



Advocating to City Government

a guide



About Sister Cities International

Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit which serves as the national membership organization for individual sister cities, counties, and states across the U.S.

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 forming these relationships, President Eisenhower reasoned that people of different cultures could celebrate and appreciate their differences and build partnerships that would lessen the chance of new conflicts.

This network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers in 471 member communities with over 1,800 partnerships in more than 135 countries.

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Introduction

As a member of Sister Cities International, you already know the immense value Sister City organizations and programs provide to their communities and beyond.

While a great benefit of Sister Cities is that they allow citizens to promote diplomacy and peace regardless of national or subnational policy, having the support of your city government and elected officials can provide an array of benefits that help you expand the reach and lifespan of your organization.

By advocating for your Sister City organization to local government, you may secure more funding for your organization, and bolster the presence of Sister Cities and citizen diplomacy in your city.

Developing an Advocacy Plan

Developing an advocacy plan is a powerful strategy to ensure that you are making the most out of your interactions with city hall on behalf of your organization. Since city councilmembers often change with each election, your advocacy plan needs to contain tried-and-true strategies that will get current and future iterations of city council on board.

Our step-by-step plan below will help you develop a comprehensive strategy to advocate to local officials and develop relationships which you can leverage to strengthen your Sister City organization.

Step 1: Identify Your Audience

In this case, you already know that your audience is local government officials. Knowing your audience is the first and most important step in advocacy. By selecting your audience, you can then figure out how to tailor your message to them. The great thing about Sister Cities programs is that they offer a diverse number of both qualitative and quantitative benefits within a community.

Step 2: Identify Your Ask: What Am I Advocating for?

Now it's time to tailor your "ask:" an action item for your audience. The best asks clearly articulate the action item and back it up with thoughtful preparation, data, and success stories that will compel your audience (in this case, local officials) to take action.

Some common things that you can advocate to city council for include:

- Cost-share for Sister City events
- Funding and/or in-kind support for your program – includes staff members
- City Council participation in Sister City events
- City Council participation in exchange programs
- Payment of Sister Cities International membership dues
- Encouraging other local officials to get involved in Sister Cities

While you may want to “ask” for all of these things, it is best to keep your ask limited to one or two items maximum. If you are advocating correctly, you will meet with City Council continuously, and it is best to ask for further support after you’ve done some relationship-building.

After you’ve decided what you want to ask of your local officials, your next step is to develop a pitch for your ask(s).

Developing a Pitch

A successful pitch must achieve three things: first, your pitch must actively engage your listeners. Second, your pitch must clearly articulate your goals. Third, your pitch must show the beneficial impacts for your listeners when they choose to support your cause.

Engage Your Listeners: Make It Personal

The best way to engage your audience is to make them feel like your pitch is relevant to them. You can find out the interests, expertise, and passions of your local officials on the internet (LinkedIn is a good place to start). If you can, use this information to your benefit when making your Sister Cities pitch.

Articulate Your Goals

The driving goal behind all Sister City relationships is to promote peace and build bridges across cultures, but your city council will want to know the more tangible benefits of these relationships in order for them to agree to your ask. When relevant, share stories and statistics about how your ask contributes to your goals—whether that be fundraising, the number of students sent abroad on a trip, or important industry connections abroad.

Show the Impact to Them

Articulating your organization's goals leads straight into the final part of a successful pitch. In most cases, the goals of your organization will align with the goals of city council, i.e. to help your local community thrive. When pitching, make those connections for your listeners—for example, if your organization receives sufficient funding to make a business delegation trip abroad, the connections you make there can help bring foreign investment to your own community in the future.

Another option is to ask your local officials what areas of interest the city has in relation to international affairs and other city needs. It may be possible to collaborate with your officials to integrate their selected needs, such as foreign investment, into your Sister City activities.

Step 3: Identify Key Stakeholders Who Support Your Ask

While a strong pitch is key to your success, having the support of other important community figures is a highly influential way to get city council on your side.

Hopefully, the members of your City Council can easily see the value of Sister City relationships. However, supporting your ask by calling on other stakeholders in the community can make for a strong argument as to why Sister Cities relationships are key to your thriving community.

Stakeholders can vary greatly from organization to organization, but there are a few key community leaders you may want to bring in for support.

