



# **BROADENING DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT ACROSS AMERICA**

**Executive Summary** of the Truman Center  
City & State Diplomacy Task Force Report

June 2022



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America is facing increasingly aggressive global competitors and a host of transnational challenges, from climate change to COVID-19. These complex threats do not stop at national borders, and solutions require shared innovation, collective focus, and action. The Biden/Harris Administration deserves credit for rebuilding trust and working closely with allies and partners to confront these threats. But there remains another largely untapped resource within the United States.

City and state governments are investing in diplomacy. They are engaged globally, establishing relationships that advance their values and benefit their constituents. These relationships are often grounded in economic interests, from international trade and investment to tourism. But they are also increasingly focused on advocacy and practical steps to address climate change, migration, gender equity, democratic resilience, as well as the response to and recovery from the pandemic. With more mechanisms for communication and collaboration between federal, state, and city governments, all levels of government can contribute to U.S. foreign policy.

Connecting city and state diplomacy with U.S. foreign policy objectives is a massive opportunity. City and state governments in other parts of the world are growing their international engagement, including through subnational networks and within the United Nations system. Most cities and states in the United States are not keeping pace, and often lack the resources and knowledge to support a dedicated international diplomacy team and strategy. The efforts of many are needed to close this gap; the U.S. State Department, in particular, should do much more to understand and support city and state diplomacy.

In March 2022, the Truman Center for National Policy created the Task Force on City and State Diplomacy, comprising more than 30 experts and practitioners and guided by five co-chairs. This Task Force collaborated through virtual workshops and in written submissions to prepare this report.

**The report recommends ways the U.S. State Department can strengthen ties with cities, states, and other subnational governments, as well as what those governments can do to build their capacity for diplomacy, and how academic, community-based, and philanthropic organizations can support these connections.**

These three perspectives inform the structure of this Task Force report. Key excerpts of the task force recommendations follow:

## SECTION 1

# Structuring Commitment

## Establish an Office of City and State Diplomacy

Building more regular engagement with cities and states throughout the United States requires a team to lead the work. Bipartisan legislation to establish an Office of City and State Diplomacy in the U.S. State Department was introduced in both the 116th and 117th Congress, but has not yet passed. Congress should act quickly to adopt this legislation, to ensure this office is a permanent component of the Department. Even without passage of this bill, the State Department should establish this office and appoint its leadership and staff immediately. This office should be led by an Ambassador-at-large and be informed by both the Secretary's priorities as well as inputs from cities and states. An Office of City and State Diplomacy can strengthen communication and collaboration between the State Department and subnational governments on U.S. foreign policy priorities, expand the reach and impact of the State Department, and support greater awareness of and engagement by city and state governments in global affairs.

## Expand engagement with Cities and States Nationwide

Engaging cities and states begins by establishing the office and appointing its lead, but should continue by expanding opportunities for State Department personnel to serve with city and state governments throughout the U.S. The Pearson Fellowship, most frequently used to place Foreign Service Officers as staff for members of Congress, was established with a broader remit to embed professional diplomats with public organizations around the U.S., including state and local governments. The State Department should employ this existing mechanism to increase the number of Pearson Fellowships and work with city and state governments to define how these fellows

can support the development, expansion, and coordination of their priorities for diplomacy. Other existing outreach initiatives, like the Hometown Diplomat and Diplomat-in-Residence programs, should be expanded in order to better reach a larger and more diverse swath of communities. For the State Department to fully embrace city and state diplomacy, it will require a broader understanding of how subnational governments are engaged with the world. These examples should inform Foreign Service curriculum, training, and career advancement.

## Map the Current State of City and State Diplomacy and Build Enablers

The State Department should work with partners to map existing city and state diplomacy efforts throughout the United States by building a dynamic catalog with data that is crowd-sourced by inputs from communities. This is one of several enablers that would strengthen the relationships between the State Department and city and state governments, thereby encouraging cities and states to grow their diplomatic efforts. Additional recommendations for the State Department include:

- Establishing a Local-to-Global Engagement Fund as a competitive grant program to incentivize diplomacy by cities and states.
- Developing a toolkit for cities and states to grow their diplomacy, including awareness of existing federal programs and opportunities for engagement.
- Creating a “diplomatic marketplace” or “federal register for diplomatic opportunities” through which city and state governments can offer their leaders (or recommend others) to participate in international events, convenings, or delegations. This platform could include opportunities from other federal agencies in addition to the State Department.

## SECTION 2

# Building Capacity

## Set Priorities and Explore Models for International Engagement

City and state diplomacy creates new relationships between the United States and the world, rooted in shared values and culture, economic interdependence, and solving complex problems. Not only should the State Department identify ways to strengthen these ties, it should encourage cities and states to develop more of them. City and state governments throughout the United States should consider their priorities for international engagement, and explore models that exist to support a dedicated lead or a team. Whether their diplomacy is motivated by economic development, shared action on transnational challenges like climate change, or both, cities and states should consider how non-profit organizations or subnational networks may support their international engagement. Cities and states should regularly communicate how their international engagement creates benefits for their communities, including through technical exchanges, educational opportunities, jobs, investment, and collective impact.

## Build Diplomatic Connections That Start at Home

Hosting foreign delegations, engaging regularly with foreign consular missions and diaspora communities, and connecting to international conferences or cultural events are strategies for cities and states to bolster their diplomacy and leverage what is already happening close to home. Just by showing up, cities and states can demonstrate that they value these international connections. City and state governments should identify benchmarks for their international engagement, evaluate the impact (e.g., foreign investment, delegations hosted, international direct flights) of their outreach, and capture trends that inform city and state priorities.



## SECTION 3

# Partnering with Communities

## Leverage the Resources of Academic and Research Institutions

Academic and research institutions are ecosystems unto themselves, with resources that include faculty, students, alumni networks, convening spaces, and satellite campuses overseas. In partnership with cities and states, these institutions can jumpstart international engagement and provide additional bandwidth to support diplomacy. These institutions can also offer young people—including international students—opportunities to partner with city and state governments in their diplomacy.

## Partner with Nonprofit, Community-based Organizations

Many nonprofit and community-based organizations are affiliated with international organizations or connect to a global mission. They offer city and state governments an existing network of advocates for greater international engagement, as well as platforms to share their diplomatic priorities and needs. Community-based organizations should support cities and states by encouraging their diplomacy, sharing opportunities for international engagement, linking to diaspora communities, and facilitating technical or cultural exchanges that deepen substantive government-to-government relationships.

## Connect with Philanthropy and Their Grantees

Philanthropic organizations should connect their networks and grantees to city and state governments interested in expanding their diplomacy, and create a global community with shared solutions and expertise. Both philanthropic and corporate social responsibility programs should consider how working with cities and states who are engaged with the world aligns to their mission. They should support cities, states and nonprofits with grants, expertise, or public-private partnerships to bolster their diplomacy and insulate international engagement from political transitions.