



REPORT

Report Date: April 5, 2022
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Meeting Date: May 18, 2022
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TO: Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities
FROM: Chief, External Relations and Protocol
SUBJECT: Establishing a Friendship City Program in the City of Vancouver

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT Council approve the new Friendship City Program outlined in this report, including the framework for evaluating new Friendship City relationships, and the mechanism for terminating Friendship City relationships.
- B. THAT, if Recommendation A is approved, that Vancouver's five current Sister Cities (Odesa, Yokohama, Edinburgh, Guangzhou and Los Angeles) be given two years to transition to Friendship Cities, and, if at the end of two years, this transition has not been made successfully, staff will report back to Council with recommended next steps.
- C. THAT, if Recommendation A is approved, City Council delegate authority to the Mayor's Office to interface with the External Relations and Protocol Office to bring Friendship City recommendations to Council for consideration as described in this report.

REPORT SUMMARY

In September 2021, Council directed staff to create a "Friendship City Program" with certain provisions. This report outlines a new Friendship City Program which includes a framework for evaluating Friendship City relationships and a mechanism for terminating Friendship City relationships, as well as a plan to transition current Sister Cities to Friendship Cities. These Friendship City relationships would be community-driven agreements that are time-limited and focused on achieving defined goals and objectives.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

At the Council meeting following the Standing Committee of Council on Policy and Strategic Priorities on September 22, 2021, Council approved a motion directing staff to create a “Friendship City Program. The motion further directs staff to review the existing Sister City Program and provide a report back with recommendations to Council on the program, including a review of the status of current Sister Cities, and suggestions for updating the gendered language of the program. The final motion is outlined in Appendix A of this report.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

The City of Vancouver is involved in a number of different city partnering activities, ranging from Sister City relationships to participation in international and national networks such as C40 and Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Sister City relationships are one of the City of Vancouver’s oldest forms of city partnerships. These partnerships exist for various reasons and were formed in the context of their specific time and circumstance. Vancouver’s oldest Sister City dates back to 1944, when the City formed a relationship with Odesa, Ukraine to provide humanitarian aid during World War II. Vancouver has since signed four more Sister City agreements, with Yokohama in 1965, Edinburgh in 1978, Guangzhou in 1985, and Los Angeles in 1986.

Vancouver’s Sister City relationships were initiated and driven by the efforts of local community groups with direct connection to the Sister City, many of which formed local non-profit friendship societies to formally govern and coordinate the community’s relationship to the Sister City. The City of Vancouver formalized the Sister City relationships based on the support and participation of these local non-profits friendship societies.

For reasons that are unclear, the majority of these friendship societies have been decommissioned over time. The only Sister City with a local non-profit society in existence today is the Vancouver-Guangzhou Friendship Society. Yokohama, Odesa, Edinburgh and Los Angeles do not have local friendship societies at this time to support Sister City relations. Despite this, the City of Vancouver still has formal agreements with these five Sister Cities, with no end date. Therefore, the City still has obligations to uphold with the five Sister Cities, such as coordinating official correspondence, responding to requests for information or assistance, as well as organizing protocol meetings and special events when required.

External Relations and Protocol (Protocol) within the City Clerk’s Office provides the bulk of the staff support to maintain the City’s Sister City relationships as a matter of protocol and historical obligation. Protocol staff coordinate formal correspondence to and from Sister Cities, organize protocol meetings and special events, and respond to requests for information from existing Sister Cities or requests to form relationships with new cities around the world.

Protocol also serves as the consistent conduit between Sister Cities and City of Vancouver's elected officials to ensure that relations remain intact over time through changing Councils. Despite Protocol providing the bulk of the staff support, it is important to note that no City budget exists for Sister City relations and there are no dedicated Protocol staff assigned to Sister City relations.

