

THE SEMPai PROGRAM



A simple way of helping new JETs deal with information gaps from the moment of their acceptance into the JET Programme until they first hear from their Contracting Organizations. This program is scalable, flexible, and encourages participation from alumni. In addition to the general information provided at official Pre-Departure Orientations, the Sempai Program offers local information catered to the departing JET.

05.2013

What is the Sempai Program?

As JET alumni, we've all experienced the confusing mix of excitement and trepidation when we first opened that acceptance letter for the JET Programme. For most people, that one letter is all they have to tide them over until they hear from their Contracting Organization or Board of Education, weeks or even months later. The natural inclination for the JET is to search the internet for any bit of information they can find about their new home. More often than not, they end up in their town's all-Japanese website, incomplete Wikipedia entries, or internet forums, where every ESL teaching horror story is embellished upon. The Sempai Program offers an alternative.

Tapping into the accumulated and often-unused local knowledge of JET alumni, the Sempai Program is a sort of "modern-day pen pal system" where new JETs are matched with JET alumni volunteers — based on the proximity of their JET placement cities — in order to provide the new JET with relevant local knowledge about his/her new home. Placement city proximity

is important to the success of this relationship. There is much more relevance and comfort in advice coming from someone who knows the region you are going to spend at least a year in.

The Sempai Program does not replace the official Pre-Departure Orientations. There is simply no time at the Orientation to talk about regionally-specific information, and besides, at such an event, JETs can only absorb so much information. The Sempai complements the Orientation, and answers any question that comes up when the new JET finally digests the new information. Of course, information from the Contracting Organization and the direct predecessor must take priority when they finally make contact.

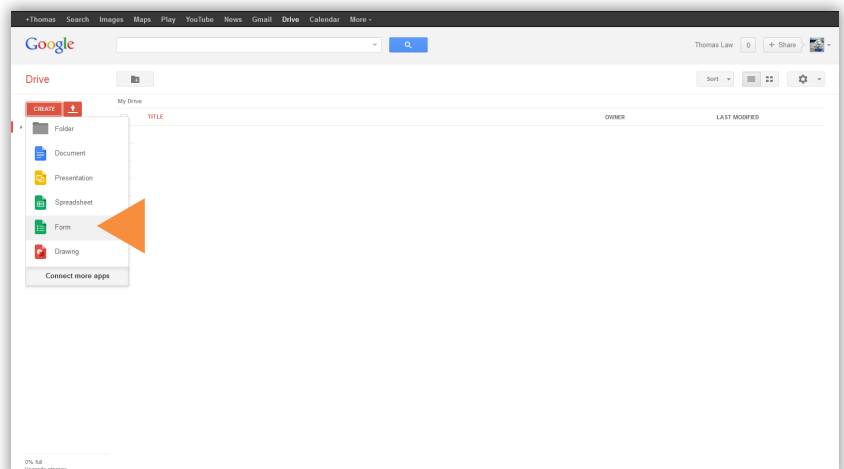
In addition, this Program lessens the burden of the local Consulate JET Programme coordination staff, since the Sempai can answer many of the smaller questions, allowing the staff to deal with more pressing issues.

Implementation

Two spreadsheets — one from the Consulate JET Coordinator, and one from the Sempai Program Coordinator — and a Google account are all that is needed.

1 Data Collection. Google Drive (formerly Google Docs) has a function to produce electronic forms that outputs data into a spreadsheet.

In the Google Drive page, click **Create**, and choose **Form**.



2

With the easy-to-use form generator, we suggest asking the following questions (substituting in your region's equivalent names where appropriate):

1. [Text Box] Full Name
2. [Text Box] Contact Email
3. [Text Box] JET Placement Prefecture
[Help text:] If you had more than one, please clarify in the Comments section below.
4. [Text Box] JET Placement City
[Help text:] If you had more than one, please clarify in the Comments section below.
5. [Multi.] Type of JET:
 - ALT
 - CIR
 - SEA
6. [Text Box] Years on JET (eg. 19XX-20XX)
[Help text:] Please enter the Start year and the finishing year, not just an amount.
7. [Check Box] What did you teach while on JET?
 - Kindergarten
 - Elementary School
 - Junior High School
 - Senior High School
 - Specialty Vocational High School
 - Other:
8. [Multi.] Where are you currently based?
 - Metro Vancouver
 - in BC, outside of Metro Vancouver
 - in Canada, outside of BC
 - Other:
9. [Multi.] Have you volunteered with the “JETAABC Sempai Program” before?
[Help text:] Please offer us any suggestions or comments about your experiences in the Comments box below.
 - Yes
 - No
10. [Para.] Comments:
11. [Multi.] May we keep your contact info on our Sempai Program database for subsequent years?
 - Yes.
 - No, ask me every year.



