

## Sister City Interviews April and May 2020

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

- **Montgomery Sister Cities (MSC) Board Members** (April 7, 2020);
- **Mumin Barre**, Acting Chair, MSC Board (April 20, 2020);
- **Sanjay Rai**, Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs, Montgomery College; Board Member, Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (April 20, 2020);
- **Gabe Albornoz**, County Councilmember (April 22, 2020);
- **Mike Mills**, Vice President, E-Learning, Innovation, & Teaching Excellence, Montgomery College (April 24, 2020);
- **Mansfield (Kasey) Kaseman**, Interfaith Community Liaison, Office of Community Partnerships (April 28, 2020);
- **Cinder Cooper Barnes**, Director, Global Humanities Institute, Montgomery College (April 29, 2020);
- **Bob Levey**, former Senior Fellow, Montgomery Sister Cities; Member, Montgomery College Board of Trustees (April 28, 2020);
- **Jorge Granados**, Morazán, El Salvador Committee (April 28, 2020);
- **Matthew Lee**, Founder/President & CEO, FASTech, Inc.; Board Member, Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (May 1, 2020);
- **Karla Silvestre**, Member, Board of Education (MCPS); Community Engagement Director, Montgomery College (MC); Former Latino Liaison, Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) (May 1, 2020);
- **Lily Qi**, Member, Maryland House of Delegates; Former Assistant CAO (Economic Development), Montgomery County; Former Asian Liaison, Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) (May 1, 2020);
- **Reemberto Rodriguez**, Director, Silver Spring Region and **Geraldina Dominguez**, Director of AIDS Malignancy Program, National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health (May 2, 2020);
- **Sharon Ledner**, Chief of Staff, Councilmember Rice (May 3, 2020);

- **John Paukstis**, President & CEO, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland; and **Sarah Reddinger**, Director of Program Services, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland (May 4, 2020);
- **Drew Powell**, President, Rockville Sister City Corporation (May 5, 2020);
- **Solomon Ayele**, Former Chair, Gondar Ethiopia Committee; Former Board Member, Montgomery Sister Cities (May 5, 2020);
- **Brad Colton**, Strategic Projects, Global Procurement, Marriott International; Past Chair, Leadership Montgomery (May 6, 2020);
- **Monifa McKnight**, Deputy Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) (May 6, 2020);
- **Aruna Miller**, Former Member, Maryland House of Delegates (May 7, 2020); and
- **Eunmee Shim**, President of Fort Washington Medical Center, Adventist HealthCare (May 20, 2020).
- **George Leventhal**, Director, Community Health, Kaiser Permanente; Former Montgomery County Councilmember (May 21, 2020).

**Montgomery Sister Cities Board Members:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 7, 2020**

*This interview of the members of the Board of Montgomery Sister Cities was conducted via Zoom.*

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

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

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

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

**Nan Qiao (NQ):** senior software engineer (North Potomac);

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

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

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

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

**MB:** The people to people relationships we have established.

**CS:** The successful country visits have given us visibility.

**AH:** We have built bridges with local immigrant communities. We have established channels of information and access for them.

**NA:** Ability to attract large attendance at our meetings at Silver Spring Civic Building.

**TD:** We have informed public officials and county residents about the cultures of the people who have come here from across the world.

**NQ:** We educate people about different cultures.

What attracts you to serve on the MSC board?

**CS:** I have had a longstanding interest in global communities.

**NA:** I want to make a contribution by putting my international experience and background to service.

**NQ:** Bringing together the place where I live now with the place where I once lived.

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

**CS:** We have not had the resources necessary to run a highly effective program. We need a full-time champion for our program.

**NA:** I would like to see more outreach. We just preach to the choir. We need to energize the country committees that are not functioning.

**YY:** It has been frustrating not to be able to bring the entire Ethiopian community together in support of our Sister City program.

**NQ:** I'm not frustrated.

**RS:** The Latino liaison included all of us, and the Salvadoran committee was strong. We need that kind of support now to recruit new members.

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each goal on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Average of rankings: 8.75**

**NA: This is our energy. This is what creates our momentum.**

**AH: This is our credibility. It is pointless without the community engagement.**

**RS: Our communities here were able to help the people back home.**

**YY: The people to people relationships are important.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Average of rankings: 8.36**

**RS: We helped Morazán develop a community college.**

**NA: We need to identify economic development projects that are to scale and doable.**

**AH: Economic development provides a direct way to change lives. We can create wealth for our Sister Cities.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Average of rankings: 8.75**

**RS: MCPS and MC sent people to Morazán. The World of Montgomery Festival is very important in creating a welcoming environment.**

**MB: The welcoming community is the foundation for what we are doing.**

**Promoting understanding sets the stage for everything we want to do.**

**AH: Ditto!**

**TD: Learning about the different cultures in our county is the foundation of our program.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Average of rankings: 9.75**

**CS: We should be helping the next generation build the skills needed to function in the global marketplace. Broadening their horizons and helping them gain an understanding of others will have a life changing impact on our students.**

**AH: Whitney Houston: "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way."**

**YY: Montgomery College study abroad trip to Ethiopia helped sensitize the students to be more grateful for what they have here.**

**NA: Clemmie (CS) said it all.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new Sister Cities to fill gaps in representation (*e.g.*, Latin America) or respond to community interest (*e.g.*, Western Africa).

**NA: How hard is it to create a new Sister City?**

**Diane Vu (Director of the Office of Community Partnerships): Engaging a new community to select a Sister City and plan and implement a mission trip is a very time and resource consuming process.**

**CS: We need to strengthen what we have so we have examples of successful Sister Cities for others to follow. Maybe we will be able to add some down the road.**

**YY: Ditto.**

**TD: We need to assess what we have. We need to build a strong foundation.**

**MB: Agree. With the economic and health situation, should we drop one of the Sister Cities so we can add one?**

**TD: Do we have standards for maintaining a Sister City to give us a way to decide when it is appropriate to drop one?**

**MB: We need an evaluation process.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (*e.g.*, OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**NA: Go with whichever gives Sister Cities the most visibility and support.**

**NQ: We need one full time staffer in County government.**

**CS: Where would we get the most support? An outside group partnering with the County government and aggressively fundraising would seem best. We have not done a great job fundraising.**

**RS: The Salvadoran committee was able to raise money, but with the federal tax law change and a coming economic recession, nonprofits will struggle. At least for the next five years, we will need support from Montgomery County.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**CS: We need a full-time staff person with an administrative assistant.**

**NQ: Agree.**

**NA: Agree.**

**TD: Agree.**

**AH: Agree.**

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

**NA: All of the above.**

**MB: 20% County, 80% private. But that may be wishful thinking.**

**RS: It depends on the projects. Easy to raise money for the hospital in Morazán. But it is hard to raise money in the abstract.**

**CS: It is important that we get 100% giving from the Board.**

**NA: Agreed. Fundraising is more successful when funders see all Board members donate.**

Role of County Executive: What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

**CS: County Executive should be our Promoter in Chief talking up Sister Cities around the County.**

**MB: Attending events and going on mission trips.**

**YY: Needs to go to Ethiopia in 2022 for tenth anniversary.**

**NA: Go with a County Executive who can find the resources to help Board members and others go on the mission trips -- to facilitate economic development and support students.**

**TD: County Executive should be the face of our annual fundraiser and to raise scholarships so more can travel.**

**RS: Use the website and online conversations to facilitate community meetings. Virtual trips until we get a vaccine for Covid-19. No trips for the next year.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**NA: Plan activities that give Sister Cities wide visibility.**

**YY: Use social media to give communities the information they need to know.**

**MB: The country committees are where the action should be. The Board's role should be to support the country committees.**

**RS: Identify best practices from Sister Cities International.**

**TD: Board members should provide guidance to country committees and attend their events.**

Strategic partners: Please take a look at the list I sent you of proposed interviewees of our strategic partners. Are there important strategic partners for Sister Cities I am missing? Are there individuals at these partners I need to interview?

**MB: Habitat for Humanity helped us in Morazán.**

**YY: Get help from Sister Cities International.**

**RS: Marriott.**

**MB: Ask opinion of people who went on our trips and former OCP staff liaisons.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this? Please give me priority groups and individuals you want me to interview:

1. Ethnic communities
2. Business
3. Education
4. Faith communities

**RS: Jorge Granados and Ana Sol Gutierrez.**

**YY: Amde Amde, director of Ethiopian Community Center, and Councilmember Will Jawando.**

**MB: Former Member of Congress and Ambassador Connie Morella.**

**CS: Senator Chris Van Hollen.**

Method of outreach: In addition to interviews, how best can I gather information from stakeholders? Town meetings? Surveys?

**NA: Zoom meetings work. Social media.**

**CS: Zoom, old fashioned conference calls, surveys. Use it all.**

**MB: Zoom with the country committees.**

**RS: Send a survey like the Census and follow-up with people who don't respond.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**NA: As an organization committed to building cultural understanding, Montgomery Sister Cities should be at the center of rebuilding community in Montgomery County post-pandemic world.**

**RS: We should organize an online World of Montgomery Festival. We should partner with MCPS and Montgomery College to do training programs and tutorials online to create classrooms for Sister Schools in our Sister Cities.**

**MB: We assume the community knows our success stories, but we need to celebrate them and publicize them better.**

**TD: Lots of people don't know about Sister Cities. We need to strengthen our social media and web presence.**

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

**NA: Ask the country committees what they think the Board could do to support them.**

**MB: Ask the country committees how our partners in our Sister Cities feel.**

**NQ: Should we be asking Xi'an for support we need to get through Covid-19? Government should ask government.**

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**Mumin Barre, Acting Chair, Montgomery Sister Cities (MSC) Board:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 20, 2020**

Strengths: Please identify the most important strengths of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What works? What attracted you to serve on the MSC board?

**The people-to-people relationships are the great strength of the Sister Cities program. The partnerships we create are a win-win for our county and our Sister City. I was attracted to serve on the Board of Montgomery Sister Cities because it strengthens understanding across our communities. It helps our residents and elected officials understand the virtue of our diverse community.**

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

**Honestly, I'm not frustrated. We have had our ups and downs, but that's just the way life is. Certainly, we have had a lack of resources. Volunteers are great, but the lack of a full-time staff person and lack of dedicated funding have presented long term challenges of sustainability. The relationship between the MSC Board and the country committees has been fuzzy.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please be prepared to rank the importance you attribute to each goal on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Seven (7). Community Engagement is a key aspect of the people-to-people relationship. By engaging communities that are generally underserved, they feel they are members of a vibrant and inclusive community here as well as able to help the communities in their homeland.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Seven (7). The global economy presents opportunities for job creation. We should take advantage of the people here to connect to the global economy and produce tax dollars that benefit everyone in the community.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Nine (9). This is the foundation of everything we do at Sister Cities.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Nine (9). We need to look to the future and expose students to the global marketplace so we can be competitive.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new Sister Cities to fill gaps in representation (e.g., Latin America) or respond to community interest (e.g., Western Africa).

