



2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT & 2026-2027 WORK PLAN



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In an increasingly complex world, the simple act of people connecting with people – building understanding one relationship at a time – is perhaps our most powerful diplomatic tool.

Preeti V. Shah
U.S. Consul General for
Duesseldorf

*... and also a former Arlington resident,
speaking at the Welcome Reception for
the Arlington/Aachen Family Exchange,
Aachen, Germany
March 2026*

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Letter from the Chair

I am pleased to share our annual report, which celebrates the Arlington Sister City Association's (ASCA) accomplishments over the past year and looks ahead to the exciting opportunities before us. With the energy and dedication of our Board of Directors, Sister City Committees, and the commitment of our remarkable volunteer community, ASCA continues to bring Arlington and our sister cities closer together through exchanges, cultural programs, and meaningful community involvement.

ASCA is a volunteer organization, and everything we do is accomplished by committed volunteers who give their time, energy, and expertise to the organization. Our Board members and Sister City Committee volunteers take on a wide range of responsibilities, from organizing student and family exchanges and producing community educational events to managing finances and developing partnerships. I am grateful for their continued commitment and for the many hours they contribute throughout the year.

This year was one of deepened partnerships. Our Aachen Committee reached full capacity for the Elementary/Family Exchange — with 50 families accepted from 62 applicants representing students from 17 public elementary schools and 3 private schools — a testament to the program's enduring appeal and the powerful bonds it creates between families. The Aachen High School Exchange brought together Arlington and Aachen students in educational and cultural experiences that will last a lifetime, and we continue to expand access to South Arlington schools, ensuring that these opportunities reach every corner of our community.

We were honored to mark the 20th Anniversary of our relationship with Reims, France, celebrating two decades of friendship through a commemorative dinner, the inauguration of the Musée de la Reddition in Reims, and Arlington County Board Member Takis Karantonis's official visit to Reims — reaffirming the partnership in person. The inaugural year of the digital Pen Pal Program, connecting Wakefield High School students with peers at De La Salle School in Reims, opened a new and exciting chapter in educational exchange.

Our San Miguel Committee, under new leadership, brought a fresh sense of energy and purpose — hosting the Resource and Community Fair that served over 225 Arlington community members, participating in the Salvadoran Heritage Night at Nationals Park, and building toward a milestone 20th Anniversary celebration. The Ivano-Frankivsk Committee continued its steadfast commitment to our sister city relationship, conducting a virtual firefighter exchange and sustaining vital connections despite the ongoing challenges of war.

The Education Task Force completed its inaugural year with real accomplishments — launching the Arlington Young Artists & Authors Showcase, connecting an Arlington student with the Sister Cities International Youth Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, and building the infrastructure for expanding the Pen Pal Program across all of our sister city relationships.

Looking ahead, our priorities include:

- Strengthening our sister city partnerships and expanding opportunities for cultural exchange.
- Creating meaningful educational experiences through arts, culture, student, and family programs.
- Supporting exchanges that allow Arlington government officials and employees to share knowledge in civic, technical, and economic fields.
- Partnering with local organizations that share our mission of building global connections.
- Building our fundraising and growing our membership and revenue base.

The Arlington Sister City Association plays an important role in fostering cultural understanding and citizen diplomacy, offering creative ways for our community to engage both here in Arlington and abroad. We are grateful for Arlington County's continued support and look forward to another exciting year together.

Daphne

Daphne Lathouras
Chair, Board of Directors

Meet the Leadership

ASCA is led by a volunteer Board of Directors elected to three-year terms, plus two ex-officio members from the Arlington County's Deputy County Manager and Arlington Public Schools. Officers are elected to one-year terms by the Board of Directors at a Board meeting on the same date as the Association's general membership meeting. Presidents of each Sister City committee may be elected by their respective committee or appointed by the ASCA Chair. Upon ratification by the Board, the Sister City President becomes a member of the Board of Directors.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Chair

Daphne Lathouras

Communications Manager
Rebuilding Together Arlington/Fairfax/Falls Church, Inc.

Vice Chair

Arshia Burney

Independent Consultant

Governance Chair

Farah Salim Eck

Managing Director, United Nations Association of the USA

Secretary

Susan McGinty

U.S. Federal Government

Treasurer

Michael Jensen

DIRECTORS

Alyssa Bivins, PhD.

Education Task Force Chair; Co-President Reims Sister City Committee

Senior Graduate Professional Development Coordinator, George Mason University

Ebenezer Nii Martey

Snr Program Manager APHA

Shannon Flanagan-Watson

Deputy County Manager
Arlington County, Virginia

Chloé Duchaj

Supervisor, World Languages
Arlington Public Schools

Daniel Vasquez

CEO/Founder
Intelliwings, LLC

Emily Lyons

President, Aachen Sister City Committee

Education Advocacy
Red Edge

Lily Caballero-Torres

President, San Miguel Sister City Committee

College & Career Counselor
Arlington Public Schools

Jose Pineda

Transportation Engineer
Virginia Department of Transportation

Dawn Darling

Former International Educator

The Arlington Sister City Association



Vision

Promoting Arlington's international profile and creating long lasting relationships. ASCA fosters productive exchanges in government, education, commerce, culture, tourism, and the arts with our Sister Cities.

Mission

ASCA is a nonprofit organization affiliated with Arlington County, Virginia. Established in 1993, ASCA supports and coordinates the activities of Arlington County's five Sister Cities: Aachen, Germany; Coyoacán, Mexico (in emeritus status); Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine; Reims, France; and San Miguel, El Salvador. ASCA works to enhance and promote the region's international profile and foster productive exchanges in education, commerce, culture, tourism, and the arts through a series of activities and programming.



Management

ASCA is actively recruiting a part-time Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager on a contract basis. The Fundraising and Community Engagement Manager reports directly to the Executive Committee and serves as both liaison and advisor to the Sister City Presidents and the Board of Directors, supporting programs and activities across the organization. Key responsibilities include fundraising, event planning, membership growth and retention, marketing and communications, and overall operational administration.

