CREATIVE WELL-BEING TOKYO: PRACTICE JOURNAL 2020—2026





CREATIVE
WELL-BEING
TOKYO

PRACTICE FOR OPEN ACCESS TO CULTURE

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Practice for Open Access to Culture

Creative Well-being Tokyo (hereafter, CWT) continues its practice of exploring ways of thinking about human well-being through arts and culture. Starting with a reconsideration of accessibility to cultural facilities, and through a growing range of collaborations with diverse people and initiatives at various Tokyo Metropolitan cultural facilities, we have continued to ask what it means for everyone to connect through culture. This booklet is a "Journal" that traces the trajectory of this "Practice." It looks back on the major social changes surrounding the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onward, the launch of the project in 2022, our initiatives to open up access to culture, the new questions that emerged from them, and the move toward "Moving Together—A Culture of Mutuality" from 2026 onward. These pages do not present a finished achievement or a single answer. Through photographs and words, we reflect on the insights and questions nurtured through this cumulative process of thinking, putting ideas into practice, evaluating, and putting them into practice again.

The PDF and a text version for reading aloud of this booklet are available on the Creative Well-being Tokyo website.
Please visit the website using the URL below or the QR code on the right.
https://creativewell.rekibun.or.jp/activity-know/practicejournal.html

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Continuing to Question Well-Being

Arts Council Tokyo has been working since 2012 to promote a diverse range of arts and culture initiatives across Tokyo. Today, at a time when cities around the world face challenges such as social division, the erosion of local character through development, and natural disasters, we believe there is a need to take a fresh look at the role that culture can play in urban life.

Culture has the power to act as a catalyst, giving new value and purpose to spaces and other aspects of the city that have lost their function in the shadow of urban development. Furthermore, in cities where memories from different eras are interwoven and people with diverse backgrounds reside, culture can also serve as a foundation for communities to overcome division and discrimination and connect diverse residents. When the social fabric of communities is disrupted by rapid urbanization, culture can create time and space for communities to absorb change at a gentler pace.

Our experiences in Tokyo have led us to reflect on the power of culture. Fukuhara Yoshiharu, then chair of the Tokyo Council for the Arts and a key figure in establishing Arts Council Tokyo, described culture as "important infrastructure for today's cities." He envisioned moving beyond the limitations of the twentieth-century model of society driven by people, goods, and capital, further enhancing the value of Tokyo while honoring the pride and dignity of its residents. Identifying culture as a driving force for this vision, he argued for an organization that could embed culture in society and help build a city that values residents' pride and dignity. This philosophy continues to underpin our work today.

At the same time, two major developments in Tokyo in recent years have prompted us to reconsider the very nature of "culture."

The first was the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, held after a one-year postponement. In preparation for the Games, which were a celebration of both sport and culture, we implemented numerous cultural programs from 2016 onward. Together with efforts to make Tokyo more accessible environment in preparation for the Tokyo 2025 Deaflympics, these experiences of major international events have left us with a legacy of reflection and trial and error on how to create spaces where people of different backgrounds can come together and respect one another's cultures.

The second was the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid restrictions on cultural activities of all kinds, Tokyo launched the "Cheer for Art! Tokyo Project," providing support to professional artists and cultural practitioners while creating opportunities for people to engage with culture from home. Through this initiative, we gained a renewed understanding of the breadth of Tokyo's arts and culture community, while at the same time being prompted to reexamine the needs of those who had long faced difficulties accessing culture in their daily lives.

Creative Well-being Tokyo, launched in 2022, emerged and grew out of these experiences. Taking account of the diverse circumstances that shape people's lives—including differences in language, culture and whether or not they have disabilities—the project works to create an environment where everyone can enjoy arts and culture. Its wide-ranging initiatives include improving accessibility at cultural facilities and organizing the Conference on Open Access to Culture.

