

*Soroptimist International
of the Americas
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FACT SHEET: Soroptimist International of the Americas

Organizational Profile

Soroptimist International of the Americas is an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women. The first Soroptimist club was formed in 1921 by a group of 80 women in Oakland, Alameda County, California, USA. The name Soroptimist is a coined name meaning “best for women.”

Organizational Mission

Soroptimist’s mission is to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

Members and Clubs

Soroptimists are business and professional women of all ages, cultures and ethnic groups. Soroptimist International members reside in about 120 countries throughout the world. Soroptimist International (the organization’s parent organization) has about 95,000 members. Soroptimist International of the Americas has about 45,000 members. Soroptimist International of the Americas’ clubs are located throughout these 19 countries and territories: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guam, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, United States and Venezuela.

Funding

Soroptimist International of the Americas’ programs are funded in part by investment income and member dues and contributions. As a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization, the organization depends on outside contributions from those who want to help improve the lives of women and girls.

Projects Benefiting Women and Girls

Soroptimist clubs receive assistance in their volunteer efforts by participating locally in programs developed and sponsored by the organization.

- **Women’s Opportunity Awards**—The Women’s Opportunity Awards program, Soroptimist’s major service project, aids women seeking to improve their economic status by gaining additional skills, training and education. The program helps women who, as the primary wage-earners for their families, must enter or return to the work force. The women may use the awards to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education—including books, childcare and carfare. Many Women’s Opportunity Awards winners are domestic abuse survivors who use the funds to help rebuild their lives through improved employment opportunities. Each year, more than \$800,000 is awarded through the Women’s Opportunity Awards program. Since the program began in 1972, it is estimated that \$15 million has been disbursed and more than 20,000 women have been assisted through this program.

• **Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence**—Preventing and eliminating domestic violence is a Soroptimist focus. Each year, Soroptimist promotes participation in an event on November 25 (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) that targets domestic violence as a workplace concern. Since 1997, the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence has consisted of club members distributing cards in the workplace that contain domestic violence hotline information. Clubs also create awareness and work to end domestic violence by directly supporting shelters, advocating for legal protections, and helping abuse survivors to rebuild their lives.

• **Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls**—The organization awards about \$175,000 annually in Soroptimist Club Grants to Soroptimist clubs that are initiating or continuing innovative projects that benefit women and girls. Sample projects include providing job training and mentoring for survivors of domestic violence; helping impoverished women learn income-generating skills; establishing health clinics for women and girls in developing nations; hosting forums on the sexual trafficking of women and girls; and teaching girls about careers in non-traditional fields.

• **Making a Difference for Women Award**—Soroptimist formally acknowledges the efforts of women who, through their personal or professional activities, are working to improve the lives of women and girls. Making a Difference for Women Award recipients include domestic violence expert and advocate Elaine Weiss, U.S. Congresswoman Patsy Mink, U.S. Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, novelist and former district attorney Linda Fairstein, Princess Diana, Shirley Temple Black, Philippines President Corazon Aquino and marine biologist Dr. Sylvia Earle.

• **Violet Richardson Award**—This program recognizes and honors young women who make the community and world a better place. Volunteer efforts include creating mentoring programs for girls, working to end violence against women and girls, and working to end discrimination and poverty. Named after the president of the first Soroptimist club, the program offers a cash award to recipients and the charitable organizations for which they volunteer.

• **Venture Clubs** —As part of its mission to improve the lives of women and girls, Soroptimist sponsors an organization for young working women. Membership in Venture provides young women the opportunity to volunteer in their communities while developing leadership ability through association with Soroptimist mentors.

• **Disaster Relief Fund**—The Soroptimist Disaster Relief Fund for Women and Girls provides financial assistance to areas affected by natural disasters or acts of war. Because relief efforts targeted to women are often overlooked during a crisis, the fund supports projects that specifically assist women and girls. The fund is replenished by voluntary donations from Soroptimist clubs and members.

International Projects

Soroptimist International of the Americas joins its parent organization, Soroptimist International, in supporting projects throughout the world. The current international project partners with Women for Women International on Project Independence: Women Survivors of War. The project provides direct aid to women in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Rwanda and helps them meet basic needs for themselves and their families.

Club Projects

Soroptimist clubs identify individual community need and undertake local projects tailored to meet those needs. Soroptimist clubs often unite—be it across state, provincial or national boundaries—to work on joint projects that provide direct assistance to women and girls.

Relationship with the United Nations

Soroptimist International has consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which oversees U.N. activities and policies promoting human rights.

Representatives from Soroptimist International can request agenda items, submit written statements for circulation to all members of the council, make oral statements at meetings and contribute to other U.N. gatherings and seminars. It is in this forum that Soroptimist representatives can advocate for the Soroptimist mission of improving the lives of women and girls. Soroptimist representatives are volunteers and work in one of the four U.N. centers in New York City, Paris, Vienna or Geneva.