

Sister Cities Policy and Program Review

Research report for the City of Adelaide

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Sister Cities Policy and Program Review

Executive Summary

- Adelaide's sister city relationships are valued by the community as a mechanism for cross-cultural connection, knowledge sharing and professional networking. Valuable outcomes of Adelaide's sister city relationships have included: knowledge, arts and student exchanges; development of entrepreneurship, tech and innovation; raising Adelaide's international profile and strengthening the city's identity; and long-term friendship and international connection.
- Adelaide's sister city relationships offer a great deal of untapped potential. Although some outcomes are generated under the auspices of the sister city, the relationships hold largely symbolic value. They would benefit from greater strategic clarity, community awareness and tangible outcomes.
- To realise these benefits, City of Adelaide needs to resource its Sister City Program by: building internal capacity; setting up resilient governance structures, including community networks; and adequately funding activities, including travel. To establish and maintain social license for this resourcing, it must communicate benefits to the Adelaide community. Evaluation mechanisms and review periods should be built into existing and future sister city arrangements.
- Due to its role as capital city, City of Adelaide should liaise with State Government to ensure policy alignment, access funding, manage program scope and maximise the benefits of international arrangements.
- When assessing future sister city relationships City of Adelaide should assess whether there are: a clear, shared purpose and level of commitment; strategic fit and compatibility with Adelaide's identity and priorities, including existing cultural, social or economic links; and identified, viable community benefits.

Introduction

This report was commissioned by the City of Adelaide to review its Sister City Program and help shape a new Sister City Policy. It provides a background of sister city programs internationally and in Australia, and an overview of the City of Adelaide's sister city relationships and activities. It brings together insights from academic and policy literature and the views of local stakeholders to understand what makes a successful sister city relationship. It then makes a series of policy recommendations to guide the City of Adelaide's engagement in existing sister city relationships and assessment of potential new sister cities in the future.



PHOTOS: SANDY HORNE

Approach

This research was undertaken in three stages. In the first we reviewed international academic literature about sister cities and a wide range of grey literature, including reports, policy documents and international relations frameworks. We conducted an environmental scan of Australian sister city relationships and a more detailed exploration of Adelaide's sister city history and engagement.

Following this background review, we held a series of interviews and focus groups with community, government and industry stakeholders. In these, stakeholders were given the opportunity to share their views on the purpose and value of sister cities, what makes a successful relationship, how sister city relationships and programs should be managed and by whom, what opportunities exist for the City of Adelaide's sister city relationships and what a new policy might include. We then analysed the data collected in interviews and focus groups to identify themes.

Lastly, using the findings from these conversations and from the background review, we devised a set of policy recommendations. These are intended to clarify the purpose and objectives of Adelaide's sister city relationships (SCRs), and provide a framework for maintaining existing SCRs, including matters of governance, and the consideration of any future relationships.



Background

What are sister cities?

Sister city relationships, also known as ‘twin towns’, gained momentum after the Second World War as a form of people-to-people diplomacy promoting friendship, peacebuilding and cross-cultural understanding. Twin towns expanded rapidly across Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly between towns in formerly hostile nations. The United States began its formal sister city program in the 1950s and established Sister Cities International, which remains the institutional framework for these relationships. From the 1960s onwards, there was widespread adoption of sister cities globally, with uptake peaking in the 1980s. There are now tens of thousands of official city-to-city linkages worldwide.

SCRs are established via a formal agreement that usually sets out the purpose of the relationship. While these agreements are commonly open-ended and focused on the development of a long-term city-to-city relationship, some cities build in review periods that enable them to review whether to remain active. An SCR can become dormant if no activities take place, even if the agreement still technically exists. From time to time, SCRs are terminated, usually because of political tensions, changing council priorities or a lack of engagement.

SCRs are often conceived around a set of shared aspirations for cultural, social, economic and educational exchange. SCRs are commonly seen as an avenue for the development of trade, investment and business networks; cross-cultural learning; promotion of tourism; knowledge sharing in areas such as sustainability, technology, innovation, public administration and shared industry sectors; arts and festival exchanges; and celebration of historical ties.

