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JET Participant Involvement in Local Communities



JET Participant Involvement in Local Communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grassroots internationalisation is one of the primary pillars of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. The purpose of this report is to examine the relationships that JET Programme participants have with their local communities, and the nature of their involvement within them. This report is based upon the results of an Association for Japanese Exchange and Teaching (AJET) survey distributed to current JET Programme participants. The scope of the survey includes:

- the level of JET participant involvement in their local communities
- the type of activities most commonly participated in
- how much of an impact the JET participants feel their participation has on their local community and on themselves
- the type and sources of information that JET Programme participants receive regarding community involvement opportunities

The survey found that nearly all JET Programme participants are involved in their local communities in one way or another. A large majority (82%) believe that their community benefits from their involvement, and an even larger proportion (91%) believes that they also personally benefit from this involvement. Over 77% of ALTs and 91% of CIRs said that they seek out information about getting involved in their communities on their own, and more than half of first-year respondents and 85% of respondents in their second year or above said that they did not receive any information regarding community involvement prior to departure for Japan. However, the majority (78%) of all participants indicated that they would like to have received such information before they arrived.

This report concludes that:

- The majority of JET Programme participants are actively working to achieve the 'grassroots internationalisation' that the Programme strives for.
- Many uninvolved, or under-involved, JET Programme participants either do not know how to get involved or feel they lack the necessary Japanese language skills to do so.
- JET Programme participants are highly motivated to seek out community involvement activities themselves, but still desire more information.
- Contracting organisations should be a significant source of information regarding community involvement, but most of them currently are not.
- Pre-departure JET Programme participants are very keen to receive information about community involvement opportunities, but few are receiving it.



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INTRODUCTION

One of the core aims of the JET Programme is to promote grassroots internationalisation. JET Programme participants develop strong relationships with their local communities through foreign language education, international exchange activities and in a wide variety of other ways. This report will investigate how well this aim is being achieved and propose ways that greater involvement could be achieved.

Based on the Spring 2013 Opinion Exchange involving the Ministry of Internal Communications (MIC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Council of Local Authorities and International Relations (CLAIR), it is clear that lasting relationships between JET participants and their contracting organisations/communities are very important to the **governing bodies of the JET Programme**. This report aims to provide some insight into local activities that help encourage participants to build relationships in their communities that can in turn lead to lasting exchanges once they return to their home countries.

First, the report seeks to establish the general level of community involvement among JET participants. It will detail factors influencing levels of involvement and also discuss what form this involvement takes. The perceptions of first-year JET participants in terms of how they hope to become involved in the local community will be compared with the actual involvement of JET participants in their second year and above. The final part of this section looks at whether JET participants feel their involvement benefits their community and also whether they benefit personally from their involvement.

Secondly, the obstacles JET participants face when becoming involved in the community are discussed. The main reasons behind these obstacles are presented along with some suggestions on how to alleviate them.

Finally, the report will assess how JET participants discover opportunities for community involvement and how well contracting organisations disseminate information and encourage participation in community activities.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report come from a survey conducted by the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) over the period 2–13 September 2013. This survey was distributed to current JET Programme participants using an online survey development tool. The survey consisted of 47 questions in a variety of formats including 'Yes' or 'No', multiple choice, and free response.

Throughout the report, the following abbreviations will be used for the common terms used in relation to the JET Programme:

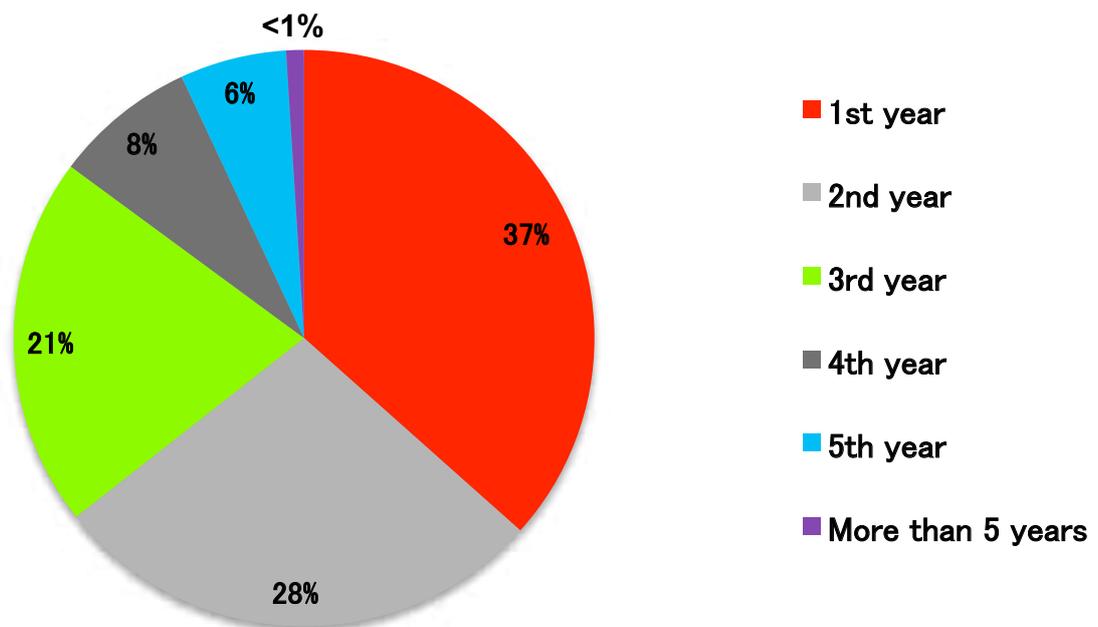
- ALT: Assistant Language Teacher
- CIR: Coordinator for International Relations
- AJET: The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching
- JET: Japan Exchange and Teaching (Programme)
- PA: Prefectural Advisor

For the purposes of this report, survey percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Survey Sample

This survey collected responses from a total of 815 JET Programme participants, which is approximately 19% of the total current JET Programme population in Japan. The largest proportion of respondents identified themselves as being in their first year on the JET Programme (37%), with second- and third-year participants the next most populous groups (28% and 21%, respectively). The graph below shows the complete breakdown of respondents by year on the JET Programme.

Year on the JET Programme



Note: Although the maximum JET Programme tenure is 5 years, 'More than 5 years' is used to denote JET participants who have a combined total of more than 5 years over 2 or more separate appointments.

At the time the survey was taken, first-year JET participants had been in their local communities for less than a month. As such, they were not asked about how they were involved in their local communities because they would not have had sufficient time to become involved. Instead, they were asked a separate series of questions about their intentions to become involved in their local communities. Their responses are separated from those of all other respondents, and will be used for comparison.

Most respondents (93%) indicated that they are Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and 7% are Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs). No Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs) responded to the survey. These figures closely mirror the demographics of the JET Programme population as a whole, in which 91% are ALTs, 8% are CIRs, and 0.25% are SEAs. The graph below shows the breakdown of respondents by job type.

Position on the JET Programme



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

JET Participant Involvement in Local Communities

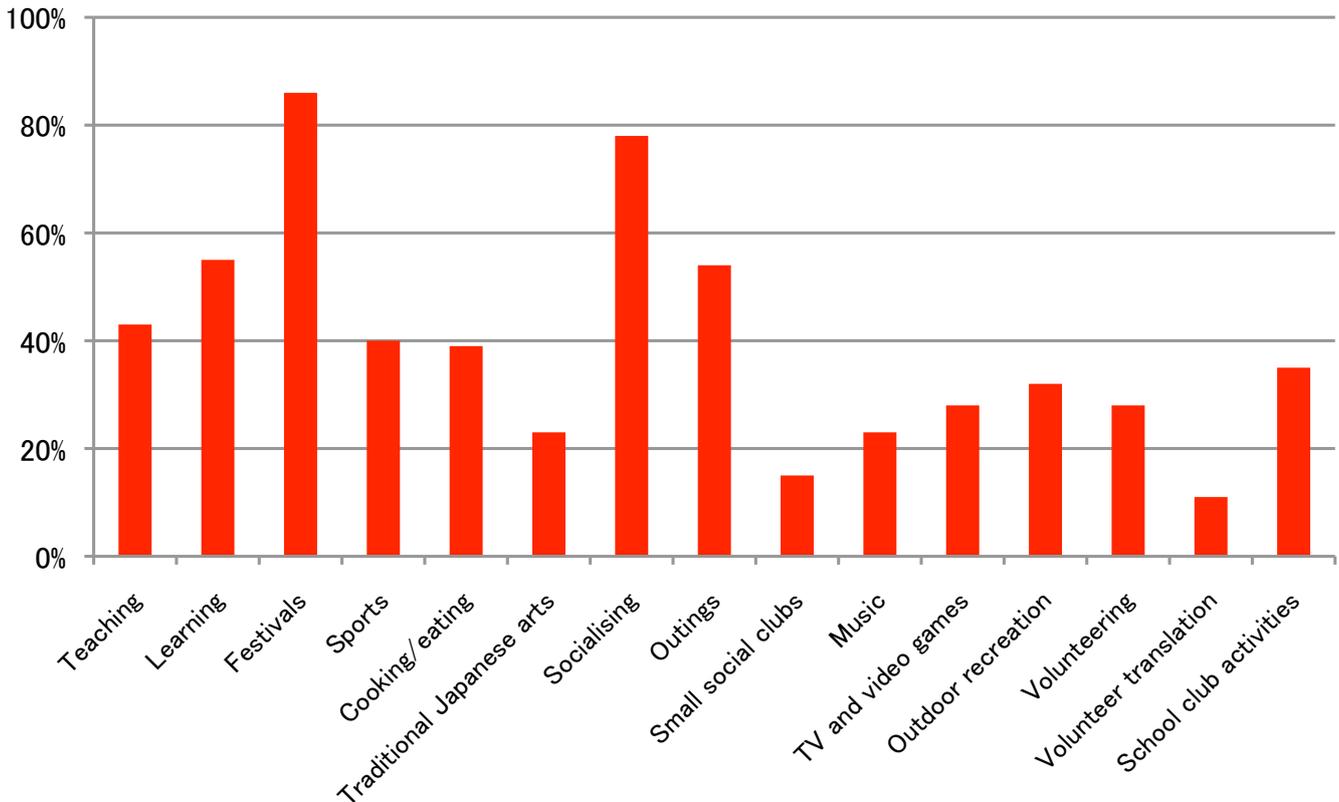
This section of the report will examine the ways in which current JET Programme participants are actively engaged with Japanese people in their local communities.

Local Community Involvement

Over 96% of JET Programme participants who are not in their first-year reported that they participate in activities with Japanese members of their local community. When asked what types of activities they participate in, the most common responses were festivals (85%) and social gatherings (78%). Additionally, the survey showed that more than half of respondents participate in learning activities, such as Japanese classes, and outings with Japanese friends, such as hiking and picnics. A large proportion of respondents (43%) are also involved in teaching outside of their work. Since JET participants are not permitted to derive income from any source other than their contracting organisation, this response is taken to mean teaching on a casual and/or voluntary basis, be it in community centres, English conversation classes outside of typical working hours, language exchanges between friends or other similarly casual or ad-hoc situations. Figure 1.1 shows a full breakdown of the results.

Figure 1.1 JET Participant Community Involvement

What activities are you involved with in your local community?



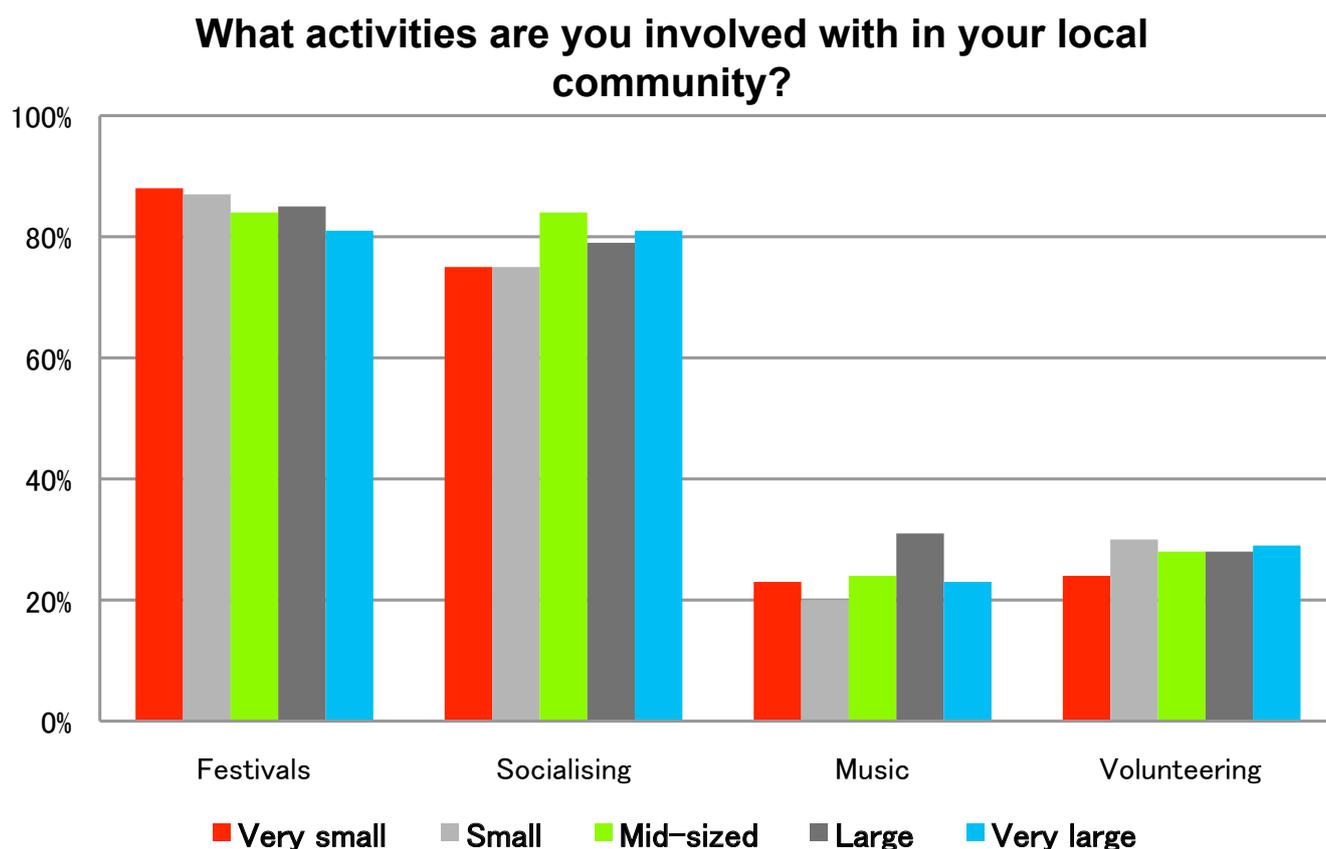
Community Size and its Effects on Levels of Participation

In order to determine whether or not the population of a JET participant's placement affects their level of community involvement, the survey asked participants to describe the size of their local community. Possible responses were:

- very small (0 to 10,000 people)
- small (10,000 to 50,000 people)
- mid-sized (50,000 to 200,000 people)
- large (200,000 to 1,000,000 people)
- very large (over 1,000,000 people)

Interestingly, for many kinds of community participation, the size of one's community did not appear to make a significant difference in the level of involvement. For example, between 80% and 90% of respondents from each community size participate in and attend festivals. Similarly, between 20% and 30% of respondents in all five community sizes reported getting involved in music-related activities with Japanese members of their local community. The figure below shows the types of community activities in which there was not a significant difference (10% or less) in participation when broken down by community-size.