**We need to be realistic and understand our limitations. We need a pause in adding new Sister Cities so we can sustain what we have. Maybe if we decide that one of our Sister Cities isn't working, we could replace it with a new one. I wouldn't want to close the door on a West African Sister City.**

Base of Operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (e.g., OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**Short term: we need to stay inside the county government. Long term: we could explore independence for Montgomery Sister Cities 501(c) (3) community organization. But that would be way in the future.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**The MSC board members and I strongly advocate for a full-time director and an administrative aide.**

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

**Short term: 80% county; 20% private. Long term: 80% private; 20% county. An aggressive goal for MSC would be to get to 50% county and 50% private in two years. We need to develop a full range of private fundraising – private sponsorships, small dollar fundraising, foundation grants, individual donations, and revenue from trips.**

Role of County Executive: What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

**County Executive Leggett was our champion. A strong commitment from the County Executive is crucial. The County Executive is our promoter. We need the County Executive to host events and give us visibility. We need the County Executive to lead trips and headline an annual fundraiser.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**The Sister City country committees are critical to our success. The MSC Board's job is to guide them, to support them, and to provide resources for them. The country committees need to take the lead in planning activities between the mission trips. The country committees should submit to the board an annual plan of events with priorities and budgets. We need to make sure each country committee has representatives from business and education.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this? Please give me priority groups and individuals you want me to interview:

**I want you to interview and/or survey the former Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) liaisons who worked with Sister City country committees, former MSC Board members, former and current country committee members, and people who went on mission trips. Bob Levey, the former Senior Fellow who has fundraising expertise. Councilmember Will Jawando. Former Latino liaison and current Board of Education member Karla Silvestre. Former Councilmember George Leventhal.**

Method of outreach: In addition to interviews, how best can I gather information from stakeholders? Town meetings? Surveys?

**Surveys are OK. Use them to identify people with good ideas that deserve follow-up interviews. Ask the Volunteer Center to find someone to help design a survey.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices from other Sister City organizations?

**What can we learn from other Sister Cities about their mix of funding and how they built a base of support – government support, private sponsorships, small dollar fundraising, foundation grants, individual donations, and revenue from trips. At the end of the day, we need to be able to sustain our programs.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year

2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**2020: Covid-19 gives us an opportunity to look inward:**

- Strengthen the inner workings of the Board and the country committees;
- Each country committee should develop a plan for 2021.
- Strengthen our social media and publicity: who are we? what have we accomplished?
- Begin to develop a base of financial support through small donor fundraisers.
- Host a virtual World of Montgomery Festival.

**2021:**

- Plan for trips, possibly to El Salvador, Ethiopia, and/or India.
- Host virtual trips to all five Sister Cities.

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

**We need to develop a process for evaluating our country programs. What is working? What is not working?**

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**Sanjay Rai, Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs, Montgomery College:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 20, 2020**

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

**The Sister Cities program has been very helpful in strengthening the connection between Montgomery County, Montgomery College, and the world. Several**

**economic development accomplishments have been advanced by the Sister Cities program. For example, the Sister Cities trip to India in 2014 was a catalyst for the location of the Infosys Public Services headquarters in Rockville.**

**Montgomery College's Global Humanities Institute has benefitted from our association with Montgomery Sister Cities. The Institute's international work is part of our larger effort to strengthen teaching and learning of the humanities at Montgomery College. A trip was being planned to India in December of 2020.**

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

**Sister Cities has not been able to take full advantage of the leads developed on the mission trips. Staff is needed to ensure follow-up.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (*e.g.*, El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Eight (8). Sister Cities enables us to engage our community members here in the county. The County and the College are able to better serve our residents because of our greater understanding of their needs.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (*e.g.*, China, India, and South Korea).

**Nine (9). We are part of a global economy. Sister Cities helps us make connections around the world.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the

people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). As an immigrant, you feel more welcome, you feel valued. You don't just feel tolerated.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Nine point five (9.5). By building the skills of our students, we are making the county more marketable to the larger global companies.**

Montgomery College (MC): What role do you see Montgomery College playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of Montgomery College?

**Montgomery College views Montgomery Sister Cities as a valued partner. We have students from 165 countries. One of the impacts of the global health pandemic will be the reduction of international students at our universities and colleges. Across the country, eighty percent of Chinese students are returning to China. But this is not happening to the same degree at Montgomery College. Our international students feel welcome here. They feel deeply connected to the local Chinese community.**

How do international trips advance the academic lives of MC students? What more could be done to support international travel for your students?

**International trips offer greater exposure to staff and students. They are limited because of finances. So, to build the global skills of our students, we are making our curriculum more global.**

Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC): As a member of the MCEDC Board, what role do you see MCEDC playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of MCEDC? How important are international trips

to the work of MCEDC? What can be done to encourage more economic development mission trips?

**International mission trips are critical for the economic success of our county. MCEDC can play a larger role. Economic development should not be an isolated event. We need to integrate culture into our economic development work. Education, economic development, and culture are not three different things. They must converge. The Sister Cities program is the platform to bring the three together.**

India Sister Cities Committee: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the India Sister Cities committee?

**The volunteer-based country committees need staff to ensure the follow-up required to sustain the programs.**

Do you think it will be possible to have a mission trip to India this Fall? If so, what needs to be done? If not, what is our Plan B?

**Planning for the November 2020 trip had begun. Infosys had agreed to host us in Bangalore. The Covid-19 pandemic makes November 2020 unlikely. We should plan for November 2021. The Governor is planning a trip to India in March of 2021.**

What about a virtual Sister Cities trip to India?

**That hasn't been discussed. It would be a good idea to begin to think about how to do that.**

Economic Development and Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**On the India trip in 2014, I think we tried to do too much. We tried to satisfy everyone. Some tourism is important. The trip to South Korea in 2017 had a better balance of program and free time.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**The program needs two full-time staff people and money for travel.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision?

**We need to educate corporate leaders about the value of the Sister City trips. We need to remind them of how much of their business comes from our ethnic communities. Leadership Montgomery should collaborate with Sister Cities. All Montgomery County leaders need to better understand our immigrant communities.**

Other interviewees: Who else at MC in addition to you and Mike Mills are most important for me to interview? Who else at MCEDC in addition to Ben Wu and Spiros Balntas are most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Talk with Cinder Cooper Barnes, director of the College's Global Humanities Institute. From the MCEDC board, talk with Robby Brewer (Lerch, Early & Brewer) and Angela Graham (Quality Biological).**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**I want to better understand how other Sister City programs have met the challenge of sustainability. I want to know how other Sister City programs have created visibility. We have a great program, but too few people know about it.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

- **Identify two trips for 2021;**
- **Recruit the planning teams;**

- **Identify the activities;**
- **Recruit the partners on the other side; and**
- **Begin some activity with the partners on the other side.**

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

**This is a very dear program to me. I feel passionately about Sister Cities personally, professionally, and from my role at Montgomery College. How do we expose others to this? How do we educate and engage others so they see the value of being involved? MCPS. MCEDC. Chambers of Commerce.**

**CNN's Fareed Zakaria recently pointed out that the pandemic could isolate us from the world. This means Montgomery Sister Cities will be needed now more than ever.**

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**Gabe Albornoz, County Councilmember:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 22, 2020**

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

**The Sister Cities program has done a good job of selecting diverse locations that represent the demographics of Montgomery County. The country committees provide excellent representation of their communities. The trips are enriching experiences, but the work done to prepare for the trips is just as valuable. There have been tangible outcomes in terms of housing and education for our Sister Cities.**

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

**This program is incredibly valuable. To really “get the juice,” we need to keep the people who staff the trips engaged to help the country committees with follow-up.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Ten (10). Trust is so important in the county’s relationships with our communities. Because of the trips, I can speak in the first person with authenticity about what I saw as I discuss the challenges facing our communities.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Ten (10). When economic development opportunities lead to better results in the home countries, it benefits our residents here in Montgomery County.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). The Sister Cities relationships provide a context that enables me to make better public policy decisions.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Ten (10).**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (e.g., Latin America) or respond to community interest (e.g., Western Africa).

**We need first to reinforce the existing relationships. Then we might turn to other countries.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (e.g., OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**This should be a hybrid similar to the Arts & Humanities Council and the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families. It must always be a priority for the County because it provides so much benefit. Private fundraising is always going to be challenging. And now it will be more difficult.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**At least one full-time and a second full-time if possible. Hire part-time staff to support the country committees.**

FY21 Budget: With the budget submitted, what is realistic in terms of funding for FY21? My report won't be finished until the first weeks of the FY21 budget.

**What was submitted by the County Executive for FY21 is reasonable. Sister Cities is an investment in strengthening the county's relationships with our ethnic communities. It will help us provide better service to our residents and because of that it reduces costs on the back end.**

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

**We work closely with Montgomery College on Sister Cities. I think there is an opportunity to tap into higher education funding by partnering with the University of Maryland and The Universities at Shady Grove. The El Salvador**

**trips demonstrate the value of working with successful business leaders here. We can help them make more strategic investments in their home countries.**

Role of County Executive: How do you view the role of the County Executive in the Sister Cities program? What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

- **Make this a budget priority by providing funding and resources.**
- **Go on the trips which provide valuable insights about serving communities here.**
- **Be our Ambassador. Use the bully pulpit. Tell the stories.**

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

**I will encourage my Council colleagues to go on Sister City trips. What I learned has been valuable to me as chair of the Council's Health and Human Services Committee. I really liked my predecessor George Leventhal's support for the hospital in El Salvador. We should try to schedule the trips when the Council is on recess. Council should send staff.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**The country committees define the valuable projects we do in our Sister Cities. We should connect the Sister City country committees to our other county boards and commissions. They can provide valuable context for the work of our boards and commissions.**

Economic Development and Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**The preparation work for the mission trips is very valuable. Each planning committee should focus on the economic development aspects of their trip by working with Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and Visit Montgomery.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Councilmember Navarro will have valuable insights.**

**I would like to see the faith based groups play a more significant role in our Sister City trips and programs.**

**Important to engage the Chambers of Commerce and the ethnic business groups.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices from other Sister City organizations?

**I want to know how to engage the 20 to 25 year-olds and the millennials. We need to make a long term investment in leadership development. We need to communicate to them what we are learning through our Sister Cities work.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important three or four steps we should take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in the aftermath of the economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**I would like to see a half-day summit focusing on the lessons we have learned through our Sister Cities work.**

**Montgomery Sister Cities should connect to Hispanic Heritage Month, African Heritage Month, Asian Lunar New Year, and other ethnic celebrations.**

**I would like to see Face Time Live concerts that connect with our Sister Cities.**

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**Mike Mills, Vice President, E-Learning, Innovation, & Teaching Excellence**

**Montgomery College:**

**Sister Cities Interview April 24, 2020**

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

**Connecting the College to the county and to the world, connecting our international students to their home communities, and connecting the Sister Cities work to our curriculum at the College.**

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

**Sustainability. The mission trips generate great ideas, but the follow-up is fragmented.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (*e.g.*, El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Nine (9). The program helps the county serve underrepresented communities.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (*e.g.*, China, India, and South Korea).

**Nine (9). There is a great opportunity to bring new businesses to the county. There was a lack of follow-up on leads from the South Korea trip.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). This is what the program is all about. Sister Cities helps county residents understand the cultures of our fellow residents who have come here from around the world.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Ten (10). We need to make sure our students are global citizens. Many do not have the funds to travel. The Sister Cities program could give them that opportunity.**

Montgomery College (MC): What role do you see Montgomery College playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of Montgomery College?

**We will continue to reach out to our university partners in the Sister Cities. We want to make sure education continues to be a key part of the Sister Cities program. Our Global Classrooms program that is part of our Global Humanities Institute has connected our faculty to universities in Ethiopia and El Salvador. Our students love learning about other cultures. Here is the link that explains our Global Classrooms program:**

<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/special-programs/global-humanities-institute/international-partnerships.html>

Role of International Travel: How do international trips advance the academic lives of MC students and faculty? What more could be done to support international travel for your students? What role do you see international travel playing in your work to advance teaching excellence?