Adelaide’s sister cities

The City of Adelaide has five official sister cities—Christchurch (New Zealand), George Town (Malaysia), Himeji (Japan), Austin (USA), and Qingdao (China). The City of Adelaide also has an MOU with Athens (Greece) and two ‘friendly cities’

in China, Dalian and Chengdu. The MOU with Athens focuses on cooperation in the arts and culture, tourism and the environment, and is valid for three years, at which point it can be evaluated and the relationship renewed. The friendly cities are less formal partnerships than SCRs, but are still designed to promote friendship and cooperation.

Christchurch, New Zealand (est. 21 Feb 1972)

This sister city relationship was established to foster mutual understanding through the sharing of ideas and information, trade missions, and student, sporting and cultural exchanges. A consistent focus has been tourism and place branding, with mutual promotion as garden or green cities. Education links include student exchange programs and Children’s University connections between Adelaide and Canterbury and Lincoln Universities. The relationship is also visible through public art, including the Kaurua Wailu artwork by Adelaide artist Karen Genoff installed in the Adelaide Garden at Halswell Quarry, Christchurch. City of Adelaide supported Christchurch in practical ways following the 2011 earthquake, for example by inviting 170 students from earthquake-damaged Canterbury University to study at the University of Adelaide.

George Town, Penang, Malaysia (est. 8 Dec 1973)

The relationship began with strong historical and symbolic connections. Colonel William Light was the eldest son of Captain Francis Light, who established George Town, and the two cities share similarities in city planning and grid layout. Activities have included cultural exchanges and promotional events that highlight Penang’s multicultural heritage and Adelaide’s festival identity. Two-way delegations and trade missions have been documented, with benefits linked to economic development and tourism. Heritage and cultural tourism cooperation has been a recurring strand, shaped in part by George Town’s UNESCO World Heritage status. Adelaide has also supported education and policy engagement, including sponsorship of the ASEAN Australia Education Dialogue in George Town. The 50th anniversary in 2023 included civic receptions, commemorative activities and a sister city book launch alongside the George Town Literary Festival.

Himeji, Japan (est. 19 Apr 1982)

Adelaide’s relationship with Himeji is strongly grounded in symbolic place making and long-term cultural engagement. The Adelaide Himeji Garden, opened in 1985 in the southern parklands, functions as the principal public symbol of the partnership and a site for civic and community activity. A granite lantern gifted by the City of Himeji, inscribed to mark the sister city bond, reinforces the ceremonial character of the relationship. Ongoing student exchanges and cultural visits are noted in City of Adelaide reporting, alongside regular cultural exchanges linked to Japanese festivals and community events. Milestone anniversaries have been used to activate public programming, including 35th and 40th anniversary celebrations with a City Library exhibition and civic events in the garden.

Austin, Texas, USA (est. 11 Jul 1983)

Originally framed as a series of exchanges to deepen cultural ties, promote products and services, and build awareness of tourism attractions. The relationship includes prominent symbolic gestures and physical markers, including Adelaide’s gift of a large opal in 1983 and the establishment of Austin Street and Austin Garden in Adelaide’s parklands. Documented exchanges span creative industries such as fashion, education and media, alongside civic diplomacy through delegate visits and anniversary events, including 40th anniversary activity in 2023. More recent activity has expanded into innovation agendas, with smart city and entrepreneurship roundtables focused on learning from Austin’s ecosystem. Creative exchange highlights include Fashion X Austin and the Adelaide Fashion Festival exchange in 2018 to 2019, with two-way designer participation, and involvement of Adelaide musicians in Austin’s annual SXSW festival.

