

Melissa Spooner
Platform for JETAA USA Country
Representative 2014-2015



- JET Program, ALT, Mie Prefecture (2006-2009)
- Mie AJET, President (2008-2009); Southern Representative (2006-2008)
- JETAA Florida, Secretary 2010-2011
- National Conference Delegate – 2010 (New York)
- Currently an active member and volunteer with JETAA New York (2011-present)

The JET Program and its mission of “grassroots internationalization” has been a constant presence in my life ever since I departed back in 2006. As Country Representative, I hope to further my commitment by strengthening our national organization’s identity and by continuing to make the case that the JET Program represents a good “Return on Investment” for the Japanese government. I believe that my years of experience in various JET and JETAA capacities make me a candidate well suited for the position.

JET Program Achievements

The southern part of Mie Prefecture was not initially represented at the prefectural level. I became Mie AJET’s Southern Representative from 2006-2008, expressing the interests of individuals in the more remote south. I also forged ties with neighboring Wakayama Prefecture. Acting as a liaison, I promoted events going on in both prefectures and encouraged cross-prefectural activities. As Mie AJET President from 2008-2009, I brought attention to the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace to National AJET, resulting in a survey and discussion at the national level. During my tenure I continued to strengthen relationships with nearby prefectures and focused on establishing a variety of events spread throughout Mie Prefecture.

JETAA Florida Achievements

As Secretary of JETAA Florida from 2010-2011, I confronted the challenge of living in a large state where JETs are rather thinly spread. As I did before in Mie Prefecture, I tried to find ways to make it easier for us all to connect. By calling or emailing possible Florida JET Alumni directly, our executive committee created a spreadsheet for a more structured and current contact list. In addition, we established regional representatives to provide better communication throughout the state. Through our regional representatives, we were able to highlight events going on in each area on our website and the Florida JETAA newsletter.

JETAA USA Bylaws Committee Achievement

At the 2010 National Conference in New York, one of the goals discussed was connecting all the chapters as a stronger national unit. As part of a group session, we talked about improving the guidelines of JETAA USA. After researching the subject, I was invited to the 2011 National Conference in Washington D.C. to present on the importance of having a strong set of bylaws for our national organization. After the conference, I became a founding member of the committee tasked with creating a standard set of bylaws for JETAA USA. The Bylaws were passed by a simple majority vote on February 16th, 2012.

Country Representative Goals:

- Continue to improve communication and transparency between all levels of the JET Program; continue to showcase the program's positive short and long-term impacts
- Enthusiastically support and continue to develop the National Initiatives set forth by previous Country Representatives
- Move JETAA USA toward attaining Non-Profit Incorporated status

As a Country Representative, I would have the unique perspective of being heavily involved with two very different chapters: Florida and New York. This viewpoint may allow me to troubleshoot problems within chapters more effectively. I believe frequent and open communication between chapters is integral to the success of our national organization, and would like to continue the "Fire Side Chats" established by previous Country Representatives.

As can be seen from my involvement with Mie AJET and JETAA Florida, encouraging interconnectedness is something I highly value. It is for this reason that I really appreciate the incentive behind the Sister-Cities/States project. I think it is a good way to create lasting US-Japan bonds, which can be further nurtured via support from JETAA USA. This is a very tangible way the Japanese government can see the positive influences of the JET Program. I look forward to continuing this project and the cross-cultural benefits it provides.

Finally, as I mentioned before, creating a strong and cohesive national identity was a long-term goal discussed at the 2010 National Conference. After the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake, being part of the quick and efficient national mobilization effort was inspiring. I believe this momentum is still with us. Thanks to the hard work of the JETAA USA Working Group and U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, I am excited about the possibility of working together with an official JETAA Project Director. I believe this gives us a real opportunity to fine-tune our organization's role and realize the maximum potential it could have as a national entity.

I sincerely appreciate the consideration of the elections committee and JETAA USA chapters. I look forward to the opportunity to serve you at the national level.