ENGLISH CONVERSATION MARATHONS (EIKAIWA SHIMIN MARATHONS)
Introduction

■ Citizens' Marathons (Shimin Marathon) in Japan

Many "running" SHIMIN MARATHONS are already held in Japan.
One such event is the "Hida Takayama Ultra Marathon," which started in 2012.

Hida Takayama Ultra Marathon

http://www.r-wellness.com/takayama/2014/

The above photo gives a strong impression of beautiful Hida-Takayama, also known as "Little Kyoto" to the eyes of beholder. Likewise, the Eikaiwa Shimin Marathon will be remembered in association with the positive image of local hosting communities.

The picture below is from the Senshu International City Marathon, organized by a bank in Osaka with the support of over ten local governments.

Senshu International City Marathon ｜ Ikeda Senshu Bank
http://www.sihd-bk.jp/news/130219_01.html

As in this example, it is possible to seek for support from more than one municipality.

Currently, there are over 100 full marathon and shorter distance running events held annually in Japan.

List of marathon events and tours in Japan during the 2014-2015 season

http://marathontour.info/kokunai.html

■　About English Conversation Marathon (ECM)

《Our Goal》

We aim to create venues to USE English for people in Japan. This is a significant and meaningful goal since they study the language for years, but rarely get to actually use it and build confidence doing so.

At ECMs, participants build and train their muscles, brains and mentality for speaking English. Our goal is to make ECMs annual events held at various communities in Japan.

With ECMs, we will promote a positive image of people using English throughout the country rather than shying away from it. Thus, we will empower the nation to feel more natural and confident using the language without feeling the "Eigo konpurekkusu" (inferiority complex surrounding English).

《Overview of English Conversation Marathon》

1. Participants keep speaking English for two hours or more, as in running marathons.
This is conducted through a multi-stage format, in which participants can enjoy the race without getting too exhausted. Unlike in real marathons, beginners finish sooner than experienced participants, who will proceed to more advanced stages. The entire event takes about three hours.

2. Overview of Planning ECMs
First, we will create a detailed guidebook with help from you, the volunteer committee members. Then, we will find sponsoring organizations such as local governments, schools and businesses in your communities to implement small-scale ECMs. As we become more experienced, we will scale up the events.

Our goal is to gradually expand our network and have ECMs held in three to five communities by 2020.

Our first step is to successfully implement small-scale ECMs. The next step will be to establish the methodology for organizing larger-scale ECMs based on the small-scale successes. Also, we will increase the ECMs' recognition in Japan.

3. Like Running Marathons…
(1) ECMs are non-profit events.
(2) ECMs receive support from organizations, e.g., local governments, schools and businesses.
(3) ECMs are open events.
There are already English-speaking events in closed groups, but ECMs welcome anyone to join and promote public awareness.

■ Core Concept of ECM

Steve Soresi has been conducting this type of activity in various forms for college classes, corporate events and adult classes.

The main activity is a conversation circle with communication in pairs. The pairing is shifted many times with a very short time interval. One pair speaking too long does not work well. Also, groups of more than two do not work either due to various factors.

★ The best format based on the past experiences is:
➢ Two people,
➢ with clear speaking roles,
➢ communicating within a short time limit, and
➢ switching pairs.

Additionally, in order to make sure beginners can participate, we:
1. use a sentence count or word count for clear production standards, and
2. set the speech topic so that participants can speak more easily.

Here, details are omitted for clarity, but it is important that all members believe that people in Japan can eventually be able to speak English when given the proper opportunity.

Thus, the content of the English conversation during ECMs is not determined by a textbook or syllabus. This marathon project will also show that "free talk" at a very basic level can be done by beginners. When they reach their performance limit, they will finish the race, but they will make a progress to a certain point.

This well-defined format reduces nervousness and pressure among participants, and prevents an awkward silence. In other words, this format enables participation of people with wide range of English skills. All will be able to progress in this special format: pairwork, with clear roles and clear speaking as shown above. That is one of the main points of this activity – to allow even beginners a chance to take their first steps in USING English for real.

■ Alpha Version of ECM

1. Obtain support from organizations (e.g., local governments, schools and businesses) for a small- (or mid-) scale event.

2. Plan to invite from beginners to advanced participants of ages 16 and up.

3. The number of participants should be at least 30 and no more than 200.

4. The time required for one ECM event is:
    1 hour for staff preparation + **1 hour** for welcoming participants +
    2-3 hours for Eikaiwa Marathon + **1 hour** for clean-up = **6 hours**
    * For >200 participants, split the event into two days or increase the number of groups.

5. Grouping participants by (self-evaluated) skill level to facilitate beginner participation.

6. The races are done in tournament in each skill level/block; or
    in group-tournament with each group consisting of members from all skill levels.

■ Future Plans

We will organize ECMs every year, if possible, and keep records of achievement and improve our methodology and models.

Initial ECMs (Alpha version) will gradually evolve (Beta version), and will be conducted as annual events in many more communities.

■　To You, Volunteer Committee Members…

➢ Do you think you can start an ECM in your community?

Sponsoring organization： local governments, schools, businesses, etc.
Participants： 30 or more from one or more organization
Venue： place to conduct an ECM

➢ Which team are you interested in?

1. Public Relations Team
   Prepare presentation materials and find sponsoring organizations.
   Publicize ECM, and find ECM venues and staff in local communities.

2. Documentation Team
   Develop effective steps of organizing and conducting ECM's and compile
   implementation manuals.
   Update materials for different sponsoring organizations and communities.

3. Volunteer Membership Maintenance Team
   Maintain the volunteer directory.
   Communicate about meetings and progress, and expand the volunteer network.
   Establish preparatory committees in different communities in Japan.