**If done properly, we can link the Sister Cities program to our academic curriculum. Our faculty get ideas for strengthening the curriculum from our international trips. Scholarships can help students travel.**

**The College is still fragmented in our global approach. Plans to strengthen coordination have had to take a back seat to Covid-19. The county's Travel**

**Abroad program is based on proposals from faculty members. It is very successful, but it doesn't necessarily produce trips that represent the international communities resident in the county.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**This has to be an intentional effort. The county liaisons for the trips need to be accountable for following up with activities between trips. This isn't always easy. Right after our 2019 trip to Ethiopia, for example, leadership changed at the University of Gondar. The College continues to train teachers from Daejeon, South Korea, but the program to allow them to shadow MCPS teachers is on hold because of Covid-19.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**Don't try to cram so much into the trips. Be clearer about the Sister City purpose of each trip. The goals of the county might be different than the goals of the College on a given trip.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**The Sister Cities program needs full time support staff to ensure needed follow-up to the mission trips.**

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

**50-50 so there is no control issue based on funding. Connect with the business community, and show them the economic development component. There is such a great opportunity to promote tourism in Ethiopia, for example.**

Other interviewees: Who else at MC in addition to Sanjay Rai and you are most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Cinder Cooper Barnes, director of the College's Global Humanities Institute.**

**Community leaders, business leaders, and the liaisons who led the mission trips.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**How to sustain the program. There are always questions of funding.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

- **Set a plan and set a schedule for trips. Identify roles and how to get resources.**
- **Connect virtually, perhaps virtual trips to the Sister Cities.**
- **Organize virtual half day conferences for each Sister City with county department heads to identify issues so that when it is safe to travel again we are prepared to act rather than waiting to have those planning discussions when we are on our trip. The College will put a team together to plan each conference to work with a team from the county.**
- **Host a virtual summit with all five Sister Cities.**

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

**The biggest question mark is funding. For the College, we need a lot of advance knowledge of when the mission trips will be so we can make sure we have the resources in our budget. There needs to be full-time staff so there are clear lines**

of authority. Sometimes the College doesn't know with whom to connect on the county side.

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**Mansfield (Kasey) Kaseman, Interfaith Community Liaison,**  
**Office of Community Partnerships:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 28, 2020**

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

**The Sister Cities program provides the participants and especially the planners with a deeper understanding and appreciation for each other, both personally and professionally, that enriches life and makes us more effective in our work. It broadens our perspective, increases skills in interpersonal relations, and grants greater credibility in addressing people of different cultures and religions.**

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

**The lack of follow-up. We go on these exciting trips and establish these wonderful relationships. Then we go back to all the emails and meetings at work, and we don't stay in touch. We have not had sufficient funds and staff to stay engaged after the trips.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Ten (10). This is by far the greatest benefit.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Four (4). This is very important, but it is not a priority for me.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Eight (8).**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Nine (9). This produces the long term benefit of broadening the perspective of our young people.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (e.g., Latin America) or respond to community interest (e.g., Western Africa).

**Our priority must be to revive and strengthen existing bonds. The existing relationships are already laced with broken promises and guilt.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (e.g., OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**The mission of the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) and the diversity of the OCP staff make OCP the best fit with the Sister Cities program. The problem is that the OCP staff members have so much other work. The OCP liaisons can not carry the major load of Sister Cities. There needs to be a core Montgomery Sister Cities staff with administrative and organizational skills. We need to give the Montgomery Sister Cities Board the resources, and we need to empower the Board and make it stronger.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**Ideally, Montgomery Sister Cities would have a budget to cover a full-time staff director with administrative support. I suggest giving them an office in the Silver Spring Civic Building.**

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

**A 50-50 split would be a major achievement down the road. It would require a professional presentation of the case for private funding. The case would need to state the value of Montgomery County's diversity as our edge in the global marketplace bolstered by quotes from business, civic, and political leaders and from our students. We need to make the case for embracing our essential interdependency in the post-Covid-19 world. We are one human family.**

Role of County Executive: How do you view the role of the County Executive in the Sister Cities program? What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

**The County Executive has important roles to play to help with fundraising and developing the Board. The County Executive must fulfill the ceremonial role as the chief supporter and advocate of the Sister Cities program.**

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

**Sister Cities needs the same solid support from the County Council that it needs from the County Executive. The Councilmembers represent constituencies that are important to Sister Cities.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**The Sister City committees are too focused on the trips. They need to focus more broadly. They need to develop ongoing programs and relationships as the Rockville Sister City Corporation has done. It would be good to include representatives of the relevant faith communities in the work of the committees.**

Engagement of Faith Communities: What could be done to strengthen ties between Montgomery's faith communities and the Sister Cities program?

**Faith community representatives should be on the Sister Cities committees. Some faith leaders might need their travel subsidized. Faith communities could develop programs and festivals to celebrate our Sister Cities. For example, Ethiopian community churches and mosques could host presentations about our Sister City program.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**It would be good to get the travelers on the trips together to build relations and plan activities in advance of the trips. We should reduce the activities on the trips to leave time for dialogue, reflection, and sharing of the awe and wonder of our experience together. We need staff to facilitate the follow up working with the Sister City committee.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Imam Mohamed Abdullahi of the Muslim Community Center and Dr. Rajwant Singh of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices from other Sister City organizations?

**Number one – fundraising. We need the best practices. We need to see the materials and presentations that work.**

**I'd like to know how best to balance the different stakeholders – business, education, nonprofits, government, and faith organizations.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important three or four steps we should take for the second half of calendar year 2020?

- **Secure funding and staff;**
- **Identify key partners from business, education, nonprofits, government, and faith organizations;**
- **Revitalize the Sister City committees with fresh visions.**

What do you see as realistic in 2021 in the aftermath of the economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**We could have a rich discussion on the impact of Covid-19 across our six communities. We are one human family in a smaller world where we need to be more understanding and appreciative and working together. We need to show the business community and others the benefits of this cooperation.**

Your thoughts on ideas suggested by others for the Covid-19 era:

- virtual Town Hall about future of Montgomery Sister Cities;

**Only if it comes after plans are solidified and funding secure. There need to be exciting ideas to share and not simply an event that raises hopes we cannot fulfill.**

- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;

**Relatively easy to do with modest funding.**

- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;

**Good idea. Maybe the World of Montgomery Festival could be five different trips to our Sister Cities.**

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

**This could work if it follows the five virtual Sister City trips.**

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

**Faith is central to the identity of every immigrant community. The Sister City program and our ethnic celebrations deepen our understanding of each other and demonstrate the value of our diverse community.**

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**Cinder Cooper Barnes, Director, Global Humanities Institute,  
Montgomery College:  
Sister Cities Interview April 29, 2020**

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

**I became Director of the College's Global Humanities Institute in September 2019. As a county resident, I have felt the World of Montgomery Festival and similar activities are good for the community. They give the wider community access to the different cultures. They bring people together to learn in a fun way.**

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

**I wonder how people learn about the Sister Cities programs. It would be valuable to get more people exposed to the programs. I see visitors to the College and wonder what program brought them there. I think there could be better communication both within the College and between the College and the county government about opportunities to interact with visitors from our Sister Cities and other parts of the world.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Nine (9). Sister Cities helps us see needs so we can better serve our residents.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Five (5). If we do the other three well, economic development will follow.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Nine (9). This is important for the College, especially in this climate of fear. Our Sister Cities represent such important parts of our community.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Eleven (11)! This is important for our students but also for our faculty. We have faculty preparing our students for the global marketplace who have never travelled outside the country. Our students need to learn how to connect outside their immediate community. They must not stay isolated in their community.**

Montgomery College (MC): What role do you see Montgomery College playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister

Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of Montgomery College and the Global Humanities Institute?

**We know that travel changes lives. Funding for travel is challenging. Many of our students do not have an opportunity to travel. We have some scholarships to cover part or all of trips, but even that is not enough. Some students cannot travel even if their costs are covered because they cannot afford to take time off from work. For some, the \$145 cost of a passport is prohibitive. Visitors from our Sister Cities are welcome in our classrooms to expose our students to their cultures.**

Global Classrooms: Please tell me about the Global Classrooms program and how it might link with the Sister Cities program. How do international trips advance the academic lives of MC students and faculty? What more could be done to support international travel for your students and faculty?

**The virtual connections that allow our students to learn Spanish by speaking with students in El Salvador have worked well. We have the faculty and technology to make the personal connections. But the different time zones present challenges with Ethiopia, China, India, and South Korea. Some of our partner Sister Cities don't have the faculty and technology to make these connections. The College has fellowships to train our faculty to learn how to make these connections. Perhaps the College could send trainers to the Sister Cities to build capacity there.**

Study Abroad: How does the Study Abroad program interact with the work of the Global Humanities Institute?

**Study Abroad and Global Humanities Institute are two different programs. Study Abroad trips typically include 20 people with about 12 students and eight faculty. Global Humanities Institute prepares faculty to change their curriculum and internationalize their classes. The Global Humanities Institute has reduced funding now because the federal grant that supported it ended.**

Virtual Trips: In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

**We haven't discussed this, but it makes sense. I hope we will talk about options this summer.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**I'm not familiar with these committees, but I would be interested in connecting to the Ethiopian Sister City committee. It would be good to have our students and faculty connected to these committees.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**A program like this needs a central staff to connect people. These programs need funding to be sustainable. College students and staff need funding to travel.**

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

**To make money, you need to spend money. Need to fund travel for students and then get those students in front of funders. When people see the students telling their stories, the value of global education will be clear.**

Other interviewees: Who else at MC would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Professor Carla Naranjo, Spanish Professor and co-lead of the Global Classrooms Program**

**Dr. Elena Corbett, Director of Education Abroad at AMIDEAST**

**Dr. Glenn Corbett, Director of CAORC (Council of American Overseas Research Centers)**

**Adileh Sharieff, Islamic Center of Maryland**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**We are living through an historic period. We should document on the web with first person narratives what it is like to live through Covid-19 here and in our Sister Cities. And we should document through our person-to-person relationships what it is like as we return to normalcy. We can make it real for donors. People want to know how this is affecting people. Will students in our Sister Cities be wearing masks when they return to school?**

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

**I want to know who is left out. Are there communities in the county who are not part of this? For example, is the LGBTQ community part of the Sister Cities program? Are we getting input from our marginalized communities?**

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**Bob Levey, former Senior Fellow, Montgomery Sister Cities,  
Member, Montgomery College Board of Trustees:  
Sister Cities Interview April 28, 2020**

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

**The Sister Cities program provides underrepresented communities with seats at the table.**

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

**The program needs to be more than celebratory. There needs to be a clear purpose beyond the trips. To be sustainable, the program needs to promote economic development.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Eight (8). The Sister City program bubbles up. Without it, the county officials are talking downward.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Ten (10). Without economic development, the Sister Cities program is a candy store idea. It needs the muscle of economic development.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Three (3). There is already on the ground awareness. Go to Watkins Mill High School. The teachers there already get this. This is already known to those on the frontlines.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Seven (7). You can not do this in a vacuum. This isn't going to happen in today's economic environment. Today, this is aspirational. If you shifted Sister Cities**

**under the tent of Montgomery College or The Universities at Shady Grove, this could move forward.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (*e.g.*, Latin America) or respond to community interest (*e.g.*, Western Africa).

**Cameroon needs to be next. I would not go beyond adding a sixth Sister City for now. Focus on the six.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (*e.g.*, OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**Sister Cities needs to be based at Montgomery College or at The Universities at Shady Grove (USG). This would bring needed administrative and fundraising support. It would strengthen the academic curriculum where it is based and get support to the kids who want and need it the most.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

- **Part-time fundraiser**
- **Part-time administrative support**
- **Part-time media and social media staff.**

**And the best way to get these skills is to add these responsibilities to work already being done at Montgomery College or USG. There is no way this can be done by a freestanding organization in this economic climate. Graft it on to something that already exists.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision? What was your experience in attempting to raise money for Montgomery sister Cities? What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Sister Cities?

**I would like to see 50% government and 50% private funding. I don't see it happening now, but I can imagine a prospective case being made that Sister**

**Cities can help provide real jobs in the county. Fundraising is a pyramid. You need a big gift on the top and then each subsequent gift leads to another.**

A College administrator told me: “Need to fund travel for students and then get those students in front of funders. When people see the students telling their stories, the value of global education will be clear.”

