

# Radical revision of social infrastructure development processes reflecting community needs: Local government and residents thoroughly discussing social capital's ideal form

Gunma Prefecture



## Background and Reason for the Project

**Gunma Prefecture desires to promote a WIN-WIN social development between government agencies and local residents that truly reflects residents' needs.**

In Japan, the process of implementing public projects generally comprises of a government agency formulating a “draft plan,” which is then presented to interested residents in order to gain their understanding and cooperation.

While this system has the advantage of enabling government agencies to invest capital in more effective places from the perspectives of utility and expenditure, from the viewpoint of residents, it easily invites criticism of public projects due to the projects' insufficient comprehension of community needs, distrust of government due to a non-transparent plan formulation process, and dependency on government due to residents' limited participation. Accordingly, delays in a project's progress stemming from the difficulty of building consensus regarding the project's development and the declining satisfaction of residents have long been issues.

By revising the process for implementing public projects and focusing on the draft plan formulation stage, Gunma Prefecture is endeavouring to resolve three issues for local residents.

In concrete terms, Gunma Prefecture is endeavouring to prevent delays on project implementation and improve local residents' satisfaction by implementing prefectural resident participatory plan formulation procedures—that is, by formulating plans after first hearing the opinions of residents and gaining a comprehensive understanding

of residents' needs.

## Project Outline

**Five steps for the consideration of public projects at the draft plan stage are established, and a draft plan that is acceptable to both the government agency and local residents is formulated through repeated discussion and consensus-building between the government agency and local residents.**

### Step 1: Sharing of schedules and draft plan formulation procedures

The government agency explains to interested residents its intention to create the plan while identifying and understanding community needs, and both parties agree on the process and schedule for formulating the plan.

### Step 2: Identification and comprehension of concrete community needs

Using resident surveys, residents' expectations and concerns about the proposed public project are identified and comprehended in detail. In addition, by gaining understanding of the concrete reasons behind these sentiments, the government agency identifies residents' true needs.

### Step 3: Reflection of community needs in evaluation items for draft plans

Residents' true needs are interchanged with the functions of the proposed public project and are set as objective evaluation items for evaluating draft plans. In addition, other general evaluation items are also determined based on discussions between the

government agency and residents, especially concerning items of particular importance to residents.

**Step 4: Government agency formulates multiple alternative draft plans and evaluates these together with residents**

The government agency formulates multiple alternate draft plans for achieving items of particular importance to residents and then evaluates these alternative draft plans objectively together with residents to determine the degree to which each plan fulfils the community's needs.

**Step 5: Plan is decided and publicly announced to residents**

The results of Step 4 as well as each plan's consistency with government policies and its technical viability are considered, and the best draft plan from the standpoint of public utility and openness is presented to residents as the project plan.



Explanatory meetings

**Features and Innovation**

**Starting with a highly specific survey of residents, the project endeavours to identify residents' true needs and reflect these needs in plans for public projects, thereby increasing the satisfaction of both the government agency and local residents.**

The most important aspect of this project is surveying residents. These surveys are not forums for residents to express superficial positions or attitudes such as "Agree/Disagree"

or "Plan A/Plan B"; rather, the surveys are intended to elicit residents' concrete thoughts and requests—their expectations, concerns, and anxieties— regarding the proposed project. The greatest characteristic of these surveys is that by hearing the concrete reasons and context for the thought process behind residents' opinions, the government agency is able to gain an understanding of residents' true needs.

For example, if residents express a wish for footpaths to be widened, rather than focusing on the literal content of this request, identifying the underlying reason of the residents wanting the number of accidents involving pedestrians to be reduced as the residents' true need enables the resolution of community problems with flexible ideas, such as installing traffic mirrors and boosting local traffic safety activities rather than focusing simply on widening footpaths.

Furthermore, even when residents have conflicting opinions, focusing on the underlying reasons may show that the true needs of both sides are actually the same, and responding in a way that focuses on residents' true needs can be expected to have the effect of leading to a resolution for both sides.



## **Results of the Project**

### **Sense of improving the quality of public project plans and residents' satisfaction, as well as implementing projects smoothly**

Rather than formulating plans from only a governmental perspective, flexibly reflecting residents' needs in plans for public projects not only gives the sense that the quality of the plans has been improved but also increases the transparency of the plan formulation process, thereby making it easier for government agencies to obtain the understanding and cooperation of residents regarding public projects.

As a result, these efforts have furthered residents' understanding regarding land acquisition and construction works when a project is being implemented, leading to a shortening of the time required for projects to be completed.

## **Future Developments**

This experiment is being implemented as an initiative for changing the way public projects are carried out in Japan ahead of other local government bodies in Japan. Moving forward, by further deepening and continuing these initiatives as a representative project of Japan, Gunma Prefecture intends to promote social infrastructure development that achieves balance between residents' satisfaction and quality.

## **Reference URLs**

[https://www.pref.gunma.jp/06/h80g\\_00078.html](https://www.pref.gunma.jp/06/h80g_00078.html)

(Official Gunma Prefecture Official website "Public Works Reflecting Community Needs" (available in Japanese only - multilingual translation services provided))

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