For example, if your organization does a school exchange—you can garner the support of a principal, a member of your Board of Education, or even the superintendent. Likewise, if you host a professional exchange, such as one between police departments, you can ask your sheriff for support.

Here are some questions to consider when choosing key stakeholders to support your ask:

- Can you clearly identify what you want from the stakeholder?
- What is the stakeholder's interest in your organization/ask?
- Does the stakeholder have a fundamental impact on your organization's performance?

- Is the relationship between your organization and the stakeholder dynamic—that is, do you want it to evolve? What is the positive outcome you envision?

Showing your city council that your programs directly affect the community will make them more receptive to supporting your ask.

Step 4: Collect Data and Success Stories That Support the Ask

No ask is complete unless it has tangible data and/or impactful stories to back it up. Because advocacy involves both the “head” and the “heart,” data that expresses the tangible impact of your Sister City partnerships are equally as important as narratives.

If you aren’t already keeping track of data regarding your Sister City partnerships, here are some pointers:

- Make sure someone on your Sister City team is keeping a log of important facts and figures. Helpful information can include:
 - o The total guest count at a Sister Cities event
 - o The number of inbound and outbound exchanges you have with your Sister City
 - o The number of people who participate in inbound and outbound exchanges
 - o The number of students and youth who participate in your exchanges
 - o How many students your community hosts per semester from a Sister City
 - o The percentage of youth exchange participants who have gone on to study abroad in college
 - o A running list of partnerships developed as a result of your Sister City relationship
 - o The effect on local tax revenue, tourism, jobs and other investments of your Sister City relationship
- Make sure these facts are accurate. Data tells a strong story but only when it is accurate. Wrong or misleading figures will cause people to question your claims about how your “ask” will impact your SCI chapter and your community.

No pitch would be complete without qualitative data i.e. success stories. Before you arrange a meeting to advocate on behalf of your program, take some time to think about what makes the partnership between you and your Sister City valuable. This will help you construct success stories to share with your local officials:

- How has our Sister City relationship specifically affected our community?

- Whose stories will have the strongest impact on my audience? If there is someone in your community who has been deeply influenced by their experience with your Sister City organization, s/he may make a great advocate for your programs.

New and noteworthy narratives are always worth collecting. When your Sister City does something noteworthy, make sure you record it. Whether you publish it on social media, submit a story to your local newspaper, or simply record it for your next meeting with an elected official, it is important to continue to capture the stories that portray great work that you are doing.

Data and success stories will be integral to your pitch, but it is also important to collect them for the audiences that are already engaging with your organization. They can be useful for fundraising, for spreading awareness, etc.

Step 5: Develop A One Page “Leave-Behind”

Now that you have your pitch, data, and success stories, it’s time to create an impactful document that you can leave with your local officials once your meeting is over. This “leave-behind” usually contains basic details about your organization (mission, contact information, list of Sister City relationships) as well as curated content relevant to your meeting, such as success stories, statistics, photos, website links, etc.

The leave-behind will help make sure local officials can recall and expand upon the critical points you make in your meeting long after you’ve left.

We have included a **customizable one-pager outline** in the appendix of this guide. More resources can be found at: www.sistercities.org/about-us/sci-at-a-glance/

Sister City Success Story: Tulsa Global Alliance

Tulsa Global Alliance had great success with their recent Tulsa Run event. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Tulsa Run, the Tulsa Global Alliance invited all of their Sister Cities to participate in the race, of which three (San Luis Potosi, Mexico; Utsunomiya, Japan; and Amiens, France) sent runners.

While they were in Tulsa, delegates from Sister Cities had an opportunity to meet with government officials and leaders of cultural and business organizations (such as the Tulsa Port of Catoosa and the Hardesty Arts Center), while also taking the time to meet the Mayor, run the race, and visit local schools.

This event, while focused primarily on sports diplomacy, gave Tulsa the opportunity to generate international interest in different sectors of the community including education, business, government, and the arts.

Step 6: Meet with Your Local Officials

Nothing is more effective than speaking to your local officials face-to-face when it comes to developing relationships and garnering support for your program. It's important to prepare for these meetings well ahead of time.

Scheduling Meetings or Calls with Your Local Officials

The office contact information of elected officials is publicly available, so a basic internet search will help you locate the phone number and email address of the local officials that you wish to meet. Phone calls are always an efficient way of scheduling a meeting; however, you may wish to send a formal email. We have provided a **meeting request template** in the appendix for you.