**No question about it. Have three kids from three different countries tell their stories to a funder, and you’ll get tears and money.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips? How can we strengthen the relationships between the MSC Board and the country committees?

**The Sister City committees are inevitably going to focus on the trips.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**I wouldn’t change a lot. Tremendous good will is developed during the trips. I would work with staff at the embassies before and after the trips.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Individual chambers of commerce. I would engage with the large companies that hire staff from the Sister Cities communities.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices from other Sister City organizations?

**Avenues to private fundraising success.**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important

three or four steps we should take for the second half of calendar year 2020 and 2021?

**All of this is utterly aspirational. We are just at the start of a two year lockdown.**

What do you see as realistic in the aftermath of the economic meltdown and the global health pandemic? Your thoughts on ideas suggested by others for the Covid-19 era:

- virtual Town Hall about future of Montgomery Sister Cities;

**For sure. Get the Councilmembers who have a history of representing immigrant interests engaged – Glass, Hucker, Navarro, and Albornoz.**

- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;

**For sure.**

- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;

**Not sure this works. You would lose everything that you get out of travelling together.**

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

**Worthy if linked to an economic development strategy.**

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

**My main point is that to be sustainable, Sister Cities needs to be based at Montgomery College or USG. We need the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation at the table in a big way. Talk to Ben Wu and Bill Tompkins.**

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**Jorge Granados, Morazán, El Salvador Committee:**  
**Sister Cities Interview April 28, 2020**

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

**It is very important for us as a community to have these connections with our country. Sister Cities allows us to understand and enjoy all the cultures and to see the music and traditions of other countries.**

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

**We need to identify people who really believe in the exchanges. They need to love it and have energy for this as Morazán Governor Ventura and County Executive Leggett had. We had a well organized committee, and we functioned well when we had staff to follow up. Over time, we lost focus. People who wanted to do projects left the committee. It will be hard to get people back. We need to develop a new committee led by someone who can energize us. And we need staff support to follow up.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (*e.g.*, El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Nine (9). This is the main reason for Sister Cities. We build power by coming together.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (*e.g.*, China, India, and South Korea).

**Six (6). For El Salvador, the Sister City is more about culture than business. I'm sure it is different for China and India.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Seven point five (7.5). Sister Cities gives us the opportunity to know county officials and to know that the county is interested in us.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Eight point five (8.5). Important for our kids to know more about our culture and for the different countries to know more about each other.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (*e.g.*, Latin America) or respond to community interest (*e.g.*, Western Africa).

**We need to motivate and energize more people about what we already have. Maybe we can add more Sister Cities later.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (*e.g.*, OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**The way it is based at the county is OK. Montgomery County is the authority. We want the elected officials to know about this.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**The liaisons have many other roles. We need staff who like this work and can focus attention on it. We need the county to make a call to motivate us. It will have more credibility if it is under the county government.**

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

**A combination – some from government and some from our businesses. The county should hire staff and then businesses can make a monthly donation to support the programs.**

Role of County Executive: How do you view the role of the County Executive in the Sister Cities program? What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

**We need the County Executive to provide the budget for staff support and to be with us when we have activities. I want to see results, not just social meetings. If no one takes responsibility, we won't achieve anything.**

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

**We need Councilmembers to be our partners and help us when we need it. They will learn about our communities. George Leventhal's support for the hospital was great. It was great to have Gabe Albornoz with us on the trips.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**Hire someone who really cares and can motivate us. We need focused staff support. We need staff to dedicate a certain number of hours to the committees and to report to us about what they are doing.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**The trips are good. They are a little busy, but we want to take advantage of being there. It is important to have people who can communicate with the other side. We had a core group that would go every summer and take computers and medical supplies. We need to be able to motivate the other side. Morazán has a new Governor. We need to educate him about what we have done. We need to have student exchanges. We continue to support the new college with scholarships.**

Other interviewees: Who are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Ana Sol Gutiérrez**

Implementation: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu have given me clear direction that they want an implementation plan for fostering more engagement with the Sister City communities between the trips. What are the most important three or four steps we should take for the second half of calendar year 2020?

- **Identify motivated people**
- **Form a new committee**
- **Coordinate activities.**

**We need the OCP liaisons to help us. We have good conversations and then there is no follow up.**

What is the situation in El Salvador with the COVID-19?

**Life has changed, but there have been few deaths because of very aggressive policies. There have only been 395 cases and nine deaths. People are sent to jail for violating the quarantine orders. Everyone is scared.**

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

**I am glad to hear Sister Cities will continue. It is important to reactivate it. I will help identify new people for our committee.**

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**Matthew Lee, Founder/President & CEO, FASTech, Inc.**  
**Board Member, Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 1, 2020**

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

**I came here from South Korea at the age of 19, and I have been an owner of a small business for 30 years. I'm an advocate for the Sister Cities program. The educational and cultural exchanges ultimately lead to economic development, and economic development is very important.**

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

**I have been on Maryland, Montgomery County, and Baltimore City Sister City trips. To be successful, they need to engage the entire community. It is important they are not used for personal gain. We need steady relationships. For example, since our trip to South Korea in 2017, both the Montgomery County Executive and the Mayor of Daejeon have changed. If the larger community is involved, these political transitions would be less of a problem. Also, Sister Cities should focus more broadly to include all of South Korea.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Nine (9). Broad community engagement through participation on the Sister Cities committees is important. It can't be just one or two people. And we will learn best if the different country committees share ideas.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Ten (10). Trade is the key. If there is a strong economic development emphasis, it will benefit the cultural and educational exchanges. We want South Korean businesses to come to Montgomery County.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Nine (9). I'm in sales. To be successful, we need a welcoming environment.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Nine (9). We need to produce global citizens. We need people who understand that if our neighbors do well, we will all do well.**

Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC): What role do you see MCEDC playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of MCEDC?

**We want to bring companies here from other countries. The Sister Cities program is important. MCEDC is very young, but it has the basic staff infrastructure to make connections with state and federal government business organizations like the Small Business Administration.**

How important are international trips to the work of MCEDC? What can be done to encourage more economic development mission trips?

**Covid-19 is blocking trips. Virtual meetings are important, but we will still need to meet face-to-face. We will need the County Executive and MCEDC on the trips.**

Economic Development and Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**South Korea has lots of trade shows and international conferences. We should utilize these existing opportunities to make broader connections.**

How will Montgomery County be able to recruit international businesses as long as the health pandemic prevents mission trips?

**I have been in contact with the new Daejeon Mayor's office by email. We need to maintain regular communication. Kakao is the South Korean equivalent of China's WeChat.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**Each Sister City needs to have a committee with at least ten members. Once every three months, all the Sister City committees should meet to share experiences and best practices. Full-time staff would be good if county can afford it. MCEDC has staff members with relevant skills. It would be good if county staff worked with MCEDC staff.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision? What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Montgomery Sister Cities? What would it take to get major businesses to provide funding for the Montgomery Sister Cities program?

**Daejeon has a budget for Sister Cities. Every significant city in South Korea has a budget for Sister Cities. Exports are so important to South Korea that the cities will fund costs of people to visit. I work with the Baltimore Sister Cities program. We were able to get sponsors and raise \$10,000 for an Inner Harbor reception**

**for visitors from South Korea. Some Baltimore businesses make a \$500 annual contribution to the Sister Cities program.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**It is important to keep up communications between trips.**

Other interviewees: Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Senator Susan Lee is the champion of our APIA (Asian and Pacific Islander American) community.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**I wish we could get more support from the Maryland Sister States Program. Maryland has 17 official Sister State relationships.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**We went through dating and then we got married. But after the marriage, we separated. We need to restart the dating process. We need to reconnect all the Sister Cities. With the Daejeon relationship, we have a new Mayor and a new County Executive. We need to restart the communication and connect at least monthly. I was involved in helping get the Covid-19 supplies from South Korea. Maybe Daejeon could help Montgomery County get needed equipment.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

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

**There is no other choice. We need to communicate. MCEDC can help us organize regular virtual meetings.**

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

- **Strengthen the country committees and establish regular communication.**
- **Recognize that the greater Washington region is the capital of the world.**
- **Connect the new political leaders.**
- **Tie into trade shows.**

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**Karla Silvestre, Member, Board of Education (MCPS);  
Community Engagement Director, Montgomery College (MC);  
Former Latino Liaison, Office of Community Partnerships (OCP):  
Sister Cities Interview May 1, 2020**

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

**The most important strength is that Sister Cities gives the county an opportunity to engage with emerging immigrant groups. County officials learn about the communities and identify the "go to" people in the communities. You become part of a network. I still hear from people I met through Sister Cities a dozen years ago.**

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

**The El Salvador country committee members are SO focused on helping the people back in their home country that it is hard to engage them on local issues.**

**They think things are great here. They do still reach out when they need me, but they aren't always ready to engage on local issues. If I had to do it again, I would push harder on engaging with local issues.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Ten (10).** Sister Cities gives the county access to networks and the opportunity to help stand up new groups when needed. The KID Museum has really been able to tap into our ethnic communities through Sister Cities and the World of Montgomery Festival.

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Five (5).** This is important, but I have not experienced it in my Sister Cities work.

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10).** We facilitate communication by teaching people in government how to speak community and community members how to speak government. We demonstrate to communities that we recognize them, that we are learning more about their history, culture, current situation, and that we ultimately want their help in building community here in the county.

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Two (2). Our kids are already living in a super diverse community. We have not been able to raise money for this. There is work to be done to improve multicultural skills and welcoming newcomers to schools, but they don't have to travel to do it. Involve the Student Leadership Office in getting students to reflect on this and see if there is role for them to play.**

Montgomery College (MC): What role do you see Montgomery College playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of Montgomery College's Office of Community Engagement?

**The College is working on organizing its global education program. Our Office of Community Engagement is in the business of hosting events that promote intercultural understanding and promote neutral public dialogue. We have staff to facilitate and market events. It is tricky. Students don't come to night events. Community members don't come to events during the day. Salvadorans like fiestas with lots of dancing. Americans not so much. We need to figure out what kind of activities attract the receiving (*i.e.*, non-immigrant) communities as well and meet each group half way.**

Board of Education (MCPS): What role do you see Montgomery County Public Schools playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of MCPS?

