

Irene Hirano Inouye

Lifetime Achievement Award



IRENE HIRANO INOUE is President of the U.S.-Japan Council (USJC), which administers the TOMODACHI initiative, a private-public partnership with the United States Embassy in Tokyo, with the support of the Japanese Government. TOMODACHI brings together the next generation of Japanese and American leaders through educational and cultural exchanges and leadership programs. The USJC's Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD), supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, draws together Japanese American leaders in business, culture, government, and academia with their counterparts in Japan. The program began through the Japanese American National Museum from 2002 to 2009 and has been organized by USJC since 2010 with 197 delegates to date that have taken the trip to Japan.

Hirano Inouye was the inaugural executive director of the Japanese American National Museum, later becoming its president and CEO. Hired in 1988, she guided the institution for 20 years during which she oversaw the museum's renovation of a former Buddhist temple in Little Tokyo as its first headquarters in 1992 and the construction of the 85,000-square-foot Pavilion expansion in 1999. In 2005, JANM opened the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy, which included the newly-built 200-seat Tateuchi Democracy Forum. Under Hirano Inouye's leadership, the museum traveled exhibitions nationally and internationally; organized national conferences in Little Rock, Arkansas; Denver, Colorado; and Seattle, Washington; and hosted members of Japan's royal family and heads of state. During her tenure, the museum became an official affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and was accredited by the American Association of Museums.

A recipient of bachelor's and master's degrees in public administration from the University of Southern California, Hirano Inouye headed T.H.E. (To Help Everyone) Clinic prior to coming to JANM. She is currently a trustee and immediate past chair for the Ford Foundation; trustee and immediate past chair for the Kresge Foundation; trustee for the Washington Center; and vice chair for the Smithsonian Institution's Asian Pacific American Center. Hirano Inouye previously served as chair for the board of directors of the American Alliance of Museums and sat on the boards for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Museum of American History. She was married to the late United States Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawai'i, who passed away in 2012.