What is a Sister City?



In post-war America, President Dwight D. Eisenhower believed that, to avoid future global conflicts, people could gain a better understanding of each other's beliefs and cultures if they were given opportunities to come together. Thus, the "Sister City" concept was created and, in 1956 at President Eisenhower's Conference on Citizen Diplomacy, it was officially launched and the Sister Cities International organization (SCI) was founded as a result. The President's vision was essentially to create a network that would be a champion for peace and prosperity by fostering and facilitating bonds between people from different communities around the world. President Eisenhower reasoned that "people from different cultures could understand, appreciate, and celebrate their differences while building partnerships that would lessen the chance of new conflicts."

SCI defines a sister city as "a broad-based, long-term partnership between two communities in two countries. A relationship is officially recognized after the highest elected or appointed official from both communities sign off on an agreement to forge a sister city relationship and become sister cities."

A city may have any number of sister cities, with community involvement ranging from a half dozen to hundreds of volunteers. In addition to volunteers, sister city organizations can include representatives from nonprofits, municipal governments, the private sector, and other civic organizations.

Each sister city organization, like the Arlington Sister City Association, is independent and pursues activities that are important to them and their community including municipal, business, trade, educational, and cultural exchanges, and projects with their sister cities.

Note: Excerpts from the [Sister Cities International](http://www.sistercitiesinternational.org) website.

About ASCA

Connecting Arlington to the World

Established in 1991, the Arlington Sister City Association is a nonprofit organization affiliated with Arlington County, Virginia. ASCA supports and coordinates activities of its five Sister City Committees that work with their counterparts in Aachen, Germany; Coyoacán, Mexico (in emeritus status); Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine; Reims, France; and San Miguel, El Salvador.

ASCA works to enhance and promote Arlington's international profile and to foster productive exchanges through arts and cultural partnerships, business development, educational and professional exchanges, and government relationships. ASCA helps the people of Arlington form long-lasting partnerships and friendships with the people of its Sister Cities and beyond through its many activities and programs.



ASCA Support for Official Visits

The mayors' offices of Arlington's sister cities invite Arlington elected officials to attend important and prestigious ceremonial events in their communities. These visits are a highly visible way for Arlington to demonstrate its commitment to its sister city partnerships, and elected officials are strongly encouraged to participate. ASCA helps support the travel expenses associated with these official visits.

Arlington County also strengthens these relationships by extending official invitations to the mayors of our sister cities and welcoming visiting delegations to the Bozman Government Center for meetings with County officials and staff. The County Board and staff also help connect visiting delegations with the broader Arlington community through tours of Arlington and visits to municipal and partner facilities, such as fire stations, public art installations, and Fuse at Mason Square.



ASCA Pillars:

Best Practices for Sister City Relationships



Government

- Develop government relationships, promote government exchanges, discuss best practices, and attend official events in sister cities



Economic Development

- Promote and facilitate open dialog between Arlington business professionals and their counterparts in our Sister Cities through organizations such as Arlington Economic Development and the Arlington Chamber of Commerce
- Create network opportunities and connections for Business Exchanges



Art/Culture

- Partner with arts and cultural organizations to create and expand performing & visual arts exchanges, shared exhibitions, cultural linkages, and partnerships
- Host concerts and lectures



Education

- Organize in person exchanges for Arlington students to visit sister cities and their schools, and to have reciprocal exchanges for students from our sister cities to come to Arlington
- Facilitate teacher exchanges so teachers can observe each other's educational approaches
- Develop virtual exchanges so more Arlington students can meet their peers from our Sister Cities to learn about each other's similarities and differences



A Look Back: FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments



Standing Committees

Governance

Key responsibilities:

Governance
Nomination

- Conducted officer elections at June 2026 Board meeting: re-elected Daphne Lathouras as Chair; elected Michael Jensen as Treasurer; elected Susan McGinty as Secretary; ratified Emily Lyons as Aachen Committee President
- Elected Dawn Darling and Ebenezer Nii Martey as Directors to three-year terms at June 2026 Annual Meeting
- Elected Farah Eck as Governance Chair (July 2026)
- Delivered Board Orientation and Governance Training for FY2025-2026 (February 2026)
- Adopted new Code of Conduct for Board of Directors and volunteers (January 2026)
- Updated five-year Memorandum of Agreement with Arlington County; pending final signatures (September 2026)
- Continued Board expansion efforts toward the 25-member bylaw maximum
- Maintained compliance with bylaws, privacy and conflict of interest policies
- Initiated search for part-time Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager (Dawn Darling leading hiring process)

Finance

Key responsibilities:

Financial Management,
Compliance and
Oversight.

- Completed comprehensive financial reconciliation of FY2024-2025 with contract bookkeeper; corrected prior-year misclassifications in Aplos
- Elected Michael Jensen as Treasurer (June 2026) following interim service.
- Engaged CPA for 990 tax filing preparation (estimated annual cost ~\$1,000)
- Streamlined chart of accounts to reduce misclassification risk
- Updated expense reimbursement process to require account specification at submission
- Evaluated potential transition from Aplos to QuickBooks
- Developed SOPs for key financial transactions in Aplos
- Approved chaperone stipend policy (February 2026)

Development

Key responsibilities:

Sponsorship,
Membership Dues &
Fundraising

- Continued corporate sponsorship with Long & Foster of Arlington and Falls Church
- Managed membership dues program and member engagement initiatives

Education Task Force

Key responsibilities:

Education Activities,
Cross-committee
Collaboration

- Launched the inaugural Arlington Young Artists & Authors Showcase (ages 12–18); 7 submissions, 4 first-place winners; reception hosted pro bono by Art House 7
- Connected one Arlington student with the Sister Cities International Youth Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.
- Successfully piloted the digital Pen Pal Program: Wakefield High School (Arlington) with De La Salle School (Reims), involving 20 Arlington and 12 French students
- Secured Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Arlington Public Schools enabling Pen Pal Program expansion
- Built replicable framework for Pen Pal expansion to Ivano-Frankivsk and San Miguel
- Launched the ASCA Instagram Account

Fundraising

One of the Board's ongoing goals is to diversify ASCA's revenue through corporate sponsorships, government grants, and community fundraising. The Aachen Committee successfully maintained program fees for both the High School Exchange and the Elementary/Family Exchange, generating important revenue that sustains ASCA's programs across the organization. Long & Foster of Arlington and Falls Church continued as ASCA's corporate sponsor. The board is actively pursuing additional corporate sponsorships and grant opportunities for the coming year. The Arlington business community is a largely untapped source of growth for the association.