Strategic Analysis

The intention of City Council's September 2021 motion is to develop a Friendship City Program that strengthens cultural and business relationships internationally, is administratively straightforward and easy to manage, requires no financial commitment from the City, and builds in a mechanism to ensure that relationships are time-limited and governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with measurable goals and objectives. The motion directs staff to develop a program in which Friendship City activities and day to day relations are managed and resourced by local non-profits, but endorsed by Council to make the friendship status official with Vancouver. Council also directed staff to design a program that includes a framework for evaluating new Friendship City relationships, and a mechanism for terminating Friendship City relationship after a prescribed period of time. The Council motion also called on staff to review the Sister City Program with the intention to evaluate the status of current Sister Cities, update the gendered language of the program, and report back with recommendations.

Existing Sister City Relationships

Current Sister City relationships have been historically and broadly based in humanitarianism, cultural and learning exchanges and economic development, but the effectiveness of the relationships is unknown and remains difficult to quantify. Vancouver is often approached to form official relationships with other cities but has no formal mechanism to do so other than detailed, extensive Sister City agreements that often have no end date or measurable goals and objectives.

Public attitudes have changed with respect to city-to-city partnerships and governments are expected to have measurable goals and objectives that assess effectiveness and demonstrate value for money. Other cities face the same challenge of shifting broadly defined and historically based city-to-city relationships to objective-based relationships that create tangible benefits for participating cities. There is a trend towards developing relationships that are project or goal-oriented, time-limited and community driven.

Review of Other Sister and Friendship City Programs

Staff reviewed Sister City and Friendship City Programs in seven North American cities, including Toronto, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Richmond, British Columbia; Fort Collins, Colorado; Dallas, Texas; Irvine, California and San Diego, California.

Staff summarized findings and found that the majority of Friendship City Programs ensure that Council approves the relationship, but the local community initiates and drives the activities that support the relationship. Cities typically have both Friendship Cities and Sister Cities, and all cities have very similar criteria to evaluate Friendship City proposals.

None of the cities have restrictions on the number of Friendship Cities they can have per country; however, some cities have a limit on the overall number of Friendship Cities they can have at any one time. It is common to have term-limited agreements with measurable goals and

objectives. City budget and staff are commonly dedicated to Friendship City activities/relations and management of agreements.

The City of Toronto's "Partnership City Program" is the most similar in nature to Vancouver's current Sister City system. The City of Toronto also has a less formal and more local community-driven "Friendship City Program" which allows Toronto to expand its range of city-to-city relationships without incurring significant additional administrative costs. Toronto's Friendship City Program applications must be co-sponsored by a Council member as well as an interested community organization, with the candidate city also officially signalling a willingness to participate in a Friendship City agreement.

The City of Toronto currently has 6 Friendship City relationships and 4 Partnership City relationships with an annual budget of \$5,000 per Friendship City (for a total annual budget of \$30,000 for the Friendship City program), and \$40,000 per Partnership City per year. There are also four full-time staff that resource the City of Toronto's International Alliance Program (made up of the Partnership Cities and Friendship Cities), with one staff member dedicated to each of the 4 geographical regions in which their Friendship and Partner Cities are located. There are also two full time staff working on strategic policy development, information gathering and special projects.

It is important to note that the City of Toronto is reviewing its Partnership City Program and Friendship City Program to explore transitioning from Friendship Cities and Partnership Cities to project-based MOUs with cities they want to engage with. This transition aligns with staff research findings that city-to-city partnerships are trending towards agreements that are time-limited and based on measurable goals and objectives.

City of Vancouver Friendship City Program – Recommended Framework

Staff recommend the establishment of a Friendship City Program that would allow local non-profits that represent a group of residents or businesses in Vancouver, and have an active relationship to a proposed Friendship City, to apply to the City of Vancouver for Friendship City status.

The local non-profit would be responsible for all associated Friendship City activities and costs and would be required to demonstrate that the Friendship City relationship meets the criteria set out below.