Figure 1.2 Local Community Involvement Activities Unaffected by Community Size

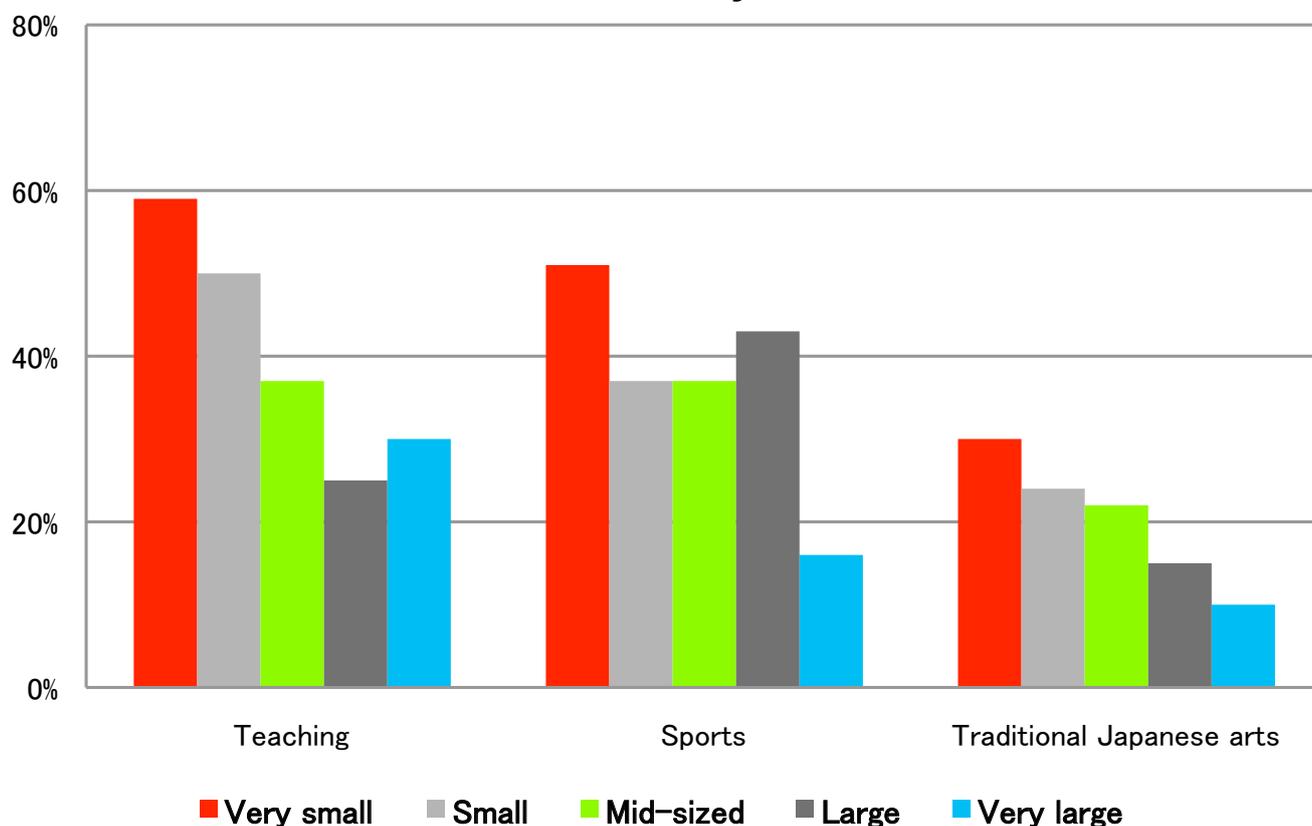


The kinds of activities seen in Figure 1.2 (for which there is little or no difference in participation levels based on community-size) are assumed to be easily available in communities of all sizes. For example, almost every Japanese community, no matter how small, holds festivals regularly. Opportunities to volunteer, to play music, and to socialise, do not require a minimum community size or infrastructure. This suggests that whether or not a JET Programme participant engages in these activities is based entirely on the participant's desire to do so and is not directly affected by their local environment.

However, the size of one's local community does appear to affect some types of community participation. The figure below shows the types of activities for which there was a difference of 20% or greater in participation level when broken down by community size.

Figure 1.3 Local Community Involvement Activities Affected by Community Size

What activities are you involved with in your local community?



For the types of activity for which there was a significant difference based on community-size, the level of participation as reported by survey respondents was generally inversely proportional to the size of the community. That is, the larger the community size, the fewer the JET Programme participants who typically engage in these kinds of activities.

There are several possible explanations for the declining trend this graph shows, and it is important to remember that the reasons for one kind of activity's decline in participation as community size increases, may not apply to another kind of activity.

More than half (53%) of participants living in small or very small communities reported that they do some form of teaching outside of their daily work duties, such as English conversation classes, while only 26% of respondents living in large or very large communities do this same kind of teaching. One possible reason for these significantly lower numbers of participants may be the Japanese community's greater access to other English education opportunities in larger communities. This includes English education classes and English conversation groups run by for-profit corporations, as well as community centre classes. In very small communities, those resources may not be available, and the local JET Programme participant may be the only native English speaker. As a result, JET participants in small and very small communities may be approached about creating or joining an English conversation class much more frequently than those living in larger communities.

Similarly, just over half (51%) of respondents in very small communities reported participating in sports with Japanese members of their communities, whereas only 16% of those in very large communities participate in these activities. This could be the result of the fact that larger communities are more densely constructed, and have fewer open athletic areas. Another possibility is that JET participants in larger cities have a much larger range of opportunities for spending their free time that do not bring involve interaction with the local Japanese community. Larger cities have shopping malls, movie theatres, nightlife scenes, and larger numbers of other foreigners, whereas very small communities often have none of those things, and the local sports club may be one of very few options that a JET participant in a very small community has for spending his/her recreational time.

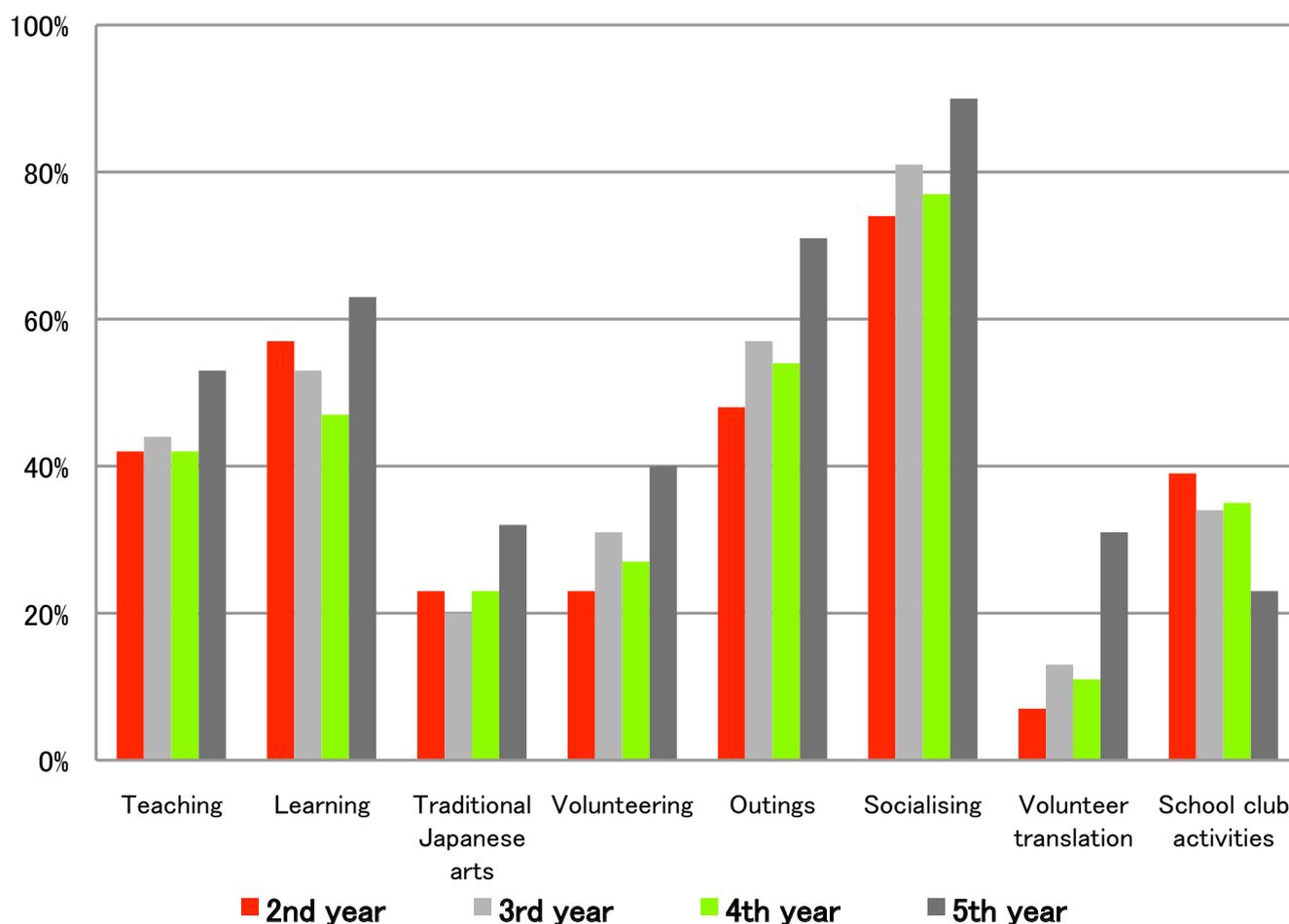
Perhaps most striking is the decline of JET participant involvement in traditional Japanese arts as the size of their community increases. While 30% of those in very small communities participate in some kind of traditional Japanese arts, only 9% of those in very large communities do so. This may be a product of **Japanese** people in small communities being more engaged in traditional activities than those living in big cities. Another possibility is that JET participants in very small communities may have significantly less access to the kinds of activities and amenities that those in larger cities do. As a result, those in small communities may have very few options for spending their personal time. As with sports, participants in these communities may take up an interest in traditional Japanese arts such as tea ceremony or calligraphy because of an absence of other options.

Year on JET Programme and its Effects on Levels of Participation

In addition to community size, the length of time a participant has been on the JET Programme also affects levels of community participation. The figure below shows the types of community involvement in which there was a difference of 10% or more in participation levels when broken down by respondents' year on the JET Programme.

Figure 1.4 Types of activities for which fifth-year respondents' involvement is markedly different

Involvement in Community Activities Based on Year on the Programme



For seven of the eight activities in this figure, respondents in their fifth year participate at a significantly higher percentage than those in their second, third, and fourth years. There are a number of possible explanations for these results.

At the most simple level, the increased participation of fifth-year respondents in the first seven types of community activities could be because they have been in their communities longer, and have therefore had more time to form relationships with members of their community. A person with more connections in the community is more likely to spend their time engaged with those community-members. This is especially true for the responses seen for socialising and outings.

The activity with the largest difference based on one's year on the JET Programme is volunteer translation, in which fifth-year respondents participate at a rate of 31%, compared to 7%, 13%, and 11% respectively for second-, third-, and fourth-year participants. This too can be partially attributed to having spent more time in the community, having made more contacts with local community-members who may ask the JET participant to help them translate something. It is also likely that JET participants who have been in Japan for that long have a higher Japanese language proficiency level, and are therefore more able to do volunteer translation when requested. The same reason could apply to teaching outside of their normal work duties as well; because a JET participant has made more connections within the community, more people may request their help.

For learning and traditional Japanese arts, the explanation for fifth-year participants' increased rate of involvement may be a sense of impending loss of opportunity. All fifth-year JET participants' appointments will expire at the end of their current term, and many will leave Japan when that happens. As a result of this, fifth-year participants may have a sense that their window of opportunity to take classes, learn about Japanese culture, and try traditional Japanese arts is closing. This may be motivating a higher number of fifth-year participants to engage in these kinds of activities.

It is interesting to note that none of the seven types of community-involvement activities in which fifth-year JET participants engage at a higher level than others, show increasing participation as a consistent trend. For all seven, the differences between second-, third-, and fourth-year respondents is less than 10%. Furthermore, for six activities, fourth-year respondents actually engage in these activities at a lower rate than third-year respondents (although the differences are very small). In fact, the only type of activity that shows any discernible trend among respondents in their second, third, and fourth years, is learning, in which case the trend is downward; with each successive year on the Programme, second-, third-, and fourth-year respondents engage in learning activities at a lower rate. But fifth-year respondents break this trend, and the proportion jumps by 16%, compared to fourth-year respondents.