Culture is not created solely by a select group of creators. It takes shape through relationships with those who mediate it, and those who receive it. Moreover, the difficulties faced by people in particular circumstances can, as times and conditions change, become challenges for anyone. That is precisely why it is important to respect each other's differences while continually reconsidering the boundaries drawn within society. At times, this means exploring forms of culture that go beyond even the distinction between humans and other living things, opening culture to all forms of existence, while seeking common ground that can be shared through culture. We believe such efforts hold a vital key to helping contemporary cities overcome division and disaster.

Culture provides people with a sense of security and comfort, contributing to individual well-being. Yet when its forms become fixed, it leaves room for cultural stagnation and new forms of exclusion. The term "Creative Well-being" embodies our desire to break free from preconceived notions and continually renew our understanding of culture and well-being from fresh perspectives.

This resembles the journey in search of the Blue Bird in Maurice Maeterlinck's play. What truly matters is not arriving at a single answer, but the very process of continually questioning our ideals and moving forward without fear of change.

We hope that our experiences in Tokyo will serve as a point of reference for all those considering the possibilities of culture in their own communities and contexts. We also hope that, transcending existing positions and boundaries, we can boldly advance together on this journey of exploration.

Aoyagi Masanori
Director General, Arts Council Tokyo

What Is Creative Well-being Tokyo?

This project is jointly led by Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture). Under the *Tokyo Cultural Strategy 2030*, CWT works to build an environment where diverse individuals can encounter, participate in, and create arts and culture, regardless of disability, language, or cultural background.

CWT's Journey | 2020—2026 → 2030

Phases of CWT:

PHASE 1　2020—2022
The Olympics and Paralympics, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

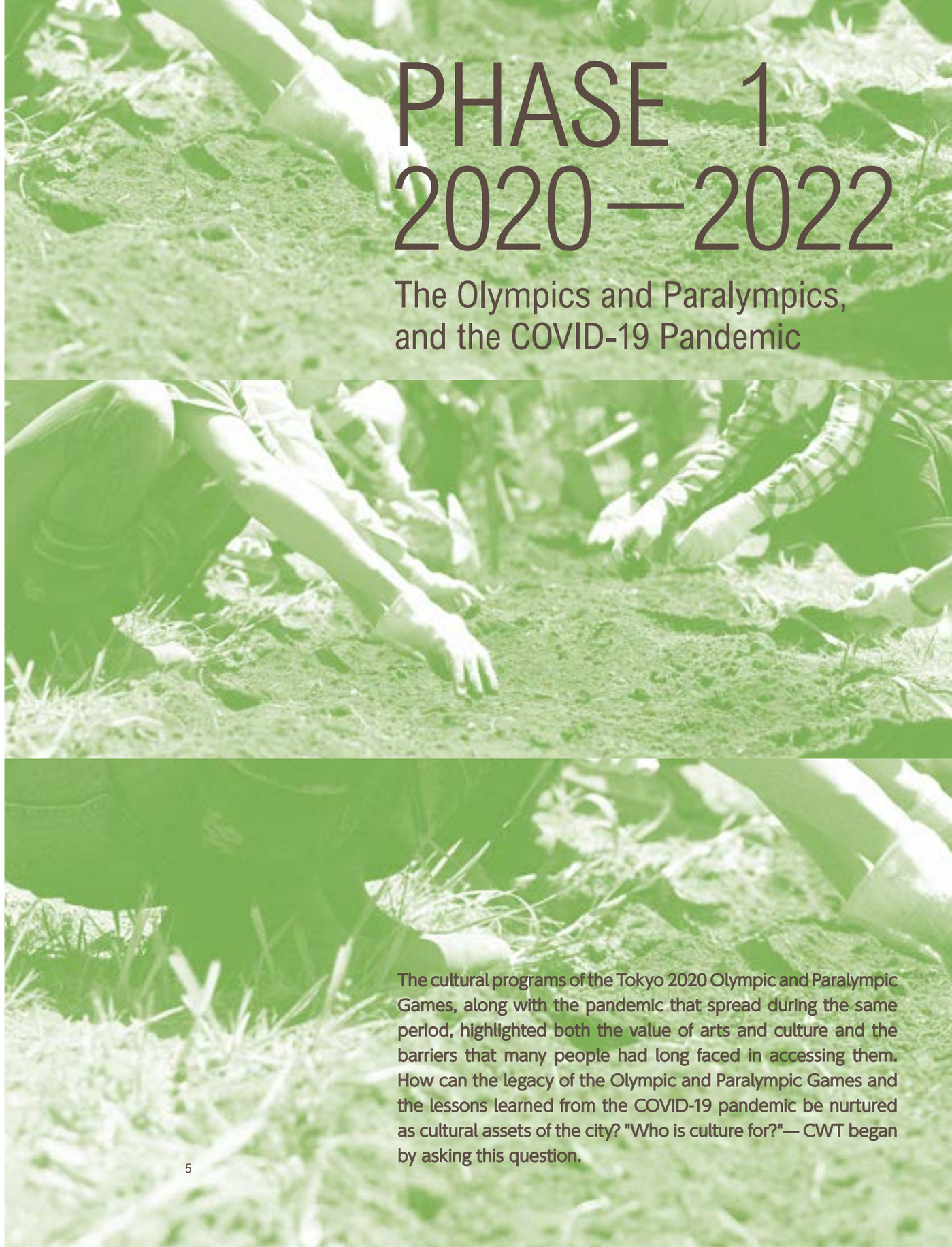
PHASE 2　2022—2024
Accessibility to Cultural Facilities

