



WISE in Obuse, May 29-31, 2026

Japan Institute for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Supported by Obuse town

★ W2026 WISE in Obuse was made possible by the generous support of the United States-Japan Foundation.

Japan Institute for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (JSIE) organized Women's Initiative for Sustainable Empowerment (WISE) in Obuse on May 29–31, 2026. Supported by United States Japan Foundation and Obusemachi, this program is designed to promote entrepreneurship and collaboration toward innovative solutions against various social challenges related to Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs). We welcomed 27 participants from various countries, including United States, Kenya, Singapore, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Germany, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Czech Republic, Costa Rica, Ukraine, and Japan. They had opportunities to shape ideas into plans through group work and to learn leadership and communication skills.



JSIE's focus points:

- *Identify and define problem(s)
- *Present and explain your ideas to others
- *Negotiate, collaborate, and involve with others
- *Accept different values and be flexible
- *Play leadership and bring "the best outcome"



JSIE invited innovative ideas aimed at creating a better society for the next generation. On the first day, participants pitched their ideas for addressing social challenges, and the top six ideas were selected through a vote. Participants then formed six diverse, cross-cultural teams to further develop these ideas. Throughout the three-day program, each team worked intensively to refine its concept, develop a feasible implementation plan, and prepare a final presentation. The WISE Program was honored to welcome Obuse Town Mayor Toru Omiya as a special guest, and Mayor Omiya also presented the Special Obuse Town Award.

JSIE supports fostering global talent and offers global networking opportunities for participants, including students, young and experienced professionals, with an emphasis on helping women and younger generations realize their greatest potential. The WISE program is to provide opportunities to shape our life mission and work toward social challenges.

The 2026 WISE Program in Obuse was supported by the United States-Japan Foundation, Obuse Town, the Obuse Town Chamber of Commerce, GlobalGiving, & Mr. Michael Brown. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for their generous support.

See www.jsie.net/en for more JSIE activities!

2026 WISE in Obuse “Global x Inclusive x Leadership”

~ Creating New Social Values for Sustainable Community



Mt. Tatsuya Matsui Ms. Shuri Fukunaga Mr. John Chesen Mayor Toru Omiya

Mentors played a vital role by offering diverse perspectives, posing critical questions, and encouraging participants to continue refining their plans. Mr. Tatsuya Matsui, a world-renowned robot designer and co-producer of the Robot Momo Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, shared insights on creativity and systems design. Ms. Shuri Fukunaga, a leading PR strategist and CEO of Persuade Inc., provided guidance on business risk management. Mr. John Chesen, founding investor and co-managing partner of Baird Brewing Company, emphasized the importance of practicality and designing from the user’s perspective. By learning from the mentors’ experiences and professional journeys, participants gained valuable insights to further develop their own projects.

JSIE facilitators introduced practical frameworks for organizing discussions, defining expected outputs and their potential social impact, and developing a clear vision and mission through real-world examples. In addition, JSIE provided an investor’s perspective, highlighting the key elements required to develop a compelling and viable social innovation project. Participants also attended a session on effective storytelling and presentation techniques, learning how to communicate their ideas more persuasively to attract funding, partners, and future customers.



1st prize winner: Squares4Change



2nd prize: The Common Room



3rd prize: Mountain Tribe team



Obusemachi award: Parachichi



From the judges’ perspective, the awards recognized projects that demonstrated the greatest combination of innovation, feasibility, and potential for social impact. After careful deliberation, the judges awarded **Square4Change** as the First Prize winner for its idea of connecting crocheted patchwork blankets to support people living in poverty while building a global movement of solidarity. **The Common Room** received Second Prize for proposing an interactive social media platform that encourages meaningful discussions on social issues. **Mountain Tribe** was awarded Third Prize for its project to improve English language skills through outdoor activities and nature-based experiences. The **Special Obuse Town Award**, presented by Mayor Toru Omiya, was awarded to **Parachichi**, whose project connects Kenyan avocado farmers directly with the Japanese market while sharing the producers’ stories to create greater social value. Working in culturally diverse teams representing 13 countries, participants collaborated intensively throughout the program to develop a shared vision and mission, explore innovative approaches, and transform their ideas into practical social innovation projects. Despite the challenges of working across cultures and disciplines, every team demonstrated remarkable creativity, dedication, and teamwork in delivering thoughtful final presentations.

