

Islamic Peace & Friendship Initiative Report

July 2006

Peace Through People

■ 50 YEARS OF ■



Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative
Report
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Origin of the Islamic Peace & Friendship Initiative

Aftermath of the Terrorist Attacks on the United States September 11, 2001

On September 12, 2001 Sister Cities International President Chuck Stokke and Executive Director Tim Honey posted the following message on the organization's website to members, friends, and supporters around the world.

"All of us involved with Sister Cities International must speak out against the horrific events of September 11, 2001. As a country and as ordinary citizens, we are now struggling to find appropriate ways to respond. We are all filled with questions and doubts. How do we ensure that such evil forces can never again strike at the heart of our cities? What can we do as ordinary citizens? How can we make a difference?"

In our hearts we must find ways to break down the barriers that divide us as human beings - barriers that become the breeding grounds for such hatred. We must find ways to communicate with those who speak a different language, have a different religion, or come from different political traditions. All of us are fortunate that through our involvement in Sister Cities we can find tangible ways to respond to this tragedy. Our collective commitment to the Sister City movement speaks to our personal commitment to foster a more peaceful world. From these tragic days, let us go forward with the mission and values of Sister Cities International at our side. May the work and deeds of all our members continue to inspire hope and peace for all mankind."

In March 2003, the Sister Cities International Board of Directors adopted the "Sister Cities United for International Peace and Friendship policy document." This document stated:

Sister Cities International, on behalf of its 675 communities in the United States, linked in partnership with 1,500 communities in 121 countries around the world, is committed to creating a more peaceful world through specific sister city projects and programs that will build bridges to international understanding.

The 45-year sister cities movement is built upon the active participation of both local government leaders and citizen volunteers. Working together, they implement projects that reflect the values of their communities and their special relationship with their sister cities.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 have inspired a global imperative to act. The elimination of worldwide terrorism and the promotion of international peace and friendship are the highest priorities. Community-based initiatives, structured around sister city partnerships, can provide a unique opportunity for communities worldwide to respond with passion, commitment and action.

The following initiative, was unanimously approved by the Board of Directors.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Sister Cities International is launching a five-year sustained and focused initiative that will involve sister city communities and their citizens around the world. Through this initiative the sister cities network is recommitting itself to building a more peaceful world in the 21st century. This will be accomplished through the following objectives:

1. Promoting specific community-based programs focused on education and communication for global understanding, friendship and peace.
2. Initiating specific economic development programs that will alleviate poverty, especially the ravages of malnutrition and disease that affect children in the poorest regions of the world.
3. Undertaking specific programs that will nurture the human spirit through religious understanding and tolerance, through music and the arts, and through the joy of forming new bonds of international friendship.
4. Promoting a new spirit of civic responsibility in the face of terrorism. This will ensure that no individual or group will experience discriminatory or prejudicial repercussions because of racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious composition or beliefs.
5. Providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of terrorism and war, and sharing with them the opportunities for building peace through the sister city movement.
6. Helping local governments throughout the world actively exchange their knowledge regarding specific issues that have taken on an increasingly global dimension, such as economic development, technology, the environment, healthcare and the public safety imperatives associated with international terrorism.

SPECIFIC MEASURES APPROVED CRITICAL TO ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF "SISTER CITIES UNITED FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP"

- Opening Sister Cities International membership to international communities that have a sister city partnership with a U.S. community.
- Expanding the number of SCI members by 100 percent over the next five years, so that by 2006 the Sister Cities International membership will have increased from 675 communities to 1,350.
- Expanding the number of sister city partnerships in areas of the world that are currently underserved, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and the former Soviet Union, and other targeted countries that are under-represented within the sister cities network.

- Launching a series of “Peace Initiatives” that will provide opportunities and resources for local sister city organizations to promote the goals and objectives of “Sister Cities United for International Peace and Friendship.” The first “Peace Initiative” will be the “Wheelchairs for Peace” project, a partnership with the Wheelchair Foundation, Sister Cities International and local Rotary clubs.
- Undertaking a major fundraising campaign over the next five years. Funds from this campaign will be used to strengthen and expand the sister cities network in the following areas: building the sister cities movement within developing and transitional countries; supporting local projects of economic development and poverty alleviation; significantly expanding opportunities for young people to actively participate in sister city programs; promoting projects of municipal cooperation, especially in the areas of democratic governance, openness and transparency; and providing “sister city seed grants” through the SCI endowment.
- Urging the federal government to provide increased funding for “citizen diplomacy programs.”
- Encouraging the federal government to make a concerted commitment to helping the country’s local governments strengthen their capacity to be internationally engaged in areas such as economic development, environmental management, healthcare, education and public safety.
- Convening a White House Summit on Citizen Diplomacy in 2006, the 50th anniversary of President Eisenhower’s people-to-people conference (held September 11-12, 1956), which sparked the sister cities movement. This will be accomplished by working in partnership with other “citizen diplomacy” organizations and networks.
- Forging new partnerships throughout the world to strengthen the sister cities movement, and to achieve the specific goals, objectives and outcomes of “Sister Cities United for International Peace and Friendship.”

Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiatives and Programs

Programs from 2002 through the present

Wheelchairs for Peace, 2002 - present

Currently, more than 100 million people around the world need a wheelchair, but cannot afford to purchase it or do not have access to one. The Wheelchair Foundation and Sister Cities International provide wheelchairs to mobility impaired individuals around the world, including many predominantly Islamic countries such as: Armenia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mali, and Turkey.

Wheelchairs for Peace is a five-year initiative begun in 2002 and conducted jointly by Sister Cities International and the Wheelchair Foundation. So far, 22 sister city programs have raised \$525,000, which is matched dollar for dollar by the Wheelchair Foundation, enabling the delivery or commitment of wheelchairs for sister city communities in Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, China, Ghana, Iraq, Israel, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Swaziland, and Turkey.

In addition, in 2006, Sister Cities International put together a shipment of wheelchairs to Rabat, Fez, Marrakech, and Casablanca as part of the Morocco Peace and Friendship mission.

During the 50th Anniversary year in 2006, organizers are raising \$150,000 to distribute 2,500 wheelchairs in China and Latin America for the "50 Wheelchairs - 50 Communities" initiative.

Launch of the YES High School Exchange Program, 2003 - present

Sister Cities International is part of a consortium of organizations, led by Academic Year in the USA (AYUSA), which brings high school students from predominantly Islamic countries to study in the U.S. for an academic year through the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of State and aims to engage participating youth, their teachers and classmates, and community leaders in an exchange effort that promotes increased understanding and tolerance between cultures.

Students participate from Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank, and Yemen. In 2006, the program will expand to include students from Bangladesh, Algeria, Senegal and, Mali.

Each spring, Sister Cities International brings together many of the YES students for a Leadership Summit that is held in Boulder, Colorado.

Sister City Mission to Lebanon, October 2003

Dearborn's Mayor Guido Leads Sister City Mission to Lebanon

Dearborn, Michigan's Mayor, Michael Guido, led a sister city delegation comprised of city officials, Arab-American business leaders, and the president and executive director of Sister Cities International to Lebanon. The trip was organized by the mayor's office, with assistance from the

U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, and the USAID mission in Lebanon. Dearborn became a sister city to Qana, Lebanon, in 1999 and today more than 30% of Dearborn's residents are of Arab descent. Many of them have been instrumental in the urban renaissance that Dearborn has experienced over the last decade, reinforcing a thriving center of Arab-American life. The 40-member delegation focused upon a broad range of economic and municipal government issues.

The Initiative Gathers Speed - A Task Force is Established, 2004 - present

The initiative found an early champion in Sherman Banks, a Little Rock, Arkansas tourism and travel consultant who had worked for years with sister city programs. In July 2004, Sherman Banks was elected president of the Board of Directors for Sister Cities International. In his inaugural remarks he indicated that he called on the entire Sister Cities International network to reach out to the Islamic world, and stated that the Sister Cities International Board of Directors will provide exceptional leadership to achieve this objective.

A few months later in March 2005, the Sister Cities International Board of Directors officially launched the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative. Banks noted that:

Understanding the Islamic world is imperative to anyone living in the 21st century. If there is any doubt about this, we only have to switch on the television or read a newspaper. Globalization was already changing the way we relate to the rest of the world prior to the events of 9/11. The aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center illustrate just how little the United States understands the Islamic world. It has never been more crucial to forge cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

He appointed Mary Palko, Global Envoy, to chair the Islamic Initiative Task Force. Palko brought years of experience with the sister city movement as a state coordinator and volunteer in Texas, and together, they developed the initiative and drew on "Sister Cities United for International Peace and Friendship."

U.S. -Iraq International Partners for Peace - June 2004 - October 2005

This grant-funded initiative is a critically important public-private partnership program designed to increase communication, cooperation and understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Iraq. The U.S. Department of State provided each partnership with a \$20,000 seed grant over a 24-month timeframe, matched by each community more than three times over! Initially, the partnerships focused on humanitarian assistance projects, though as the partnerships have developed, other program areas are being explored including, but not limited to, health care, good governance, education, economic and business development, sister schools, and tourism. The partnerships include:

- Denver Region Council of Governments (DRCOG), Colorado and Baghdad - municipal cooperation program and school supply aid.
- Dallas, Texas and Kirkuk - youth and sports program and "Shoes for Souls" donations.