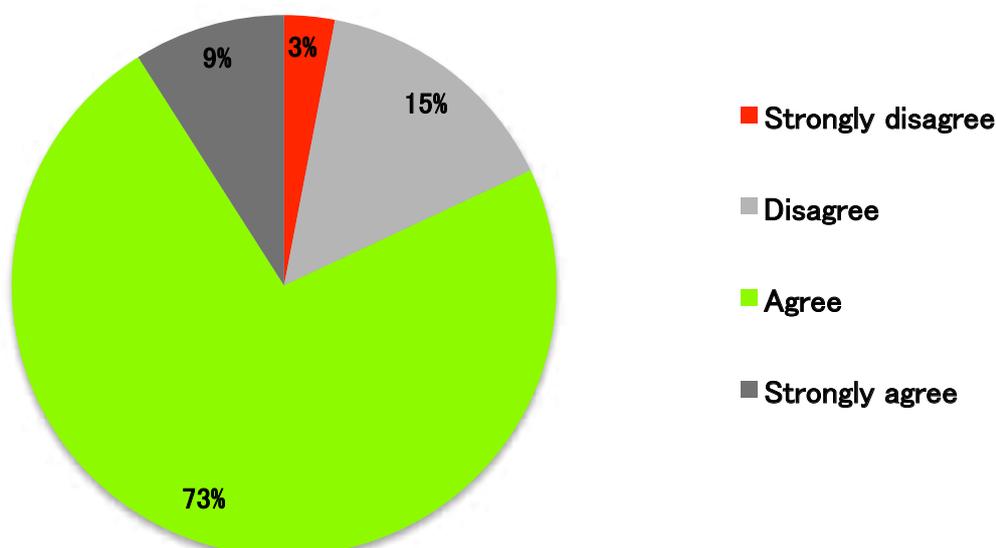
The fact that fifth-year respondents' levels of participation lie outside the norm for these kinds of activities could suggest that a significant number of JET Programme participants in their fifth year make a conscious effort to change their patterns of community engagement, and become, overall, more involved. Or, it could be a result of the fact that the type of people who elect to reappoint for a fifth year (and whose contracting organisation offers them reappointment) are the types of people who are generally more engaged in their local communities.

Of the eight types of activities for which fifth-year respondents report significantly different levels of engagement, only school club activities saw a drop-off in participation rates with each successive year on the Programme. Respondents in their second, third, and fourth years are active in school club activities at a rate of 39%, 34%, and 35% respectively, but fifth-year respondents are only engaged in school club activities at a rate of 23%. There is no outside factor that would specifically inhibit or prohibit fifth-year JET participants from participating in school club activities any more than other participants, so it is assumed that a greater percentage of fifth-year participants are simply choosing not to be involved in this manner. This could be the result of the fact that they are choosing to engage in other community activities, and thus do not have as much time to participate in school club activities. It could also be the result of burnout; more fifth-year respondents may become bored with, frustrated at, or simply tired of, school club activities and elect to stop participating.

Benefits of JET Participant Involvement in Communities

Figure 1.5 Community Benefit from JET Participant Involvement

I feel that my local Japanese community benefits from my involvement



As Figure 1.4 above shows, 82% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the local Japanese community benefits from their involvement. Various types of benefits are reflected in the respondents' responses, from language exchange to the breakdown of cultural boundaries, as an ALT from Ehime Prefecture expressed: "Many [community residents] have never met a person of African descent so I have the ability to break stereotypes and re-mold [sic] their perceptions."

The most frequently given explanation for how the community benefits was simple exposure to a foreign person. As an ALT from Nara Prefecture noted, "In a town of 1000 people, my presence is the only exposure to a non-Japanese person that many people will have."

Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Japanese community benefits from their involvement and gave a reason for their response, the most common explanation was that they believe that they do not interact **enough** with the local community to create a benefit. For some this may be true: as will be discussed below, a small percentage of respondents reported not participating at all in their local communities. Others may only become involved occasionally, or regularly. Still others may be highly involved, but undervalue the community's perceptions of their presence.

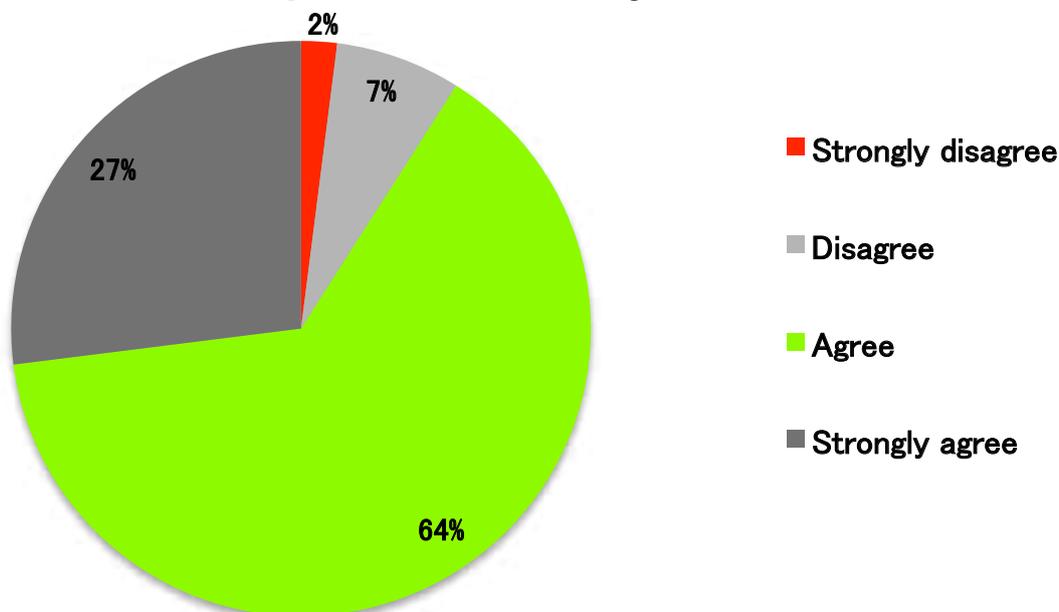
It is interesting to note that not a single respondent who disagreed about their involvement benefitting the community specifically reported that their community-involvement has a **negative** effect. Even some respondents who selected 'disagree' for this statement acknowledged that there is some positive impact derived from the JET Participant's involvement, such as this statement from an ALT in Kochi Prefecture demonstrates: "They do fine without me, but it does make us more aware of one another if I get involved."

Many of the respondents wrote that language difficulties were a contributing factor in their disagreeing with the statement that their community benefits from their interaction; an ALT from Hiroshima Prefecture wrote, "I can't speak enough Japanese to fully engage as part of the community."

Along with community benefit, respondents were asked whether or not they agree with the statement 'I feel that I benefit from my involvement with the local Japanese community.' The responses are shown in the figure below.

Figure 1.6 JET Participant Benefit from Community Involvement

I feel that I benefit from my involvement with my local Japanese community



Most respondents (91%) reported that they agree or strongly agree with the idea that they themselves benefit from their involvement with the local Japanese community. The most common reasons provided were cultural understanding and exchange, and improved Japanese language ability. This corresponds with the December 2013 AJET report 'Life After the JET Programme', which found that language acquisition and the

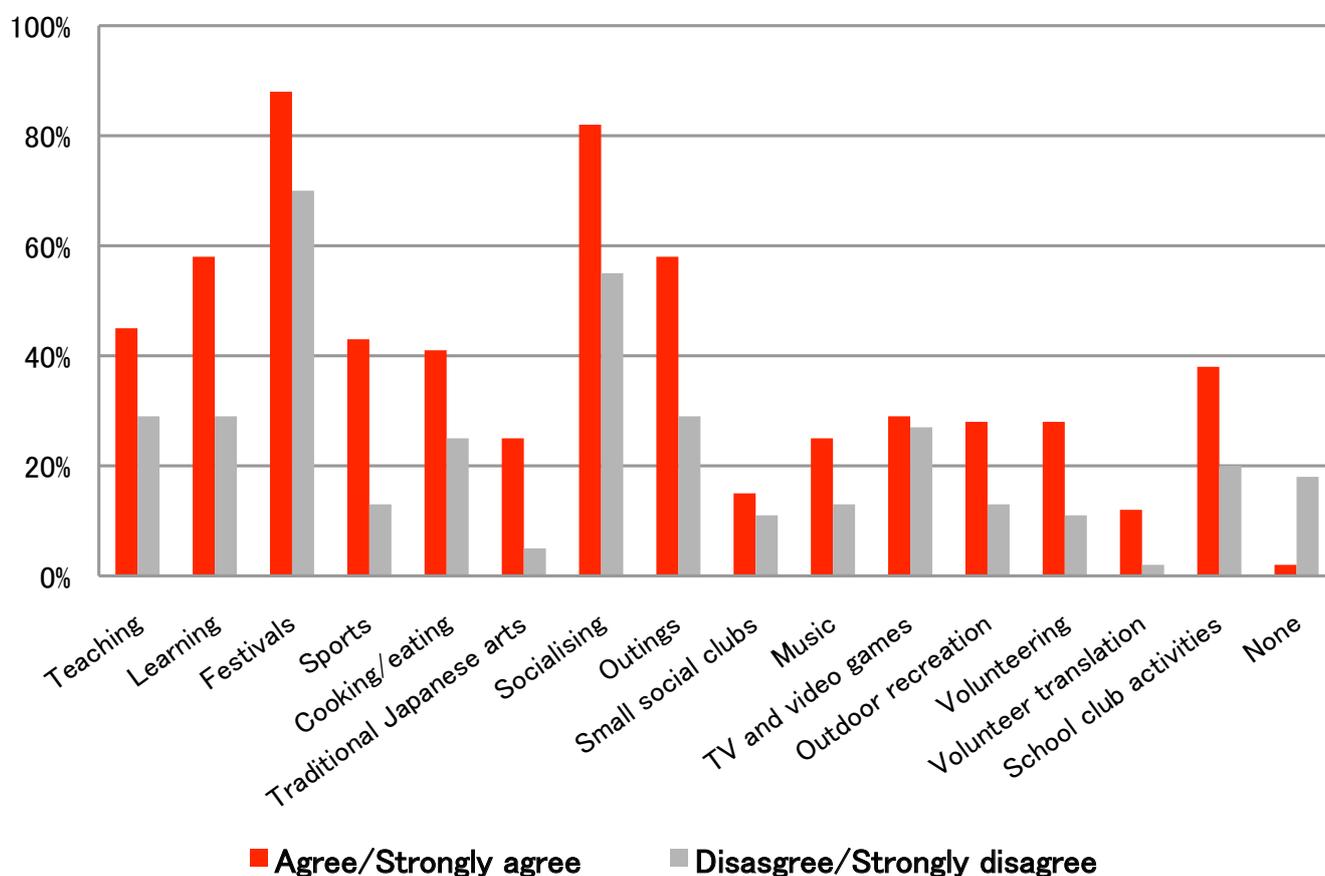
acquisition of cultural knowledge were the aspects of the JET Programme that JET participants indicated would become strong assets to their professional development once completing their time on the Programme.

An ALT from Shimane Prefecture wrote of the benefits of community involvement: "I learn a lot about Japan. It lets me see aspects of Japan they don't talk about in books."

Just as with those who feel the community itself receives no benefit from their participation, those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they personally benefit, gave their own lack of involvement as the primary reason. As shown in the figure below, the respondents who reported that they do not benefit from community involvement are typically involved at a much lower rate than those who report that they do benefit.

Figure 1.7 Levels of Community Involvement by Those Who Agree and Disagree that They Benefit From Community Involvement

Level of Participation in Community Activities Based on Whether Respondents Agree or Disagree that they Personally Benefit from this Interaction



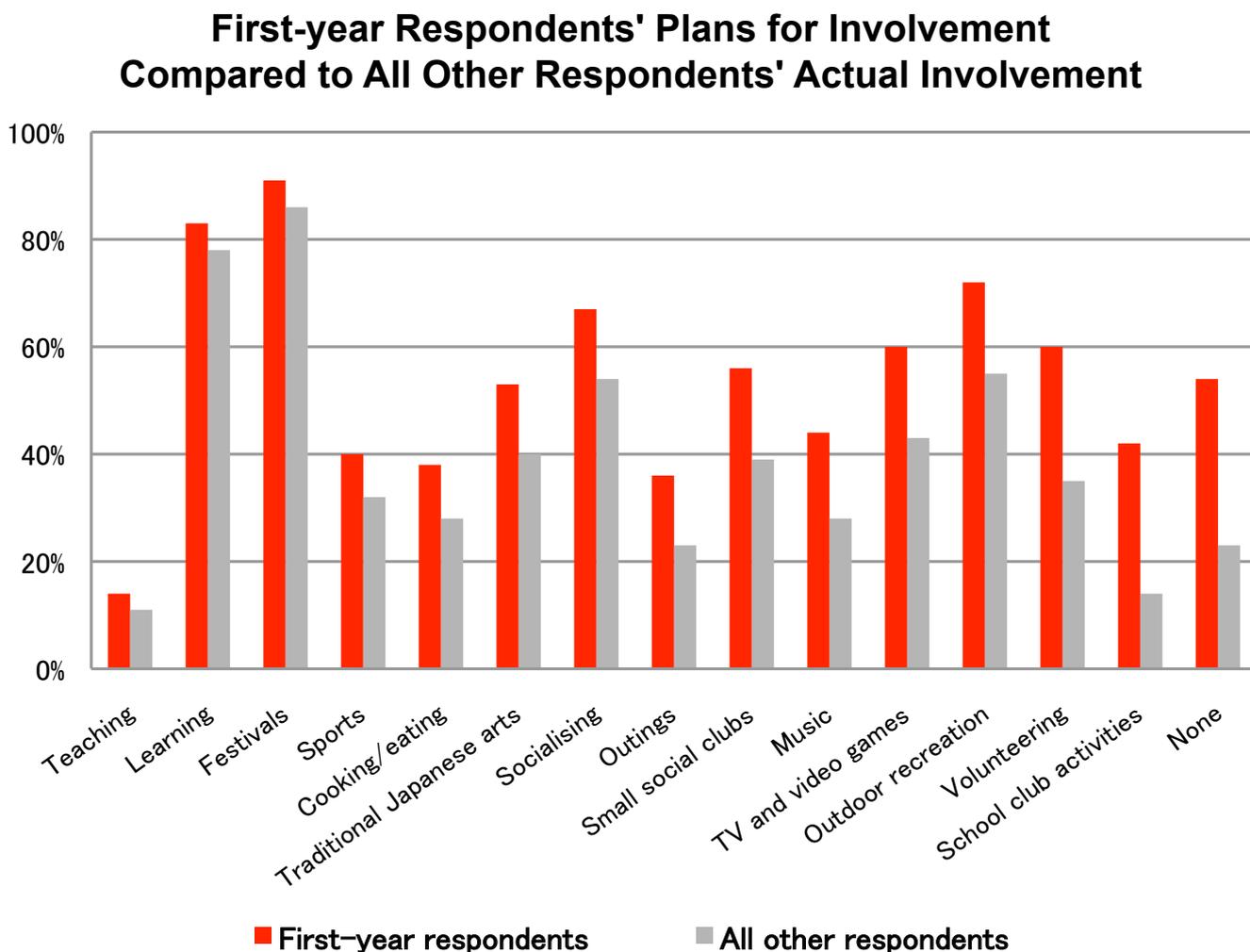
On average, 18% fewer JET participants who disagree or strongly disagree that they personally benefit from local community involvement participate in their local communities compared with those who agree or strongly agree with the same statement. In addition, nine times as many people who disagree or strongly disagree that they benefit from community involvement reported that they do not engage in their local community at all, compared with those who consider community involvement to be beneficial (as indicated by the response 'None'). These results indicate that JET participants who are less involved in their local communities also experience less (perceived) benefit.

