundly meaningful experiences in one's late teens and early twenties can be. Having the opportunity to participate in a program like this at a young age is something that stays with a person for a lifetime.

Friendships with people from different cultures, homestay experiences, and participation in various events—even spending just one week in another country—can leave a lasting impact that remains throughout the rest of one's life. From such experiences, truly strong relationships can be formed, enabling Canada, the United States, and Japan to endure future challenges and to transform them into positive opportunities together.

4) What role do you think young individuals can play in improving US-Canada-Japan relations?

- I believe that having international experiences at a young age can reveal their value later in life in unexpected ways. When I visited China at the age of eighteen, the only means of communication available was airmail, and it took more than three weeks for a letter to arrive. In contrast, young people today can instantly connect three countries across two continents through digital technologies such as Zoom.

This means that the current generation of young people is living in an environment where the relationships built through programs like the KAKEHASHI Project can be sustained and actively maintained over time. That said, the initial relationships that serve as the starting point are critically important, and I believe they are deepened not through television or online interactions alone, but through direct, real-time, person-to-person engagement.

When young people connect across borders in this way, it can also serve as one means of preventing xenophobia, harmful nationalism, and isolationism. Experiencing international exchange at a young age, I believe, offers an exceptionally high return on investment for the future of Japan–U.S.–Canada relations.

- Each year, I witness young participants from Canada, the United States, and Japan step into unfamiliar spaces, build relationships, and quietly fulfill the role of diplomacy. I believe that young people demonstrate their greatest strength not at the top of systems, but at their foundation. Change is far more sustainable when it is built from the bottom up, rather than imposed from the top down. Governments can sign agreements, but trust, empathy, and long-term cooperation are built through individuals and through conversation. This, I believe, is precisely why youth exchange programs like the KAKEHASHI Project are so important.

What I hear consistently from KAKEHASHI participants is that they did not truly understand Japan or Canada until they met local people and saw things with their own eyes. Exchange replaces abstract concepts and stereotypes with names, faces, and relationships. These informal networks can become connective tissue that facilitates official cooperation when it is most needed. Young people humanize international relations, grounding them in diplomacy and trust rather than rhetoric, and working from the bottom up through people-to-people connections. Together, we work to ensure that Canada–U.S.–Japan relations are resilient enough to withstand uncertainty, disruption, and change.

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)