The local non-profit would submit an online application (draft attached as Appendix B) to the City's External Relations and Protocol Office, and must demonstrate that the proposed Friendship City relationship has:

- ***Strong community, civic and corporate support:***
There is strong community support from individuals, corporations, civic leaders, and the local government of the proposed Friendship City. This would be demonstrated through official letters of support, the formation of a new non-profit society or the commitment of an existing non-profit society that has a vested interest and connection to the proposed Friendship City.

- ***Strong alignment of goals and priorities:***
There are strong connections – both with cultural ties and clear alignment in priority areas between Vancouver and the proposed Friendship City (ie: sustainability, housing affordability, equity and diversity) as well as in city attributes (ie: population, geography, demographics).
- ***Strong diplomatic and ethical alignment:***
There is a strong ethical match and the proposed Friendship City strives to be a stable and ethical government. The proposed Friendship City is within a country in which the Government of Canada has a relationship.

Proposed Approval Process:

- **Application process.** Once the Protocol Office has reviewed the application and determined that the application meets the criteria, a summary of the application and recommendation would be sent to the Mayor's Office. The Mayor's Office would approve or decline the recommendation.
- **MOU.** If supported by the Mayor's Office, the Protocol Office would work with the local non-profit and proposed Friendship City to facilitate the development and signing of an MOU by the Mayors of Vancouver and the proposed Friendship City. It would then be the Mayor's Office responsibility to bring a motion forward to Council to approve the MOU.
- **Annual activity report.** The local non-profit would be obligated through the MOU to provide an annual written report to the Protocol Office with progress and activity updates to ensure that the agreement is being honoured. The annual written report would be shared with Council.
- **MOU term.** All Friendship City MOU's would expire at the end of five (5) years with an option to renew for one additional 5 year term.
- **City support.** Support provided by the City of Vancouver would be limited to a letter signed by the Mayor, annual letters to confirm the agreement, and staff coordination of any incoming visit or meeting request from Friendship City representatives wishing to meet with the Mayor.

Proposed Program Limits:

- **Maximum two new per year.** A maximum of two new Friendship City agreements would be permitted per year.
- **Maximum ten overall.** An overall limit of 10 Friendship Cities would be active at any given time, with no limit on how many Friendship Cities would be permitted per country.

The limit of 10 Friendship Cities at any one time, and two new Friendship City agreements permitted per year would allow for the City to manage its limited staff resources required to bring on new Friendship Cities, diplomatically retire expired Friendship Cities, uphold the City's protocol obligations with active Friendship Cities, and review written reports submitted by the local non-profit.

Proposed Program Organizational Structure and Responsibility:

- The Protocol Office would be responsible for receiving and reviewing applications to determine if the application meets the criteria, and providing a summary and recommendation to the Mayor's Office.
- The Mayor's Office would be responsible for approving the application, submitting a motion to Council for approval, and signing the MOU to confirm the Friendship City relationship.
- Protocol would also be responsible for monitoring annual written reports from non-profit and passing these reports to Council as progress updates. The Mayor's Office would arrange for annual letters to Friendship City.
- Protocol would arrange the formal MOU signing, and any incoming visits by Friendship City Mayors.
- All MOUs would indicate that staff reserve the right to request the Mayor's Office terminate a relationship should the above criteria be contravened by the Friendship City.

A chart outlining the proposed process for approving Friendship Cities is attached as Appendix C.

Proposed Program Costs:

No new budget would be requested for the Friendship City Program; however, it should be noted that additional staff resources would be required to review Friendship City applications, summarize and make recommendations to the Mayor's Office, as well as support and facilitate the drafting and signing of the official MOU. All costs related to Friendship City events and activities would be the responsibility of the local non-profit society.

Review of Sister City Program

In the September 2021 motion, Council directed staff to review the existing City of Vancouver Sister City Program and provide a report back with recommendations to Council on the program, including a review of the status of current Sister Cities, and suggestions for updating the gendered language of the program.

