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## City of Sisterly Love

**P**hiladelphia was recently awarded a \$5,000 grant to focus on transparency and openness in government. The monies will be used to work with Russian sister city, Nizhny Novgorod.

Three groups of Russian visitors will soon visit here and two city commerce department officials will head back to the third largest city in Russia.

The first group, scheduled to visit Philadelphia on June 22, will plan future exchanges and bring back medical equipment sorely needed in their hometown. The rest of the trips will focus on how local citizens influence local government.

The visitors plan on meeting with the Center City Residents Association and the Zoning Board of Adjustments. They'll also meet with community groups like the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp., which played a major part in keeping the new Phillies stadium out of its back yard. Though there are no plans for new arenas in the Volga district city formerly known as Gorky, the controversy will be presented on the international front as a success story of citizens influencing governmental decisions. Nancy Gilboy, the president of the International Visitors Council (IVC), applied for the grant after attending a neighborhood association meeting. The IVC administers the Philadelphia sister city program.

While it seems that Philadelphia has got sister cities a-plenty — Florence, Italy; Tel Aviv, Israel; and Bilbao, Spain are among the 10 — the city doesn't have the most civic siblings in the state. (Pittsburgh's family extends to a whopping 14 cities.) Sister cities are chosen based almost on a matchmaking process with Sister Cities International, a nonprofit that pairs cities on criteria such as population size or whether it's a port city. From there, two to three cities are "auditioned" before the final selection, according to Ami Neiberger-Miller, spokeswoman at the organization.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that Old Orlu, Nigeria will be taking lessons from Austin, Texas, on how to eliminate corruption in local governments. Hey Austin, can you stop by Philly on the way?

—Helen i-lin Hwang