- Tucson, Arizona and Sulaymaniyah - agricultural and medical capacity-building programs.
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Mosul - municipal cooperation program, aviation security capacity-building, and medical supply aid.
- Tempe, Arizona and Hilla - Wheelchairs for Peace program.

Friendship Mission to Egypt, May 2005

People to People International teamed with Sister Cities International on Peace and Friendship mission to Egypt. Mary Jean Eisenhower, President and CEO, of People to People International teamed with Sherman Banks, President of Sister Cities International, to lead a 120 member delegation to Egypt.

Islamic Initiative Plenary Session - Annual Sister Cities Conference in Spokane Washington, July 2005

A plenary session was devoted to the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative. This session demonstrated that mutual respect and understanding can be built and sustained between the United States and the Islamic world through grassroots efforts. Featured speakers told their remarkable stories of building bridges of mutual respect and understanding with the Islamic world. Speakers included:

- Laverne Johnson is a Senior Program Officer for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, at the U.S. Department of State.
- Stephen R. Brown, Chairman of the San Diego-Jalalabad Sister Cities Committee.
- Joe Rice coordinator for the U.S.-Iraq International Partners for Peace grant on behalf of the Denver Regional Council of Governments in their partnership with Baghdad, Iraq.
- Michael A. Guido, Mayor of Dearborn, Michigan who is actively involved with Dearborn's sister city in Qana, Lebanon.

Official Launch of SupportSisterCities.org, July 2005

Launched July 2005 at the Annual Conference in Spokane, Washington, this web site (www.SupportSisterCities.org) serves as an easy to use, low cost means of fundraising for individual member projects.

The site allows individual donors to make contributions to specific projects, improving the ability of sister city programs to raise funds for ongoing programs and grow their involved membership base. An example is the San Diego, California - Jalalabad, Afghanistan project to rebuild classrooms in Afghanistan.

“Nangarhar University and its faculty have endured 30 years of war. They want to break their isolation, revitalize their curriculum, and prepare leaders for their local and national communities,” said Steve Brown, San Diego Sister Cities Society Chair.

Funds will a) equip classrooms & teaching labs for effective pedagogy; b) offer faculty development on site through visiting scholars; and c) provide sufficient classroom equipment (projectors, models, white boards) relevant to each discipline.

Nangarhar University's 250 faculty prepare their 3,500 students in 9 disciplines but lack sufficient classroom or lab equipment, relevant texts, or opportunities for continued learning. Six NU faculty came to the U.S. and learned about new techniques and resources but returned to Afghanistan without the capital to incorporate these in their classrooms. Faculty, students, and Jalalabad residents want a better quality of life and can do so with an improved learning center and meaningful degree.

Fifty Community Summits held throughout the United States, Fall 2005 – Spring 2006

These Community Summits took place in cooperation with the Coalition for Citizen Diplomacy. They focused upon community dialogues covering global citizenship, connecting global communities, and communicating with predominantly Islamic communities.

Peace and Friendship Mission to Morocco, March 2006

Sister Cities International and People to People International are coordinated a joint trip to Morocco on March 17-27, 2006. The tour visited the cities of Rabat, Fez, Marrakech, and Casablanca. In addition, a one-day on the "Islamic Dialogue: The Future of Citizen Diplomacy" was held in Casablanca at the end of the mission.

The Number of Predominantly-Islamic Sister City Partnerships Increases

In March 2005, the Membership Department at Sister Cities International reported that the "Sister Cities United for Peace & Friendship" initiative had sparked a 33% increase in U.S. communities partnering with the Middle East since 2002. They also reported an 18% increase in partnerships with Africa and a 3% increase in Eurasian sister city relationships. By February 2006, the percentage increase had risen to 67% since 2002. Staff attributed the increase to outreach to Iraq and new sister city partnership signings because of the Islamic Peace & Friendship Initiative.

Sister Cities International 50th Anniversary Conference, July 13-15, 2006

In conjunction with the National Summit on Citizen Diplomacy, Sister Cities International is holding its 50th Anniversary Conference in Washington, D.C. Important program components at the conference that will help to build on the goals of the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative include:

- National Summit on Citizen Diplomacy - will issue a recommended blueprint for the next 50 years of global citizenship developed by representatives of 100 citizen diplomacy organizations
- International Youth Summit on Global Citizenship - 200 students from around the world will attend this dynamic and thought-provoking conference. The goal of this Youth Summit is to assist the youth to become better global citizens and leaders within their communities.
- A plenary session focused upon the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative.