**Sister Cities provides our teachers with great opportunities to travel to the countries of origin of their students. At Montgomery College, we have learned, for example, that test taking in Ethiopia is very different there than here. Knowing this is basic cultural competence. Travel will let us learn what works there. What can we learn to help us serve our students better?**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**I saw my job as Latino liaison in the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) as keeping the Salvadoran committee on task. The committees need to be open to new members with fresh ideas and approaches. We need more than just isolated activities but rather also integrate into other county wide events. We need to integrate the groups and bring the Sister City committees together in an annual retreat with the OCP staff and the county's regional directors.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**I loved staying with host families. I would like to learn more about the educational systems so I could understand what works best with different cultures. We should have reunions after trips so the travelers maintain their networks.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**Sister Cities needs a paid staff person to convene the country committees and keep them on task. Each committee should select two tasks to work on each year.**

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

**The Salvadoran committee was willing to do fundraising for scholarships for students in Morazán. We should explore international contributions. And international companies like Ethiopian Airlines.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Shella Cherry, Coordinator, MCPS Student Leadership**

**Sonia Umanzor, Embassy of El Salvador**

**Jeannette Noltenius, Salvadoran House of Culture**

**Melissa Pace, Director, Montgomery College Television (MCTV)**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**What types of activities between trips are meaningful to the receiving community?**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**For the country committees to stay focused on substantive relationships with our Sister Cities, they need staff support from the Office of Community Partnerships. But there are tough budgets ahead.**

**The committees need face time with the County Executive so they know Sister Cities is being taken seriously. Reunions of travelers.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

**We have made so many strides in the use of technology in the last two months. We will need to use what we have learned even as things get back toward normal. Technology might provide better ways to be in touch with our Sister Cities. In the early years we skyped the Gandhi Brigade youth with youth in El Salvador. These virtual Sister Cities ideas might provide an opportunity for the College to jump start aspects of its global education program. Melissa Pace is the director of Montgomery College Television (MCTV). Carolina Galeano and Danielle Stescki are the MCTV producers who did such a good job on the World of Montgomery Festival.**

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**Lily Qi, Member, Maryland House of Delegates;**  
**Former Assistant CAO (Economic Development), Montgomery County;**  
**Former Asian Liaison, Office of Community Partnerships (OCP):**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 1, 2020**

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

**There is a direct and sustainable benefit to engaging local communities from our Sister City countries. It was good that we started with the countries that have the largest numbers of our immigrant residents in the County. The exposure Sister Cities provides allows our elected and community leaders to do a better job serving our communities. It also makes people feel good about living in Montgomery County. Sister Cities provides meaningful exchanges for Montgomery College.**

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

**Without dedicated funding for these programs, it is a real challenge to fulfill the potential of Sister Cities. These programs take a lot of effort. The volunteers at NCAAGW (Northwestern Chinese American Association of Greater Washington) have other jobs. There are language and time zone barriers. The Sister Schools program with Churchill was born of great intentions but failed because of communications and coordination issues.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Ten (10). Engaging local communities is most important.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Five (5). This is the element that is least likely to succeed. The local government is removed from deal-making. The role of Sister Cities is to have the County Executive make the introduction to the businesses but you don't know which ones may work out. It takes tremendous amount of prep work both before and afterwards to facilitate a meaningful deal.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Six (6). Creating a welcoming environment comes from many things, not just from our Sister City program.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Eight (8). These trips will open the eyes of our young people.**

Economic Development: Please discuss further how economic development can be advanced through Sister Cities.

**Leave it to MCEDC (Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation). Use the County Executive to open the door. The necessary deal making after the introduction is not the government's thing. MCEDC can be part of planning the trips if there is a business component. We need data and good research. We need staff who speak the language and are available to make the calls at different time zones.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**Ask Sister Cities International for best practices. Montgomery County's economy is rooted in the services industries. We don't sell stuff to facilitate easy trade partnerships, and we don't have a four-year college that naturally recruits International students.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**The trips got better every year. We learned how not to pack in too many activities. Make sure there is one or maybe two economic development or educational contracts to sign on each trip. Otherwise, it is just another feel good trip.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**Not sure the county government can support a full-time staff person. Combine the Sister Cities staff responsibility with some other relevant function.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision?

**Hard to raise private dollars unless we can demonstrate substantive results. Sister Cities isn't a program like feeding the hungry. It will mostly be government funded. Require each board member of Montgomery Sister Cities to contribute.**

What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Montgomery Sister Cities?

**It won't be a top priority for most companies. Partner with companies like Marriott to promote their brand. Visit Montgomery should be selling Montgomery County globally.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

- **People who have been on the trips like George Dang.**
- **John Wobensmith, Maryland Secretary of State**
- **Eunmme Shim, President, Adventist Healthcare Fort Washington Hospital**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

- **Organizational structure (e.g., country based committees)**
- **Funding**
- **How to sustain activities between trips.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020?

- **Start with best practices – what works elsewhere?**
- **Start with projects with the best chances for success – look for quick wins that can result in positive examples.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

- virtual World of Montgomery Festival;

**Possible. Do it in multiple segments.**

- virtual trips to each of the five Sister Cities;

**Maybe these add up to your World of Montgomery Festival.**

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

**Logistical nightmare with language and time zone barriers. More likely to fail than succeed.**

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**Reemberto Rodriguez (RR), Director, Silver Spring Region and  
Geraldina Dominguez (GD), Director of AIDS Malignancy Program,  
National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health  
Sister Cities Interview May 2, 2020**

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

**RR: Sister Cities opens our eyes to how we are one world and how much we have in common. And how much value our diversity brings to Montgomery County.**

**GD: An enriching tool to engage and build perspective. It helps us appreciate our differences.**

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

**RR: It is hard to communicate the inherent value of the investments we make in these trips. The ROI is not always immediately evident. As for us, both professionally and personally, they have enriched us so much.**

**GD: Sometimes there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of the mission trips. We should have a clear statement of purpose: why are we going on these trips? what are we trying to accomplish?**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**RR: Eight (8). Relationships make the world go round.**

**GD: Seven (7). Sister Cities makes people feel they are at the table.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**RR: Two (2). Economic development is built on relationships. These trips spark those relationships. However, economic development delegations are different than Sister Cities trips. While there is an inherent connection, it is a mistake to mix in economic development as a priority. There are other ways to do economic development.**

**GD: One (1). Too much economic development may keep some people from going on the trips.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**RR: Eight (8). We gotta walk the walk. Sister Cities is a practical way to do this.**

**GD: Eight (8). Ditto.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**RR: Eight (8). This is a no-brainer. Relationships formed at that age can last a lifetime and lead to substantive common good.**

**GD: Five (5). I'm lukewarm on this. Let others do this. There are lots of good organizations running service trips for high schoolers and college age students.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is

activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**RR: You won't get activity between trips without staff. Someone needs to call the meetings and keep the group moving forward. You need quality staff with the time to focus on the task of each committee.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**RR: The clarity of purpose and of process have to be improved. You need quality, culturally competent and logistically competent staff. These trips are transformational for me in terms of doing my job. Because the trips are so affordable, you attract people who are not "in the know" about the county's purposes for these trips. Travelers should be briefed before the trips so they more fully understand the purposes of the trips.**

**GD: I saw the donations of computers to Gondar, and I thought "that's cool but why are we doing that?"**

**RR: These trips shouldn't be limited to our Sister Cities. These are great experiential learning opportunities. We could attract travelers from adult education programs at the College and from the Senior Villages. Offer a course, a trip, and follow up opportunities.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**RR: We need Sister Cities now more than ever. We might not be able to travel until 2022, but this program needs institutional support. Ideally, it would be led by someone of stature in the County Executive's office. I could see it done from Montgomery College as part of the lifelong learning program. It should be done collaboratively with, but not led by, the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation.**

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

**RR: What we are going through right now might spark our major corporations throughout the county to better world connections in new ways and step up with significant investments in the Sister Cities efforts.**

**GD: The concept of a public-private partnership appeals to me.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**RR: Greg Wims of Rotary. I would also like to see some of the travelers who are not plugged into the county government be interviewed to see how we might popularize these trips beyond those of us 'in the know'.**

**GD: Our videographer Joy West.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**RR: Ask how clearly the broader community understands the mission of Sister Cities; and how clearly the process and participant expectations are communicated. And ask how culturally and logistically competent their staffs are. Clarity of mission, process, and logistics.**

**GD: How do they partner with civic groups like Rotary and Habitat for Humanity?**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**RE: The ideal would be to have a half-time staff person directly accountable to the County Executive. This individual should know how to navigate the county**

**government, have extensive relationships, and be able to operate with the authority of the County Executive.**

**GD: Ultimately, this requires a full-time person.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

**RR: I love all of these ideas. The last six weeks have demonstrated amazing possibilities. To implement any of them, we need a staff person on board now to start (re)connecting with each of the Sister Cities. Some of the Town Hall Zoom meetings have been as good or better than in person meetings.**

**Here's a specific strategy:**

- **Start with a virtual gathering of a handful of leaders from Montgomery County and from each of the five Sister Cities. Don't try to do a big event. Just a check-in. Just ask how each is doing with the Covid-19 challenge. Then do the same for each of the five Sister Cities individually.**
- **And then - and only then - do a very public, multi-media countywide Summit to both celebrate, excite, and invite participation.**
- **Simultaneously develop a course with Montgomery College that focuses on Sister Cities. Prepare this type of multi-week course for the future to include (a) prework; (b) site visits; and (c) debrief and follow up.**

**GD: There won't be trips any time soon. At our office, we aren't even planning trips for the future.**

**RR: Do something big every three months virtually over the next 18 months until we can get back to travelling.**

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

**GD: Make sure you get input from the people in our Sister Cities. Too often we only consider what we think. We need to know what they think.**

**RR: I don't see physical exchanges until the Fall of 2021. We need to reimagine the relationships. Use Covid-19 as the spark to rekindle the relations and not wait until 2022.**

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**Sharon Ledner, Chief of Staff, Councilmember Rice:**  
**Sister Cities Interview by Email May 3, 2020**

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

**Relationship building and understanding how by working together we mutually benefit in a myriad of ways.**

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

**I think we need to focus on economic/academic/infrastructure goals as well as relationship building goals. I know some of this is done already at the university level, but in pre-planning what the needs are and the opportunities that exist for both the county and our sister city in working together, the right folks can be on this trip to immediately start working toward the goals set in place.**

**We also need to properly fund this program if we feel it is a priority. You need the staff to organize travel and itinerary, do pre-planning to pre-determine**

**goals and mission and ensure the right folks from the right departments are able to go and meet up with the right folks in that Sister City.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Nine-ten (9-10). Very Important.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Nine-ten (9-10). Very Important if we expanded this to academics and infrastructure building as a subset of economic development.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Eight-nine (8-9). Absolutely important. I see this more as part of 1 and 2 in that our county cares about our residents from all over the globe and wish enhanced community engagement and economic/academic opportunities for their home countries and cities.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Six-seven (6-7). I love this concept and any opportunities for our students and teachers to expand upon their knowledge and skill sets.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (e.g., Latin America) or respond to community interest (e.g., Western Africa).

**I believe Sister Cities should re-evaluate the current relationships we have with our current Sister Cities to determine if we are doing all we can in terms of not only community partnership but economic/academic/ infrastructure considerations that would be mutually beneficial to both parties.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (e.g., OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**Whichever one provides the most flexibility to accomplish the goals and missions.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**Adequate staff to provide for travel/itinerary needs, coordination of goals/mission and what department heads etc. need to travel and with whom they should be meet.**

FY21 Budget: With the budget submitted, what is realistic in terms of funding for FY21? My report won't be finished until the first weeks of the FY21 budget.

**I do not know the answer to this. How many trips a year are being considered? What is the purpose of these trips and what is future commitment to funding to ensure we can take the next strategic steps to move that goal/mission forward?**

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

**If there is a county economic benefit to the trip, the county should be invested in carrying through the commitment in seeing it move forward. What that percentage ratio is I do not know.**

Role of County Executive: How do you view the role of the County Executive in the Sister Cities program? What commitments would you like to see from the County Executive to support the Sister Cities program?

**Linked to question above.**

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

**I think County Council can be a great resource in leadership for these trips. Several councilmembers expressed an interest in the last planned trip to Gondar, and I think that partnership is a good one to continue to cultivate.**

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

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

**This pandemic has redefined a lot of us, especially the critical need of incorporating virtual learning and work into our daily lives now. It is no longer an option but a necessity, so I appreciate the thought in how to move Sister Cities forward in that vein through the events you mentioned.**

**Each one should be looked at in terms of the purpose of each, who we will reach, the impact of doing it virtually (will it resonate and make a difference?), and will the desired outcome be achieved?**

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**John Paukstis (JP), President & CEO,**

**Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland;**  
**Sarah Reddinger (SR), Director of Program Services,**  
**Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 4, 2020**

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

**JP:** In 2011, Habitat built a home for a teacher in Morazán. Over the next several years, our Habitat Metro Maryland built 24 houses and repaired 45 others in Morazán's El Barrial community. We made about a dozen trips, raised \$500,000, and engaged 80 volunteers.

**JP:** Leadership from the top. The County Executive was able to get people engaged.

**SR:** Very genuine human connections. The trips to El Salvador were one of the best experiences of my life. The knowledge of other cultures we got was very valuable.

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

**JP:** We were fortunate to have a strong Habitat affiliate in El Salvador. They helped us understand the culture and history of El Salvador.