As noted at the beginning of this report, there are no staff resources or budget dedicated to Sister City activities, and staff maintain these relationships with periodic letters and e-mail exchanges. Sister City activities have historically been driven by local non-profit friendship societies; however, the only society in existence today is the Guangzhou-Vancouver Friendship Society.

Transitioning Sister Cities to Friendship Cities

Given the minimal resources dedicated to Sister Cities, and the absence of local community groups available to help drive the relationships forward, it is an opportune time to evaluate these agreements and create a new structure that would make these relationships mutually beneficial to both the City of Vancouver and the Sister City. Furthermore, given Vancouver's long-standing commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, it is a good time to update the term "Sister City" to a more inclusive, gender-neutral name.

To this end, staff recommend merging the current Sister Cities Program into the new Friendship City Program framework, whereby current Sister Cities would transition to Friendship Cities with the support of an active local non-profit that meets the criteria set out for Friendship Cities.

Of Vancouver's five current Sister Cities, only one (Guangzhou) has such a non-profit in place. Staff are recommending that the other four Sister Cities (Odesa, Yokohama, Edinburgh and Los Angeles) be given a two-year period to transition to Friendship Cities. This period of time would allow local community support to organize and coordinate with a local non-profit that is willing to take ownership over the relationship and develop the MOU with the Friendship City. One of the key benefits of transitioning current Sister Cities to Friendship Cities is the new accountability framework built into the Friendship City Program that ensures relationships have local support and an active MOU with measurable goals and objectives.

If after the two-year period, a successful transition has not taken place for a Sister City, staff will report back to Council with recommended next steps.

Special Status

Sister Cities that successfully transition into Friendship Cities would be required to update and re-sign the MOU every 5 years; however, there would be no limit to the number of terms the MOU can be re-signed. This ability to renew in perpetuity would honour the strong and historical nature of the relationships. (This compares to a maximum ten-year term for new Friendship Cities.)

Furthermore, Sister Cities that transition to Friendship Cities would not be counted towards the limit of 2 agreements signed per year, but would be counted toward the overall limit of 10 Friendship Cities that could be active at any given time.

Process for transitioning to Friendship Cities

- The Protocol Office would be responsible for working with the local non-profit to ease the transition process and provide advice and guidance.
- The Mayor's Office would approve and sign the MOU to confirm the Friendship City relationship.
- Local non-profits responsible for the Friendship City relationship that have successfully transitioned from Sister City status would be required to submit annual reports to the Protocol Office to be passed on to Council to keep Council apprised of Friendship City activities, successes and challenges.
- The Mayor's Office would arrange for annual letters to Friendship City as a matter of protocol and to affirm the relationship each year.

An Enhanced Friendship City Program

If City Council wishes to pursue a more robust Friendship City Program than the one described above, staff recommend that Council approve an annual budget of \$60,000 per year, which would include the costs for an additional 0.5 full-time employee to implement and manage the Friendship City Program (\$50,000 per year), and provide grants (\$5,000 each) to two local non-profits per year at the signing of a new Friendship City agreement.

With this investment, the Friendship City Program would be managed more rigorously, and, the City would be able to provide “start-up grants” to up to two new Friendship Cities per year. Details of how this would be managed are contained in Appendix D.

The enhanced Friendship City program outlined in Appendix D would differ from the recommended Program in that all Friendship City relationships would be vetted through a cross-departmental staff team, and would be presented to Council in a full report with recommendations. Furthermore, there would be more staff resources to support Friendship relationships. In the recommended Program, the application would be vetted through Protocol and the Mayor’s Office and the Mayor’s Office would bring the proposal through a Council motion to approve the Friendship City relationship. There would be no staff resources to support local non-profits or Friendship Cities with friendship building activities.

Financial implications

Pursuant to recommendations A, B and C, all costs related to Friendship City events and activities would be the responsibility of the local non-profit society, as such there would be no direct financial implications to the City.

Facilitation and support of the Program will create additional work, including the review and summarization of applications, formation of recommendations to the Mayor’s Office and support and facilitation of the drafting and signing of the official MOUs. It is anticipated that this additional work can be managed from within existing resources.

