

Sister Schools Mission & Goals

The Sister Schools Mission:

Promote peace through mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding –

one student, one school at a time

Sister Schools Goals:

- Integrate the Sister Cities model of citizen diplomacy into youth and education
- Offer “people-to-people” connections to students
- Motivate cultural exchange and global awareness among students through project-based learning

Introduction

Welcome to Sister Schools! Your local Sister City organization has chosen your school as a candidate for participating in the Sister Schools program. The Sister Schools program is a change for schools to introduce an international curriculum and cultural exchange program to their students.

The staff at Sister Cities International looks forward to working with your school and the local Sister City organization in making your school a part of Sister Schools.

The following is a guide for starting and running your Sister Schools program based on pilot partnerships, existing Sister Schools organizations and the research and experience of Sister Cities International's Youth and Education Department.

The packets and different worksheets in the Sister Schools Toolkit are meant to guide you through all the processes of finding, starting and running a Sister Schools program.

If you have any questions or need any further assistance, use the contact information at the end of the toolkit to contact Sister Cities International. As a teacher or principal, your role in a Sister Schools partnership is pivotal to its success. Thank you for your interest and commitment to bringing global awareness and cultural exchange to your students.

What is Sister Schools?

Sister Schools brings together schools within existing Sister Cities. The Sister Schools partnerships can be between individual classes, entire schools or even school districts. Teachers and Principals in partnered Sister Schools have their classes participate in collaborative projects together.

Why Start a Sister Schools Program?

Sister Schools participate in collaborative projects together so that students can work with and learn from fellow youth in their Sister City. These collaborative projects provide students with an understanding of international and cultural differences.

Through these cultural exchanges, students not only gain a more global perspective on subjects, but learn about their own community by sharing it with their Sister School.

Interacting with their international peers allows students to become active citizen diplomats and ambassadors for their country. These interactions create a mutually beneficial relationship for all participants and rewarding experiences for your schools and students. Thank you for your interest, and again, welcome to the Sister Schools program!

The Three Components of Sister Schools

To conduct a Sister Schools program, three components will be needed to ensure its success:

- ✓ The Local Sister City Organization
- ✓ The Schools
- ✓ Sister Cities International

The Individual roles of each of these components are detailed below. Please make sure to note your role and responsibilities in a Sister Schools Program.

✓ The Local Sister City Organization:

Locates a Sister School in a Sister City through current contacts, supports the program, and keeps updated information for the Sister Schools program

A local Sister City Organization must have the following to fulfill their role:

- A Sister City staff member or volunteer willing to act as the **Sister Schools Coordinator**.
- A staff supportive of incorporating a Sister Schools partnership in their community
- An active partnership and contacts in the Sister City where the Sister School will be located.

Sister City organizations need a Sister Schools Coordinator to:

- Facilitate the pairing of Sister Schools between Sister Cities
- Keep updated contact information for both Sister Schools
- Provide basic support and resources for the Sister Schools program
- Act as a contact between Sister Cities International and the Sister Schools

The Sister Schools Coordinator

A Sister Schools Coordinator is a staff or volunteer member from a local Sister City organization who is in charge of finding contacts for a Sister School abroad.

A Sister Schools Coordinator will need to be:

- Someone who has current contacts in a Sister City who can help locate a Sister School.
- The main contact at the Sister Cities organization for school staff throughout the process of starting the program.

The Sister Schools Coordinator will:

- Head the search for and pairing of Sister Schools
 - Help organize initial discussions between the Sister Schools
 - Keep updated contact information and do scheduled check-ins of the Sister Schools partnership
- Update the national office on the status and activities of the Sister Schools

✓ The Schools:

Conduct the program by designing and implementing projects between Sister Schools, and sustaining the partnership through consistent communication

Schools need motivated teachers and principals to:

- Work with the Sister Schools Coordinator to find a Sister School
- Communicate with their Sister School to structure the partnership
- Conduct the program by organizing projects between Sister Schools
- Maintain consistent contact and communication with their Sister School
- Update their Sister Schools Coordinator about the program.

The Principals and Teachers

The schools need the following to fulfill their roles:

- A supportive principal
- At least one teacher who is willing and excited to employ the program in their class.

