



# BRIEF 4.1. LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH DIASPORA AND MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES FOR GLOBAL TIES AND RESILIENCE

Local governments with strong, trusting relations with their diaspora and multiethnic communities are best positioned for impactful global engagement. These connections can enhance global economic and diplomatic ties, while strengthening local cohesion and resilience to foreign interference. Informed collaboration with foreign embassies and consulates at home can further improve community engagement and amplify cultural and economic benefits.

## 1. The opportunity: tapping the potential of diaspora and community connections.

**Local governments possess valuable international assets in their diverse populations.** Diaspora and multiethnic communities carry both local knowledge and expansive international networks that can strengthen a region's economic competitiveness, cultural vibrancy, and social cohesion. Deep relations based on culture and heritage create the foundations for long-term diplomatic and economic benefits.

Bristol, United Kingdom demonstrates this potential with over 90 spoken languages and 185 countries of birth. The city's International Strategy, Bristol Global City, focuses one of its four strategic outcomes on global connections of its international diaspora, recognizing how international communities link Bristol to the world while creating opportunities in culture, business, and education (see case study below).

**Local governments can also tap their own diaspora in other countries to enhance their international connections and cohesion.** For instance, Okinawa leverages Okinawans living overseas by convening the Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival every five years to celebrate the roots and the achievements of this community in service of industry, peace, and culture worldwide. Similarly, Scotland recognizes that *"international relations are fundamentally about relationships. (...) The Scottish Government has long believed that better engaging our diaspora—family and friends of Scotland globally—can not only benefit Scotland economically and enrich our culture but also improve Scotland's connections and reputation."* (see case studies below).

## 2. Strategic guidance for diaspora and community partnership development

**Build trust through regular and dedicated engagement.** Successful engagement with diaspora communities starts with trust and listening. Building direct and diverse links through meetings and structured consultation enables the identification of specific needs. For instance, Bristol convened representatives from 20 communities in a Diaspora Dialogue Group to discuss how government offices could support their communities. This engagement unearthed specific requests, as well as ideas for business development and cultural events (see case study below).

**Acknowledgment complex histories.** Memorial work strengthens long-term trust, as illustrated by the efforts from the Bristol Legacy Foundation (see case study below). Beyond acknowledgement, Scotland introduced equality objectives in its international diaspora engagement explicitly addressing historical injustices of its colonial legacy and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. When supporting community celebrations of cultural holidays and historic figures, local governments should apply consistent, transparent criteria across communities.

**Recognize different perspectives within communities.** Avoid treating any single organization or individual as representing an entire diaspora community. Ensure varied engagement within communities rather than treating them as monoliths and apply consistent support across all communities.

**Develop diaspora partnerships with clear purpose, whether you are seeking to advance:**

- Cultural enrichment: arts programming, educational exchanges, heritage festivals and cultural identity preservation.
- Economic development: talent retention, trade connections, investment attraction, tourism promotion.
- Diplomatic outreach: strengthening sister city/state relationships, facilitating official visits and bilateral cooperation.
- Policy development: international perspective on local challenges, technical expertise.
- Social cohesion: community integration, anti-discrimination initiatives, cross-cultural dialogue.

**Support diaspora representatives as global ambassadors and connectors.** Diasporas and their representatives can champion ideas and opportunities overseas through their existing networks and links that go beyond civic and institutional avenues. This role can even be formalized by designating honorary or official envoys as done by Maryland and Bristol (see case studies below). State, local, and devolved governments can support their diaspora worldwide by funding projects that increase its visibility, reputation, and connections, as illustrated by the Scottish Connections Fund.

**Leverage consular relationships strategically.** Consulates can be useful partners for state and local governments in supporting diaspora engagement and events, celebrations, and commemorations. These relations also create a diplomatic multiplier effect, with consular representatives serving as information conduits to both their governments and local diaspora communities. For instance, Bologna, Italy developed an innovative model for diaspora engagement centered on regular dialogue with consular representatives. The city hosts webinar calls providing updates on municipal policies and economic issues, with focused attention to issues relevant to specific diaspora communities. Honorary consuls may not have direct immediate contact with home country officials, but they are influential champions of cultural and economic goals.