All questions are set as “required questions” except for the Comments box.

#6 will help with the volunteer selection when there are multiple candidates for a match. The more recent alum should receive priority for the match. #11 is very important, as it offers peace of mind for any volunteer who is interested, but may not be ready to commit long-term in the Program.

3

Promote the link to the sign-up form through all available communications channels to your chapter membership. Data collection continues through to the end of the Program period to maximize the volunteer pool.

The data received from the Google Form can be output into a spreadsheet file by going to **File > Download as...**

The resulting spreadsheet will look similar to the one listed below. We suggest adding a column titled “Matches” to keep track of how many JETs a Sempai has been matched to.

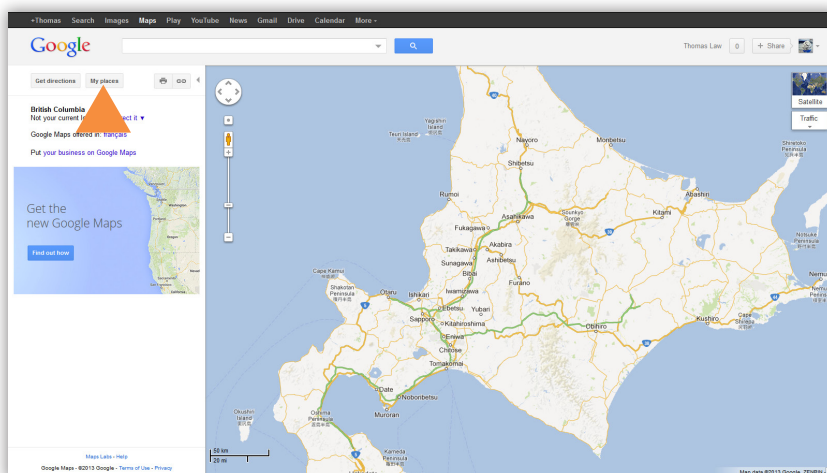
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Matches	Full Name	Contact Email	JET Placement	JET Placement	Type of JET	Years on JET (eg. 2000-2003 & 2010-2011)	What did you teach	Where are you	Did you volunteer with the	Comments
1			Okayama	Niimi-shi & Rumoi	ALT	2000-2003 & 2010-	Kindergarten, Junior High	Japan	Yes	I was on the JET Programme fr
2			Nagasaki	Tsushima	ALT	2008-2011	Elementary School	Moving to	Yes	
3			Mie-ken	Owase-shi	ALT	1997-2000	Junior High School	in BC, outside of	No	
4			Fukushima	Samegawa Village	ALT	2009-2012	Elementary School	Metro Vancouver	No	I lived in Fukushima previously
5			Hyogo	Aioi	ALT	2009-2012	Junior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
6	1		Nagasaki	Nagasaki City	ALT	2008-2010	Elementary School	Metro Vancouver	Yes	
7			Iwate	Senmaya	ALT	1997-2001	Kindergarten	Metro Vancouver	No	
8	1		Saga	Karatsu	ALT	2003-2005	Junior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
9	1		Okayama	Setouchi City	ALT	2002 - 2005	Kindergarten	in BC, outside of	No	I travelled all reaches if Japan e
10			Hokkaido	Ishikari	ALT	2002-2005	Elementary School	in BC, outside of	Yes	Great. This year, I will be unac
11	1		Mie	Kameyama	ALT		2	Elementary School	in BC, outside of	
12			Gunma	Kanra-machi	ALT	2005-2007	Kindergarten	Metro Vancouver	No	
13			Fukushima	Koriyama	ALT	2008-2011	Junior High School	Metro Vancouver	Yes	
14			Hyogo	Kobe	ALT	2010-2012	Kindergarten	Metro Vancouver	No	
15			Shizuoka	Izu city	ALT	2002-2004	Junior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
16	1		Fukui	Fukui	ALT	2001-2007	Kindergarten	Metro Vancouver	Yes	
17			Hiroshima	Miyoshi	ALT	2002 - 2005	Elementary School	Metro Vancouver	No	
18			Kyoto	Yosano	CIR	2004-2006		Metro Vancouver	No	
19			Miyagi	Sendai city	ALT	2010-2012	Junior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
20			Mie	Taki	ALT	2006-2010	Senior High School	Hainan, China	No	My base school was in Taki, b
21			Saitama	Seio	ALT	2004-2006	Senior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	glad to help however i can
22			Shizuoka	Makinohara City	ALT	2005-2006	Senior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
23			Kumamoto	Kumamoto	ALT	2009-2012	Elementary School	Metro Vancouver	No	
24			saitama	kasukabe	ALT	2007-2008	Senior High School	Metro Vancouver	Yes	
25			Saitama	Okegawa	ALT	1988-1991	Senior High School	Metro Vancouver	No	
26			Ehime	Matsuyama	ALT	2003-2006	Kindergarten	Metro Vancouver	Yes	I did volunteer but never heard fr
27			Osaka-fu	Matsubara-shi	ALT	2002-2004	Elementary School	Metro Vancouver	No	