Qingdao, Shandong, China (Friendly City 2001; Sister City Nov 2014)

The relationship developed through economic, trade and tourism exchanges, building on the broader South Australia to Shandong sister state relationship. Education has been a major pillar, including agreements on education and training and initiatives promoting Adelaide as a study destination, with continuing institutional links such as Haide College in Qingdao described as a joint

institute of the University of Adelaide and Ocean University of China. Cultural exchange has included festival and conference engagement, particularly through participation by Shandong and Qingdao in the OzAsia festival. Symbolic place-based diplomacy is represented by the Qingdao Rose Garden in Veale Gardens, unveiled on 25 Feb 2018, featuring the Song of the Wind sculpture and the City of Qingdao Rose. The opening included community cultural activities such as lion dances and calligraphy, reinforcing public visibility and community connection.

Table 1: Main focus themes across Adelaide’s sister city relationships

Sister City	Main focus themes of the relationship
Christchurch New Zealand	Green city identity, education links, tourism promotion, public art, disaster resilience and mutual support
George Town Penang, Malaysia	Heritage and multiculturalism, food and tourism, education and policy dialogue, Asia-facing cultural diplomacy
Himeji Japan	Garden diplomacy and symbolic place making, cultural exchange, student exchange, long-term relationship building
Austin Texas, USA	Creative industries exchange, innovation and smart city collaboration, festival-based exchange, civic diplomacy
Qingdao Shandong, China	Trade and port city branding, education and student mobility, festivals and conferences, symbolic place-making

Table 2: Timeline of the establishment of Australian capital cities' sister city relationships

AUSTRALIAN CITY	YEAR	SISTER CITY
Sydney (first partnership)	1968	San Francisco, USA
Adelaide (first partnership)	1972	Christchurch, NZ
Adelaide	1973	George Town, Malaysia
Perth (first partnership)	1974	Kagoshima, Japan
Hobart (first partnership)	1977	Yaizu, Japan
Melbourne (first partnership)	1978	Osaka, Japan
Melbourne	1980	Tianjin, China
Sydney	1980	Nagoya, Japan
Darwin (first partnership)	1982	Anchorage, USA
Darwin	1982	Kalymnos, Greece
Adelaide	1982	Himeji, Japan
Adelaide	1983	Austin, USA
Sydney	1983	Wellington, NZ
Sydney	1984	Portsmouth, UK
Perth	1984	Houston, USA
Perth	1984	Megisti (island of Kastellorizo), Greece
Perth	1984	Rhodes, Greece
Melbourne	1984	Thessaloniki, Greece
Melbourne	1985	Boston, USA
Brisbane (first partnership)	1985	Kobe, Japan
Sydney	1986	Guangzhou, China
Perth	1987	San Diego, USA
Darwin	1988	Ambon, Indonesia
Brisbane	1988	Auckland, NZ
Perth	1989	Vasto, Italy
Darwin	1990	Haikou, China
Brisbane	1992	Shenzhen, China
Brisbane	1993	Semarang, Indonesia
Sydney	1993	Florence, Italy
Canberra (first partnership)	1993	Nara, Japan
Brisbane	1997	Kaohsiung, Taiwan
Hobart	1998	L'Aquila, Italy
Perth	1998	Nanjing, China
Perth	1999	Taipei, Taiwan
Darwin	1999	Milikapiti (Tiwi Islands) Australia
Canberra	2000	Beijing, China
Brisbane	2002	Daejeon, South Korea
Darwin	2003	Dili, Timor-Leste
Melbourne	2004	Milan, Italy
Brisbane	2005	Chongqing, China
Perth	2006	Perth, Scotland
Perth	2008	Seocho (Seoul district), Korea
Brisbane	2009	Abu Dhabi, UAE
Brisbane	2010	Hyderabad, India
Perth	2012	Chengdu, China
Adelaide	2014	Qingdao, China
Canberra	2016	Wellington, NZ
Darwin	2022	Denpasar, Indonesia

Adelaide’s sister city relationships in context

Sister city relationships around Australia

The first Australian sister city relationship was forged in 1961, between Bega, NSW and Littleton, Colorado in the US. The Australian Sister Cities Association formed in 1979. **Table 2** (previous page) shows a timeline of SCR uptake by Australia’s capital city councils, although hundreds of SCRs belong to other metropolitan and regional councils across Australia. Forty percent of these SCRs were taken up during the 1980s.