PHASE 3　2024—2026
Accumulating Experience and Taking It Further

PHASE 4　2026→2030
Moving Together—A Culture of Mutuality

List of Cultural Facilities Managed and Operated by the Foundation

Tokyo Metropolitan Edo-Tokyo Museum / Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum / Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum / Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum / Tokyo Photographic Art Museum / Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo / Tokyo Arts and Space / Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery / Tokyo Bunka Kaikan / Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre



PHASE 1 2020—2022

The Olympics and Paralympics, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The cultural programs of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, along with the pandemic that spread during the same period, highlighted both the value of arts and culture and the barriers that many people had long faced in accessing them. How can the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic be nurtured as cultural assets of the city? "Who is culture for?"— CWT began by asking this question.



In this project, which focused on the actions, practices, and creative expressions of hands, the artist together with a diverse range of local community members grew cotton from seed. Igarashi Yasuaki, an artist who creates works with thread, held the project at weaving studio Atelier La Mano.
Hand Project (2018) Photo: Tomita Ryohei

TURN
TURN LAND Program

TURN (2015–2021) began as a leading cultural project for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It brought together people with disabilities, people attending welfare facilities or special needs schools, and artists visiting those settings. By creating spaces and time for people who might not otherwise meet to spend time together, TURN enabled new forms of expression to emerge. As people encountered one another's differences, forms of expression unique to each individual took shape. This process itself lies at the heart of TURN. Since 2022, TURN LAND Program has built on these experiences to create new cultural activities in everyday life, together with welfare facilities, the people who attend them, and artists.

PHASE 1 2020—2022

TURN in BRAZIL was held during the Rio de Janeiro Olympics. Kiriko paper cutouts displayed in the street-facing windows of Paço Imperial, a historic landmark in Rio de Janeiro and the exhibition venue, were made together with participants at social welfare facilities in Tokyo and São Paulo.
TURN in BRAZIL (2016)
Photo: RAFAEL SALVADOR





A view of the exhibition: Visitors gathered around a platform at the center and worked together to weave a giant braid using threads dyed at a facility for autistic children in São Paulo.
TURN in BRAZIL (2016) Photo: RAFAEL SALVADOR



Artist Tomizuka Emi's work *A Square of Light* was based on the theme of inaudibility. Drag queen Madame Bonjour JohnJ is here indicating that it is 3 p.m. TURN, which began with people at social welfare facilities, expanded its focus to people with disabilities living in the wider community.
TURN FES 3 (2017) Photo: Ito Yuji



