

U.S. ADVISORY COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Minutes and transcript from the December 12, 2023 quarterly public meeting with a focus on **Public Diplomacy and DEIA Promotion: Telling America’s Story to the World.**

U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy--Quarterly Meeting

Friday, December 12, 2023, 12:00 PM - 1:15 PM ET

In Person: USC Annenberg Center, 1771 N St. NW, 8th Floor, Washington, D.C.

Online (Zoom) access

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

TH Sim Farar, Chair

TH William J. Hybl, Vice-Chair

COMMISSION STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Vivian S. Walker, Executive Director

Mr. Jeff Ridenour, Senior Advisor

Ms. Kristy Zmary, Program Assistant

MINUTES:

The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy held a public meeting from 12:00 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. on Friday, December 12, 2023, to discuss the Commission’s recent special report on public diplomacy and DEIA promotion.

A distinguished panel of experts provided unique insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of DEIA principles into the practice of foreign policy. Panelists included **Nicholas J. Cull**, Professor of Communication, USC Annenberg; **Krista Johnson**, Director Center for African Studies, Howard University; **C. Brian Williams**, Founder and Director, Step Afrika! Dance Company; and **Yolonda Kerney**, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Department of State.

ACPD Executive Director Vivian Walker opened and moderated the session, Chairman Sim Farar provided introductory remarks, and Commissioner Bill Hybl closed the meeting. The speakers took questions from the Commissioners and the audience, as detailed in the transcript below.

AUDIENCE:

Approximately 200 participants registered and 30 attended this in-person public meeting. Ninety-two logged on to the Zoom platform to view the event virtually, including:

- PD practitioners and PD leadership from the Department of State, USAGM, and other agencies;
- Members of the foreign affairs and PD think tank communities;
- Academics in communications, foreign affairs, and other fields;

- Congressional staff members;
- Retired USIA and State PD officers;
- Members of the international diplomatic corps; and
- Members of the public.

Note: The following transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Vivian Walker: Hello everyone. I'm Vivian Walker, the Executive Director and Designated Federal Officer for the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.

Together with ACPD Commission Chairman Sim Farar and Vice Chairman Bill Hybl, I am pleased to welcome you to this quarterly public meeting held in fulfillment of the ACPD's mandate to keep the American people informed about USG public diplomacy activities.

Today's panel marks the publication of a recent special report put out by the Commission on *Public Diplomacy and DEIA Promotion: Telling America's Story to the World*. USIA fans will recognize the reference. That was the motto emblazoned above the U.S. Information Agency.

As the lead foreign affairs agency and the face of the nation to the rest of the world, the Department of State has a mandate to promote DEIA principles abroad. But much of the responsibility for the promotion of these principles lies with public diplomacy practitioners.

And not just with public diplomacy practitioners, but with the distinguished scholars and academics and other representatives who travel abroad to discuss these issues and values on behalf of the U.S. government.

My co-author, Deneysel Kirkpatrick, and I prepared this special report to better understand how the promotion of DEIA principles is shaping the current practice of public diplomacy in the field.

Today, we are lucky to be joined by a distinguished group of experts on various aspects of public diplomacy, from its history to its theory to its practice. They will provide some of their thoughts on the report, and, more broadly, their views on the integration of DEIA into public diplomacy practices.

We are joined remotely by Professor Nicholas Cull, who is Professor of Communication at USC Annenberg--many of you know his scholarship on public diplomacy; Dr. Krista Johnson, who is the Director for the Center of African Studies at Howard University, among many accomplishments; Mr. Brian Williams, founder and Director of Step Afrika! Dance Company; and, also remotely, Ms. Yolonda Kerney, a Public Diplomacy Officer at the U.S. Department of State and an expert on these issues.

I just want to remind our audience that the panelists will present consecutively, so please hold your questions until the end, when we'll have time for a round of discussion on the issues. Our online audience--welcome to all of you as well--will be able to submit questions through the Q&A function.

A full written transcript of this event will be made available on the ACPD website in about four to six weeks. We also plan to make the livestream version of this event available online.

It is now my pleasure to turn to ACPD Chairman, Sim Farar, for introductory remarks.

Sim Farar: Thank you, Vivian.

With my distinguished colleague from the Commission, Vice Chairman Bill Hybl from Colorado Springs, Colorado, I am pleased to welcome you to this quarterly meeting.

A warm thank you to our distinguished panelists for agreeing to share their expertise with us.

Thanks also to all of you who have joined us in person and online for today's discussion. We sincerely appreciate your continued interest in and commitment to the practice of public diplomacy.

I would like to express our sincere thanks to the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership and Policy for hosting this meeting and to the Public Diplomacy Council of America for its partnership and support for this event and the work of the Commission.

Our bipartisan Commission was created by Congress in 1948 to appraise U.S government activities intended to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics and to increase the understanding of, and support for, these same activities.

This year we are especially proud to be celebrating 75 years of Commission service to the White House, Congress, the Department of State, and, above all, to the American people.

This Commission has a long history of assessing and reporting how well public diplomacy programs have projected basic American values such as diversity, equity, and tolerance.

Our new report indicates public diplomacy professionals at home and aboard are working hard to put these principles into practice, producing significant, and in some cases remarkable, outcomes despite resource and capacity constraints.

Once again, thank you for joining us today.

Vivian, over to you.

Vivian Walker: Thank you, Sim.

Just a reminder that there will be no break between presentations, but there will be an opportunity to ask questions after the panelists have made their remarks.

It is now my pleasure to open the floor to Nicholas Cull, who is joining us remotely from Rome.

Nicholas J. Cull: I'm pleased to present something of the history of DEIA in U.S. public diplomacy. I want to talk about three things: the challenge of linking the United States to these values, the history of each of the components of public diplomacy in addressing DEIA, and the significance of DEIA today to what I call "reputational security," or securing national reputation for material benefit on the world stage.

My overall theme is that there is power in this area, but it comes from real change. And my research basis here is my book on the United States Information Agency during the Cold War.

So, first, the challenge. I think the challenge for the United States talking about these issues is that there has historically been tremendous weakness on the part of the United States with respect to diversity and equity especially. And the United States has a special vulnerability around issues of race, which was fully exploited during the Cold War by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union also knew how to point out failings of the United States with respect to gender. The first Soviet female cabinet minister was immediately appointed when the Bolsheviks acquired a government. And think of the countries around the world which have had a female head of government. Here, the United States is behind such places as India and Pakistan.

The United States can also, because of its economic system, seem merciless, and this was an issue when the UN was debating its Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 as to whether people had entitlements to economic inclusion. So, the United States is not always best fitted to lead in the area of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, but I think it does have important things to contribute.

We've also seen that American politics can get in the way. Historically, sometimes the Senate would restrain what American diplomats could talk about, most famously when they closed an element of the American pavilion at the Brussels Expo because they didn't want American racial issues being discussed internationally.

Yet within public diplomacy, there's a tremendous tradition of putting issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion front and center. Leo Crespi, the great founder, really, of USIA's polling practices in the 1950s, always gave the agency honest answers about people's attitudes towards the United States, including attitudes towards American racism.

America's-- or the USIA's--advocacy included advocating for the United States by opening up, honestly, about its civil rights and gender equality struggles. The fabulous film by James Blue depicting the March on Washington is one of the best examples of this.

In terms of cultural diplomacy, the United States not only placed diverse American voices front and center, but it also recruited diverse voices to the business of delivering American public diplomacy. This photo shows Louis Roth, one of the most famous advocates for the United States and for the role of women in public diplomacy, meeting a senior Iranian cabinet minister in the late 1960s.

Also, women who contributed to the American cultural mainstream, like Joan Ganz Cooney, were featured by the United States. Cooney was best known for her work with the Children's Television Workshop in bringing Sesame Street to the screen.

When we get to exchanges, I think we see interesting things--not only the inclusion of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in people-to-people-type exchanges, but also the inclusion of people connected to disability issues among the groups that were part of Eisenhower's People-to-People Program.