The large number of SCRs across Australia makes a full review beyond the scope of this report. However, this study has included the five other South Australian councils that also have sister cities as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3: South Australian sister cities

SA council	Sister city/cities
City of Marion	Kokubunji, Japan
City of Port Adelaide Enfield	Malmö, Sweden
City of Salisbury	Mobara, Japan
City of Tea Tree Gully	Asakuchi, Japan Borodyanka, Ukraine
City of Port Lincoln	Lincoln, UK Muroto, Japan

A review of sister city activities and purpose statements from these five South Australian councils, and the seven other state/territory capital councils, reveals wide variety in the way SCRs are conducted and conceptualised. However, there are notable commonalities. The most common areas of activity by far are in **education** (primary, secondary, tertiary and specialist exchanges); **economic development** (trade, investment, industry, business networking, conferences and professional exchange); and **cultural exchange** (delegations, symbolic friendship).

Not as common, but still a focus of many SCRs, are the **arts** (creative industries, festivals and events, and arts exchanges); **city improvement** (public art, place-making, urban renewal and development); **tourism** (development and promotion); and celebration of **historical ties**

(WW2 links, diaspora communities, namesake cities, influential figures).

Sport (exchanges), **civic diplomacy** (delegations), **public administration** (knowledge sharing and capacity building), **innovation and technology** (knowledge exchange, entrepreneurship, research), **diversity initiatives** and **sustainability** (climate and the environment) are less of a focus, but still a priority for several SCRs.

Lastly, a handful of SCRs include the following among their priorities: **mutual support** (disaster resilience, refugees); **health and medicine**, **First Nations** (recognition, knowledge sharing), and **food and hospitality**.

It should be noted that upon signing the agreement the stated aims for SCRs can often be quite wide-ranging, but underrepresented in the activities that follow. While many Australian SCRs are very active, some SCRs are decades old and have become largely symbolic or encompass only one or two flagship programs, such as an annual student exchange or national day celebration. This reflects the changing nature of city identities and priorities and fluctuating community support. Milestone anniversaries are often a time when these ‘dormant’ SCRs are revived and celebrated.

State policy context

SA Government policy environment: Connections to sister cities programs

The South Australian Government's international engagement spans across most government departments. The Protocol unit in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) has a central role and facilitates incoming delegation visits to South Australia as well as coordinating the Premier's international engagement and travel.

Most state government departments have policies, strategies and nominated staff roles that relate to international engagement. In the context of local government relationships more broadly, and the City of Adelaide in particular, connection points to key government policies are outlined below. These highlight opportunities for cooperation and engagement with sister cities across many areas of public policy, depending on current priorities, resourcing and ambitions of the City of Adelaide. It is worth noting that most schemes are two-directional, supporting export and attracting investment.

Department of State Development: Trade, International and Investment

South Australia's Trade & Investment Strategy (TIS) to 2030 was launched in August 2023. The strategy provides a seven-year focus for developing South Australia's export markets and driving direct investment. In terms of the largest export markets by country, all five of the City of Adelaide's sister cities are located in markets that are significant trade partners for South Australian exporters. In addition, the Trade & Investment Strategy identifies India and South East Asia as future growth markets.

The strategy is built around seven pillars that aim to increase export and investment outcomes across South Australia. It identifies nine globally competitive industry sectors, some of which have close alignment with City of Adelaide's current activities and strategies through AEDA.

- Renewables, fuels and cleantech
- Mining and minerals processing
- Defence and space
- International education
- Tourism
- Wine
- Food and agribusiness

- Critical and emerging technologies
- Health and medical

Department of the Premier and Cabinet: CreateSA

CreateSA launched *A Place to Create*, South Australia's ten-year cultural policy, in March 2025. The policy is accompanied by shorter, two-year delivery plans with the first one covering years 2025-27. The cultural policy document, together with the delivery plan, provide insights into the direction of government investment in the area of arts, culture and creative industries.