- Consistent Communication between Sister Schools!

The school's role in a Sister Schools partnership is of course the most important and pivotal to its success. The schools need to have motivated teachers and principals who recognize the value and importance of bringing international curriculum into their schools and classes in order for the program to be successful and effective.

The Principal's Role

The principal's role is one of coordination and support. The primary functions of the principal are to:

- Have a **Sister Schools Dialogue** between their schools and sign a Sister School Contract
- Acknowledge the Sister School partnership at their school
- Support the teachers who are conducting Sister Schools projects in their classes
- Keep consistent communication with their fellow Sister Schools principal

Principals should make their school aware and excited about their new Sister School. There are many ways to have the partnership be visible and accessible to students!

For example:

- Have special assemblies to announce the partnership, and present the new Sister School to the school as a whole
- Hold annual school wide events to commemorate the partnership (such as international holiday festivities or other types of cultural events)

The Teacher's Role

The teachers' role is to communicate consistently with their Sister School, and to design and implement projects between the schools.

Teachers will need to:

- Have a **Sister Schools Dialogue** between schools to structure the partnership
- Teachers will need to coordinate their schedules to ensure that they have consistent communication with one another.
- Teachers will collaborate to design and complete cultural exchange projects between their Sister Schools.
- Teachers at Sister Schools should e-mail once a week, or as often as needed, to update one another on their class's progress on current projects, and to discuss future plans.

After teachers have had their Sister Schools Dialogue, and have become official Sister Schools, they will need to choose a project to implement in their classes. Have teachers look through the Sister Schools Project Packet, decide on a project together, and modify it to fit their schools' needs.



Sister Schools Toolkit for Sister Cities

Teachers can also design their own project or decide to collaborate on one through the International Educational & Resource Network (i-Earn).

Consistent Communication between Sister Schools

Consistent communication cannot be emphasized enough. It is the key to keeping a Sister Schools relationship active and sustained, year after year. The easiest way for a Sister Schools partnership to end is by schools failing to communicate regularly. Make sure to emphasize this to your Sister Schools!

• **Sister Cities International:**

Provide resources, toolkits, and project ideas to the schools and Sister City organizations to start and sustain their Sister Schools program

Sister Cities International's Youth & Education Department:

- Provides Sister Schools and Sister Cities members with resources and tools to help sustain their Sister Schools program
- Supplies project ideas and other resources for Sister Schools to help develop and strengthen partnerships

The Youth & Education Department

Sister City International's Youth & Education Department will fulfill the following role

The role of Sister Cities International is to provide the resources, toolkits, guides, and other materials necessary for the Sister City organizations and Sister Schools to independently run a successful and sustainable Sister Schools program between their communities.

Sister Cities International will:

- Provide members with the resources and guidance needed to start a Sister Schools program
- Will provide project packets and resources for teachers to use as a direction for the partnership
- Will provide tools and ideas for sustaining the partnership

Sister Schools Models

There are three basic models to base your Sister Schools program on:

• **Class to Class**

A Sister Schools program can be as simple as partnering a single class at each school to partake in projects together. Ideally, classes should be matched by age, and number of students.

The Class to Class model allows for a more intimate cultural exchange experience to occur between students and teachers at Sister Schools. Teachers can pair their students up as pen-pals, and can easily monitor projects between their classes. Sister Schools teachers in class to class partnerships will form close bonds, designing and completing projects year after year that will strengthen the program.

Sister Cities International Tip:

The Class to Class model is recommended by Sister Cities International as the best starting point for a Sister Schools program. The program is more manageable this way, and is therefore more rewarding and effective for the students involved.

If you would like to incorporate the whole school in the program, we still suggest starting with the Class to Class model. If Sister Schools start by pairing one class, the relationship will tend to spread throughout the school to include more classes and students in the program over time.

Having a Class to Class model does not mean that the Sister Schools partnership can't be celebrated by the whole school. Assemblies and school wide events to commemorate the partnership and update the school on current projects should still be planned.

• **School to School**

A Sister Schools model can be between schools as a whole by conducting school-wide Sister Schools projects or events. The principals will take more of a leading role in this model.

