

# Sister Cities – Background – Mission, History, and More

## Mission

To promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation — one individual, one community at a time.

## History

Sister Cities International was created at President Eisenhower’s 1956 White House conference on citizen diplomacy. Eisenhower envisioned an organization that could be the hub of peace and prosperity by creating bonds between people from different cities around the world. By becoming friends, President Eisenhower reasoned that people of different cultures could celebrate and appreciate their differences, instead of deriding them, fostering suspicion and sowing new seeds for war.

Sister Cities International creates relationships based on cultural, educational, information and trade exchanges, creating lifelong friendships that provide prosperity and peace through person-to-person “citizen diplomacy.” Since then, Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and now President Barack Obama have served as the Honorary Chairman of Sister Cities International.

Since its inception, Sister Cities International has played a key role in renewing and strengthening important global relationships. Early partnerships included a trading relationship between Seattle, Washington and Tokyo, Japan, repairing post-WWII tensions by creating cultural and educational exchanges and, subsequently, lasting friendships. A 1974 study found that many early sister city relationships formed out of the post WWII aid programs to Western Europe. The relationships that endured, however, were based on cultural or educational reasons that developed lasting friendships. Sister Cities International improved diplomatic relationships at watershed moments over the past 50 years, including partnerships with China in the 1970s.

In the new millennium, Sister Cities International continues to expand its reach to new and emerging regions of the world. Today, it dedicates a special focus on areas with significant opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges, economic partnerships, and humanitarian assistance.

## About

Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States. This network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers in programs in 136 countries on six continents.

Sister Cities International helps advance peace and prosperity through cultural, educational, humanitarian, and economic development efforts, and serves as a hub for institutional knowledge and

best practices to benefit citizen diplomats. Sister Cities International empowers individual citizens to become diplomats and represent their community and their country in new and meaningful ways.

We also strive to strengthen the sister cities network through strategic institutional partnerships, grants, programs, and support for our members. We motivate and empower private citizens, municipal officials and business leaders to conduct long-term, mutually beneficial, sister city, county or state relationships.

### **What are Sister City Relationships**

A sister city, county or state relationship is a broad-based, officially approved, long-term partnership between two municipalities in two countries. A sister city, county or state relationship is officially recognized after the highest elected or appointed official from both communities sign off on an agreement.

A city may have anywhere from one to an unlimited number of sister cities, ranging from a half dozen members to hundreds of volunteers, and receive some support from the local government.

Sister city relationships offer the flexibility to allow connections to form between communities that are mutually beneficial and take on issues that are most relevant for the partners.

### **What is a Sister City Organization**

A sister city organization is a volunteer group of ordinary citizens who, with the support of their local elected officials, form long-term relationships with people and organizations in a city abroad. Each sister city organization is independent and pursues the activities and thematic areas that are important to them and their community including municipal, business, trade, educational and cultural exchanges with their sister city.

Sister city organizations promote peace through people-to-people relationships—with program offerings varying greatly from basic cultural exchange programs to shared research and development projects between cities with relationships.