

Building lasting relationships

In an era of insecurity, states are leading the way in creating partnerships around the world.

BY CHRIS WHATLEY

The attack on America has had a direct effect on programs that states conduct abroad. The role of states in international affairs has been increasing steadily for many years. However, in an era of insecurity, states are rethinking many aspects of their international programs to reflect new concerns and priorities.

States go abroad

The past 20 years have witnessed a dramatic expansion of the role of U.S. states in foreign affairs. Export promotion has been the driving force behind this trend. As our economy has become increasingly intertwined with the global community, state economic-development agencies have moved aggressively to create jobs at home by helping state businesses sell products and attract investment from abroad.

The clearest evidence of states' interest in international affairs is their efforts to establish overseas offices. State overseas offices help small- to medium-size businesses gain access to key international markets by conducting research, identifying potential buyers and facilitating ongoing contacts. From 1984 to 2000 the number of state overseas offices jumped from 55 to 224, an increase of more than 400 percent. During this period states also made significant changes to the geographic focus of their trade programs, moving from a small group of representa-



The Montana National Guard's partnership with Kyrgyzstan became even more important after Sept. 11. The partnership includes activities such as infantry exercises with Kyrgyzstani soldiers to hands-on training in pediatric care by nurse practitioners. National Guardsmen and civic leaders in Montana have worked since 1996 to build lasting ties with this former Soviet republic.

tives based largely in Western Europe to a broad network of offices located increasingly in East Asia, Latin America and other emerging markets.

International activities of state governments also include a wide range of programs designed to foster broad partnership with the global community. These programs include educational exchanges, cultural activities, environmental-assistance programs and even military partnerships. The programs are often supported at least in part by federal funding or private grants. State officials have various reasons for participation. Many state leaders recognize the value of these programs for building long-term relationships that may ultimately lead to increased trade. For oth-

ers the primary motive is the education of state residents and professional development of state employees by exposing them to the international community and expanding their perspectives.

States have become increasingly involved in promoting international partnerships through their education departments, cultural programs and other agencies. During the 2000-2001 academic year more than one-half million foreign students studied in the United States, the majority at state universities and local community colleges. According to the National Association of State Arts Agencies, states also spent more than \$40 million in 1999 to sponsor artist-exchange programs and other international cultural activities. Environmental-exchange programs also



have attracted significant interest from state governments. In addition, 21 states conducted environmental exchange and training programs for Asian countries from 1994-2001 through the State Environmental Initiative, a matching-grants program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and administered by The Council of State Governments.

Impact of Sept. 11

In response to the tragic attacks on our country, states have refocused their international activities to reflect new threats and challenges. This development has been most clearly felt in state export-promotion programs. Governors have played

a strong role in these programs by leading frequent trade missions to key foreign markets. However, in the aftermath of Sept. 11, many governors cancelled trade missions to stay close to home and coordinate emergency response, address budget shortfalls and attend to other pressing matters. At the same time, many Americans, including state business leaders, have been reluctant to travel abroad in the face of ongoing security concerns.

State economic-development departments are retooling their trade-promotion programs to respond to these developments. States are continuing to conduct trade missions overseas, but some have seen participation drop significantly. Some states have limited international travel for state employees and instead are relying on their overseas offices, often staffed by foreign nationals, to represent state businesses abroad and to recruit foreign buyers and investors.

While the new security environment has made export-assistance programs more challenging, the current economic slowdown has made the need for these programs even more apparent. Recent studies have shown exports sustain one in five American manufacturing jobs. Jobs in export industries also pay an average of 13 percent to 18 percent more than similar positions in non-export industries. Despite the importance of export-promotion programs, growing budget shortfalls are compelling many states to reduce spending on them.

The Sept. 11 attacks also have highlighted the importance of building international partnerships that extend beyond traditional trade ties. America is reaching out to new partners across the globe in its worldwide effort to combat terrorism. States have contributed to this effort through a wide range of innovative activities. States are working with their counterparts in Canada, Mexico and elsewhere to coordinate emergency-response efforts. States also have contributed to U.S. diplomatic efforts by forging long-term ties with other key countries around the world.

One program particularly successful in building important international ties is the State Partnership Program of the National Guard Bureau. Since 1993, 33 states and two territories have entered into partnerships with countries as

diverse as Bolivia and Bulgaria. This program links National Guardsmen and other state leaders with partner countries' defense ministries and government agencies to build mutually beneficial relationships. Activities carried out by participating states include joint military-training exercises, emergency-management workshops, exchange programs and many other initiatives.