4 The spreadsheet mentioned in Step 3 is all that we are collecting from alumni volunteers. From the Consulate JET Coordination staff — due to privacy concerns — you will receive a simple spreadsheet with only two columns: one for placement city, and one for current city.

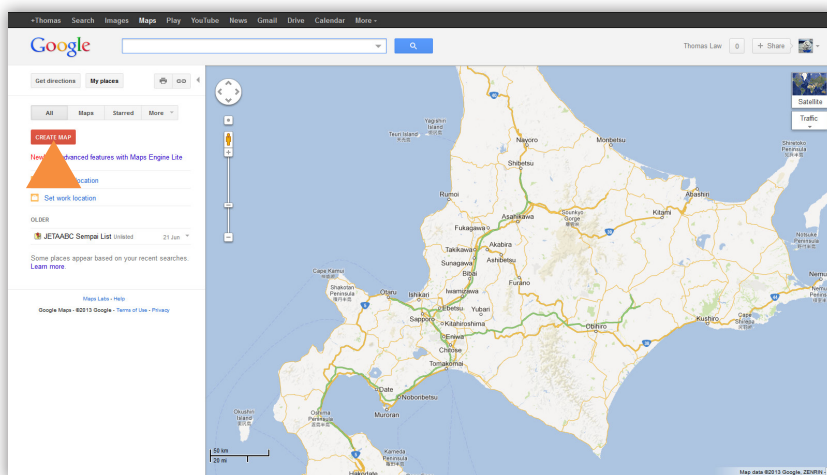
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Place	Location in Canada	JETAABC Member	Alum Placement	Contact Email	Alum Confirmed				
2	Shinshinotsu-mura, Hokkaido	LM								
3	Sendai-shi	LM								
4	Iwamizawa-shi, Hokkaido	LM								
5	Iwate-ken	Victoria								
6	Annaka-shi, Gunma-ken	LM								
7	Kumamoto-shi	LM								
8	Takayama-shi, Gifu-ken	Victoria								
9	Shimonoseki-shi, Yamaguchi-ken	Victoria								
10	Annaka-shi, Gunma-ken	Victoria								

5 **Plotting the Data.** With every new entry that comes in on either spreadsheet, plot the location onto the same custom map in Google Maps.

