
SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL RECEIVES GRANT FROM THE STEVENS INITIATIVE TO EXPAND VIRTUAL EXCHANGE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

WASHINGTON, DC, (November 6, 2017) - The Stevens Initiative today announced the award of a 1.5-year grant to Sister Cities International, one of 13 new grants funded through an international competition to use online, collaborative learning to increase cross-cultural understanding and equip young people with the skills needed to thrive in a 21st century economy.

Sister Cities International is among the second cohort of virtual exchange programs to be funded by the Stevens Initiative, an international effort to build career and global competence skills for young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by growing and enhancing the field of virtual exchange: online, international, and collaborative learning. The Initiative honors the legacy of Ambassador Chris Stevens, who devoted his life to building bridges between people from different cultures.

The new programs will expand the Initiative's reach to 30,000 students in 18 countries in the Middle East and North Africa and 31 American states.

Sister Cities International will oversee two programs through its Special Education and Virtual Learning in the U.S. and Palestine (SEVLUP) grant in collaboration with team members in Gainesville, Florida and Muscatine, Iowa. The Gainesville program will connect students in Florida and Qalqilya, Palestinian Territories to develop an ASL-Palestinian sign language video dictionary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. The Muscatine program will work with sister city Ramallah, Palestinian Territories, to provide special education training for educators and utilize best practices to expand intercultural special education curricula.

The Initiative's second grant competition was open to US and MENA educational institutions and non-profit organizations. It prioritized virtual exchange projects that focused on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); projects that are rooted in project-based learning; projects that support the education of refugees across the MENA region; and projects that propose in-person exchange to complement the virtual learning experience.

"Sister city exchanges have always played an important role in increasing global understanding among youth and building bridges across cultures." said Tim Quigley, Chairman of the Board and CEO of Sister Cities International. "We are thankful for this opportunity to work with the Stevens Initiative and our team members to provide educational resources and training to improve access to quality education for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and special education students in the United States and MENA regions."

"Of 43,000 deaf citizens in Palestine, less than two percent attend school and receive formal education," said Waleed Nazzal, General Manager of the Al-Amal Association for the Deaf. "With the support of the Stevens Initiative, Sister Cities International, and our partners in Gainesville, we will be able to create a resource that expands educational opportunities for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing youth and allows participating students to build international friendships and enrich language skills."

The other Stevens Initiative grantees announced today are:

- Al-Quds University

- An-Najah National University
- Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport
- Arizona State University
- Ball State University
- Institute of International Education
- IREX
- Johns Hopkins University
- Karam Foundation
- University of Nebraska – Lincoln
- WGBH Educational Foundation
- William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan

Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for over 500 member communities with relationships in over 2,000 communities in 145 countries. This sister city network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers who work tirelessly to promote peace and understanding through programs and projects focusing on arts and culture, youth and education, economic and sustainable development, and humanitarian assistance.

Housed at the Aspen Institute, the Stevens Initiative is a collaboration between the family of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, the U.S. Department of State, the Bezos Family Foundation, the governments of the United Arab Emirates and Morocco, and Microsoft, Twitter, Vidyo, and LRNG. Visit us at www.stevensinitiative.org.

More Information

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) builds relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, professional and private exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships and mentoring programs. These exchange programs improve foreign relations and strengthen the national security of the United States, support U.S. international leadership, and provide a broad range of domestic benefits by helping break down barriers that often divide us. Visit eca.state.gov.

The Bezos Family Foundation supports rigorous, inspired learning environments for young people, from birth through high school, to put their education into action. Through investments in research, public awareness, systems building and programs, the foundation works to elevate the field of education and improve life outcomes for all children.



SisterCities
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