

Managing Global Connections

The Role of Citizen Diplomacy for U.S. Cities and Towns

At her U.S. Senate confirmation hearing to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes said, “I believe there is no more important challenge for our future than the urgent need to foster greater understanding, more respect, and a sense of common interests and common ideals among Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths throughout the world.”

In an age of nonstop news coverage, integrated financial markets, and global terrorism, diplomacy is no longer a task reserved for government-employed diplomats. In subsequent remarks, Under Secretary Hughes has said that diplomacy is also “our shared American challenge.” In fact, the diplomatic efforts of private citizens, through scientific exchanges, traveling artists and sports teams, and conferences and study tours, are some of the most useful activities that build bridges between people, increase trust, and foster mutual understanding. These contacts can serve to correct misperceptions and unfounded fears, and can reverse the trend toward dehumanization and the entrenchment of hostile images that often are at the core of conflicts.

In short, the work of “citizen diplomats” is indispensable because their efforts start with the underlying assumption that real or potential animosity can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to accept good will and reasonableness, and to respond in kind.

Q. What is citizen diplomacy?

President Dwight D. Eisenhower created the present-day concept of “citizen diplomacy.” During the early years of the Cold War, Eisenhower established *The People-to-People Program* to enhance international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities involving the exchange of ideas and experiences directly among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures. President Eisenhower felt that creating understanding among people was essential to building the road to enduring peace and envisioned programs such as sister cities, international sporting events, musical concerts, theatrical tours, book drives, pen-pals, and hospitality tours as the means to achieving this goal.

Q. Does citizen diplomacy support national security?

Studies by the Aspen Institute and the Pew Research Center emphasize both an extreme lack of knowledge and understanding about the United States, particularly in the Islamic world. This lack of knowledge facilitates vicious stereotyping that diminishes regard for the United States and fuels terrorism. This knowledge deficit is in fact a two-way deficit. Americans need to know and understand the world better lest ignorance be perceived as arrogance.

A web of person-to-person contacts supports U.S. national security by undercutting these stereotypes. Even a person who strongly opposes U.S. foreign policies will find it hard to be hostile towards the United States if he or she has had dinner in an American home, worked cooperatively with American counterparts, learned English from an American teacher, or attended an American school. A globally literate and internationally engaged American public can be one of the strongest pillars of national security.

Q. What kinds of outcomes do American citizen diplomats achieve?

- They project the nation's values of freedom and human dignity regardless of race, religion, cultural practices, or political beliefs.
- They promote global economic growth by sharing an entrepreneurial spirit and connecting business leaders.
- They dispel myths and stereotypes about countries, peoples and societies.
- They offer a neutral haven for the airing of conflicts and disagreements.

Q. Why is it important for municipal officials to be citizen diplomats?

Mayors, councilmembers, and city managers are both the symbolic and the practical leaders within their communities. Local leaders hold positions of enormous respect, especially when viewed from the perspective of people outside the United States.

Municipal officials are uniquely positioned to build global connections. Examples include:

- advocating for increasing international connections whether for commercial, cultural or educational purposes;
- seeking and welcoming foreign investment to build jobs in the community;
- promoting the products and services of local businesses abroad;
- encouraging tourism; and
- supporting international student and cultural exchanges and foreign language study in schools.

In short, local officials may be the best ambassadors for their communities because they combine a deep level of knowledge about the community with an abiding commitment to see it prosper and possess the legal mandate to craft and implement laws.

Q. How can U.S. municipal officials become active as citizen diplomats?

There are a wealth of programs and institutions that provide support for international exchange and global education. Some of the best that have served the interests of local government, especially with scholarship and fellowship opportunities, are listed below.

Sister Cities International (USA): a nonprofit citizen diplomacy network that creates and strengthens partnerships between U.S. and international communities which strive to build global cooperation at the municipal level, promote cultural understanding, and stimulate economic development. Established in 1956 as an outgrowth of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s People-to-People Conference, Sister Cities International supports 2300 city “twinings” in 127 countries. Web address: www.sister-cities.org.

The German Marshall Fund of the United States: a nonpartisan American public policy and grantmaking institution dedicated to promoting greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and Europe. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. Web address: www.gmfus.org.

The American Council on Germany: an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which promotes dialogue among leaders from business, government, and the media in the United States and Europe. The ACG strengthens transatlantic understanding and coordinates policy initiatives on key issues. Incorporated in 1952 in New York to encourage reconciliation and understanding following the two World Wars, ACG anticipates emerging challenges relevant to the transatlantic relationship and encourages innovative approaches to problem solving. The ACG supports the open exchange of views and builds personal networks among leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Web address: www.acgusa.org.

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (Japan): Founded in Tokyo in 1988, the Council supports the internationalization of local government in Japan. CLAIR promotes international exchange activities for Japanese local governments as well as a special program for teaching English at the junior and senior high school level. The office in the United States operates in New York under the name of the Japan Local Government Center. Web address: www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html (for English text).

National Committee on United States-China Relations: Established in 1966 as a private, nonpartisan not-for-profit organization, NCUSCR promotes understanding and cooperation between the United States and Greater China in the belief that sound and productive Sino-American relations serve vital American and world interests. The National Committee creates opportunities for informed discussion and reasoned debate about issues of common interest and concern to the United States, the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. They currently organize programs for private and public sector participants on politics and security, education, governance and civil society, economic cooperation, the media, and transnational issues such as the environment and public health. In 1972, NCUSCR sponsored the historic visit of China’s Ping-Pong team to the United States. Web address: www.ncuscr.org.

U.S.-China Exchange Association: a not-for-profit organization dedicated to building relationships between American and Chinese leaders in business and local government. The organization sponsors a trade and business development mission to China each year for elected municipal officials and entrepreneurs. Contact Mr. George Wang, President, at ucieaa@cs.com.

The Arab American Institute: a not-for-profit research, policy and advocacy organization that represents the interests of Arab Americans throughout the United States. The Institute strives to serve as a central resource to government officials, the media, political leaders and community groups on a variety of public policy issues of concern to Arab Americans and to U.S.-Arab relations. The Institute convenes national and local organizations for leadership summits to respond to crisis situations, provides public information through newsletters, magazines and television, and organizes study tours to the Middle East for Members of Congress and other U.S. delegations. Web address: www.aaiusa.org.

Q. Is there an international organization that brings together elected leaders from local governments around the world for the specific benefit of cities and towns?

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the largest and most representative organization serving local governments and local officials in every region of the world, and the principal municipal partner of the international community. The organization has over 1000 member cities in more than 100 countries and is an advocate for local governments before international organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank. Under the auspices of UCLG, local leaders come together to share experiences, learn about successful programs, and work collaboratively to support the economic competitiveness of communities in the global marketplace. The National League of Cities is a member of UCLG and serves as the regional administrator for North America. American municipal officials play a significant role in the governance and operation of the organization. Website address: www.cities-localauthorities.org.

Q. What other resources are available to inform or assist citizen diplomats?

People to People: Founded on September 11, 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, People to People International (PTPI) is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to enhance international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities involving the exchange of ideas and experiences directly among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures. PTPI will cooperate with any other organizations which are of similar nature and purpose and dedicated to enhancing cross-cultural communication within each community, and across communities and nations. Tolerance and mutual understanding are central themes. Web address: www.ptpi.org

National Council on International Visitors: a nonprofit organization providing services to members that help them be more effective citizen diplomats. Acting through a national network of program agencies and 91 community-based organizations, volunteers design and implement professional programs and provide cultural activities and home hospitality opportunities for foreign leaders, specialists, and international scholars. The international visitors served by the NCIV network are participants in the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program, other international exchange programs, and guests of local governments, corporations, universities, medical and research centers, and other professional organizations. Web address: www.nciv.org.

American Council of Young Political Leaders: a bipartisan nonprofit association founded in 1966 and dedicated to promote understanding and cultivate lasting political, economic and cultural relationships among young political leaders and policy makers (aged 25-40) worldwide through the regular exchange of delegations, educational forums, leadership training and ongoing dialogue. As a catalyst for introducing rising political leaders to international affairs and to each other, ACYPL conducts programs and exchanges with more than 90 nations, producing a global network of several thousand alumni, a large number of whom have risen to positions of great influence in the United States and in nations around the globe. Web address: www.acypl.org.

Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange: an association of non-governmental organizations comprising the international educational and cultural exchange community in the United States whose mission is to formulate and promote public policies that support the growth and well-being of international exchange links between the people of the United States and other nations. In addition to policy and advocacy activities, the Alliance publishes the *International Exchange Locator*, a comprehensive directory on U.S.-based organizations, federal agencies, and Congressional offices involved with international exchange. Web address: www.alliance-exchange.org.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and International Republican Institute: twin nonprofit nonpartisan organizations funded through the National Endowment for Democracy to advance democracy, freedom, citizen participation, self-government and the rule of law worldwide by developing and supporting political parties, civic institutions, open elections and good governance. Web addresses: www.ndi.org and www.iri.org

U.S. Department of State: the cabinet department which operates the International Visitor Leadership Program and the Fulbright Program, both of which are designed to increase mutual understanding through communication and cooperation at the personal and professional level. Fulbright grants are offered to U.S. graduate students, teachers, professionals and others with leadership potential. Web address: www.state.gov

Q. What questions should be addressed to municipal staff on this topic?

- Does the community have a sister city agreement with a logically identified partner, a set of measurable and meaningful goals, strong local support, a dedicated team of volunteers, a stable financial base, and a clear vision about future activities and benefits?
- How many foreign visitors – students, professionals, politicians, business executives, and tourists – come through the city each year? From where do they come? Are there any programs in place to connect with these visitors?
- How might the local government play a coordinating role to support the diverse and possibly isolated organizations that have relationships abroad – schools, businesses, civic and social clubs, convention bureaus, ports authorities, foreign consular officials, and ethnic groups?

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