Comparisons with First-Year Respondents

As stated earlier in this report, first-year JET participants were asked about their plans to become involved in their local communities, since they only arrived recently and may not have had an opportunity to become involved as yet. Through this data, we are able to draw comparisons

between the levels of community involvement JET participants plan to achieve upon first arriving in Japan, and the reality of what is achieved by respondents who have been here for more than a year, which we see in the data provided by all other respondents. Figure 1.4 shows this comparison with the smallest differences on the left side of the graph, and the largest on the right.

Figure 1.8 Difference Between First-Year Plans and All Other Respondents' Involvement



For all 15 types of activities, more first-year JET participants plan to engage in the activity than all other participants actually do engage in the activity. The average difference is 15% fewer people participating in activities than first-year participants plan to. While some have very small differences such as socialising and festivals, for others, including traditional Japanese arts, and small social clubs, there is a drop of over 25% from first-year participants' plans to the actual involvement reported by JET participants in their second year or above. The next section of this report will discuss some of the obstacles that may prevent some JET Programme participants from engaging in their local Japanese communities.

Obstacles to Local Community Involvement

This section of the report will analyse why some JET Programme participants are not involved in their local communities and also explore the reasons that 93% of first-year JET participants plan to get involved.

As seen in Figure 1.8 in the previous section, there are distinct gaps (up to 32%) between the numbers of first-year respondents who **intend** to get involved in various activities within their local communities and the proportion of all other respondents who actually do get involved. This indicates that JET participants are not able to get involved in the community to the levels they would like to or intend to when they first arrive.

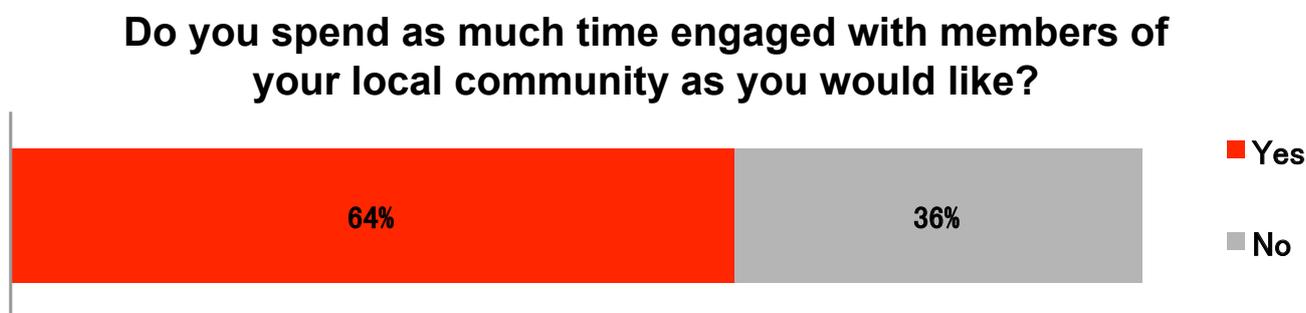
When looking at the difference between the intentions of first-year JET participants to become involved compared to the actual involvement of all other survey respondents, there is an average difference of 15% across all types of activities. However, when examined individually, some types of activities show almost no difference, while for others fewer than half the number who hope to participate actually end up doing so.

Open community activities, such as socialising and attending or participating in festivals, show a very small gap (3% and 4%, respectively) between the desire to attend and actual attendance. These kinds of activities do not require significant efforts to seek out specific information. On the other hand, small social clubs and traditional Japanese arts, which require a significant amount of planning and communication with people who have specific knowledge, have significantly lower levels of actual participation when compared to intent. Put simply, these kinds of activities require more connection with, and ability to communicate with, members of the local Japanese community.

The following subsections examine the major obstacles that respondents identified as preventing them from becoming involved in their local Japanese communities to the extent that they would like.

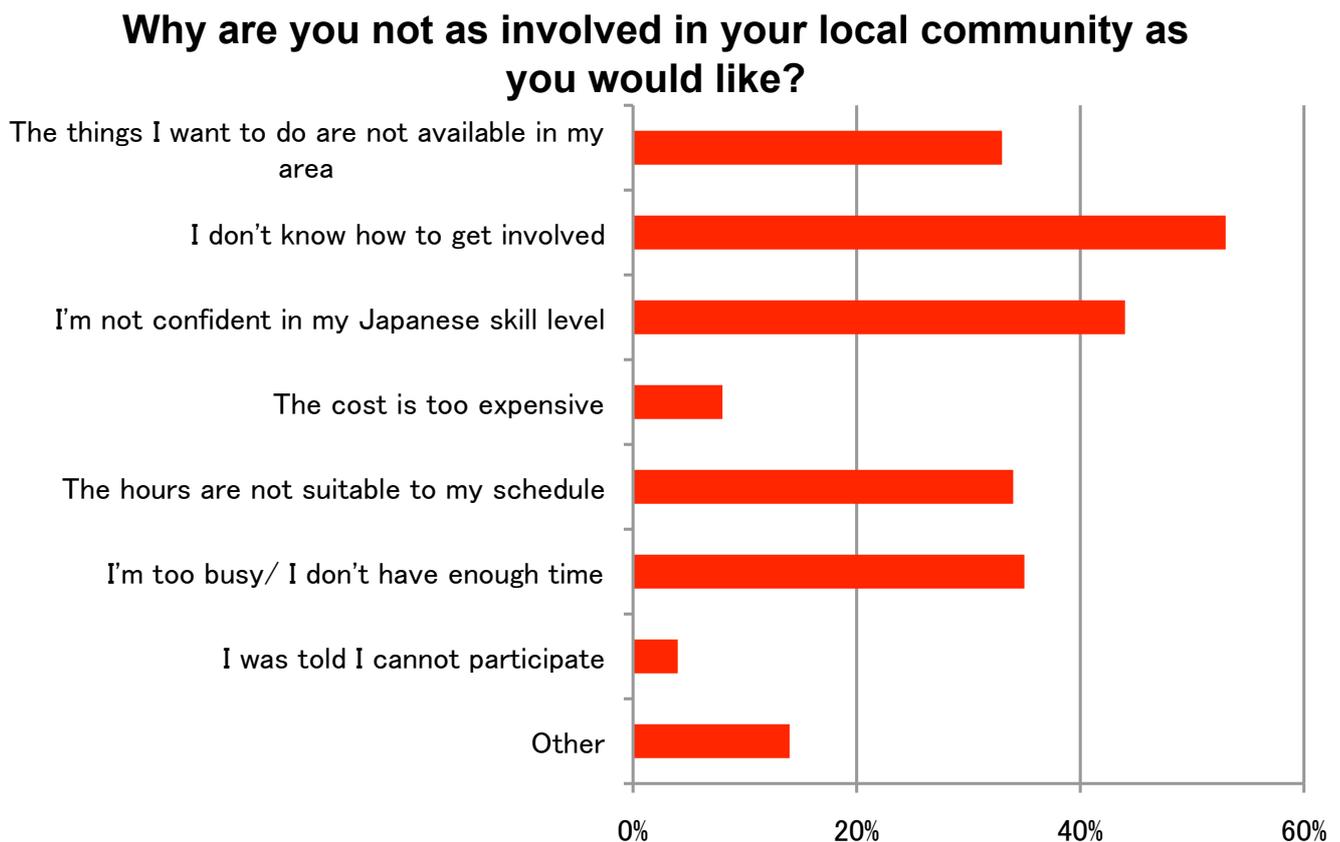
Reasons for Low or Non-Involvement in the Community

Figure 2.1 Satisfaction with Level of Community Involvement



As the figure above indicates, nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents indicated that they do not spend as much time engaged with members of their local community as they would like. This indicates that there is tremendous potential for JET participant involvement that is yet to be fully realised. It also indicates that there is a very significant desire on the part of JET participants to be further involved. In addition, based on the findings in the previous section, a greater ability to be involved could lead to more meaningful interactions between JET participants and the communities that benefit both parties.

The respondents who indicated that they do not spend as much time engaged with members of their local community as they would like were subsequently asked why they are not as involved as they would like to be. A full breakdown of their responses is shown in the graph below.

Figure 2.2 Reasons for Not Participating in the Local Community

As shown in the graph, respondents reported a variety of reasons for not becoming involved in their local community. The two most common responses were 'I don't know how to get involved' (selected by 53% of respondents), and 'I'm not confident in my Japanese skill level' (44%). Among those who selected 'Other', the most common explanation was that it was difficult to find friends their own age in their community. These reasons for not being involved will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

Lack of Awareness about How to Get Involved

As noted above, the most common response, selected by more than half of respondents, for why they do not participate in their local community as much as they would like, is that they do not know how to get involved. This indicates a significant lack of information about community activities and opportunities available to JET participants. Somewhat concerning, an ALT from Nagano Prefecture commented that "I'm not sure what is available in my town, though I have asked repeatedly, I have never received a response from anyone." Another ALT from Chiba simply stated, "I don't know how to find people to get involved with."

Lack of Confidence in Japanese Language Skill Level

JET Programme participants' confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in Japanese was also a major factor in their lack of involvement in their local community. The survey asked both ALTs and CIRs how important they perceive their Japanese skill level is to being able to get involved in their local communities. A high level of Japanese proficiency is necessary for CIRs to do their jobs, so their responses to these questions serve as an interesting contrast to the ALTs' responses, whose Japanese level may not be as proficient, and therefore may view it as more of a barrier to involvement in their local communities.

How important to CIRs feel that their Japanese language ability is to getting more involved in community activities?

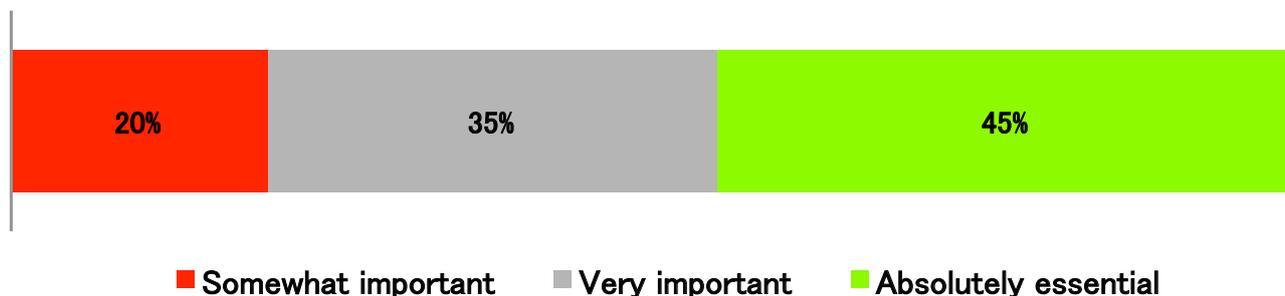


Figure 2.3 Importance of Japanese Language Ability to CIRs

As this figure shows, an overwhelming majority of CIRs (80%) reported that their Japanese level was very important or absolutely essential to getting involved in their local community.

As was shown in Figure 2.2, 44% of respondents reported that a lack of language proficiency is a hindrance to their becoming involved in their local community. While Japanese proficiency clearly makes interacting with the Japanese community and finding new avenues of participation easier, the lack of language skill may be more of a self-perceived hindrance than an actual barrier. JET participants may refrain from participating simply because they wish to avoid troubling their Japanese friends or colleagues, as an ALT from Tottori Prefecture said: "I sometimes feel like more of a burden because they often have to spend extra time to teach me new skills/translate for me."

This indicates that the language barrier does not necessarily mean that the participant could not participate in the activity, only that he or she feels hindered by it. If many CIRs feel their Japanese level is essential to their involvement, then, understandably, ALTs who are not at the same lingual skill level may feel discouraged from getting involved. There is no way to determine to what level the language barrier is a real obstacle or a self-perceived one; although it is perhaps a moot point, as the result is the same: lack of confidence in one's Japanese skill level keeps many JET participants from engaging with their local communities.

Inconvenient Time Frames

As Figure 1.8 showed, the number of JET participants who plan to get involved in their local communities is higher than the number of participants who actually do end up getting involved. The gap between these two groups is much smaller in relation to activities such as festivals and general socialising than it is with traditional Japanese arts and small social clubs. According to Figure 2.2, 34% of respondents indicated that one of the reasons they were not as involved as they would like was because the hours were not suitable to their schedule.

Festivals, which usually last into the evening and often fall on weekends, could have a smaller difference between planned and actual involvement because the times are more convenient to JET participants' schedules. Attending a festival would not require as much precision planning or time commitment as a regularly-scheduled class. Smaller classes and activities having to do with traditional Japanese arts, for instance, or activities that more commonly take place in a scheduled class setting, can be much more difficult for JET participants to attend regularly, especially if they are scheduled during the work day. Involvement in those classes may also be difficult if the JET participant has any extra duties such as English conversation classes at nights or on weekends. JET participants with many duties may also feel too tired to frequently attend events or regularly scheduled activities outside of work.

Impediments to Community Involvement in Rural Areas

Figure 2.4 Type of Community of JET Participants.

How would you describe your local community?