**SR:** We didn't always know what the Montgomery Sister City committee was doing. There was a disconnect. It could have been a stronger relationship.

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**SR: Ten (10). Community engagement was one of the things we did really well. The relationships we built helped us serve.**

**JP: Ten (10). These trips gave us an opportunity to see how people lived.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**JP: Six (6). I certainly have a greater appreciation for pupusas.**

**SR: Seven (7). From a Habitat perspective, I'm not connected to this. As a resident, I view it as valuable.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**JP: Eight to nine (8-9). We were able to make great connections with the local community. We were able to have dialogue at a high level. We set up a computer lab in the El Barrial community, and the local government got them an internet connection.**

**SR: Ten (10). We had great conversations with our volunteers about immigration. The experience completely changed how some of them viewed immigration. Helped them establish more empathy.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**JP: Eight to nine (8-9). Hard for high school kids we met in El Salvador to find the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership abilities.**

Role of Nonprofit Community Groups: Habitat was such a great partner for Sister Cities. How could Montgomery Sister Cities (MSC) make it easier for community organizations to become involved in Sister Cities? What would be the strongest argument to recruit community groups to partner with MSC?

**JP: A community organization would have to have an interest in that part of the world and an ability to mobilize resources. I suggest you start with faith groups. My first trip to El Salvador was with a group from St. Camillus Church.**

**SR: It needs to start with the Sister City committees creating clear goals and objectives. Then look for appropriate partners. We were fortunate that there was already a Habitat organization in El Salvador to facilitate our logistics.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committees?

**SR: Ask the committees – both here in Montgomery County and in the Sister Cities -- what they want to happen over the next ten years. This can be done virtually.**

**JP: Get a facilitator to help the committees visualize the needs of the Sister Cities and try to match resources.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**JP: It is a big job to try to organize these trips. You need to make sure the volunteers have a good experience – transportation, lodging, food all has to be good.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**JP: You need a leader with organizational skills for each Sister City. The committees should establish committees for each initiative.**

**SR: You need someone in each Sister City to facilitate logistics.**

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

**JP: Habitat has a tithe policy that requires each affiliate to spend ten percent of its unrestricted fundraising on programs in the world's poorest places. This established mechanism and support from other Habitat programs in the region helped us raise \$500,000 for the El Barrial project. I was pleased that people got very excited about these trips. We didn't get corporate support.**

**SR: We collect \$600 from each volunteer who goes on the trip.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**JP: Find examples of really impressive substantive accomplishments.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**JP: Start with: what do we want to achieve?**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

**SR: Do virtual planning with each Sister City. I love the idea of virtual trips. This will excite kids.**

**JP: Lucky to have Zoom and Microsoft Teams. We are able to have conversations and make decisions. We have valuable webinars with our elected officials. We have the tools. The key to successful meetings is to have a tight agenda and stick to it. That way you can get stuff done.**

**SR: More people are showing up for our virtual homeowner association meetings than we had for in person meetings.**

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

**JP: I'm a big fan of structure. You need structure, decisions, and follow-up.**

**SR: You need to communicate. I'll bet most of my neighbors don't know about Montgomery Sister Cities.**

**JP: How about a virtual cooking lesson from El Barrial to teach us how to make pupusas? Food connects people.**

**SR: Consistency is a key to engagement. Have town halls and other meetings at a regular time like Councilmember Jawando's Virtual Story Time. Lots of people are watching.**

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**Drew Powell, President, Rockville Sister City Corporation**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 5, 2020**

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

**We were very fortunate in 1957 to have been the third Sister City program created in the nation after President Eisenhower launched this program. Our relationship with Pinneberg, Germany went through some quiet periods. The Rockville Sister City Corporation (RSCC) was formed in 1986 to promote people-**

to-people exchange programs with residents of Pinneberg. The citizen based leadership of our 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization gives us the continuity our program needs as elected political leadership changes over time in our city. We now have a second Sister City in Yilan City, Taiwan and unofficial "friendly relations" with Jiaxing, China. The program has been fortunate to have strong support from our Mayors and Councilmembers over the years. Our relationships with our Sister Cities are remarkably intimate. The hospitality is extraordinary. We are treated like royalty, like family.

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

**Our main weakness is funding. We are grateful for receiving approximately \$3,000 each year (annualized) from the City of Rockville in support of our events, but we do not receive annual funding from the city.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for a Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities.

**Ten (10).** It took me a little while to figure out how important community engagement is.

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for local businesses and bringing new businesses to a community.

**Five (5).** Not as important. This was not part of President Eisenhower's vision. If we get an economic development lead, we turn it over to REDI (Rockville Economic Development, Inc.) or Rockville Chamber of Commerce.

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Nine (9).** We are fortunate that our Mayors and Councilmembers get it. We take the Sister City delegations that visit Rockville to Mayor and Council sessions. One-third of our residents were born in other countries. Nearly twenty-five percent of Rockville residents are Asian.

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Ten (10)** We have had a lot of success and some frustrations involving local schools. There hasn't been a clear message coming out of MCPS about student travel. MCPS has liability concerns. To date, we have relied on our personal relationships with teachers and principals. MCPS needs to develop clear policy and procedures regarding international travel by students and faculty. We have had limited engagement with Montgomery College.

**Our most recent success story came in October 2019 when ten students and two faculty from the Richard Montgomery Jazz Band travelled to Taiwan to perform at the Yilan International Art Festival. Rockville Sister City Corporation contributed \$4,000 (as well as covering liability and travel insurance) toward airfare and all costs in Taiwan were covered by the hosts. It was a lifechanging visit for the students. Talk with RMHS Music Director, Dr. Peter J. Perry.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. He cited Rockville as his model. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Montgomery Sister City committees?

**Why are we here if not for the community engagement? RSCC organizes an annual Lantern Festival Event, marking the end of Lunar New Year celebrations, which showcases seven or eight Asian cultures (which celebrate Lunar New Year and the Lantern Festival) at the Fitzgerald Theatre, a Taiwan Bubble Tea Festival at Rockville Town Square and the Taiwan Fiesta (both in May) .**

**Our RSCC board meets once a month. The chairs of our City committees serve on the board. All three City committees (for Rockville's two Sister Cities and friendly relations city) meet monthly (less during the pandemic).**

**We get three to four inquiries each year about possible new Sister Cities, but few follow up after we explain they are required to demonstrate the commitment to organize strong citizen committees, both in Rockville and in the proposed sister city.**

[Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of your Sister City mission trips?](#)

**We have a strong relationship with our two Sister Cities. We are treated like royalty when we travel. They generally pick up all the costs (other than our airfare). We have taken as many as 27 people to Pinneberg in a single delegation (they have sent as many as 60 to Rockville in a single delegation). It is really important to have a videographer on the trips. The Rockville City Manager approves this with guidance from the Rockville Mayor and Council. Please see the following award winning videos:**

**"Rockville - Pinneberg Sister Cities 60th Anniversary Special"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6fhDUhaj3s>

**2018 Honorable Mention Award by the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, Documentary - Event Coverage Category**

**"Yilan City, Taiwan Becomes a Rockville Sister City"**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE4\\_eDhYLd8&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE4_eDhYLd8&t=3s)

[Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?](#)

**Dedicated staff would cost a lot of money. We look to the City of Rockville to provide venues for three large events per year.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of City and private funding do you envision? What success have you had raising private dollars to support for Rockville's Sister City program?

**We do not receive annual funding from the City of Rockville. Our budget is about \$15-20,000 each year. We have approximately 200 members paying \$25 dues as individuals and \$40 as families. We have about twenty corporate sponsors that contribute from \$100 to \$1,000 each. Our travel costs are very low because our Sister Cities provide lodging with host families and cover virtually all of our costs except airfare. The individuals who travel cover their own airfare. Staying with host families makes the people-to-people experience all the richer.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview?

**I will send you contact information for our board members so you can send them your survey.**

Sister Cities International: Which other Sister City organizations do you look to for best practices?

**Phoenix Sister Cities and Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation are both amazing organizations with robust programs and ten Sister Cities each.**

Operating in a Covid-19 World. What does the Rockville program see as realistic in 2020 and 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic? In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

- **We are working on developing some Sister Schools relationships with Rockville schools and schools in Pinneberg and Yilan City.**
- **This is a time to work on restructuring. We are working on changes to RSCC bylaws.**
- **We are exploring virtual meetings with our Sister Cities.**

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**Solomon Ayele, Former Chair, Gondar Ethiopia Committee**  
**Former Board Member, Montgomery Sister Cities**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 5, 2020**

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

**Both governments and peoples are committed to work together. That is the real asset. The trips are a strength.**

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

**I see a structural issue. The Montgomery Sister Cities Board is OK. But there is nothing from the Sister City committees. The Gondar committee is not active. The committees need bylaws. They need guidance. I don't see any activities except when there are trips. The committees aren't inviting to people unless there are activities. The problem is the mentality of both the Board members and the committee members. The Board members think the committees should be all Ethiopians. The committee members think the committees should be all Ethiopians. And some committee members want just people who came from Gondar. I am the only person who thinks the committee needs people who are from outside of Gondar, outside of Ethiopia. We need people who represent all of Montgomery County serving on these committees.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Eight (8). This is important. And we need to engage not just Ethiopians but representatives of all of Montgomery County.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Nine (9). America should not leave Africa to the Chinese. American investment in Ethiopia will create good relationships. America may import more goods from Ethiopia – flowers, textiles, coffee. I recommend Ethio-American Trade Fair in Gondar.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). Exchange of cultures is important and that is one of the objectives of Sister Cities.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Nine (9). The Sister City committees need projects to stay active and Sister Schools would be a good project.**

Sister Cities Committees: County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Ethiopian Sister Cities committee?

**There are a large number of Ethiopians who would be interested in reinvigorating the Gondar committee. Not just the original members. Not just people from Gondar. Not just Africans. And we need activities that involve the people of Montgomery County.**

**First, create a strong committee with members not just from Ethiopia. Second, establish bylaws or guidelines for the committee. Third, create projects.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**The trips are not enough. Important activities/projects need to be established and be worked on before the trips.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**The volunteers are the major resource. Corvallis, Oregon is a Sister City of Gondar. They have gotten grants and done projects in Gondar.**

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

**The governments are involved on both sides so Sister Cities should be able to attract private funding. Maybe try for some grants. Small contributions from members. Membership in the Corvallis Sister Cities Association begins at \$10 and goes up from there.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**Dr. Asefa is a medical doctor who is very active in the community. He donated medical supplies for our first trip.**

**Josephine Garnem**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**What types of projects have been most successful in strengthening Sister City committees?**

**Which citizen committees have been most successful in sustaining activity through the years and what are the keys to their success?**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

**Very few residents of Ethiopia have the Covid-19 now. There are strong controls at the airports and at the borders. We don't know what will come. If something happens, perhaps Montgomery County could share what it has learned.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

**Communicate about Covid-19. The Montgomery-Gondar Sister City email group could share information, get ideas, and encourage involvement.**

**I agree with the virtual town hall and summit with leaders from Montgomery County and all five Sister Cities.**

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

**Go to the website of Corvallis Sister Cities Association. They get grants. They do activities. They just did a family reading night.**

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**Brad Colton, Strategic Projects, Global Procurement,**  
**Marriott International**  
**Past Chair, Leadership Montgomery**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 6, 2020**

I have not been familiar with Sister Cities, but from the background you have given me I have a few observations.

Marriott is an international company with our headquarters in Bethesda. We have executives in our headquarters from all of the Sister Cities countries. We have housekeeping and other staff from some of the Sister Cities. Many of our staff members might be interested in connecting with the Sister Cities program and connecting with Montgomery County. This fits with Marriott's Spirit to Serve.

