

1) Conduct a Sister City Organization “Find-A-Member Campaign”

A great way to drum up volunteer/membership support is to hold a special Sister City introductory meeting. Ask every member to bring a friend who is unfamiliar with your sister city organization. You can make it a party with food related to your partnered communities. Highlight the goals of a solid sister city partnership and your upcoming special events or programs. Devote at least two to three weeks ahead of time to generating commitments and interest in the local community for attending this special meeting.

2) Organize a Sister City Organization Volunteer Recognition Event

This can follow soon after your “Find-a-Member Campaign.” Invite the people who attended the campaign to this Volunteer Recognition event. Celebrate the hard work and creativity of your members. Have special awards for volunteers or officials who demonstrated outstanding commitment and effort to your organization’s programs. Have a slide show or video highlighting the work done by your members. Ask family members to get involved by making special dishes related to your partnered communities.

3) Hold a Window Display Contest

Ask youth in your community to create a display on what an International Sister City partnership means to them. Contest entries can be displayed in local business windows. This could be a contest open to the general youth population. Businesses or public offices can be recruited to donate display space. Give prizes for the best display. Ask your local newspaper to photograph the grand prize-winning display. A variation is to ask local businesses to display artwork based on what the International Sister City partnership means to youth, or Young Artists Competition entries.

4) Set up a Sister City Day at Your Local Mall or Shopping Center

Contact your mall to see if they hold special events to bring in customers. Malls tend to plan their schedule very far in advance, so you may need to plan this event with plenty of lead time. Hold a mini-talent show or interactive craft fair showcasing cultural highlights of your partnered community. Games, foods, and customs from your partnering community can be shared. Have volunteers on hand to talk about their sister city experience. Have sister city fact sheets, information about your local programs, and contact sheets asking for e-mail and street addresses for volunteers to fill out.

5) Sponsor the Young Artists and Authors Showcase Competition in Your Local School System

Give prizes for “best of” winner for each grade level or age categories. Work with the school art director/teacher to make it a class project and to have the results displayed around the school. Or ask your city or county office to display the results along with an explanation about your sister city organization and its programs. Arrange for your local newspaper to publish photos of the results or to interview contest winners.

6) Sponsor a Speech or Essay Contest with the Theme “Creating World Peace through International Sister City Partnerships” in Your Local School System (open to all students)

Give prizes for “best of” winner for each grade level or age category. Work with English or social studies teachers to make this a class project. If you hold a speech contest, ask the winners to make their speeches during a local event or at your next organization meeting. If you hold an essay contest, ask your local paper to publish them, or place the finished essays on your organization’s website. Ask your local newspaper to photograph the winners and run excerpts of their essays or speeches.

7) Create a Sister Cities International display at your local library

Ask your local library if you can create a display about your sister city organization. Involve the library by asking them to select books about your partnered city or cities as a special section or for a week/month. Ask if special displays or events can be held at your local or main library throughout the year.

8) Ask if you can leave information about your sister city organization at your local library

Many libraries provide public information bulletin boards and flier racks. Arrange to have a supply of brochures or fact sheets about your sister city projects with contact information distributed through the library.

9) Set up a reading event at your local library

Many libraries have youth reading hours, poetry readings and adult book clubs. See if volunteers can read books or selections of stories from the partnered communities. Be sure to have follow-up information available in case families or attendees want to get involved in sister city projects.

10) Host an Open House

Ask members to bring one potential member to the event to learn more about your sister city organization. Use a mixture of interactive activities and speakers to hold the audience's attention. Invite federal, state, or local officials to participate in this informal gathering. Ask these invited guests and selected members to talk about your sister city organization and its impact on your local community and the community abroad. Invite the press and be sure to have contact sheets so you can stay in touch.

11) Invite Youth Volunteers/Members to Celebrate Their Accomplishments

Honor your youth volunteers/members through a special event. Give awards for their involvement in your organization's programs. Recognize those youths who participated in youth exchange programs through your organization and the impact it had on their lives. Be sure to open this to the general youth population.