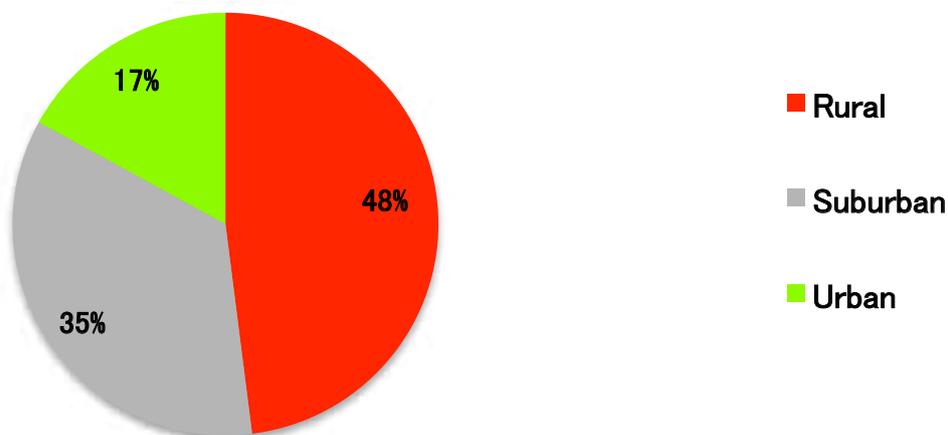
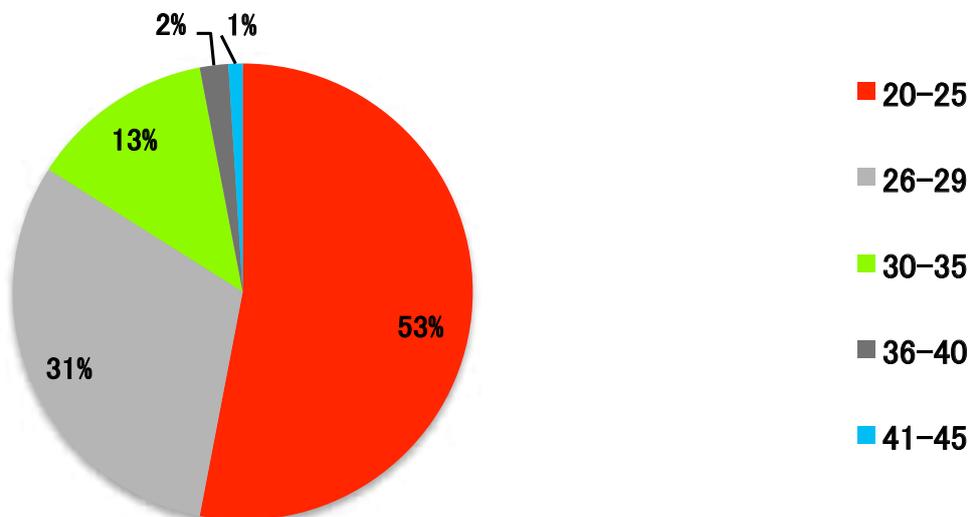


Figure 2.5 Age Demographics of JET Participants.

How old are you?



As shown in Figure 2.4, 48% of respondents described their community as rural, 35% described their community as suburban, and 17% described their community as urban. Roughly 84% of all respondents are between the ages of 20 and 29. Not surprisingly, with this large number of young respondents living in rural areas, many JET participants reported having difficulty finding people their own age and making friends with members of the community who are older than they are.

Many survey respondents reported that young Japanese people tend to leave their small hometowns and go to bigger cities, for work or for school, as an ALT from Gunma Prefecture commented: "I would like to meet more Japanese young people (age 20-30ish) but there are so few in my area (they all move to big cities)." To what extent this 'exodus' from rural areas by young Japanese people is actually occurring, or simply perceived, is unknown. However, the perception alone is enough to keep some JET participants from fully engaging with their communities.

In addition, with more than half of the respondents aged between the ages of 20 and 25, they may find it difficult to bond with people outside their age or peer group. This was well-illustrated by an ALT from Nagano Prefecture, who noted,

I would like to spend more casual time with Japanese people in my community, but it is small and there are few young people around. I have trouble finding and connecting with them.

Although the age of people in the community cannot be controlled or changed, it is evident that it is a barrier that prevents some JET participants from becoming involved. It is important to find ways around this barrier. Perhaps what is needed is more encouragement and support for JET participants to get involved outside of their peer-age comfort levels in addition to more and better quality resources and information.

Transportation for JET participants in rural areas may also be an issue, where not owning a car can significantly impact their ability to interact with the local community. Some JET participants are prohibited by their contracting organisations from owning a car; for others, the cost is prohibitive, and licensure is a difficulty. Whatever the reason, for rural JET participants who do not own a car, community involvement can be a significant challenge. As an ALT from Wakayama Prefecture commented,

There's not much to do around here. Most people travel elsewhere by car to do social things. I don't have a car.

JET Participant Friendships with Japanese Community Members

Despite the barriers that many JET participants feel impede their involvement in their local communities, a very large majority of respondents (84%) reported that they have friends in their local Japanese communities.

Figure 2.6 Percentage of JET Participants Who Report Having Japanese Friends

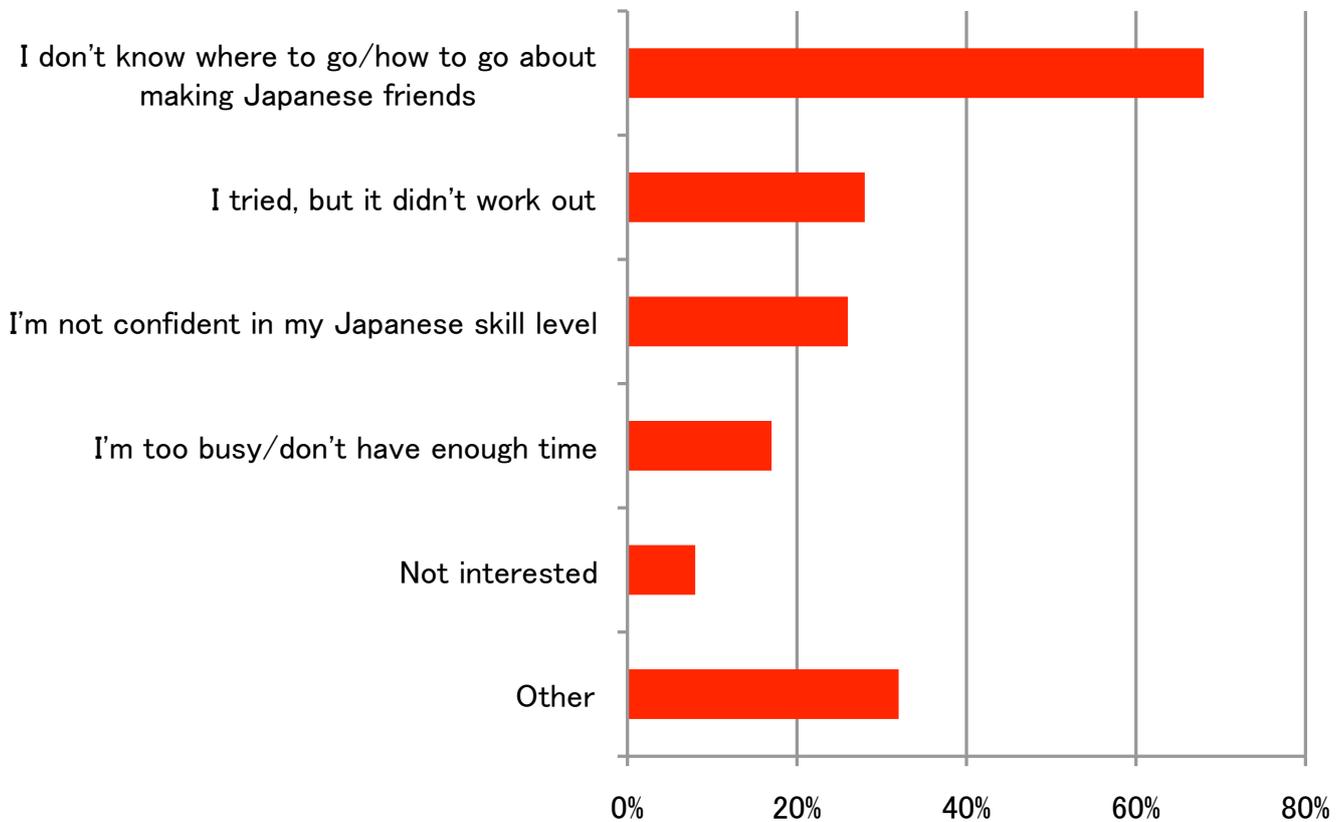
Do you have Japanese friends in your local community?



Those who responded 'No' to the question of whether they have Japanese friends were then asked why this is the case, and their responses are very revealing. The fact that 16% of respondents do not have Japanese friends does not necessarily indicate that 16% of respondents are **uninterested** in having Japanese friends. Rather, less than 8% of those who do not have Japanese friends reported that they are uninterested; the other 92% indicated that they are prevented by other obstacles, as seen in the graph below.

Figure 2.7 Why Some JET participants do not have Japanese Friends in their Local Community

Reasons for Not Having Japanese Friends



According to the survey results, the biggest inhibitor for JET participants who want to make Japanese friends is that they 'do not know where to go/ how to go about making Japanese friends'. There may be a lack of diverse resources and information available for those who want to meet Japanese people, such as fliers or printed documents (for events and classes) available in the JET participant's native language, verbal communication between the JET participant and his or her contracting organisation about existing opportunities to meet more Japanese people; in the case of very rural areas, there is possibly a lack of people altogether.

Of the 5% of respondents who selected 'other' as a reason for not having Japanese friends in their local community, the most common explanations provided were that there were no young people their own age to whom they could relate, which ties in with the findings of the previous section in relation to rural communities; there was not anything they wanted to do in their area; or they had to go outside their local community to meet their friends.

Access to Opportunities for Community Involvement

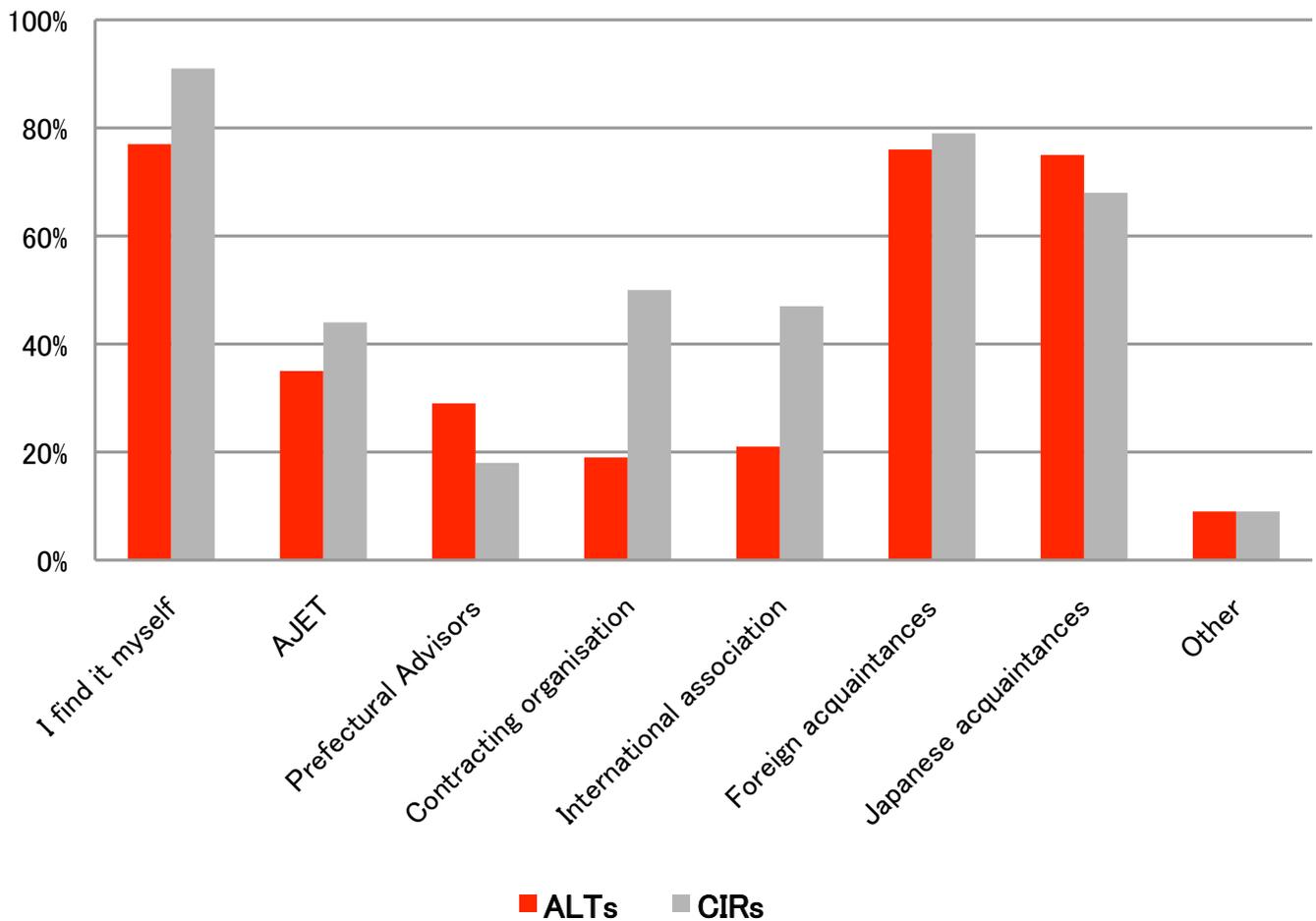
This section of the report will examine the access to information regarding community involvement opportunities that JET Programme participants receive, including the sources of this information. Furthermore, it will show the amount and type of information that is being disseminated by contracting organisations to both ALTs and CIRs. Lastly, it will discuss the desire that JET participants have for more information about opportunities for community involvement.

Access to Information about Community Involvement

Survey respondents who have been on the JET Programme for more than one year reported receiving information about community involvement from a variety of sources. Figure 3.1 below shows the full breakdown of results for both ALTs and CIRs.

Figure 3.1 Community Involvement Information Resources

Where do you get your information about opportunities for community involvement?