The School to School model can have schools participating in joint fundraising events, art projects, letter-writing campaigns, festivals commemorating your Sister Schools' holidays, or exchange visit programs between schools. The possibilities for projects are endless, but they must be structured carefully between schools to succeed in their efforts. A school to school model may also be the appropriate starting point when partnering with a more hierarchical culture or school government, such as in China or Japan.

An annual Sister Schools Day could be considered for any model as well, to renew appreciation for the program every school year!

• **School District to School District**

There are circumstances when a School District to School District model is the best. This model may work especially well when working with a hierarchical international school district. A District to District model offers a larger program which may be more inviting to financial sponsors, and support from the district may allow for more diverse opportunities for activities and in-person

exchanges. A great challenge in a District to District model is making sure the teachers are invested in the program. Teachers may see a district Sister Schools program as just another of many they are required to implement.

Two of the most successful programs, Sister Schools San Diego and Sister Schools Chicago are school district wide, but still operate as a voluntary opportunity for interested district teachers. Both of Sister Schools San Diego and Sister Schools Chicago have become independent non-profit organizations. They each have staff and volunteers to run Sister School partnerships at schools throughout their entire school districts. These are exceptional examples of a Sister Schools program, and would only work for Sister Cities who have the means and volunteers to manage such large endeavors.

If such a model interests you, please inform Sister Cities International and we will provide you with more contacts and information for taking on such a program.

10 Steps to Starting a Sister Schools Program

Forming Your Sister Schools Team

1. Talking to your local Sister City Organization
2. Contacting the Sister City abroad
3. Introducing Sister Schools to the schools
4. Have a Sister Schools Team Meeting: Choose a Model

Finding a Sister Schools Abroad

5. What to consider when choosing a Sister School
6. Working with your Sister City abroad
7. Coordinating communication between the Sister Schools

Starting the Sister Schools Program

8. Having a Sister Schools Dialogue
9. Choosing Projects for Sister Schools
10. Creating a Sister Schools Schedule

Forming Your Sister Schools Team

1. Talking to your local Sister City Organization

- Talk to your fellow Sister City volunteers and staff members. Hold a meeting and discuss the Sister Schools program as a possible new program to incorporate between your Sister Cities. We suggest reading the Sister Schools Project Packet, and sharing a few with your Sister City organization to help them get an idea of what the program would have Sister Schools doing together.
- Designate a Sister Schools Coordinator: someone who is willing to contact the schools and take the lead contacting your Sister City to find a Sister School.

2. Contacting your Sister City abroad

- Contact your Sister City abroad and introduce the Sister Schools program idea to them. Determine whether they are interested in conducting the program between your Sister Cities.
- Send them the Sister Schools toolkit and supplemental materials to look over, and talk to them again to determine if you will go through with the program.
- If they are interested, discuss what model you would like to pursue, the grade level, the type of class, etc.
- Tip: Unless your Sister City already has a teacher/ school in mind, tell them to wait to look for a match until you have yours set up. This way, they will be able to find a more suitable match.

3. Introducing Sister Schools to the Schools

- Choose a school(s) in your community to introduce the idea to. Perhaps there is a school where children of Sister City members and volunteers attend. Are there any principals or teachers in your community that would be interested in a cultural exchange program? Start from there!
- Ask the principal at a school of interest if you could come to a staff meeting and introduce the Sister Schools Program to their school. We suggest a Sister City representative attend a meeting at the school, so that any questions that may arise can be answered.
- Ask the principal if they know of any specific teachers that they think would be especially interested in Sister Schools.
- Give prospective teachers and principals a copy of the Sister Schools Toolkit for Schools and the Project Ideas Packet. This will help them in considering whether the program will work at their school, and how they will structure it.
- Make sure to tell the schools about your Sister City organization's history if they are not already aware of it. Explain your intentions for the program, and ask them how they would like to run the program if they were to implement it in their school.
- Give the principal your contact information and tell them to contact you as soon as possible when they know if their school is interested, and which teachers are on board. If you attend the meeting, get all the contact information for the teachers interested in the program.
- Tip: Remember to utilize language classes for starting a Sister Schools Program The possibilities for student exchange programs are especially valued in these classes.

