

## Roundtable Discussion



# Contributing to development of the local economy and society by supporting entrepreneurs who aspire to solve social issues

Nara prefecture ranks 40th in Japan in the number of private-sector business establishments with approximately 47,000, and its out-of-prefecture employment percentage is third highest in Japan, indicating an outflow of labor talent to neighboring cities. The percentage of small businesses is higher than the national average, moreover, and the number of listed companies is only 7, which is too few to promote satisfactory economic expansion and corporate growth.

Under these circumstances, the Nanto Bank Group perceives a need to expand our business by supporting new business ventures as a means of realizing regional development, a basic tenet of the Nanto Mission.

Nanto Capital Partners, a Nanto Bank Group member company, discovers and supports startups that are dedicated to solving regional issues in accordance with its mission of “bringing new value to Nara through investment.” More than just an investment company, however, it also serves as a hub connecting entrepreneurs with local businesses.

The Nanto Bank Group is directing particular efforts this fiscal year to fostering entrepreneurs who aspire to solving local social issues. In February 2024, Nanto Bank and Nanto Capital Partners launched the joint “Yamato Social Impact Acceleration Program” (details on page 43). Through this initiative, we are generating and supporting entrepreneurs from Nara and elsewhere in Japan who are ready to take on new challenges.

In the roundtable discussion presented here, Atsuyuki Sakai, President of Nanto Capital Partners, and representatives of four companies selected in the 10th “Nanto Success Road” startup campaign discussed regional economic revitalization and collaboration with startups.



IKETEL, Co., Ltd.  
President and Representative Director  
**Eisuke Matsumoto**

Mashichoi Co., Ltd.  
Representative Director  
**Fumiko Takemoto**

Nanto Capital Partners Co., Ltd.  
President and Representative Director  
**Atsuyuki Sakai**

Tale Navi Co., Ltd.  
Director/Founder  
**Shohei Oniki**

RelyonTrip Co., Ltd.  
Representative Director and CEO  
**Akihito Nishimura**

Established 2021  
Head office: Kita-ku, Osaka  
Engages in product development for the manufacturing industry and cloud development to support DX.

Established 2022  
Head office: Heguri-cho, Ikoma-gun, Nara Prefecture  
The company develops and sells safe, secure nutrition beverages that even babies can enjoy.

Established 2023  
Headquarters: Nara City  
Founded to solve problems facing tourism in Nara, Tale Navi engages in planning of proposal tourism and café management.

Established 2019  
Headquarters: Yodogawa-ku, Osaka City  
RelyonTrip develops and operates tourism and dining apps for regional revitalization.

## Why did you decide to help tackle Nara prefecture's issues?

**Sakai:** Although Nara prefecture's business start-up rate is higher than the national average, there is room for further improvement. There are only seven listed companies in Nara prefecture, moreover, too few to adequately support expansion of the local economy and corporate growth in the region. Against this backdrop, the Nanto Bank Group is, as a regional financial institution, in a position to support new business formation and help new businesses grow.

We are implementing an acceleration program for selected entrepreneurs who are committed to solving social issues in the Yamato region.\* We invite you to share your own motivations and ideas with us.

\*Nara prefecture and its surrounding regions



**Matsumoto:** I started my business in 2021 because I believed, based on my experience in Japan and around the world, that ongoing major changes in Japan's social conditions were making various regional and social issues increasingly apparent and eroding our affluent lifestyle. At first, I thought that increasing the number of people who were continuously involved in the community would lead to its revitalization, but I soon learned that it is also essential to strengthen our local industries and consolidate people, money, and information. It occurred to me that changing Japan's manufacturing industry, in particular, which accounts for about 20% of its GDP, would be the quickest way to accomplish this, and I am now developing and providing specialized cloud services for product development work in the manufacturing industry.

Another reason why I am tackling local issues in Nara prefecture is that Nara is a prefecture with many standard values from a national perspective. Measured in terms of industrial structure, the percentage occupied by the manufacturing industry equals the national average, and the population and geography are also around the median among Japanese prefectures. I consequently believe that if we create a successful model in Nara, we will be able to replicate its operations in other regions.



**Takemoto:** I have long considered women's employment conditions in Nara Prefecture, where the rate of female employment is the lowest in Japan, to be a major issue. I have the good fortune to live in Nara. In my experience, several women around me who were highly motivated to work have given up their dreams when confronted with the prospect of balancing work and child-rearing, since most jobs of the kind they wanted were in Osaka and the commute would have been too time-consuming. This led me to establish a company in 2022 to develop and market a safe, reliable vegetable-based nutrition beverage that even babies can enjoy. I hope we can contribute to solving the employment issues by letting everyone in Nara know that mothers can also start their own businesses while raising children.

**Oniki:** I'm working to improve the quality of Nara's tourism industry with the aim of solving such problems as the high number of tourists relative to spending on tourism. This is a difficult challenge that many people have tackled in the past, but my approach will be to start by finding solutions that are deeply rooted in Nara prefecture's rich history and culture. Among specific examples, I established a company in 2023 to plan proposal-based tourism and manage a café. I want to use the knowledge and network I have acquired through this program to make more people aware of Nara prefecture's tourism resources and promote sustainable tourism.