I am a former Bishop of the Bethesda Ward in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I currently support twelve congregations of young adults as the First Counselor in the Washington DC Young Single Adult Stake. Many of our 18 to 25 year old's have served eighteen months to two years on mission trips around the world. This is such an impressionable period in their lives. Many develop a great love for the people and the culture of the country where they served as well as becoming fluent in their languages and cultures. Many of them now are professionals in different businesses here in Montgomery County. I consider myself as a connector. We could tell them about Sister Cities and suggest they might want to become personally involved.

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Ten (10).** It is important for the county to connect to its residents. It is important for businesses to connect with their employees.

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Ten (10).** We are living in a global economy more and more.

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10).** We need to understand where our residents have come from, what they need, and how to make them feel welcome. This will give them an opportunity to contribute and make it easier for them to assimilate and quicker to engage.

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Ten (10).** The only way to do this is to travel. Montgomery County gives a better possibility because of our diversity, but you just can't get this in the classroom. And we need to get young adults who grew up in wealthy homes as well as all young adults in the county to connect with other people of our world.

Cultural Competence: How does Marriott train its workforce to be culturally competent? Please tell me about Marriott's diversity group.

**We have several Vice Presidents in charge of important diversity initiatives. It is important for Marriott to understand the cultures of the people we are serving and the countries where we do business. For example, Indian weddings can be up to three day events. We need to understand how best we can serve them. We need to understand the LGBTQ community. We have learned in Asian countries and in destinations where Asians travel, we need to have teapots rather than coffee makers in the rooms. Training on cultural competence is very important to us. We need to know and respect that some Muslim women are not comfortable shaking hands. In our business, we need to limit faux pas. We have policies to promote diversity in the hotel owners we partner with and in terms of our procurement supplies.**

**Apoorva Gandhi is our VP of Multicultural Affairs, and he might help determine howabout how Marriott can connect with Montgomery Sister Cities.**

International Trips: What is Marriott's history of engaging with Sister Cities organizations or Leadership organizations on international trips?

**I'm not familiar with this. You could ask Tammy Routh, SVP Group Sales, who on her team may be handling this market. I remember helping Lily Qi connect to our hotels in China when Montgomery Sister Cities went to China a few years ago.**

Corporate Support: What are the factors a major corporation like Marriott considers in making decisions about supporting a program like Montgomery Sister Cities in a local community? What does an effective fundraising case from a community organization look like?

**You need to show how Sister Cities resonates with their employees and/or customers. So many Montgomery County businesses – Choice, Host, Marriott, Clark Construction, Miller & Long, landscape companies, Lockheed Martin, etc. – have staff who came from the Sister Cities. Supporting Sister Cities will strengthen their relationships with their employees.**

**Marriott does not own the hotels around the world, but we could introduce the owners in areas where you travel to Montgomery Sister Cities and the owners might be interested in sponsoring the organization.**

Role of County Officials: How important would it be to Marriott's support that Montgomery County officials were leading mission trips?

**Not that important to us. Marriott doesn't need anyone to open doors for us. What Montgomery County does for Marriott is to provide a welcoming community that helps us recruit and retain high quality employees.**

Leadership Montgomery: Has Leadership Montgomery ever discussed international trips as a tool of leadership development and team bonding? How might Leadership Montgomery benefit from a relationship with Montgomery Sister Cities? How might a relationship with Leadership Montgomery benefit Montgomery Sister Cities?

**When I became the Area General Manager for Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, I participated in the 2000 Leadership Montgomery class. Later, I served as Chairman of the Board. There is lots of diversity among the 2,000 Leadership Montgomery graduates. Leadership Montgomery is necessarily focused on strengthening its internal organization more than collaborating with others. Rather than a partnership, look to Leadership Montgomery to connect Montgomery Sister Cities to its members with the hope that some would resonate with this and get involved.**

Faith communities: From your involvement with interfaith work, how should Sister Cities connect to faith communities?

**Be strategic. Look to which faiths are significant portions of the populations of the Sister Cities. There may be members of the different faiths that have connections/passion toward the Sister Cities and would love to connect and support this effort.**

Sister Cities International: What would you be most interested in learning from SCI about best practices from other Sister City organizations?

**How do Sister City organizations connect to faith congregations in doing mission service work?**

**How can we get more travel from our Sister Cities to Montgomery County.**

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

**The Sister Cities concept makes all the sense in the world to me. The challenge is how to get organizations like Marriott and Leadership Montgomery to identify their people who might be interested. It is unlikely a Marriott could contribute money in today's environment, but we might be able to connect you to our staff who would want to volunteer and contribute. You need a simple, direct ask with good electronic information on the program that can be shared.**

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**Monifa McKnight, Deputy Superintendent**  
**Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 6, 2020**

**I am recently back with MCPS now as Deputy Superintendent so I am not able to comment on the history of the Montgomery Sister Cities program. I was part of discussions about partnership with Gondar as we met with state, government and educational officials in the fall of 2019. And I do believe it is important to continue the Sister Cities program.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (*e.g.*, El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Eight to ten (10). We have to continue to develop our relationships with our underrepresented and underserved communities. We need to empower our residents.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (*e.g.*, China, India, and South Korea).

**Eight to ten (10). Economic development brings a future to our students. We want them to come back and contribute to our community and have a global perspective that elevates knowledge, culture, and enrichment in our community.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). This goes to the heart of our community. We are so diverse. We have a wealth of culture. Our mission is to create a welcoming community. Everyone must feel included in a community and feel they bring value. “Do I feel like I fit in?” We model this through understanding and respecting our diverse cultures.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Ten (10). This is what we do. As learners, we want our students to develop a deep appreciation for diversity that exists among various groups of people. We want to give our students a world experience. We want them to experience culture. We want to make it real and relevant to them.**

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS): What role do you see MCPS playing to advance the goals of Montgomery Sister Cities? What is it that Montgomery Sister Cities could do to be most supportive of the mission of MCPS?

**Sister Cities brings us partnerships with educators in the countries our students come from. This allows us to better understand the diverse cultures of our students and most importantly to bring relevance to the learning we build in the classrooms. These partnerships allow for the opportunity to extend that learning into real life experiences.**

Sister Schools: Several of the people I have interviewed recommend Sister Schools. What is the current thinking at MCPS about having Sister Schools? Are there any policies and procedures that have been adopted or that are under development?

**We need to get MCPS staff from the academic side and from the community engagement side together with county government staff and representatives of the Montgomery Sister Cities program to map out a vision for Sister Schools. We have an opportunity to align our visions and dedicate needed resources. The Superintendent of Schools and I believe that coordination of a Sister Schools program from our offices will allow us to focus particular resources and strengthen Sister Schools programs.**

**We want to be continuous learners. The partnership with Gondar would allow us to learn more about the culture that could perhaps support how we as a system and schools particularly connect with our Ethiopian community. We want school principals to travel and to learn how to support their students because sometimes it is about experiencing a culture that allows for us to build on our cultural proficiency lens to serve all communities well.**

Is there any documentation about schools that currently interact with schools outside of the United States?

**We have not participated or sent anyone in the last few years, and if we did, they have either retired or left our school system.**

What do I tell a Sister Cities group that wants to start a Sister Schools relationship to do? What are the possibilities?

**There is going to be a process, and we are going to move forward.**

Travel Abroad: What are the MCPS guidelines for student trips abroad? What liability concerns does MCPS have? Are any new initiatives under discussion for after it is safe to travel again?

**Legal counsel needs to be a part of this discussion. We want to travel, but we may need to revisit our current policies and regulations. And now, the COVID-19 experience shows us we have new health issues that need to be part of that discussion.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program? How might Sister Cities staff interact with MCPS staff?

**County government-MCPS partnerships work when the commitment to collaborate is strong. We need to stay focused and keep the commitment to communicate strong. On the MCPS side, we need to get the right people in the room and identify clear responsibilities.**

Funding: Long term, what mix of County and private funding do you envision? What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Montgomery Sister Cities? What experience has MCPS had in raising private dollars for student and faculty trips abroad?

**We need to develop a strategy in consultation with our Board of Education, foundations, etc. and others to address ways to support this program.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**Which Sister City organizations are doing the best job of funding robust travel experiences for students?**

**What are the personal benefits to students from these trips?**

Implementation: In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad? What have you learned from the experience of the last six weeks that could inform our efforts in the coming months with these ideas:

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

**We have learned that not everyone on the other side of our virtual learning has what they need to participate and make it a meaningful experience for all. Equity demands that we ask “what do you need?” We always must be checking in to make sure all students are equipped to learn.**

**Yes, virtual meetings with Sister Cities makes sense. The programs do not have to stop because of COVID-19. But the same equity questions must be asked: What do our Sister Cities need to be able to participate? Perhaps in some cases, Montgomery County will need to provide the technology resources necessary to support the participation of our Sister Cities.**

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**Aruna Miller, Former Member, Maryland House of Delegates**  
**Sister Cities Interview May 7, 2020**

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

The greatest asset is and has always been the people. Montgomery County is the home of the nation's most diverse cities, including Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, Germantown, and Rockville. Our diversity allows us to be such a source of innovation in the global economy. As such, I would say the most important strengths of the Montgomery Sister Cities program are:

- the human connection it creates between people from different corners of the world, each with unique cultures/customs/languages /faiths, and yet one with solidarity of mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation;
- the educational, cultural, community, and economic presence/ opportunities it fosters with the international community;
- the staff are hard working.

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

There is a disconnect after the ceremonial events take place. It would be beneficial if various Sister City groups met on a social/professional basis two to four times a year. Perhaps even have zoom calls with our global friends.

The Board of Montgomery Sister Cities needs to more diverse and reflective of race/ethnicity/gender of the county. The Board should be 50% female and should have much more representation from the Asian Sister Cities than the current makeup. The Board should also include a male and a female student member. Students are the cornerstone of our future, they will be the changemakers and leaders. They offer a unique perspective on the educational learning opportunities across the globe. There should also be a male and female member from each of the Sister Cities.

**It is surprising there are no bylaws for the Board. Bylaws enable members to determine what rules they can all agree with and abide by, and yet allow the members to make changes when the organization grows and changes. These rules ensure stability, continuity, and structure, especially during times of rapid growth or when there are not many "old" members to tell the new members what to do.**

**It is imperative that staff execute effective communication measures for Board participation. Any meeting invitations should be addressed in the following manner:**

- 1. Email**
- 2. Followed by an immediate calendar entry directly into the Board members' calendars**
- 3. Lastly, a reminder call/text the day before the meeting.**

**There should be a greater emphasis on marketing/public relations efforts for outreach. The website needs to be improved dramatically and brought up to date. The pictures are fuzzy, the site gives virtually no information, the site is static, the site is loaded with pictures of the previous CE, the site should provide a Montgomery County demographics tab, etc. The website should include a promotional video that can be generated by students which in turn gives them an opportunity to present their skillsets.**

**In a time when the federal government continues to fail in international diplomacy, this is an opportunity for local governments, like Montgomery County, to take the bull by its horns and foster citizen diplomacy. It's a chance to be the go-to place for international economic endeavors, educational exchanges, cultural appreciation and diplomacy. We must strive to make Montgomery County the prime destination for international businesses and foreign investors.**

**The face of Montgomery County Government employees needs to be more diverse and equitable. If we are going to tout our Sister Cities accomplishments, and that we embrace inclusion, then we need to ensure that our government workforce reflects this diversity from top to bottom. In the years I have worked at MCG, there have been so many times that qualified women of color have been passed up for promotions for managerial roles.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Seven (7).** This seems a lot like #3 below – **Creating a Welcoming Environment.** I would recommend your website be updated with current County Executive and be made a lot more dynamic with videos and be offered in various languages, share monthly stories of our rich immigrant community with videos.