There are several possible connection points to the City of Adelaide's sister cities program. For example, the current delivery plan includes a direct commitment to seek further opportunities for South Australian artists to develop international markets. The delivery plan also seeks to support strategic market development and export initiatives, identify new opportunities through cultural diplomacy and international networks and to leverage international networks to support knowledge sharing and collaborations for both artists and organisations.

As noted earlier in this report, City of Adelaide, together with State Government agencies, has a history of arts and cultural connections with the sister cities. For example, South Australians have connected with SXSW through events and delegations, leveraging the sister city connection with Austin especially in relation to contemporary music, screen and tech sectors. As an example of an inbound cultural connection, a delegation from George Town Literary Festival visited OzAsia Festival in 2023. The connections within this policy area can span both CreateSA initiatives and individual organisations, artists and creatives working in the City of Adelaide.

Capital City Committee

In terms of mechanisms for partnering with the State Government, the Capital City Committee is a legislated, high-level body tasked with promoting the development of the city of Adelaide through a variety of mechanisms, including brokering partnerships and investment, stakeholder engagement and events. The Committee is chaired by the Premier and in 2023-24 included members with ministerial portfolios that included Arts, Small and Family Business, Tourism and Multicultural

Affairs, thereby providing a broad connection point to key State Government policy areas. Recent reporting on the Capital City Committee activity denotes a lower level of activity than during some earlier periods, but the mechanism continues to be available to the City of Adelaide.

In terms of relationship with the Federal Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is a core stakeholder and partner for local government international engagement activities, including the sister cities programme. DFAT administers the Foreign Arrangements Scheme and local governments must notify the Minister for Foreign Affairs of any prospective new arrangements, such as any new sister city relationships. There has been a recent review of the scheme, but DFAT indicates that sister city relationships are likely to continue as notifiable relationships for the purposes of the Act. However, DFAT is working towards a better understanding of the nature and risk of sister city arrangements. DFAT has published a [Fact Sheet](#) and a [Guidance Note](#) to support local government decision-making and process planning.

Global context: what makes a sister city relationship successful?

Research has shown that SCRs have typically evolved through three overlapping phases. The **associative phase**, dominant through the first two decades, emphasised international friendship and symbolic solidarity. Following this, the **reciprocal phase** emphasised structured, mutually beneficial activities geared towards cultural understanding, such as educational and professional exchanges. From the mid-1980s, sister cities entered a **commercial phase**, in which cities increasingly began to view the relationships as tools for economic development, tourism promotion and access to international markets. Importantly, these three expressions of SCRs have not replaced each other but continue to co-exist, creating a diversity of sister city practices and purposes (O’Toole 2020).

Much current debate about the value and purpose of SCRs centres around the extent to which they should be used for economic development or just focus on cultural exchange. Views tend to differ from country to country, and indeed, from city to city (Mpanza et al. 2022; O’Toole 2000). SCRs can generate a wide spectrum of benefits that extend across cultural, social and economic domains

(Baycan-Levant et al. 2020). SCRs foster long-term friendship, trust and goodwill between communities, offering significant opportunities for exchange, collaboration and engagement. Student exchanges are an obvious and well-known expression of this, but opportunities extend into the arts, sports, sustainability, governance, tourism, innovation and trade.

SCRs can also function as a useful form of ‘paradiplomacy’ that complements national and state-level diplomacy. As long-term, people-centred relationships, they can create openings and add value for state government objectives in international policy, and have been shown to weather a degree of political turmoil (Fortunoff et al. 2025). Local governments should work closely with state and federal government on SCRs to ensure compliance and policy alignment and maximise benefits for all.