Policy Review

ASCA regularly reviews, drafts, and updates its policies and procedures to ensure consistency with the Bylaws, alignment with nonprofit best practices, and overall modernization. Board members and volunteers with access to confidential information complete required disclosures, including confidentiality and conflict of interest policies, as well as photo use permissions. This year, the board reviewed protocols for collection and use of exchange participant photos, including consideration of photo waivers as part of youth exchange applications.

Membership

ASCA continues to maintain healthy engagement with its members through its quarterly newsletter, special e-blasts, social media on Facebook and LinkedIn, and through events and activities. The Aachen Elementary and High School Exchange programs continue to be a primary driver of new family memberships. The San Miguel Committee's community events attracted new participants to the organization. ASCA held an annual "Meet & Greet" event for volunteer outreach and education and recruited several new board members.

Website

ASCA's website continues to be a primary resource to members, corporate supporters, prospects, students, and anyone wishing to learn more about the Arlington Sister City Association. The Aachen Committee undertook a significant website refresh for the Elementary Exchange program, creating a cleaner, more findable experience with improved search engine optimization. The committee plans to templatize this format for other ASCA programs, starting with the High School Exchange.

Leadership/Volunteer Management

ASCA's By-laws allow for up to 25 Board members. With the current Board of 14 members, ASCA sees a clear opportunity for growth. Expanding the Board is a top priority, as it will bring fresh perspectives, broaden community representation, and strengthen the organization's ability to deliver impactful programs. ASCA is deeply grateful to Arlington County Board member Takis Karantonis for his active involvement and his official travel to Reims and Aachen on behalf of ASCA.

Communications

Communications activities remain a key priority for ASCA's programming. ASCA's newsletter reaches over 1,800 subscribers. ASCA actively uses social media to engage the community, posting updates and announcements on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. ASCA continues to strengthen partnerships with Arlington Public Schools, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Arlington Economic Development, the Business Improvement Districts, Volunteer Arlington, and the Arlington County Library.

FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments:

Aachen Sister City

The Aachen-Arlington Sister City relationship is ASCA's longest standing partnership, established in 1993. Under new committee leadership this year, the relationship continues to flourish across multiple dimensions — educational, artistic, and governmental — delivering programming that connects hundreds of Arlingtonians with their counterparts in Aachen each year. The benefits of this relationship are immeasurable and we look forward to carrying it forward for many years to come.

This year, the Aachen committee voted in a new president, Emily Lyons, who was able to meet with many members of the Aachen committee in Germany in the spring of 2026 during her participation in the Elementary/Family Exchange. During this meeting, a renewed relationship between counterparts was built, and ideas and opportunities for the future were exchanged, such as the opportunity for an arts exchange.

The 5th Grade Elementary/Family Exchange

The Elementary/Family Exchange reached full capacity for the 2025-2026 cycle with **50 families** representing students from **17 public elementary** schools and 3 private schools. We had the largest applicant pool in the program's history, with a waitlist established for the second consecutive year. On the Aachen side, 120 families are currently on the waitlist for 2026/27, reflecting extraordinary demand on both continents.

In addition to the work of the Aachen Committee, the success of the exchange depends on the direct involvement of participating families on both sides. Exchange families help plan group activities and gatherings, while also spending time together in their homes and communities so that exchange partners experience the rhythms of everyday life in each city. The Elementary/Family Exchange is ASCA's largest program, involving direct family-to-family participation, with at least 200 people directly involved on both sides each year, including participating students and parents as well as siblings, spouses, and extended family members.

Official events on each side included meetings and celebrations with elected officials from the Arlington County Board and staff on our side, as well as the German Embassy. In Aachen, the current mayor was a participant in the program, and former Arlington resident, Consular General Duesseldorf, Preeti V. Shah spoke at our reception in the Coronation Hall in Aachen.

Notable highlights include Mayor of Aachen Dr. Michael Ziemons participating as an exchange family for the second time. During his visit for the elementary exchange he was welcomed by Arlington County Board Members and staff at the Bozman Government Center, had a tour of Arlington with Takis Karantonis, and dinner and a tour of Fire Station No. 8 - Halls Hill. We received positive media coverage in both Arlington and Aachen. Community partners including Arlington Babe Ruth Baseball arranged field access to Nationals Park for visiting Aachen students and parents. The committee credits strong support from Arlington County government and Arlington Public Schools as essential to the program's success.



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While governments focus on complex issues like tariffs and taxes, the children are busy discussing their hopes and dreams.

**Lord Mayor of
Aachen Dr.
Michael Ziemons**

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FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments: *Aachen Sister City*

High School Exchange

The 2025-2026 High School Exchange cohort reflects expanded geographic representation across Arlington, with South Arlington high schools now represented alongside historically predominant North Arlington schools. A priority under new committee leadership. This year, all 5 Arlington public high schools are represented, Arlington students are scheduled to arrive in Arlington in October 2026 to complete this cycle of the exchange. Scholarship funds were granted to two students to help offset the cost of the program. The committee continues to actively promote financial assistance to all interested families.



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The Arlington Aachen Exchange program was very fun and eye-opening—I got to see German culture first hand, and me and my Exchange partner have become very good friends because of it. Overall, it was a very fun trip and I hope to return to Aachen sooner rather than later.

