

## Sister City Interviews June 2020

*The Montgomery County (MD) Government has commissioned a strategic planning process designed to identify an implementation plan for strengthening Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. Below are interview notes taken by Bruce Adams to capture the essence of what the interviewees said. These notes have been approved by the interviewees, but they should not be cited as verbatim quotes from the interviewees. For more information about this project, please email Bruce Adams at [bruce@greaterwash.org](mailto:bruce@greaterwash.org).*

*To see notes from the April and May interviews, go to:  
<http://montgomerysistercities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Sister-City-Interviews-April-and-May-2020.pdf>*

- **Montgomery Sister Cities (MSC) Board Members** (April 7, 2020 and June 10, 2020);
- **Ben Wu**, President and CEO, Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC); Former Deputy Secretary, State of Maryland Department of Commerce; and Former U.S. Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce (June 11, 2020);
- **Craig Rice**, County Councilmember (June 15, 2020);
- **Gondar, Ethiopian Sister City Committee Members** (June 15, 2020);
- **Don Mooers**, Founder, Mooers Immigration; Former Peace Corps Regional Director; Former Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone (June 16, 2020);
- **Greg Wims**, Former Governor, Rotary District 7620, Central Maryland and Washington, DC; Former President, Maryland and Montgomery County Chapters of NAACP; Founder, Victims' Rights Foundation (June 17, 2020);
- **Jayme Staley**, Executive Director, Greater Columbus Sister Cities International and **Sameen Dafar**, Program Manager, Greater Columbus Sister Cities International (June 17, 2020);
- **Beth Weibel**, Senior Program Manager, Fort Worth Sister Cities International (June 17, 2020);
- **Kay Sargent**, Executive Director, Lexington Sister Cities Commission (June 19, 2020);

- **Sherry Dowlatshahi**, Chief Diplomacy and Protocol Officer & Head of International Relations Office; and **Martha Henry**, International Relations Manager, International Relations Office; City of San Antonio, Texas (June 19, 2020);
- **Mary Kane**, Director, National Museum of American Diplomacy; Former President and CEO, Sister Cities International; Former Secretary of State, State of Maryland (June 22, 2020);
- **Richard Buckler**, Treasurer and Former President, Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation (June 23, 2020);
- **Northwestern Chinese American Association of Greater Washington - Xi'an, China Sister City Committee Members** (June 24, 2020); and
- **Morazán, El Salvadoran Sister City Committee Members** (June 25, 2020).

**Montgomery Sister Cities Board Members:**  
**June 10, 2020 Board Meeting**

**This meeting of the members of the board of Montgomery Sister Cities was conducted via Zoom. The following members were in attendance:**

**Nick Arrindell (NA):** retired Johns Hopkins University administrator (Takoma Park);

**Mumin Barre (MB):** Acting Chair of MSC Board; retired from The Travelers Insurance Company (Gaithersburg);

**Tracey-Alexis Dixon (TD):** Secretary of MSC Board; public health project manager (Silver Spring)

**Alicia Hannon (AH):** US Department of Treasury financial analyst (Rockville);

**Roman Santillan (RS):** Treasurer of MSC Board; MC Public Libraries (Hyattsville);

**Clemmie Solomon (CS):** retired Montgomery College Dean of Student Engagement (Takoma Park);

**Yasin Yimam (YY):** head of Gondar, Ethiopia Sister City Committee (Takoma Park).

**Staff:** Cynthia Morris (CM), Senior Fellow, Office of Community Partnerships.

**Guests:** Sid Groeneman (SG) and Nazaret Berhane.

**MB, MSC acting chair of the MSC board, welcomed the members and guests and asked BA to introduce our guests.**

**BA reminded the board that in the discussion of a possible survey, board chair MB had suggested asking the Volunteer Center to help us find volunteer professionals to assist us with our survey. BA explained that Sid Groeneman, a public opinion and marketing research professional, volunteered to develop, implement, and summarize the findings of the survey. Nazaret Berhane compiled a list of people who had been involved with Sister Cities over the years. As a result of their efforts, we have a very rich survey document compiling the opinions of more than 200 respondents as well as a list of people interested in Montgomery Sister Cities. BA, MB, and board members thanked Sid Groeneman and Nazaret Berhane for their important contributions to the work of Montgomery Sister Cities, and MB virtually presented each of them with a certificate of appreciation from MSC.**

**BA began the discussion of the survey by stating that it was not to be read as a random survey of Montgomery County residents. The survey was sent to those on the Office of Community Partnerships email list and those past supporters from the list developed by NB, people predisposed to favor efforts to showcase Montgomery County's diversity. But BA said that the survey data will be quite helpful to him in preparation of his report for the County Executive and to the MSC board moving forward.**

**SG confirmed that this survey should not be viewed as a random sample, but that it did show real interest by four of ten respondents in serving on Sister City committees. He said all five goals were tightly clustered with a slight preference for Welcoming Environment and Community Engagement.**

**RS pointed out that it is not adequate to send surveys by email. To get a broad sample and get to the younger generation, surveys must be sent via social media. SG confirmed that half of respondents were 60+ and only 2% were 30 or under. CS pointed out that support for preparing global citizens for the future might have been higher if more younger people responded to the survey.**

**RS said MSC should do more programs that would give students an opportunity to fulfill their Student Service Learning (SSL) hours.**

**TD said we should make the board more diverse and add younger people.**

**MB referenced the 20,000 masks coming from our Sister City in Xi'an, China.**

**BA suggested he walk the group through the recommendations in his preliminary report of May 25, 2020.**

### **Montgomery Sister Cities: Board of Directors**

**First, the MSC Board of Directors needs to be more representative of the Montgomery County population and needs active participation from representatives of all the Sister City committees.**

**NA: We need to try to do this. We need to look carefully at what additions are needed to create a fully representative board.**

**CS: We need a philanthropist who can help us attract large donors.**

**CM: I will share the job description we created for board members along with a template nonprofit groups use to help to ensure a board is representative.**

**AH: We need to be careful in our wording about having a board 50% male and 50% female. I'll suggest some language. [AH proposed by email after the meeting: "We want to ensure our board is gender expansive, to represent individuals of all gender identities and gender expressions."]**

**MB: We need to have a representative of the County Executive on the board.**

**General agreement for asking each Sister City to propose two rather than one member to serve on the board.**

**BA: I urge the board to establish a nominating committee and not wait until my report is submitted to get going on the diversification of the board.**

**Note: MSC bylaws provide there may be no more than 25 members on the board.**

**Second, once a more representative board is in place, the MSC board should review the original mission statement and objectives of the organization to determine if change is needed.**

**General agreement.**

Third, the MSC board must play a much stronger role in providing guidance to the five Sister City committees and begin by convening a meeting of all members of the committees to discuss expectations.

**TD: We must insist on accountability of the Sister City committees.**

**NA: We must have representation of all five Sister Cities on our board.**

**AH: We need to make a strong effort to ensure these accountability provisions. We must demonstrate that we made an effort before we drop any Sister City for failure to comply.**

Fourth, the MSC board needs to develop a public relations and marketing plan to lift the visibility of the organization.

**General agreement.**

**NA: we should prepare and distribute short tv/social media ads promoting Montgomery Sister Cities program.**

Fifth, the MSC board needs to develop a comprehensive plan for raising private dollars to support the organization.

**General agreement.**

**CS: There should be a set amount that each board member contribute or raise from others.**

**BA: Rather than a set amount, an option would be to ask each board member to make MSC one of the board member's top three annual contributions to charity.**

Montgomery Sister Cities: Sister City Committees

First, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister City committees needs to focus on broadening representation and participation.

**General agreement.**

Second, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister Cities needs to develop operating procedures for ensuring basic accountability to the board and to the public.

**General agreement.**

Third, each of the five Sister City committees should provide two members to serve on the MSB board.

**General agreement.**

Fourth, each of the five Sister Cities should submit an annual plan to the MSC board committing to organize a minimum of two public events each year.

**CS & NA: Support minimum of two events per year, but we would hope each would do more.**

**Staffing the Sister Cities Program**

BA said there was a clear consensus by interviewees that the Sister Cities program needs dedicated staff with most recommending one full-time staff person with administrative support. But BA said the problem with the consensus view in his opinion is that it is not adequate.

BA suggested the solution might be the creation of a global affairs coordinating council with each partner agreeing to release some time of staff to contribute needed expertise to support the Sister Cities program and the single Sister Cities staffer serving as the connector in a role not unlike an orchestra conductor. The council would be made up of representatives from the major Sister City partners – Montgomery Sister Cities Board, Montgomery County Executive, Montgomery County Council, Montgomery College, Montgomery Public Schools, The

[Universities at Shady Grove, KID Museum, and the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation.](#)

**CS: One full-time staff person with administrative support might not be enough, but it would be a start. Yes, it would be good to try to get commitments of staff support from all the partners.**

**RS: In this job market, it will be easy to find a person with all the skills we need. We will be able to find someone with excellent qualifications.**

**NA: BA's proposal for "the single Sister Cities staffer serving as the connector in a role not unlike an orchestra conductor" is a great idea, but it will not be easy to implement.**

**BA: Agreed!**

**CM: Think through with real clarity what you want the staff person to do. Things will fall apart if you rely too heavily on volunteers.**

**BA: My proposal is that the staff person would be collaborating with paid staff from our partner organizations who would be held accountable by the partner organizations for carrying through on their agreed upon tasks.**

**MB: Once we are able to travel again, we will also need a staff person expert in organizing mission trips.**

**BA: Absolutely. That will be essential in the future, but not needed in the short term.**

**BA: My proposal fails to address the need of staffing the Sister City committees. In the Leggett administration, we used the Office of Community Partnerships' liaisons to staff the Sister Cities committees. That worked fine for El Salvador and Ethiopia where Sister Cities was an excellent engagement tool and the Latino and African liaisons each had only one Sister City. But it fell apart when we added three Asian Sister Cities with less emphasis on the community engagement goals of OCP and only one Asian liaison to serve all three.**

**RS: We can not rely on the OCP liaisons as they have much too much other work to do.**

**MB: Yes, but the OCP liaisons do need to be part of the Sister City teams.**

**Recommended Programs & Activities: 2020 & 2021**

BA reminded the group that the County Executive and OCP director Diane Vu asked for a specific set of recommendations for actions that can be taken in the next 18 months. In his preliminary report, BA recommended the remainder of 2020 be devoted to building a strong organizational foundation starting with a more representative Montgomery Sister Cities Board of Directors and reenergized Sister City committees and discussions among the Sister City partners about the best way to strengthen and deepen the Sister City program as a means of advancing community engagement, global education, cultural understanding, and economic development. 2021 could include more virtual events and the start of a return to a more traditional Sister City program with perhaps a mission trip to India in November 2021.

The board reviewed the recommended programs and activities for 2020 and 2021 included in BA's preliminary report of May 25, 2020.