Effective management of SCRs also requires local governments to develop organisational capacity. Poorly funded or unstructured relationships tend to remain symbolic rather than productive. SCRs need to be supported by clear objectives, adequate resources and commitment from council leadership. In particular, local governments need institutional capacity to successfully manage the relationship, in the form of human resources, external resources, organisational infrastructure and financial resources. However, an ongoing benefit of SCRs is that local governments can further develop these capabilities through international engagement, including knowledge sharing with their counterpart organisations in sister cities (Walker et al. 2024).

Regular communication and clear governance structures are also required. There are a range of governance models in use by councils but a degree of involvement by the community via networks, committees and volunteer groups is critical for success. Community ‘ownership’ creates benefits for all and expands the capability and resourcing of sister city programs, while building into the relationships a degree of resilience to changes in elected leadership (Harrison & Huang 2022).

Research emphasises that successful SCRs depend on clear purpose, strong mutual commitment and the capacity to sustain the relationship over the long term. The most compatible cities tend to be similar in size, economic profile or policy interests (Cohen 2020). Pre-existing ties—whether cultural, historic or economic—also create a more natural affinity,

especially where there are diaspora communities. However, dissimilarity is also valued in some SCRs, offering opportunities for cross-cultural learning driven by curiosity (Fan et al. 2023). In either case, flagship cultural programs such as festivals, growing industrial sectors, or shared geographic characteristics and sustainability challenges can also create meaningful opportunities to learn from each other.

On the other hand, misalignment of expectations, resources and objectives, shifting priorities over time, geopolitical tensions, inconsistent management and inadequate resourcing can all lead SCRs to become symbolic rather than productive (O'Toole 2000; Gibbs et al. 2015; Tham & Shim 2025).

Importantly, SCRs need community support to succeed as adequate resourcing requires social licence. Critiques of SCRs have in recent years centred around community perceptions of economic benefit and whether the money spent on activities, especially overseas travel, is justified (Ryan & Mazzilli 2024). However, SCRs work best when they cultivate person-to-person links through exchanges, regular visits and continuous communication, which can take time to mature. Councils must work to involve communities so that they benefit from programs, as well as demonstrating the value of SCR activities in a transparent and consistent way (Gibbs et al. 2015).

Finally, regular review periods should be built into SCR programs so that both cities can assess the value of the program and make sure they are aligned on future objectives and how to achieve them.



Findings

A central part of research for this report was a series of interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. We spoke to 20 representatives of the Adelaide community, including Council, business leaders and professional associations, arts organisations and festivals, and state and federal government. We also sought insights from other councils. Respondents were asked for their views on:

- The purpose of SCRs and their value to Adelaide
- How well our SCRs currently fulfill that purpose
- What could increase community participation and support
- What the role of the South Australian Government should be in Adelaide's SCRs
- What we can learn from any previous challenges in establishing or maintaining SCRs
- What conditions or qualities make an SCR successful
- How City of Adelaide should evaluate the success of its SCRs
- What factors should guide the decision to establish a new SCR

Transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were then analysed to identify themes. A summary of the main themes is below.

Core purpose of Adelaide's sister city relationships

- Build long-term, people-to-people relationships that can outlast political cycles and are resilient to geopolitical turbulence.
- Support Adelaide's international engagement so the city is not culturally or economically isolated.
- Create pathways for cultural, economic, educational and other types of meaningful exchange, with programs that deliver tangible benefits for the community.
- Create practical value through exchange of knowledge, capability building, and best practice transfer.
- Provide a platform that can enable economic outcomes over time such as trade links, tourism growth and business internationalisation.

- Provide opportunities for all members of the community to participate.
- Boost city identity and pride.
- Complement the State Government's international agenda and economic priorities.

How well do the City of Adelaide's sister city relationships currently fulfil that purpose?

- Participants saw strong symbolic and relational value, but weak strategic clarity.
- Community awareness and visibility are low, so public value is not well understood. Some relationships feel distant from everyday city life and local priorities.
- Outcomes appear uneven and often not systematically captured or communicated.
- Lack of clear aims, resourcing and evaluation makes it hard to sustain momentum and demonstrate impact.

