



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: November 20, 2025

From: Jeremy Dennis, City Manager

Subject: Reestablishing a Sister Cities Partnership with the City of Brisbane, Queensland (AUD)

Recommendation

Staff recommends Council receive a report on potentially reestablishing a formal Sister Cities relationship with the City of Brisbane, Queensland (AUD).

Background

The cities of Brisbane, California and Brisbane, Australia have long been connected in bonds of friendship:

- In 1963, Betty Miller, a pilot from Santa Monica, flew from California to Australia, becoming the first woman to fly solo across the Pacific Ocean. In her plane, Mrs. Miller carried a silver plate, a gift from the City of Brisbane to its Australian namesake. Mrs. Miller presented this gift to Clem Jones, then Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Australia.
- In August 1963, the Brisbane City Council invited Betty Miller to a banquet in her honor at the 23 Club. During the festivities, a trans-Pacific radio-telephone conversations between Jim Williams, mayor of Brisbane, California, and Clem Jones. This began the start of an on-going sister-city relationship.
- Since 1965, there have been a number of informal visits by city officials, beauty queens, and citizens between the two cities. In 1974, Mayor Anja Miller and her husband were invited by Clem Jones to be guests at the Warana Spring Festival. The visit included 10 speeches, two appearances on television talk shows, three formal balls, an art show opening, several concerts, and a visit to a wildlife preserve.

City records show a formal partnership dating back as far as 1975 when the cities were paired as Sister Cities through Sister Cities International (SCI), whose mission is to, "Promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, cooperation- one individual, one community at a time." Sister Cities International was founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 to promote peace through people-to-people diplomacy. SCI has established thousands of partnerships between U.S. cities and cities worldwide. SCI serves as the national membership organization for sister city programs in over 400 communities with over 1,800 partnerships in more than 140 countries. The City's files show that the cities were members through 2006.

More recently, in October 2025, the City hosted Peter and Annabelle Johnstone in the City of Brisbane. Peter is the CEO of the Clem Jones Group. During their visit, Peter informed the City

of his desire to promote economic connectivity, cultural exchanges, and strengthening the bonds between the cities' respective Lions Clubs. Additionally, Peter suggested that the City consider its potential role in the promotion of the 2032 Olympics, to be held in Brisbane, QLD.

Discussion

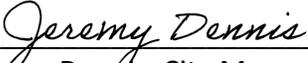
While the City maintains an informal sister-city relationship with the City of Brisbane, QLD, Mayor Lentz expressed a desire to look at reestablishing a formal Sister City relationship. Given the historical ties between the two cities, and the desire to potentially reestablish a relationship with the City of Brisbane, QLD, staff requests direction on whether to pursue reestablishing a formal relationship through Sister Cities International. Should Council desire to reestablish a formal relationship with the City of Brisbane, QLD, Mayor Lentz has drafted a letter to Lord Mayor Schrinner, expressing our interest in re-establishing a sister city relationship between the two cities. Staff would also work to reestablish the relationship through Sister Cities International, which includes a Planning Process, a Research Phase, Development of a Partnership Agreement, a Signing Ceremony, and Implementation/Evaluation. More detailed information on the SCI process may be found as Attachment 2.

Fiscal Impact

Should the City wish to pursue a formal relationship through SCI, membership costs are based on population size. For cities with populations of less than 5,000, the cost of membership is \$190 annually. These costs exclude potential costs of exchange visits between the two cities.

Attachments

1. Draft letter from Mayor Lentz to Lord Mayor Schrinner
2. Quick Guide to Establishing a Sister City Toolkit



Jeremy Dennis, City Manager



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November 6, 2025

Cr Adrian Schrinner
Lord Mayor
Brisbane City Council
City Hall, Adelaide St
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Lord Mayor Schrinner,

On behalf of the City of Brisbane, California, I write to express our sincere interest in re-establishing the sister city relationship that once united our two Brisbanes – one a city just south of San Francisco, and the other a thriving economic and cultural metropolis in Queensland.

The connection between our cities dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, during the tenure of former Lord Mayor Clem Jones. On a visit to the United States, he made a special side trip to visit our city and instantly fell in love with our residents and small-town charm. Whenever he would visit San Francisco, he would always make an effort to visit Brisbane, CA.

In 1974, at the invitation of Lord Mayor Jones, former mayors Anja and Ray Miller visited Brisbane on a ten-day cultural exchange visit. They brought back great stories of their trip that included attending the Warana Spring Festival (the precursor to the Brisbane Festival), concerts and other cultural events.

More recently, through the visits of Peter Johnstone, CEO of The Clem Jones Group, we have been reminded of the enduring goodwill between our two cities. His presence has reignited local enthusiasm to reconnect formally and celebrate the friendship that Clem Jones helped establish decades ago.

Peter has been keen on promoting economic connectivity, cultural exchanges, and strengthening the bond between our two Lions Clubs. We've also talked about the possibility of having Brisbane, CA be a part of the Olympic Torch process, as we celebrate Brisbane's amazing opportunity to host the 2032 Olympics.