**CS: We should convene a day long retreat of the board this fall.**

**General agreement with CS's proposal for an October 2020 retreat.**

**AH: We do not have to do everything ourselves. We do not have to wait until 2021. We should partner with others and start holding events this fall.**

**RS: The libraries will partner with Sister Cities on events.**

**YY: Please add a possible tenth anniversary mission trip to Ethiopia in January 2022.**

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**Benjamin Wu, President and CEO**  
**Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC);**  
**Former Deputy Secretary, State of Maryland Department of Commerce; and**  
**Former U.S. Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 11, 2020**

Strengths:

Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works? What aspects of Sister Cities most advance the goals of MCEDC?

**I am a big fan of Sister Cities programs. My experience with Sister Cities comes mostly from my work as Deputy Secretary of Maryland's Department of Commerce. I am not as familiar with the Montgomery Sister Cities program. Sister Cities programs provide great value by giving us the ability to connect worldwide.**

Weaknesses:

Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

**I have found that virtually every Sister Cities engagement wants an economic development component, but not every Sister City has an economy mature enough to justify the effort. It can be awkward trying to force an economic development element into every Sister Cities relationship. That can change over time as a Sister City's economic capacity grows. Our Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) is a very small organization with only twenty staff members and a budget of \$5 million. We need to allocate our resources wisely.**

Economic Development Mission Trips:

- How important are international trips to the work of MCEDC?

**Trade missions done properly can be very important. Governor Hogan's 2015 trade mission trip to South Korea, China, and Japan produced \$13 billion in commitments, Maryland's most successful trade mission ever. With the Governor heading the delegation and through engagement with the federal government and the embassies, we were able to meet with top officials in all three countries.**

- When do you think MCEDC might be able to travel internationally again?

**MCEDC has no trips and no conferences planned for the rest of 2020. It might be possible for us to travel to India in 2021.**

- What are your plans for travel once things get back to near normal?

**The County Executive's priorities are India and China.**

- How important is it to tie your trips to international trade shows and conferences?

**The State of Maryland does this. There is federal support for states to do this. The state helps companies attend trade shows. MCEDC could join with the state, but we have to look at the return on investment. We would need to see the payoff in job growth and strong deliverables.**

- How important is it to have the County Executive on your trips?

**Protocol is so important in international trips. It helps when the chief executive is part of the group.**

MCEDC & Montgomery Sister Cities:

Some of the people I interviewed said economic development needs to be at the top of the Sister Cities agenda. Others told me Sister Cities shouldn't really have much of a role promoting economic development. Lily Qi said the County Executive's job is to make the introductions and then hand the deal making over to MCEDC.

**Lily Qi's point is very astute. You don't always sign a deal at the first meeting. The trade mission is often the first step in the process. If you want a strong relationship, you want to make connections that outlast the terms of political officials.**

#### Developing Global Citizens:

Several people I interviewed pointed out that Montgomery County would be more marketable to global companies if it develops the skills of global citizens in its youth by providing more opportunities for students to travel. How important is the development of global skills in Montgomery's future workforce to your short term goals?

**Conceptually, it is true there is value in developing the global skills of our youth. But we are Montgomery County so people understand the global marketplace. This wouldn't be a priority for MCEDC.**

#### Resources & Staff:

Particularly in this environment, Sister Cities has no chance to build a staff with all the needed expertise. Some people I interviewed pointed out that our partners at MCPS, Montgomery College, and MCEDC all have staff capacity that Sister Cities needs and suggested we create a multi-agency team where Montgomery College might help Sister Cities organize events as they have in the past, MCPS might help design and print brochures and help with social media, and MCEDC might take the lead on helping Sister Cities develop fundraising pitches to businesses. Would MCEDC be able to partner in that way?

**MCEDC is relatively small so we need to be nimble. I preach to our staff the importance of collaborating with partners to strengthen what we do and to obtain the full value that comes from working together.**

#### Funding:

What prospects would you envision for private funding support for Montgomery Sister Cities? What would it take to get major businesses to provide funding for the Montgomery Sister Cities program?

**A business can justify contributing to support a World of Montgomery Festival for community good will. To contribute to Montgomery Sister Cities, they would need to see a direct return on investment. Look for companies with direct connections to the countries of the Sister Cities.**

Partnering with Businesses:

Brad Colton from Marriott said it would be unlikely Marriott would make a financial contribution to MSC in this environment, but he pointed out that there are lots of Marriott employees who would like to support the program. How should we approach businesses about sharing our program with their employees and customers?

**Start with the Human Resources staff. Sodexo, for example, has a diverse group of employees.**

Implementation:

What are the opportunities for collaboration between MCEDC and Sister Cities in the second half of calendar year 2020?

**MCEDC is just beginning to focus on our international efforts. I know from experience the value of working with embassies and with the country desks of the State Department. And lots of those staff members live in Montgomery County.**

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**Craig Rice, County Councilmember:**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 15, 2020**

Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works? What aspects of Sister Cities most advance the goals of the Montgomery County Council?

**Number one is the educational component – making sure we understand and embrace the cultures and diversity of Montgomery County and provide a bridge to the home countries of our residents. The other great strength of the Sister Cities program is the opportunity to expand our economic reach with investments here and in the Sister Cities.**

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

**I learned about pendulum shifts in political leadership when I worked for the government of Puerto Rico. There can be a large change in focus from one administration to the next. And this happens on our side as well.**

**As with many aspects of county government, we need to continue to expand our outreach beyond the insiders. There are many people in the know who want to represent their home city and country. We need to grow the program to include the broader community.**

Goals:

1. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).
2. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
3. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

4. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
5. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all these goals as opportunities come up OR should there be a focus on one or two? Which are most important to you?

**My priorities are education about our cultural diversity and economic development. I consider preparing global citizens part of our cultural diversity. Humanitarian assistance is something many of us care most about, but it is the responsibility of the federal government not our local government. That is why when the Mayor of Gondar was here, I took him to meet with United States Senator Van Hollen. We shouldn't try to take on too much.**

Role of County Council: How do you view the role of the County Council in the Sister Cities program?

**Continue to advocate and engage. We should be ambassadors for the program.**

Role of Montgomery College: How critical is Montgomery College to the success of Sister Cities? What would you like to see Montgomery College doing that would strengthen the Sister City program while advancing the goals of Montgomery College?

**Sister Cities should be at the very top. If you are an educator, you care about education everywhere. The more globally educated we all are, the better the planet will be. The College can help shape programmatic goals of Sister Cities. We shouldn't just donate computers and then run. We need to help our Sister Cities be connected and thrive.**

Role of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS): How critical is MCPS to the success of Sister Cities? What would you like to see MCPS doing that would strengthen the Sister City program while advancing the goals of MCPS? Deputy

Superintendent told me she is ready to convene a group to map out a plan for Sister Schools. Your thoughts?

**Again, Sister Cities should be at the very top. Our commitment must be long. We should “enhance” the education of the youth in our Sister Cities from a respectful position of continued sharing. We need to link our students with students in our Sister Cities. Some of our kids don’t realize how big the world is. We should start with one Sister School in each Sister City. We should be sharing best practices. My Sister Cities trip to Xi’an helped shape my work on the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education developing the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.**

**Sharon Ledner, Chief of Staff, Councilmember Rice: In our discussions with MCPS, we spoke about creating teacher training hubs so our impact can be beyond a single Sister School.**

Role of Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC): Some of the people I interviewed said economic development needs to be at the top of the Sister Cities agenda. Bob Levey said Sister Cities without economic development is “a candy store idea.” Others told me Sister Cities shouldn’t really have much of a role promoting economic development. Lily Qi said the County Executive’s job is to make the introductions and then hand the deal making over to MCEDC.

What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of MCEDC? How do the cultural and educational aspects of Sister Cities advance the economic goals of MCEDC?

**Our role is to give Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation a platform to do its thing. On our trip to South Korea and China in 2017, MCEDC did its thing. There is potential for some kind of investment in all of our Sister Cities. There is so much potential with the farmers in Gondar to take just one example. The more you know about someone, the more likely they might make an investment. People can make money while helping the development of our Sister Cities.**

Resources & Staff: Virtually all the proponents of Sister Cities say it needs a full time staff person with administrative support. I think that's not adequate and what would be adequate wouldn't be possible in this environment. Several people suggested that the College, MCPS, MCEDC, and county government have skilled people in fundraising, public relations, event planning, etc. They have suggested assigning current staff to support pieces of the Sister Cities program with the Sister Cities staff person playing a role like a conductor of an orchestra. The leadership of the major partners could meet a couple of times a year as a global council for the county. Reaction?

**Who would really be in charge? If I work for the College, I will respond to what I am told by my supervisors at the College.**

**I would recommend a series of contractors. A travel agency would be a good example.**

**I would really like to see Sister Cities get department level status by law or with a director and program manager under the Office of Community Partnerships umbrella. Put the investment in. Lock in the commitment by law to make it hard for the next set of elected officials to back away.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision? What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Sister Cities?

**If Sister Cities is a priority for county government, government funds should be there to show our support. At some point, we will get back to where there is an opportunity to raise private sector dollars.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What do you see as realistic for 2020-2021? In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

- virtual Town Hall about future of Montgomery Sister Cities;
- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;
- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;



- virtual Summit with leaders from MC and all five Sister Cities.

**First of all, we need staff to make these things happen.**

**It is one thing to hold a Town Hall virtually and get more participation. We did that with the recent Town Hall meeting with the Ethiopian community. I think these higher levels of participation are likely to fall off. A World of Montgomery Festival is another thing. A virtual festival is very different than an in-person festival. It just won't have the same feel. Perhaps an Arts Showcase in collaboration with the Arts & Humanities Council would work.**

**We should do quarterly check-ins with our Sister Cities, covid or not. That would be an excellent way to track progress on issues like agriculture and water and sewer infrastructure in Ethiopia, for example.**

**Sharon Ledner, Chief of Staff, Councilmember Rice: These check-ins would be especially valuable in the case of turnover of political leadership as in Gondar.**

Questions: What have I not asked you about that you want to make sure I know about your views about the future of Sister Cities? What questions do you most want asked in this strategic planning and implementation process?