4. Have a Sister Schools Team Meeting: Choose a Model

- Hold a meeting that includes the: Sister Schools Coordinator, all the school staff involved in the program, and any Sister City staff interested in helping with Sister Schools. This is your Sister Schools Team!
- Have the schools' principal and each teacher fill out a Sister School Application form. This will help the Sister Schools Coordinator's search for a compatible Sister School.
- There are several models to consider when starting a Sister School partnership. Remember: pairing single classes is a recommended way to start the program.

Tips

- A fun twist on the basic program is to have a Sister City volunteer come into a class once a week to help the teacher implement a Sister Schools project. This is a great way to connect youth and adults in Sister City activities!
- Also, remember to consider the opportunity of having a Sister Schools Club at the school. For further information, contact Sister Cities International.

Finding a Sister Schools Abroad

Remember: The process of searching for and finding a Sister School that shares your local school's interests and goals can take weeks or months. Therefore, your search must be extremely well organized and undertaken with great planning and commitment.

5. What to consider when choosing a Sister School

- If your town has multiple Sister Cities, the first thing to do is decide which Sister City to have a Sister School with. Our advice is to choose a city you have the most contacts and activities with. This will increase your chances of finding a Sister School.
- Remember that most communication between schools will likely be done online considering the distance between Sister Schools and the need for speedy communication to conduct projects. Make sure the school you partner with has internet access if this is needed for your program.
- Make sure you received every teacher and principal's Sister Schools Application form. This is pivotal in finding a proper match for them.
- Another important factor when looking for a Sister School is the language. An inability due communicate due to language barriers is a common cause of failed sister schools partnerships. The most important factor is that teachers are able to communicate well enough to design and conduct projects together.

6. Working with your Sister City abroad

- This is the most vital step in finding a Sister School for your school to partner with. Call your Sister City organization abroad and introduce the program (if you haven't already) by sharing your interests and goals for the program.
- Send your Sister City a copy of the Sister School Application that your school filled out, and a synopsis of what you're looking for in a Sister School. Make sure to detail what you are looking for: an English language class, a school that has internet access, a teacher fluent in English and French, etc. There can't be too many details.
- Sister Cities International can send them a copy of the toolkits and other resources for starting a Sister Schools program as well.
- Have the Sister City abroad designate a Sister Schools Coordinator at their organization for you to work with in pairing the Sister Schools.
- Ask them to introduce the program to a school in their community that they think would match well with yours. See if they know of any teachers or a Principal at a school in their community who would be interested in cultural exchange.
- Tell your Sister Schools Coordinator abroad to use the Toolkit for teachers and the Project Ideas Packet to introduce the program to the schools.
- Explain the criteria to them: at least one teacher and a principal who want to participate. And tell them to have any schools they contact fill out a Sister Schools Application!
- Stay in touch with your Sister Schools Coordinator abroad regularly, updating each other on any progress or obstacles.

7. Coordinating Communication between the Sister Schools

- Once you have identified schools in each of your Sister Cities that are compatible and potential Sister Schools, it is very important to get the teachers and principals communicating as soon as possible.
- Send the teachers and principals e-mails introducing the schools to each other. Send them all of your Sister Schools Team members' contact info.
- Tell the schools to set up a time to have a conference call or online discussion to structure the partnership. The Sister Schools Coordinator should be included on these first e-mails or conference calls, to make sure everything is moving in a productive and forward direction.
- The goal is for Sister Schools to form a relationship together and run the program independently, so get them communicating as early as possible. They must be pro-active in communicating with each other to make the Sister Schools partnership work!
- The schools should cc the Sister Schools Coordinator on e-mails at first. The teachers and principals will eventually be communicating independently, but there needs to be a lot of team activity at first to make sure the partnership has a strong foundation.

