

Digi-Tosho-Shinshu

—Digital Library Co-operated by the all local municipalities and Nagano Prefecture

Nagano Prefecture



Background

The COVID-19 pandemic was what led to the launch of this project. Following the declaration of a state of emergency through April and May 2020, approximately 92% of libraries nationwide and 73% of libraries in Nagano Prefecture were forced to close. Even before this, several libraries had closed due to flooding caused by the 2019 East Japan Typhoon. These experiences served as a major motivation for stakeholders in the prefecture to work together on this project.

Nagano was faced with the urgent task to introduce an e-book service, in order to provide sustainable services even under emergency

circumstances, promote the digitalisation of school education, take measures in accordance with the Reading Barrier-Free Act, and adapt to other social changes towards ensuring an environment that allows prefectural residents to read books and access information.

Objectives

1. To build an environment in which all residents, irrespective of their area of residence, age or ability/disability, can access the necessary information (e-books)—anytime, anywhere and free of charge.

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Municipal and Prefectural Collaborative Digital Library Steering Committee

- 2. To create a foundation for learning for Nagano residents and to make an equal society where no one is left behind, through cooperation between public libraries and community centre libraries from across all municipalities in Nagano Prefecture.

Project Outline

- The prefectural government and all 77 municipalities in Nagano Prefecture collaboratively operate an e-book service that is accessible to all prefectural residents—anytime, anywhere.
- Municipal libraries select the e-book content, while the Prefectural Library is responsible for building and maintaining the system infrastructure. The content fees are borne by each municipality based on their respective populations. The Prefectural Library covers the system costs.
- The project was launched in August 2022, with a project review scheduled every five years. An assessment of Phase 1 and a preparatory review for Phase 2 are currently underway.

is available to all Nagano residents. This is the first project of its kind in Japan that involves all municipalities from across a single prefecture.

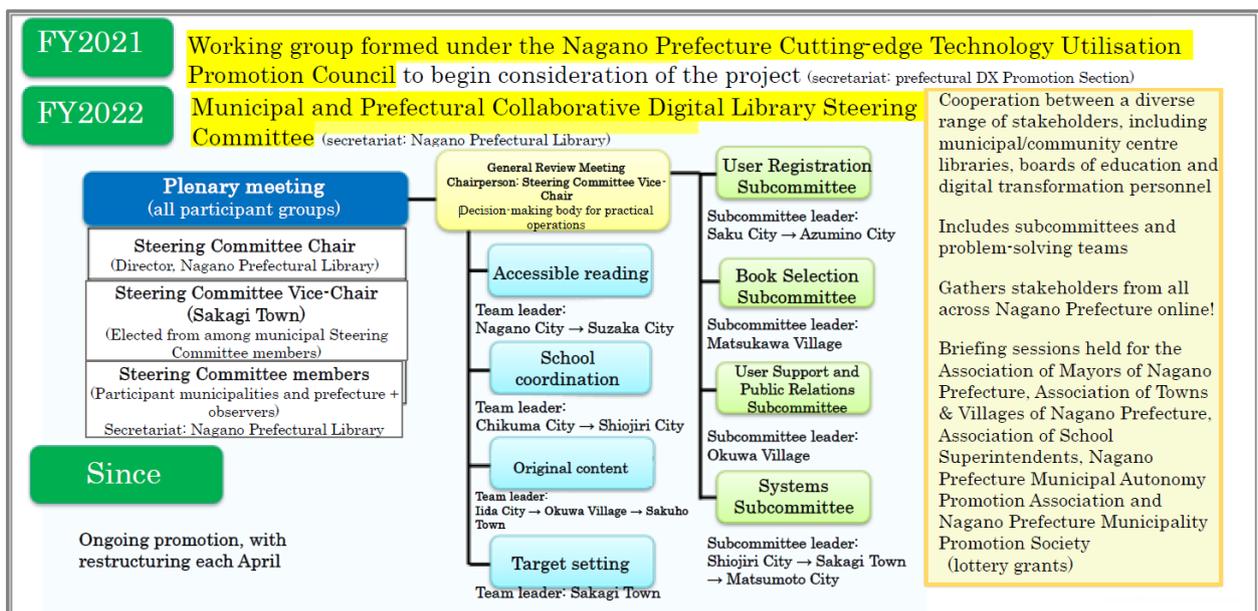
- Since there were no business models to work on in the review phase, we meticulously designed the project and selected the service provider through a proposal process.
- The service is operated by the Operating Committee, which comprises all municipalities. The committee have a general review meeting for swift decision-making, subcommittees responsible for user registration, book selection, public relations and systems and teams responsible for coordination with schools, accessible reading, original content creation and target setting and evaluation, with each organisation promptly addressing issues in their area of responsibility.
- The project was designed with the cooperation of library personnel and local government departments responsible for promoting digital transformation, and involved briefing sessions for local government heads and school superintendents.