The majority of participants (77% of ALTs and 91% of CIRs) get information about community involvement by actively seeking it themselves, which may indicate that there are a large number of self-motivated JET participants. However, the significantly lower percentages in relation to JET-related resources, such as contracting organisations, Prefectural Advisors (PAs), and AJET, may show that not enough information is being made available to those who lack in language ability or awareness of how to find the information themselves. Though 'I find it myself' is still the most common response for both ALTs and CIRs, more CIRs receive information from their contracting organisations (50%) and from international

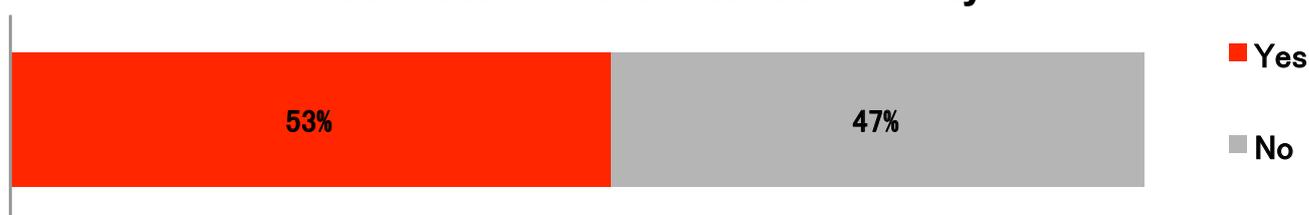
associations (47%) than ALTs do (19% and 21%, respectively). As discussed earlier in this report, this may be because CIRs have a higher level of Japanese fluency and are therefore more easily able to request and understand information about opportunities for involvement. It may also be due to the nature of CIR jobs, which often involve community activities and working closely with international associations. CIRs may have stronger relationships with their contracting organisations, which they work for directly and on a daily basis; whereas ALTs, whose primary contacts are usually at their schools, are often quite removed from their contracting organisations. CIRs receiving information from their contracting organisations at significantly higher rates than ALTs is a trend that continues throughout this section.

For all respondents, but especially for ALTs, the sources of information most frequently reported as providing community-involvement opportunities are what can be described as 'disorganised' sources: acquaintances, both Japanese and foreign, and searching for it themselves. A participant's search for information on his/her own is inherently limited by issues such as language ability, and the knowledge (or, more importantly, a lack thereof) of where and how to look. Similarly, when receiving information from acquaintances, one is restricted by the number of acquaintances, and the breadth and accuracy of those acquaintances' knowledge of the opportunities. These kinds of 'disorganised' sources could be haphazard when it comes to providing opportunities, and while they are certainly valuable, they are inherently unreliable.

'Organised' sources of information, that is, those with official connections to (or positions within) the JET Programme (such as contracting organisations, AJET and PAs), and those for whom knowledge of cultural opportunities is a part of their very purpose (such as international associations) are providing information to far fewer JET Programme participants than the 'disorganised' sources described above.

Figure 3.2 JET Support System and the Creation of Community Involvement Opportunities

Has the JET support system helped create opportunities to connect with the local community?

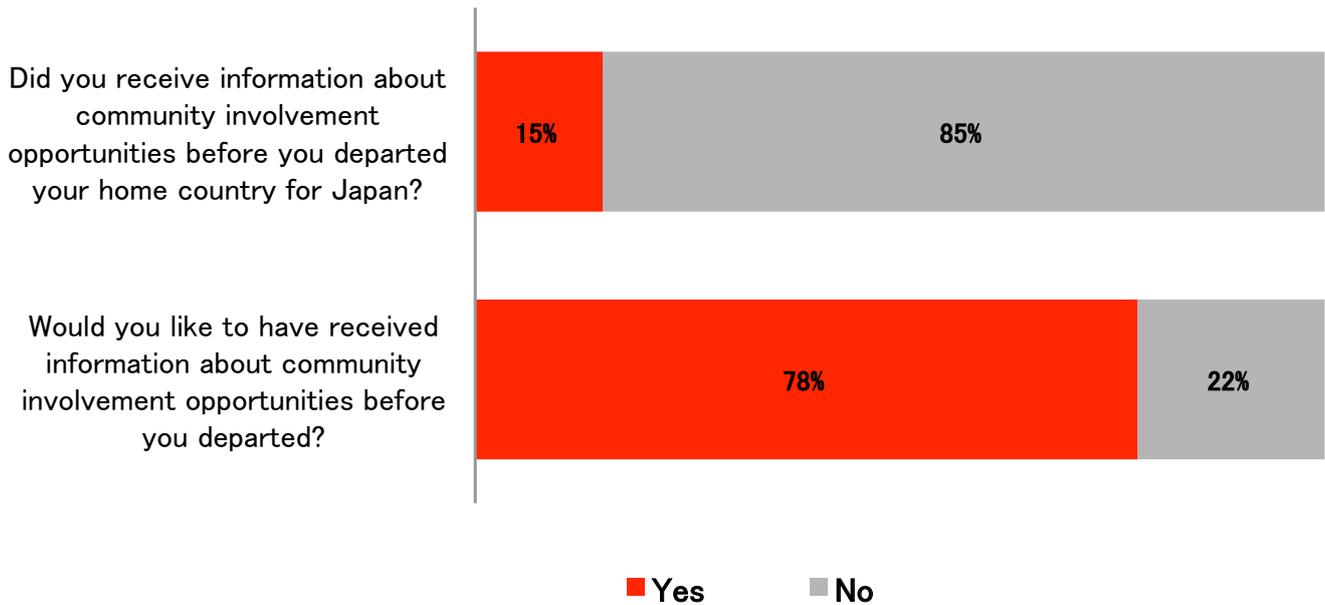


In relation to whether the JET support system (PAs, contracting organisation) helped create opportunities for JET participants to connect with their local community, 53% of respondents indicated that it had. On the other hand, a significant proportion (47%) responded that they had not received such support. This indicates that the support system available to JET participants is inconsistent throughout Japan. PAs are not necessarily obligated to give out information about community activities to other JET participants as a part of their work duties, however there may be an opportunity for more Japanese-proficient PAs to help gather information for less proficient JET participants. Though the majority of respondents said that the JET support system has helped create opportunities to connect with their community, this is in contrast to the information seen in Figure 3.1, where respondents reported on their sources of information.

These results suggest that even though contracting organisations and PAs do not necessarily provide much specific information on community activities (as seen in Figure 3.1) they do help to create opportunities for a little over half of the respondents. Nevertheless, nearly half of the total survey respondents (47%) reported receiving information from neither the JET support system nor their contracting organisation. The reason for this difference in percentages may be due to the wording of each question.

While many respondents said they do feel that opportunities are being created by the JET support system, they may not be receiving new information about activities outside of the JET support system infrastructure.. For example, one ALT in Hyogo Prefecture mentioned: "We are required [by the contracting organisation] to participate in the International Festival" but that same ALT indicated that the JET support system does not create opportunities to connect with the local community. Another ALT in Hiroshima Prefecture reported that "Once an 'International Music Festival' was arranged [by the Board of Education], we only found out about it through our friends in the community, rather than the BOE!" This same ALT said that their JET support system has created opportunities but they also reported that they do not receive information regarding community involvement from their PAs or their contracting organisation. These quotes help to demonstrate the difference that survey respondents perceived between the two questions.

Figure 3.3 Information about Community Involvement Pre-Departure



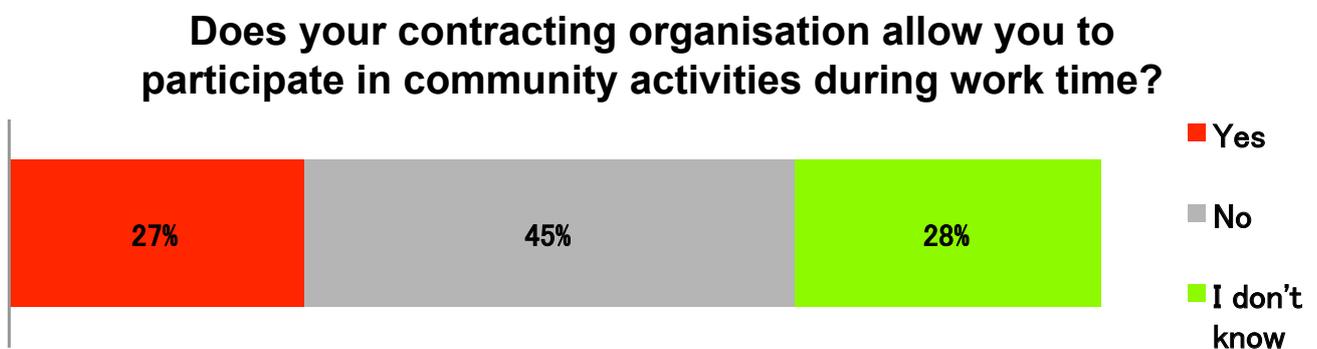
As shown in Figure 3.3, the majority of respondents reported that they did not receive any information regarding involvement in their local communities prior to coming to Japan. More specifically, 68% of first-year JET participants and 85% of participants in their second year or above indicated that they did not receive this information. However, 78% of respondents would like to have received this type of information before they departed their home countries. Though more first-year JET participants did report receiving information prior to departure compared with all other respondents, there is still clearly a significant need for more information. However, these results show that the situation is at least improving, with more information made available to JET participants who arrived in Japan in 2013.

Still, most respondents, regardless of the year of arrival, said that they did not receive any information and would like to have received it prior to arrival in Japan. Though the survey respondents were not able to comment on their preferred source of pre-departure information, it is assumed that organisations/individuals that have a level of contact with the participant prior to departure would be in a position to provide more information on community involvement, such as PAs, Regional Advisors or contracting organisations.

Community Involvement and contracting organisations

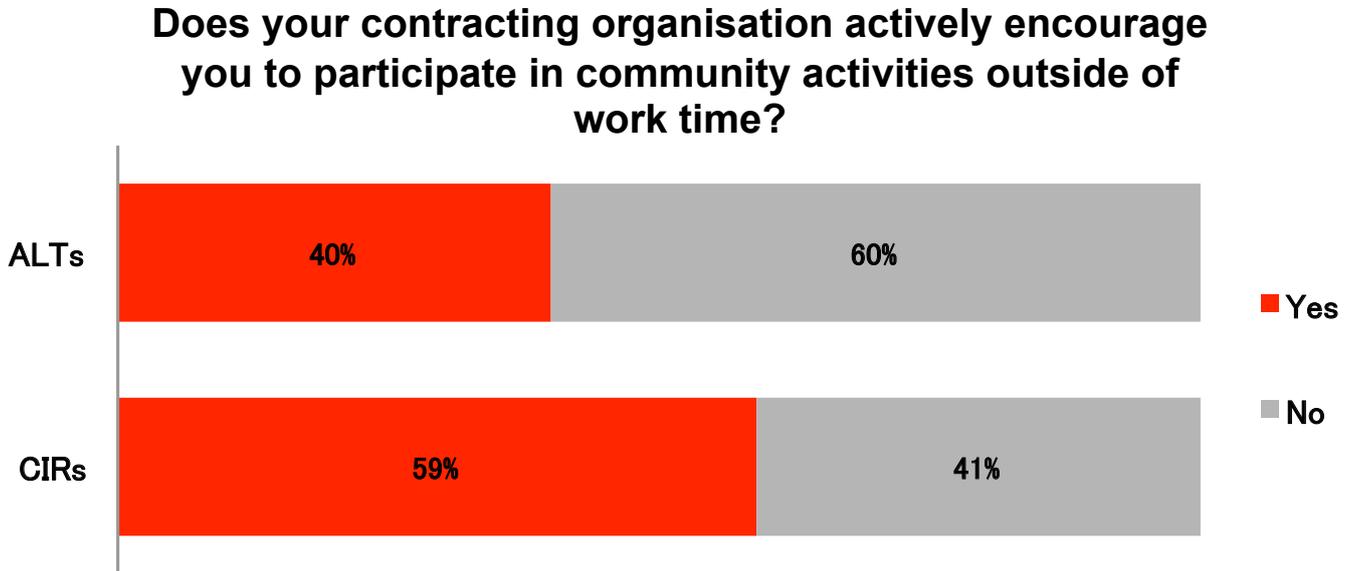
When asked if their contracting organisation allows them to participate in outside community activities during work time, not surprisingly 45% of respondents said they were not allowed and 28% said they did not know whether they were allowed or not, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 3.4 Permission to Participate in Community Activities During Work Time



Respondents were also asked whether or not their contracting organisation actively encourages them to participate in community activities outside of work hours. The responses, divided between ALTs and CIRs, are shown in the figure below.

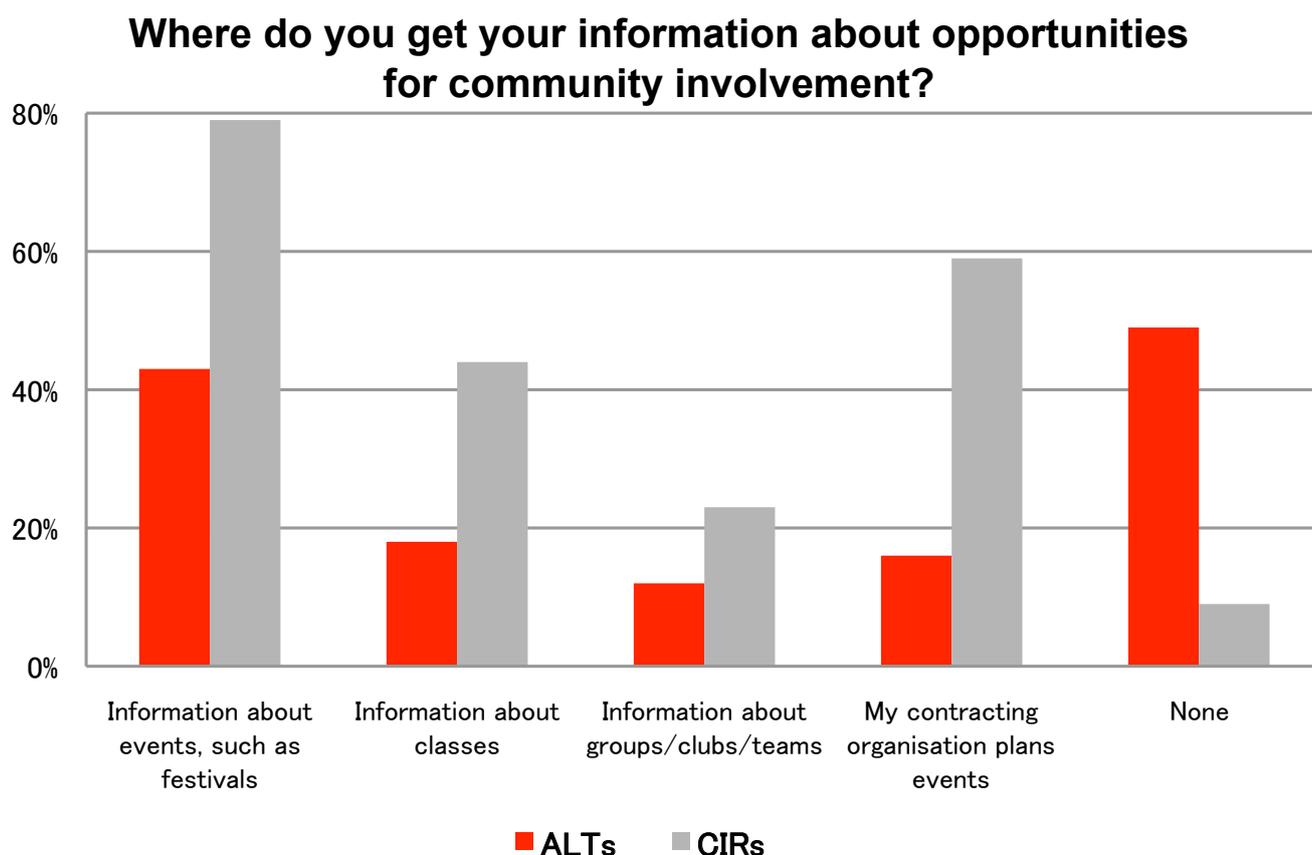
Figure 3.5 Contracting Organisation Encouragement to Participate in Community Activities



It is interesting to note that an additional 19% of CIRs are actively encouraged to participate in community activities outside of work time, compared with ALTs. As is a recurring trend throughout this report, this result may be due to the level of Japanese language proficiency, and the stronger relationship that CIRs often have with their contracting organisations by virtue of their working with them on a daily basis.

