

# Vision for the New National Archives of Japan

KAMATA Kaoru  
President  
National Archives of Japan

## Introduction

The National Archives of Japan (hereinafter referred to as “NAJ”) will open a new headquarters building and make a transition to a three-building system in spring, 2030. Taking this opportunity, NAJ is determined to establish itself as a core institution for the management of public records and archives, the “Center for Archives” in Japan. To become an entity that is appropriate for this future vision, NAJ is making an endeavor for dynamic organizational development. Fortunately, in FY2024, NAJ was able to increase its full number of personnel by 20 and received an exceptional budget increase. However, this is literally the first step. To further make vigorous progress towards realizing the ideal, it is necessary for the entire NAJ to build momentum to achieve the vision and to gain broader understanding from society.

## 1 The Role of NAJ

Since its establishment in 1971, NAJ has been engaged in preserving “specified historical public records and archives” and making them available to the public (see Article 4 of the National Archives of Japan Act). The Public Records and Archives Management Act (Act No. 66 of 2009; hereinafter referred to as “PRAMA”) clearly underlines the social significance of NAJ in making these records and archives accessible to the public. PRAMA stipulates that public records and archives are intellectual resources to be shared by the people, supporting the foundation of a sound democracy, and should be used by the sovereign people on their own initiative. In light of PRAMA, the services of NAJ are acknowledged as contributing not only to the proper and efficient administration of government but also to the fulfillment of its accountability to the people of present and future generations.

## 2 Vision for the New NAJ

Considering the above-mentioned role expected of NAJ, we believe that various reforms should be implemented in conjunction with the opening of the new building, particularly with the aim of making NAJ more useful and accessible to society. Our efforts should focus on improving services for three groups of stakeholders: current and future citizens;

administrative organs; and local public archives as well as other relevant institutions both within Japan and abroad. NAJ will strive to achieve the goals outlined below and will continue to seek input from a wide range of experts and relevant stakeholders to further enhance its usability and accessibility.

## **2.1 Relationship with the public**

### **2.1.1 Expansion of the range of holdings**

In recent years, “criminal reference records,” which are excluded from the application of PRAMA under the provision “otherwise provided for by other Acts or orders based thereon” (PRAMA, Article 3), are gradually transferred to NAJ. Likewise, it has been decided that Official Gazettes, which are excluded from the scope of administrative records under Article 2, paragraph (4), item (i) of PRAMA, will be also transferred to NAJ following the enactment of the Act on the Issuance of Official Gazettes (Act No. 85 of 2023).

In addition, to enhance usability of NAJ, we will collect private materials that can supplement our holdings. This includes further encouraging and promoting the donation and deposit of diaries and other materials from Prime Ministers and other key figures involved in policymaking, based on systematic and organized research. Such an initiative was recommended in the “Basic Concept for the Functions and Facilities of the National Archives of Japan” compiled by the Investigation and Review Conference on the Functions and Facilities of the National Archives of Japan on March 31, 2008. Moreover, we will contribute to discussions on expanding the scope of case records and other judicial files to be transferred to NAJ.

Furthermore, we recognize the need to examine the applicability to accept records, such as family registers and real estate registers, which are widely used in some countries but are exempt from PRAMA in Japan. We are aware that this review involves a range of challenges including the development of appropriate systems and facilities. Another topic within our scope of consideration is determining whether it is appropriate and feasible to accept legislative records, including those related to legislations proposed by Diet members.

### **2.1.2 Efforts to promote the utilization of holdings**

NAJ will develop an environment where anyone can easily access and utilize our holdings. This will be achieved by improving searchability and user-friendliness through digital

technologies, as well as by enhancing public engagement through exhibitions, educational assistance, training programs, and other outreach activities. To this end, NAJ will promote the digitization of paper-based materials; strengthen its reference support services; expand the NAJ Digital Archive, and actively contribute to educational initiatives. These include the development of learning programs and public awareness activities to increase familiarity with public records, archives management systems, and archival institutions.