- Kenneth Behring, chairman of the Wheelchair Foundation will receive the Humanitarian Partnership Award during the event to recognize his outstanding contributions to building global peace and harmony.
- The YES students will receive the Young Global Leaders Award to honor the commitment and dedication of hundreds of YES alumni.
- Sister Cities International members meet with members of Congress to promote the Sister Cities International 50th Anniversary Initiative. This five year initiative includes \$750,000 annually to support the “U.S.-Islamic Sister Cities Partnership Program.” For each of the five years 25 sister city partnerships will receive an “Islamic Friendship Grant” of \$30,000, and each grant will leverage at least an additional \$30,000 in non-federal resources. This will result in at least 2,500 citizen exchanges and projects over five years to Islamic communities around the world. Each partnership will conduct their exchanges within a substantive area, such as economic development, youth, disability advocacy, emergency preparedness or humanitarian assistance.

Islamic Initiative 2006 Survey

Results show intense interest in the Islamic world tempered with concerns

In 2006, the Islamic Peace & Friendship Task Force conducted a survey of sister city members, partners and friends about the initiative, and views on outreach to the Islamic world through sister city programs.

Approximately 204 people took the survey.

Locations included:

United States

Mesa, Arizona
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
Phoenix, Arizona
Prescott, Arizona
Queen Creek, Arizona
Sierra Vista, Arizona
Tempe, Arizona
Tucson, Arizona
Yuma, Arizona
Little Rock, Arkansas
Anaheim, California
Bakersfield, California
Long Beach, California

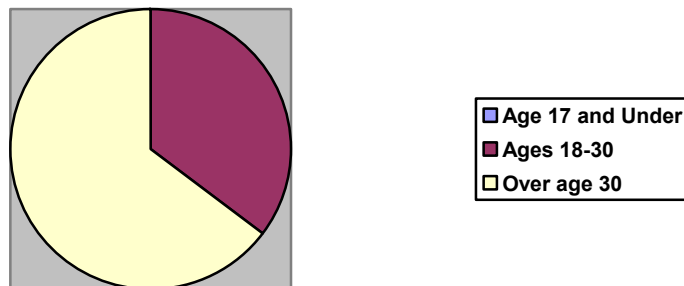
Los Angeles, California
Millbrae, California
Riverside, California
San Diego, California
Santa Cruz, California
Torrance, California
Denver, Colorado
Washington, DC
Jacksonville, Florida
Carbondale, Illinois
Noblesville, Indiana
Des Moines, Iowa
Columbia Heights, Minnesota
New Ulm, Minnesota

St. Paul, Minnesota
Tewksbury, New Jersey
Durham, North Carolina
Toledo, Ohio
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Fort Worth, Texas
Houston, Texas
Alexandria, Virginia
Lynchburg, Virginia
Roanoke, Virginia

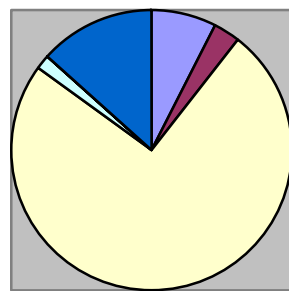
Other Countries

George, South Africa
Northern Ireland

Respondent Age (total responding = 51)



Respondent Ethnic Background (total responding = 67)



What is the most important issue that inhibits successful relationship-building between the United States and the Islamic world?

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Lack of tourism	8	2.74%
Terrorism	78	26.71%
Poor trade relationships	16	5.48%
Safety concerns	85	29.11%
Immigration Restrictions	9	3.08%
Ease of Travel	15	5.14%
Other	81	27.74%
	292	100%

Other Responses:

- The media should cover cultural and recreational activities and portray more about the interests and lives of ordinary citizens (ie. Not suicide bombers)
- Stop picturing Muslims as “evil men”
- Education within our schools regarding Islamic culture and location of populations
- Have open forums on Islamic culture in high schools - since high school is a foundation of many people’s education
- Stop bombing Islamic countries
- Educate all citizens about history and complexity of issues
- Encourage business, student and leisure travel to Middle Eastern countries
- Educate people on the Islamic world
- Encourage tourism
- Educate!!!
- Individuals getting to know other individuals - can speak up against stereotypes
- Educate ourselves about Islamic culture
- Provide more positive media coverage about the Middle East
- Internationalize our K-12 curriculum