**David, H-B
Woodlawn Student**

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Civic & Government Exchange

Arlington County Board Member Takis Karantonis attended the 2026 Karlspreis (Charlemagne Prize) ceremony in Aachen, meeting with the mayor, Aachen sister city committee president, and Consul General Preeti Shah. These visits strengthen the institutional foundation of the partnership and open new avenues for civic collaboration. The potential for an Arlington Chamber of Commerce trade mission to North Rhine-Westphalia was also explored.

While there, he was able to meet with local government officials in addition to Lord Mayor Ziemons to begin the conversations to establish a municipal-based exchange of ideas and best practices among government employees to drive discovery and innovation.

Arlington County Board and staff welcomed Mayor Ziemons to Arlington in October 2025 as noted in the report on the Family/Elementary Exchange program.



FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments: Aachen Sister City

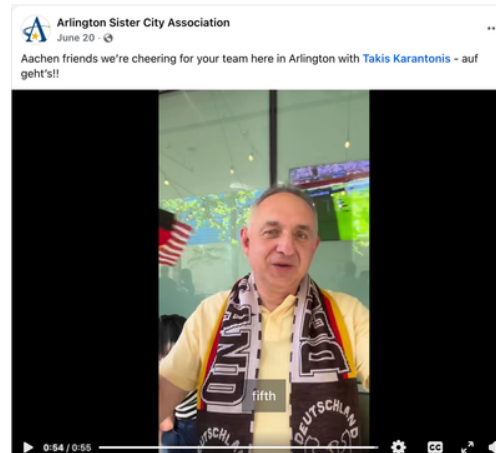
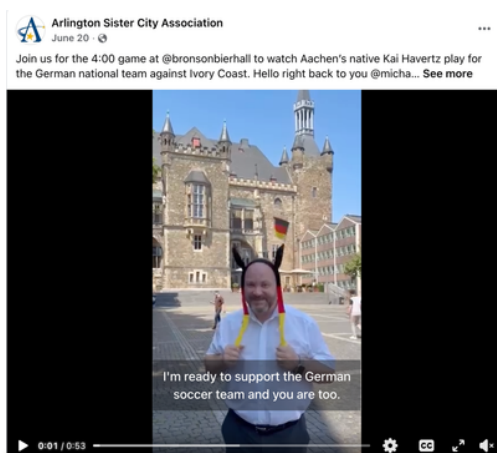
Website Refresh

The committee completed a significant refresh of the Elementary Exchange website, creating a cleaner and more findable digital experience with improved Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The committee plans to templatize this format for the High School Exchange, ensuring all families searching for these programs can easily find them.



World Cup Watch Party

The committee hosted a World Cup Watch Party focused on celebrating Aachener and Germany starting player Kai Havertz at Bronson Bier Hall for the Germany vs. Ivory Coast game. The event drew an enthusiastic group of fans, and Aachen Mayor Michael Ziemons and Arlington County Board member Takis Karantonis traded playful videos on our social media pages to help build interest in our sister city relationship.



FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments:

Reims Sister City

The Reims Sister City Committee had a milestone year, marking the 20th Anniversary of the Arlington-Reims sister city relationship with a series of meaningful events and a deepened institutional partnership. The committee, now led by Co-Presidents Dr. Alyssa Bivins and Anne-Marie Daris, continues to balance a small but dedicated membership with an ambitious program calendar.

20th Anniversary Celebration

2025 marked the 20th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Arlington and Reims — a relationship that was actually signed twice (in 2004 and in 2005), giving the committee two occasions to celebrate and, as befits the Champagne capital of the world, two reasons to raise a glass. The committee held a commemorative dinner at local Arlington restaurant the Green Pig Bistro with Takis Karantonis representing the Arlington County Board and a representative from the French Embassy in attendance, in addition to former Arlington County Board Chair Libby Garvey. This event reaffirmed the Sister City partnership in the work of the people who have sustained it over two decades.

Official Travel — Reims and the Musée de la Reddition

Arlington County Board Member Takis Karantonis traveled to Reims in connection with Victory in Europe (VE) Day commemorations and the opening of the Musée de la Reddition/Museum of the Surrender — built at the site where Germany's initial surrender was signed on May 7, 1945. Representatives of all Allied governments attended, and County Board Member Karantonis participated in a floral offering alongside representatives from Aachen.

During the visit, County Board Member Karantonis met with the president of ASCA's French counterpart committee and sat down to discuss re-establishing more regular contact. New relationships were built with school principals and educational administrators in Reims, and strong enthusiasm was expressed on the French side for deepening the partnership — including particular interest in Arlington's 250th anniversary.



Pen Pal Program — Inaugural Year

The Reims Committee successfully launched the pilot year of ASCA's first ever digital Pen Pal Program. This pilot launch connected 20 Arlington students at Wakefield High School with 12 French students at De La Salle School in Reims. The students exchanged bilingual letters, and teachers on both sides required submissions in both French and English, with two letters per exchange. The classrooms further connected via Zoom sessions across the Atlantic time zone difference.

The French students created a thank-you video for ASCA at the conclusion of the semester. The program operates under a MOU with Arlington Public Schools that protects student privacy and enables future expansion. This MOU, secured through months of careful negotiation, is now the foundation for bringing the Pen Pal Program to additional sister city relationships.

Arlington 250 History Day

The Reims Committee organized ASCA's table at the Arlington 250 History Day event. Committee member Virginie Vaselopulos coordinated the table, and the committee secured the French and Aachen flags for display. The ASCA table featured trivia about all sister cities for adults and children and was well-attended throughout the day — raising ASCA's community visibility and introducing new residents to the sister cities program.

FY 2025-2026 Accomplishments:

San Miguel Sister City

The San Miguel Sister City Committee, under the leadership of President Lily Caballero-Torres since June 2025, has pursued an active calendar of community events aimed at reconnecting with Arlington's Salvadoran community and raising the committee's visibility across the county. The committee is small but passionate, and its events in FY2025-2026 reached thousands of Arlington-area residents.

