



SCA FAQ 1 – Setting Up a Sister City Relationship

Who are SCA?

Before we start the Sister City relationship information, can we just give you a brief overview of what and who SCA is and how we may be able to assist. SCA is a member organisation of Shires and Councils across Australia that have sister city relationships both overseas and internally to Australia. Six people comprise the Executive and we fill these roles as volunteers. Unfortunately we don't have the resources to directly put cities in contact with each other, and you may be aware there are 549 local government areas in Australia and unfortunately the majority are not members of SCA so our reach is limited. We do, however, provide a quarterly newsletter that is sent to nearly all local governments so maybe that could be an avenue to either seek a sister city opportunity or network – more on that later in this document. We also, as the Executive, have many years of collective knowledge and experience that can assist answering questions and providing advice and support along the way.

Do Your Research First!

We will try to provide some advice on starting what should be an incredible journey with finding a potential sister city. In order to make a sister city relationship work there are a number of steps needed to be taken in order to ensure that it is sustainable. As every sister city relationship is unique we can't provide a formula to follow, just some ideas on things that need to be considered.

Sister City relationships are a Council-to-Council relationship that, after research and negotiation, is sealed by the mayors of both cities signing a document cementing that relationship.

Identify your goals*

To get the maximum benefit with limited time and resources it's best to identify which areas your city hopes to enhance through an active sister city program. The following is a list of some of the more common areas that sister city relationships concentrate on:

- **Best practice: improving capability.** *The exchange of new ideas and successful experiences with partner cities leading to a more vibrant Local Government Authority. This can also allow your city to avoid some consultancy expenses by learning directly from partners. Council would not have had free access to this information in the absence of its sister city program.*
- **Business development: supporting initiatives and opening doors.** *Sister cities provide accelerated access and open doors into key markets. Trade and investment benefits are generated through greater access to, and credibility in, partner markets with a higher degree of access. Sister city programs can connect your city more effectively with buyers and sellers, often at a higher level than would otherwise be possible.*
- **Tourism: showcasing your city.** *Cross promoting each other's cities as visitor destinations coupled with exchange of destination marketing expertise and experience to enhance the market intelligence of both cities.*
- **Education, Culture and sport: empowering your youth, supporting the education sector and getting the community involved.** *The provision of opportunities for your students, sporting clubs and community groups to participate in a variety of Exchanges and study abroad programmes. Students,*

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teachers and community are therefore better equipped to thrive in an inter-connected world. Economic benefits can flow from foreign fee-paying students that (a) originate from partner cities; and (b) would not have studied in your city in the absence of the relationship. The economic benefits are generated mainly by tuition fees and living costs.

- **Global connectedness: enhancing your reputation.** A successful sister city program can provide good opportunities to engage at the city level with important partners. Exchanges in both directions provide opportunities for high-level engagement; supporting business interests, including education and tourism; promoting culture and values; and sharing approaches to policy issues facing municipalities.

The key opening activity is to decide on how the relationship will work:

- 1) what activities will be conducted between the two cities,
- 2) how the communities of both will be involved,
- 3) what the governance process will be,
- 4) how will it be funded.

Some examples of each of the above could be:

- 1) School exchanges, sporting exchanges, arts and crafts exhibitions, community groups exchanges, job swap opportunities, business opportunities, etc...
- 2) Engage community members in a steering committee, open and transparent communication with the community.
- 3) Will it be governed by a Council committee, or by an independent committee? Most councils employ a council run committee with community members participating.
- 4) Sufficient funds need to be allocated annually to cover all proposed activities, and the time involvement of council employees. There is the option to seek sponsorship or to do fundraising as well, which works well if the local community is fully on-board with the program.

Sister City relationships need to be created with longevity in mind so that they will continue to flourish and prosper long after those who initiated the relationship have moved on to other things. Make them 'future-proof'.

Seeking a Sister City

Scoping a suitable city*

Once you have identified the key areas you would like to develop through a sister city program you will need to scope out some potential partners. To narrow down the list of candidates, the following is a list of some of the factors that you might wish to take into consideration:

- A similar population size or demographic.
- Existing connections including educational exchange programs or political/economic ties.
- A good international reputation particularly in areas of interest and relevance to your city.
- Potential for capacity building in governance.
- Willingness to create a contract agreement and effectively resource the proposed level of commitment.