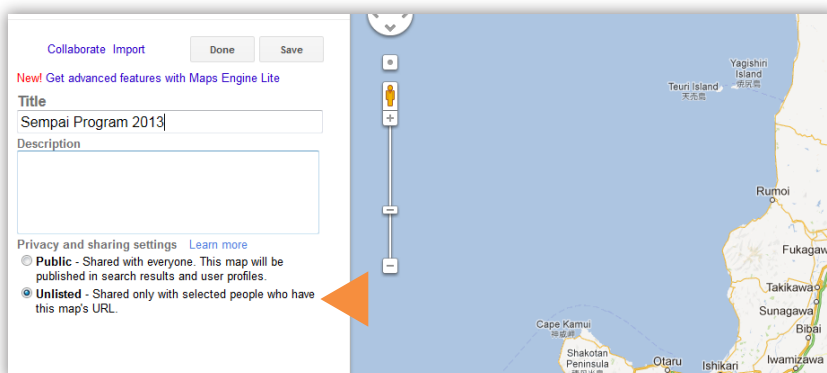
5A To create a custom map, click **My places** in Google Maps.



5B And then choose **Create Map**. Any map you make will be stored in this sidebar as well.



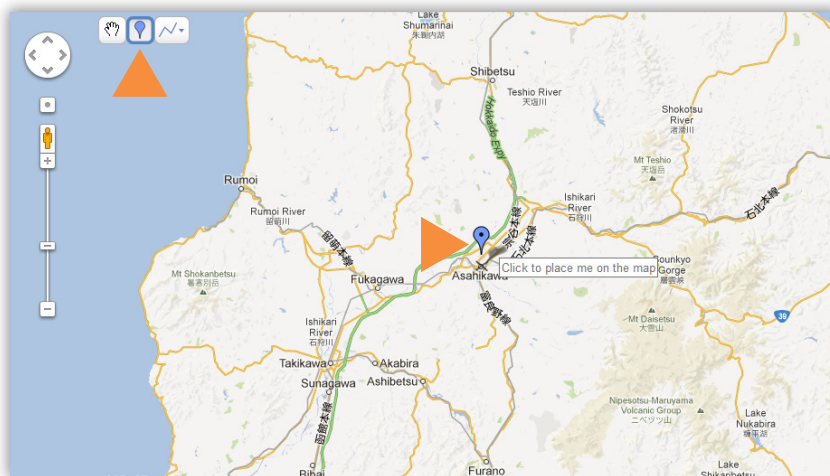
5C Enter a title for the custom map. Make sure to mark this map as “Unlisted”. This should not be a shared map.



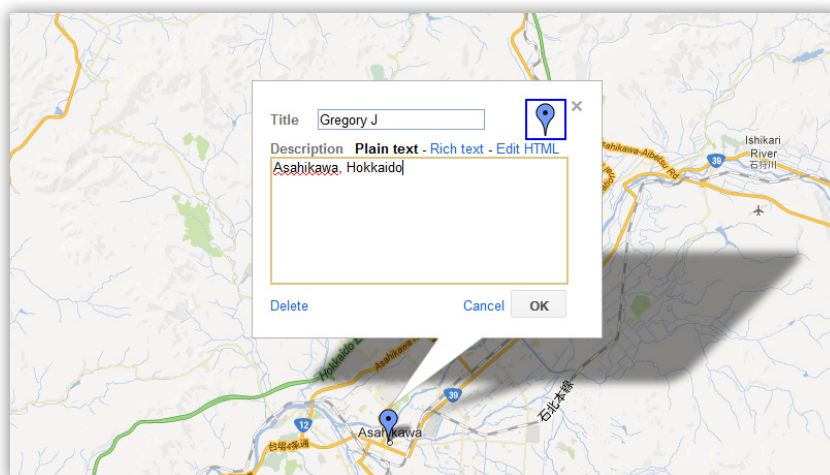
5
D

To place a pin, choose the Pin tool, and simply click on the city.