Meet and Greet

The committee hosted a Meet and Greet at a local Salvadoran restaurant, drawing 26 attendees and welcoming 4 new members. The event introduced the community to the San Miguel Committee's new leadership and laid the foundation for the year's programs.



Resource and Community Fair

The Resource and Community Fair was one of the committee's most impactful events of the year, drawing over 225 Arlington-area participants. More than 20 businesses, organizations, health professionals, and legal experts offered information and community connection. A highlight was the informational table hosted by the Consulate General of El Salvador in Virginia. The event also featured music, folkloric dancing, and a pupusa vendor, making it both a practical resource and a cultural celebration.

Salvadoran Heritage Night at Nationals Park

The committee participated in Salvadoran Heritage Day at Nationals Park, an event that drew approximately 40,000 overall attendees, with roughly 1,000 participating in Salvadoran heritage programming specifically. This provided ASCA and the San Miguel Committee with significant visibility in the broader regional Salvadoran community.



San Miguel Sister City

-- continued



DC United Salvadoran Heritage Night

In collaboration with Orgullo Salvi DMV and DC United, the San Miguel Sister City Committee participated in Salvadoran Heritage Night at Audi Field, hosting an engaging display during the soccer match featuring Salvadoran trivia and ASCA outreach materials.



Arlington Festival Latinoamericano

The committee participated in the Arlington County-hosted Festival Latinoamericano in October, engaging with the Arlington community and celebrating Latin American cultures during Hispanic Heritage Month.

World Cup Watch Party

The committee hosted a World Cup Kick-off Watch Party cheering for neighboring team Mexico against South Africa at Abi's Azteca Grill & Bar — a long-standing Salvadoran restaurant serving the Arlington community since 1986. The event drew an enthusiastic group and reinforced the committee's community involvement in Arlington



2025-2026 Accomplishments: *Ivano-Frankivsk Sister City*

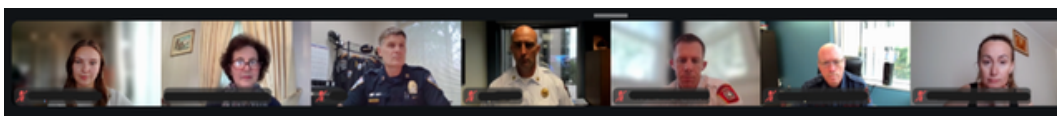
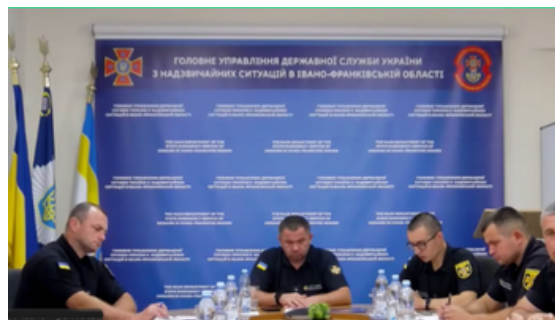
The Ivano-Frankivsk Sister City Committee continues its steadfast commitment to maintaining and strengthening ASCA's relationship with one of Ukraine's most progressive and innovative cities. Located in southwestern Ukraine in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, Ivano-Frankivsk is a university city of approximately 250,000 people with a long history and forward-thinking local governance. Arlington's sister city relationship with Ivano-Frankivsk spans approximately 15 years.

Context: The War in Ukraine

Ivano-Frankivsk is not in or near the active combat zone, but the war in Ukraine shapes daily life in the city. The local fire service — ASCA's primary institutional counterpart — has been heavily involved in responding to war-related incidents, including a Russian drone strike on an apartment building in the city in May 2026. Ukrainian firefighters are not permitted to leave the country, limiting in-person exchange travel. The committee remains committed to sustaining the relationship through every available channel.

Virtual Firefighter Exchange — September 2025

The primary programmatic activity in FY2025-2026 was a virtual exchange between the Arlington and Ivano-Frankivsk fire services, held in September 2025. The exchange covered firefighting techniques, rescue operations, and — reflecting wartime realities — the handling of explosive remnants of war, a challenge the Ivano-Frankivsk fire service faces regularly. Arlington County's Special Hazards Response Program also presented on emergency response tactics and lessons learned. ASCA extends deep appreciation to Fire Chief David Povlitz and Chief Fire Marshall Matthew Cobb for their sustained commitment to this relationship.



Rebuilding Contacts & Community Engagement

The committee is in an active rebuilding phase, re-establishing contacts in Ivano-Frankivsk disrupted during COVID-19 and the ongoing war. Multiple tracks of engagement are being pursued, including outreach to the Ukrainian-American community in the Arlington and Northern Virginia region. Takis Karantonis serendipitously encountered a representative from Ivano-Frankivsk at the Charlemagne Prize events in Aachen — a reminder that these international relationships create unexpected connections across global gatherings..

State Department Grant Application

ASCA joined with Sister Cities International in submitting an application in July 2025 to a US DEPARTMENT OF STATE program for strengthening ties with communities in Ukraine. The outcome of this application is not yet known. The committee looks forward to resuming a robust program of in-person exchanges once the security situation permits.

Connecting Our Community:

Partnerships & Growth in 2025-2026

The 2025-2026 fiscal year continued ASCA's trajectory of growth and deeper community engagement. Across all sister city programs, the year was defined by expanding access, building new institutional relationships, and demonstrating the real-world impact of citizen diplomacy.

Education Task Force: Young Artists & Authors Showcase

In Spring 2026, ASCA ran the Arlington Young Artists & Authors Showcase for its inaugural year. This competition is open to youth ages 12-18 and is based on the Sister Cities International YAAS competition. The competition accepts entries in visual art, digital art, photography, music, and poetry. This year, seven submissions yielded four first-place winners, who received giftcards and prizes supported by community partners including Dick Sullivan and Art House 7. The winners' reception was hosted pro bono by Art House 7, which expressed strong interest in continuing and expanding the partnership in future years. Five of the seven winners attended the reception with their families, and winners were eligible to submit their work to the Sister Cities International national competition. Despite this being only the first year of the competition, one ASCA youth artist winner went on to win Third Place at the Sister Cities International level competition with her entry in the poetry category.