If you are seeking a Sister City this is the hardest part of the journey. On our website the SCA has a form ([http://www.sistercitiesaustralia.com/images/images_media/Documents/Request for Sister City.pdf](http://www.sistercitiesaustralia.com/images/images_media/Documents/Request_for_Sister_City.pdf))

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that, once filled in with the relevant details, will be posted back to our website. There may be a need to request that the Mayor provide the details that may help other interested cities to assess suitability for exploring a relationship. Once this information has been received we can also do a feature article in our newsletter.

Formalising an Agreement

Requirements of the Foreign Relations Act 2020

The *Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act 2020* (The Act) requires for all LGA's that have, or are seeking to have, an overseas Sister City or Friendship City arrangement to:

- Notify the Minister, from **10 March 2021** onwards, of any proposal to enter into an arrangement with an overseas entity. If that arrangement is then entered into the Minister should be informed of this within 14 days.

Notifications should be made through the Foreign Arrangements Scheme Online Portal (www.foreignarrangements.gov.au). Registration details are on the website, along with some additional useful information and resources.

NOTE: LGA's **DO NOT** have to seek approval to enter into any negotiations or wait for Government approval to proceed.

Identify your mutual level of commitment*

A range of partnership types can be applied for international and domestic connections, depending on the level of engagement and commitment. These may include:

- *Memoranda or Letters of Understanding.*
- *Friendly Cooperative Agreements.*
- *Alliances.*
- *Formal Sister City connections.*
- *Membership of international associations.*

The trial period*

Run a few projects of mutual benefit and assess the results. A sister city relationship will need to be sustainable and the successful completion on your project will point to whether this is a relationship which your Council should continue to put its resources.

Establish the relationship

Once a city has been selected, agreement made to investigate the possibility of a sister city relationship and both cities have developed their lists of priorities, including some performance indicators, many councils will enter into an MOU arrangement in order to commence the official process of drawing up a Sister City agreement, getting the infrastructure in place for governance, including funding, and to cement the community agreement and involvement. Yes, this does take time – as with any kind of relationship.

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When all these are in place in both cities it would then be appropriate to sign an official sister city agreement which sets out the aims of the relationship and is signed by the mayors of both communities. This is always a time of celebration and needs to be well publicised.

Sister City v Friendship City

We are often asked “What is the difference between a Sister City and a Friendship City agreement?”.

In simple terms a Sister City agreement is a formalised, community to community relationship with multiple aims, goals, targets and activities being involved with the focus on a long term relationship. A Friendship City agreement is generally less formal, aimed at a specific area of a community or region, with a single goal or target in mind. The relationship may often lapse after the specific target has been attained.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: *Sources include Adelaide City Council's International Partnerships Strategy and Redland Council's Redland City Council's International Relations Discussion Paper, July 2012*

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Checklist of Important Questions

Here are a list of some Key Questions that may need to be addressed for a successful, meaningful, community acceptable, and sustainable Sister City Relationship:

WHO?

- Who will research the possible city options?
- Who will lead the negotiations with a selected city?
- Who will be on the Sister City Committee?
- Who will 'champion' the program in the community?

WHAT?

- What are the benefits of a Sister City relationship?
- What are the selection criteria for choosing your Sister City?
- What activities will be conducted between the two cities?
- What will the governance process be?
- What will be the measures of success?
- What is your long term strategic plan?
- What will be put in place to ensure the longevity of the relationship?

WHERE?

- Where do you want a sister city?
- Where will delegations visit, home and abroad?
- Where will Sister City Committee meetings be held?

HOW?

- How will it be funded?
- How will the communities of both cities be involved?
- How will you keep the community engaged and informed?
- How will you get media onboard?
- How will you celebrate formalising the relationship?
- How will you celebrate important milestone anniversaries?

WHY?

- Why do you want a Sister City relationship?

WHEN?

- When will the Committee meet?
- When will exchanges occur?
- When will delegations take place?

We hope this information proves to be of use and if there is anything else SCA can do to assist then please let us know.

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