**Effective engagement with embassy and consular partners on diaspora issues requires appropriate boundaries.** State and local government should exercise vigilance on political matters and establish clear protocols for official interactions. If not managed properly, collaboration with embassies and consulates can create foreign interference risks (see Brief 3.1. on Guidelines for engaging with foreign governments).

## Insights from the Field



### Maryland's model of Citizens Ambassadors.<sup>1</sup>

Maryland's leaders throughout the past several decades have known that one of Maryland's most important assets is its diverse constituency. The Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI) is the State of Maryland's lead agency for diaspora engagement. GOCI houses several ethnic and cultural commissions that serve as advisory bodies to the Governor and state agencies, representing the diverse communities within Maryland.

Additionally, the Office of the Secretary of State maintains the Sister State Program and international business advisory councils, under which community members serve as "citizen ambassadors" to advance the State's interests. The members of these volunteer bodies devote their skills and high-level connections to the staff, who then perform due diligence to assess opportunities. Additionally, several members of the Maryland General Assembly, the state legislature, are part of the diaspora community as well, bringing their own connections to the benefit of Maryland.



### Increasing Scotland's influence and reputation worldwide with the Scottish Connections Fund<sup>2</sup>

A key element of the Scottish Connections Framework is the Scottish Connection Fund. The Scottish Connections Fund aims to promote increased visibility or connectivity between Scottish diaspora communities outside Scotland, or with Scotland itself. It offers funding to individuals

<sup>1</sup> Contribution from Maryland (United States)

<sup>2</sup> Contribution from the Scottish Government (United Kingdom)

and organizations around the world to take forward new and innovative projects, that will help to bring together Scotland's diaspora and promote Scotland's reputation and interests. All projects align to the aims and objectives of the Scottish Connections Framework.

After a pilot round in 2023-2024, the Fund attracted 65 proposals in 2024-2025 from organizations across six continents. Eleven projects were selected through a competitive process and receive funding to a total of £49,997.

The successful projects reflect Scotland's wide range of international links, including themes of language and heritage, music, education, and business. Successful projects include the promotion of the Gaelic language in Taiwan, the inclusion of Scottish literature in German schools, the promotion of Scottish traditions in Florida, USA, Nova Scotia, Canada, and Sao Paulo, Brazil, and an ["Africa Scotland Business Network's Future Leaders Business Network."](#)



### **How Bristol leverages the connections of its international diaspora for local cohesion and global appeal<sup>3</sup>**

Bristol's International Strategy, [Bristol Global City](#), has one of its four strategic outcomes focused on the global connections of its international diaspora: *"international communities link Bristol to the world, creating a vibrant, cohesive and welcoming city, and bringing opportunities for culture, business and education."*

Three very different strands of work that support resilience and global connections through working with diaspora are highlighted here:

- Diaspora dialogue group: Supported by British Council Funding, and working with Bristol's Black South West Network, Bristol's former Deputy Mayor convened an international diaspora dialogue group with representatives from across the community to seek views on where the city could collectively build stronger links on culture, education and business. Examples of recommendations included mapping out existing festivals to see where there could be increased diaspora elements supporting opportunity to link and connect overseas including film festivals, tech festivals as well as music and street art, promoting overseas examples of successful diaspora investment among others, and involving diaspora representatives in UK government trade and business delegations overseas.
- [Bristol's International Ambassadors](#): each year three international Ambassadors are selected, including representatives from international diaspora, to champion Bristol's interests and opportunities overseas through their existing connections and links that go beyond civic and institutional links, e.g. we have a former boxing Commonwealth Champion, a robotics entrepreneur, artist and DJ making the most of their connections for the city across various global continents.
- Bristol City Council is an institutional partner of [Bristol's Legacy Foundation](#) who were set up to amplify the voices of African Heritage Communities through culture, education and public space initiatives and memorialization and legacy programs. International roundtables have been held by with cities overseas in Europe, USA, Caribbean and Africa who have similar organizations and program to share best practice and establish links.



### **How Welsh culture and heritage can drive meaningful diplomatic and economic outcomes.<sup>4</sup>**

The Welsh diaspora continues to be a powerful asset in international engagement. A notable example is Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, originally from Llandudno, who emigrated to Utah in the 1850s and went on to become a pioneering physician, suffragist, and the first woman Senator in the United States. Her legacy was recently honored with a statue in the National Statuary Hall in Washington, DC. This became a springboard for renewed ties with the Utah State Government.