12) Plan an Annual Community Service Project

Community service projects can range from adopting a highway or road to working with Habitat for Humanity. An annual community service project can emphasize your organization's commitment to your community, and also highlight your sister city partnership. For example, a group of visiting exchange students can participate in a service project alongside youth from your community, building friendships and cultural dialogue while helping others. Your sister city organization can ask the community to support a service project for your sister community abroad through Wheelchairs for Peace, Operation Iraqi Children, or some other sister city humanitarian assistance program.

13) Plan a Street Festival or Parade

Ask members to wear outfits from their partnered communities and provide promotional materials to attendees. Set up a street festival celebrating the diversity of cultures brought together through sister city partnerships. Be sure to have a booth to provide information about your sister city organization.

14) Talk to Other Community Groups

A great way to expand your efforts is to talk to other community organizations about your sister city projects and plans. Contact local business, service, and professional organizations to see if you can speak to them about sister city partnerships. Groups you may want to contact include Altrusa, the Greater Federation of Women's Clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis, the Lions Club, etc.

15) Host a Film Festival

Partner with a local movie theater or community organization to host a film festival featuring films from your sister communities. Have information about your sister city programs at the theater for distribution to moviegoers and staff a booth in the theater lobby or outside.

16) Create a Website about Your Sister City Program

Creating a website about your sister city organization can be done easily now using various online website resources. Make sure your site includes current contact and meeting information. List online your sister city partnerships, explain the history of your sister city relationships, and talk about upcoming projects and events. A website can be a very valuable archival tool for a local sister city organization, providing a place to store meeting notes, fliers, and other information so everyone in the organization has access to them.

17) Create a Newsletter or e-Newsletter

Many sister city organizations issue their own newsletters or e-newsletters on a bimonthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis. Several easy-to-use desktop publishing tools are now available that make it easy to create both print and electronic newsletters. You may want to publish meeting summaries, information about exchange trips, personal stories about sister city programs, upcoming meetings, and more. A newsletter is only as effective as its mailing list - make sure your list is up-to-date and includes all your organization's members and interested members of the community. Place key community leaders on your mailing list or e-mail list to ensure they stay in the loop about your activities. Respect requests for removal from postal or e-mail lists.

18) Host a Photo Exhibit about Your Sister Community

Hosting a photo exhibit can be a great way to educate the general public about your sister community. Use only quality photos and make sure photos are displayed properly to ensure adequate viewing. Caption the photos so viewers will understand the nuances of what they are seeing in the photos. Invite an expert, author, or university professor to talk about the photos or your host community and its customs. Host the exhibit with a local art gallery, public office, bank, bookstore, or local business. This event can also be a fundraiser if you add refreshments and a short program to it. Make sure you inform the press about this event and publicize it well in advance.

19) Plant a Tree in Honor of Your Sister Community

A tree can be a visible reminder of a sister city relationship. Plant a tree common to your sister community in a public park, near a sponsor's office, or another location. Dedicate the tree with a program including song, dance, artwork, or a speaker talking about your sister community. A simple program can include a speech by a public official sharing what he or she experienced while visiting your sister community, the planting of the tree by key volunteers/youth/officials, and a song or dance. A plaque commemorating the event and the sister community relationship can be placed near the tree. Make sure you send a news release about this event to local media, as it's often a great fit for television coverage.

20) Display Gifts from Your Sister Community

Many sister city relationships involve an exchange of gifts. The initial snapshots and smiles fade, but those gifts can be used to publicize your sister city relationship. Draft a short paragraph about each gift. If it is a ceremonial item with a special use, try to include a photograph showing the item or one similar to it being used. Create a brief display about your sister city relationship, either through a one-page fact sheet mounted on foam core or a more formal exhibit. Place the exhibit in a public place, such as a display case in a public building, a library, a bank, a museum, or another facility, where it can be enjoyed by the public. Make sure your gift items are secure and have local contact information nearby for people seeking to get involved.

Tip for Success

Many of these events may be of interest to the news media. Make sure you send out a brief, one-page news release to news desks and assignment editors at your local newspapers and magazines, as well as area radio and television stations. Check the “Working with the Media” and “Creating a Press Kit” toolkits for more information and tips!