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Ten (10).** This is a heavy lift for Sister Cities but a critical lift. This effort must include partnering with Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation in order to: (1) enhance global opportunities for locals in business, trade, education, and cultural activities, and (2) bring international attention to Montgomery County area investments, resources, and events. This focus will lead to job creation, strengthen our partnerships with the various cities, provide tangible and measurable results which would clinch support from the business community and buy-in from the doubters.

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10).** I believe Montgomery County does a respectable job hosting international events and identifying commemorative days of the year to inform the public about the various cultures, and participating in cultural /faith based celebrations. However, it can further support policies to promote social and

**economic integration of immigrants and refugees. While not directly related to Sister Cities, the MCG should consider having an office of Immigrant Affairs or New Americans.**

[Preparing Global Citizens for the Future](#). Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Eight (8). Before we fly students to various countries, much can be done remotely to guide them to become citizens of the world: (1) The use of technology to connect students with other students throughout the world (electronic pen pals); (2) Focus on human rights issues as a platform for discussion; (3) Practice Learn-Think-Act. [See this link](#). Once this is established, a guided overseas trip with deliverables would be beneficial.**

[Sister Cities Committees](#): County Executive Elrich and Diane Vu stressed to me the importance of strengthening the Sister City country committees so there is activity between mission trips. What are the most important steps that can be taken to reenergize the Sister Cities committee for Hyderabad?

**It's been six years since Montgomery County established a Sister City with Hyderabad. Between these years, I am not sure what outreach and activities have taken place. Frankly, the best way to reenergize that interest would be to start all over again. Start with a small, gender balanced core. Count me in! Bring others in. Include business, education, culture, and humanitarian programs. Many immigrant communities embrace humanitarian causes. Indian Americas abide by Gandhian principles of: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Again, we need to establish and achieve tangible and measurable results.**

**We need to maintain consistent communication with our Sister Cities. There should be annual reports on progress toward our goals.**

**There is a real opportunity here. The world is dramatically different today than it was in 2014. The United States has become increasingly intolerant of our global partners, there is a perception among other eastern nations that the United States is discriminatory toward people of color and various faiths. In the**

era of Donald Trump's America, rebuilding these important relationships from the ground up is an opportunity to repair and promote international relations just as it was when President Eisenhower established the program. We need to recognize the damage done to diplomacy under the Trump era. We should emphasize that Montgomery County welcomes the exchange of diversity, creativity, and enthusiasm from our global friends.

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you do to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Sister City mission trips?

**Be very focused: why are we going there? What do we hope to accomplish?**

- **Focus on humanitarian causes; business and trade; arts and culture; youth and education; and professional and technical exchange categories.**
- **Add business leaders who do business in both India and USA. They can give greater insights into the challenges of conducting international business.**
- **Include K-12 educators, SMOB to collaborate on educational collaboration. Cultural exchanges should include ethnic artists.**

Resources & Staff: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**This needs a strong nonprofit organization with chairs for each of the five Sister City committees. The current Board needs to be far more diverse, gender balanced, include students, socio-economically diverse, diverse in faith, as well as in sexual orientation.**

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

**The Board Members should be required to raise a certain level of funds (via their own contribution or through others) with the contractual help of a professional fundraiser if needed. Donations can be unlimited to a nonprofit. Donors can be U.S. citizens, noncitizens, and individuals from foreign countries, corporations, and tax exempt organizations. Contributions are tax deductible.**

Other interviewees: Who would be most important for me to interview? Who else are you most interested in hearing from on this?

**It would be beneficial to reach out to your contacts in the various Sister Cities specifically, Sister City programs like Austin and Fort Worth. Understand how they have been successful. Establish goals/benchmarks.**

Sister Cities International: What are you most interested in learning from SCI about best practices of other Sister City organizations?

**Look for the best ideas. I went to the SCI website and found the Fort Worth program. It is amazing what they are doing.**

Implementation: What are the most important three or four steps that we should try to take for the second half of calendar year 2020? What do you see as realistic in 2021 in (we hope) the aftermath of the international economic meltdown and the global health pandemic?

- 1. Revamp the website. A website is the first place people seek to understand an organization. First impressions are critical, and the lack of dynamic, updated, vibrant website will turn many away from being involved and engaged.**
- 2. A stronger more diverse Board with strict bylaws.**
- 3. Identify key people to serve on the committees of each Sister City and have them reconnect with their contacts in the Sister City.**

In our lockdown world, what can be done virtually until it is safe to travel abroad?

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

**With every crisis there is an opportunity. Start with a Town Hall meeting for the strongest Sister City relationship. Don't try to do five at once. Get it right. Plan carefully. Test it in advance. Script it. Have someone monitor the chat room.**

**Layout the meeting. Practice. Don't let this be amateur hour. Do the same careful planning for the virtual World of Montgomery Festival.**

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**Eunmee Shim, President of Fort Washington Medical Center,  
Adventist HealthCare  
Sister Cities Interview May 20, 2020**

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

**Sister Cities is a wonderful program. We have shortage of nurses in the Washington region. We needed to break past the boundaries of the United States and look for global solutions to our staffing needs. The 2017 trip to South Korea has been productive for Adventist HealthCare. We are offering jobs to 28 nurses and hope they will be here as early as late summer or fall of this year. We recruited across all of South Korea. The nurses will come as Green Card holders.**

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrated you?

**There was no follow-up after the trip. Landing the United States headquarters of a major corporation doesn't often happen as a first step. It might start with a corporate executive's child coming for education or maybe the executive comes for tourism. It takes time to build relationships and develop interest.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (e.g., El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Six (6). My goal is larger than just engaging individual communities. The individual communities need to work together as part of the larger community.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (e.g., China, India, and South Korea).

**Nine (9). Montgomery County needs to diversify the workforce and not be so reliant on the federal government.**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Nine (9). We have people from 92 different countries working for Adventist HealthCare. Diversity alone is not a strength unless we figure out how to promote cultural integration.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**Eight (8). Travel changes people. It opens their eyes and their minds. If children travel, their parents will travel.**

**Because Montgomery County has such a wholesome, welcoming environment, we have a real advantage in attracting international students. They are in a quandary now because of the anti-immigrant feelings in other parts of the country.**

Role of County Officials: How important was it to your decision to participate in the 2017 trip that Montgomery County officials were leading the delegation?

**Lily Qi invited Adventist HealthCare President and CEO Terry Forde, and Terry suggested I go on the 2017 trip. I had no expectations. I so enjoyed being on the**

**trip with the County Executive and Mrs. Leggett. It is crucial the County Executive lead the delegations.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**We should bring our own translators to ensure we minimize communications gaps. Not all the translators were of high quality.**

How important is it to you that Sister Cities include humanitarian projects as part of our trips?

**Be careful. Humanitarian missions need lots of preparation. Americans can be presumptuous about what another country needs. Humanitarian actions should be part of the follow-up only after you have a better understanding of the needs and wants of the Sister City**

Resources, Staff, & Funding: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program?

**If you are going to do this right, it will take a lot of work. You need staff.**

What would it take to get a corporation like Adventist HealthCare to support the Sister Cities program on an ongoing basis?

**Companies will support programs if they see long term value for the company. Aligning their financial interests is critical to long term sustainability. In the first five years, start with educational organizations and hotels. The Washington region has a great advantage in trying to attract United States headquarters, but Montgomery County does not have a business friendly reputation. Incentives will be needed.**

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**George Leventhal, Director, Community Health, Kaiser Permanente;  
Former Montgomery County Councilmember  
Sister Cities Interview May 21, 2020**

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

**I am glad I went to El Salvador on two Sister City trips. The trips were a good experience for me. But I do not believe Montgomery County should have a Sister Cities program. It is not a good investment of our time and resources.**

Weaknesses: Please identify the most important weaknesses of Montgomery County's Sister Cities program. What are the main barriers holding the program back? What frustrated you?

**Foreign relations are not within the job description of a county government. This is not a priority for a local government, especially now in a time of crisis. We have to make choices about how we spend our time and resources. And the trips are expensive so the broad public is not able to participate.**

Goals: Please reflect on your level of interest in each of four possible goals for our Sister Cities program. Please rank the importance you attribute to each of the four goals on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being very important:

Community Engagement. Developing relationships with previously underrepresented and underserved ethnic and faith communities (*e.g.*, El Salvador and Ethiopia).

**Five (5). I have mixed feelings. Reaching out to immigrant communities is very important, but there are other ways to achieve this. It is very important for Montgomery County officials to get to know their own constituents, but getting to know the rest of the world is beyond the scope of their official duties.**

Economic Development. Developing economic development opportunities for Montgomery County businesses and bringing new businesses to Montgomery County (*e.g.*, China, India, and South Korea).

**No ranking. I see no evidence of any real economic development benefits that have come from Sister Cities. There are benefits of one-on-one international business relationships, but Sister Cities is not the best vehicle for that. That**

**should be done by MCEDC (Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation).**

Creating a Welcoming Environment. Broadening the understanding of Montgomery County officials and the public at large about the cultures of the people who have come here from every corner of the globe through cultural exchanges.

**Ten (10). This is the most important. We want people to feel welcome in Montgomery County.**

Preparing Global Citizens for the Future. Promoting trips for high school and college students to give them the opportunity to broaden their skills and enable them to thrive in the global marketplace of the future.

**No ranking.**

Priorities for next three years: Should MSC put a priority on strengthening the existing five Sister Cities or adding new ones to fill gaps in representation (*e.g.*, Latin America) or respond to community interest (*e.g.*, Western Africa).

**Sister Cities should not be a priority for Montgomery County government. If you do this, have one or two Sister Cities. Be strategic and lay out measurable goals. Otherwise you dilute the focus by spreading the program too thin. But once you have one or two Sister Cities, many other immigrant communities will want Sister Cities in their countries of origin.**

Sister Cities Mission Trips: What would you change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our mission trips?

**The two trips I went on were marvelous experiences. I felt personally enriched.**

Role of the Sister City committees: What role do you see the Sister City committees playing? How could we strengthen the program activities between mission trips?

**Each Sister City committee needs to establish clearly defined goals, and there must be an assessment whether or not the goals have been met. We can celebrate the cultural heritage of our communities without taking international trips.**

Humanitarian projects: Your support of the hospital in El Salvador is one of the very most impressive humanitarian accomplishments of the Sister Cities program. How important is it to you that Sister Cities include humanitarian projects as part of our trips?

**I appreciate the recognition, but I worry that the computers and hospital equipment and supplies we took to El Salvador might not have been useful, or may become obsolete quickly. Humanitarian projects need tangible, measurable goals. There are other organizations that do this.**

How difficult was it to organize the hospital project?

**The hospital project was pretty time consuming. It definitely took time away from my job as County Council President. Lots of phone calls to recruit donors and secure supplies from hospitals. These projects are complicated and difficult.**

Base of operations: Do you have views about whether core Sister Cities staff should be based in the County government (e.g., OCP) or outside of County government with Montgomery Sister Cities?

**Montgomery County government should not have a Sister Cities program. There shouldn't be any county staff dedicated to this. County staff should not feel pressured to volunteer their time by their supervisors. There are ways county officials can support ethnic community groups like COTSA (Comunidades Transnacionales Salvadoreñas Americanas) by attending, promoting and facilitating events.**

Resources, Staff, & Funding: What organizational staff structure and other resources do you see as needed to support a successful Sister Cities program? Long term, what mix of County and private funding would you envision?

**Zero county dollars should be devoted to this with the exception of economic development and that should be done by MCEDC.**

What prospects do you envision for private funding support for Sister Cities?  
What would it take to get a corporation like Kaiser Permanente to support the Sister Cities program on an ongoing basis?

**The County Executive should not be raising undisclosed private dollars. County government should be the paragon of ethics. Kaiser Permanente does not engage in any philanthropic activities outside the United States.**

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

**If the county government is going to establish charities, it should: (1) identify a clear public purpose; (2) publicly disclose donors; (3) establish clear goals; and (4) benefit Montgomery County directly.**