Resources to Bring to Your Meeting

When meeting with elected officials, you should always bring an agenda and a leave-behind.

Agendas will help you keep the meeting on track, while the leave behind will extend your impact on the official long after you have left their office.

We have provided a **meeting agenda template** and a **one-pager template** in our appendix.

Meeting with Your Local Officials to Make Your Ask

At this point, you should be well-prepared to have a positive and effective meeting with your local officials. What is important to remember now is what NOT to do when interacting with elected officials and staff when seeking support for your ask.

What NOT to Do When Working with Elected Officials and Staff

1. "Wasn't my appointment with the Mayor? I don't want to meet with 'just staff!'"

Forging relationships with a staff member can greatly benefit your cause. There are strong benefits to speaking with an elected official's staff member, because s/he has more time to meet and has the ear of the elected official.

2. "Here is some reading material for you – our 67 page annual report."

When meeting with an elected official or a staff person, try to limit leave-behind materials to one page (see our one pager template in the appendix). Long reports are unlikely to be read. However, you should include details on where further information on your organization can be located.

3. “No, I don’t have an appointment, but I promise I’ll only take a half hour of your time.”

Unless you already have a strong relationship with the elected official or staff person, a “drop-in” is not advised. Most staff are happy to try to set up a meeting if you can demonstrate why a meeting is worthwhile.

4. “Our meeting is only scheduled for half an hour, so I’ll lead with my “ask” to save time.”

Building a good rapport with your elected official or assigned staff person can go a long way toward turning them into advocates for your cause. Even if time is tight, avoid rushing into making demands. Take some time to establish who you are and why your organization makes a difference in the community.

5. “No, I don’t really need anything specific.”

If you do not make an ask, staff will wonder why you came by. Updates on your program are fine, so long as they are accompanied by a request, such as a request to attend an event or to consider adding SCI membership dues to the annual budget.

6. “We have ten (or more) people in our group.”

If you have more than five people in your group, the meeting will likely feel overcrowded. Try to limit your group to no more than five. If you plan to bring several people to your meeting, it is a good opportunity to invite your stakeholders for support.

7. “No, I don’t represent anyone from your district.”

Local officials are elected to represent their constituents. Your time is always best spent working with your own elected officials and turning them into an advocate for your cause.

Thanking and Following Up with Your Local Officials

No matter how short your meeting was, always send a thank you follow-up email message to the elected official or staff member with whom you met. Not only is it polite, but it will leave a positive impression of you and your organization in their memory. You should send this thank you note as soon as possible, but the official or staff person should receive the note by the following day at the latest.

Tip: send relevant links about your organization in the thank you email to share further success stories, demonstrate the value of your organization, and to encourage officials to follow your work.

This is where regular press coverage of your initiatives and events can come in handy.

We have provided a **post-meeting thank you letter template** in our appendix.

Step 7: Reflection and Communication

Immediately after your meeting, reflect on the time spent with your official, your preparation, and your follow-up. What went well? What didn't? Decide what worked and what needs improvement, and revise your approach. This will be important to the success and effectiveness of future meetings.

Ways to Sustain Communication with Your Local Officials

Advocating to your local officials on behalf of your Sister Cities program isn't a one-off event. In order to gain true, sustained support for your program, you must maintain regular communication—which includes a combination of face-to-face meetings and sending collateral about your program. It makes them feel valued and keeps them up-to-date with what your local program is doing.

Some of the ways in which programs can keep local officials and other supporters informed include:

- Newsletters
- Blog
- Social media
- Events

Finding the right mixture of communications is important to sustaining support for your program—not just among local officials, but in the wider community as well. We have included a breakdown of each communication type below.

Newsletters

Newsletters—especially electronic newsletters—are a great way to keep the contacts you have updated on your program's activities. Not all of your followers may have social media, but they definitely have an email address!

You should decide on a template or format for your newsletter that suits your needs, but make sure your newsletter includes things like upcoming events, recent success stories, photos, and opportunities for people to get involved.

Sister City Success Story: Aspen Sister Cities

Aspen Sister Cities International has developed a dynamic medical exchange program with Bariloche, Argentina. Since 2003, the two cities have been exchanging medical professionals to improve patient care in both cities.