Valuable outcomes of Adelaide's sister city relationships

- Knowledge exchange that helps Adelaide share solutions to challenges and adopt solutions already tested elsewhere. This includes scientific approaches to sustainability and climate challenges, and matters of public administration and council capacity building.
- IT sector entrepreneurship, innovation and growth; developing Lot Fourteen connections.
- Arts and cultural exchanges, especially related to music and festivals. This leverages Adelaide's identity as a UNESCO City of Music and the gateway to the Festival State.
- School exchanges (teachers and students), especially with a focus on language skills and building cross-cultural understanding in future generations.
- Community-led cultural activity such as diaspora engagement that strengthens social cohesion and place identity.
- Tourism enabling outcomes such as improved city profile and potential pathways to better connectivity, including direct flights and hospitality infrastructure.
- Long-term trust and continuity that can enable economic or connectivity benefits, including examples like aviation continuity after COVID being linked to relationship strength.

Future opportunities for Adelaide's sister city relationships

- Promoting international higher education.
- Wine linkages – tourism, industry, education. Although our wine regions are not in the City of Adelaide, it has the National Wine Centre and acts as the gateway to our regions.
- Sports linkages – tourism, exchanges.
- Engaging diaspora communities, including international students.
- Advancing Reconciliation by ensuring First Nations perspectives are centred in SCR policy and programs and by facilitating First Nations knowledge exchange with sister cities.
- Collaborating with other SA councils and 'sisters of sisters' to open up larger networks.

Qualities of a successful sister city relationship

- Clear shared purpose and an orientation that fits both cities.
- Strategic clarity and alignment with Adelaide's economic and cultural identity.
- Willingness and buy-in from city leadership.
- Community visibility and participation.
- Areas of mutual interest around which activities can be planned.
- Regular engagement and visits supported by adequate resources.
- Equal energy and investment of time and resources on both sides.
- Strong people to people infrastructure including diaspora, schools, universities, cultural organisations, and business networks.
- Alignment across city, state, and federal priorities, with awareness of DFAT and broader diplomatic constraints.
- A governance model that supports continuity and reduces dependence on individual champions, including volunteers with a connection to the sister city.
- An evaluation framework with goals and KPIs, plus regular reporting.
- Risk management of political shifts.

Governance

- Create a clear strategy per sister city with explicit aims, workplan, and priority sectors.

- Use a steering committee model that links city, state, and community stakeholders. City of Adelaide needs a formal liaison mechanism through which it can collaborate with State Government and DFAT on SCR compliance and strategic objectives. This will ensure alignment on priorities and enable City of Adelaide to seek State Government support. It will also support the clear delineation of City of Adelaide's role in international arrangements and limit scope creep.
- Different cities use different governance models – internal staff, internal committees, external (volunteer-run) committees. These take time to build but once up and running, committees in different sister cities talk to each other and create initiatives. Different volunteers can be involved in different aspects of the relationship.
- City of Adelaide can engage with the private sector to form subcommittees to develop and/or implement SCR initiatives, leveraging existing private sector networks.
- Implement regular review cycles and outcome reporting.
- Dedicate resourcing for engagement, exchanges and profile building.
- Take a structured approach to diaspora engagement and local storytelling to make benefits visible.
- Build resilience through people to people and institution to institution ties so relationships are not solely dependent on political leadership or individual champions.

Evaluation – meaningful criteria and indicators

- Level and quality of engagement including frequency of exchanges, visits, and joint initiatives.
- Community awareness and participation measures.
- Economic indicators where relevant such as business connections, trade activity, tourism outcomes, and investment leads.
- Education and cultural exchange outputs such as school partnerships and program participation.
- Knowledge transfer outcomes where specific practices are adopted or adapted in Adelaide.

- Relationship resilience indicators such as continuity through political change and breadth of stakeholder involvement.