The State Partnership Program has built long-term ties with a broad network of countries. However, this program has been of particular value in the volatile region surrounding Afghanistan. Until recently most Americans had never heard of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or Turkmenistan. However, a dedicated group of National-Guard soldiers, state-government officials and community leaders in Arizona, Louisiana, Montana, and Nevada have been working with these nations for

International Partners Program

The Council of State Governments' International Partners Program is a unique networking opportunity for international groups. This program allows international groups and governmental bodies to join CSG and participate as voting members of its International Committee. By joining CSG as an International Partner, government officials and private-sector leaders from other countries gain access to CSG's research, publications, meetings, and services and can gain valuable insight into policy activities in the United States. The program also establishes a forum for the discussion of policy issues of global importance and the sharing of innovative ideas across national borders. CSG's International Partners include the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario along with the Polish province of Silesia and the province of Taiwan. For more information about this program, please contact Chris Whatley, director of international programs, by e-mail at cwhatley@csg.org or by phone at (202) 624-5460.

the past three years to build lasting ties. The relationships and good will built through the State Partnership Program have been invaluable to U.S. military leaders and State Department officials as they sought to establish basing rights in the region to fight the war against terrorism.

"We help America in these countries by being there every day," said Col. Mark Kalber, director of international affairs for the National Guard Bureau. "The key to the State Partnership Program is the citizen-soldier concept. By involving National Guard units, we can demonstrate through example the proper role of the military in a



Montana Guardsmen conducted a combat lifesaving seminar in Kyrgyzstan.

democratic society. National Guardsmen also bring their civilian skills to the table, ensuring that the partnerships forged extend beyond pure military exchanges."

While the primary goal of the program is to foster military-to-military ties, it has spawned a wide range of broader contacts between participating states and international partners. Each participating state forms a team of 15 to 20 civilian leaders to participate in exchanges and build broad relationships. The activities of these leaders vary; some states hold exchanges of legislators and other officials, while others include community leaders such as medical professionals to foster cooperation on specific assistance programs.

Montana's partnership with Kyrgyzstan has acquired a new strategic importance since Sept. 11. National Guardsmen and civic leaders in Montana have worked since 1996 to build lasting ties with this former Soviet republic. The program "focuses on building relationships with partners, not on merely providing military information in a one-way channel," said its coordinator, Chief Warrant Officer Ernest Bridwell. "All the parties in this endeavor are equal partners."

The Montana partnership includes a wide array of activities, from infantry exercises with Kyrgyzstani soldiers to hands-on training in pediatric care by skilled nurse practitioners from the Montana Nurses Association. One of its most innovative

activities has been to link the Farm-in-the-Dell Foundation, a charitable organization that assists the developmentally disabled in Montana, with service organizations in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, Farm-in-the-Dell is building a home for the developmentally disabled in Kyrgyzstan.

Participants in the Montana partnership emphasize the program builds a deep bond between both partners. "The geosympathy between Montana and Kyrgyzstan is genuine," said Stephen Maly, legislative research analyst for the Montana Legislature and a recent exchange participant. "Though there are vast differences between

both partners, we both share a frontier history and the challenges of meeting the needs of a largely rural population."

Before Sept. 11, many Americans would have had a hard time understanding how these partnerships are in their immediate interest. Today as American soldiers, diplomats and law-enforcement officers fan out

across the globe, it is clear the investments by Montana and dozens of other states in building lasting partnerships with countries in distant corners of the world have contributed substantially to the good will and common interest necessary to sustain the war on terrorism.

Future implications

States are adjusting to the new challenges of an insecure world. State international programs, like all facets of American life, have been directly affected by the tragic events of Sept. 11. State leaders have responded quickly to this challenge and are working to restructure their international programs and to develop new partnerships abroad. Despite new security challenges and budget constraints, it is clear the successes of state international programs, including the jobs they create for American citizens and the ties they forge with future allies, are more vital now than ever. ★

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Promoting trade

The State International Development Organizations is the only national organization focused exclusively on state international trade development. SIDO helps create U.S. jobs by helping sell American products abroad. State international trade agencies are leaders in helping U.S. businesses access export markets and attract investment from abroad. Located in their states, international trade staff members provide export guidance to small- and medium-size businesses.

SIDO is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, affiliated with The Council of State Governments and made up of international trade directors and other professionals from state and related organizations across the country. Through its CSG partnership, SIDO members contribute expertise, information and resources to promote state international trade programs. SIDO allows members to share best practices from other state agencies,

expand international contacts and resources, participate in training programs, and access additional products and services. SIDO also is a forum for bringing issues to a broader audience.

As of January 2002, 31 states have joined SIDO including Alaska, Ariz., Calif., Conn., Del., Ga., Idaho, Ill., Ind., Iowa, Maine, Md., Mass., Mich., Minn., Miss., Mo., N.H., N.J., N.M., N.Y., N.C., N.D., Ohio, Okla., Ore., Penn., R.I., Vt., W.V., and Wis. In addition, the Council of Great Lakes Governors and the Quebec Ministry of Commerce are affiliate members. An additional 18 states regularly cooperate with SIDO's international objectives.

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