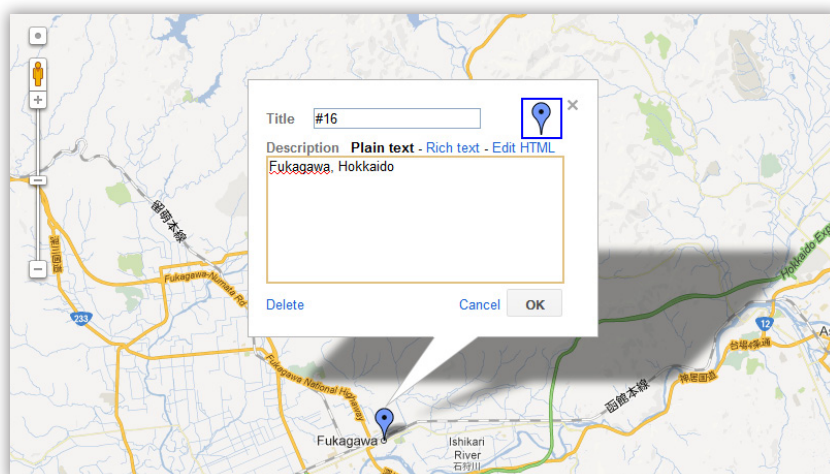
Note: the more you zoom out, the closer nearby pins group together, especially when you have two people in the same city.

5
E

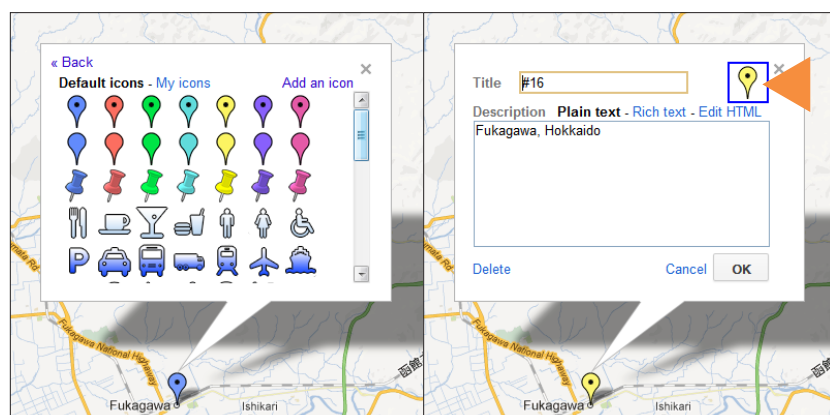
Once the pin is set, mark the pin with the first name and initial (try to make them identifiable only to you), and mark the city and prefecture in the description box.

5
F

When setting the pin for a new JET, you will not have access to a name. The number we marked for this JET is the row number in the Consulate spreadsheet.

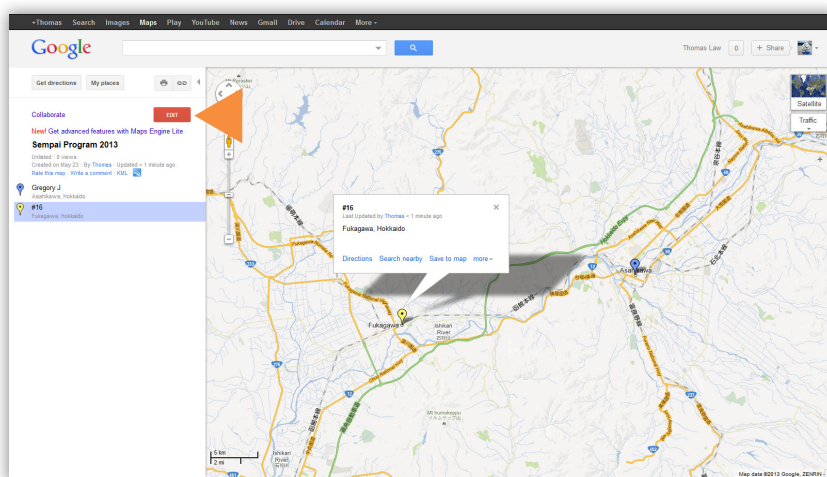
5
G

To change the appearance of the pins, click on the pin icon.



