

Vermont Sister-State Working Group Final Report

*Tim Tierney, Director of Business Recruitment and International Trade
Department of Economic Development
Co-Chair, Sister State Working Group*

Background

- Working Group was created during the 2024 legislative session through Act 132 (sunsets March 31, 2026).
- Charged with exploring ways to formalize an international exchange system to strengthen global partnerships, collaboration, and economic opportunities. Findings are outlined in the [final report](#).
- Met 14 times to develop recommendations supporting cultural, educational, and economic partnerships with sister states or regions worldwide.
- Recommendation is to establish a Vermont sister-state program that positions Vermont as globally connected, with benefits extending to communities, businesses, families, and beyond.

Working Group

Tim Tierney, Co-Chair Secretary of Commerce and Community Development designee

Patricia Preston, Co-Chair Vermont Council on World Affairs

Debra Bloom Secretary of Education designee

Trevor Lowell Secretary of Agriculture designee

Susan Evans-McClure Vermont Arts Council designee

Major General Gregory Knight Adjutant General

Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Enriquez National Guard State Partnership Program Director

Lise Veronneau Sister City Committee Burlington-Honfleur France

Peter Lynch Green Across the World, Inc. Senate Committee on Committees appointee

Representative Edye Graning House Speaker's appointee

Jessica Vintinner Agency of Commerce and Community Development Administrative Support

Nathan Davidson Agency of Commerce and Community Development Administrative Support

Process

- Met with directors of other sister-state programs (Hawaii, Maryland, Philadelphia, etc.)
 - Obtained application materials and internal review documents for use as templates for developing a structured and transparent framework for Vermont
- Examined Vermont's existing Sister-State and Sister-City relationships (Tottori, Japan; Honfleur, France; Thies, Senegal; Austria; and North Macedonia)
- Key input from the Vermont National Guard and the Vermont Council on World Affairs
- Assessed international exchange activities already taking place across the state, particularly within academic institutions and institutions of higher learning, to identify existing assets and opportunities for coordination.

Proposed Framework

- **Purpose:** Establish a formal selection committee to evaluate, recommend, and monitor sister-state partnerships that advance cultural exchange, economic development, education, and diplomacy.
- **Authority:**
 - Established under the Governor of Vermont
 - Operates in coordination with ACCD
 - Governor's Office retains final approval authority
- **Committee Role:**
 - Review new and existing sister-state partnerships
 - Apply standardized evaluation criteria and scoring thresholds
 - Conduct due diligence and sunset reviews
 - Recommend partnerships to the Governor and Legislature
- **Application & Review Process:**
 - Bi-annual application cycles with set deadlines
 - ACCD conducts initial review; Committee evaluates within same quarter
 - Two application review meetings and two program management meetings annually