Features and Innovations

- Thanks to collaboration between the prefectural government and all 77 municipalities in Nagano Prefecture, the service

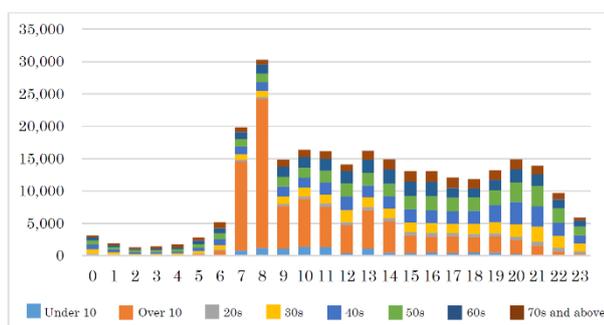
Results of the Project

- Some municipalities in Nagano Prefecture have no libraries. However, as Digi-Tosho-Shinshu’s e-books are available to all prefectural residents,



the service has helped bridge the information gap.

- Working people in their 30s to 60s tend to borrow books around 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. This service is utilised by people in age groups that have difficulty visiting libraries during opening hours, thus expanding library access.
- To promote the service’s utilisation at schools, a special provision was added to the user guidelines to allow group registration at schools. As the books are utilised in morning reading sessions, in which the whole class reads before classes start, the service is often accessed by people in their teens around 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. Therefore, the service helps the younger generation build reading habits.
- The unique advantages of e-books (font enlargement, text-to-speech functions etc.) make it possible for senior citizens and people with reading disorders to enjoy reading more easily.



Issues, Problems and Responses

- In Japan, most e-books are sold exclusively to individuals and are not available to public libraries. Even those e-books available to public libraries are often not offered as one-time purchases but under limited licences (e.g. two years, or can only be used up to 52 times). In the future, initiatives must be explored to achieve a prosperous coexistence with publishers and bookstores based on mutual understanding.
- The system is operated with the aim of achieving the goals of ‘Leave No One Behind’

and ‘Quality Education’ (SDGs). However, as some who need the service are still unable to access it, more effective publicity measures must be developed.

- Library budgets for book purchases are being cut throughout Japan. Therefore, another major challenge is to secure a stable budget for e-books.

Future Developments (expected effects and project vision and issues)

- In an increasing number of cases, public librarians are visiting schools to hold briefing sessions and promote this service. Efforts to promote this system at schools will continue.
- Digi-Tosho-Shinshu is being utilised in some local smartphone workshops for the elderly. Support is needed to expand adoption of digital technology.
- Hands-on Digi-Tosho-Shinshu sessions are held for deaf and hard-of-hearing people to reach to those who do not usually use libraries. Further initiatives are needed to provide barrier-free reading opportunities for people with various needs.
- In addition to offering publicly available content, the participant municipalities aim to create their own regional materials to expand the range of content aimed at teaching children about their local community.
- Moving forward, Digi-Tosho-Shinshu will also be actively used in the promotion of multicultural coexistence. We believe it is very important to offer residents of foreign descent the opportunity to learn Japanese by reading books written in simple Japanese, and to read books written in their mother tongue, and picture books and children’s books with their children (cherishing one’s mother tongue and native culture). (Apart from English, Nagano Prefecture has started offering books in Chinese and Portuguese to cater to the large number of residents from China and Brazil. Whereas it is

challenging to collect physical books in various languages, e-books have the benefits of being readily available in various languages and being purchasable on the spot.)

Websites for Reference

<https://shinshu-kyodo-library.overdrive.com/>

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