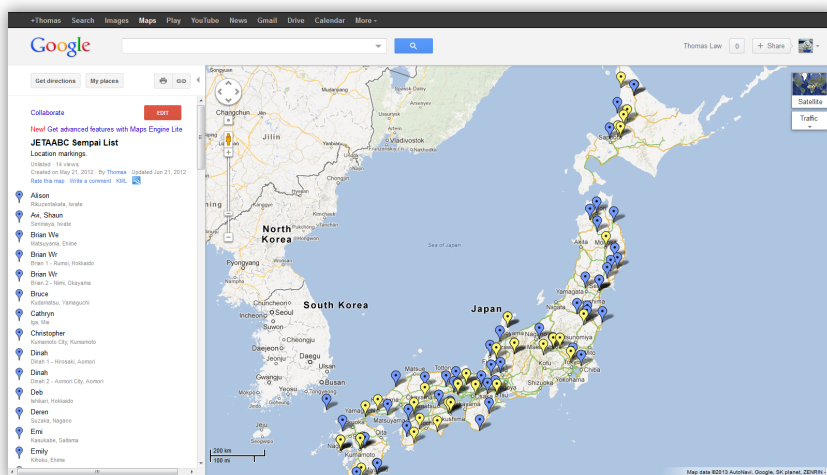
5
H

Click “Done” or “Save” in the left sidebar when the plotting is complete. To continue plotting a map, click **Edit**.



6

A completed map looks like this. From here on out, it is simply a matter of going through the Consulate spreadsheet, zooming in on the new JET's location, and finding the Sempai who is closest.



7

Once a match has been found, the Sempai Program Coordinator contacts the Sempai to confirm his/her participation, and the Sempai's email address will be added to the Consulate spreadsheet. After a large amount of matches have been made, the spreadsheet is sent to the JET Coordinator so the email addresses can be forwarded to the new JET. The Sempai Program Coordinator does not contact the new JET directly. The Sempai does not receive the new JET's email address either. The ball is completely in the new JET's court to contact the Sempai. (If the Consulate allows access to the new JETs' emails, then this procedure can be streamlined.)

A letter of introduction was produced by JETAABC for the Consulate to send to the new JETs as well, so they can have a better understanding of the Sempai Program.

This completes the Sempai Program matching process. Sempai Program Coordinators are encourage to send a Google Form survey out to both new JET and Sempai participants in mid-September to gather suggestions and comments about the Program.

CONGRATS!

FROM

Hello, I'm Thomas. I'm one of many JET alumni from the JET Alumni Association of BC and Yukon (JETAABC) who are working hard to help make your pre-departure preparations as easy and stress-free as we can. First of all, congratulations on making it to this stage of the JET Programme! To those who still don't have a placement city looked in yet, I imagine it's pretty nerve-wracking, but hang in there!

This year you have all signed up for a new JETAABC pilot program we're running called the "JETAABC Sempai List". It's pretty simple, really. Here's how it works:

- 1 So you get the notice from the Consulate telling you where you're being assigned, and you look at that city name and you can barely pronounce it, let alone know where it is.
- 2 A strange mixture of panic and excitement ensues.
- 3 Because you signed up for the Sempai List, you've already been matched with a JET alum who lived in your destination city's region before.* Instead of scouring the internet or random forums scraggling together bits of info about your new city, you can simply email your Sempai and ask him/her anything about the region. Chances are, your Sempai had the same questions when he/she was in your shoes. Better yet, he/she now also has the answer.

- 4 In the Sempai List program, you're the boss. Yes, you! The amount of interaction you have with your Sempai is entirely up to you. He/She is volunteering his/her time purely to help make your life easier. How often, where, and when you discuss your questions is entirely up to you two to decide.

*Remember, the JET Programme is a job. Official training will occur at the Pre-Departure Seminar this month, at the Tokyo Orientation, and again at the Prefecture Orientation. Your Sempai can offer you their advice on how things were when they were a JET, but times change, their advice and opinions should only be taken as just that. Very soon, you will be contacted by your direct predecessor, with maybe different and definitely more updated information. The Sempai List program is a supplement to your official training. For better accuracy of information, ask your Sempai about things that aren't dependent on staff/administration changes. Your Sempais may not know who teachers of your school anymore, but they can probably tell you where the doctor is, where you can buy groceries, how to pack for the weather, etc. They can help you figure out the "life" stuff so you can ask the tough questions of the Orientation or to your direct predecessor.

If you have any questions about the JETAABC Sempai List, or if something isn't working out with your Sempai and you'd like to try meeting another one, please let me know at tomdelaney@jetaabc.ca. We can figure something out. On behalf of JETAABC, congratulations again, and we look forward to meeting you at the Seminar.