Sister Cities International Youth Leadership Summit

ASCA connected with the Sister Cities International Youth Leadership Summit for the first time this year. The Summit program brings students from across the country to Washington, D.C. for leadership-themed experiences. A Reims committee member's grandson applied, was accepted, and attended. ASCA's role is primarily to advertise this opportunity; eligible students simply need to be affiliated with a sister city association.

Arlington 250

ASCA participated in Arlington County's 250th anniversary celebrations through the Reims Committee's involvement in Arlington 250 History Day. The ASCA table introduced new residents and community members to all five sister city relationships and highlighted the global connections that have always been part of Arlington's identity. Arlington County Board Member Karantonis noted that the French counterpart committee has expressed deep interest in the Arlington 250 anniversary as a milestone for deepening the relationship.



Classic Art Winners from Our Young Artists Showcase

...Continued Connecting our Community in 2025-2026

Official Travel: Reims and Aachen

Arlington County Board Member Takis Karantonis made official visits to Reims and Aachen in connection with the Charlemagne Prize ceremony and Victory in Europe Day commemorations. In Reims, he attended the opening of the Musée de la Reddition, met with the president of ASCA's French counterpart committee, and built new institutional relationships with school and educational administrators. In Aachen, he met with the mayor's office and the Aachen counterpart sister city committee president, confirming that both capacity and willingness exist on the Aachen side for a reinvigorated relationship, and exploring a potential Arlington Chamber of Commerce trade mission to North Rhine-Westphalia.

These visits embody a conviction Karantonis articulated at ASCA's Annual Meeting — drawn directly from Eisenhower's vision — that transferring international relations from national governments to citizens and communities makes lasting peace more achievable. At a time when geopolitics is more complex than ever, the work of citizen diplomacy matters more than ever.

Building the Reims Partnership

Starting in May 2026, members of the Reims Committee, the ASCA Board, Arlington County Board member Takis Karantonis, began a series of meetings with City of Reims and Reims Rayonnement Representatives, including International Relations and Twinning Officer Elisa Sombart and Aurelie Vautheny. These virtual monthly meetings have begun comprehensive discussions for deeper expansions of the Reims-Arlington partnerships for the future, including youth exchanges, business exchanges, civil servant exchanges, and more. These discussions are scheduled to continue through the end of 2026.

Governance & Financial Strengthening

FY2025-2026 was a significant year of organizational strengthening. A comprehensive financial reconciliation project brought ASCA's books into full accuracy following a period of leadership transition. New officers were elected at the June 2026 board meeting, and the board voted to begin a search for a contractual part-time Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager. A contract bookkeeper engagement produced standard operating procedures for key financial transactions, reducing institutional risk and building long-term organizational knowledge.



*Digital Art Winner from Our
Young Artists Showcase*



*Poetry Winner from Our
Young Artists Showcase*

A Look Forward: *FY 2026-2027 ASCA Work Plan*



Aachen Sister City

The Aachen–Arlington Sister City relationship is our longest-standing partnership, established in 1993. Over the past three decades, this friendship has flourished through educational, artistic, and governmental exchanges. Beyond the official programs, countless personal friendships have taken root — among students, families, and government officials — strengthening the bond between our two cities for many years to come.

Elementary/Family Exchange — FY2026-2027

With the 2025-2026 inbound cycle completed at full capacity, the Elementary/Family Exchange begins a new cycle with applications from across Arlington County's public and private schools. The committee will manage the full cycle: inbound (Aachen families visiting Arlington in fall 2026) and outbound (Arlington families traveling to Aachen in spring 2027). There are currently a record-breaking 51 participating families, representing 19 public schools and 3 private schools - with first-time participants from Claremont, Drew, Hoffman-Boston, and Randolph.

The continuing expansion of the number of Arlington schools represented in the Elementary/Family Exchange will extend the impact of the program beyond participating families. As part of the exchange, each Aachen student spends a day attending fifth grade with their Arlington exchange partner. This gives all students in the host classroom an opportunity to meet and interact with a student from Aachen and learn about life and school in Germany. Expanding participation to schools that have not previously been represented will bring this direct international exchange experience to more Arlington students and classrooms. The committee remains committed to reaching families in South Arlington and underrepresented schools and will continue active outreach.

High School Exchange — FY2026-2027

Recruitment for the 2027 Aachen High School Exchange will launch in fall 2026. Volunteer coordinators will host information sessions, manage applications and scholarship requests, and finalize the participant list. The outbound portion takes place in summer 2027, with Aachen students visiting Arlington in October 2027 to complete the exchange cycle. The committee will continue to promote geographic diversity and actively recruit from South Arlington high schools.

Student Ambassador Program

A new student ambassador program is being developed in partnership with board members. The goal is to recruit a high school student to serve as a junior board member or ambassador who can spread the word about the exchange program to peers across Arlington's high schools, building the next generation of exchange participants and citizen diplomats.





High School Homestay Program

The committee has received an application from an Aachen student who would like to attend an Arlington public school during the spring 2027 semester. Following productive discussions with Arlington Public Schools about the administrative process, the committee is now working to identify a host family. This would restart a U.S. State Department program administered through Sister Cities International that has been dormant in Arlington since 2019.

Art Exchange: Charlemagne Museum Digital Exhibit

The Aachen counterpart committee has expressed strong interest in arranging a reciprocal digital art exhibit in Arlington, featuring content from the Charlemagne Museum. The Aachen Committee is actively working to identify the right Arlington venue and contacts. This would mark the first formal art exchange program in the Aachen relationship since 2011 when the Face to Face International Artist Exchange and Residency took place between Arlington and Aachen.

