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April 4, 2012

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**Lakeland Sister Cities International, Inc. receives funding to send four-member delegation to Imabari Japan**

WASHINGTON, DC – Lakeland, Florida is one of seven U.S. cities selected by *Sister Cities International* to receive the *Leading Asia: Renewing the U.S. and Japan Sister Cities Network* exchange funding. The funding will enable a 10-day Lakeland delegation visit to their Japanese sister city, Imabari.

Through the *Leading Asia* exchange funding, Lakeland will focus on enhancing language skills in both communities, particularly fostering Japanese language speakers in Lakeland. The program will also focus on developing import-export ties between both cities to build a sustainable economic relationship.

The Lakeland-Imabari 17-year old sister city relationship has enabled several successful private, business, and government exchanges and programs in education and art.

The purpose of the *Leading Asia* exchange funding is to launch programming in the following areas: business development, sustainability, creative economies, and young professional development. In 2011, five cities were awarded funding during the first round.

The *Leading Asia: Renewing the U.S. and Japan Sister Cities Network* is funded by a grant from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnerships. The objective of this grant award is to improve and expand existing relationships between the U.S. and Japan. To see the entire list of exchange funding awardees and to learn more about *Leading Asia*, please visit [http://www.sister-cities.org/programs/leading\\_asia.cfm](http://www.sister-cities.org/programs/leading_asia.cfm)

**About *Sister Cities International***

*Sister Cities International* facilitates nearly 2,000 partnerships in 136 countries on six continents between 600 communities in the United States with similar municipalities abroad. *Sister Cities International* represents citizen diplomats who work tirelessly to promote the organizations' mission of creating world peace and cultural understanding through economic and sustainable development programs, youth and education projects, arts and culture, and humanitarian assistance.

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