Medical professionals from Aspen teach their counterparts in Bariloche new techniques and how to use modern medical equipment (donated by Aspen), while the Bariloche medical professionals teach their Aspen counterparts how to perform medical procedures without modern equipment and few supplies—highly valuable knowledge as disaster and emergency management become more important to cities.

When Dr. Mindy Nagle (on OB-GYN in Aspen) visited Bariloche, she had never not used an ultrasound to check in on the progress of a patient's pregnancy. The medical professionals in Bariloche taught her how to do this by using a hollowed out horn and holding it up to the belly to listen to the baby. (Source: Aspen Times Weekly)

This ongoing exchange provides mutual benefit to participants from both cities: Bariloche medical professionals receive supplies, equipment, and training in order to extend the service capabilities of their local public hospital, while Aspen medical professionals learn how to perform important medical procedures without modern equipment. All participants come away with new knowledge that will help them better serve their communities.

Blogs

Blogs are a basic communication item that you can use to talk about your programs and initiatives. Blogs can be shared on multiple platforms (like your newsletter and social media channels) and have versatile formats—making them the perfect way to spread awareness. If you do not have your own Sister City program website, there are lots of platforms where you can host a blog for free.

If you are short on time and staff to write blogs, you can ask others to write blogs for you. Create some blog guidelines (word count, topic, questions answered, pictures, etc), share with your volunteers, and encourage them to contribute.

If you don't want to host a blog for your organization, you can work with staff at Sister Cities International to write about your organization. We share these "member stories" with our entire network, giving your programs and initiatives a wider audience. Visit <http://sistercities.org/news/submit-your-story/> and fill out our webform to get started.

If you are looking to contribute to a more local outlet, you can also contribute to a community blog like the Patch, which shares local news to readers based upon their zipcode.

Social Media

Widening your communication channels to social media will allow you to reach both followers you already have on a more casual and regular basis and new audiences. This is important especially if you are looking to involve younger people in your programs, as most young people are more active and engaged on social media than they are with their email.

While there are a number of social media platforms out there, you don't need to be present on each one. If you take on too many social media platforms, it will be difficult to maintain an active presence and ensure your messages are reaching your audiences.

Tips on Maintaining a Good Social Media Presence

1. Social media is built for two-way communication, so respond to your followers' comments.
2. Mention or tag people involved in your pictures or posts.
3. Post often and use pictures and video in posts.
4. Be consistent across all social media platforms (use the same profile picture, logos, etc.)
5. Include links to your social media accounts on your website, email signatures, newsletters, etc.
6. Fine-tune the message to the platform—the best content to share will be different for each platform.

Events

Events can increase awareness of your Sister City organization by bringing together local officials, program participants, and other stakeholders to network and become further involved in your organization.

Sharing pictures, statistics, and quotes from the event on your blog, social media channels, and in your newsletter boost awareness of the event and give you relevant content for your audiences.

We have provided several **event-related templates** in our appendix.

Appendix

1. One Page Leave-Behind Template
2. Meeting Request Template
3. Meeting Agenda Template
4. Post-Meeting Thank You Email Template
5. Event: Speaker Invitation Template
6. Event: Thank You Letter Template

Thank you for reading our Advocating to City Governments guide. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact us at info@sistercities.org.

Facebook: Sister Cities International | Twitter: @SisterCitiesInt | Instagram: @SisterCitiesInt

One Page Leave-Behind Template

Background on Issues in the Community

The mission of your organization as it relates to these issues is [fill in]
I/We seek to achieve these goals through a variety of means, including:
[List one or two highlights of your work here. Try to limit it to two or three sentences.]

Currently, businesses and groups in our community impact this issue in the following ways:

- Brief overview of programs and projects in the community.
- What you're doing to solve existing problems.
- Other relevant information (any graphics).

Current Challenges

As our organization/community grows, we face a number of challenges.

[List one or two specific challenges, such as funding, awareness, etc.]

How Elected Officials Can Help

Local government will play an important role in setting policy priorities and identifying the funding necessary to meet our current and future goals. [add any specific asks here]

Insert your contact information here including websites, phone numbers, and details that can help local officials better understand the issues and what can be done.