However, if Council decides to adopt the enhanced Program, with more City staff involvement and oversight, it is estimated that an additional \$60,000 of new annual budget would be required to fund an incremental internal resource to implement and manage the program and to provide two annual grants at \$5,000 per grant. This incremental funding would need to be considered and approved by Council as part of the 2023 budget process.

Human Resources/Labour Relations Implications

No additional staff would be required. At this time, it is anticipated that additional work can be managed within existing resources.

However, if Council wishes to support the enhanced Friendship City Program, staff recommend a 0.5 External Relations and Protocol II role be added to the staff team to implement the program, assist current Sister Cities with the transition to Friendship City status, and support the review and processing of any new applications received. As previously noted in the report, the existing Sister City Program has no assigned staff resources or budget.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, staff recommends that City Council adopt the new Friendship City Program framework outlined in this report, and approve the transition of current Sister Cities to Friendship Cities.

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Final Motion - Establishing a Friendship City Program in the City of Vancouver

WHEREAS

1. Partnering with cities located outside Canada is an effective way by which Vancouver can build and strengthen cultural and business relationships around the globe - especially in an increasingly divided world;
2. Vancouver has a long established "Sister City Program" and detailed and extensive Sister City agreements with Edinburgh, Odessa, Guangzhou, Yokohama and Los Angeles;
3. Vancouver is often approached to form official relationships with other cities but has no formal mechanism to do so other than detailed, extensive, and sometimes costly Sister City agreements;
4. The City of Toronto has a "Partnership City Program" similar in nature to Vancouver's "Sister City Program", but also a less formal and more local community-driven "Friendship City Program" which allows Toronto to expand its range of city-to-city relationships without incurring significant additional administrative costs; and
5. Toronto's Friendship City Program applications must be co-sponsored by a Council member as well as an interested community organization, with the candidate city also officially signalling a willingness to participate in a Friendship City agreement.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to create a "Friendship City Program" including the following provisions:
 1. Applications to add a new Friendship City be initiated by a "sponsoring community organization" that is also a registered non-profit society;
 2. The sponsoring community organization represents a resident community located in Vancouver with an active relationship with the proposed Friendship City;
 3. The sponsoring community organization be responsible for all associated Friendship City activities and costs;
 4. The sponsoring community organization demonstrates support and commitment in terms of community interest and active participation in the program;
 5. The sponsoring community organization provides an annual written report to Council with progress and activity updates;

6. Friendship City agreements expire at the end of five (5) years with an option to renew;
 7. Proposed Friendship Cities have aligned strategic values; shared economic and cultural values with Vancouver, and have a similar size and geography;
 8. There is a limit of one Friendship City per country;
 9. Every Friendship City agreement requires a separate Council motion;
 10. Support provided by the City of Vancouver be limited to a letter signed by Mayor, annual letters to confirm the agreement, and staff coordination of annual reports to Council; and
 11. Any other budgetary considerations are included in the foundational motion to Council establishing the relationship with a new city.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to include a framework for evaluating Friendship City relationships, and a mechanism for terminating the Friendship City relationship, if it no longer meets a standard such as community reporting, active relationship, or shared values.
- C. THAT Council direct staff to review the existing City of Vancouver Sister City Program and provide a report back with recommendations to Council on the program, including a review of the status of current Sister Cities, and suggestions for updating the gendered language of the program.

SAMPLE FRIENDSHIP CITY APPLICATION

Friendship City Application (Note: this application is draft and is intended to be online.)