A cross-talk session at the 7th TURN Meeting. The discussion began with a question: How do hearing people perceive 'hearing culture' in relation to 'Deaf culture'? Speakers (from left): Makihara Eri, Robert Campbell, Hibino Katsuhiko, and Watanabe Tasuku.
The 7th TURN Meeting (2019) Photo: Tomita Ryohei, Suzuki Ryuichiro

TURN LAND Meetings are held regularly, bringing together staff from facilities and organizations involved in TURN LAND Program, artists, coordinators, and local collaborators to report on and share their activities. The meetings provide a space for sharing practical knowledge and experience gained through the work.
TURN LAND Meeting (2022) Photo: Umeda Ayaka





A scene from Nodate, an open-air tea gathering led by artist Kimura Toshiro Jinjin, where people attending a disability support facility and local residents come together in a public space through collaborative activities.
TURN LAND Program at Asakusa Miraido (2024)
Photo: Umeda Ayaka



Dance group Newcomer "H" Sokerissa! is made up of dancer Aoki Yuuki and people who have experienced homelessness, shown here at an event at a social welfare home for people with mental and physical disabilities.
TURN LAND Program at Sakuranbo (2023)
Photo: Umeda Ayaka



At the International Conference on Open Access to Culture 2024, artist Ise Katsuya and people attending the facility exhibited knitted works they had made together through TURN LAND Program and shared the work with visitors.
TURN LAND Program at Nishiogi Fureai no Ie Photo: Umeda Ayaka



Artist SKANK, through collaboration with users at a senior citizens' day care center, created word cards that can be arranged to make songs.
TURN LAND Program at Nishiogi Fureai no Ie (2025)
Photo: Umeda Ayaka

PHASE 2 2022—2024

Accessibility to Cultural Facilities

We provide information on accessible exhibitions and performances, art projects that address social issues, and the accessibility of Tokyo's cultural facilities. We also provide support for activities such as grants for those involved in art and culture, as well as case studies.

Find accessible events

Learn about case studies

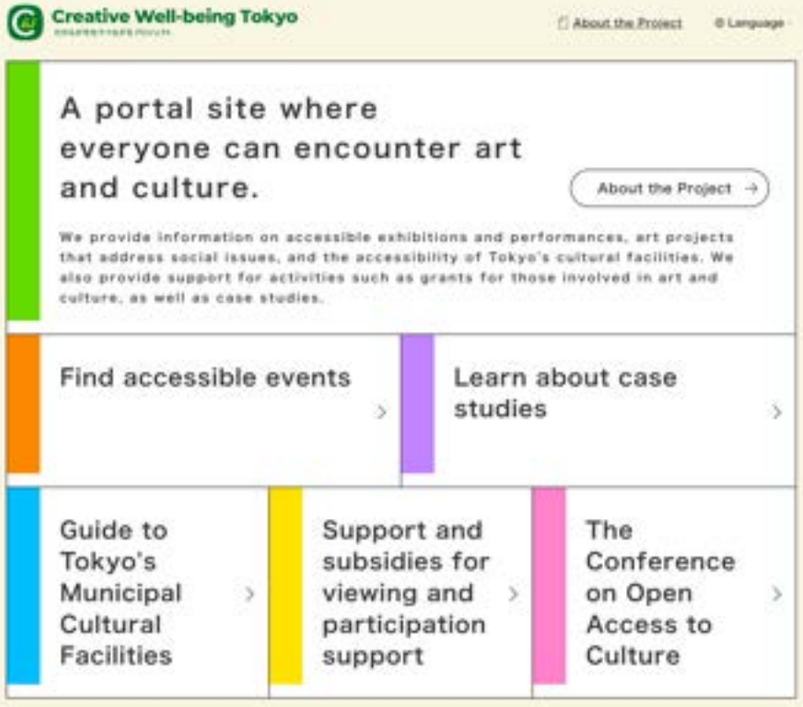
Guide to Tokyo's Municipal

Support and subsidies for viewing and

The Conference on Open

Learn about case studies

CWT got underway in 2022. With the aim of building a city where everyone can encounter and engage with arts and culture, it began by reviewing accessibility at cultural facilities and other venues. The Conference on Open Access to Culture, which became a catalyst for many of CWT's subsequent developments, helped build networks in Japan and abroad. This was also when the organizational framework began to take shape, including the appointment of social inclusion coordinators at Arts Council Tokyo.