Factors that should guide decisions about a new sister city relationship

- Clear shared purpose.
- Compatibility or complementarity with priority sectors, industry capabilities or shared challenges.
- Strategic fit with Adelaide's city identity and economic and cultural priorities.
- Targeted areas of activity for the relationship and realistic pathways to outcomes.
- Identifiable and tangible benefits to the community.
- Linkages already exist (e.g. in business, education, the arts) that can be leveraged to make the relationship successful.
- Presence of strong community or diaspora links that can support people-to-people ties.
- Resource feasibility, including ability to support regular engagement and exchanges.
- Potential for knowledge exchange and best practice transfer that can be adapted to Adelaide's context.
- Risk assessment for political sensitivity and multi-level government complexity.
- Parties share an equal appetite for engagement.
- Both parties are willing to develop the relationship over time and to evaluate it regularly.



Sister City Policy & Program recommendations

Informed by the findings of this research project, the following proposes items for inclusion in City of Adelaide's policy approach to its SCRs. A policy and/or operational plan should guide assessment and review of SCRs, governance and program delivery for the next 3-5 years.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework for Council's sister city relationships and related MOUs.

Policy statement

The City of Adelaide is committed to ensuring its sister city relationships facilitate social, cultural, educational, economic and environmental benefits, based on mutual interests, for the whole organisation and the wider Adelaide community.

Objectives

Strategic focus

- support delivery of City of Adelaide's strategic objectives.

Arts and culture

- Raise the international profile of Adelaide's art events and creative practitioners.
- Facilitate international arts exchanges and collaborations.

Economic development

- Support City of Adelaide's economic development priorities.
- Facilitate international business networks to increase investment, innovation, job creation and growth.

Education

- Support international cooperation in education and research opportunities.

Environment

- Support international cooperation on climate and other environmental solutions.

International promotion

- Strengthen Adelaide's reputation internationally as a place to live, work, invest, visit, learn and create.

Budget and resourcing

Funding and other resources for the Sister Cities Program will be established each year as part of the annual budgeting process.

Evaluation and criteria

City of Adelaide will agree on a regular review period with each sister city of no more than three years.

In addition to ensuring the relationship aligns with City of Adelaide's strategic objectives and this policy, the following criteria should guide assessment of new sister city relationships or when reviewing existing relationships:

1. Establishment of a clear shared purpose.
2. Compatibility of strategic priorities, cultural identities, industry capabilities or shared challenges.
3. Existing linkages to the local community through business, cultural and social activities or historical ties.
4. Opportunities for people-to-people connection and a range of activities with tangible outcomes and community benefits.
5. Comparable appetite for engagement and resourcing.

A tool for the assessment of future sister city relationships can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Compliance

All current and future sister city relationships must comply with the relevant guidelines provided by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Appendix 1

Sister City relationships – Assessment Tool

The purpose of the assessment tool is to assess the value and viability of future Sister City relationships. The tool should be used in conjunction with the City of Adelaide’s Sister City and International Arrangements Policy, current Strategic Plan and current cultural, economic and social policies.

The tool is informed by our research findings, which strongly indicate that successful Sister City relationships:

- reflect a shared vision between the two cities and shared ambition for the relationship;
- are aligned with the cities’ strategic priorities;
- leverage existing linkages;
- create opportunity for cultural, economic, educational, knowledge and environmental collaboration and exchange;
- create people to people connections and community involvement;
- are appropriately resourced;
- are governed by appropriate structures and mechanisms;
- reflect mutual capacity and interest from both cities;
- create clear value for communities, that can be effectively communicated;
- are time-bound and regularly evaluated.

Proposed Sister City relationships can be assessed by answering questions under four domains: strategic fit, impact, deliverability, and social licence. A weighting is given to each question, resulting in an overall score.

Lastly, the investigations undertaken to answer these questions should inform whether the relationship is viable in the long-term.

A final check should be performed to ensure that the requirements of City of Adelaide’s Sister City and International Arrangements Policy are met.

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