**We all stand to benefit from the Sister Cities program. We can take Montgomery County and the world to the next level. We can learn what it means to be global citizens. We need to connect to larger issues and have conversations beyond our borders. We need better global relationships. It starts with Sister Cities. This will benefit all of us on so many levels.**

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**Gondar, Ethiopia Sister City Committee Members**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 15, 2020**

**This meeting of Ethiopian community leaders was conducted via Zoom. The following community leaders were in attendance:**

**Enkutatash Alemayehu (EA)**  
**Shibeshi Alemayehu (ShiA)**

**Dr. Asefa Mekonnen (AM)**  
**Solomon Ayele (SoloA)**  
**Tracey-Alexis Dixon (TD)**  
**Clemmie Solomon (CS)**  
**Solomon Teklai (ST)**  
**Yasin Yimam (YY)**  
**Pastor Endalk Sahle (ES)**  
**Harriet Shangarai (HS)**  
**Ermiyas Dejene (ED)**  
**Tatye Kassegne (TK)**

**Bruce Adams (BA) began the conversation by explaining this is the twenty-sixth in a series of interviews he has conducted as part of a strategic planning process designed to create an implementation plan for strengthening Montgomery County’s Sister Cities program. This process has been commissioned by the Montgomery County (MD) Government. His final report to the County Executive is due June 30.**

**Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County’s Sister Cities program. What works?**

**SoloA: There is a willingness of both Sister City governments to work together. Gondar has a rich culture, it is an old city, it is a place for tourism, and is a good place for tourism, investment, and trade. There is a mutual relationship and benefit. Also, the relationship between Montgomery College and Gondar University is going well.**

**ST: There are endless possibilities to connect two cities. There is a willingness from the county residents to build on the relationship. The people are comfortable contributing to the organization that is governed by the government. The last visit from the Mayor of Gondar sparked opportunities and ideas that were created because of the Sister City relationship.**

**CS: There are three things I consider as strengths: 1) the leadership of the former County Executive. His commitment to establish a relationship between the county and Gondar was notable. 2) Engagement early on between the faculty staff and students at Montgomery College. The engagement was very significant. 3.) Educational component. As we become more of a global society, it is important to advance global awareness and understanding. For example,**

the 2016 Montgomery College Study Abroad Program allowed students to fly to Gondar. The education that occurred during the trip resulted in a lasting impression about Ethiopia and the significant role it has played in history.

ED: There are two strengths to address. First, it created an opportunity for citizens in both cities to explore various cultures in those countries. Second, the Sister City has created an environment for both communities to learn and share experiences to advance their integration. It may not be fully realized, but these are strengths the Sister City has brought about.

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

ST: Lack of leadership. There needs to be better guidance from the county and the board. There was a sense of dissolution. Assign who is leading the organization (*e.g.*, hometown association, county, AAAG). There is no clear direction or vision on how to manage. Initially, there were people recruited to lead the organization, however since then it has been lost. This can create conflict of interest. We need clear direction.

CS: I have been an advocate of full-time funding of the Sister City program. Until we have individuals who are full time salaried employees working on behalf of the Sister Cities program, we will be short changing ourselves moving forward. We are under resourced. We may need to hire a coordinator, administrative assistant, and additional staff for support.

ED: I see this notion of Montgomery County as a benefactor and Gondar as a beneficiary. The Sister City should be considered as an opportunity to create citizens interaction and opportunity to stimulate communities to come together. It should not be a one way street. Second, there has not been an effort to invest in the potential opportunity that this relationship would bring. There was an MOU initially, but that has not been followed. Most emphasis has been given to the cultural aspect rather than other areas. Most who have heard about MSC relationship associate it with the trips. However, apart from the trips, the group does not intentionally invest in other areas. Culture is one aspect, but Sister Cities should not be limited to one area.

AM: There needs to be structure and a full-time responsible person. This would make it stronger. There is so much that can be done, for example a cancer center relationship (NIH and Gondar University Cancer Center relationship;

biotech). We can connect medical organizations here with Gondar University. Gondar is a hot spot for COVID 19.

HS: It is great to have people to people relationships where the community owns it and takes the lead. It is better to be an NGO so that it is less politicized.

SoloA: Sister Cities has its own bylaws as a nonprofit organization. They need to revise the bylaws and review the structure. Be sure the committees are following the guidelines in the bylaws to fix the structural issue. The board needs to assign internal auditors and have an external audit. The committees should be open to all the people of Montgomery County. We need to create programs, not just trips.

ES: This is the first time I have heard about the partnership. The preliminary report lists five important goals. We need to make the goals as smart goals to specify the goals and establish a timeline. There could be a designated person to create an organizational structure.

TK: Program is not known. Right now it can showcase itself by helping the COVID19 response. If the Sister City helps the GoFundMe campaign, then it will help spread awareness of Sister Cities. Contact Dr. Asefa on how to assist. If the help arrives through the Sister City, it will be a great advertisement.

Possible goals of a Sister Cities program: Should the SC program be open to all of these goals? What is your reaction to the goals?

1. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.
2. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
3. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County.
4. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
5. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

**ST:** The goals are good and solid. There is no need to tweak them. People have different skills, and we advocated earlier that we have committees in place that can address these goals. Once the committee members are leading, they can bring people from outside the community (other countries). Having an individual leading the organization should be open to the members, but not to close it off to everyone else who wants to be involved. Government to Government gives it weight, and we should not exclude public officials. However, the leadership should drive the organization.

**AM:** We can find a passionate person within the community, but the members should be there to embrace and help. We should pitch to the county residents and recruit based on their skills.

**CS:** Global Education – Mandela conveyed: "Education is the weapon that can change the world." Gandhi urged us: "Become the change you want to see in the world." I continue to support education as a vehicle in which we can create change and establish global relationships that are built on a positive foundation.

**SoloA:** We have to consider all of the goals. We need to prioritize the goals. The program should start looking at COVID 19, and look at funds (look at Sister City International, USAID). There are funds that could be used for Sister City. Start looking at programs related to COVID and the opportunity for funding. Corvallis Sister City got funds.

**TK:** It is suggested to narrow the goals. It is good to have multiple goals but it is good to focus on goals one by one - first starting with education. Gondar region has 92K pupils, MCPS has resources to help. We need to focus on long and short term ideas. Right now the urgent need is the COVID 19 virus. There is a GoFundMe organized by Dr. Asefa and colleagues to assist, and they have a specific need such as surgical masks gowns and N95 needs. Education, Information, Investment is what the city needs.

### **COVID Assistance Needs**

**-Need for gowns (over 7,000)**

**-Need N95 masks (20,000)**

**-Need gloves (over million).**

**AM:** Available to serve and assist with the process.

**BA:** Connect with Councilmember Craig Rice.

**ST: US Ambassador to Ethiopia. Potentially make an announcement at Montgomery College.**

**CS: Contact Mike Mills and Mumin Barre.**

What are the updates on the New Mayor?

**AM: New mayor is an engineer. He is young. Unfortunately, he is tied up with COVID. He is active in the Fassilides School project. An exchange with the CE and Montgomery College Sister City program can happen.**

**YY: There has been a turnover in mayors over the past few years of Sister City. We have had promised conversations but then the mayor changes. Is there any suggestion or ideas on how to move forward?**

**TK: Goal is to connect with the diaspora and mainly to work on the infrastructure. The new mayor will be there for two years and in this position he is very professional. There is an office to accomplish this. Also there may be one person who has been there the whole time who can be the point of contact.**

**AT: Follow up with the Ambassador for funding.**

**BA suggested he walk the group through the recommendations in his preliminary report of May 25, 2020.**

### Montgomery Sister Cities: Board of Directors

First, the MSC Board of Directors needs to be more representative of the Montgomery County population and needs active participation from representatives of all the Sister City committees.

Second, once a more representative board is in place, the MSC board should review the original mission statement and objectives of the organization to determine if change is needed.

Third, the MSC board must play a much stronger role in providing guidance to the five Sister City committees and begin by convening a meeting of all members of the committees to discuss expectations.

**ST: The co-existence between the hometown association and board needs to be defined. The hometown association would serve as a "committee" and will**

designate members to be represented on the MSC board. The hometown association should be a 501(c)(3) and would establish subcommittees.

**SoloA:** I do not agree with the hometown association idea. The board needs to review the bylaws that determine the structure, policies, and procedures and regulate the requirements under the board. The structure of the committee should be defined. To be successful, all citizens should be open to join the committee.

**ED:** I am not from Gondar, I joined as a MC resident. I hope and I believe it should continue that way so that anyone in MC would be able to join.

Fourth, the MSC board needs to develop a public relations and marketing plan to lift the visibility of the organization.

Fifth, the MSC board needs to develop a comprehensive plan for raising private dollars to support the organization.

### Montgomery Sister Cities: Sister City Committees

First, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister City committees needs to focus on broadening representation and participation.

Second, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister Cities needs to develop operating procedures for ensuring basic accountability to the board and to the public.

Third, each of the five Sister City committees should provide two members to serve on the MSB board.

**SoloA:** The structure needs to be reviewed and the bylaws need to be discussed as well.

**ST:** Agree, the committee should select who should serve on the board.

Fourth, each of the five Sister Cities should submit an annual plan to the MSC board committing to organize a minimum of two public events each year. What kind of activities are you envisioning?

**BA:** what about a virtual meeting with the mayor?

**ST: Agree. Also include educational components by partnering with MCPS to create online resources.**

**CS: There was considerable discussion about having a webinar with the leadership of Montgomery College and University of Gondar. Mike Mills was working on leading this discussion. I will provide a status update on the webinar.**

**EA: Share the COVID 19 GoFundMe to address immediately. 90% of cases in the Amhara region are in Gondar.**

**TD: Target the younger generation to get them involved. This will also help to spread awareness of the Sister City program. Events like cooking, dancing, history, culture, panel discussions are examples of topics that can be addressed on a virtual call.**

**TK: Montgomery College has International Day. We can use that to showcase Sister City.**

**SoloA: There is a program related to COVID 19 at Sister City International for funding.**

**BA: I'll contact Sister Cities International.**

**CS: We need to have a number of individuals with expertise come together to work on writing a proposal to support a foundation grant/government grant.**

**ST: MCPS has developed a curriculum (K-12) for remote learning toolkit that we can receive permission to access.**

**TK: The mayor wants 25 high school students to be given scholarships to come to Montgomery County. These students would be sponsored and hosted by local families. It will have a big impact on their lives.**

**YY: Short term goal is to support the COVID 19 response. Yasin to schedule a July meeting to discuss more.**

*Email of June 19, 2020 from Solomon Teklai:*

"If I understand him correctly, Solomon Ayle's suggestions were that the MSC board should have full control of the Gondar Sister Cities Hometown Association and this hometown association should not have its own 501c3 organizational structure. This includes from selecting who should serve on the board, managing the financial statements, and more will be the responsibility of the board. Since this hometown association will not have 501c3 status, all the accounting and the money collected will be directly deposited to the MSC board's account as it was done since this relationship was established in 2012. However, I on the other



hand, believe that the Gondar Sister Cities Hometown Association should have its own 501c3 independent organization status. From this hometown association, two of its members selected by community members (not by the Board) will serve on the MSC board. The MSC board will be informed and updated about the hometown association work and activities through these two representatives of the hometown association members."

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**Don Mooers, Founder, Mooers Immigration;**  
**Former Peace Corps Regional Director;**  
**Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Sierra Leone):**  
**Member of Initial Sister Cities Delegation to Morazán, El Salvador**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 16, 2020**

Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works?

**I was there at the beginning as part of the exploratory delegation that visited Morazán, El Salvador in 2010, and I am pleased that the efforts we launched together created significant ties between the people of our respective communities.**

**Throughout my life, which has included working in over 90 countries and traveling in a total of 125 countries, I have witnessed over and over the key role cross-cultural understanding has played in the success of endeavors large and small. Any time one can provide the opportunity to step into the shoes of others, it adds to a fuller understanding of the fact that we are all tied together in a common humanity. Sister Cities was created with a similar vision that motivated Senator Fulbright to fight for the educational exchange program that bears his name, and the vision that drove Sargent Shriver to create the Peace Corps inspired by his brother-in-law, President Kennedy.**

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

I am a bit reticent to share any thoughts on this since my engagement was primarily at the onset of the Morazán program. Sustainability is the key to the success of Sister Cities. Your challenge will be to continually find win-win outcomes where people will find their own motivations to participate. In a community where everyone, especially people of working age, is seemingly so busy at all times, finding time for Sisters Cities could prove difficult. This will be an on-going challenge.