- Encourage the celebration of the difference in cultures in education systems
- Public education to relieve the fear
- Highlight and embrace our existing Muslim communities in the U.S. in all branches of government
- Respect their ways of living
- Inviting more awareness of Muslim culture in school
- Increase awareness programs
- LEARN THE CULTURE
- Encourage fair and balanced media reports
- Develop more exchanges
- Education
- Education – programs in schools
- Encourage cultural exchanges
- Shut up, stop preaching, start listening
- Bring a true democratic peace in Iraq – but not likely
- A citizen international task force should be established by the president
- Willingness to twin
- Young leadership programs
- Educate about the true teachings of Islam
- Educate our citizens about all Islamic countries – history, geography, people, customs
- Exchanges
- Educate the public, most people think a high percentage of Muslims are terrorists or sympathize with them
- Continue teaching the difference between the Muslim religion and extremists
- Arrange meetings with Islamic people to share with them
- Foreign direct investment
- Develop study abroad opportunities
- Education
- Broad-minded education of Americans
- Get out of Iraq
- Teach about the Islamic world in our schools, television, etc.
- Provide community education forums
- Be more curious about foreign cultures
- Focus on a solution to the Israel – Palestinian impasse
- Teach about it in the schools – it will be a long process
- Offer Islamic studies in high schools
- Promote my positive images and reports of the vast number of peaceful Muslims in the world
- Make world cultures and world religions a larger part of public education
- Start with knowing which countries are Islamic

What do you believe best explains the weakness in relations between the U.S. and predominantly-Islamic countries?

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Many Americans are not sure which countries are predominantly Islamic	15	4.30%
Most Americans do not understand Muslim culture	106	30.37%
Most Muslims do not understand American culture	63	18.05%
The post 9/11 atmosphere in the U.S. makes it difficult	71	20.34%
U.S. government has not made building these relationships a priority of our foreign policy	69	19.77%
Other	25	7.17%
	349	100%

Other Responses:

- Promote student exchanges to the Middle East
- Stop the emphasis on terrorism
- Stop panicking about terrorist attacks by Muslims
- Develop more areas of exchange and volunteerism between the different communities in this country
- Study abroad experiences at schools
- Start talking about the good things in the Islamic world
- Include more history of the Islamic world in the school curriculum
- Educate!
- International visits - can break down stereotypes
- Stop racial profiling and legitimizing racism
- Media objective portrayal of the Islamic world
- Teach different religion classes in middle school through high school
- Promote cultural, business exchanges
- Provide funding both locally and abroad, focusing on better Islamic understanding and cooperation
- Encouraging and funding cultural and awareness events
- Allow more Islamic students access to the United States
- Encourage more partnerships
- DON'T SHOVE OURSELVES IN THE DOOR - ASK
- Education in public and private schools
- Exchanges
- Education of general public
- Encourage global awareness curriculum in schools
- Stop supporting oppressive regimes and exploitative businesses
- Somehow help women in Muslim dominated countries
- Under the State Department establish an Alliance for International and Cultural Exchange
- Fulbright fellowships and programs
- Have sensitivity training, so Americans can understand Muslims and have empathy

- Win the war against terrorists and continue to assist Iraq and Afghanistan to become independent democracies.
- Funding for Islamic youth to visit the U.S.
- Explore and promote examples of successful relationships, how they began

What can the U.S. government do to facilitate connections between U.S. and Muslim communities?

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Create and fund a broad range of exchange programs	83	28.92%
Reduce limitations on travel, specifically visa and customs issues, to and from the U.S.	34	11.85%
Develop international focus for schools and educational institutions, including language programs, study abroad opportunities and global awareness curriculum	139	48.43%
Other	31	10.80%
	287	100%

Other:

- Schools could offer Arabic or Farsi as languages
- Try to develop more trust so that exchanges can be made between Islamic countries and North America
- Promote Arabic language studies in schools
- Exchange program
- Educate!!
- Differentiate between what you see in movies and what is real life for the everyday person
- Teach tolerance
- Increase the amount of exchanges
- Host forums where individuals are allowed to anonymously ask any questions they may have about the Islamic world so as to dispel the stereotypes they may have on Muslims
- Sponsor more exchange programs
- Prove through better immigration practices that we believe that “not all Muslims are alike”
- Offer to assist with the children
- Better educate both sides on culture, values, politics, etc.
- Positive media stories
- Student exchanges
- Stop using inflammatory language like “Islamic terrorists” and other fear-mongering
- Decrease terrorism by death penalty for immediate relatives of suicide bombers
- Educate, local, state, and national leaders on the importance of citizen diplomacy
- Peace Corps

- Starting with elementary schools, have email pen pals in other countries. Possibly adopt a school in each sister city
- Stop having media only portraying negative aspects of life in the Islamic world
- Make the visa process easier to work with
- US government leaders to reach out to Islamic cities
- Allow more high school exchange students (from all countries) to attend school in the U.S. In my opinion, high school students seem to have more impact upon their peers than the college age students.
- Sponsor visits and exchanges
- Help with visa and customs issues
- More exchange programs
- Deal with stable Muslim countries and develop those relationships
- Bring our leaders together (US and Islamic countries)
- Provide programs that connect youth from US and Islamic countries

What can Sister Cities International do to facilitate connections between U.S. and Muslim countries?