The CWT portal site (current version, launched in March 2025) has gone through several revisions. The site was rebuilt from the ground up based on testing by Sunny Bank members with various disabilities.
https://creativewell.rekibun.or.jp/

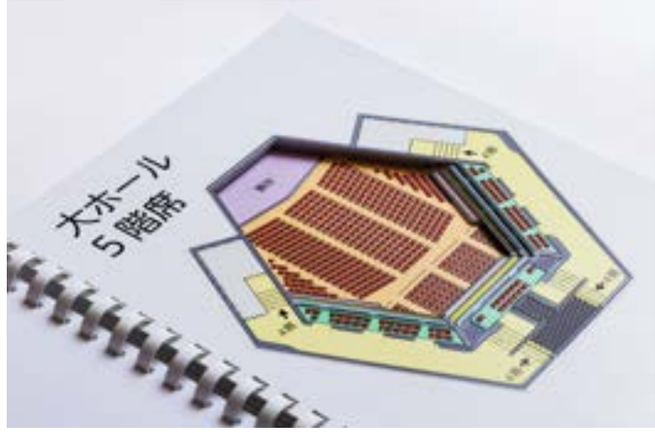
Thinking About What "Open Access to Culture" Means

In 2022, CWT began in earnest. The first step was to think concretely about what "open access to culture" really means. Working through this question together with people with disabilities, CWT reframed accessibility to culture in three stages: access to information; access to appreciating and participating in arts and culture; and opportunities to be involved in creating and communicating culture. Does information about events reach people in the first place? How do they encounter artworks and performances? Can they also take part as creators or communicators? We came to understand that there is no single right answer; each situation calls for a response suited to the people and circumstances involved. Simply introducing devices or tools does not, by itself, create an accessible environment. The work of exploring how to respond to the needs associated with different disabilities began here.
Several social developments converged during this period: amendments to the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities made the provision of reasonable accommodation mandatory for private businesses; Tokyo Metropolitan Government enacted its Sign Language Ordinance in 2022; and Tokyo was selected to host the Deaflympic games in 2025.

PHASE 2　2022—2024

Making Information Accessible

CWT addressed accessibility barriers people encounter before they even arrive at a cultural facility and explored ways to provide information with diverse audiences in mind. Initiatives included publishing accessibility information for Tokyo Metropolitan cultural facilities on a portal site, fundamentally reviewing web accessibility, providing facility guides in Plain Japanese, introducing exhibitions through sign language videos, and creating visually clear materials. The starting point was recognizing that what feels "normal" to one person may be a barrier to someone else.



A braille/tactile guidebook that explains the structure of the multi-floored Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Main Hall.



The event search page of the portal site displays accessibility-related pictograms showing what accessibility arrangements are available for each event at a glance. It reflects the knowledge accumulated through the efforts so far.



A video guide to using cultural facilities, presented in sign language by a Deaf sign-language performer. The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo released the first such video in April 2020, and similar initiatives were subsequently developed at other facilities.

International Conference on Open Access to Culture 2022

CWT's first step was the 2022 International Conference on Open Access to Culture. With a focus on diverse values and inclusive environments, it was the first comprehensive international conference of its kind in Asia. Practitioners and researchers from Japan and abroad came together for sessions, exhibitions, performances, and networking. They discussed the role arts and culture can play in Tokyo as the city works toward diversity and inclusion.