Possible Goals:

6. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.
7. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
8. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County.
9. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
10. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all these goals as opportunities come up OR should there be a focus on one or two? Which are most important to you?

**Sustained success will most likely come from a multifaceted approach as the four key goals will each have appeal to multiple key constituencies in Montgomery County. You want individuals and organizations in the County to**

**find in the program one or more goals that will encourage their participation in the program.**

**Humanitarian projects may not make sense for the Sister Cities program, principally because it violates the key concept of mutuality that is integral to a people-to-people partnership. Humanitarian assistance, by definition, is one-way - from the donor to the recipient, and is best left to respected international assistance organizations. An exception to this rule could be helping our Sister City friends in the face of a crisis like Covid19, for example, but it should be funneled through an international or established host-country NGO.**

**[Peace Corps & Sister Cities: How should we reach Montgomery County residents who have served in the Peace Corps?](#)**

**During my tenure at Peace Corps headquarters, I learned that the communities of Takoma Park and Silver Spring had the highest concentration of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in the country. The way to reach them is to explain Sister Cities and to connect what Sister Cities does to their experience in the Peace Corps.**

**The mission of Peace Corps is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals:**

- to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women;**
- to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and**
- to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.**

**During their two years of service, and for the rest of their lives thereafter, PCVs and RPCVs dedicate their lives to these three goals.**

**There are several direct avenues ways to reaching RPCVs living and/or working in Montgomery County. The best points for initial contact are the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) and Returned Volunteer Services office at Peace Corps Headquarters:**

- The regional NPCA chapter for Montgomery County is Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV/W) of Washington. RPCV/W is a member-driven organization committed to the Peace Corps' Third Goal: Promoting a better understanding of the peoples of the world within our local community.
- While many RPCVs belong to RPCV/W, many others focus their attention on Country of Service chapter organizations. National groups of RPCVs have been created for most countries where PCVs have served over the past 60 years (*e.g.*, Ethiopia/Eritrea RPCVs, Friends of Sierra Leone, etc).
- Another avenue through which to connect with RPCVs is through cross-cutting affiliated RPCV organizations (*e.g.*, LGBT RPCVs, Women of Peace Corps Legacy).

Other international organizations: How would we reach others in Montgomery County who have had experience working internationally?

In Montgomery County, we are literally sitting on top of the globe. The Washington area is full of people who have worked in U.S. embassies around the world, USAID, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, Inter-American Development Bank, Organization of American States, and on and on. The World Bank, for example, has an alumni group. Again, the best way to reach them is to explain Sister Cities and to connect what Sister Cities does to their experience.

Humanitarian projects: Former Delegate Aruna Miller said humanitarian projects would be very popular. Other people I interviewed warned that they are quite difficult, time consuming, and often do not achieve desired results. What have you learned in the international humanitarian work you have done?

I have a great deal of respect for Aruna Miller, and can appreciate where she is coming from. However, humanitarian relationships are one way -- donor to donee. Sister Cities is not sustainable unless both parties engage in reciprocal endeavors. Moreover, humanitarian assistance is a complicated process if done correctly. My suggestion is that any donations be directed through established

**and respected humanitarian organizations rather than trying to create a stand-alone part of the MoCo Sister Cities organization.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What do you see as realistic for 2020-2021? In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

- virtual Town Hall about future of Montgomery Sister Cities;
- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;
- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;
- virtual Summit with leaders from MC and all five Sister Cities.

**We have learned during the COVID-19 crisis that Zoom and similar technologies provide us with inexpensive opportunities to connect around the world in ways that we have not had in the past. This should provide opportunities for Sister Cities in the future so long as partner organizations have sufficient Internet access. One potential project for Montgomery County could be to help our Sister Cities with their communications infrastructure.**

Questions: What have I not asked you about that you want to make sure I know about your views about the future of Sister Cities? What questions do you most want asked in this strategic planning and implementation process?

**I suggest that Sister Cities be viewed as a useful launch pad to get more people in Montgomery County to learn how they can help their neighbors here by learning about the countries they came from through travel.**

**We are all in this together, and we live in one of the most diverse and exciting communities in the country. Strengthening our understanding of our neighbors can only make our community an even better place to live and work.**

**Travelling to the countries where our neighbors came from will enrich us all. We will all benefit through an improved understanding of the cultures where our neighbors have come from, and an understanding of what their lives were like before they immigrated to the US.**

Nearly two decades ago, I created an AmeriCorps program in Montgomery County to help close gaps in education, girls empowerment, housing, and other key areas. MCPS had identified numerous issues to try to address, including teachers who complained that parents refused to attend parent-teacher meetings. It was through dialogue and increased understanding among parents, teachers, and school administrators that the parents wanted to participate in PTA and other meetings, but it was impossible for them to meet during the week because they often had to work three jobs. The only time they had free was on Sunday. To better serve those students, teachers had to find a way to meet with parents on Sundays after church.

These cross-cultural issues have been the subject of considerable attention by NGOs/PCVs throughout Montgomery County. While much has been learned through the years, there is still much more to be done. Sister Cities can assist this effort.

Three more ideas: (1) connect with small nonprofit organizations based in the United States that are serving in the countries of our Sister Cities; (2) make empowerment of women a priority; and (3) educate those who have served internationally that Sister Cities is a way to continue that service.

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**Greg Wims, Former Governor, Rotary District 7620,**  
**Central Maryland and Washington, DC;**  
**Former President, Maryland and Montgomery County Chapters of NAACP;**  
**Founder, Victims' Rights Foundation**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 17, 2020**

Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works? What aspects of Sister Cities most advance the goals of the Montgomery County Council?

**Citizens from cities outside the United States learning about each other. It is much needed that we work together.**

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

**We just don't have enough Sister Cities. We don't have the funding.**

Possible Goals:

11. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.
12. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
13. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County.
14. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
15. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all these goals as opportunities come up OR should there be a focus on one or two? Which are most important to you?

**I like all of these goals.**

Rotary & Sister Cities:

The website of Rotary International explains that "Rotary is a global network of 1.2 million neighbors, friends, leaders, and problem-solvers who see a world

where people unite and take action to create lasting change – across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.” That sounds a lot like the mission of Sister Cities programs across the globe.

**Rotary International is the big umbrella. Rotary International has spent billions over the last 32 years working to eradicate polio. Clean water, educating girls, and maternal health are Rotary’s other priorities. Rotary is huge in India.**

Please tell me about how Rotary Clubs function in Montgomery County.

**There are eight Rotary clubs in Montgomery County. In addition to dues paid to Rotary International, each club spends about 75% of its funds on local community service projects and 25% on international service projects. Members recommend grants. There are also global grants where Rotary International will match local dollars for \$50-60,000 projects.**

**There are two assistant governors each working with four clubs. They can help you set up speaking engagements at the clubs.**

What’s the likelihood that Rotary members would pay \$25 or \$50 to join Montgomery Sister Cities?

**It is possible a few would join. I’ll join.**

Humanitarian projects: Former Delegate Aruna Miller said humanitarian projects would be very popular. Other people I interviewed warned that they are quite difficult, time consuming, and often do not achieve desired results. What have you learned in the international humanitarian work you have done?

**Our Victims’ Rights Foundation could mobilize a project in an emerging country. Our 24 year old organization has worked in Ecuador, Haiti, and Kenya. [www.victimsrightsfoundation.org](http://www.victimsrightsfoundation.org).**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision? You have been a very successful fundraiser for many charitable organizations. What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Sister Cities?



**First, the old-fashioned way -- get a few sponsors, set up a lunch with a speaker, show a video. Second, raise money online. The pitch: We live in a global economy. Montgomery County has more than one million people. So many of your employees and customers come from the countries of our Sister Cities. We need to find peace by understanding each other. We need to pursue economic development opportunities.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What do you see as realistic for 2020-2021? In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

- virtual Town Hall about future of Montgomery Sister Cities;
- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;
- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;
- virtual Summit with leaders from MC and all five Sister Cities.

**I'm seeing virtual meetings work. People are really engaged. We are getting great attendance at Rotary meetings.**

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**Jayme Staley (JS), Executive Director,**  
**Greater Columbus Sister Cities International**  
**and**  
**Sameen Dafar (SD), Program Manager,**  
**Greater Columbus Sister Cities International:**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 17, 2020**

Overview of the Greater Columbus Sister Cities International program:

- **Name: Greater Columbus Sister Cities International**

- **Organization: 501(c)(3) nonprofit**
- **Founded: 1997 (first Sister City relationship in 1955)**
- **Ten (10) Sister Cities**
- **Two (2) staff members**
- **Sister Cities International Award: 2018 Innovation Award for Arts & Culture.**

Goals of the Greater Columbus Sister Cities International program: Which of the following are goals of the Columbus program and which are most important?

- 16. Community engagement;
- 17. Creating a welcoming environment;
- 18. Economic development;
- 19. Preparing global citizens for the future; and
- 20. Humanitarian assistance.

From your website, it looks like economic development is a strong component of your program. Correct? What role does your Sister City organization play in economic development and how does it partner with state and local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce?

**SD: Economic development is part of our requirement under our city and county grants. Sister Cities is in the relationship building business so it is hard to measure our success in promoting economic development.**

Sustaining activity between trips: Our new County Executive has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. When the County Executive expresses an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there has been great interest and engagement. It is the follow-up after our mission trips that has been disappointing.

Dean Suozzi-Auberry at Sister Cities International recommended talking with you because he said the Columbus program is really strong on events, including concerts. We are most interested in how you sustain a robust flow of activities throughout the year and engage the broader community.

- What structure do you use to support each Sister City relationship?

- What kinds of activities and events are undertaken between trips?
- What staff support is available for each Sister City relationship?

**SD: We have committees for six of our ten Sister Cities. They serve as an extension of our staff. As program manager, I attend their quarterly meetings. Each committee does two or three events a year. For example, the Chinese committee does a Lunar New Year event with local organizations. The Brazil committee helps to organize a Carnival party. Arts and sports events attract new people. We have had a symphony conductor exchange and an international marathon exchange.**

**SD: The chairs of the five Sister City committees meet with each other and with staff four times a year. They share best practices and help each other.**

**SD: There are only two staff members. We contract out financials. We hire travel agents to arrange air travel. Most of our Sister Cities plan all the activities, lodging, and food while we are there.**

Connecting with media and community leaders: Many of our supporters ask us why so few people in the community know about our program. How have you created visibility for your program?

**SD: We partner with the city and with museums (e.g., Paganini Violin exhibit) and increase our visibility through their media networks.**

Connecting with millennials: We just completed a survey and were pleased to get more than 200 respondents. Half were 60 and older; only 2% were 30 or younger. How have you been able to connect to millennials? Any special social media efforts that have helped you reach new audiences?