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Share successful U.S. - Islamic partnership models	70	14.99%
Actively engage Muslim communities to link with U.S. cities	78	16.70%
Host training sessions for local and state leaders on relations with the Islamic world	66	14.14%
Increase educational and cultural programs with Muslim communities	95	20.34%
Develop sustainable development and humanitarian assistance programs that enhance the livelihood of Muslims in the sister city network	59	12.63%
Act as catalyst between U.S. and Islamic leadership to cultivate relationships	78	16.70%
Other	21	4.50%
	467	100%

Other responses:

- Open Middle Eastern restaurants or Hookah bars
- Educate people concerning Islam so they understand it better
- Cross-cultural activities/diversity in schools
- Try to encourage local schools to adopt educational programs which will teach local children more about Islamic religion, culture, and art
- Invite others to local mosques at times to learn about the religion

- Educate people about Islam
- Mandate schools and Islamic courses to curriculum
- Hold forums for Islamic speakers to give lectures and discussions for community groups
- Educate!!
- Put together a community workshop on Islam
- Establish connections through sister schools
- Community forums for discussion with leaders from both sides
- Active engagements requiring one-on-one interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the U.S.
- Teaching about all cultures/religions in schools instead of none
- Islamic awareness
- Link to a sister city in the Middle East
- Convene public hearings through our university systems with Islamic and U.S. local volunteer and elected leadership on cultural differences.
- Have an Islamic speakers bureau
- Better news and TV coverage of our existing exchanges
- Host community summit
- Form a community advocacy and education group
- Interfaith seminars
- Hold out the hand of friendship and promote small humanitarian projects
- City-wide educational programs – such as art exhibit, film festival, cultural festival
- Reach out to local Muslims to join the Sister Cities International committee.

In your opinion, what prevents existing U.S. sister city programs from starting a new sister city relationship with a predominantly Islamic community?

- I think the negative portrayal of Middle Eastern nations might be one reason.
- Not really sure, but travel restrictions, people's attitudes, and willingness to get involved and money all probably play a part.
- Safety issues, political instability, and possible unwillingness of people to want to participate.
- The war on terror.
- The U.S. government.
- Fear that the citizens of an Islamic country don't "like" Americans. In the mind of civic leaders, this could lead to negative reactions when the U.S. delegates visit the Islamic community.
- Negative perception of Muslims in American cities – and/or fear that there will be an outcry against making friends with terrorists.
- The lack of interest in establishing a relationship, the difficulty in officializing the relationship, and the unwillingness of volunteers to travel to such parts of the world to maintain such a relationship.
- Fear and lack of understanding of the Muslim world that breeds fear.
- Not knowing where to start, how to establish a relationship.
- Fear of the unknown; old, misguided stereotypes; lack of U.S. government focus.
- Lack of contact information

- Cultural misunderstanding and inadequate mechanisms to appropriately communicate between willing communities.
- A lack of understanding about the Islamic community and no interest in finding out because of all of the negative press.
- Most such communities are economic basket cases with poor access and inadequate facilities for accommodating visitors and exchanges; absence of volunteerism and lack of partner institutions for building connections; exchanges are primarily with elites; religious bigotry on both sides.
- Carefully considered, realistic fear! The percentage of radical fundamental Muslims is too high and even moderate Muslims are afraid to confront them. You couldn't pay me enough to visit any Muslim dominated country!
- Fear of terrorism tainting the relationship
- Concerns about safety – the visa situation
- Fear not of culture, but of safety
- Safety concerns and the lack of understanding of the culture
- Not having a complete understanding within the Muslim community. Information distributed by the media has an impact on how one perceives the culture and beliefs of the Islamic community.
- Lack of approach, resources, funding, lack of connection to corporations and governing structures that can create investment in these countries, a strategic plan to engage the long term resources needed.
- Local community is unsure of federal position on Islamic relationships.
- With the current rise of fundamentalism and the meddling of the U.S. into Middle Eastern countries have been painted with a broad brush as “the devil” to many Muslim countries. Until the situations change, we may see it wise to avoid exchanges. Of course, there are several Muslim countries where we are not “the devil” but the danger level is high any way.
- 9-1-1. endemic fear of extremists; misplaced thoughts that all Arabs have oil wells, wealth and need nothing e.g. stereotypism; and are suicide bombers or related to one. “The “War on Terror” has encouraged all these fears.
- The post 9/11 atmosphere and fear of how any approach will be received
- Lack of understanding, tolerance and knowledge of Islamic communities by Americans and our government officials.
- Brutality toward women makes the concept of sisterhood have little value. General hatred towards Americans.

