

**SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENSHIP AND SERVICE**

**By
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Sister Cities International**

Sister Cities International (SCI) is pleased to announce that the Florida League of Cities has become a member of SCI as part of the “Small Community Sister City Initiative.” Its membership will help strengthen and expand the sister cities movement in the state of Florida, and ensure that all of Florida’s communities benefit from the increasing opportunities for international engagement and growth in this new global era.

Currently, 42 communities in Florida are partnered through their sister city programs with 118 international communities located in 48 different countries. These communities, much like the rest of our network’s nearly 700 U.S. communities linked with about 1, 500 communities in 121 countries around the world, have already discovered the joys and benefits of participating in international partnership programs.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., SCI is an international membership association responsible for recognizing and supporting sister city relationships between U.S. communities and their international counterparts. The U.S. sister cities movement was developed in 1956 during a White House Summit on citizen diplomacy, initiated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The partnerships were initially seen as a means to promote world peace and diminish the tensions of World War II. Since that time, they have grown to encompass all sorts of cultural, economic and development-oriented activities. Originally a part of the National League of Cities, SCI became a separate, non-profit corporation in 1967 due to the tremendous growth and popularity of the sister cities program.

Sister city programs are locally based and focus on the international interests and values that emerge from a local government’s collaboration with citizen volunteers. This occurs through an organizational structure officially approved by the local government governing body. Each community, together with its sister city, decides on the projects and activities to be undertaken. These can range from youth exchanges to economic development, from humanitarian assistance to municipal cooperation. The program possibilities are as extensive and diverse as the sister city network itself.

The goals of the sister cities movement are to increase global cooperation at the community/municipal level, promote cultural and educational exchanges, and foster community and economic development. Sister city programs are built on a partnership between local government and citizen volunteers and are often focused on the following objectives:

- **Developing** municipal partnerships between U.S. communities and communities around the world.
- **Providing** opportunities for municipal officials and their citizens to experience and explore other cultures through long-term community partnerships
- **Creating** an atmosphere in which positive economic and community development can be implemented and strengthened given the realities of the new global economy
- **Stimulating** environments through which communities creatively learn, work and problem-solve together through reciprocal exchanges and projects, involving education, arts and culture, business, and professional/technical areas such as health, the environment and public safety

THE SMALL COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE:

Through the SCI/ Florida League partnership, a “Small Communities Sister City Initiative” has been developed. This initiative reflects our joint determination to encourage smaller communities to become active in the sister cities movement. As part of the program, any member League community within Florida, and with a population under 25,000, will receive a 50 percent reduction in their first year’s membership dues. The following table shows the benefits to the smaller communities for the year 2002:

Population	Dues	50 percent First Year Small Communities Initiative due 7/1/02	Next Dues Payment (full amount)
10,000 – 25,000	\$295	\$148	7/1/03
5,000 – 10,000	\$205	\$102	7/1/03
Under 5,000	\$130	\$65	7/1/03

SCI, as a membership organization, offers extensive services to its members. These include:

- Assistance in formulating an excellent community process that can result in the selection of an appropriate sister city. This is done through publication manuals, SCI staff assistance, workshops and conferences, and networking with other communities that have a successful sister cities program
- Subscription to all SCI publications, including bi-monthly issues of *SCI News* and the *Report to the Membership*, the annual Membership Directory, and instructional guides covering all aspects of local program development
- Eligibility for all SCI-managed grants and programs
- Opportunity to purchase online discounted supplemental medical insurance when traveling abroad

- Processing of IAP-66 applications for J-1 visas for secondary school exchange programs at a rate 80 percent less than other companies
- Entitlement to send voting delegates to the SCI Annual Conference, and the ability to participate in all aspects of SCI growth and development
- Opportunity to participate in the SCI Annual Awards Program and the SCI Young Artist Program
- Eligibility for member-only discounts for registration at the SCI Annual Conference and other events and activities
- Full password access to SCI's Web-based International Community Resource Center (ICRC) at www.sister-cities.org. This includes:
 - The ability to instantaneously send email and translate documents in seven different languages, with more to be added in the near future
 - Direct access to one of the most advanced and innovative "search engines" for foundations, corporations, and government grants.
 - Entry to the only Web site with the power to report, track, and compile the tools and techniques, which promote outstanding sister city programs, including fundraising, publications, and capacity-building for local programs
 - Landmark entry to detailed community profiles and contact information for member communities and cities seeking cities

Communities over 25,000 in population are also encouraged to join SCI. They will be entitled to all of the above membership benefits, with the exception of the first year 50 percent discount on their dues.

Please visit our Web site at www.sister-cities.org. Here you will find a wealth of information, including a list of international cities seeking U.S. partnerships, a section on Frequently Asked Questions, and all the information and online forms to apply for membership. And, of course you can call our office. Our Coordinator of Membership Services is Justine Morgan, her phone number is 202-347-8639 and e-mail is jmorgan@sister-cities.org

We look forward and are committed to working closely with everyone associated with the Florida League of Cities and potentially participating in the League workshops and conferences. Our common goal is to promote global partnerships where local citizens, working with their sister city programs, can make tangible and significant contributions. In doing so, the quality of life in your communities will be enhanced, and your citizens will be immensely proud of the contributions they are making to a more just and peaceful world.