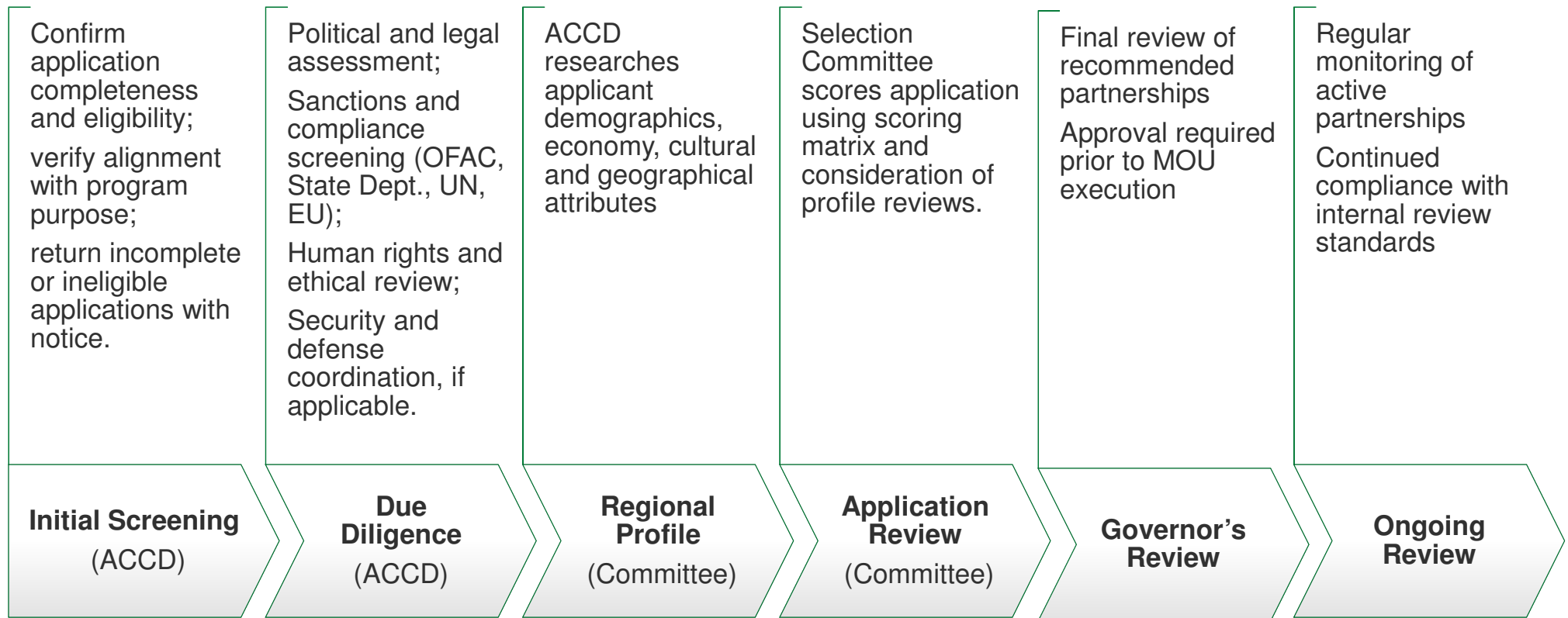
Proposed Framework, Cont.

- **Evaluation Standards:**
 - Cultural compatibility
 - Mutual economic benefit
 - Educational exchange potential
 - Strategic alignment and diplomatic feasibility
- **Reporting & Transparency:**
 - Annual report due January 15 to Governor and General Assembly
 - Compliance with Vermont Open Meeting Law
 - Registry of all current and historical sister-state partnerships
- **Membership:**
 - 9 members representing state government, Legislature, cultural, military, and educational institutions
 - Appointed positions with staggered two-year terms
- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Annual recommendations (approved and denied applications)
 - Program performance updates
 - Strategic outlook and partnership opportunities

Applicant Screening

- **Why it's Needed:**
 - International and subnational engagement involves diplomatic, political, and national security sensitivities that are not appropriate for full public disclosure.
- **Key Risks Addressed:**
 - Foreign policy alignment and legal compliance
 - Human rights and governance concerns
 - Geopolitical and reputational risk to Vermont
- **Recommendation:**
 - Establish a formal, confidential internal review process within the Sister-State Committee to evaluate sensitive political, ethical, and strategic factors.
- **How it Works:**
 - Standardized, confidential review of sister-state applications
 - Conducted in coordination with ACCD, a designated state lead, and federal partners (including the U.S. Department of State), as appropriate
- **Outcomes:**
 - Partnerships aligned with Vermont's cultural, educational, economic, and diplomatic goals
 - Compliance with state and federal law, including sanctions
 - Reduced risk and stronger, more sustainable international partnerships

Review Process, Cont.



Application Form & Scoring Matrix

- **Purpose:**
 - Standardized application and scoring process to support a formal, consistent sister-state program.
- **Informed by Best Practices:**
 - Existing global partnerships
 - Motivation to partner with Vermont
 - Clear benefits to Vermont
 - Strength of public, private, and civic support
- **Application Focus Areas:**
 - Partnership rationale and benefits (culture, economy, education, diplomacy)
 - Existing relationships and historical ties
 - Coordinating organizations and government support
 - Oversight structure and local leadership commitment
- **Scoring Matrix:**
 - Standardized evaluation criteria set by the Committee
 - Minimum score required for recommendation to the Governor
 - Supplemental information not scored; reviewed in later phases

Questions?

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