**SD: Columbus is a university town. There are people here interested in international affairs, and we try to help fill a void in programming. A young professionals group of twelve under 40s went to Italy in 2015.**

Fundraising: What is your annual budget, and what is the mix between government dollars and private fundraising?

**JS: The city and county contribute the same amount. Fifteen to 20 corporate sponsors contribute the rest of our budget. Corporate giving is often program driven. We are about to revamp our website to include individual memberships with an online donor system and automated data base. People will be able to pay for their trips online.**

**We have two board members on our fundraising committee who meet with staff once a week. We have specific fundraising metrics. We host an annual luncheon.**

Delegation exchanges: In a typical, pre-covid year, how many delegation trips did you take? What was the size of a typical delegation?

How often does the Mayor and other elected officials participate?

**JS: Three of our councilmembers have traveled with us in the last year. The trips are focused around certain community priorities. There are best practices that we bring back. Although it got postponed because of COVID, this year we were planning to learn about transit and infant mortality from our visit to Brazil. That delegation was slated to include community, business and elected leadership.**

**SD: We have been taking two trips each year. We would like to increase that to three or four. The trips are open to anyone, but most travelers are there for business or policy. Culture is always part of our trips, but we attract more participants when we focus on a policy topic. For example, we had a Smart City transportation grant and our delegation included elected officials, transportation staff, and a representative from Ohio State University.**

**SD: We have a line item in our budget for hosting visiting delegations from our Sister Cities.**

When do you imagine traveling again to your Sister Cities?

**SD: We hope to be travelling again in the summer of 2021.**

International high school exchange: How many student exchange trips happen in a typical year? How many students? How are these trips funded?

**JS: We do not currently offer high school exchanges.**

**SD: We have not gotten past the issue of liability. We visit schools. Columbus Council on World Affairs provides certificates for high school students.**

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things are you doing to sustain your program in the age of covid?

**SD: We are looking at options. We have live streamed the recording of the Concert with Columbus Symphony and the Paganini Violin from 2019.**

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**Beth Weibel, Senior Program Manager,  
Fort Worth Sister Cities International  
Sister Cities Interview June 17, 2020**

Overview of the Fort Worth Sister Cities program:

- **Name: Fort Worth Sister Cities International**
- **Organization: 501(c)(3) nonprofit**
- **Founded: 1985**
- **Nine (9) Sister Cities**
- **Annual budget (2019): \$1,250,000**
- **Five staff members**
- **Sister Cities International Award: 2018 Best Overall Program Population Greater Than 300,000.**

Budget, staffing, and funding: What is a typical annual budget and where does the money come from? How many staff members do you have?

**The annual budget is between \$1.2 and 1.4 million. We have a five year contract from the City of Fort Worth at \$50,000 per year. We raise about \$300,000 each year from corporate sponsorships and memberships. One of our business partners does a fundraiser for us each year that raises \$70,000. There is a program fee of \$350 for each person who travels on one of our trips.**

There are five full-time staff members:

- **President/CEO & Protocol Officer;**
- **Vice President & COO (HR, Finance, Procurement);**
- **Senior Program Manager (trip and event planning);**
- **Associate Director for Community Engagement (special events and marketing); and**
- **Exchanges & Outreach Associate (includes social media).**

Delegation exchanges: In a typical, pre-covid year, how many delegation trips did you take? What was the size of a typical delegation?

When Fort Worth Sister Cities International was named 2018 Best Overall Program for cities with a population greater than 300,000 by Sister Cities International, the award cited 19 outbound exchanges and 22 inbound exchanges involving 400 people. In 2019, there were 16 outbound trips and 18 inbound trips involving 406 people. Most outbound trips involve 12 to 15 people. The majority of the outbound trips involve youth. There are typically two or three outbound trips for adults each year.

Youth travel: How many student exchange trips happen in a typical year? How many students?

The majority of our trips – typically a dozen each year -- are for youth. As program manager, I organize the youth trips. I work with the CEO in organizing the adult trips. We use a travel agent in Fort Worth to get group rates on the air travel. I try to work with local businesses in our Sister Cities to book hotel and travel there. I work with my counterparts in the Sister Cities to plan the itinerary.

In 2019, 46% of the students who went on an exchange received a scholarship. The cost of the youth ambassador exchanges range from about \$1500 (Toluca) to \$2500 (Japan and Europe) to \$3800 (Africa, Indonesia, China). The average scholarship is about \$400. The most money we give someone is \$900-\$1000. We look at their family income and circumstances.

Sustaining activity between trips: Our new County Executive has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. When the County Executive expresses an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there has been great interest and engagement. It is the follow-up after our mission trips that has been disappointing. We are most interested in how you sustain a robust flow of activities throughout the year and engage the broader community.

- What structure do you use to support each Sister City relationship?
- What kinds of activities and events are undertaken between trips?
- What staff support is available for each Sister City relationship?

**There is an Exchanges & Outreach Committee made up of the Sister City Committee Chairs and chaired by a former Fort Worth Assistant City Manager. The nominating committee of the board nominates Sister City Committee Chairs to serve for two years while they serve as members of the board. The Sister City Committee Chairs are responsible for recruiting volunteers to serve on their committees and for organizing two public events each year. They assist with activities for inbound trips including finding host families for our visitors.**

**The chairs and members are rarely natives of the Sister Cities but often have some kind of connection with the Sister City (e.g., serving there in the Peace Corps, adopting a child from the Sister City). We value the diversity of the committee membership as the purpose of Sister Cities is to educate the broad public about different cultures. The Sister City Committees usually meet quarterly although more often when there is an upcoming event to be planned. I attend the Sister City Committee meetings for all nine Sister Cities.**

**There is a fee for attending most but not all of the Sister City Committee events. The events range from a calligraphy lesson to a speaker to an annual ethnic heritage event. A Japanese Children's Day attracted 175 participants many of them new to our Sister Cities program (\$20 for adults, \$10 for youth, free for 12 and under).**

Economic development: What role does your Sister City organization play in economic development and how does it partner with state and local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce?

**We do a lot of economic relations, but our role is as a connector to our Chamber of Commerce and Fort Worth’s Economic Development Department. We introduce people to each other. In 2019, we won the Sister Cities International Business and Trade Innovation Award for a “Pickles & Whiskey” business exchange with our Sister City in Nagaoka, Japan.**

Connecting with media and community leaders: I know your organization is really connected with media and community leaders. Many of our supporters ask us why so few people in the community know about our program. How have you created visibility for your program?

**The parents of our youth who travel are among our greatest allies.**

Connecting with millennials: We just completed a survey and were pleased to get more than 200 respondents. Half were 60 and older; only 2% were 30 or younger. How have you been able to connect to millennials? Any special social media efforts that have helped you reach new audiences?

**It is challenging for millennials to find the time away from their jobs to travel. We try to engage them in our programs when people from our Sister Cities visit Fort Worth.**

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things are you doing to sustain your program in the age of covid?

**To mark the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Fort Worth Sister Cities International, we are posting on Facebook new educational, informative, and entertaining content every day starting on May 23 – “35 Things in 35 Days.”**

**We are asking each Sister City Committee to hold one virtual activity this year.**

**Our youth who had planned trips to France, Italy, and Hungary during spring break this year were not happy. We also had a May youth trip cancelled. We did Zoom sessions with youth in our Sister Cities.**

**Each year we have an International Leadership Academy to bring high school students from our Sister Cities to Fort Worth for a two week session with local**



high school students. We usually have about 100 participants. The \$1,175 fee covers costs. Each Sister City must send one or two chaperones with their students. All the Sister Cities participate. This year, the Leadership Academy will be weekly Zoom calls for eight weeks.

One silver lining from Covid 19 is that we have learned the value of technology to connect us in ways we might use in the future.

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**Kay Sargent, Executive Director, Lexington Sister Cities Commission**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 19, 2020**

**Overview of the Lexington Sister Cities Commission:**

- **Name: Lexington Sister Cities Commission**
- **Organization: City government commission (note: there is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1970s)**
- **Founded: Commission founded 1988**
- **Four (4) Sister Cities**
- **Annual budget (2019): \$95,000. The City pays staff member and provides office space. We raise \$20,000 from fundraisers and donations. The budget for our exchanges and programs is approximately \$75,000 per year.**
- **One (1) staff member**
- **Sister Cities International Award: 2019 Best Overall Program Population Between 100,001-300,000.**

The mayor appoints the seven members of the commission who represent major stakeholders – University of Kentucky, city school system, arts and culture, tourism, corporate, and mayor’s office.

**Economic development:** What role does your Sister City organization play in economic development and how does it partner with state and local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce?

**Tourism is seen as a partner for Sister Cities. With the travel involved with Sister Cities' programs, it has a positive economic impact for the city. We also have partnered with the State Travel Development office to promote state tourism in our Sister Cities.**

Fundraising: What is your annual budget, and what is the mix between government dollars and private fundraising?

**We raise about \$20,000 each year to support our program. The city covers the cost of the one staff member and office space. An annual golf tournament covers half our costs. We have smaller events during the year including a Halfway to Saint Patrick's Day event that attracts 100+ people and raises a few thousand dollars each September. We have some corporate sponsors and about 150 members paying dues (\$5/student, \$25/individual, and \$45/family). We require people to become members in order to travel on our exchange trips. Members get quarterly electronic newsletters and a hard copy annual report.**

Delegation exchanges: In a typical, pre-covid year, how many delegation trips did you take? What was the size of a typical delegation? How often does the Mayor and other elected officials participate?

**We have one adult exchange each year rotating between the four Sister Cities. A typical trip will include about 30 participants. Elected officials are often part of our delegations.**

International high school exchange: How many student exchange trips happen in a typical year? How many students? How are these trips funded?

**Students are a big part of our program. We take approximately 50 students on exchange programs each year to our four sister cities. Each of the 50 students is matched with a student in a Sister City. The students pay the airfare and the students stay with their host family. We have fundraisers to provide scholarships for the airfare for four to six students each year.**

**We have virtual exchanges for younger students with one class per Sister City each year. Sister Cities International is promoting Sister Schools -- "Sister Schools Toolkit for Sister Cities."**

**Sister Cities International has an art contest each year – “Young Artists and Authors Showcase.” A local bank sponsors our arts competition. We usually have 100 or more 13 to 17 year olds compete for cash prizes. The art is displayed for a month each year in the bank’s art gallery. Our winner competes in the international contest.**

**We also have a partnership with the University of Kentucky. Five or six undergraduates study abroad each year and several take summer internships in our Sister Cities.**

Sustaining activity between trips: Our new County Executive has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. When the County Executive expresses an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there has been great interest and engagement. It is the follow-up after our mission trips that has been disappointing. We are most interested in how you sustain a robust flow of activities throughout the year and engage the broader community.