Community Events & Outreach

The committee will continue to use cultural and sporting moments to build community and attract new members, including events tied to German cultural touchpoints. These community touchpoints keep the Arlington-Aachen relationship alive and visible between exchange years.

University Partnerships

The committee is actively pursuing university-level exchange opportunities with George Mason University and Marymount University, building on contacts with Professor Jürgen Vogt (RWTH Aachen University). Discussions supported by the Education Task Force aim to produce an initial proposal for what Aachen-based universities can offer Arlington County college students.

Education Task Force Collaboration

The Aachen Committee and ASCA's Education Task Force will collaborate on a free educational event for the Arlington community in FY2026-2027. Details are in development; past programs have featured lectures, panel discussions, and author talks. The Aachen Committee and ASCA's Education Task Force will collaborate on a free educational event for the Arlington community in FY2026-2027. Details are in development; past programs have featured lectures, panel discussions, and author talks.

Official Travel

ASCA anticipates an official invitation to the 2027 Karlspreis (Charlemagne Prize) ceremony in Aachen. Should an official visit take place, it may also include travel to Reims, given the ease of train travel between the two European sister cities.



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Reims Sister City

The Reims Sister City Committee enters FY2026-2027 with momentum from County Board Member Takis Karantonis' visit to Reims and new institutional relationships on both sides of the Atlantic between ASCA and the Reims Rayonnement organization. Co-President Dr. Alyssa Bivins and Anne-Marie Daris lead a committee of mostly veteran volunteers. They remain mindful of capacity and committed to high-quality, concentrated programming that deepens the Arlington Reims relationship across educational, cultural, and civic dimensions.

Pen Pal Program — Year Two & Expansion

Building on the successful pilot year connecting Wakefield High School with De La Salle School in Reims, the committee has used feedback from participating teachers to identify improvements and refine the program for a second cycle. An additional Arlington high school teacher and possibly an additional classroom in Reims have each expressed interest in participating, which could double the program's reach and expansion in Spring 2027.

French Film Series

A French film series is being planned in partnership with the Shirlington Library, led by committee member Mona Steffen. Screenings would showcase French cinema — ideally films with a Reims connection or well-known selections from the Cannes Film Festival — free and open to the public, attracting new members and celebrating French cultural contributions.

Student Exchange between Arlington and Reims

County Board Member Karantonis identified launching a student exchange program with Reims as his primary practical takeaway from his visit. There are multiple levels of interest in student exchanges, including the middle school, high school, and university-level.

The French counterpart committee has expressed willingness to support exchanges with organizational input from the ASCA Board. In terms of university exchanges, discussions are underway between Dr. Alyssa Bivins at George Mason University, Professor Lorie Magure at the University de Reims, and the Global Education Exchange Office George Mason University regarding potential graduate student exchanges. Professor Maguire has a personal connection to Arlington and is eager to start an active exchange.

Exchanges at the K-12 level have a great deal of interest, but are still in the discussion phases. Capacity building is needed on the ASCA Board side to support the Reims committee to organize an additional student exchange.

Mayor-Level Exchange

The committee will work with the County Board to explore an invitation to the Mayor of Reims for an official visit to Arlington, following the precedent of formal mayor-level exchanges with Aachen — a proven tool for deepening the relationship and identifying new stakeholders on both sides.

Champagne/Sparkling Wine Fundraiser

A revival of the popular April in Reims sparkling wine event is under consideration for spring 2027, building on the success of prior years. The committee is evaluating format and venue options to ensure the event continues to serve as both a community celebration and a meaningful fundraiser for ASCA.

Official Travel

Should an official Arlington delegation travel to Aachen for the 2027 Karlspreis, the trip will likely include a visit to Reims, given the ease of travel between the two sister cities. The committee also maintains its affiliation with a network connecting French-related nonprofits in the DC area, providing ongoing opportunities for visibility and partnership.

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San Miguel Sister City

Looking forward, the San Miguel Sister City Committee has a series of planned initiatives that continue to build on the goals of cultural exchange, education, and community involvement. Under President Lily Caballero-Torres, the committee is committed to growing its visibility within Arlington County and strengthening partnerships with counterparts in San Miguel.

Pen Pal Program

The committee is eager to participate in ASCA's digital Pen Pal Program, connecting students in Arlington Public Schools (APS) with peers in San Miguel's English language program. The English language program, running since 2022, now serves students at five San Miguel high schools at Intermediate and Advanced levels — a natural counterpart for an APS pen pal connection. The MOU infrastructure with APS provides the pathway for this expansion.

Cafecito y Cultura — Coffee Education Program

The committee is exploring a coffee educational event in partnership with Arlington BizLaunch, highlighting coffee as one of El Salvador's major exports and educating the community about its cultural and economic significance. This event aligns with both ASCA's Education and Economic Development pillars.

National Pupusa Day

The committee is planning a community celebration of National Pupusa Day (November 8), open to the Arlington community. The committee is pursuing with Arlington County officials a proclamation recognizing the cultural significance of the pupusa, highlighting cultural pride and Salvadoran community contributions.

Festival Latinoamericano

The committee plans to continue participating in the Arlington County-hosted Festival Latinoamericano in October, engaging with the Arlington community during Hispanic Heritage Month.

Strengthening San Miguel Partnerships

A priority for FY2026-2027 is building out the committee's working group in San Miguel — strengthening the institutional relationship with local government and community organizations, and expanding the volunteer and programming infrastructure on the El Salvador side. The committee also aims to connect San Miguel's English language program and soccer programming to Arlington County in more formal and sustainable ways.

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Ivano-Frankivsk Sister City

Aachen

Contact Rebuilding & Long-Term Development

A sustained focus of FY2026-2027 will be rebuilding the committee's network of contacts in Ivano-Frankivsk — connections disrupted during COVID-19 and further complicated by the ongoing war. The committee is open to new programming ideas that ASCA can mount locally to maintain engagement and visibility for the Ivano-Frankivsk relationship among Arlington residents. The committee is re-establishing contacts, rebuilding volunteer capacity, and exploring new avenues for programming while sustaining the core institutional relationship with counterparts in Ivano-Frankivsk.

