

Sister Cities International Conference
July 12-14, 2012
Jacksonville, Florida



Instead of a lengthy report of all of the activities of the SCI Conference, I am instead just including some best practices and ideas that particularly impressed me, and, of course, the highlight of the entire year – The Best Overall Program Award for populations 25,001-50,000.

Economic Impact

- Relationship building between sister cities plays a major role and is essential before attempting economic development
- Look at your city's comprehensive plan and see how your sister city program fits into the plan, how do we fill the need
- All you need is ONE economic success to show viability of the program
- Assess your local resources – Business, Government, Education & Non-Profits
- Create a one-page handout with heading in foreign language and outline below (based on information from Assessing Local Resources handout) of investment opportunities in Tourism, Industry, Other
- Look at your sister city first – what is THEIR need, how can we fill it?
- Put your community profile data on a jump drive to distribute to businesses in your sister city
- Start an international festival or festival based on your sister city relationship; Tempe, AZ has had huge success with theirs <http://www.tempeoktoberfest.com>
- Incubators – Help your sister city become successful in the U.S. market
- Invite business from your sister city to come see you and your market
- Internships for young adults from your sister city or for one of your young adults to your sister city can form relationships that pay off in business
- A big part of a delegation trip is cultural training

Leading Asia – Renewing the U.S. Japan Sister City Network (the grant we received)

- Incorporating Business into your U.S. Japan Sister City Relationship
- Japanese perspectives – 1.)having friends in the U.S. means a lot – the U.S. is a prestigious country, 2.) if we start talking business they might think we are taking advantage of the U.S. relationship, 3.) friendships are the basis for trust that can form business liaisons
- Japan-U.S. Southeast & Southeast U.S./Japan Association meeting in Tokyo Sept. 13-15
- The main emphasis was building relationships; they are the basis for economic development
- Met a representative from Miyagi Prefecture – the neighboring prefecture to Hanamaki, where the tsunami hit - his purpose is to develop business relationships with U.S.

Exchange ideas

- Photography exchange
- Humanitarian exchange – for your sister city or partner with your sister city to help another city
- Youth projects – HONEY project sells honey from their sister city in Ghana to benefit sister city as well as unemployed youth in the U.S. city
- Do a book study with schoolchildren in sister city; Skype to discuss

Miscellaneous

- SAGE (Strengthening America’s Global Engagement) is a public private partnership – PR for a more positive American image to predominately Muslim countries with large youth populations. There are lots of funding opportunities for exchange between U.S. sister cities and cities in Muslim countries. Speaker was Goli Ameri, Former Assistant Secretary of State
- Fund raiser idea – Mayor’s International Dinner, vote online prior to the event to raise money for the favorite (dancer in their case, but other categories could be used)
- A huge plea for sister cities to match with cities in Africa

Hot Springs Sister City Program

As one of the award-winning cities, we were given a table in the exhibit area to feature our program. Our table promoted not only our program, but Hot Springs to attendees from across the country and around the world.

I also had the opportunity to do a presentation about our program in a “Best Practices” presentation and participate in a panel discussion made up of best overall program recipients.



Multiple Sister Cities

Many U.S. cities have multiple sister cities. Each sister city appeals to a different segment of the population, and instead of diluting the support of the program, seems to enhance it. In what seemed like the most common model, one person affiliated with the city coordinated the programs with separate boards for each of the sister cities. The possibilities for exchange, trade and tourism can be expanded exponentially by having multiple partnerships.



The conference ended with the awards ceremony featuring top sister city programs being recognized for overall programming, arts and culture, energy innovation, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, youth and education, and volunteerism. It was a great honor to represent Hot Springs in accepting the award for Best Overall Program, population 25,001-50,000.

The 2012 Sister Cities International Conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas.