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PUTTING POLICY & AUDIENCE FIRST

A PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PARADIGM SHIFT

A Special Report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy

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To the President, Congress, Secretary of State and the American People:

The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD), authorized pursuant to Public Law 112-239 [Sec.] 1280(a)-(c), hereby submits the following special report: *Putting Policy and Audience First: A Public Diplomacy Paradigm Shift.*

The ACPD is a bipartisan panel created by Congress in 1948 to formulate, assess and recommend policies and programs to carry out the Public Diplomacy (PD) functions vested in U.S. government entities, to include the Department of State. This special report focuses on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI), which represents one of the most important transformations in U.S. public diplomacy (PD) operations overseas since the merger of the U.S. Information Agency into the Department of State in 1999.

In addition to launching a major revision of the position descriptions for locally employed public diplomacy staff at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, the PDSI includes a significant restructuring of embassy public diplomacy sections. Yet outside of the relatively narrow scope of public diplomacy sections, bureaus and offices within the Department of State, little is known about the PDSI's strategic intent, let alone its impacts.

To fill this knowledge gap, and to better understand the PDSI's transformative potential, the ACPD is proud to present an assessment of this new staffing model and its role in the modernization of PD practices. We are especially pleased to showcase the great work of locally engaged public diplomacy professionals who are essential to the success of America's information and outreach activities around the world.

Respectfully Submitted,

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of public diplomacy professionals at home and abroad in the preparation of this report.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on Zoom interviews with over 100 public diplomacy and human resources professionals within the Department of State from May to July 2021. Two-thirds of our research participants were working abroad, serving in public diplomacy sections at various U.S. missions around the world, which, in late April 2021, represented over 30 percent of the 49 missions that had "implemented" the PDSI. The remainder of our interviewees were based in Washington, DC. To guarantee confidentiality, neither individual interviewees nor specific posts/offices are named in the report. We should also note that the ACPD encouraged interviewees to express their own personal views and experiences of the PDSI and its effects.

During May and June 2021, ACPD Executive Director Vivian Walker and ACPD Senior Advisor Shawn Baxter conducted 24 focus group discussions with the ten missions and three consulates that agreed to provide input. This included 12 one hour meetings with locally employed (LE) staff and 12 one-hour meetings with American PD officers at those same missions. These missions represented each of the five regional bureaus in which posts had implemented the initiative.

Three of the missions were "small" (six or fewer LE staff in the PD section), five were "medium" (7-15 LE staff in the section), and two were "large" (more than 15 LE staff in the PD section). One of the large posts included LE staff from three separate consulate PD sections. Most of these missions had been working in their new section structure for six months to one year when our discussions occurred.

Part I of this report provides a historical overview of the PDSI's origins and evolution. In this section, we also explain key elements of PD modernization initiatives and their linkages to the PDSI. Our questions to PD professionals in the field focused on four main areas in which the PDSI strives to make an impact: improved audience analysis and segmentation, enhanced collaboration inside the section and externally within the mission, strengthened policy focus of PD activities around mission strategic goals, and better use of strategic content in public engagement. Our colleagues' answers to these questions, and their additional insights, make up the bulk of Part II of this report.

We recognized early in our discussions with the field that it would be vital to include Washington views on the PDSI, as well. Part III is the result of approximately a dozen ACPD discussions with senior PD and human resources professionals in nine Department of State bureaus from March to July 2021: African Affairs (AF), East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP), European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR), Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA), Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), Global Talent Management's Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE), the Foreign Service Institute's PD Training Division (FSI/PD), and the Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR) for the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R).

The report also draws on the authors' observations and experience over a combined 45 years in the Foreign Service and over 50 years working with PD staff at all levels overseas and in Washington.

The Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI) represents one of the most important transformations in U.S. public diplomacy (PD) operations overseas since the merger of the U.S. Information Agency into the Department of State in 1999. In addition to launching a major revision of the position descriptions for locally employed public diplomacy staff at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, the PDSI included a significant restructuring of embassy public diplomacy sections. Yet outside of the relatively narrow scope of public diplomacy sections, bureaus and offices within the Department of State, little is known about the PDSI's strategic intent, let alone its impacts. Even within the Department's internal PD network, understanding of the PDSI is incomplete.

To fill these knowledge gaps, and to better understand the PDSI's transformative potential for the practice of public diplomacy, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy engaged in a series of structured conversations with PD professionals at ten small, medium, and large U.S. missions around the world as well as with Washington PD bureaus and offices. With the help of the Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR) in the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R), we identified a representative range of missions, focusing on posts which had completed the PDSI implementation process in the past two years.

In these conversations, which took place between May and July 2021, we asked locally engaged (LE) staff and public diplomacy officers to comment specifically on key aspects of the PDSI's impact to date on the practice of public diplomacy in the field, to include audience analysis and segmentation; collaboration inside the section and externally within the mission; the organization of PD activities around mission strategic goals; and the use of strategic content in public engagement.

Our aim was to obtain a preliminary assessment of how PDSI-driven changes in staff duties and responsibilities have affected information and outreach practices in an increasingly complex information environment.[1] As the following report indicates, we determined that the new staffing model represents a significant step forward in the modernization of PD practices. We also noted a genuine commitment on the part of PD professionals in Washington and in the field to adapt to the new structure, despite the more immediate operational challenges presented by the global pandemic and the longer term effects associated with this profound institutional change.

At the same time, we found that there are several aspects of the PDSI that require additional work to assure the durability of its impact. The following recommendations address four major areas for consideration: the range and quantity of available training options, greater ease of access to support materials and resources, the provision of precise and targeted guidance to the field, and the expansion of information sharing among key stakeholders within the PD family and across the Department of State.

This report is intended for use as an introduction to the PDSI and baseline overview of its impacts. Although the full implementation of the PDSI is not yet complete, we hope that this interim review will play a helpful role in the ongoing effort to modernize public diplomacy practices at the Department of State.

TRAINING

1. Global PDSI Skills Training Working Group

More training, skills development, continuing education, and learning opportunities should be provided to all posts on audience identification, analysis, and segmentation for the transition to an audience focused approach to be successful. R/PPR should consider forming a working group to focus on developing a long-term plan for professional skills development in line with PD modernization objectives for State Department PD professionals. To assure better coordination of skills training efforts, this working group should be made up of representatives from the R family, to include the bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA). Additionally, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), and the regional bureaus should be brought into this group given the importance of their contributions to the success of the PDSI. The leader of this working group might be dual hatted as a "Chief Training Officer" for R.

2. Regional PDSI Skills Training Platforms

With fewer resources and limited staffing, small posts in particular need enhanced support to manage audience identification, analysis, and segmentation requirements. In conjunction with FSI, R/PPR should consider the development of regional audience analysis training and support platforms aimed at small posts in environments with significant infrastructure and resources challenges.

3. LE Staff Supervisory Training Skills Development

Newly designated LE staff supervisors deserve more training and support to learn the skills necessary to be effective managers. R/PPR, in conjunction with the bureau for Global Talent Management (GTM) and FSI, has just begun to prioritize access to LE staff supervisory skills training for transitioning posts with new LE staff supervisor positions anticipated. In additional to training and advisory opportunities, more needs to be done to institutionalize a culture of supervision among LE staff members.

PROGRAM RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

4. On-Line PDSI Resource Platform

R/PPR, with input from FSI, should take steps to develop an on-line support function dedicated to assisting PD professionals in the field with questions regarding audience analysis, content creation, strategic planning, and resource management. This site could feature prepared training materials, case studies, and best practices, along with the capacity to provide immediate and specific targeted advice as needed, such as a PDSI "Hotline."

5. Small Post Support Function

As part of an overall on-line PDSI resource platform, R/PPR, in close collaboration with the regional bureaus and FSI, should set up a support function for small to medium posts to provide practical advice on PDSI implementation in PD sections where staffing and resources are at a premium. More needs to be done to enable small posts to decide on a realistic menu of LE staff duties and responsibilities and to make the most efficient use of limited tools and infrastructure.

GUIDANCE

6. Strategic Content Development

As a part of communicating public diplomacy's shift to the PDSI structure to the entire Department of State, R/PPR should update and reinforce existing guidance to all bureaus regarding the necessity of sending content to posts in a timely manner. Bureaus should build sufficient flexibility into their content development and clearance processes so that missions have enough time to adapt them for local use.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation Practices Working Group

The PDSI-driven focus on audience requires renewed emphasis on program outcome assessment. R/PPR should provide clear, consistent guidance to posts regarding monitoring and evaluation practices for field programs and activities. An R family working group on monitoring and evaluation, to include representatives from ECA and GPA, might be established to develop consistent definitions, uniform standards, and a flexible, on-demand training continuum.

8. Recruitment and Hiring Practices

R/PPR, in close coordination with GTM, should (re)issue human resource (HR) guidance on recruitment and hiring practices to posts preparing to transition to the PDSI. Specifically, R/PPR should build on and reinforce existing efforts to ensure that as hiring managers, PAOs and/or their designates are 1) thinking about long-term section and mission needs as they brainstorm their new organizational structures and adjusted positions; 2) not using the PDSI to address pre-existing personnel issues; 3) adjusting PDSI-driven performance requirements to the local talent pool; and 4) establishing work requirements linked to a realistic set of LE staff goals by rating cycle.

OUTREACH

9. Outreach within the PD Family

R/PPR should continue to communicate regularly and consistently about the PDSI process and impacts to ensure that all PD FSOs and LE staff in the field understand the initiative, why it is being undertaken, and how this refresh of so-called traditional PD practices will keep USG PD competitive overseas. Similar communication efforts directed at ECA, GPA, regional, and functional bureaus with a PD component should be expanded to assure full understanding of and support for PDSI objectives and to address existing perceptual gaps that inhibit PDSI implementation.

10. Outreach within the Department of State

R/PPR should build on existing outreach efforts to familiarize PD's internal partners with PDSI fundamentals and objectives and to highlight the PDSI's overall strategic value. Institutionalization of information sharing with and involvement of mission Ambassadors, Deputy Chief of Missions, and Country Teams about PD structures and operations, to include PDSI, would help to mitigate knowledge gaps owing to unfamiliarity with PD practices and frequent turnover at the leadership level.

PART I:
PDSI ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

THE NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY LANDSCAPE

In 2013, the State Department's Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R) launched a major review of field-based public diplomacy operations and infrastructure, with a focus on locally employed (LE) staff position descriptions. This effort coincided with an overall Department of State effort to standardize LE staff titles and job descriptions. This overhaul was long overdue. Public diplomacy staffing patterns and structures for approximately 2,600 locally employed PD staff at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world had not been updated since the 1970s.

Additionally, during the intervening half century, the global communications infrastructure underwent a radical transformation, but the language and conceptualization of public diplomacy duties and responsibilities remained firmly rooted in the pre-digital age. Finally, the post-Cold War focus on democratic institution building, the post 9-11 mandate to counter violent extremism, and concerns about increasingly aggressive authoritarian influence strategies resulted in a significant expansion of PD program objectives and the emergence of a broad range of new, relatively unknown target audiences.

Acknowledging these profound transformations in the public diplomacy operating environment, the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI), as it became known, took on the challenge of updating decades-old job descriptions and organizational structures of PD sections to reflect the skills and competencies required to understand, inform, engage, and influence foreign audiences successfully in the 21st century.

In the process of modernizing field practices, the PDSI also tried to capture the unique skills and expertise of local PD staff members, who offer both continuity and consistency in executing USG public diplomacy programming in their countries long after individual American officers have transferred to other assignments. Finally, the PDSI has become a catalyst for an update of foreign service officer (FSO) public diplomacy duties and responsibilities and may well lead to a review of Washington-based management of PD program implementation.

THE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STAFFING INITIATIVE: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

The PDSI replaces a nearly 50-year old legacy structure designed around functions and programs, breaking with the traditional division of PD work as information and cultural program functions. Instead, the PDSI strengthens the ability of U.S. mission PD practitioners to carry out policy-driven, audience-oriented approaches to advance mission objectives as articulated in the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), the primary strategic plan carried out by every U.S. overseas mission.

It is important to recognize that under the PDSI, many of the tools of public diplomacy – academic and professional exchanges, speaker programs, cultural events, grants, information outreach, press, digital content creation, and other forms of audience engagement – remain the same. However, the new staffing structure and portfolios have changed the way these tools are used. Instead of grouping duties and responsibilities around broad information and cultural functions, PDSI position descriptions focus on target audience identification, explicit linkages between audiences identified and mission-specific policy objectives, and engagement strategies to bring about shifts in audience perceptions and behaviors in service of USG foreign policy goals.

From 2013 through 2017, R/PPR worked closely with the then-named Bureau of Human Resources (now Bureau of Global Talent Management) Office of Overseas Employment (HR/OE) to research and then negotiate 14 Framework Job Descriptions (FJDs) for locally employed PD staff. R's Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR) piloted an effort to implement these new job descriptions at 11 missions in 2017 through what was then called the Locally Employed Staff Initiative.[2]

Originally, the initiative intended to update LE staff position descriptions, make PD sections more effective, and enable PD sections to achieve more policy objectives. R/PPR incorporated lessons learned from the pilot and broadened the rollout to all missions worldwide in 2018.[3] After leading a second cohort of missions through implementation in 2018-19, R/PPR incorporated additional lessons learned, renamed the effort as the PD Staffing Initiative (PDSI) to reflect the focus on all PD staff in a section, LE as well as Foreign Service, and updated the PDSI's objectives to make them more clear, measurable, and achievable.

The initial PDSI implementation process included an organizational review of every U.S. overseas PD section, followed by the development of new, mission-specific structures designed for a policy-centered, audience-focused approach to public diplomacy. R/PPR deployed a cadre of trained coaches to assist Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) and their teams in identifying priority audiences for each mission's strategic goals, adopting updated standards and structures for PD operations, and revising all staff portfolios, which included American Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and LE staff. As the April 2021 OIG report noted, however, the evolution from a "human resources exercise" to "an overhaul of how Public Diplomacy Sections operate" was not without its management, resource planning, communication, and training challenges.[4]

PDSI AND PD MODERNIZATION: STRUCTURES, TOOLS, AND SKILLS

The PDSI became integral to a broader effort to update long-standing organizational structures, tools, and skills development. In 2019, R launched what is now called the "PD Modernization" initiative. According to R/PPR,

> "PD Modernization seeks to create an adaptive, data-driven, audience-focused U.S. public diplomacy method that achieves measurable foreign policy results. It will accomplish this vision by providing PD practitioners the tools, skills, and organizational structure they need to analyze local audiences and to design, execute, and evaluate strategic engagement initiatives in a dynamic, collaborative, and digital environment."[5]

Coordinated activities within the PD Modernization effort included new tools, operating structures, and professional development opportunities designed to ensure that

> "PD practitioners have universal access to the data, tools, and organizational structures needed to effectively conduct public diplomacy and to quickly respond to emerging events in a constantly evolving digital communications landscape."[6]

The modernization effort also attempted to align PD resources with the Department's overall PD Strategic Framework, which linked PD assets to the advancement of foreign policy and national security objectives. As a part of this modernization effort, R/PPR and the Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA) began to roll out new audience analysis, strategic planning, management, monitoring and evaluation, and outreach and collaboration tools to enable PD sections to deliver on policy priorities.[7] These modernization initiatives include the following:

1. Contact Relationship Management (CRM) The Salesforce-based CRM system is the Department's enterprise diplomatic engagement platform for managing contacts and relationships. It is intended to provide users with a complete view and history of interactions and relationships with individuals, groups, and organizations, both at the mission level and for coordinated outreach across missions and bureaus. CRM is designed to give PD practitioners and all mission staff the ability to identify and manage key contacts, track interactions with those contacts, message those contacts with targeted outreach campaigns, plan events, and evaluate effectiveness with analytics. Through CRM, the "R family" of bureaus anticipate that PD practitioners will be able to conduct more effective, data-driven strategic outreach.

2. PD Tools Another Salesforce-based system, PD Tools seeks to improve strategic alignment of PD activities and the tracking of results. Designed to replace several legacy planning, monitoring, and evaluation tools, such as the Mission Activity Tracker and PD Resource Profile, it is meant to shift the PD Implementation Plan (PDIP) into a continuously (rather than annually) updated strategic planning tool. By integrating with CRM, PD Tools allows practitioners to plan initiatives and activities, connect them to target audiences, execute the programs, and evaluate impacts.

3. Digital Collaboration and Productivity Tools The PD community uses a range of tools to maximize on-line collaboration and productivity (e.g. Slack, Google Suite, Zoom for Government, etc.). These platforms have proven to be especially valuable during the pandemic, improving communications, productivity, and the ability to be fully mobile while increasing information sharing across the PD community and the Department. R/PPR has been working with the Bureau of Information Resource Management (IRM) to enable additional capabilities and enhanced security across these platforms and will continue to support the specific business and collaboration needs of PD practitioners.

New organizational structures and tools require appropriate training and professional development. R/PPR and the Foreign Service Institute's PD Training Division (FSI/PD) are jointly identifying the key capabilities needed by today's PD professionals to support audience analysis and segmentation, strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities. In addition to expanding the training in these areas within traditional PD courses offered by FSI, the two offices are working to build a supplemental suite of on-demand instructional materials and "just-in-time" professional development opportunities. The PD Tools and CRM deployment teams also continue to offer training in the use of the integrated tool set. Finally, PDSI coaches provide team building and management consultations for at least a year after implementation of the new position descriptions.

PDSI OBJECTIVES

As previously outlined, the PDSI realigns mission-based PD practitioners from the program-focused structures of the past to policy centered, audience-focused portfolios that facilitate collaboration for specific policy results. The initiative also aims to create flexibility to adapt to constant changes in public opinion, technology, and communications. Working with coaches, posts develop their PDSI roles from the 14 FJDs that more accurately reflect today's practice of public diplomacy, including the requirements of digital engagement. R/PPR coaches also work with PAOs on creating new portfolios and duties for the Foreign Service positions in each PD section, aligning the FSO roles with PDSI's policy centered, audience-focused approaches as well.

As of the writing of this report, R/PPR's stated objectives for the PDSI include the following:[8]

- Design a policy-centered staffing structure for each overseas PD section organized around audiences, content, and resources. Create accurate LE staff position descriptions.

- Improve the structural ability to collaborate internally and across the mission on strategic activities and engagement, planning, and evaluation of results.

- Deliver a structure that engages employees around audiences and strategic results.

PDSI ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE – NEW WORK "CLUSTERS" AND PORTFOLIOS

A senior PD official involved in the initial design and implementation of the PDSI described the audience-focused position descriptions as part of a sustained engagement effort intended to meet the needs of key contacts across the full arc of their educational and professional development.[9] For example, a young academic exchange program participant might return home positioned to become an emerging voice, and over time, develop into an established opinion leader. An audience driven outreach and engagement strategy allows posts to build long term relationships with key contacts that evolve along with their interests, capabilities, and capacity to influence. The press and media component enables post to amplify its audience engagement efforts, managing both short term advocacy and outreach requirements while building longer term influence projection.
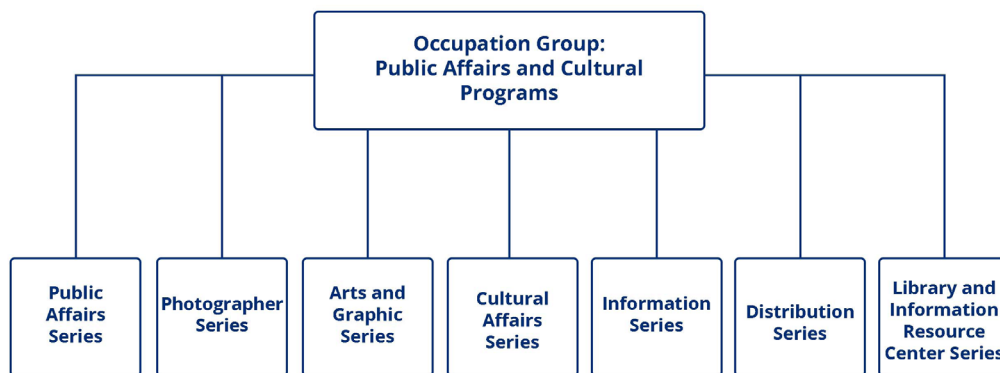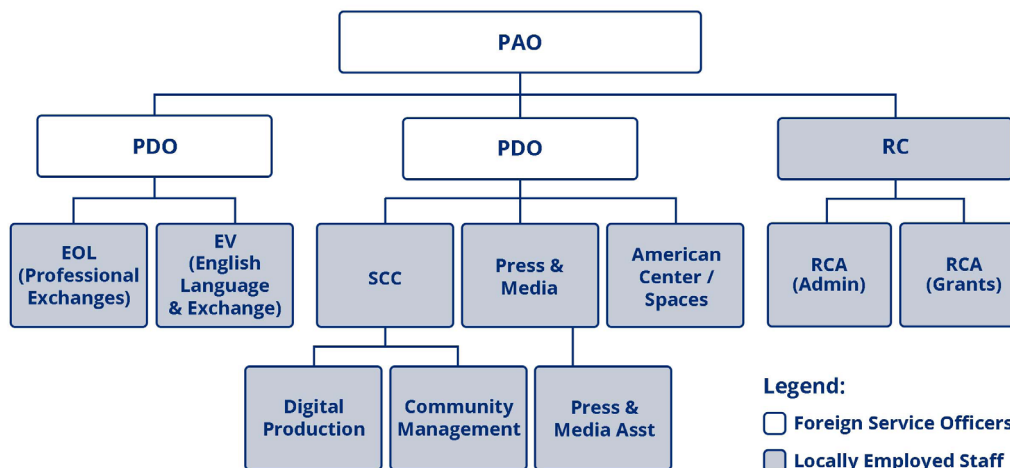
To achieve this audience focused approach, the PDSI replaces program "silos" with three new job series ("clusters") made up of collaborative work units organized around Public Engagement, Strategic Content Coordination, and Resource Coordination. The revised structures and roles emphasize policy results through strategic planning, audience research and analysis, and monitoring and evaluation. Significantly, posts retain the ability to modify working titles for positions in terms appropriate to the local context, in recognition of the need to effectively communicate the substantive responsibilities of the position to mission staff and external audiences.

The largest cluster, Public Engagement, is responsible for mission programming and outreach that supports U.S. foreign policy by influencing the actions and opinions of three groups: Established Opinion Leaders (EOL), Emerging Voices (EV), and Press and Media (P&M). This cluster encompasses ten of the 14 new FJDs working in the following portfolios: EOL, EV, P&M, English Language, Exchanges and Alumni, Experiential Learning, Education Outreach, and American Spaces management. The Strategic Content Coordination (SCC) cluster involves three of the new FJDs focused on section-wide strategic content coordination, digital production, and community management (digital engagement). Finally, the Resource Coordination (RC) cluster includes one new FJD focused on section-wide resource coordination specific to public diplomacy's needs. Importantly, for the first time some level of responsibility for strategic planning and audience analysis is built into every job description in the section, so that all staff are able to contribute to advancing policy priorities.

Public Diplomacy Section Structure in the 1970s

- Occupation Group: Public Affairs and Cultural Programs
  - Public Affairs Series
  - Photographer Series
  - Arts and Graphic Series
  - Cultural Affairs Series
  - Information Series
  - Distribution Series
  - Library and Information Resource Center Series

PDSI Organizational Structure - Medium Post

- PAO
  - PDO
    - EOL (Professional Exchanges)
    - EV (English Language & Exchange)
  - PDO
    - SCC
      - Digital Production
      - Community Management
      - Press & Media Asst
    - Press & Media
    - American Center / Spaces
  - RC
    - RCA (Admin)
    - RCA (Grants)

Legend:
- ☐ Foreign Service Officers
- ☐ Locally Employed Staff

The portfolios are broadly summarized here:[10]

Emerging Voices (EV) is a functional category of work to engage individuals, communities, and organizations that wield significant, and often unpredictable, influence on host-country attitudes through digital communication and/or informal, evolving networks. American Spaces management is part of the EV engagement portfolio. (American Spaces are fully-owned and operated U.S. government facilities such as American Centers or independent entities not part of the U.S. Mission, operated under a contract, memorandum of understanding (MOU), cooperative agreement, or another instrument with the PD section.)

Established Opinion Leaders (EOL) is a functional category of work to engage individuals or institutions in already influential positions, such as think tanks, professional syndicates, civil society organizations, academia, professional training institutes, and government. This engagement enables them to shape public attitudes, either as individuals or through the policy priorities they adopt for those institutions.

Press and Media (P&M) is a functional category of work to engage the reporters, editors, and commentators who influence discourse on the full range of critical issues through print, broadcast, and online media. Press and media areas of focus can include newly emerging thought leaders as well as more established influencers.

Strategic Content Coordination (SCC) is a function that can include specialized roles in section-wide strategic content coordination, strategic planning, audience analysis, research, and/or monitoring and evaluation as well as separate roles for digital production, and community management. Strategic content is defined as material from multiple formats – policy statements, speeches, video, audio, graphics, photos – pertinent to host-country discussion and understanding of U.S. foreign policy and American values. SCC series positions support the PAO in coordinating section-wide planning, development, and use of strategic messaging and content, and in operating digital platforms to advance mission PD engagement.

Resource Coordination (RC) is a function responsible for developing PD budgets and accounting for PD resources, aligning resources to policy priorities, managing PD section human and material resources, and coordinating with the management section on PD budgets, property, regulations, etc. RC portfolio positions oversee the use of resources funded by R and other USG and host-country sources for PD purposes. These funding sources can include Diplomatic Programs (DP) ".7" funds received through regional bureaus, programs and services from the R family of bureaus such as ECA and GPA, and non-PD funding streams such as foreign assistance, counterterrorism, or countering violent extremism for PD projects. RC also includes management of audio visual, event preparation, and other PD program support functions.
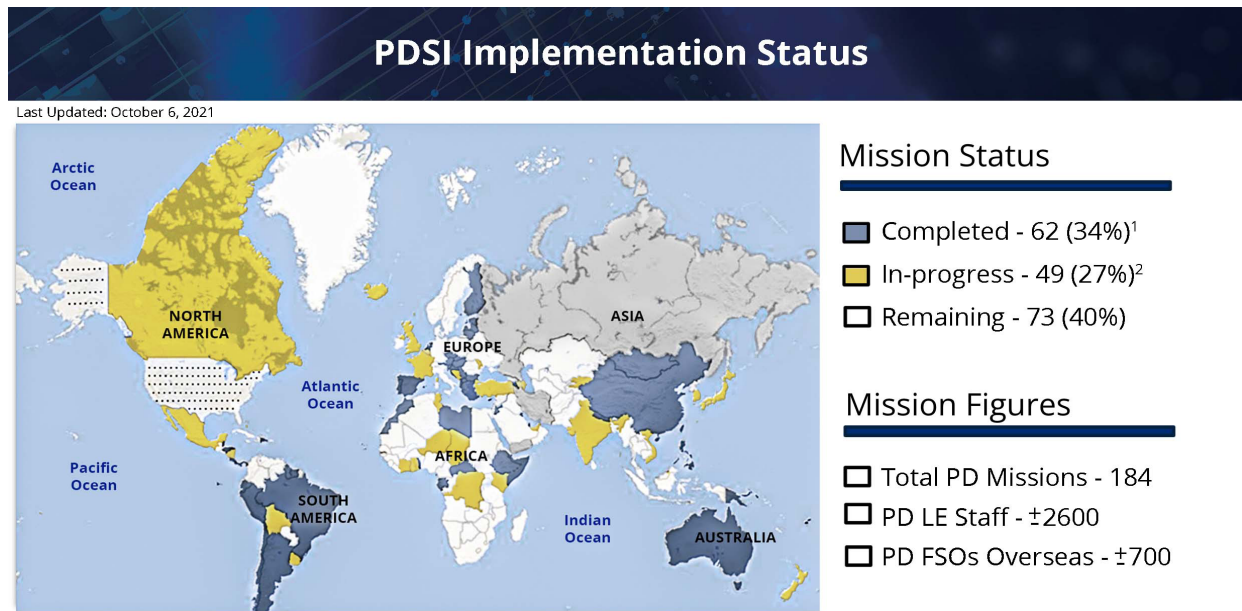
UPDATED PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OFFICER POSITIONS

Clearly these new portfolios have significant implications for the roles and responsibilities of PD foreign service officer positions. To align American officers within the new PDSI-driven organizational structure, in April 2021 R/PPR announced changes to FSO titles and capsule job descriptions to include oversight of the re-focused and reorganized operations. Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) and Information Officer (IO) position designations overseas no longer correspond to the new organizational structure implemented in mission PD sections.

Going forward, there will be two official titles for U.S. FSOs serving in PD sections: "Public Affairs Officer," and "Public Diplomacy Officer." The PD section chief position will retain the official title of Public Affairs Officer (PAO), and, as such, will continue to be the designated head of the PD section and the officer who bears ultimate responsibility for the effective and responsible management and oversight of all PD resources. All other PD positions will be designated as Public Diplomacy Officer (PDO), regardless of the specific functions and responsibilities associated with that position, similar to the separate designations for the political, economic, and consular cones.[11]

PDSI IMPLEMENTATION: CURRENT STATUS

As of October 2021, 62 of 184 (34 percent) of U.S. missions around the world have "implemented" PDSI, which R/PPR defines as having received their finalized new position descriptions. Additionally, 49 of 184 (27 percent) of U.S. missions around the world are "in progress," which R/PPR defines as missions that have a new organizational structure and are waiting on the final classified positions or were beginning PDSI work. Together, this represents 111 of 184 (60 percent) of U.S. missions as of October 2021. R/PPR states that, despite the pandemic, it is on track to complete PDSI organizational reviews of all overseas PD sections by December 2022, with the goal to have all these sections working in the new structure by the end of 2023.[12]

PDSI Implementation Status

Last Updated: October 6, 2021

Mission Status

- Completed - 62 (34%)[1]
- In-progress - 49 (27%)[2]
- Remaining - 73 (40%)

Mission Figures

- Total PD Missions - 184
- PD LE Staff - ±2600
- PD FSOs Overseas - ±700

1. "Completed" on this map refers to missions that have moved staff into PDSI classified positions.
2. "In-progress" includes missions that have a new organiztional structure and are waiting on the final classified positions.

As the PDSI evolved from a largely human resources centered project in its early years to a key part of the overall effort to modernize USG public diplomacy, R gradually increased the financial resources and staff dedicated to implement it globally. In 2020, R approved a significant increase in the PDSI's budget for FY 2021 to onboard 30 contract personnel to accelerate implementation. The table on the next page outlines how R has resourced the PDSI since it began to be rolled out in 2017.

PDSI Personnel and Financial Resources (FY2017-2021)					
	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021
Total # of Personnel	7	9	19	22	58
Civil Service	0	0	0	1	1
Foreign Service	2	2	8	7	12
Contractors	2	3	6	9	41
REAs	3	4	5	5	4
Total Expanded Budget	$42,793.74	$703,771.24	$1,208,421.21	$1,696,770.16	N/A (in progress)

Today, the length of time for implementing the new PDSI structure varies from mission to mission, although most require two years to fully implement the initiative. The process includes a preparation phase (4 months), an implementation phase that includes final HR classification of all new position descriptions (8 months), and a transition support phase (12 months). Once a post is scheduled for the PDSI, implementing PAOs are invited to a R/PPR-led workshop focused on the conceptual basis of the new structure and the leadership and management skills needed to bring their teams through the change.

During the implementation phase, R/PPR's trained coaches work with PAOs, LE staff, American officers, and embassy leadership to design the new structure, identify the new position descriptions needed, anticipate the shifts in FSO portfolios required, and write and classify all LE staff jobs. After each post approves the new job descriptions, they are assessed by the regional classification center, which determines the grades and final classification of all positions. Posts then begin working in their new structure, while PDSI coaches based in the United States or working remotely overseas provide ongoing transition support for the following 12 months.

During the transition phase, PD sections begin employing the new organizational structure at post and work collaboratively through the process of learning to use the policy-centered, audience-focused collaborative structure effectively. This includes working as a team to analyze audiences for defined policy objectives, plan strategically and manage effectively, and learn and adapt engagement activities based on M&E that advance U.S. foreign policy priorities.[13] R/PPR has emphasized repeatedly that any post's PDSI transition is an ongoing, gradual process that takes time.
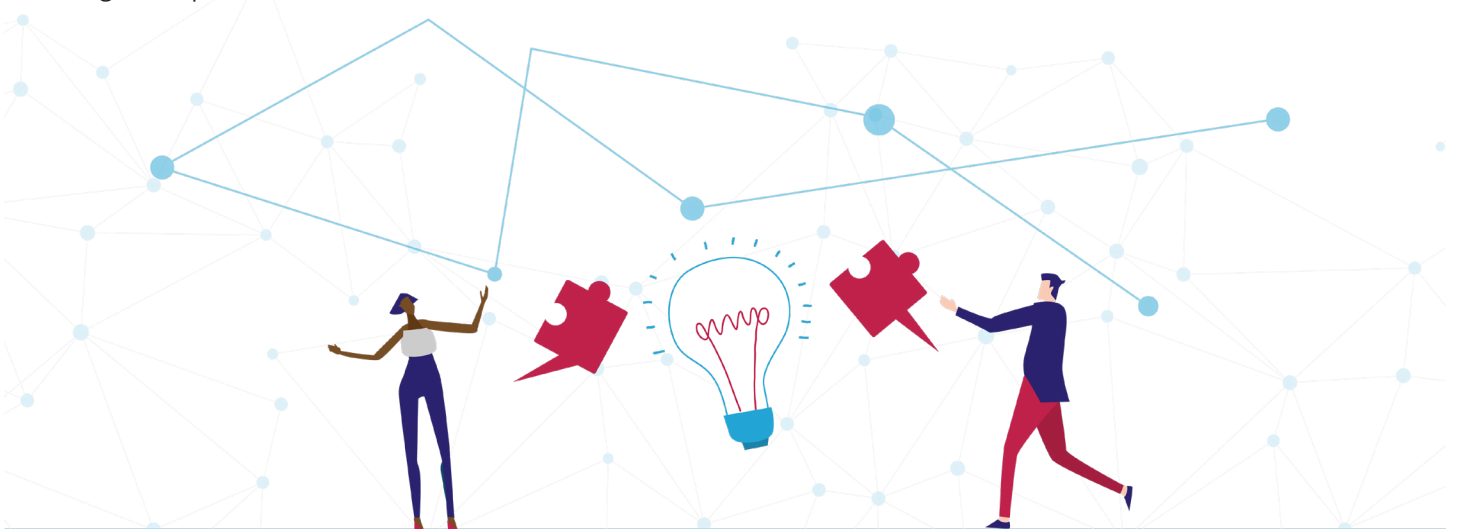
PART II:
FIELD PERSPECTIVES ON PDSI IMPACTS

To gain an understanding of the PDSI's impacts on the practice of public diplomacy in the field, the ACPD Executive Director and Senior Advisor conducted a series of discussions with PD LE staff and foreign service officers (FSOs) at ten small, medium, and large U.S. overseas missions in nearly every geographic region. We specifically addressed four aspects of PDSI implementation objectives: audience analysis and segmentation; collaboration inside the section and externally within the mission; the organization of PD activities around mission strategic goals; and the use of strategic content in public engagement. Part II of this report summarizes our findings on these areas based on the input we received from PD professionals at posts that have implemented the new staffing model in the past two years.

"FITTING PROGRAMS TO PEOPLE": THE NEW AUDIENCE-FOCUSED PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Arguably, the central tenet of the PDSI is to enhance the ability of U.S. mission PD sections to be more policy centered and audience-focused. A clear majority of our interlocutors appreciated – and in most cases fully embraced – the value of an audience-centered approach. However, many of the missions with whom we spoke were still in the initial planning phases of the new audience identification, analysis and segmentation process, so at the time of our discussions, the development and implementation of PD activities largely continued as it had before PDSI. (Pandemic imposed restrictions, or outright moratoriums, on in-person engagements also had a significant impact on outreach activities and audience analysis efforts.)

As they ramp up for full implementation, however, a number of posts raised significant concerns about their capacity to carry out the audience analysis aspect of PDSI, identifying it as the single most challenging aspect of the new structure. First, posts consistently expressed frustration at the lack of available training and resources to support the development of effective audience analysis strategies. Small posts in particular cited the added challenges of resource limitations, including the PAO at a post in the African Affairs (AF) bureau, who reported that the operating pace of the section and the scarcity of personnel made it "impossible" for PD staff to dedicate the time necessary to do audience analysis.[14]

As the ACPD discovered, however, training is only a part of the issue. Audience focused diplomacy requires a change in mindset as well. As a PAO at a mid-sized post in the European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) region noted, "putting the audience first is one of our biggest challenges," adding that local staff "struggle" with audience prioritization.[15] Another EUR-based PAO agreed, pointing out that the change to an audience focused approach would take time because for "decades" both LE and FSO staff have been "fitting people to programs" rather than the other way around. Exchanges with every post on the question of audience prioritization made it clear that this transformational shift in program planning and execution requires a significant conceptual shift among most PD professionals and will not happen overnight.[16]

Along the same conceptual lines, several posts cited examples in which embassy leadership, to include the Ambassador, the Deputy Chief of Mission, and section heads, actively resisted an audience focused approach. Instead, they expected programs to be implemented as they had been in the past, along traditional programmatic lines. This has had the effect, at some posts, of thoroughly upending efforts to transition to an audience focused approach before program selections are made.

Another audience-related challenge relates to the new descriptive categories for target audiences. Several LE staff and FSOs noted that the "artificial" division of audiences into Established Opinion Leaders and Emerging Voices categories caused confusion for PD sections because many, if not most, audience groups cannot be so precisely defined or segregated. As one PAO noted, the EOL and EV distinctions are "too black and white" because an established opinion leader in one context may also be viewed as an emerging voice in a different frame of reference.[17] In these cases, sections had to decide how to assign responsibility for engagement with multiple audiences within a single category, which created more complexity and added an extra layer of decision-making in implementation.

Posts' issues with the focus on audience extended to bigger picture concerns about the consequences for Washington program management. Among the posts we interviewed, a prevailing perception emerged that the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and other Washington-based regional and functional bureaus and offices have not yet adapted their programs to prioritize audience identification. As a PAO at a large post said, "The way ECA is structured hampers audience focus at overseas missions."[18]

Some of the more experienced LE staff and FSOs at medium to large posts, especially those who manage complex exchanges and cultural programs, commented that as long as ECA and other PD bureaus and offices continue to present program offerings and opportunities using format, language, and performance expectations that predate the PDSI, it will be difficult to implement PDSI-driven changes in process at post. Clearly, the field-based perception that ECA and other Washington based PD program offices have not fully embraced the PDSI's audience focus has had a dampening effective on post efforts to realize it.

Despite these challenges, a number of success stories have emerged as a result of the shift to an audience-centered programmatic focus. One mid-sized post reported that the section is working on a "map" of key EOL audiences and using CRM to help analyze the reach of its alumni and journalist contacts, a good example of how posts can use the new PD systems to embrace the audience-centered approach. Another post is working to contract a country-wide audience analysis to increase the specificity of its programming and messaging. LE staff at two small posts in the East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) region said that through their expanded portfolios, they felt empowered to reach out to new audiences. One gave the example of working with local broadcasters to broaden the reach of the section's English language content.[19]

Several posts underscored that even though they had not yet been able to analyze specific audiences for their activities, the seed had been planted in all staff regarding the importance of considering audiences before program planning commenced. In this way, these missions suggested that their work had become more audience-focused already, even if they could not yet define the exact audience groups they wanted to reach.

As an additional caveat, we note that nearly every post emphasized the absence of "normal" audience contact during the pandemic. Most in-person programs have been postponed, canceled, or changed to a virtual format, and their resumption has been complicated by the summer 2021 emergence of the COVID Delta variant. At the same time, though great improvements have been made across the board in the development of virtual engagement strategies, each mission is still learning how to fine-tune its array of on-line outreach tools and platforms to reach intended audiences. In addition, many of the posts included in our research were only a few months into the implementation of their PDSI structure when the pandemic struck, making it difficult to follow up with implementation. For these reasons, some LE staff and PAOs were reluctant to draw definitive conclusions about how the PDSI had affected their shift to an audience-centered approach.

"BREAKING DOWN THE SILOS": ENHANCED COLLABORATION

ACPD conversations with posts on PDSI implementation also focused on shifts in internal and external collaborative practices. Here, in contrast to the challenges associated with audience research and analysis, posts generally reported that in-office and cross-mission collaboration has improved as a result of the PDSI. Although smaller missions indicated that greater intra-sectional collaboration was as likely to be driven by necessity as by the PDSI, most of the mid-sized and large mission staff with whom we spoke said that the PDSI "helped break down silos within the public diplomacy section" and provided opportunities for increased cross-mission collaboration.[20]

Several LE staff noted that the PDSI structure had strengthened and clarified the roles for each employee in the section and also helped them to better understand, and therefore support, the work of their colleagues. A number of posts also reported that with greater awareness of section duties and responsibilities, LE staff are now more effective in covering for absent colleagues. A few posts used the example of their grants programs to illustrate expanded internal collaboration. Before PDSI, posts may have had one or two Grants Officer Representatives (GORs); now, with expanded grant management responsibilities among LE staff members, these posts have three or four. As the result of PDSI implementation, many more staff understand the grants process and appreciate the opportunity to share those responsibilities.

Additionally, several LE staff also said that the PDSI focus on audience specific program development resulted in better integrated digital engagement across the section. Two larger posts noted that the rollout of CRM simultaneously enhanced internal as well as cross-mission cooperation as all sections began using the new tool.

Beyond grants management and CRM, programmatic cooperation across the mission has also improved. The PAO at a small post in the East Asian and Pacific Affairs region (EAP) described using the PDSI as a "deliberative effort to improve cross-sectional collaboration." This PAO also reported that by establishing the strategic values of their responsibilities, the "new position descriptions have empowered staff to work with other sections."[21] At another small post, LE staff emphasized that the PDSI changes instilled a "one team" concept in the section that encouraged staff to work together across the section and the mission.[22]

While cross-sectional collaboration appears to have improved under PDSI, LE staff and FSOs at a variety of mission sizes indicated that the support of embassy leadership (or the lack thereof) had a make-or-break impact on the initiative's successful rollout. A PAO at a mid-sized EUR mission reported that ambassadorial or "Front Office" (FO) influence had inhibited transition to the PDSI," citing a lack of understanding of the PDSI's origins and intent. Several other PAOs noted that more needed to be done to obtain "buy-in" for the PDSI's structural changes from the FO and the Country Team.[23]

Specifically, several posts emphasized that mission understanding of PD functions tend to default to traditional press and cultural configurations. Improved cross-sectional collaboration, they argued, will require a full-on mission-wide "education" effort to explain the changes to PD structures and practices. Some posts have already taken this on. One mid-sized post's PD leadership proactively briefed the PDSI to the Ambassador "as a dream for the FO" because the new structure could better assist the FO in fulfilling ambassadorial priorities while cross-training LE staff for direct FO support.[24] The same post noted that PDSI provides consistent communication with the FO since the cross-trained PAO, CAO, and IO are able to address all aspects of every program, making FO communication transparent.

Another section used PDSI restructuring as a way to redirect or reframe requests from other sections that do not fit with post's target audiences and policy objectives. In other words, the PDSI has enabled some PD sections to deflect or deter one-off "niche" initiatives that are inconsistent with mission priorities.
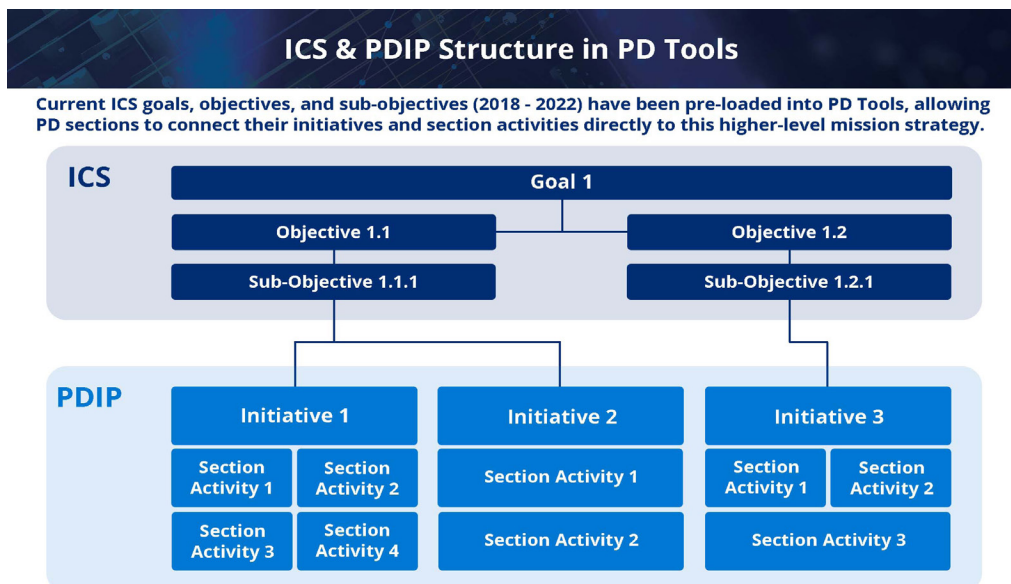
The collaboration-driven increase in LE staff duties and responsibilities has, however, raised some concerns about new supervisory structures. As of October 2021, R/PPR reported that over 140 LE staff supervisor positions had been created at the first 62 PDSI missions.[25] But not everyone is happy with the promotion. A few LE staff working in mid to large posts reported that they found it difficult, if not awkward, to be thrust into a supervisory role for the first time. Some did not ask for increased responsibilities, nor did they expect to be upgraded. Several said they felt uncomfortable in having their former peers report to them as supervisors. One LE staff stated that he did not feel prepared to take on a supervisory role, noting "being a manager takes time," and working directly with Embassy leadership was a "big challenge."[26] Most of those we spoke to who had become new supervisors expressed the need for more supervisory skills training and support.

Finally, some FSOs in our discussions conveyed that resistance to PDSI-driven collaborative structures remains embedded in the PD officer corps. One PAO at an EUR post said, "just changing the job description does not change the mentality" and that the traditional silos and divisions between press and culture still exist, with negative implications for future collaboration.[27] An LE staff member at a large post noted that sending an "admin notice" on the new structure is not enough to improve cross-section collaboration, adding that "officers need to show more leadership" to make the PDSI effective.[28] It is clear, as several experienced LE staff told us, that strong officer leadership and investment in the PDSI process is "critical" to making a successful transition to the new structure. This includes active cultivation of embassy leadership buy-in and targeted communication within the mission about the PDSI and its impacts.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE POLICY": PDSI AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

ACPD discussions with PD LE staff members and FSOs overseas revealed that, so far, the PDSI has had a relatively limited effect on strategic planning, largely because posts have already been closely linking their PD activities to mission strategic plans for years, if not decades. The long-standing premise that PD must support overall mission goals has been drilled into the professional PD community by a succession of efforts from the R "family" of bureaus and reinforced by functional and regional bureau PD offices.

Most PD teams we spoke to indicated that they consistently rely on the mission's Integrated Country Strategy (ICS)[29] and PD Implementation Plan (PDIP) to guide their programming and media engagement. According to LE staff at a large post, "even before the PDSI, lots of emphasis was placed on strategic planning and ICS goals."[30] One PAO at a large post in the Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) region reaffirmed this observation, adding that the PD section's focus on supporting mission specific objectives significantly predates the PDSI.[31]

ICS & PDIP Structure in PD Tools

Current ICS goals, objectives, and sub-objectives (2018 - 2022) have been pre-loaded into PD Tools, allowing PD sections to connect their initiatives and section activities directly to this higher-level mission strategy.

ICS

Goal 1

Objective 1.1 — Objective 1.2

Sub-Objective 1.1.1 — Sub-Objective 1.2.1

PDIP

Initiative 1 | Initiative 2 | Initiative 3

Section Activity 1 | Section Activity 2 | Section Activity 1 | Section Activity 2
Section Activity 3 | Section Activity 4 | Section Activity 2 | Section Activity 3

Several posts offered that transitioning to the PDSI and rolling out PD Tools concurrently improved the section's focus on the PDIP. A few LE staff commented appreciatively that planning and reporting on programs in PD Tools requires users to link various aspects of the programs directly to the PDIP. In other words, users have become much more actively engaged in the strategic planning process. As a consequence, the PDIP has morphed from a relatively static document updated once a year and referenced occasionally into a dynamic planning and reference tool. A mid-sized embassy PAO in WHA also praised PD Tools' capacity to assist the section with PDSI-based tracking and monitoring of programs.[32] Thus, it appears that both PD Tools and PDSI work in tandem to reinforce sections' support of overall mission goals.

Inevitably, given the scale and scope of the changes being absorbed, several LE staff commented that the simultaneous transition to the PDSI structures and the rollout of PD Tools and CRM has led to cognitive overload and generated considerable confusion among staff members struggling to absorb a number of new processes and tools at once. Many LE staff reported that they are still getting accustomed to the new systems and requested more training, especially in the use of PD Tools, to better understand and integrate these new capabilities.

Our conversations with LE staff on PD strategic planning yielded several useful insights into challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation (M&E). LE staff at a large post in WHA informed us that, despite calls within the PD community to do more M&E in recent years, Washington has not provided sufficient training and support to meet the demand. These same LE staffers also commented that too many Washington offices are involved in conducting research, resulting in multiple and often uncoordinated data collection calls to already beleaguered posts. Our interlocutors added that, in their experience, not all PD officers at post understand and support the time and effort required to do quality M&E. Finally, many PD professionals still do not know how to design relevant indicators and collect reliable M&E data.[33]

The LE staff at a mid-sized post in WHA summarized the impact of the PDSI on policy planning by noting that the initiative "has helped us become more strategic." Another group at a mid-sized post in NEA agreed:

> "Before the PDSI, the section was more reactive. Now, there is more strategic thinking about how and why we do things; more advanced planning regarding speakers, media engagement, and exchanges; and more focus on mission goals. Now we are considering strategy at multiple points of the programming process, and branding has improved, as well."[34]

Finally, the PAO at a small post in EAP noted that even if the strategic planning component of the PDSI was not new, it encouraged post to re-emphasize the central importance of mission goals to PD planning and allowed for a "fresh start." The officer added that the PDSI "makes sense" because "what we do is all about policy."[35]

"STRATEGIC" CONTENT AND DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Lastly, the ACPD asked PD practitioners in the field to comment on how the new PDSI staffing structure has impacted audience engagement with strategic content, primarily – but not exclusively – via digital platforms. Generally speaking, posts that felt poorly prepared to conduct audience research and analysis also expressed confusion about the definition of "strategic content." Many reported that to date the PDSI has had little to no impact on section use of Washington-based or post-generated digital content. Several of these missions stated that they continued to use DC-produced content when they could, but they often had to modify that content to make it relevant in a local context.[36]

Additionally, several LE staff said they often ignored Washington content because it either did not match up well with mission goals or was not delivered in a timely fashion. LE staff and FSOs at a large post in WHA cited the Washington content marking the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder as an example of DC-generated content that arrived too late to be of use, especially when time is needed for translation and contextualization.[37] While the timely distribution of materials for local adaptation is a perennial challenge, several posts were disappointed that the PDSI's renewed focus on strategic content development has not, in their view, increased the speed of content delivery. (It is worth noting that timely content delivery was not among PDSI's stated goals.)

On the plus side, several posts remarked that the transition to the PDSI allowed them to transform their digital engagement strategies by facilitating the hire of new staff members with expertise in digital analytics and content creation. The PAO at a mid-sized EUR mission commented that "our content on the digital side has totally changed. PDSI enabled the section to hire a new digital team. Before, we just pushed out DC content; now, we post lots of localized audience-focused content."[38]

The PAO at a mid-sized section in WHA explained that "the content side of the house has really benefited from the PDSI," adding that the new structure "has helped clarify roles and responsibilities. Strategic communication campaigns are now better planned and integrated" into section and mission activities.[39] Another PAO at a mid-sized embassy in EUR noted that while nothing has changed regarding content so far, s/he was optimistic that two staff newly focused on this role "should be able to refine how the embassy understands digital audiences and engagement."[40]

Under the PDSI, linkages between strategic content and audience outreach have improved. LE staff at a mid-sized post in the Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) region praised the PDSI for pushing the team to "use content to reach a specific audience and work toward a policy goal." After transitioning to the PDSI, they added, "we changed from just reporting to really analyzing the data," and "staff are using more advanced social media tools and data analytics." An FSO at the same post affirmed "the PDSI reinforces how we think about tailoring content to different groups." S/he cited EducationUSA and other information on higher education in the United States as an example of Washington-produced content that the section is modifying for use with target audiences in country.[41]

Finally, nearly all posts commented on the pandemic's positive impact on the quality of their digital engagement initiatives. With in-person programs and exchanges significantly curtailed, posts have focused more resources, staff, and creativity on localized digital outreach, including how to better understand actual and potential digital audiences. Many posts saw the impetus to do more in the digital space with the latest technologies and platforms as one of the pandemic's few silver linings for public diplomacy.

ADDITIONAL FIELD OBSERVATIONS AND CONCERNS

In addition to responding to the ACPD's four principal research questions, the LE staff and FSOs we interviewed had a lot to say about other aspects of the PDSI's impact on the practice of public diplomacy. We cover the most significant of these observations in the following paragraphs.

The "Biggest Failure": Improving Outreach within the Department of State: In the course of our research, the ACPD learned that the PDSI does not appear to be widely known or understood outside of R/PPR and the posts that have either undergone implementation or are scheduled for it. Many Washington based offices within the broader PD structure also claim not to have been fully briefed on the PDSI and its impact on field practices, which may have consequences for future program development. Finally, although R has taken steps to brief senior leadership across the Department, understanding of the PDSI has not trickled down to the working level in non-PD bureaus and offices.

According to a PAO at a mid-sized EUR post, the apparent lack of awareness about ongoing efforts to modernize PD's overseas structure and practices may well be the PDSI's "biggest failure." S/he added: "We [the PD family] need to be better communicators. [We need to explain that] the old Cold War staffing model [is] no longer working, and we need the PDSI to remain competitive."[42] An NEA PAO agreed, noting the need to "empower PD officers to explain the new structure and responsibilities" and to demonstrate that cross-training and flexibilities that come with the PDSI benefit the work of the entire mission.[43]

"Disconnects" between Field and Domestic PD Structures: A number of LE staff and FSOs also reflected on what they saw as an emerging "disconnect" between the new PD structure overseas and Washington-based program processes and functions. They noted in particular that Washington based program office expectations for field based program management did not reflect the PDSI-driven transformation of roles and responsibilities at post. As a PAO at a mid-sized mission in EUR observed, "the PDSI only focuses on the field, not the PD structure in Washington, which is confusing everyone."[44]

"Drowning" in Responsibilities: Staff Limitations at Small Posts LE staff at small posts worried about the difficulty of combining multiple responsibilities (as identified in the 14 possible Framework Job Descriptions) into a handful of actual positions. One local staff member noted that the PDSI has exponentially increased LE staff performance expectations while assigning multiple overlapping roles to individual staff members, with the result that s/he felt "overwhelmed, like I am drowning."[45] A PAO at a post in Africa went so far as to say that the PDSI just doesn't "fit" at posts with perennial LE staff deficits.[46] Small post LE staff and PAOs agreed that more staff are needed to realize the vision of the PDSI, and that the skill sets most in demand to assure the success of PD programs in the field include strategic planning, audience research and analysis, M&E, and report drafting.

What's in a Name? "Confusion" over New Job Titles: While internal position names frequently differ from public titles, per Department of State human resources practices, LE staff at a number of posts still struggle to describe their new job titles. Several have chosen not to use the designated titles for their updated positions because they are "confusing" to their external contacts. Job titles in the "Public Engagement" and "Strategic Content" clusters in particular seem to be difficult to explain in context and do not translate well into local languages. In some cases, LE staff have reverted to "traditional" titles such as "Cultural Assistant" or "Media Outreach." Others have come up with creative workarounds. As one LE staff member at a large post in WHA said, "the new titles don't change the work. It's on us to inform others about what we do."[47]

Perceived "Disconnects" between LE Staff and FSOs LE staff at nearly every post in our survey expressed surprise and some frustration that changes to PD FSO position descriptions had not kept pace with the PDSI's restructuring of PD sections. A few indicated that some officers did not appear to be invested in the changes brought on by the PDSI at post, and several more raised concerns about new officers arriving at post without sufficient buy-in to the staffing structure. That said, it is important to note that most of our discussions with LE staff groups occurred just prior to the summer 2021 update to PD officer capsule descriptions for the 2022 Foreign Service bidding cycle. This may help to allay LE staff perceptions of a disconnect between local and foreign service position descriptions.

"Two Halves of a Ship": The Traditional Press and Culture Model: Most sections in our survey reported improved collaboration and flexibility in the conduct of their work as a consequence of PDSI implementation. However, a good number of FSOs and LE staff argued that despite these changes, their section continued to uphold the traditional division of responsibilities between press and cultural functions. A PAO at a large mission in WHA noted, for example, that "there are still two halves of the ship" in the PD section. According to a PAO at a mid-sized mission in the European region (EUR), these divisions remain "ingrained in old habits and attitudes," and will continue to diminish the potential impact of the PDSI until properly addressed.[48]

The "Human Element": Flexibility and Empowerment: Despite their criticisms of certain aspects of the new structures, the majority of LE staff praised the overall objectives of the PDSI, commenting that the new roles helped them focus more on mission goals, audiences, and tangible results. Several mentioned that they are working more closely together in the new structure and that there is more understanding and flexibility within the PD section at the mission. Some noted that even though the "human element" of the new structure was missing, and that more change management support was needed during the transition phase, the PDSI structure made them feel more "valued and empowered" as PD practitioners.[49]

PART III:
THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

To broaden our understanding of the PDSI's impact on the practice of public diplomacy in the field, the ACPD conducted a series of interviews with several stakeholder bureaus and offices in Washington. For comparative purposes, our conversations with senior officers in PD regional bureaus, ECA, the PD Training Division at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and Global Talent Management's Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE) covered the same issues discussed with field posts: audience identification, cross-section collaboration, policy planning, and strategic content. Part III of this report details input on PDSI structural reforms and impacts on the practice of public diplomacy from Washington-based PD and human resources leaders.

REGIONAL BUREAU PERSPECTIVES

At the time of our research in early summer 2021, 49 missions had implemented the PDSI, many of them within the past year. (By October 2021, 62 missions had fully implemented PDSI, and 35 additional missions have a new organizational structure and are waiting on final classified positions, with 14 other missions beginning PDSI work.) As a consequence, many of the regional bureau officials with whom we spoke in early summer 2021were quick to caveat their remarks by noting their relatively limited exposure to the initiative. Nevertheless, several reported that the PDSI had "increased the general awareness of the importance of audiences in program planning." At the same time, a few officials lamented the lack of training and resources for audience analysis. One official remarked that this lack of support to staff in the field is "analogous to the approach taken with [the field roll out of] M&E procedures." Another official added that more education about the PDSI is needed mission-wide to define objectives and audiences for outreach efforts.[50]

With respect to LE staff roles and responsibilities, several regional bureau officials said that increasing the number of LE staff in supervisory roles at missions may have a negative impact on personnel management at post. Echoing LE staff concerns about inadequate preparation for supervisory roles and responsibilities, one regional bureau officer noted that "job talent does not equal supervisory talent." Another official commented that while PD roles in the field are changing, the "DC structure and resources" are not adapting quickly enough to support the shift to audience based, policy-driven PD practices.[51]

Most regional bureaus agreed with colleagues in the field that PD sections were actively engaged with mission strategic planning well before PDSI implementation. In their view, the PDSI has, at best, merely reinforced the existing focus on mission goals. Several senior officers in regional bureaus cited PD Tools as the "bigger deal" with respect to innovations in planning because it integrates so many useful systems and functions into one platform while establishing direct links between specific PD activities and overall mission strategy. One senior FSO praised the PDSI and PD Tools for making PD more "data-driven."[52]

Regional bureau officials reinforced field concerns that even with the PDSI, Washington-based content offerings continue to be disconnected from mission-specific goals and understanding of local audience needs. One official said, "Posts simply continue to ignore the content they don't care about. Washington is not enabling posts to use content or develop content for local needs." S/he used the example of Washington-produced content focusing on China, which, in this official's experience, has been insufficiently nuanced or context appropriate to be useful at specific missions.[53]

Another regional bureau official remarked that the "challenge on content is resources--people need proper tools and skills" to create persuasive outreach materials. Previously, graphic designers, videographers, and visual arts

teams based in IIP (the Bureau of International Information Programs) provided direct support to the field, but following the 2019 merger of portions of IIP and the bureau of Public Affairs into the Global Public Affairs (GPA) bureau, posts have been relying on their own limited resources to develop content. Regional bureau PD offices are trying to fill some of these skill and resource gaps, but for now, post-specific content creation, according to some bureau officials, remains "ad hoc and reactive."[54] In rolling out PD modernization initiatives, R and GPA officials acknowledged that centralized digital content production in the increasingly localized world of social media communities has not proven successful. It remains to be seen whether the PDSI and other tools will improve posts' capacity to create meaningful local digital content instead of relying exclusively on Washington-produced materials.

DEFINING SUCCESS: FSI/PD PERSPECTIVES ON TRAINING AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

Just about everyone we spoke to agreed that the success of the PDSI – and "PD Modernization" writ large – depends largely on more and better skills training. The ACPD spoke with the leadership of the Public Diplomacy Training Division within the Foreign Service Institute (FSI/PD) to better understand how these needs are being met. FSI/PD officials told us they are focused on two questions. First, what is the end goal for PD modernization? And second, what does success look like?[55] FSI/PD, along with R/PPR, is redefining the skills and knowledge that PD professionals need to master to conduct successful public diplomacy in the 21st century.

In 2021, FSI/PD launched a new Public Diplomacy Officer (PDO) tradecraft course and updated its PD Foundations course, opening enrollment to all employee categories, including LE staff. The new PDO course merged separate Cultural Affairs and Information Officer courses into a single class to facilitate the PDSI's more audience-centered, policy-focused approach to PD programming and reduce stovepipes within PD sections. The Foundations course is offered virtually to facilitate global LE staff participation as well as Civil Service employees.

Building on this integrative model, FSI PD training courses also combined elements of the PAO tradecraft course with the political and economic section chief course. The joint sessions, which include strategic planning, working with the Front Office, and leadership skills, aim to foster more collaboration in advancing policy goals overseas. The three divisions have ensured that by 2022 these courses will be offered on the same schedule. In 2022, PD training will also offer more sessions to accommodate expanded audiences and provide self-study onboarding materials for newly-hired LE staff members.

FSI/PD officials acknowledged that despite these advancements, the lack of coordination of PD training and professional development opportunities across the PD family remains a significant challenge. In the absence of a central training authority, bureaus, offices, and posts often engage in ad hoc training opportunities, which further dilutes a cohesive approach to PD professionalization and modernization initiatives. Moreover, as an FSI official noted, the concept of training is also changing: "No single course will successfully 'train PDSI.'"

The institutionalization of "PD Modernization," according to this official, requires more just-in-time training and service-oriented field support. This includes a comprehensive inventory of existing training materials at post, at FSI, and in its virtual repositories. A training continuum is also necessary to address the full range of skills needed to conduct all facets of public diplomacy. Finally, FSI/PD leadership believes that to assure its full implementation, training on PDSI objectives and methods also must be included in non-PD courses, including those for Principal Officers, Deputy Chiefs of Mission, and Ambassadors. The R Senior Official now regularly briefs Ambassadorial Seminar participants as well as outgoing DCMs and POs on the PDSI and related PD tools.

DILUTION OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: ECA PERSPECTIVES

The ACPD spoke with multiple offices within the bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs about the impact of the PDSI on ECA programs in the field. Overall, the bureau "strongly supports audience analytics and segmentation" central to the PDSI and suggested that "posts know best how to target and apply ECA programs to reach the audiences that are important to them." However, as noted in Part II of this report, many LE staff and FSOs share the view that the program-centric organization of ECA represents an impediment to the new policy centered, audience-focused PD structure at post. The ECA officials we spoke to provided helpful context and identified some compelling counter-arguments.

First, as one senior ECA official pointed out, the perception of a disconnect between ECA and the field "suggests, perhaps, a misunderstanding of how ECA programs operate, [which may be] the result of a training gap." The same official noted that more attention might be drawn to "the important role posts play in strategic planning and making critical resource allocations (financial and human capital)."[56] Moreover, as another official indicated, many PD professionals mistakenly view ECA programs as static, and don't fully understand the post's authority (and responsibility) to tailor programs to make them effective for specific target audiences. Posts also have the authority to "avoid programs that are not a good fit with their objectives."[57]

Additionally, ECA officials noted (and persuasively pushed back against) the commonplace misconception that ECA programs are not strategic. Various flagship ECA initiatives, including International Visitors and English teaching programs "have been used for policy-focused engagement for decades. The programs were not set up for the programs' sake – they are a key part of our diplomacy."[58]

ECA officials noted widespread internal apprehension about the PDSI's apparent shift away from program management at missions. Of particular concern to ECA is the loss of LE staff time and expertise dedicated to specific flagship exchange and professional training programs (think the Fulbright or International Visitor programs) as job responsibilities are distributed across various audience based clusters. ECA officials agree that the explicit linkage of key audiences to policy objectives has strengthened PD outreach in many ways. However, they worry that shifting human resources away from the exclusive management of ECA programs in the field has the potential unintended consequence of "diluting program effectiveness at the same time that U.S. ambassadors and foreign governments alike are asking for more of these programs."[59] This concern reinforces the need to match growing demand for PD programming with corresponding personnel increases. As noted elsewhere in this report, the PDSI-driven realignment of responsibilities has highlighted that some posts do not have sufficient staff to carry out the full range of PD programs.

Another senior ECA officer noted that the management of academic and professional exchanges such as the Fulbright or international visitor programs requires high levels of experience and technical skills. S/he expressed a concern that in redistributing section responsibilities, posts would run the risk of dispersing and weakening these capacities among LE staffers. One "missing piece of the PDSI is an understanding of the time and effort necessary to execute certain programs."[60] Another official observed that "expecting employees to be good at everything is not realistic."[61] Finally, some ECA officials also shared the field-based concern that the distinction between Emerging Voices and Established Opinion Leaders categories is too rigid and may risk the exclusion of viable candidates for key programs, especially since many ECA programs and alumni engagement activities target both categories.

"LOOKING FOR MICHAEL JORDANS": GTM PERSPECTIVES

Because the PDSI requires the reconfiguration of local staff position descriptions, management sections at U.S. missions overseas and personnel in the Bureau of Global Talent Management have played key roles in implementation. In addition to classifying LE staff positions, GTM is responsible for ensuring that these new positions meet Department of State personnel standards and, with post input, conform to local employment law. GTM officials confirmed that in its early years, the PDSI was at the vanguard of a government-wide effort to standardize all LE staff position descriptions at U.S. missions abroad, and, that R was one of the first Department entities to comply with this requirement.

Our conversations with GTM officials addressed some key challenges to PDSI implementation, including the difficulty in developing standardized position descriptions while dealing with employment laws that differ from country to country. One official also remarked on the occasional emergence of a "disconnect between what PAOs want to do and what policy and local law allows them to do." In some cases, as the ACPD also heard from a regional bureau official, there were concerns that PAOs might use the PDSI to "solve some difficult staffing issues, which is problematic."[62] Although transitions to new PDSI staffing structures at posts have occasionally led to some LE staff retirements or resignations, as R/PPR has made clear to the field, the PDSI "is not a downsizing or rightsizing exercise," something that bears repeating with LE staff and FSOs alike.[63]

With respect to PDSI impacts on the practice of public diplomacy in the field, the GTM officials we spoke to expressed two main concerns. First, they noted that many of the new Framework Job Descriptions have "created significant challenges to recruitment because they are not written for entry level skill sets," with the result that the bar is set too high for local applicants. According to one GTM official, some embassy HR officers have reported that some of the new positions are difficult to fill because PD sections are "looking for Michael Jordans" and not willing to settle for available, though less qualified, candidates. GTM officials further note that job requirements from an FJD that are easily met at one post may be unattainable in the local applicant pool somewhere else. This requires the PAO to work closely with the HR office to ascertain whether a post-created job description matches available local talent, and then adjust accordingly.

Second, a GTM official suggested that language in the FJDs "should be adjusted to attract candidates from outside the mission," and that many posts "could be missing out on great outside candidates" because "posts are creating job descriptions for the person, not the job, which is not how it's done." It is important to note that PDSI coaches work with posts to focus on the position rather than the candidate, something that might be worth reinforcing in Washington as well as the field. Another GTM official also shared anecdotes about current LE staff employees being involved in the modification of their new position descriptions, adding that "some missions are integrating personal points of view versus what is best for the mission."[64] While it is standard practice for an employee to review and have input into a new position description, it is also essential that American supervisors use their judgment to ensure that personal points of view don't take precedence over Mission policies.

Despite the concerns outlined above, GTM officials were quick to acknowledge the scope and complexity of the PDSI implementation process and expressed appreciation for Washington and field based efforts to make it work. They also remarked that the PDSI experience offered some important lessons learned for State Department human resource management going forward, especially with respect to the need for more and better HR policy guidance from GTM to the field.

CONCLUSION

The ACPD believes that the PDSI is an important and effective element of PD modernization efforts that are helping to breathe new life into USG public diplomacy. This report offers concrete evidence that staff are more tied to mission goals, collaborate better, and have more accurate position descriptions and job responsibilities. The new PDSI staffing structure enables PD professionals to develop new approaches to the effort to understand, inform, and influence foreign audiences in line with U.S. foreign policy and national security goals. In an institution known for its grip on traditions and aversion to risk, R is to be congratulated for slowly moving the bureaucracy to improve support of PD professionals in the field by embracing innovation and modeling a commitment to continuous, incremental improvement in the practice.

Of course, like any institutional change, PDSI implementation has been disruptive and difficult, and impacts on the practice of public diplomacy are still mixed. The new PD architecture being designed through the PDSI will take years to solidify, and the path to full PDSI adoption will be neither linear nor direct. As many of our discussions emphasized, the full field mission (and Department) must be invested in the PDSI for it to be successful. Enabling posts to analyze and segment audiences and create compelling content will take much more time to build into the practice. Expanded training opportunities and continuous education on specific skill development will be necessary to ensure success in the new structure. Finally, it will be essential to sustain robust and interactive outreach efforts about the PDSI aimed at the field as well as Washington, especially to bureaus outside the PD family.

The Commission conceived of this report as a preliminary appraisal of the PDSI's effect on the practice of PD in the field. The structural and functional shifts brought about through the PDSI will continue to unfold at over 110 missions in the next two to three years, and a final assessment of the PDSI will be possible only after all missions have been working in the new structure for 1-2 years. In the meantime, it is our hope that the ACPD's findings and recommendations will help bolster the positive transformations taking place in the field by pointing out some possible course corrections and modifications to the PDSI as more missions implement the initiative. Finally, we would like to salute the commitment to, expertise in and passion for the practice of public diplomacy displayed by everyone we interviewed for this report. The success of the PDSI rests with you.

6

ENDNOTES

[1]For an overview of the challenges associated with the PDSI implementation process, see the detailed report by the Office of the Inspector General: Review of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative, Office of the Inspector General, United State Department of State, April 2021: *https://www.oversight.gov/report/DOS/Review-Public-Diplomacy-Staffing-Initiative*.

[2]Department of State cable, "PD Issues, June 2017," June 15, 2017, 17 State 61516.

[3]Department of State cable, "Public Diplomacy Locally Employed Staff Initiative – Next Steps for Implementation," September 1, 2018, 18 State 90236.

[4]OIG Inspection Report, op. cit., p. 4.

[5]R/PPR internal PDSI working document, 2015.

[6]Department of State cable, "Public Diplomacy Modernization Initiatives," July 30, 2020, 20 State 73276.

[7]All descriptions drawn from R/PPR internal PDSI working documents.

[8]"PDSI Overview," R/PPR internal PDSI working document, July 2021.

[9]ACPD interview with senior public diplomacy officer, September 16, 2021.

[10]"PDSI Job Series and Work Clusters Defined," R/PPR internal PDSI working document.

[11]Department of State cable, "Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative: Public Diplomacy Officer Nomenclature and Position Descriptions," April 2, 2021, 2021 State 31732.

[12]"R/PPR Town Hall, June 30, 2021," R/PPR internal PDSI working document.

[13]"PDSI," Diplopedia, R/PPR internal PDSI working document, June 2021.

[14]ACPD Discussion Group, 5/24/21.

[15]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/2/21.

[16]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/15/21.

[17]ACPD Discussion Group. 6/14/21.

[18]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/15/21.

[19]ACPD Discussion Groups, 5/11/21, 5/13/21, 5/17/21, and 6/3/21.

[20]ACPD Discussion Group, 5/13/21.

[21]ACPD Discussion Group, 5/18/21.

[22]ACPD Discussion Group, 5/18/21.

[23]ACPD Discussion Group, 5/20/21, 5/25/21, and 6/2/21.

[24]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21.

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25"R/PPR Briefing on PDSI," R/PPR internal PDSI working document, 2021.

26ACPD Discussion Group, 5/18/21.

27ACPD Discussion Group, 6/14/21.

28ACPD Discussion Group, 6/8/21.

29The ICS is led by the Chief of Mission to develop a common set of Mission Goals and Objectives through a coordinated and collaborative planning effort among Department of State and other U.S. Government agencies with programming in the country. Higher-level planning documents and strategies, such as the National Security Strategy, the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP), and Department regional (JRS) and functional bureau strategies (FBS) inform the ICS. Once completed the ICS frames and informs the annual Mission Resource Request and Mission-level performance management requirements. From an internal State Department working document.

30ACPD Discussion Group, 5/11/21.

31ACPD Discussion Group, 6/15/21.

32ACPD Discussion Group, 5/25/21.

33ACPD Discussion Group, 6/15/21.

34ACPD Discussion Groups, 5/13/21 and 6/3/21.

35ACPD Discussion Group, 5/18/21.

36ACPD Discussion Group, 6/7/21.

37ACPD Discussion Groups, 6/15/21 and 6/21/21.

38ACPD Discussion Group, 6/14/21.

39ACPD Discussion Group, 5/25/21.

40ACPD Discussion Group, 6/28/21.

41ACPD Discussion Groups, 6/3/21 and 6/10/21.

42ACPD Discussion Group, 6/2/21.

43ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21 .

44ACPD Discussion Groups, 6/2 and 6/8/21.

45ACPD Discussion Group, 5/17/21.

46ACPD Discussion Group, 5/24/21.

47ACPD Discussion Group, 6/8/21.

48ACPD Discussion Groups, 6/14/21 and 6/21/21.

49ACPD Discussion Groups, 5/11/21 and 5/13/21.

50ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21.

51ACPD Discussion Group, 6/9/21.

[52]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/9/21.

[53]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21.

[54]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21.

[55]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/10/21

[56]ACPD Discussion Group, 7/7/21.

[57]ACPD Discussion Group, 7/7/21.

[58]ACPD Discussion Group, 7/7/21.

[59]ACPD Discussion Groups, 7/7/21 and 7/12/21.

[60]ACPD Discussion Group, 7/12/21

[61]ACPD Discussion Group, 7/12/21

[62]ACPD Discussion Groups, 6/15 and 6/23/21.

[63]R/PPR internal PDSI working document, "R/PPR Town Hall, June 30, 2021."

[64]ACPD Discussion Group, 6/23/21.

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Shawn Baxter is a career Foreign Service Officer at the U.S. Department of State and a public diplomacy professional, having served in multiple overseas and domestic assignments in PD roles, most recently as the Senior Advisor at the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. His previous PD assignments have included Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Naples, Italy; Public Diplomacy Advisor in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Office of Public Diplomacy; Strategic Communications Officer in the Office of Policy,v Planning, and Resources for the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs; and Public Diplomacy Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong. Mr. Baxter graduated in history from the University of Portland and earned a Masters in European history from Villanova University. He was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to teach and conduct research in Germany. He is a native of Washington State and enjoys the outdoors.

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Dr. Walker has published and lectured extensively on the practice of public diplomacy in complex information environments. She graduated from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and earned her doctorate in English language and literature from the University of Chicago.
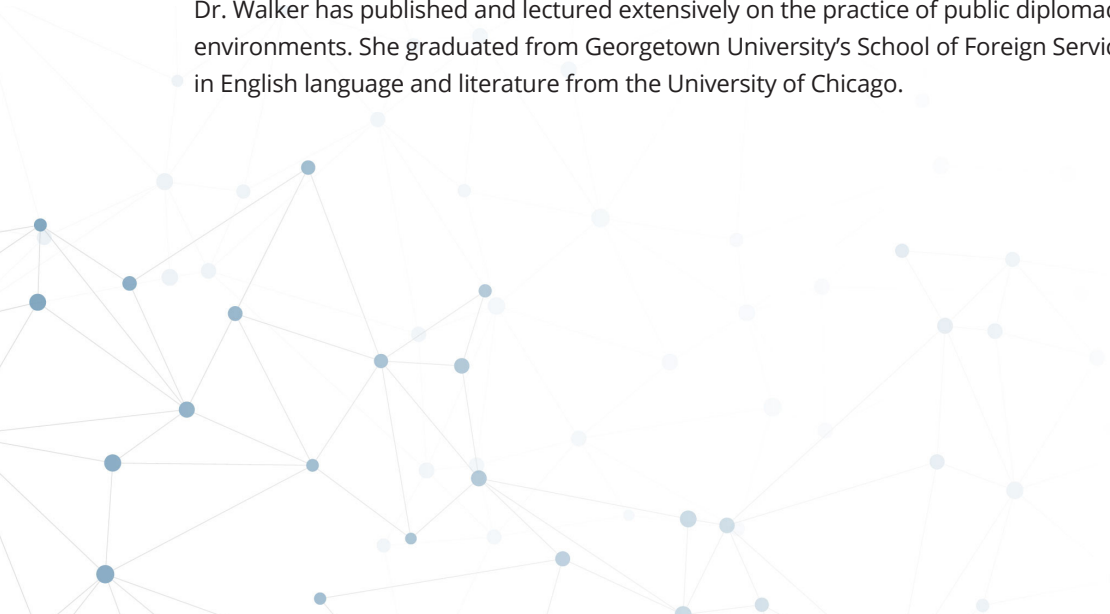
GLOSSARY

Bureau of African Affairs (AF)

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR)

Bureau of Global Talent Management's Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE)

Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP)

Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)

Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)

Contact Relationship Management (CRM)

Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO)

Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM)

Emerging Voices (EV)

Established Opinion Leaders (EOL)

Foreign Service Institute (FSI)

Foreign Service Institute's Public Diplomacy Training Division (FSI/PD)

Foreign Service Officer (FSO)

Framework Job Descriptions (FJDs)

Front Office (FO)

Global Public Affairs (GPA)

Global Talent Management (GTM)

Global Talent Management's Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE)

Grants Officer Representative (GOR)

Human Resource (HR)

Information Officer (IO)

Information Resource Management (IRM)

Integrated Country Strategy (ICS)

Locally Employed Staff (LE staff)

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR)

Press and Media (P&M)

Principal Officer (PO)

Public Affairs Officer (PAO)

Public Diplomacy (PD)

Public Diplomacy Officer (PDO)

Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI)

Resource Coordination (RC)

Strategic Content Coordination (SCC)

The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD)

Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R)

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