See [website] for more information on what our Sister Cities are doing for [name of city]

Tips

- Mediums to utilize: Google docs/drawings, MS Word/PPT, Adobe Photoshop.
- Everything should fit on one page.
- Test your one pager by printing out a copy to make sure it can be emailed and printed out easily.
- If possible, try to use simple yet engaging graphics to draw attention.

Meeting Request Template

Preliminary Considerations

Deciding whether meeting should be in-person or virtual. If the person seems to be busy very often, virtual might be the best way to go.

Research the people you plan to speak to before you ask them to meet. Not only will knowing their backgrounds help during the actual conversation, but you'll usually find tidbits you can drop into your ask to make it more compelling. By making the extra effort, your request will be much more impressive.

Initial Request

Dear Mayor [his or her name],

On behalf of the [insert your sister city program or organization here] I am writing to request the opportunity to meet briefly with you in person to discuss [insert the reason why you want to speak with this person]. My name is [your name], and I'm a [job title] who works in [your location]. I would love to learn more about how I can [two or three things that you wish to accomplish]. Your input on this topic will enable the board to make an informed decision that will be in the best interests of our city and strengthen our Sister City relationships. Let's discuss this.

Given your demanding schedule, even 20 minutes would be greatly appreciated. I will call your office in a few days to check on this possibility.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your name], title

Following Up

If your target refrains from responding to your initial request, consider waiting one week and then send a follow-up email. There are many individuals who may forget to respond to first queries but do get back to you after another attempt.

Dear [his or her name],

I hope you're having a wonderful week! I wanted to follow up on my request for a meeting concerning [reason for meeting]. As I explained in my previous email, I'd love to explore how [questions you'd like to ask]. I'm happy to meet whenever and wherever is convenient for you.

Best,

[Your name], title

Meeting Agenda Template

[Meeting Title]

[Location/Address]

[Date]

Meeting Representatives A

Name

Name

Your Organization (include mission)

Name

Name

Agenda items

1. Participant introductions *(be sure to ask some questions to establish rapport)*
2. Introduction of sister city organization and its mission
3. Making your “ask” *(address the reason for the meeting)*
4. Convey the impact of your sister city’s programs
5. Your talking points *(try to pick 2-3 powerful ones)*
6. Questions & feedback *(recap any follow up steps that have been agreed upon)*

Post-Meeting Thank You Email Template

Preliminary Considerations

After a meeting—whether it is in-person, by phone, or virtually—it is important to send a follow-up thank you letter to express your appreciation. This is also a great way of reminding the person about your cause and providing any relevant follow up information. The thank you should reiterate briefly what your “ask” was, noting that you will appreciate their consideration of this topic.

Thank You Email

Dear [Title Last Name],

My sincerest thanks for meeting with me on [date, time]. I appreciated your receptiveness to learning more about our Sister Cities program. I hope you found learning more about [reason why you want to speak with this person] worthwhile and that this meeting will be the start of our collaboration on [goal of meeting, e.g. establish SCI dues as a budget item].

Your input and feedback on this strengthening our community’s Sister City program will surely be a valuable resource. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me should you have any questions or if you would like further information about our Sister City program.

Thank you again for making time to meet with me.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Sister Cities of [city name]

Events: Speaker Invitation Template

Dear [Title, Last Name],

On behalf of [the Sister Cities organization], I am writing to invite you to speak at [event title] we are planning to hold on [date and time] in [location]. The focus of the event will be [specify the focus of the event for example: education exchanges and city diplomacy]. We expect about [guest count] to attend [event title].

[Sister Cities organization name] is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to [insert your mission, for example: global friendship, multicultural understanding, and economic growth by developing lasting relationships between our area and [name of sister city]].

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about this event. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Your Name

[Your Sister Cities Organization]

Events: Thank You Letter Template

Dear [Title Last Name],

On behalf of [the Sister Cities organization], thank you for speaking at the [event title] on [date]. Your well-crafted presentation and willingness to engage with the guests was an essential contribution to a successful event. More than [guest count] attended, and [amount of money] was raised for our program.*

Your remarks were insightful and reflected your broad and deep experience. [Choose key points from discussion that you found important].

We are grateful for you taking the time out of your schedule to speak at [event title] and look forward to seeing you again at future sister city events.

Sincerely,

Your Name
[Sister City organization]

**Only include if this event was a fundraiser*

Notes

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Notes



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