Virtual Exchange Programming

The committee will continue to pursue virtual exchange programming with Ivano-Frankivsk counterparts as the primary mode of engagement while in-person travel remains impractical. The firefighter exchange format has proven effective and the committee is open to exploring additional topics — including medical support, English language learning, healthcare, emergency preparedness, community development, and cultural exchange — that can be conducted virtually with willing partners on both sides.

Connecting Students

The committee remains interested in connecting Ivano-Frankivsk students with students in Arlington. The Pen Pal program established by our Education Task Force in partnership with APS provides one possible avenue for a virtual exchange.

Ukrainian-American Community Engagement

The committee is pursuing outreach to the Ukrainian-American community in Arlington and the DMV as a way to maintain visibility for the relationship and recruit new committee members with personal and cultural ties to Ukraine. This community represents a natural bridge between Arlington and Ivano-Frankivsk.

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Education Task Force

The Education Task Force, chaired by Dr. Alyssa Bivins, PhD, enters FY2026-2027 with an established infrastructure and a growing portfolio of programs. The task force's work — centralizing educational programming, building bridges between ASCA's committees and Arlington Public Schools, and connecting Arlington youth with global peers — is increasingly central to ASCA's overall mission.

Young Artists & Authors Showcase — Year Two

The showcase will run for its second year in FY2026-2027, with expanded outreach to build a larger applicant pool and an even more widely attended winner's reception. Art House 7 has expressed interest in continuing to partner in the judging of the event and supporting the reception. The task force will build on lessons learned from the inaugural year to streamline administration and reach more Arlington youth, particularly from underrepresented schools.

Pen Pal Program Expansion

With the MOU with Arlington Public Schools in place following the successful Reims pilot, the task force will pursue Pen Pal Program expansion to San Miguel. While some Arlington teachers have expressed interest, the next steps involve identifying interested teachers in each of the relevant sister cities, then coordinating the student participant list and timeline. The pen pal model is easy to replicate and was a successful pilot program ready to be expanded to other interested sister cities.

Sister Cities International Programs

The task force will continue to promote SCI's Young Artists & Authors national competition and the Youth Leadership Summit to Arlington students. There is potential for Virginia-level SCI support for Arlington student participation in the Youth Leadership Summit, which the task force will pursue.

Task Force Leadership

Task Force Chair Dr. Alyssa Bivins, PhD, has noted she expects to step back from her leadership role in FY2026-2027 given additional professional commitments as a Professor at George Washington University. While she will continue to maintain existing programs in the Spring, the task force will work to build additional leadership capacity to ensure continuity of the programs and relationships established by Dr. Bivins in the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 fiscal years.



A Look Forward: *FY 2026-2027 ASCA Organization-Wide Priorities*

Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager Recruitment

ASCA's most immediate organizational priority is the recruitment and onboarding of a part-time Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager on a contract basis. Dawn Darling is leading the hiring process, with Emily Lyons participating in interviews given the Aachen Committee's significant engagement with this role, along with Chair Daphne Lathouras and Governance Chair Farah Eck. The position was posted on LinkedIn, Idealist, ASCA's social media channels, and through individual board members' networks. The board is committed to a thoughtful hiring process that brings in a candidate able to strengthen ASCA's programs, fundraising, and community presence.

Board Expansion

Expanding the Board of Directors toward the 25-member bylaw maximum remains a strategic priority. The Governance Committee will lead a sustained recruitment effort in FY2026-2027, with a focus on bringing in new perspectives, broader community representation, and additional capacity for ASCA's growing program calendar.

Financial Management

The August 2026 board meeting was dedicated to a full budget review and financial planning for FY2026-2027. Key priorities include: completing the evaluation of a potential Aplos-to-QuickBooks transition; maintaining the CPA relationship for ongoing 990 preparation; and ensuring that the incoming Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager has the financial reporting tools needed to be effective from day one.

Staff Exchange Proposal

Based on County Board Member Karantonis's recommendation, the county will explore a potential Arlington County staff exchange program — in which three or four Arlington County staff members travel to a sister city every other year to work on shared civic topics, with counterparts doing the same. Aachen already runs this model with some of its sister cities. ASCA will evaluate feasibility and interest during FY2026-2027.

Financial Highlights

FY 2025-2026

FY 2026-2027 Budget

As the Arlington Sister City Association enters its new fiscal year effective September 1st, 2026, ASCA continues to thrive financially, thanks to the financial support from the Arlington County grant, membership dues income, program fees, revenue from special events as well as unrestricted contributions and contributions restricted to the Ruth White Scholarship Fund.

A significant focus of FY2025-2026 was restoring full financial accuracy to ASCA's books. A comprehensive reconciliation project with a contract bookkeeper corrected prior-year misclassifications and brought the Aplos accounting system into full order. The revised FY2024-2025 net income figure is approximately \$13,000. ASCA also engaged a CPA for future 990 preparation and updated its internal processes to ensure cleaner financial records going forward. ASCA is currently running approximately \$30,000 under budgeted expenditures for FY2025-2026, primarily due to the Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager vacancy; this gap will continue until the new hire is in place.

ASCA continues its membership with Sister Cities International and the Arlington Chamber of Commerce in order to help build relationships across the Arlington spectrum that will lead to new members and support.

The ASCA Board of Directors remains committed to providing scholarships and opportunities to underrepresented and underserved students in Arlington County so that they may attend Sister City high school exchange programs. ASCA's primary expenses are for the part-time Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager (currently in recruitment) and funding of Sister City Committee activities.

ASCA is firmly rooted in its mission to build global connections and its 35-year history exemplifies this commitment. ASCA's programming efforts will continue to build upon this history and, with the help of its dedicated volunteers and incoming Fundraising & Community Engagement Manager, anticipates remaining financially strong for FY2026-2027 and beyond.



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