**We have regular fundraising events through the year. We have dinners and events when adults visit from our Sister Cities. As an example, our Japanese Sister City usually sends four or five adults as part of their annual student exchange.**

**In addition to annual events, we take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Our Irish and Japanese Sister Cities love bluegrass music festivals, for example. We have hosted a soccer tournament and ballet performances.**

Connecting with media and community leaders: Many of our supporters ask us why so few people in the community know about our program. How have you created visibility for your program?

**Signage in the city is very important. We have a welcome sign in the airport terminal and another at the exit from the airport that highlight our four Sister Cities. We have a street sign downtown that points to our Sister Cities and says how many miles away they are.**

Social media has replaced newspapers as our source of informing the public about our activities. The radio stations love to interview the students visiting from our Sister Cities.

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**Sherry Dowlatshahi (SD)**  
**Chief Diplomacy and Protocol Officer &**  
**Head of International Relations Office; and**  
**Martha Henry (MH), International Relations Manager,**  
**International Relations Office;**  
**City of San Antonio, Texas**  
**Sister Cities Interview June 17, 2020**

Overview of San Antonio's Sister Cities program:

- **Name: International Relations Office**
- **Organization: city government agency**
- **Founded: 1986**
- **Eleven (11) Sister Cities and three (3) Friendship Cities**
- **Annual budget: International Relations Office is fully funded by a combination of hotel taxes and general funds a part of which supports the Sister Cities program.**
- **Staff: There were 11 staff in the International Relations Office, located both in San Antonio and in the Mexico City "Casa San Antonio" office, before Covid. They work on a range of issues that includes the Sister Cities program.**
- **Sister Cities International Award: 2019 Best Overall Program Population Greater Than 300,000.**

**SD: The San Antonio Sister Cities program is run out of the city's International Relations Office, a division of the city's Economic Development Department. There has never been a 501(c)(3) Sister Cities community organization. This has not been a problem when political leadership changes in the city, because San Antonio has a strong city manager form of government. The International Relations Office works closely with the mayor but reports to the city manager.**

**Our Sister Cities do not always understand the nuances of our city manager form of government. They want to deal directly with the mayor. The advantage of the city running the Sister Cities program is that as city government we are in the driver's seat. We have our priorities. We are considered the counterparts to our overseas partner cities. As soon as a city's foreign affairs officials realize we are city employees working for the mayor, their attitude changes and we seem to get attention and a certain type of respect.**

**We don't have formal committees to support our Sister City relationships. There are no citizen groups in China, Taiwan, or South Korea. We deal directly with foreign affairs staff, and they view us as peers. Our Indian Sister City did create a small nonprofit to support the relationship. Locally, we work with committees inside larger country associations to support our Japanese and South Korean relationships. For our two Sister Cities from the Canary Islands, we work with the Canary Island Descendants Association. We have no committees for our two Mexican Sister Cities. Only Japan and Germany practice citizen diplomacy.**

**MH: A couple of our Sister City relationships are inactive or dormant. We have not considered dropping them. We prefer to keep them with the hope that they might be revived in the future. Terminating them could send a negative message that might not be well received in the community.**

Goals of the San Antonio Sister City program: Which of the following are goals of the San Antonio program and which are most important?

- 21. Community engagement;
- 22. Creating a welcoming environment;
- 23. Economic development;
- 24. Preparing global citizens for the future; and
- 25. Humanitarian assistance.

**SD: Economic development is number one. We view our relationships in a bilateral way as peers so we do not provide humanitarian assistance although it is humbling to acknowledge that our China and South Korean Sister Cities recently proved us with 114,000 masks. The cultural and educational piece falls somewhere in the middle.**

Economic Development: What role does your Sister City program play in economic development and how does it partner with state and local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce?

**SD: Our International Relations Office is a division of the city's Economic Development Department. We are working to bring the economic development and international relations functions together and rebrand our work as "Global Engagement."**

**MH: We are trying to work more closely with economic development. San Antonio is expanding beyond our traditional strengths in tourism and government to cybersecurity, biomedical, and advance manufacturing. There is a story we tell about how the Toyota manufacturing and assembly plant came to San Antonio: Because of the Sister City relationship we have with Japan, our officials and community leaders understood that the Japanese play the long game and place importance on developing trust and relationships.**

**MH: San Antonio wants to develop further as a higher education hub. International students invest considerable commitment and money to their education and generate a substantial economic impact in a local community and the United States as a whole (listed as fifth highest "export" by the U.S. Commercial Service).**

Sustaining activity between trips: Our new County Executive has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. When the County Executive expresses an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there has been great interest and engagement. It is the follow-up after our mission trips that has been disappointing. We are most interested in how you sustain a robust flow of activities throughout the year and engage the broader community.

**SD: We want to make sure our Sister City agreements are more than just paper documents. We use a project based approach working with community stakeholders. When we think of a special project, we next think of which stakeholders in San Antonio should be involved.**

**SD & MH: San Antonio won the 2019 Best Overall Program award from Sister Cities International in part because of the city's Tricentennial celebration. Nine**

**Sister and Friendship Cities visited San Antonio including five Sister City mayors and the King and Queen of Spain. The cultural highlight was the Sister Cities Jazz Ensemble connecting fourteen jazz musicians from Sister Cities using a digital platform.**

**MH: San Antonio leverages its membership in international and supranational groups to present arts and culture events like an international chefs' exchange (we are both a UNESCO World Heritage site and a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy). We partner with local organizations when we see opportunities to bring people from our Sister Cities. We leverage small amounts of money to make events happen and to welcome and host our contacts with our Sister Cities. Given Montgomery County's Sister Cities, what if you, for example, thought about creating a Sister Cities cookbook?**

**Fundraising: What is your annual budget for the Sister Cities program, and what is the mix between government dollars and private fundraising?**

**SD: We get our operational budget from the city government. Sister Cities is not a line item in our budget. Our operations budget covers staff resources for all the duties of our office which includes managing our global relations including Sister Cities. Through the City's Arts and Culture Department we have access to \$150,000 funding for a line item for Sister City cultural engagement during Fiscal year 2020. For FY21 it is set at \$75,000 due to budget cutbacks as a result of covid related economic impact. This allows us to do some programming.**

**SD: When visitors from our Sister Cities come to San Antonio, we ask local businesses to underwrite dinners and help host the delegates. We have funding to host "official delegations" some of which are from our Sister Cities. We do not have a specific line item designated for hosting our Sister Cities in our budget. We have other activities and visits from partner cities, for example, that are not in the Sister City network and other unrelated official visitors.**

**MH: Many people overseas have heard of Houston, Dallas, and Austin. San Antonio is not as well known. One of our goals and a way to gain support for our activities is "to elevate the city on the global stage."**

Delegation exchanges: In a typical, pre-covid year, how many delegation trips did you take? What was the size of a typical delegation? How often does the Mayor and other elected officials participate?

**MH: The mayor will usually take one Sister Cities trip each year. The mayor might take one or two other international trips a year for an environmental conference, for example, or an economic development opportunity. There might be one or maybe two Sister City trips each year led by a city council member, especially taking into consideration the close proximity of our partner cities in Mexico.**

**MH: We have a large number of incoming official delegations. Depending on the delegation, our office can be in charge of the research, logistics, itinerary, scheduling, and meetings for these visits, especially for our partner cities.**

International high school exchange: How many student exchange trips happen in a typical year? How many students? How are these trips funded?

**MH: We don't manage youth exchanges, but we do leverage and work closely with community partners to initiate or facilitate such exchanges. The exchanges cover a broad variety of activities and fields.**

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**Mary Kane, Director, National Museum of American Diplomacy;  
Former President and CEO, Sister Cities International;  
Former Secretary of State, State of Maryland;  
Sister Cities Interview June 22, 2020**

What works? From your former perch atop Sister Cities International, what did you learn that is most important to the success of a local Sister Cities program?

**Most important is to have strong members on the board. You need board members who look at the big picture. You need people who can attract other people and attract funders. You need people like Michelle Freeman. You need people from Strathmore. You need someone from Marriott. This is hard to do,**



**but people need to see that others are involved. You need to have the County Executive and Councilmembers involved.**

What doesn't work? What are the major pitfalls that cause a local Sister Cities program to underperform?

**For example, if you undertake a humanitarian project, you need to see it through. It is not enough to donate computers and medical equipment. I was in a Nigerian hospital and saw a sonogram machine sitting in the corner. I asked why it wasn't being used. No one knew how to run it. You have to train people. You have to stay in touch to make sure you can supply a part that needs to be replaced. This can all be done with Zoom.**

Goals of Sister City programs:

1. Community engagement;
2. Creating a welcoming environment (culture and education);
3. Economic development;
4. Preparing global citizens for the future; and
5. Humanitarian assistance.

Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all these goals as opportunities come up in different Sister City relationships OR should there be a focus on one or two?

**That's exactly right. You should be open to all these goals as opportunities come up in different relationships at different times. Each place is totally different. The State of Maryland's Sister State relationship with Anhui Province, China began in the 1980s as a humanitarian initiative. Over the years, it has evolved and has led to the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Maryland and programs at Johns Hopkins University.**

Citizen diplomacy or elected leaders: How relevant is President Eisenhower's vision of citizen diplomacy? Don't the Sister Cities in other countries want to deal with our elected leaders?

**Most countries aren't like the United States. To get things done, relationships have to be peer-to-peer. In most countries, that means government-to-government. It has been very helpful to have the mayor of San Antonio as the chair of Sister Cities International these last two years.**

**The beauty of local government is its capacity to embrace Sister Cities as a means of reaching out to its residents. Rotary and Kiwanis clubs provide opportunities for productive engagement.**

Economic development: Some of the people I interviewed said economic development needs to be at the top of the Sister Cities agenda. Others told me Sister Cities shouldn't really have much of a role promoting economic development. Lily Qi said the County Executive's job is to make the introductions and then hand the deal making over to the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC). What's your take on economic development as a priority for a local Sister Cities program?

**You need to include MCEDC in your Sister Cities program. They will tell you what they are trying to sell and help you find the natural fits in your Sister Cities.**

International high school exchanges: What percent of Sister City organizations make youth exchanges and Sister Schools priorities?

**90%. Youth exchanges are very popular. A decade ago, the president of the University of Toledo was discussing with the mayor how the university could fill all its dormitory beds. The mayor suggested offering in-state tuition to students coming from the city's Sister Cities. It worked. And soon the parents wanted to visit and tourism increased.**

Sustaining activity between trips: County Executive Elrich has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. In the past, when the County Executive expressed an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there was great interest and engagement. But the follow-up after our mission trips has been disappointing. I am most interested in how a local Sister Cities organization sustains a robust flow of activities throughout the year to engage the broader community.

**One thing that happens is that a Sister Cities program often has a single champion for a specific Sister City. When the champion moves on for whatever reason, the Sister City committee dies.**

**Another thing is that the committees become like little clubs content to talk and not to accomplish much.**

Staffing: Ninety percent of the people I have interviewed say we need a full-time person working on Sister Cities. My concern is that isn't enough and given budget realities, we won't get more.

