



International Relations Policy

Date Adopted	Review Date	Officer Responsible
25 June 2025	25 June 2028	Manager Governance Strategy and Compliance

Policy Purpose

The International Relations Policy establishes how Rotorua Lakes Council (RLC) will cooperate and manage relations with its current and prospective international partners, including its sister cities. Furthermore, it will guide RLC with decision making in relation to these entities.

Scope

This policy will primarily be relevant for elected members and council staff on understanding the aspirations and processes related to RLC’s international relationships.

Interpretations

Sister city – a formal, long-term relationship based on diverse links between two cities which could include cultural, education and business connections, among others.

Friendship city – these are similar to a sister city with comparable benefits, however, are generally less formal. They can often be a stepping stone to a more formal sister city agreement.

Background

Rotorua is the most established and recognised tourism destination in New Zealand due to its unique geography and rich cultural identity. It is also home to a diverse set of industries ranging from agriculture and forestry to science and research. To continue attracting visitors and growing innovation and resilience within our sectors connecting with others across the world is essential.

RLC plays an important role in establishing these partnerships, due to the status and influence a Council holds it has more access to opportunities globally. These international relationships can provide benefits for all our community in the form of education, cultural understanding, knowledge sharing, exchanges of people, trade and business.

Sister Cities

Rotorua has four sister cities: Beppu (Japan), Lake Macquarrie (Australia), Klamath Falls (United States of America) and Wuzhong District of Suzhou City (China). The deep-rooted, formal bonds created between Rotorua and its sister cities allows for our distant communities to connect. This paves the way for the continuous exchange of ideas, culture, people, and facilitates development within the areas of trade and tourism.

Most of these relationships were established via the International Sister Cities programme between 1987 and 2000 and were formed for a variety of reasons including shared geography, demography, unique cultural identity and industry sectors.

In recent years the relationship between RLC and its sister cities has not been prioritised. These effects were further compounded by COVID-19 which stopped all travel impacting on exchanges of Council delegations and people. Therefore, the potential opportunities and benefits that these partnerships bring has been limited. This policy sets a new direction where these relationships will be revitalised to ensure all benefits are fully explored.

Friendship city

In August 2024, RLC approved of the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Pingtung, Taiwan and Rotorua. This MoU honours the historical connection based on evidence that Māori originally migrated from Taiwan. The intention of the MoU is to enhance cooperation through cultural, educational, and sustainable development exchanges.

Content of Policy

International Relationships

RLC recognises the vast economic, educational, social and cultural opportunities that come with connecting to others globally. Particularly, as these align with RLC's economy priority¹ and several of the key outcomes listed in the Long-term Plan 2024-2034² such as: economy, tourism and arts and culture. Therefore, Council will adopt an open approach to collaborating and partnering with those based internationally. These relationships will be strategic in their nature and will be assessed on their potential to provide mutual benefits.

RLC will facilitate the connecting of Rotorua based businesses, organisations, community groups, educational institutions to those overseas to ensure all opportunities are explored, particularly prospective trade and economic ties. As part of this, delegations from overseas are hosted every year showcasing the best of Rotorua, RLC will continue to extend its warm hospitality on these occasions.

Sister Cities Relationships

RLC envisages prosperous and enduring partnerships with its sister cities for the betterment of our district and community. The Council will build on the foundations on existing agreements and create mutually beneficial and meaningful partnerships.

¹ Rotorua Lakes Council, Vision 2022-2025. [Vision - Rotorua Lakes Council](#)

² Rotorua Lakes Council, Long-term Plan 2024 – 2034. [Long-term Plan - Rotorua Lakes Council](#)

In particular, RLC will continue to develop and exchange ideas and people to bring benefits in the areas of:

- Culture
- Education
- Business
- Youth
- Sports
- Trade & Tourism
- Events
- Internships

RLC and its sister cities have already undertaken many shared ventures, many of which are encompassed below. Looking forward, RLC will continue to:

- Host delegations and attend appropriate events abroad to strengthen ties and economic possibilities.
- Deepen economic ties by connecting our diverse and talented industry and businesses with potential partners.
- Support the placement of students internationally via internship programmes
- Exploring more virtual communication between schools and the possibility of language programmes.
- Develop annual exchange programmes to provide more opportunities for school, youth and community groups, including sports related activities.

New Sister Cities

Sister City relationships are strategic long-term partnerships that should be mutually beneficial, and identifying potential partners is the foundation to developing a successful relationship. To develop a new sister city the potential similarities could include, but not limited to:

- Population size
- Industries
- Pre-existing relationships
- Geography
- Academic Institutions
- Cultural Institutions

- Historical connections

Once a potential partner is identified, a line of communication will be developed either by RLC or the interested party. Correspondence could include detail on their respective communities, industries and partnership goals.

If agreed by both parties a formal partnership agreement will be drafted. This will need to be approved by RLC's elected members in a formal Council meeting. Following this, if approved, a formal signing ceremony will occur between Rotorua's Mayor and their counterpart.

Prior to establishing a new sister city RLC will contact the relevant Government departments and embassies for their advice.

International Travel

There are occasions when elected members may be invited or required to attend international events or undertaken activities as representatives of the Rotorua District. Typically, these costs are offset via revenue generated from hosting international delegations throughout the year. Although, there may be occasions where some costs may be covered by the ratepayer.

For transparency and integrity on any proposed international travel undertaken, it will need to be supported by a business case that outlines the benefits of the travel against the following criterion:

- The travel or activity must support RLC's vision, business objectives and aspirations for the future as encapsulated in the Long-term Plan, or
- The travel or activity must support council's current priorities.

When developing a business case to Council, consideration will be given to the economic, social and cultural benefits of the proposed travel. Over time, as RLC pro-

actively develops its relationships with those globally, it is expected trade and business ties will strengthen.

All business cases will need to be approved by recommendation from the Chief Executive and be approved by resolution at a Council meeting. In addition, travel costs of accompanying persons will not be paid for, unless the business case explicitly supports this.

At the conclusion of the travel the elected member or staff member is required to provide a written report to council.

For clarity, this policy does not include travel by elected members that has been undertaken at the request of and paid for by other international, national or local organisations.

Document history

Version	Adopted	Approved by
Version 1	8 December 2016	Council meeting
Version 2	25 June 2025	Council resolution on 25 June 2025