Lessons Learned

Through the pilot “Sempai List” project run by JETAABC in 2012, many lessons were learned:

Dealing with Poor Distribution

After receiving the new JETs list from the Consulate, sometimes we find there aren't any Sempais close by a new JET's placement city. We found that collecting the locations of all of these unmatched JETs, and broadcasting them in all of our communications channels created a new wave of Sempai volunteers. When an alum sees his/her city listed as requiring expertise, he/she often steps up.

When there really isn't a match in sight, a last resort is to tap into the chapter membership list and seek volunteers from alumni that used to live in the region. It is not a recommended alternative, however. Do try to assign the next closest Sempai. Even if they are not from the same region, their advice is still helpful.

There are also situations when we had groups “clumped” together. In the picture above of Tohoku, we had one new JET [yellow pin], surrounded by 8 Sempai volunteers [blue pins]. In this case we assign the Sempai who has the closest proximity and/or who has most recently returned.

The reverse also occurs, when there is only one Sempai volunteer for an area with multiple new JETs, and the next Sempai is a great distance away. We try to cap the number of new JETs matched to a Sempai at 5 matches to one volunteer (even with their permission).

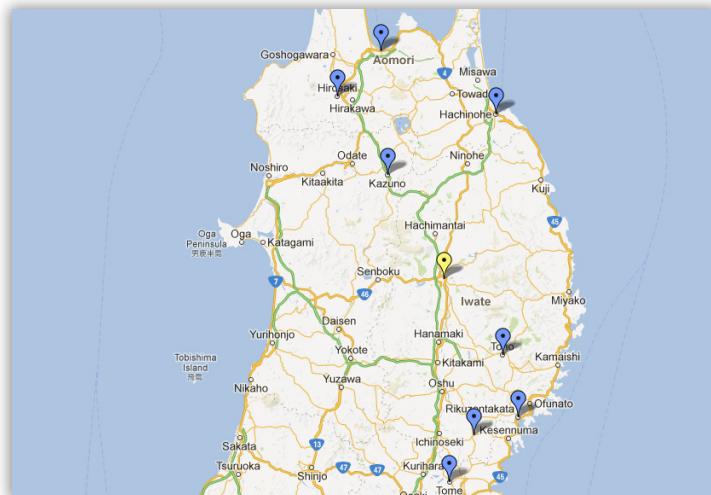
In the picture below of Shikoku, the new JETs are in the south, separated by a mountain range from the Sempais in the north (and even then, they are very far apart). In these cases we can only match them with the closest Sempai by distance.

Timeliness

The Consulate JET Coordinators should be encouraged to release the list of new JETs to the Sempai Program Coordinator as soon as notification letters are sent out. Ideally, a message informing the new JET about the Sempai Program can be placed inside the acceptance letter, but that is the prerogative of the JET Coordinator. This also means the Sempai Program Coordinator needs to have a majority of volunteers lined up and ready to go as well.

Using Google Forms

In the pilot project, interested volunteers were asked to email the Sempai List Coordinator with their information. The information they sent was rarely complete, and results in a large amount of back-and-forth emails. Please use electronic forms.



Existing Problems

Despite a successful pilot run, there are a few problems in addition to the hurdles listed in the previous page that we expect to deal with in the future:

Participation

We've received news that not all Sempais were contacted by their new JET match, and in addition, not all Sempais reply to their emails in time (or at all). There is not much that we can do about this. In the run up to departure, the new JETs are very busy, and in the end not all of them need the help they thought they would be needing. However, for the sake of good manners, we suggest reminding the new JETs at the official Pre-Departure Orientation to at least email and say hello to their matched Sempais.

Overzealousness

Some Sempai volunteers are *too* excited. They may want to talk about everything that occurs throughout the whole year in the placement city. We suggest repeatedly reminding all volunteers who sign up that there is a chance they will not be matched with a new JET. This needs to be emphasized repeatedly to temper expectations and to retain them for their participation next year. We want them to volunteer again even if they end up disappointed this year.

We Are Not the Concierge

Some new JETs ask about wanting "official information" about their towns earlier. They need to be reminded that that is the job of the Contracting Organization, and that the Sempai Program is only a casual avenue for advice and preparation.