**Nishimura:** The need to find appropriate ways to respond to inbound tourism and increase tourism consumption represents a particularly pressing challenge for Nara's tourism industry. We believe we can help overcome it by proposing comprehensive solutions that leverage technologies, such as provision of multilingual digital maps and various food maps through our SASSY app, as well as by introducing a digital donation system.



## The biggest change that occurred after participating in the Acceleration Program.

**Sakai:** Entrepreneurs often find themselves in a solitary position, and they sometimes require appropriate feedback and advice from third parties. The program's staff members act as mentors who advise entrepreneurs on growing their businesses in a short period of time. This involves working with them through regular meetings and dialogues to examine and scrutinize their business ideas and new businesses on a hands-on, two-on-one basis. Since this was our first initiative, we'd like to hear your honest opinions of it. What kind of changes have you experienced through the program?

**Matsumoto:** In our planning and development of products to solve community-specific issues with digital technology, we thought it important to understand the specific needs and challenges of the people who would be using the products. My mentor at Nanto Capital Partners introduced me to a manufacturer who is a business partner of your bank, and the ensuing very meaningful communication led to a concrete path to solving the issues and verifying our hypothetical challenges.

Business  
modelStrategies  
and resources  
allocation

Performance

In terms of my own skills, it was a big change to be able to transform the ideas I had in my mind into a story that can effectively communicate to others, and then incorporate them into presentation materials. I have also become able to structure and articulate these ideas using tools like logic models.

My mentor was especially helpful in providing consultation and feedback when I got stuck, and I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to work on this program as if we were colleagues in the same company and in the same boat.

**Takemoto:** In the past, I often felt isolated and anxious about operating a business while raising children. Participation in this program has given me the knowledge and skills I need to solve problems, and the connections it made possible with entrepreneurs have enabled me to take a bird's-eye view of conditions and employ backcasting to consider the best available approaches from a long-term impact perspective.

I had originally chosen to participate in this program in hopes that it would help me to understand the actual issues and needs of the Yamato region and to provide more effective solutions, but I was also reminded how important it is to receive informed third-party advice and to work with local businesses. People like me who are working and raising children at the same time need the support of the local community to make it easier. I encourage others who share my concerns to take the first step by joining the program.



**Oniki:** Participating in this program not only enabled me to receive advice and support for my business, but it also gave me an opportunity to make contacts with other businesses in tourism-related fields, thus giving me a better perspective and increasing my motivation. I began my business with the idea of providing places for visitors to extend their stays in response to the problem of short stays in Nara, but I'm now equipped to consider various business models from different perspectives. As regards the new business models I am considering, it is easy to validate them in an environment such as Nara, which attracts large numbers of tourists. By quickly repeating this cycle, we aim to take up the challenge of launching a new tourism model from Nara.



**Nishimura:** My participation in the program has given me a more strategic perspective on our business and enabled me to reaffirm the importance of working quickly. I was also able to develop a clear vision of how my company's services can contribute to solving specific issues in Nara Prefecture. The opportunity the program provided to learn about the initiatives of other businesses we would never have been able to contact on our own and to make actual contact with them helped us to recognize our own strengths from a bird's-eye perspective and to consider how best to make the most of them.

**Sakai:** Listening to all of you, I am reassured of the positive impact this program will have on the community. Besides supporting new business startups, we need to introduce initiatives to grow their businesses, and we would like to continue to work together with you to solve local issues. We will share the knowledge of challenges and successes we acquire through this program, not only with others in our Company, but also within the Group, in order to increase the number of employees who can nurture and expand as many businesses as possible, and to prepare the Group as a whole to work in unison to revitalize our regional economy.

### [Acceleration Program Overview]

The Nanto Success Road Business Plan Commercialization Support Project has established a Startup Category in cooperation with the Yamato Social Impact Investment Limited Partnership for the 10th edition of the program. Among efforts to nurture entrepreneurs, the Yamato Social Impact Acceleration Program has been held since February 2024 to support impact-oriented entrepreneurs who engage in businesses aimed at solving social issues in the Yamato region.

In addition to lectures to communicate the knowledge and skills necessary to solve social issues in the Yamato region as defined in the Yamato Regional Issue Design Map, this program included a two-day overnight camp in Nara prefecture. In April, in addition to attending the regular lectures, the participants toured Nara's temples and shrines, listened to Dharma talks, and stayed overnight at a lodge to deepen their understanding of the history and culture of the Yamato region, as well as to connect with other entrepreneurs.



### [Companies selected in 10th Nanto Success Road Startup Division's Acceleration Program]

The business activities of the selected companies are as follows:

Tale Navi Inc.	Inbound tourism business (planning and providing land-based tourism with the mission of converting "tourists" to an "interrelated population")
mashichoi Co., Ltd.	Aojiru health beverage planning and sales (delivering Aojiru, a nutrition beverage born of concern for babies' dietary needs, to mothers with the same concerns)
RelyonTrip Inc.	Development and operation of tourism-related apps (revitalization of the Yamato region using the SASSY tourism and dining app)
IKETEL Co., Ltd.	DX support for manufacturing companies (revitalization of the Yamato region using the "Raction" cloud-based product development support system)