Through these efforts, we hope to encourage the public to view the public records and archives management system as something that concerns themselves, and to promote greater utilization of these records.

## **2.2 Relationship with administrative organs**

It goes without saying that the effective use of public records and archives depends on their appropriate management and transfer by the administrative organs and other organizations that created them. However, as it has been pointed out that the principles of PRAMA have not yet been fully embedded in practice in Japan, NAJ recognizes the need to further strengthen its role in providing guidance, advice, and support to administrative organs at each stage of creation, arrangement, preservation, transfer, and destruction of public records and archives.

Furthermore, when applying or proposing revisions to laws and regulations, it is necessary to carefully examine the deliberations that occurred during their formulation. The public records and archives documenting such processes retain the same value as current administrative records, even after they are transferred to NAJ. Therefore, NAJ plays a critical role in supporting the proper and efficient management of ongoing administrative operations.

## **2.3 Relationships with other organizations in Japan and abroad**

As a specialized organization for public records and archives management, and as the “Center for Archives,” NAJ should also play a leading role in raising the standard of public records management nationwide. To this end, it is desirable to strengthen cooperation and collaboration, not only with administrative organs and other state organs, but also with local governments, as well as with archives and related institutions both in Japan and abroad. Through such cooperation and collaboration, NAJ is expected to play a key role in sharing information on various issues related to public records management and

archives, and in providing support for records management to peer institutions throughout Japan. To ensure that these efforts are effective and reliable, a research and study center, or the “Archives Think Tank,” will be established within NAJ. This center will conduct basic research on both theoretical and practical aspects of public records management and archival operations. It will also study mid- to long-term issues in archives, drawing on advanced cases in Japan and abroad. The results of this research will be reflected in NAJ’s various initiatives in the form of recommendations and support programs.

### **3 Future Outlook**

As mentioned above, the mission of NAJ is to enable the public to evaluate and verify the various activities of the government and related organizations by ensuring that public records and archives are accessible to both present and future generations. Following regulatory reforms, Japanese society has shifted to a freely competitive society, often described by the motto “from ex-ante regulation to ex-post judicial remedies.” This transition has led to a greater demand for administrative transparency and ex-post verification than before, thus heightening the importance of proper public records and archives management. Also as mentioned above, no policy, nor the laws and regulations underpinning it, can be properly implemented or reformed without a thorough examination of the policy formulation process; what data was used to identify the issues, what policy objectives were set, and what methods were chosen to achieve those objectives. This way of approach aligns with the principles of Evidence Based Policy Making, EBPM, which would elevate the importance of the records which account for the policy-making process, including negative data, ever more. It is therefore essential to consider and implement methods of public records and archives management that are suited to these developments.

Another essential factor in the proper implementation of the public records and archives management system is the development of human resources with specialized knowledge. From this perspective, NAJ launched a certification program for archivists in FY2020. By March 2024, a total of 323 individuals had been certified as Archivists by NAJ. In FY2024, the program was expanded with the introduction of a new certification category, Associate Archivists. As of June 2024, 176 individuals had been certified under this new category. In this way, NAJ has contributed to expanding the foundation for professional human resource development in this field. To make the most of these professionals’ expertise in critically important matters, it is necessary for NAJ to create an environment in which

archivists can demonstrate their capabilities to the fullest. This includes conducting in-depth examinations and offering expert recommendations on key issues related to the development of infrastructure and operations of public records and archives management. To this end, it is necessary to streamline operations through the use of state-of-the-art technology, along with the appropriate allocation of human resources.

While the scope of records to be transferred to NAJ and the functions expected of it are continuing to expand, there is an increasing need to consider, from a broad and long-term perspective, whether fundamental revisions to NAJ's organizational structure and legal authority are necessary. The opening of the new building presents a rare and significant opportunity for fundamental reform, as it necessitates certain institutional changes. With a sense of urgency, recognizing that how we make the most of this opportunity will shape the future of NAJ for decades to come, we are firmly committed to turning our vision into concrete action.

[This English text is a translation of an article published in *Archives*, No. 93, dated August 29, 2024.]