We would be honored to welcome you to our Brisbane, should your travels ever bring you to the United States. Our community would be delighted and honored to host you and showcase our beautiful city.

I look forward to hearing from you and exploring ways to renew our sister city bond and foster new opportunities and friendships between our two Brisbanes.

With warm regards and in friendship,

Cliff Lentz, Mayor of Brisbane, California



QUICK GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING A SISTER CITY TOOLKIT

Overview

A sister or friendship city relationship is formally created when the mayors or highest elected or appointed officials from two communities sign an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing the partnership. However, this is usually the result of a long process that involves the local sister city organization along with the municipality and other local institutions. While the process can also be very different for each community and can vary from culture to culture, this guide can serve as a point of reference in guiding communities through the process.

The steps

- **Planning process:** The first step in developing a new sister city relationship is to ensure everyone is in agreement.* This would include the local sister city organization and the highest elected/ranking official, provided this individual approves and formalizes the partnership. The contact information for local sister city organizations may be found by visiting the Sister Cities International website at [http:// www.sistercities.org/](http://www.sistercities.org/).
- **Research phase:** Sister city relationships are strategic, long-term partnerships that should be mutually beneficial. Identifying potential partners is the foundation to developing a successful relationship. If you don't already have a potential sister city in mind, below is a list of data points that communities should look for similarities when identifying potential partners:
 - **Population size:** Some variance in city sizes is natural, but choosing a sister city of a similar size usually ensures good symmetry between municipal governments, community groups, private organizations, as well as similar challenges/opportunities
 - **Geography:** Similar geographic qualities, whether it's ports, deserts, lakes, mountains, climate, etc. often means that cities will be able to share valuable knowledge related to the respective challenge or opportunity associated with each quality
 - **Industries:** Potential commerce and trade partnerships
 - **Academic institutions:** High school and university exchanges, which are often a part of any relationship, require similar counterpart institutions that should be identified early in the process
 - **Cultural institutions:** This may include museums, music venues, community centers
 - **Preexisting Relationships:** This may include, but is not limited to: mayoral relationships, trade relationships, expatriate/diaspora communities, faith-based groups, and personal experiences ranging from study/work abroad to marriages
 - **Historical or ancestral connections:** Ethnic and/or cultural links

*Many communities have developed criteria or policies to guide their research or to evaluate inbound inquiries, whether from cities abroad or local residents, in order to manage the volume of requests as well as ensure that potential relationships are both appropriate and sustainable. If you are interested in developing such a policy please email membership@sistercities.org for more assistance as part of our Governance and Policy Services.

- Develop lines of communication:** The next step in the process is to develop a line of communication with the prospective sister city community may start by sending a letter of introduction from one mayor to the other. This letter should introduce your community, identify why you are interested in developing a sister city relationship, identify potential program/exchange opportunities, and identify a point of contact for this initiative. This is when international protocol should be followed in order to ensure a positive experience. Provided symmetry is a key aspect of international protocol, if your local sister cities organization operates through the work of community volunteers it is good practice to identify a volunteer contact as well as a contact within the mayor's office. If you need assistance in targeting appropriate contacts within the international community, please contact info@sistercities.org.
- Correspondence phase:** Once the letter has been received by the perspective sister city and a line of communication has been established, the next several months should be focused on learning more about the each other's communities, identifying program/exchange opportunities, discussing local involvement, and developing a work plan that establishes short and long term goals for the partnership. Many cultures will recommend a physical exchange during this phase, but often various means of technology is used to effectively communicate. This period is also a great opportunity to implement a program to "test the waters." This program could include a youth pen pal exchange, municipal/professional best practice, or other knowledge-sharing exchange, among many other opportunities. Many communities may send non-mayoral delegations during the correspondence and planning stages-whether that be the city manager, council members, local business professionals, or volunteers.
- Develop partnership agreement:** Both communities have decided to move forward and formalize the relationship. In order for a sister city, county, or state partnership to be recognized by Sister Cities International, the two communities must sign formal documents which clearly endorse the link. The partnership agreement can range from the ceremonial, with language focusing on each city's commitment to fostering understanding, cooperation, and mutual benefit to the precise, with particular areas of interest, specific programs/activities, or more concrete goals related to anything from numbers of exchanges to economic development. Sister Cities International has developed a toolkit and template that will assist in creating this document and can be found under the toolkits and templates section of the SCI Member Area.
- Signing ceremony:** Once the partnership agreement has been developed and both communities have approved the document, the two highest ranking officials will sign the document, which is often done during a formal signing ceremony. This ceremony is usually an in-person event, but can be virtual. While it is important to tailor these ceremonies to fit your specific communities, Sister Cities International has developed a guide to this process and can be found under the toolkits and templates section of the SCI Member Area. Once the agreement has been signed, please send an electronic copy of that agreement to Sister Cities International at membership@sistercities.org.
- Implementation and evaluation:** It is time to implement programs and plan exchanges outlined in the cooperative plan developed during the early months of this process. It is a good practice to set a date, whether within the next six months to two years, to evaluate the partnership and make adjustments if needed. If you ever come across any issues, concerns, or are looking for program ideas, please do not hesitate to contact Sister Cities International.