International Conference on Open Access to Culture 2022 Opening Ceremony



At Takenodai Square (Fountain Square) in Ueno Park, an inclusive dance program by Tokyo Field of Expression Club opened the international conference in 2022 together with the audience.



In the "Resonant Bodies" workshop, participants of varying abilities, cultures, languages, and ways of thinking worked together to pursue new ways of enjoying art and culture. This intensive short-term camp program was held in advance of the conference. (2022) Photo: Sato Motoi



Justine Simons OBE, Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, London delivered a keynote speech titled 'What Now for Culture in This Complex and Ever-Changing World?'

PHASE 3
2024—2026

Accumulating Experience and Taking It Further

With social inclusion coordinators assigned across all Tokyo Metropolitan cultural facilities, the work of the CWT project management office (Arts Council Tokyo) and each facility became more closely connected and began to develop further. The coordinators meet monthly to share knowledge and hold study sessions.



In front of a toilet for assistance dogs on the grounds of the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre. Located under a roof, it is sheltered from the rain. Photo: Ikeda Masanori

Opening Up Access to Appreciation and Involvement

The framework of "delivering information," "appreciation and participation," and "involvement" moved into everyday practice as social inclusion coordinators were assigned across Tokyo Metropolitan cultural facilities. The task was not only to arrange support for experiencing exhibitions and performances, but also to create opportunities for visitors to take part in creating and communicating culture. Each facility had its own circumstances and visitors, and the challenge was to interpret a shared philosophy in ways that worked in each setting. From installing captioning devices and offering tactile ways to experience art to strengthening the capacity to provide sign language interpretation, each practical measure has accumulated over time, informing decision-making on the ground.



In the Sign Language Interpreter Training Program for the Arts and Culture Sector, Deaf professionals active in arts and culture serve as instructors, teaching interpreting skills as well as the ethics expected of sign language interpreters in cultural settings.

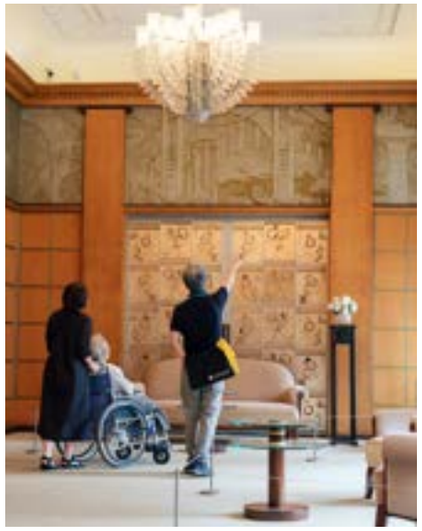


Visual assistance devices help visitors with visual impairments to enjoy backstage tours and performances. Photo: Ikeda Masanori

PHASE 3　2024—2026

"G(ALL)ERY Day" at Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum is an event where visitor numbers are limited to allow a relaxed viewing environment, established as part of an accessibility initiative for buildings of historical and cultural value. Photo: Ookura Hideki (Kurome Photo Studio)





A tactile model of the pipe organ, a symbol of Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre's Concert Hall. Photo: Ikeda Masanori

Engaging with the Deaflympics Cultural Program

The Tokyo 2025 Deaflympics were held with participants from 79 countries and regions. As part of the cultural program, CWT created the stage work *Breathe Move Don't Be Silent*, bringing Deaf and hearing people together. This put the knowledge accumulated through previous practice to work. It also prompted a renewed examination of collaboration and ways of experiencing performance that do not presume sound, and of how to create a space that starts from differences in language and the senses rather than fixed roles of those who provide accommodation and those who receive it. The collaboration between Deaf and hearing people challenged us to consider, in the most concrete terms, the kind of society CWT hopes to help create. *TRAIN TRAIN TRAIN* brought together members of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Opening Ceremony team in a new stage work featuring a diverse cast of performers with and without disabilities, building on that legacy.