<sup>3</sup> Contribution from Bristol (United Kingdom)

<sup>4</sup> Contribution from the Welsh Government (United Kingdom)

opening new avenues of cooperation in nuclear energy and FinTech. It is a testament to how culture and heritage can drive meaningful diplomatic and economic outcomes.

Through strategic planning, cultural storytelling, and a commitment to values-led diplomacy, Wales has made significant strides on the world stage. Wales has shown that international impact does not depend on size, but on a clear strategy, unity of voice, and the power of shared values.



#### **Okinawa long-lasting solid ties with Okinawa's overseas community and related-initiatives.<sup>5</sup>**

Okinawa is one of the largest prefectures whose ancestors emigrated to North and South America. Our first emigrants went to Hawaii more than 100 years ago. It is now thought that there are about 420,000 Okinawan descendants overseas. Our ties are strong based not only on our shared history and culture, but on the spirit of mutual assistance and warmhearted relations. This expanding network of Uchinanchu (Okinawans living overseas) culminates at the Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival. Held about every five years, we welcome over 7,000 overseas participants from the U.S. Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina among others. We hope this network will continue to expand and that Okinawan identity will be passed down to the next generations.



#### **How Scotland harnesses diaspora relations for local cohesion and global connections.<sup>6</sup>**

Scotland is an open, connected and outward-looking country with a long history of intellectual, cultural and economic exchange. Scotland's diaspora and our Scottish Connections are an extension of Scotland itself. Recent research suggested that upwards of 40 million people worldwide consider themselves to have Scottish heritage.

We initially commissioned an independent literature review [report](#) into effective diaspora networks and engagement in other countries, with recommendations on how learnings could be applied to Scotland—this was published in December 2021. Further [independent qualitative research](#) was then published in October 2022. The tangible recommendations provided by this research helped develop the Scottish Connections Framework and drive a global engagement plan to reach out to our diaspora. [The Scottish Connections Framework](#) was published in April 2023 and outlined a cross-cutting approach to diaspora engagement. Taking a **broad definition of diaspora**, we aim to strengthen and expand Scotland's links and networks with Scottish people living elsewhere in the world, those with Scottish heritage, people who have previously lived in Scotland, including alumni; and those with a professional, business, cultural or other links to Scotland.

As part of our commitment to everyone with Scottish connections, we launched **digital resources** to help people with Scottish links be better connected than ever before. Two digital tools are available to help people join our [#ScottishConnections community](#). Registration is available both for organizations and for individuals.

Anyone around the world can [subscribe](#) to a **Newsletter** as a member of Scotland's international community to receive regular communications on what's of interest to each individual – whether that's news from Scotland or local activity. We provide community information, whether individuals are part of our heritage diaspora, want to connect with Scottish business or education, or want to hear more about our arts and culture.

A [Community Directory](#) brings together worldwide Scottish organizations and groups into one handy list which includes heritage organizations, arts and culture groups, alumni and student groups, business networks, organizers of Scotland-themed events, like Highland Games, and any other organization that helps to celebrate Scotland. The Community Directory is regularly updated and [new registrations](#) are welcome.

<sup>5</sup> Contribution from Okinawa (Japan)

<sup>6</sup> Contribution from the Scottish Government (United Kingdom)

# About this Toolkit: Strategic guidance based on experiences from the field.

State and local leaders receive visiting foreign delegations, opportunities for international partnerships, and pressure to engage globally—but no clear guidance on how to do it right. This Toolkit provides that strategic guidance, building upon the insights and best practices from a group of innovative city, state, and regional government leaders from nine countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States

The result is a practical guide organized around the core challenges local leaders face most often. It provides strategic guidance to:

- Build an international strategy that serves community's priorities while avoiding common pitfalls (Briefs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)
- Manage relationships that create economic opportunities and jobs (Briefs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
- Navigate security threats and potential risks (Briefs 3.1, 3.2)
- Turn international connections into influence and resilience (Briefs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

Each brief includes specific steps and real examples from local leaders, experts, and practitioners. If you're using this Toolkit to apply an innovation locally or have questions or suggestions, [please fill out this short survey](#).