Other comments:

- Sponsor musical events, plays or other cultural events featuring Middle Eastern themes
- Have local book clubs set time aside to read books about Islamic life
- Talk to churches
- Involve more Middle Eastern cities in the Sister Cities organization
- Tours
- Educate
- Exchanges between schools or religious communities

- Establish a commitment to increase understanding of the Islamic world
- Interfaith dialogues introduced in churches and synagogues
- Have a “visitation day” where each group visits the place of worship of the others
- Youth exchanges between the U.S. and Muslim countries
- Host Islamic speakers
- Target educational experiences for students
- Increase media coverage
- Strengthen programs with non-Muslim countries so we can stand together against terrorism
- Have interfaith meals, such as thanksgiving dinners
- Try to find a Muslim sister city
- Work to improve legislation for vouchers for high school exchange students
- Learn about successful programs elsewhere and have them educate others
- Agri-business technology transfer into arid climates of the world
- Develop cultural programs with Muslim communities
- Student involvement
- Get newspapers to run serialized overviews of places
- Radio shows highlighting Islamic culture and the relationship with the U.S.
- Work with “local colors”

Additional Comments Respondents Offered

- I think that Muslims/Arabs are poorly represented or under-represented in the media here. For example, I am familiar with the rich film industry of India, the music of Latin America, and the clothing styles of Europe, yet the same things about Middle Eastern countries are not represented in the media here. I feel that if people could see the pop culture and rich cultural history of the region, they might be more understanding – and more willing to travel there, or open up to people from the region.
- It is important that we help our residents try to see that all Muslims are not terrorists, and why their laws have come about.
- I’m frustrated that many Americans’ lack of openness to Islamic culture and the black and white views that have permeated the U.S. since 9/11. There’s so much propaganda put forth in part by the government and it’s frustrating because Muslims are such a minority in the U.S. that it’s difficult to forge meaningful relationships – there just aren’t enough to go around!
- The U.S. needs an enemy and unfortunately at the moment it seems to be Islam.
- To the degree that Middle Eastern countries are open to engaging in business and cultural exchanges with American companies, students and tourists, American citizens can increase their knowledge of the Middle Eastern and Islamic culture beyond and outside of political issues.
- Sometimes it is harder to change the mindset of the current generation and in order to change the attitudes of a population, one needs to work on the education system of the younger generation, so that they learn at a young age that people of other religions, cultures, etc. are no different than themselves. This would allow such students to rationalize the authenticity of the media when they are older. Currently, the media is absorbed by most of our generation and thus we need to help the younger generation grow out of that.

- We should have a goal for every U.S. state to have at least one Muslim sister city relationship.
- Should Sister Cities International be attempting a lead at this time?
- With the world as it is now and the negative attitude toward Americans and vice versa, it will be most difficult to move forward on this issue. We are hated by these countries. People to People cannot do it alone. The government has to help and not try to make every country and its people like America. They do not even understand the Islamic community.
- I know I sound real negative, but I believe I have good reason for my concerns. I deeply believe in Sister Cities programs. When I send a group of students to visit our sister city, the first consideration is the children's safety. Even visiting Japan, parents ask me about safety. I don't think we should use our children to test the waters in countries with such poor security and widespread hatred for the infidel crusaders.
- The United States can have no better representatives than its own people, empowered to act on their own behalf and in the national interest as citizen diplomats. It is most important Americans become less alarmingly ignorant about the rest of the world. It is key that organizations like Sister Cities help to curtail anti-American sentiment around the globe when it is at an unprecedented level. Finally Sister Cities International can help to reverse the shrinkage of the resources for international education and exchange programs, foreign affairs and citizen diplomacy.
- The main problem is the poverty, illiteracy, exposure, greed, etc. Education can contribute immensely to eradicate all conceptions. Assist many to assist others.
- Monitor the influence of Islamic fundamentalists taking root in any community.
- Another important issue that inhibits successful relationship building between the U.S. and the Islamic world is terrorism. Another thing that best explains the weakness in relations between the U.S. and predominantly Islamic countries is that most Muslims do not understand American culture. Sister cities can also facilitate connections between U.S. and Muslim communities by hosting training sessions for local and state leaders on relations with the Islamic world.
- I would like to see more organization within the Sister Cities International staff and board.
- The focus of the U.S. has turned so much to the Islamic world that relationships with other parts of the world seem to be discounted. This is very unfortunate because with the world view of the U.S. at this time, ALL countries need to have positive programs with the U.S.