Starting the Sister Schools Program

8. The Sister Schools Dialogue

- Have the teachers and principals from the schools partake in a Sister Schools Dialogue. This can be done online, or as a conference call, or by e-mailing back and forth.
- The schools should use the Sister Schools Dialogue worksheet as a guide for questions to address when setting up the partnership.
- The Sister Schools Dialogue is meant to help schools foresee any discrepancies to be worked out between schools. Such as: schedule conflicts that need to be resolved, interest in projects, and the level of involvement in the program. This is to make sure that both schools are “on the same page.”
- Sister Cities International suggests having a conference call or at least one phone call between teachers. This will allow for teachers and principals to discuss and connect more personally and helps to solidify the partnership. Schools that never have a phone call between teachers, and only rely on e-mails may not be as successful. It only takes one phone call to establish a more firm foundation for the partnership.
- Finalize the sister schools partnership! Draw up a contract to be signed by the principal at each school. See the Sample Contract provided for direction.

9. Sister Schools Projects

- After the partnership is finalized, and both schools have signed a contract and confirmed the partnership, remind the teachers to start a project as soon as possible.
- The Sister City organization may want to help with the first project as a show of solidarity and support for the program. Look at the Sister Schools Project Packet, and suggest one as a first project for the Sister Schools. This will help guide and direct them in the beginning and get them moving in the right direction!
- Remind teachers to create timelines for their projects, with estimated completion times for intermediate steps along the way and a date for the project to be finalized.
- A speaker from the Sister City organization can come to a class participating in Sister Schools and give a quick presentation about the history of Sister Cities in your town. This will help students understand the program and why such a partnership is worthwhile and fun!
- Emphasize the idea of students being citizen diplomats, and being involved and engaged citizens. That’s what Sister Cities and Sister Schools are all about!

10. Creating a Sister Schools Schedule

- Last, but certainly not least, create a schedule for the Sister Schools Coordinator and the Sister Schools to check in with one another.
- Make sure you check in with your Sister Schools’ teachers and principal about once a month to see how the projects and partnership are going.



- Consistent Communication between the Sister City organization and the Sister Schools will give support to the schools, and help sustain the partnership. Make sure the school staff knows that the Sister Schools Coordinator and Sister Cities International are available to them throughout their partnership.
- Include and invite your Sister Schools' principal and teachers to Sister City events. They are now part of your Sister City community!
- Contact Sister Cities International's Youth & Education department with any concerns or information you may need about the Sister Schools program. We are happy to serve our members and support your programs!
- Make sure you keep current contacts for both Sister Schools. Share this information and any changes with Sister Cities International so that we may help you keep the partnership going in case of any school or Sister City staff turnover.
- Tell your Sister Schools contacts to keep you posted on any changes to staffing or programming. The idea is to have a successful and sustainable Sister Schools program for many school years!

Sister Schools Supplemental Materials

The following is a description of the supplemental material that accompanies your Sister Schools toolkit. Be sure to take advantage of these additional resources!

Sister Schools Dialogue Worksheet:

Sister Schools will use this worksheet to structure their partnership. This worksheet will help schools organize their schedules and determine how the program will be implemented between the schools.

Tips for a Successful & Sustainable Sister Schools Program:

This packet has tips on how to make sure a partnership is successful and remains active between Sister Schools. This will help schools and Sister Cities identify possible problems that may arise, how to avoid them, and how to build a sustainable program that is successful and rewarding.

Sister Schools Project Ideas Packet:

This 18-page Project Packet is filled with project ideas that are divided into three different levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. The project levels are based on age level and time commitment required to complete them, so that teachers may choose and modify projects to their classroom needs.

Sample Sister Schools Resolution:

The Sister Schools Contract will be signed by both schools and Sister Cities, confirming the partnership and making the schools official Sister Schools' members.

Sister Schools Resources Packet:

The resources packet will be a list of resources for free online international education curriculum and other tools that could help develop your Sister Schools program further. Including the i-EARN International Education and Resource Network.

Conclusion & Sister Schools Contacts

Sister Schools is a wonderful opportunity to incorporate the youth of your community into your local Sister City organization and activities. Sister Cities around the world have been creating people-to-people connections between communities for over 50 years, and now your community's schools and students can be a part of this amazing network of citizen diplomacy as well.

We are thrilled you have decided to start a Sister Schools program in your community.

Without the commitment of Sister City members and volunteers and your community's principals and teachers, this program would not be possible.

We know your Sister Schools partnership will bring an exciting new element to your Sister Cities program.

If you are ever in need of further assistance or have any questions about running your Sister Schools program, contact Sister Cities International:

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