The Deaf and the hearing encounter each other in: *Breathe Move Don't Be Silent* (2025) | Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Photo: Kato Hajime , Kawashima Ayami



A scene from the performance *TRAIN TRAIN TRAIN* (2025) | Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Photo: Miyagawa Maiko



Cards created as a tool for thinking and talking about accessibility in cultural facilities and cultural programs (2025)
Photo: Takaoka Hiroshi



Art and Culture Accessibility Hint Box



As the proportion of Tokyo residents with roots outside Japan grows, this scene from a presentation of the project shows people with diverse international backgrounds creating theatre through intercultural dialogue.
Tokyo Borderless Theatre Project (2025) |
Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Photo: Kimura Masabumi



The program which trains people to guide audiences through art appreciation in sign language.
The Deaf Navigator Training Program (2025)
Photo: Saito Akihide, Sato Erika

Outcomes of CWT's Initiatives

Working with each Tokyo Metropolitan cultural facility and a diverse range of partners — including people with lived experience, researchers, and specialists — CWT has helped identify challenges to address and test possible responses. Through this practice, CWT has brought together tools, videos, and booklets that each site can adapt and develop in line with its own circumstances, and has shared these resources through cultural facilities and online. The accessibility prompt cards are one outcome of this work.

COLUMN:
Conference on Open Access to Culture: Tracing Its Changing Themes | 2023–2026

In summer 2023, the Summer Session on Open Access to Culture 2023, held at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, brought the insights and connections developed at the 2022 international conference into dialogue with practitioners across Japan. Its theme was "Accessibility and Co-creation." The eight talks brought together practices from different settings, including tactile ways of experiencing art, Deaf expression, information access and technology, and perspectives on the Deaflympics. The closing question was: "What does it mean to create together?" Perhaps the seeds of co-creation lie not in fearing what we do not understand, but in finding it intriguing. From here, the questions surrounding creative well-being moved into a new phase.

In autumn 2024, people from a wide range of fields in Japan and abroad gathered at Tokyo International Forum for the international conference themed "Culture and Home." As more people experience isolation and alienation, the conference explored how the sense of security and belonging that culture can offer might be understood as one aspect of well-being. It also explored how we might share the fact that we do not always understand one another, and look beyond comfortable answers to engage more fully with complexity.

Then, in autumn 2025, the conference venue moved to Jiyu Gakuen Myonichikan in Ikebukuro. Its theme was "Home and the Self." Resonating with Jiyu Gakuen's emphasis on individual independence, the gathering invited people to consider arts and culture at the scale of each individual. As the dialogue unfolded, the focus shifted from "home" to "the self" as a subject, and then to "the other" beyond the self. The closing session was titled "A Home of One's Own — Envisioning Our Future." It reaffirmed that a sense of home is something we continue to create, and that everyone can help shape what comes to be taken for granted in the future. From methods to the nature of the spaces we create; from those spaces to the self as a subject and its possibilities. Over three years, the conference themes moved ever closer to our everyday lives. Building on this trajectory, the 2026 international conference, "Moving Together — A Culture of Mutuality," seeks to offer a renewed definition of Creative Well-being Tokyo to the world.