JSIE staff Fumiko from NY provided keynote with life stories on mission. Madoka, Konoha, and Nana facilitated ice-breaking session, JSIE directors Hiromi and Fumiko also joined as mentors to stimulate thinking patterns and innovative minds. Yuka provided pitch session, and the grand master Mayumi supervised entire logistics for smooth operations.



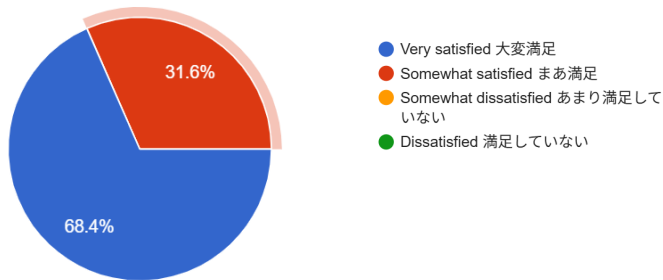
Hiromi Fumiko Mayumi Yuka

JSIE looks forward to following the future achievements of the WISE Fellows and supporting their continued growth as leaders in social innovation.

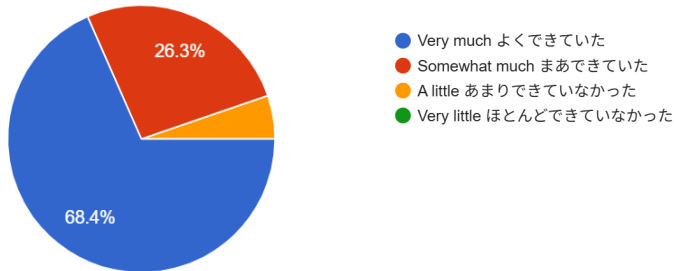


Survey outcome

1) How satisfied WISE2026?



2) Were facilitators effective?



Q: What you've learned from this program, and what inspired you the most during the program?

- Reasonably intense and a diverse community and mentorship that helped turn a small idea into something with potential and tangible progress.
- 年齢を超えて、チームとして一つのプロジェクトに取り組む経験はとても貴重でした。またビジネスを起こすためのヒントだけでなく、営業担当として自社製品を他社と差別化し、どのようにアプローチをしていくか、戦略的な考え方ができるように成長できました。
- I was first puzzled by the age difference between various participants, but I came to realise it was one of the best parts of the program actually. By mixing youth, mid-career professionals and skilled professionals, we created a well-balanced teams..

Q: What inspired you the most at WISE?

- The whole environment and everyone really inspired me. From the elevator pitches to late night conversations with fellow participants, everything was so raw. All the mentors and their success stories, their advices, failure and constructive criticism opened my mind to questions I wouldn't have rather asked myself. I was especially inspired by the diverse age bracket, but the willingness to share and learn with no formalities or hierarchy. I was mostly inspired by people older than me, for having achieved so much and doing more, and by those younger who was so many ambitions and passions yet to pursuer.
- 海外の人達のプレゼンの迫力、伝えたい気持ちが強く私もそういうプレゼンをしてみたいと思った。
- 人同士が助け合って、1つのコンセプトを作り上げて磨き上げ、そして発表すると言うプロセス自身に楽しさを覚えたこと。
- Hearing of the mentors' stories and the challenges they went through in determination to achieve their dreams really inspired me to take an action. It made me feel like my ideas are possible and achievable with solid, hard work.
- Everyone's commitment to each of their projects despite language barriers, as well as mentor feedback inspired me the most. It helped me realize that I can actually turn this project into something.

- たくさんの挑戦ができる環境 や、間違えても大丈夫な優しい雰囲気よかった。
- 入る暇がないくらいにみんな頭の回転が速くて、意見をすぐに言えるところ。
- 仲間がふえたこと。メンバー同士が助け合いひとつのコンセプトそのものを作り上げる楽しみのようなものをしっかり感じられたこと。また、リトリートとしての長野県の自然に抱かれて、ゆっくりとした時間を過ごせたこと、英語に囲まれた環境の中で、国際性をさらに深められたこと。
- I loved the community-building aspect of the WISE program. It was incredible to meet such a diverse group of people, not only in nationality, but also diverse in age and English-proficiency level. I loved the connections we built and getting to learn of other people's perspectives. I also loved seeing an abstract idea of mine come to life with the help of others - it was greatly empowering.



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