Survey respondents were also asked what kinds of information about community involvement their contracting organisation provides them with. The responses are shown in the figure below.

Figure 3.6 Information from Contracting Organisations



As is evident from the graph, nearly half of ALTs (49%) reported receiving no information from their contracting organisations about community involvement. In stark contrast, however, only 9% of CIRs reported receiving no information. The types of information that the respondents most commonly receive are varied; 43% of ALTs compared with 79% of CIRs said that they receive information regarding festivals, and some receive information about classes or clubs. Again, this may be a result of the fact that ALTs are often distanced geographically, professionally, and bureaucratically from their contracting organisations, and the specific comments of some respondents support this idea. An ALT in Fukushima Prefecture said, "My contracting organisation is in another city, so they don't really know what happens here locally." Another ALT, in Kochi Prefecture, stated "[The contracting organisation] has fliers on the bulletin boards but it is up to me to be proactive if I want more information." Unfortunately, several respondents also echoed the sentiments of an ALT in Fukuoka Prefecture who said, "My [contracting organisation] doesn't talk to me."

On the other hand, CIRs are sometimes tasked with translating materials relating to community-based activities, thus making them more aware of the events, even if the CIR's awareness wasn't the contracting organisation's specific intention. A CIR in Chiba Prefecture reported that "I translate a lot of these resources for the prefecture so they weren't provided to me, as much as for me to translate so everyone can have them."

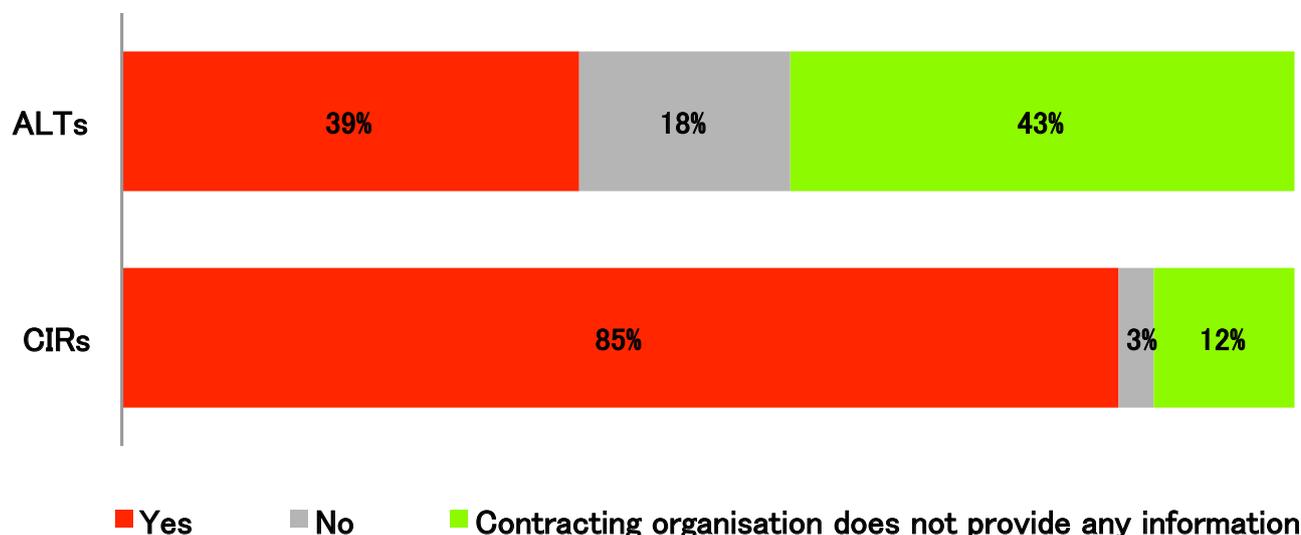
Over half of the CIRs reported that their contracting organisations plan events; by contrast, only 16% of ALTs reported the same. However, because ALTs work for municipal or prefectural Boards of Education, and many CIRs work for a variety of other governmental organisations, many of which are by definition more involved in planning events, the difference is perhaps not as stark as the numbers would make it appear. Since CIRs are generally more well-informed about community involvement activities, it stands to reason that ALTs could potentially reach this level if they had access to the same information from official sources that CIRs do.

Regardless of the reasons why, the results paints a very clear picture; overall, CIRs are much better informed than ALTs about community involvement opportunities.

Survey respondents were also asked whether their contracting organisation provides information about community involvement in a language they can understand. The results are shown in the graph on the following page.

Figure 3.7 Language Accessibility of Information Provided by Contracting Organisations

Does your contracting organisation provide resources in a language you can understand?



The majority (85%) of CIR respondents indicated that their contracting organisation does provide resources in a language that they can understand, while only 39% of ALTs said the same. Given the disparity between these figures and the high Japanese language abilities of most CIRs compared with a smaller proportion of ALTs, these results suggest that the majority of information given by contracting organisations is in Japanese. It was discussed earlier that many CIRs may have access to information within the scope of their jobs and may even translate this information. Many ALTs may not have the same level of access to information. ALTs who feel a language barrier and have geographical distance between themselves and the contracting organisations may also be unwilling to approach the contracting organisation to get more information regarding community involvement.

It is important to note that 12% of CIRs and 43% of ALTs reported that this question was not applicable to them, meaning they did not receive information from their contracting organisations in any language. This ties into the next section, which discusses the desire for more information regarding community involvement.

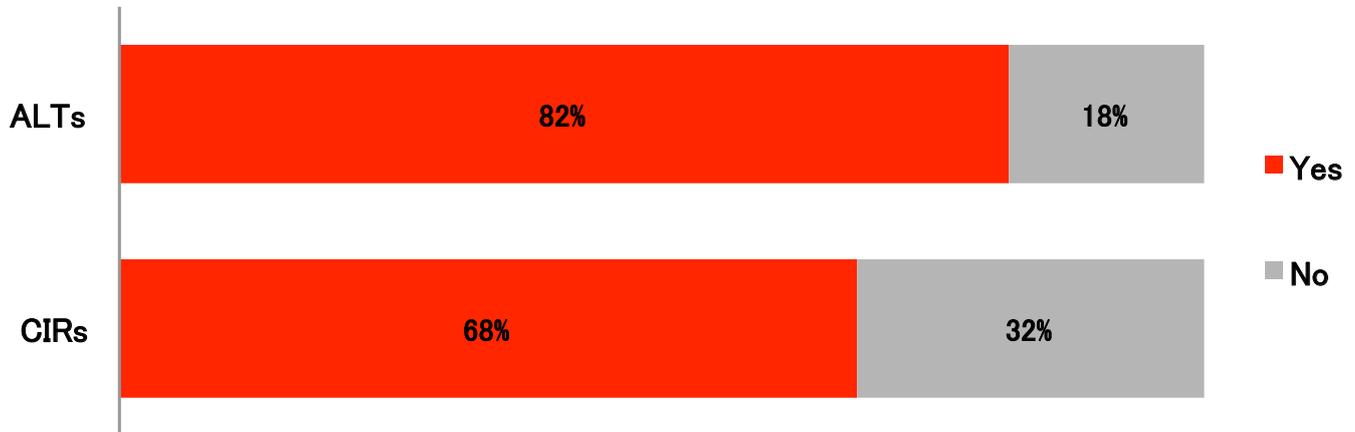
Desire for More Information

As noted previously in this report, JET Programme participants feel strongly that they would like to receive more information regarding community involvement prior to arrival in Japan. This trend of wanting more information about community involvement is also apparent in other results from throughout the survey such as those discussed below.

In the previous section, it was discussed that more CIRs than ALTs reported receiving information from their contracting organisations. The graph below shows that while CIRs seem generally more informed than ALTs, 68% still desire more information from their contracting organisations. Most ALTs (82%) would also like to get more information.

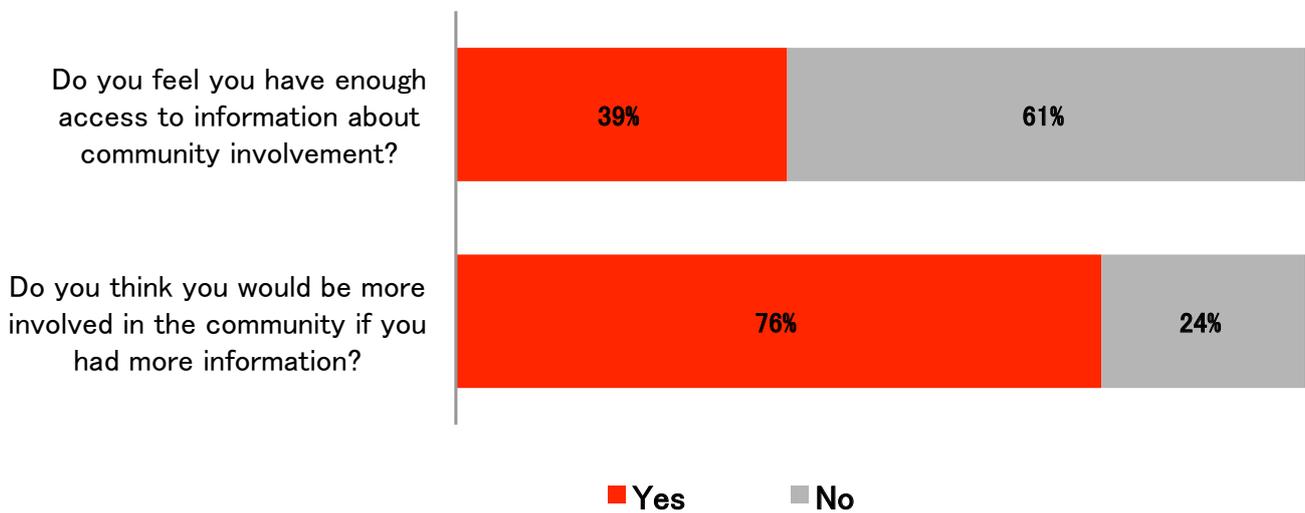
Figure 3.8 Desire for More Information from Contracting Organisations

Would you like your contracting organisation to provide more information about community involvement?



As shown in Figure 3.9 below, most survey respondents (61%) indicated that they do not feel they have enough access to information about community involvement. It should be noted that the graph includes responses from both CIRs and ALTs. Looking in more detail, CIRs were more likely to be satisfied with the level of access to information that they currently have (with the proportion of respondents answering 'Yes' around 17% higher than that of ALTs). This is understandable since it has already been established that they have more access to information from certain sources such as their contracting organisations and international associations inherently through the nature of their daily work.

Figure 3.9 Lack of Access of Information and Desire for More Information



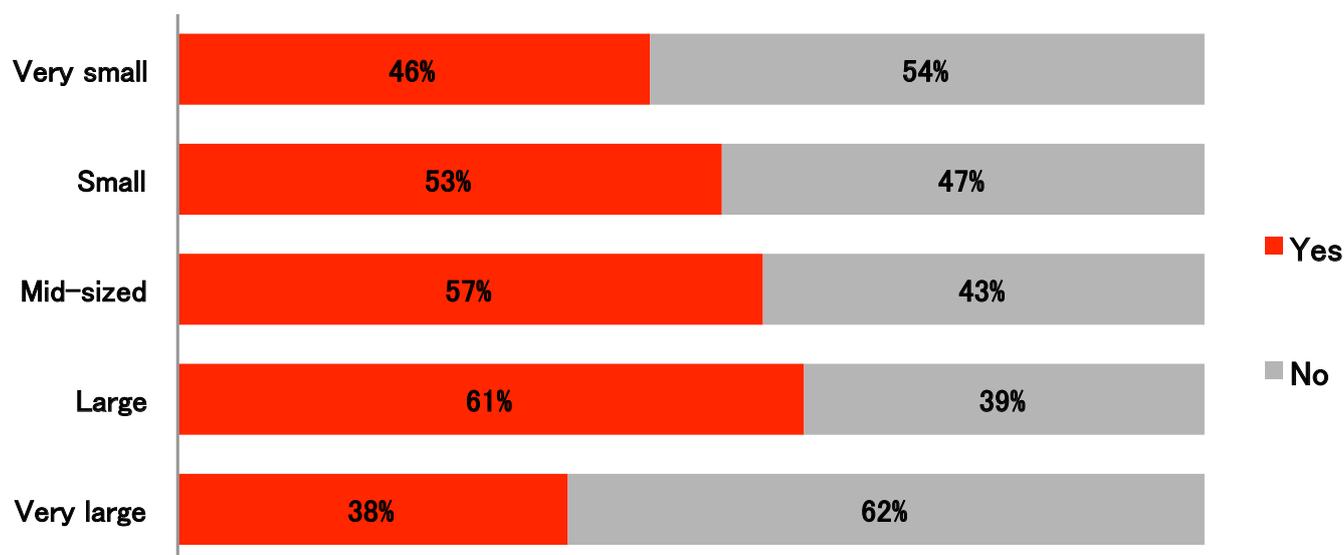
Furthermore, most respondents (76%) indicated that they would probably be more involved in the community if they had more information. This, again, shows that there is significant potential for greater community interaction between JET participants and their communities that is not currently being fulfilled because of a lack of information. Overall, the results are very clear: if JET participants were provided with more information, whether from their contracting organisation or another source, they would become more involved in their local communities.