(above) Tokyo International Forum
Photo: Kato Hajime

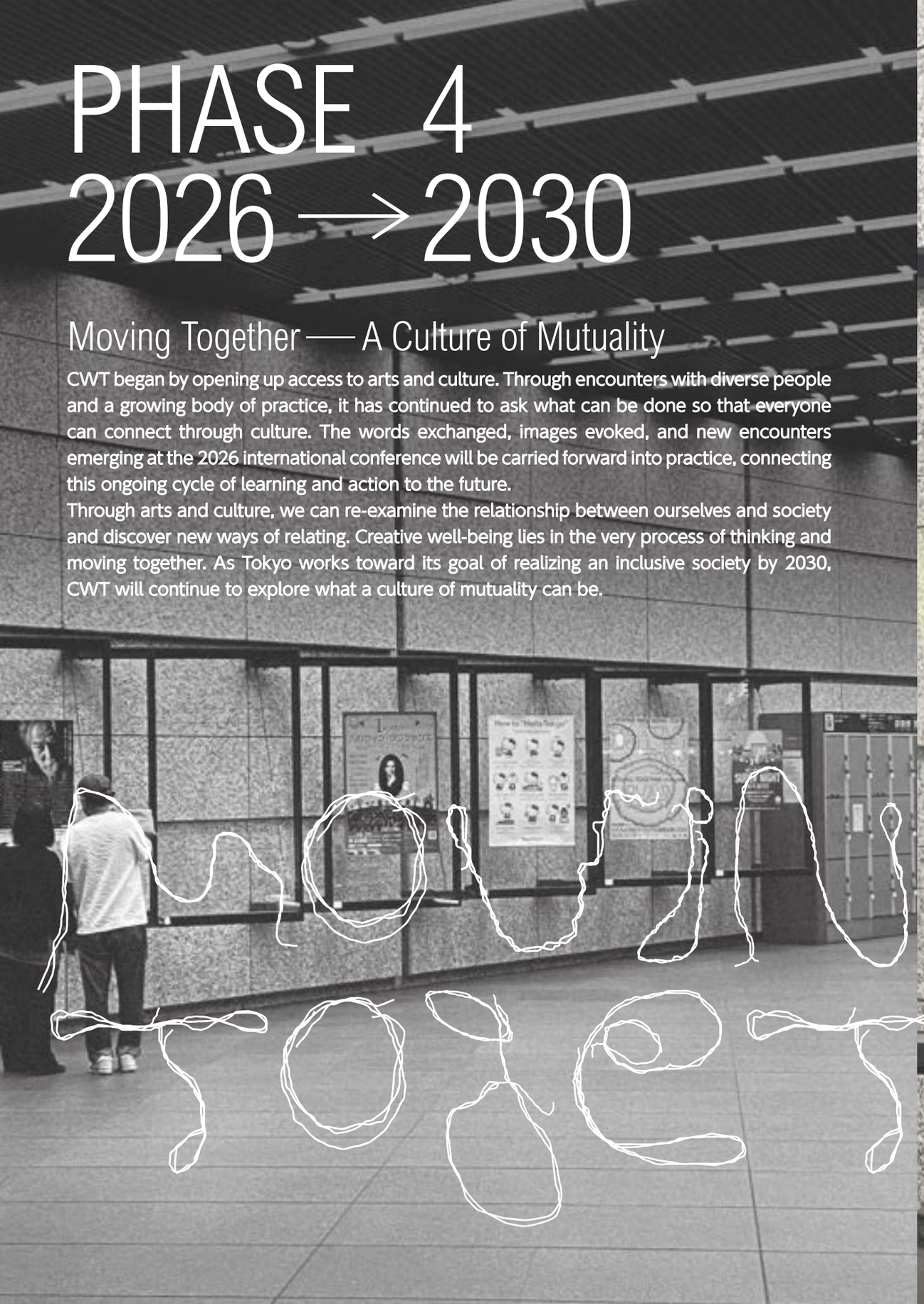
(below) Jiyu Gakuen Myonichikan

PHASE 4
2026 → 2030

Moving Together — A Culture of Mutuality

CWT began by opening up access to arts and culture. Through encounters with diverse people and a growing body of practice, it has continued to ask what can be done so that everyone can connect through culture. The words exchanged, images evoked, and new encounters emerging at the 2026 international conference will be carried forward into practice, connecting this ongoing cycle of learning and action to the future.

Through arts and culture, we can re-examine the relationship between ourselves and society and discover new ways of relating. Creative well-being lies in the very process of thinking and moving together. As Tokyo works toward its goal of realizing an inclusive society by 2030, CWT will continue to explore what a culture of mutuality can be.





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PRACTICE FOR OPEN ACCESS TO CULTURE CREATIVE WELL-BEING TOKYO

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Cover: A drawing that emerged through interactions at Showa Gakuen as part of the TURN LAND Program



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