To be completed in English by the Requesting Organization

1. Name and Country of the Proposed Friendship City

2. Today's Date

3. Name of Person and Local Non-Profit Requesting Partnership

Name: _____

Title: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

4. Rationale

Please explain the rationale and focus of the requested Friendship City Partnership. Describe why a Friendship City Partnership would be beneficial to the City of Vancouver and your local community or agency. Please outline the areas of mutual strength and interest for each of the participating partners. Limit this section to four pages. Items to include:

- Names, title and affiliations of those who will be involved both in Vancouver and in the participating organization,
- Areas of mutual interest upon which the agreement will focus,
- Opportunities for new activities and potential outcomes,
- Benefits and measurable results that the City of Vancouver and the partner organization expect as a result of the Partnership.

5. Resources

Please address monetary and in-kind resources that may be necessary to conduct the activities of the Friendship City Partnership and how they will be obtained and from whom. If none, state "no funding required."

6. Profile of the Requesting Partner Organization

A brief profile (two pages or less) of the applying non-profit (in English), including background, location, nature, size, and relevant programs. If available, please include brochures or other written information. [Web information in English is fine for the latter part, if available; however it should be edited to address the specific nature of the proposed agreement.]

7. Please add any additional information about this Partnership you wish to share and submit this form to:

Friendship City Designees

To be completed by City of Vancouver staff

8. City of Vancouver Designated Representative (Main Contact):

9. Names, title and department of any others from the City of Vancouver or the Community of Vancouver who may be involved in any Partnership activities:

10. Partner Organization Designated Representative:

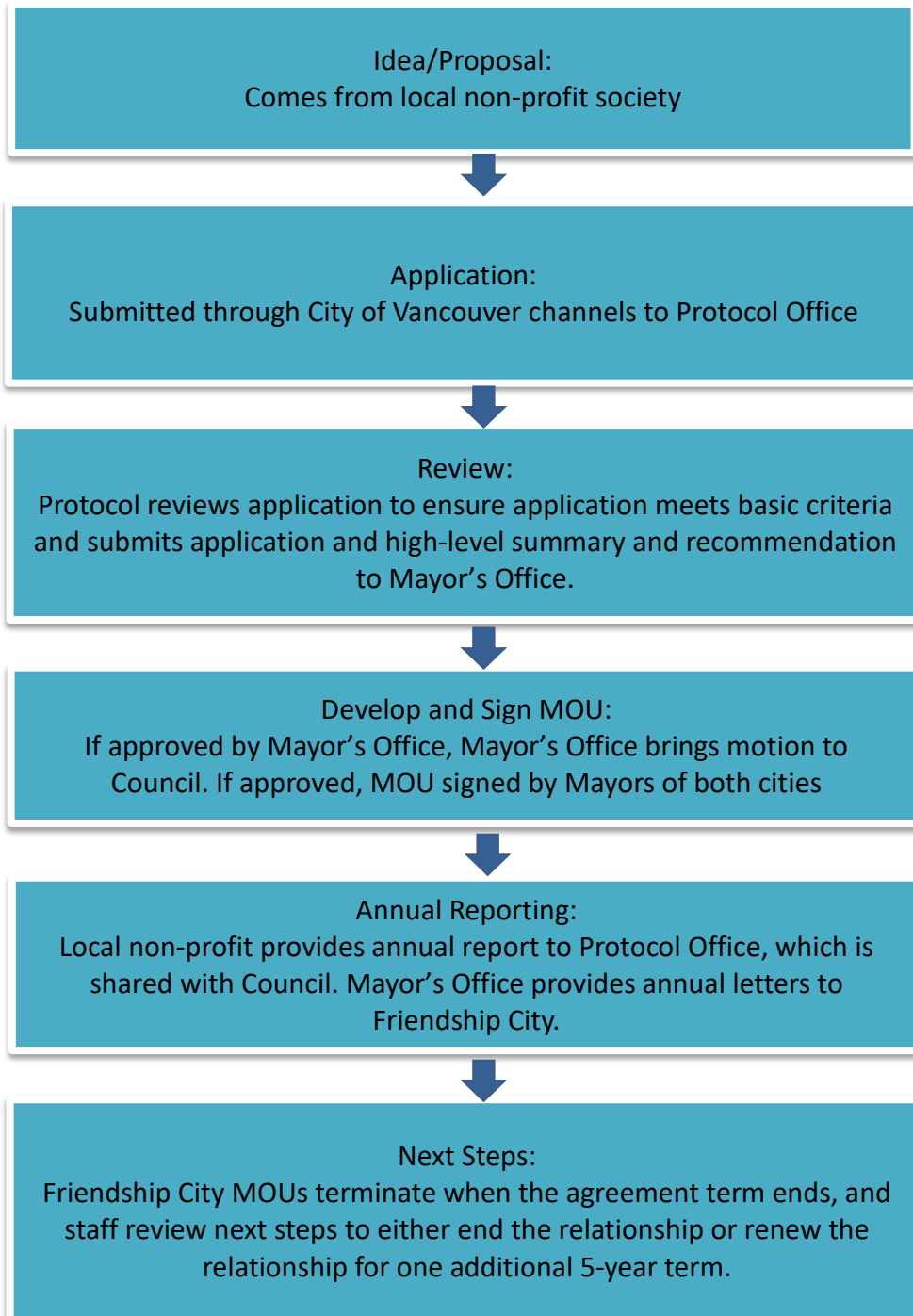
11. Names, title and department of any others from the Partnership City or Community who will be partners of the Agreement.