Community Size Impact on Access to Information

As shown in the figure below, in very small communities, 46% of JET Programme participants receive support in creating opportunities to connect with the local community from the JET support system. This proportion increases with community size up to large communities where 61% of JET participants receive this support. However, there is a significant drop in support from large to very large communities, with JET participants in very large communities in fact receiving the least help (only 38% of respondents) in connecting with the local community. This could be a result of JET participants living in large cities having a wider range of possibilities when it comes to involvement opportunities, rather than having to rely solely on the JET support system to create these opportunities for them.

Figure 3.10 JET Support System Creation of Opportunities by Community Size

Has the JET support system helped create opportunities to connect with your local community?



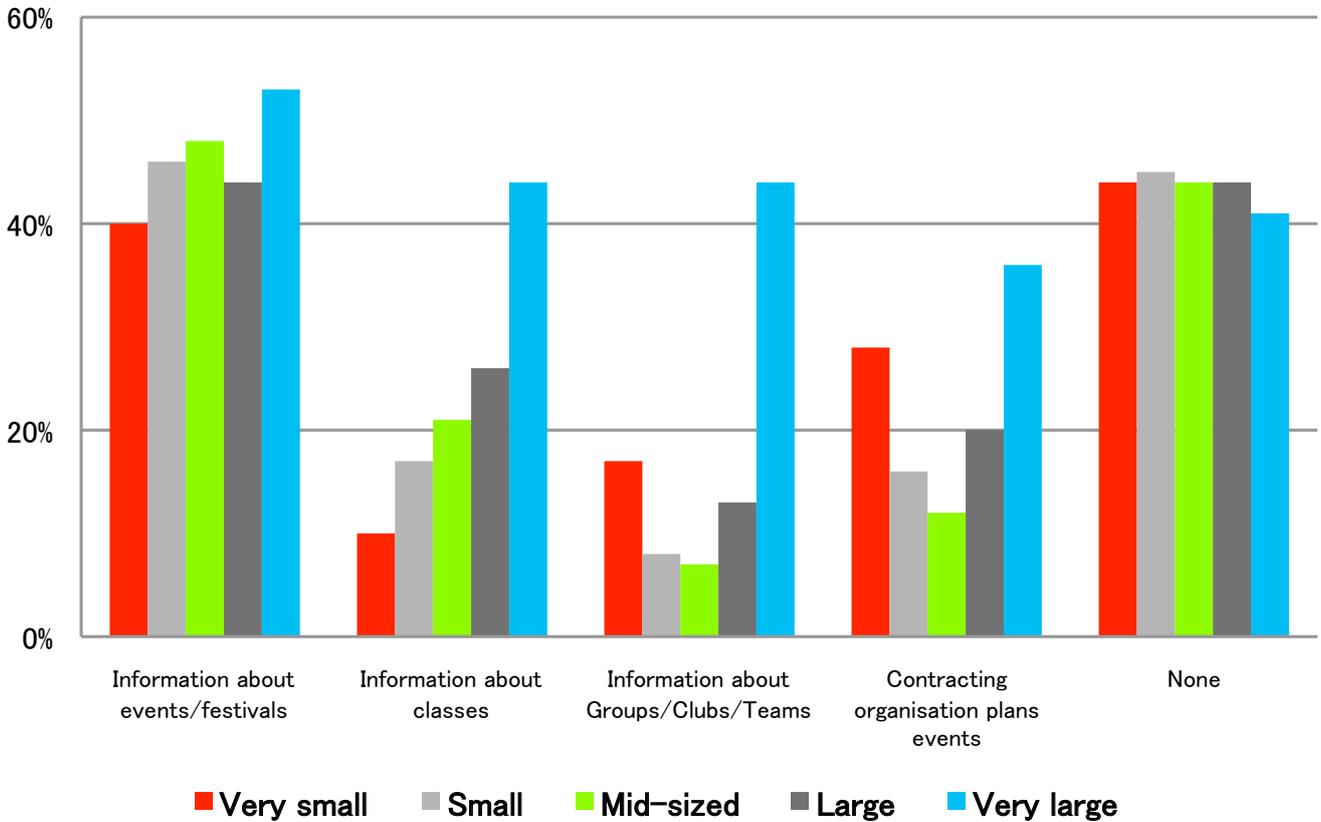
Nevertheless, JET participants in very large communities reported receiving a wider variety of resources, that is, information regarding community involvement, than any other community size. Figure 3.11 shows that respondents living in very large communities receive more information about all categories of community involvement activities than respondents in any other community size.

In terms of the specific types of resources provided by contracting organisations, responses regarding events/festivals and the provision of no information ('None') were similar regardless of community size, whereas the likelihood of resources on classes being provided, increases with community size. Only 10% of respondents living in very small communities receive information on classes that are available to them. This could be a result of the lack of classes being offered in the area, an unsupportive contracting organisation or perhaps the inability of the respondents to distinguish the type of opportunity due to the language barrier. The graph below shows these results in more detail, including a clear trend of information about specific classes being provided to a larger proportion of JET participants in larger communities.

The semantic difference between 'helping to create opportunities' and 'providing resources' may have again affected the way respondents answered the question slightly, as was addressed earlier in this report.

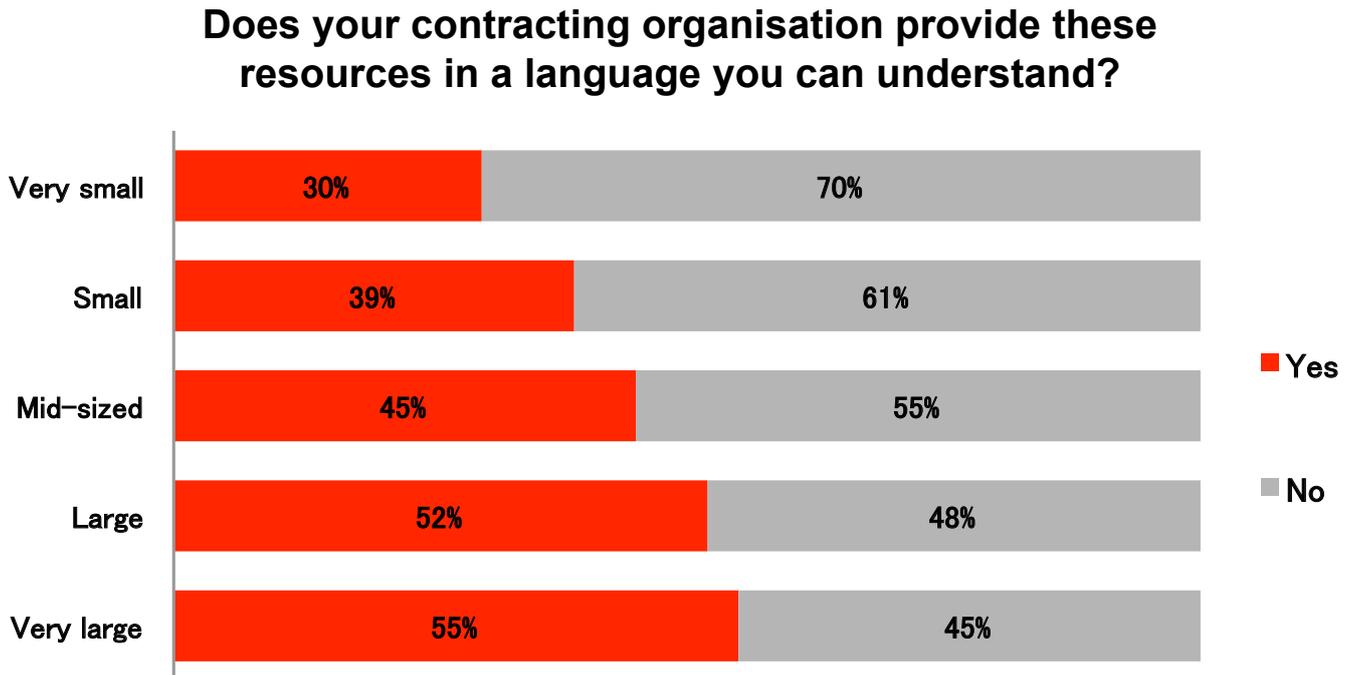
Figure 3.11 Contracting Organisations' Provision of Resources by Community Size

What resources does your contracting organisation provide for community involvement?



The community size of JET participants who do receive community involvement information from their contracting organisations has a large impact upon the likelihood of those resources being in a language the JET participant can understand, as shown in Figure 3.12. JET participants in very large communities were most likely to receive information in a language they understand (55% of respondents). This proportion decreased with community size down to only 30% of JET participants living in very small communities who received information they could understand.

Figure 3.12 Resource Language by Community Size



Together these results suggest there is a disconnect between JET participants in very large cities and the JET support system. Survey responses indicated they are the most likely community size to become involved in the community if they had more information, and yet they already appear to receive the most information of all community sizes. As such, the JET support system does not appear to be performing as well in very large communities as it is in all other community sizes. It is possible that the JET support system is more vital to a JET participant's ability to become involved in a smaller community than in a large one. JET participants living in very large communities are likely to have a wider variety of resources available to them (from sources outside the JET support system) with regard to becoming involved.

Less than one-in-three (30%) JET participants in very small communities receive resources for community involvement in a language they can understand. If it was possible to provide these resources in a language JET participants can understand it is likely that they would become (more) involved in the local community.

CONCLUSIONS

Survey respondents provided information on a variety of topics pertaining to their involvement in their local Japanese communities. The results have produced the following conclusions.

- **JET Programme participants are locally involved, and that involvement is seen to be mutually beneficial.** The vast majority (over 96%) of JET participants are engaged in their local communities to some degree, and a very large proportion believes that both their local community, and themselves personally, reap a positive benefit from this involvement. One of the stated goals of the JET Programme is to 'promote grassroots internationalisation at a local level.' The results of this survey indicate that the great majority of JET participants are achieving this, at least to some extent.
- **Most JET Programme participants are not engaged with their local communities as much as they could be, or as much as they would like to be.** Despite the very high total percentage of JET participants who are involved in their local communities at some level, there is significantly less community involvement than is possible. Fifteen per cent fewer JET participants who have been on the JET Programme for at least one year are engaged in activities with members of their local communities than first-year JET participants intend to be. Put simply: JET Programme participants are not engaging with their local communities as much as they hope to when they first arrive in Japan.
- **JET participants' levels of participation are affected by a large number of factors.** The size and demographic makeup of one's community, one's current year on the JET Programme, and one's access to transportation all affect the extent of one's community involvement. While many of these factors are beyond anyone's control, it is important to be aware of them so that they can be at least mitigated, if not actually counteracted.
- **JET participants do not receive enough information about opportunities for community involvement.** The most common reason for JET participants not to participate, or to participate less than they would like to, in their communities, is that they do not know how to become involved. Over 60% of respondents reported that they do not have enough access to information about community involvement, and over 75% of respondents stated that they would be more involved in their local communities if they had more information.
- **A lack of confidence in one's Japanese language ability is a barrier to community involvement.** Many participants do not engage with their local communities to the level they would like to because they believe their language skill level is a hindrance, or even a burden on those around them. While all JET Programme participants should be encouraged to increase their Japanese language proficiency, community interaction does not necessarily require it, and the participants' belief that it is a hindrance is something that can be overcome.
- **Contracting organisations are not providing information to the extent they could.** JET participants have a strong desire for information. Over 80% would like their contracting organisation to provide them with more community-involvement information. Only 19% of ALTs named their contracting organisation as one of their sources of information. Contracting organisations are potentially in the best position to provide ALTs with local community information, but, by and large, they are not doing so.
- **CIRs are, overall, much better informed about community involvement opportunities than ALTs are.** CIRs receive much more information from their contracting organisations than ALTs do.
- **All JET participants, and especially ALTs, rely heavily on 'disorganised' sources of information, while 'organised' sources are consulted much less frequently.** The 'organised' sources of information (contracting organisations, PAs, and AJET) are not doing enough to provide JET Programme participants with local information.
- **Pre-departure JET Participants have a great desire for information that they are not receiving.** Nearly 80% of participants desired information about local community involvement opportunities before departing their home country, and yet only 15% received it. This enormous opportunity is currently being missed. At a time when JET participants are at their most eager to receive information, this need is not being fulfilled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the report findings presented here, AJET proposes the following steps be taken in order to increase JET Programme participant involvement in their local communities:

1. Contracting organisations should be encouraged to provide JET Programme participants with more information about local community involvement opportunities. There is potentially a lot of information about these opportunities, and a lot of JET participants who want it, but it is not getting to them. Contracting organisations are best-suited to relieve that bottleneck of information because they are usually in the same area as the JET participant working for them, and are ideally placed to know both what kinds of opportunities are available, and to know (or inquire) what kinds of opportunities the JET participant is seeking.
2. A standardised method through which contracting organisations can deliver applicable information to the JET participants working for them should be created. AJET's recommendation is that this take the form of a bilingual questionnaire given by contracting organisations to JET participants on regular intervals (every three months, for example), on which JET participants can list their areas of interest. With this, contracting organisations would be better able to direct JET participants to the information they are seeking, or to where they might go to find such information.
3. Contracting organisations should be encouraged to make use of current and outgoing JET Programme participants in finding and delivering information about community involvement opportunities. Many contracting organisations have more than one JET participant in their employ, and they should encourage them to share information, and to prepare it for incoming JET participants.
4. More effort should be made to build JET participants' confidence in their ability to engage with their local communities, regardless of their Japanese language skill level. This should begin at pre-departure orientations, and be discussed further at Tokyo Orientation. AJET and Prefectural Advisors should also do more to educate JET participants with low language skills about how they can fully participate, despite their language level.
5. More specific information about community involvement opportunities should be provided to incoming JET Programme participants, before they depart their home countries. Contracting organisations are in the best position to send information to pre-departure participants because at this time, many other possible sources of information do not have access to those individuals' contact information. However, contracting organisations should rely on other sources as well to gather and package the information, including reappointing JET participants, departing JET participants, Regional Advisors (in prefectures that employ them), and Prefectural Advisors.
6. Pre-departure JET Programme participants should be empowered to seek out and find information once they arrive at their placement. They should be educated about what kinds of activities they may want to look for, and the best way to go about finding them. This could be as simple as providing new JET participants with lists of relevant words and phrases in Japanese, to equip them to ask about community involvement activities at their contracting organisations or schools.
7. Contracting organisations should be encouraged to create more cross-cultural events and opportunities for JET participants to meet and interact with members of their community. Contracting organisations receive funding from MIC for this purpose, and are uniquely positioned to make use of governmental resources to create, host, and promote these kinds of events.