**A Sister Cities program needs a paid director to coordinate the paper flow, serve as the "go to" person for the Sister City committees, and keep everyone informed about what others are doing. This person must have relationships with the economic development and education sectors.**

Fundraising: What mix of government dollars and private fundraising seems best to you? You have raised a lot of private dollars for Sister Cities programs. What has been your most successful pitch to corporate leaders? How would you approach business leaders in Montgomery County to gain their support of Montgomery Sister Cities?

**This is why you need strong board members. Who is on your board and who do they know? To gain business support, you have to show value. I will send you a study we did five years ago at Sister Cities International on the economic benefits of Sister City relationships in the United States and their impact on the global economy ("Measures That Matter").**

**Each Sister City program needs to find its niche. In Montgomery County, the niche that works might be the arts. Partner with AFI (American Film Institute) on a movie festival and provide food. Bring performers from your Sister Cities to Strathmore. Become part of the Bethesda Fine Arts Festival.**

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things would you be doing to sustain Montgomery Sister Cities in the age of covid?

**With all the options we have discovered in the last few months, there is no reason for your Sister Cities not to be connected. Practicing English is very popular.**

Questions: What have I not asked you about that you want to make sure I know about your views about Sister Cities?

**I like the Montgomery Sister Cities mission statement. I would suggest changing one phrase to give it a sense of action. The mission statement starts with: “Montgomery Sister Cities, Inc. was established to connect Montgomery County to the world by...” I would change “was established to connect” to “connects.”**

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**Richard Buckler, Treasurer and Former President,  
Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation:  
Sister Cities Interview June 23, 2020**

Overview of the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation:

- **Name: Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation**
- **Organization: 501(c)(3) nonprofit**
- **Founded: 1983 (first Sister City: 1966)**
- **Ten (10) Sister Cities**
- **Annual budget (2019): \$35,000 contract with the city**
- **No staff: all volunteer organization**
- **Sister Cities International Award: 2017 Innovation Award for Economic Development**

**I have been involved with Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation since the mid-1990s and was president for eight years. I also now serve as New Mexico representative to Sister Cities International.**

**Being a one hundred percent volunteer run organization is a challenge, but it has some power in it. We have learned how to be able to keep passing the**

**baton as volunteer leadership comes and goes. As city administrations come and go, we are here with our city government and other partners.**

Goals of the Albuquerque Sister City program: Which of the following are goals of the Albuquerque program and which are most important?

- 26. Community engagement;
- 27. Creating a welcoming environment;
- 28. Economic development;
- 29. Preparing global citizens for the future; and
- 30. Humanitarian assistance.

**We work to build bridges toward all these goals. We play the role of the middle man seeking partners to get this work done.**

Economic Development: The webpage says the 501(c)(3) “interacts with city government through the Albuquerque Economic Development Department.” Does that mean economic development is the organization’s top priority? What role does your Sister City organization play in economic development and how does it partner with state and local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce?

**Our focus from the start in 1966 was on cultural exchanges. We realized we had to respond differently when one of our mayors asked that we show economic benefit in order to justify our contract with the city. We built bridges to education and economic development. We won a Sister Cities International award for innovation in economic development for a 2016 trip to Sasebo, Japan where we commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our relationship with Sasebo. Our mayor led a delegation that included five Albuquerque companies. The mayor met with two Japanese companies that had established roots in our city. Our community college was part of a delegation that included representatives of business, education, government, and the public at-large.**

**Our role is to bring people together. What we are good at is making connections. And our city government wants to take advantage of those connections in our Sister Cities. We have to set the right expectations. International relations present opportunities. The payoff isn’t instant.**

**Sometimes the slow and steady way is the best. Not every city is a great match for economic development.**

International high school exchange: I understand your personal passion are the youth exchanges. Why are they so meaningful to you? How many student exchange trips happen in a typical year? How many students? How are these trips funded?

**We typically have two youth exchanges each year. Japan and Germany are our regular partners. We send 10-15 students on each exchange trip, and within one year those students host the students who had hosted them. We have given some scholarships, but we don't have a scholarship program. We have one chaperone for every six students. Years ago, we had a successful Sister School relationship, but it didn't last. Sister Cities International is working to recognize officially Sister School relationships so that might encourage more of them.**

**The University of New Mexico established a 40% cost reduction for students from our Sister Cities. This is done through university-to-university memoranda of understanding. Some of our other universities and colleges grant in-state tuition to students from our Sister Cities.**

Fundraising: What is your annual budget, and what is the mix between government dollars and private fundraising?

**We have a \$35,000/year contract with the city government. Corporations sponsor specific events, but we have not been very aggressive about seeking corporate sponsors. We raise a few thousand dollars each year from memberships (\$10 youth; \$30 individual; \$40 family; \$100 small business; \$200 large business).**

Delegation exchanges: In a typical, pre-covid year, how many delegation trips did you take? How often does the Mayor and other elected officials participate?

**Our goal is to take three or four trips each year with at least two of the trips focused on economic development with an elected official leading the delegation. Our goal is for the mayor to join us on one trip each year.**

**Our elected officials are who the people in our Sister Cities want to meet. We have learned that if we find the right counterparts in the Sister Cities, the citizen diplomacy strengthens the organizations on both sides of the relationship. The mayors pay attention to their citizens who are engaged in this work. We need strong relationships between the government representatives and their citizens. The student exchanges are valuable here as well. We must have activity or the relationship dies. We have to keep working on every relationship.**

**We make decisions about where to go together. The board might start the conversation about where to travel, but everyone has a say. We want to serve the city. The person in charge of international trade for the city represents the mayor on our board. The council has a representative on the board.**

Sustaining activity between trips: Our new County Executive has tasked me with figuring out how to sustain activity between trips. When the County Executive expresses an interest in traveling to a Sister City, there has been great interest and engagement. It is the follow-up after our mission trips that has been disappointing. We are most interested in how you sustain a robust flow of activities throughout the year and engage the broader community.

- What structure do you use to support each Sister City relationship?
- What kinds of activities and events are undertaken between trips?
- What staff support is available for each Sister City relationship?

**The chair of each Sister City committee serves on the board. Our individual committees are not 501(c)(3)s themselves, but often partner with other supporting groups that are. One example is our Hualien, Taiwan committee, whose Chair/Co-Chair, through a longstanding agreement, are appointed by the New Mexico Chinese Association, a stand-alone 501(c)(3) formed specifically by the local Taiwanese community to support activities for Hualien. Other Sister City committee chairs are picked by the board itself, but with consideration and recommendation from respective community groups. The chairs are volunteers, but we believe we need to give them something for their commitment so we reimburse them for one trip to their Sister City every few years if they lead a delegation of six or more. The co-chairs of the committees are usually appointed by the chairs in consultation with the board president. The chairs are responsible for keeping the committees active. The committees can do their**

own fundraising and may use the board's 501(c)(3) status. This organizational structure has worked for us, and it ensures the board does not lose control.

Three times each year we get all of the Sister City leadership together. We host an annual meeting in June and a holiday party in December. Each January, we host an international cookie and tea event that attracts 100 or more people to sample international fare from all ten of our Sister Cities. In addition, we expect each committee to host at least one trip or public event each year. It might be an Oktoberfest or an event in collaboration with the libraries.

Connecting with millennials: The website says you have partnerships with the University of New Mexico and other universities and businesses aimed at engaging young professionals. What have you found works to engage millennials?

We work with local universities and our community college to support their certificate programs on international affairs.

Global Ties ([www.globaltiesus.org](http://www.globaltiesus.org)) and Open World ([www.openworld.org](http://www.openworld.org)) are two programs that tackle global challenges by fostering relationships through international exchange programs.

We need to do a better job of identifying future leaders for our organization. We are focused on getting young entrepreneurs on our board.

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things are you doing to sustain your program in the age of covid? How did the June 3 virtual meeting with Spain go?

We have not had a lot of attendance at our virtual events, but we are doing our annual meeting June 25 via Zoom. We will continue this year to virtually feature each month a different sister city as part of a Building Bridges program designed to inform and educate our citizens. The format often includes attendance by our counter-parts in the Sister City itself.

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**Northwestern Chinese American Association of Greater Washington**  
**Xi'an, China Sister City Committee Members**



## **Sister Cities Interview June 24, 2020**

This meeting with leaders of Northwestern Chinese American Association of Greater Washington (NCAAGW) was conducted via Zoom. The following community leaders were in attendance:

1. Nan Qiao (NQ) - President
2. Sabrina Lei (SL) - Former President
3. Hui Li (HL) - Former President
4. George Zhou (GZ) - Former President
5. Siwen Wang (SW) - Vice President
6. Yuhong Liu (YL) - Vice President
7. Rong Rose Zhang (RRZ) - Standing Board Member

Bruce Adams (BA) began the conversation by explaining this is the thirty-fifth in a series of interviews he has conducted as part of a strategic planning process designed to create an implementation plan for strengthening Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. This process has been commissioned by the Montgomery County (MD) Government. His final report to the County Executive is due June 30.

**Strengths:** Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works?

**GZ: I like promoting economic development. I would like to see more interaction.**

**YL: I really like the idea of Sister Cities. I like the grassroots activity and the people-to-people effort to help understand each other. I would like regular meetings and newsletters to let everyone know what is going on.**

**HL: Sister Cities builds mutual understanding and awareness. Chinese immigrants and county government learn how we can help each other. Sister Cities is a powerful bridge. We need to go back to holding regular meetings. And we should get all the committee members from all the Sister Cities together.**

**SL: I would like to see college and school connections. People-to-people doesn't work in China. It has to be people-to-government. I would like us to do more cultural activities and would like to learn from what the other Sister Cities are doing.**

**NQ:** Too many people lose their connection to the places they come from. Xi'an just donated 20,000 masks to Montgomery County. I favor economic development but also educational and cultural exchanges.

**SW:** Sister Cities can connect people in difficult times. We can do more.

**RRZ:** I support student exchanges with MCPS and Montgomery College.

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

**NQ:** The relationship between the two countries makes Sister Cities difficult now, but I am committed to staying involved.

**YL:** You can feel it in the Chinese community. This is not a perfect time to be Chinese in the United States. My attitudes about Americans changed in 1986 when I met Americans who were studying at my university. Exhibitions that show Chinese living in Montgomery County will help the people in Montgomery County understand the Chinese at a human level.

**SL:** You can't go people-to-people on the China side. Xi'an is so large. The college level would be easier than high school. College students can go on exchanges. Families will consider it safer for them to travel than for high school students. The high schools are run by the government. The colleges have more freedom. I tried to make the Sister Schools program work with Churchill High School.

**HL:** Sister Cities is a good program, but I would like to deepen relationships. Explain the life of Chinese people in Montgomery County. Show how the government can help the Chinese. Sister Cities is a great bridge to have a wider discussion between the local Chinese and the county government. We would like more discussion with county agencies and more voice and more participation in broader issues. Help us integrate into and become a part of the county. Don't limit us to cultural issues.

Possible goals of a Sister Cities program: Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all of the following goals as opportunities come up in different Sister City relationships OR should there be a focus on one or two? Which of these goals are most important to you?

31. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.
32. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
33. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County.
34. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
35. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

**YL: Think of more ways to do cultural exchanges. The more we get in touch with each other, the more we can understand each other. We can promote economic development, but our achievements will be limited.**

**SL: Community engagement and cultural exchanges are the easiest to start with. Economic development is important but it will take more time because we have two different economic systems. We need experts with us to do this right. People need to be sure that the money they invest in another country will be protected.**

Participation in Sister Cities committee work: we are grateful for the strong support NCAAGW has given to the Xi'an Sister City relationship. Ideally others interested in the Xi'an Sister City should be able to participate. How might we do that?

**NQ: NCAAGW has established a group for Sister Cities, but the group does not hold regular meetings.**

**GZ: The group meets when needed.**

**HL: There would be no problem to include others in the Sister City group. They would be more than welcome.**

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things could we do virtually in the next year to sustain Montgomery Sister Cities in the age of covid? What about working with Montgomery College Television to produce a 30 minute documentary about the Xi'an Sister City and shorter videos about Chinese living in Montgomery County – artists, chefs, small business owners?

**All: Thumbs up! We like the idea about working with Montgomery College Television.**

**YL: Food and music.**

**SL: Show what life is like for people from Xi'an who have come to Montgomery County.**

**NQ: Showcase Xi'an restaurants.**

BA suggested he walk the group through the recommendations in his preliminary report of May 25, 2020.

### Montgomery Sister Cities: Board of Directors

First, the MSC Board of Directors needs to be more representative of the Montgomery County population and needs active participation from representatives of all the Sister City committees.

Second, once a more representative board is in place, the MSC board should review the original mission statement and objectives of the organization to determine if change is needed.

Third, the MSC board must play a much stronger role in providing guidance to the five Sister City committees and begin by convening a meeting of all members of the committees to discuss expectations.

**SL: There used to be regular meetings of the Montgomery Sister Cities board. We responded to requests from the MSC board. If no requests from the MSC board, our group didn't meet. The annual meeting of all Sister City committee members is a really good idea. It will let us show what we have done.**

Fourth, the MSC board needs to develop a public relations and marketing plan to lift the visibility of the organization.

Fifth, the MSC board needs to develop a comprehensive plan for raising private dollars to support the organization.

### **Montgomery Sister Cities: Sister City Committees**

First, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister City committees needs to focus on broadening representation and participation.

Second, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister Cities needs to develop operating procedures for ensuring basic accountability to the board and to the public.

**NQ: NCAAGW has bylaws that govern our meetings.**

Third, each of the five Sister City committees should provide two members to serve on the MSB board.

**All: Good to have two.**

**GZ: Have three with one as backup.**

Fourth, each of the five Sister Cities should submit an annual plan to the MSC board committing to organize a minimum of two public events each year. What kind of activities are you envisioning?

**All: Two Sister City events a year is OK.**

**HL: Zooming Tai Chi!**

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### **Morazán, El Salvador Sister City Committee Members** **Sister Cities Interview June 25, 2020**

**This meeting of Salvadoran community leaders was conducted via Zoom. The following community leaders were in attendance:**

**Nestor Alvarenga (NA)**

**Evelyn Gonzalez (EG)**  
**Bessy Granados (BG)**  
**Jorge Granados (JG)**  
**Leda Cristina Hernandez (LCH)**  
**Darwin Romero (DR)**  
**Roman Santillan (RS)**  
**Jessy Mejia Terry (JMT)**

**Bruce Adams (BA) began the conversation by explaining this is the thirty-sixth in a series of interviews he has conducted as part of a strategic planning process designed to create an implementation plan for strengthening Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. This process has been commissioned by the Montgomery County (MD) Government. His final report to the County Executive is due June 30.**

**Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works?**

**JG: I have a lot of enthusiasm to keep moving with the Sister City. Hope we can get together again. There was energy when the former governor was here but then no follow-up. We need someone who can get us moving again.**

**RS: Housing, hospitals, community college, scholarships – these were great achievements. World of Montgomery Festival. Health Fair for Salvadorans. We should use Zoom to do a virtual World of Montgomery Festival. Work with Telemundo to raise money for scholarships.**

**EG: Sister Cities should focus on people-to-people exchanges. Activities should be based on what people want to explore. We should meet people and maintain the relationships. Our strength was the ability to interact with government officials. Our volunteer leaders gave 100%. We have a good foundation. We have done good things.**

**JMT: As the county's Latino liaison, I am here to listen. I support the people-to-people concept. As staff, my job is to support your strategic plan. It is important to keep the committee going.**

**LCH: We need to meet on a regular basis. We need a strategic plan. We need a fundraising plan. And we need to work with the county. I want to know what the other Sister Cities are doing. Let's identify crossover projects. Let's share**

knowledge and experiences. To me, Sister Cities is cross cultural. I want it to continue. We should be doing projects with people, not the government.

NA: The exchanges have worked. We need to keep the connections with the liaisons. Do more smaller events. Go into the community. We have had lots of success. We should be proud of ourselves.

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What isn't working? What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrates you the most?

EG: People on the Sister City committee are already involved in lots of community activities. We are spread too thin, but we are still interested in being involved. We need to get important players like MCPS and Montgomery College on board. The education of young immigrants in the county and youth in El Salvador is a priority for us. By having MCPS & MC involved in the SC Board, we can partner with institutions in El Salvador, such as the Department of Education and the University of El Salvador. We can collaborate and see how to best serve that population here and there. We need more balance. This exchange should benefit both, the people in Montgomery County and Morazán. County staff, Liaison support is very important. Our strength should bring opportunities. There are many things we don't know. How can the county staff at MCPS and Montgomery College help us strengthen the college in Morazán?

JG: The Sister City committee needs new members and new energy. We need to focus on events. It is positive what is happening with the college. We need to get together and get on the same page. Cultural exchanges are important to reactivate the energy. Many of us are in other activities, but we still have the energy for Sister Cities.

BG: We need a new board. They need to be clear about finances. For example, how much money do we have in our funds? We need to set goals, and concretely create action plans to achieve them, rather than just naming goals without a sense of direction. Our committee needs new members, and we need to get young people involved. We must also follow up on all our initiatives to ensure that there is longevity and meaningful change.

RS: We have got to streamline the financial system so we know how many dollars we have.

EG: We have jobs, and we are involved in different things. Projects like the World of Montgomery Festival take so much effort. We need to find other

**Salvadoran groups to work with. We need to be realistic. How do we find new, young people to do this? Some other governments put money into their Sister Cities.**

Possible goals of a Sister Cities program: Should the Montgomery Sister Cities program be open to all of the following goals as opportunities come up in different Sister City relationships OR should there be a focus on one or two? Which of these goals are most important to you?

1. Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.
2. Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.
3. Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County.
4. Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.
5. Humanitarian Assistance. Building houses, donating computers, providing equipment and supplies to hospitals are examples of humanitarian projects that support those in need in our Sister Cities.

**EG: We need equitable resources dedicated to this partnership. The big guns of the county went to China and India. That didn't happen in El Salvador. While the CE staff coordinated the trips for those countries, volunteers organized the Salvadoran trip. If you want discontent, focus on economic development. The way goal #4 is stated, "Developing global citizens", ".. to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future" .... is selfish and centered on county youth. You need to teach the students to be humanitarians and seek mutual growth and understanding. Youth can learn and support each other. Economic development should go both ways, not just focused on Montgomery County businesses.**



**BG:** I like all of them, but it will depend upon the country. For the Morazán/Montgomery Sister City, I think that we should focus on community engagement, preparing global citizens, and humanitarian assistance, because we have limited resources and time.

**RS:** Morazán needs all five. Other Sister City committees have not done what we have done.

**NA:** We need to be mutually connected.

**EG:** The mission statement is pretty good. For #4, the exchanges need to be even, not just preparing U.S. kids to supervise Salvadoran kids. Focus on making the students humanitarians.

**DR:** Sister Cities is a great program to highlight the cultures in the county. We can improve and do more. We need to revamp and reboot. We should highlight the contributions of our community.

Virtual programming in age of covid: What creative things could we do virtually in the next year to sustain Montgomery Sister Cities in the age of covid? What about working with Montgomery College Television to produce a 30 minute documentary about the Morazán Sister City and shorter videos about Salvadorans living in Montgomery County – artists, chefs, small business owners?

**RS:** Is Montgomery College Television just on cable?

**BA:** No.

**RS:** Be great if they could do social media with us.

**NA:** Telemundo talent could moderate. Do Facebook Live. We have not worked with Montgomery College Television, but we are open to it.

**DR:** Highlight contributions of our community. Show us to the whole community. Take it to another level throughout the year. This will be more exposure for Montgomery Sister Cities.

**RS:** This could include programs with people in Morazán. I helped to organize a virtual program from Mexico. We had a virtual tour to the Workshop of Jacobo & Maria de los Angeles. Jacobo led the tour and explained to us their Zapotec traditions, the woods used in the process, as well as, the preservation of the forest, showcasing some pieces in process. At the end we had a Q&A.

BA suggested he walk the group through the recommendations in his preliminary report of May 25, 2020.

## Montgomery Sister Cities: Board of Directors

First, the MSC Board of Directors needs to be more representative of the Montgomery County population and needs active participation from representatives of all the Sister City committees.

**EG: The MSC board should have people from the areas where we need help. The board should have representatives from MCPS, Montgomery College, The Universities at Shady Grove. It should have people who can help us with our strategic plans.**

Second, once a more representative board is in place, the MSC board should review the original mission statement and objectives of the organization to determine if change is needed.

Third, the MSC board must play a much stronger role in providing guidance to the five Sister City committees and begin by convening a meeting of all members of the committees to discuss expectations.

**EG: The MSC board needs to be more involved in supporting us, helping us get the resources we need.**

**LCH: All the Sister City committees should meet annually with the Montgomery Sister Cities board. They should see what we are doing and we should share ideas.**

**JG: This is a good idea once or twice a year.**

Fourth, the MSC board needs to develop a public relations and marketing plan to lift the visibility of the organization.

Fifth, the MSC board needs to develop a comprehensive plan for raising private dollars to support the organization.

## Montgomery Sister Cities: Sister City Committees

First, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister City committees needs to focus on broadening representation and participation.

Second, with guidance from the MSC board, each of the five Sister Cities needs to develop operating procedures for ensuring basic accountability to the board and to the public.

**JG: We need to be more organized.**

Third, each of the five Sister City committees should provide two members to serve on the MSB board.

**EG: It is a real disincentive to require board members to contribute. If I have \$100 to contribute to Montgomery Sister Cities or send to El Salvador, I'm going to send my \$100 to El Salvador.**

**RS: We need two new members. I will train them, but I have served for five years.**

Fourth, each of the five Sister Cities should submit an annual plan to the MSC board committing to organize a minimum of two public events each year. What kind of activities are you envisioning?

**EG: Darwin has fresh ideas.**

**DR: Our elected officials need to understand the contributions Sister Cities has made.**

**RS: The masks from Xi'an got the attention of the elected officials.**

Final thoughts?

**EG: Be conscientious about equity or people will become disenchanting. We have a lot to offer.**