Survey Observations

Many respondents chose not to supply their names and contact information. The survey administrators believe this was because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the desire to provide honest responses to a significant issue. Survey results indicate some strong trends among sister city members about building relationships with the Islamic world. Among them:

- More education about the Islamic world is needed among Americans at all levels – for elementary and secondary school students, as well as the general public. There was also a lack of understanding among sister city members about what countries constitute the Islamic world. Forty-eight percent of respondents agreed that the U.S. government should

develop an international focus for schools and educational institutions, including language programs, study abroad opportunities and global awareness curriculum.

- Stereotypes and misconceptions about the Islamic world need to be addressed at a personal level - there is a lack of positive images of Muslims and the Islamic world in the media and this feeds into biases about the Islamic world. It was evident that some of the people responding to the survey carried some stereotypes. Thirty-one percent of survey respondents agreed that most Americans do not understand Muslim culture.
- Safety and security are concerns among sister city members wanting to reach out to the Islamic world - these fears must be addressed before exchange programs can be undertaken and successful. When asked what issue most inhibited successful relationship-building between the U.S. and the Islamic world. Twenty-nine percent of respondents felt that “safety concerns” were the issue that most inhibited successful relationship-building, ahead of the 27% who felt that terrorism was the biggest issue.
- Significant additional support - in the form of funds, training and education - needs to be provided to sister city programs reaching out to the Islamic world.

Getting Your Community Involved

Practical Ways to Link Your Sister City Program With This Initiative

How can my community get involved and make a difference in achieving the goals of the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative?

Recommendation 1: U.S. communities can enter into a Sister City partnership with a community in a predominantly-Islamic country.

More information is available online at: <http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/cityseek/index>

Predominantly-Islamic communities currently seeking sister cities in the United States include:

Goundi, Burkina Faso

Tikrut, Iraq

Lisakovsk, Kazakstan

Uralsk, Kazakhstan

Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan

Balykchy, Kyrgyzstan

Batroun, Lebanon

Deguela, Mali

Dibaro, Mali

Tougouni, Mali

Kenitra, Morocco

Meknes, Morocco

Ezzamgbo, Nigeria

Gombe Local Government, Nigeria

Iwajowa, Nigeria

Nguru Umuaro, Nigeria

Oredo Local Government, Nigeria

Mo, Palestinian Authority

Lycée Ahoune Sané¹, Senegal

Alanya, Turkey

Beylikduzu, Turkey

Pirazez, Turkey

Zeytinburnu, Turkey

For more information about these communities, visit the Cities Seeking Cities section of our website at: <http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/cityseek/index>

Recommendation 2: If you already have a Sister City partnership in an Islamic country, then post a specific project/exchange on SupportSisterCities.org or participate in the 2007 Showcase of Young Artists program. For more information about these programs:

SupportSisterCities.org <http://www.SupportSisterCities.org>

Showcase of Young Artists <http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/sciprograms/yap>

Recommendation 3: Host a YES student in your community

Learn more about this program online at: <http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/YESProgram/index>
For information about hosting a YES student for an academic year, contact Bethany Rehling at 202.347.8630 ext. 8252, brehling@sister-cities.org.

Recommendation 4: Participate in the Wheelchairs for Peace program with a community in an Islamic country.

Learn more about this program online at: <http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/Wheelchairs>

Recommendation 5: Persuade your members of Congress to actively support the 50th Anniversary Legislative Initiative which includes specific funding for Islamic Friendship Grants.

Recommendation 6: Hold a Community Summit, and focus part of the Summit on the objective of the Islamic Peace and Friendship Initiative.

Get information on how to conduct a community summit online at:

<http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/sciprograms/Conference/50th/Getinvolvednowinthe50th>

Contact Information

For more information about the Islamic Peace & Friendship Initiative, contact:

Tim Honey, 202.347.8630, thoney@sister-cities.org

For help establishing a new sister city relationship:

Amy Kohlbrecher/Christina Wesson, 202.347.8630 ext. 4000, akohlbrecher@sister-cities.org, cwesson@sister-cities.org

For assistance putting a project on www.SupportSisterCities.org

Danielle Ramirez, 202.347.8630 ext. 8638, dramirez@sister-cities.org

For assistance with holding a Community Summit on Citizen Diplomacy

Ami Neiberger-Miller, 202.347.8630 ext. 8251, amiller@sister-cities.org

For information about Wheelchairs for Peace

Matthew Corso, 202.347.8630 ext. 8636

For information about the YES program

Bethany Rehling, 202.347.8630 ext. 8252, brehling@sister-cities.org

Appendix 1

Sister Cities International Member Countries Classified as Predominantly Islamic

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Azerbaijan
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Burkina Faso
Egypt
Ethiopia
Gambia
Guinea
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Lebanon
Malaysia
Mali
Morocco
Nigeria
Pakistan
Palestine Authority
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Tajikistan
Turkey
Turkmenistan
United Arab Emirates
Uzbekistan