To be completed by City of Vancouver staff

12. Primary Signing Authority for City of Vancouver (Mayor):

13. Primary Signing Authority for Partner Abroad (Mayor, City Council Member, etc.)

RECOMMENDED FRIENDSHIP CITY APPROVAL PROCESS



ENHANCED FRIENDSHIP CITY PROGRAM, KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Friendship City relationships would still be initiated by a locally based non-profit society that represents a resident and/or business community in Vancouver. The non-profit would be responsible for submitting an application to the City, and would be responsible for the majority of Friendship City costs, activities and events, and the submission of an annual progress report to Council.
- Applications would be reviewed by a cross-departmental team lead by a staff member in the Protocol Office with input from Intergovernmental Relations and Strategic Partnership, Mayor's Office, Vancouver Economic Commission and other departments as appropriate.
- The cross-departmental team would consider the application in the context of creating a mutually beneficial relationship for the local non-profit society, the Friendship City and the City of Vancouver. Based on the overall objectives and goals of the relationship, City staff across departments would be called upon for their expertise (ie: sustainability, cultural services, housing affordability) to valuably contribute to the success of the relationship. The Friendship City relationship would be governed by a Council approved, 5-year MOU agreement.
- Fifty thousand dollars of the suggested \$60,000 budget would fund a .5 staff person in the Protocol Office to manage the application intake and review process, convene the cross-departmental team to review and gather internal input regarding the costs and benefits of entering into a Friendship City relationship, write and submit a report to Council outlining the benefits the relationship would bring to the parties so that Council has a full picture of the purpose, objectives and potential outcomes of each relationship. The additional staff would also liaise with the local non-profit, Friendship City and City departments to draft the 5 year MOU agreement, and manage Friendship City relations on behalf of the City.
- Ten thousand of the suggested \$60,000 would provide two one-time financial contributions (\$5,000 each) to the local non-profit at the time of the signing of the MOU. The \$5,000 would be used by the local non-profit to support activities and events at a local level that promote the Friendship City relationship. Examples may include, cultural events that feature performing artists and food representatives from the Friendship City and region, engagement in local festivals, educational promotion of initiatives, or honorariums for guest speakers. This grant is similar to the City of Toronto's Friendship Program, which provides the non-profit with an annual \$5000 grant. Given the City of Vancouver's financial constraints, staff recommend the one-time grant rather than the annual grant.
- The additional staff resource and financial contribution to the local non-profit would leverage the City's relationship with the local non-profits and Friendship City and provide tangible benefits to all parties.
- The Friendship City MOU would require review by the City's Law Department and approval by Council through a report that outlines staff recommendations to pursue the Friendship City.