I think this was important because this was not saying that the United States had all the answers on disability issues, but it was saying that when people cared for people with disabilities or were themselves disabled, they shared something that could be very strong, and they could be a transnational community that would in itself strengthen the reputation of the United States.

I think this remains something that we could carry forward as an example--seeing value in the United States' effort to connect communities of practice and of experience around diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

Of course, in international broadcasting, we've seen tremendous contributions in this area, the best-known example being Willis Conover's "Jazz Hour" on the Voice of America with its inclusion of African-American artists and its insistence on the diversity of the American musical experience.

Now to the issue of reputational security. I think there's no doubt that having attractive culture and values enhances the security of a state on the world stage. This is partly why right now we see so many hostile countries seeking to undermine soft power practices and to argue that enemy countries are unattractive.

Kremlin media spend a lot of time seeking to undermine the reputations of countries seen as adversaries to the Russian state. The Scandinavians are a particular target, with Russian narratives arguing that Scandinavia is in moral decline and losing its population in order to cast the attempts of Scandinavians to adopt Russian children as a sign of weakness and even of perversion.

This is part of the world in which we live. When a crisis hits, having a good reputation can help, and lacking a good reputation can hurt. Ukraine has understood the benefit of cultivating an international reputation. It did much better in 2022 than it did in 2014, before people really knew anything about Ukraine.

The relevance of a country we know comes not from whether it has cultural value in the abstract, but whether it is seen by international audiences to be doing good, to be contributing to areas that are relevant to these audiences. And diversity, equity, inclusion, and access are of tremendous relevance to international audiences.

For example, the United States has been associated with inclusion, especially the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities who, historically, have not been celebrated, have not been

given medals (and who, in many countries around the world, have not been let out of special hospitals). I think this is a tremendous aspect of America's presence on the world stage and something which, as the father of a person with a disability, I will always celebrate and thank the United States.

It is possible, through public diplomacy, to collaborate around DEIA issues in the virtual space. We can see other countries, such as France, finding ways of working with video games to promote diversity issues.

For me, mutual education is always the greatest collaboration, and we have lots of opportunities through exchanges to work together around these issues. The danger, however, is that we ignore the possibilities of partnership and instead conduct ourselves like peacocks, claiming and displaying our unilateral strength without humility.

So, I see great hope in this report and in the attention of America's public diplomacy practitioners to these issues. I see scope to collaborate on a shared experience in a powerful way. I think that the best way to approach this collaboration is with humility and honesty--that everybody is learning and no one country has an unblemished record or absolute insight into these issues.

A former USIA officer, Barry Zorthian, used to say that in public diplomacy, you should always remember the Mercer doctrine. The Mercer doctrine is not some political scientist called Mercer, but rather a lyricist called Johnny Mercer. He would say, you have to “accentuate the positive” and “eliminate the negative.”

The best public diplomacy must always be about accentuating the positive developments in America, but also realizing that the country looks best when it is actively eliminating its negatives. The Foreign Service, and the country which it represents, must always remember the importance of walking the walk of diversity, equity, and inclusion if it wishes to be admired for these characteristics internationally.

Thanks for your attention. If you're interested in the concept, my book on reputational security is out next month in the U.S. It's already out in the UK.

It has been a pleasure to join you.

Vivian Walker: Thank you, Nick. So much to think about, from reputational security to the need for humility and honesty. But let's now turn to Professor Krista Johnson for her remarks.

Krista Johnson: Thank you. I want to also thank Vivian and Deneysel for inviting me to participate in this panel, and to congratulate you on what is really an insightful report. I think good things will come of the report, and a lot of people will read it and implement some of its recommendations. Of course, I want to thank the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and the USC Annenberg Center for hosting us today as well.

One of the things that struck me in the report was the photo of Dizzy Gillespie in Pakistan. It reminded me of the research that I have been doing on Merze Tate, who was a Howard

University diplomatic historian. There are many photos of her in India where she went on a Fulbright in 1950, including those of her interacting with Indian communities. The parallels there are interesting.

It also got me thinking about how Tate was very much part of an early cohort, if you will, of Black scholars who won Fulbrights just as the program was getting started. This was still the era of segregation. Tate was at Howard University, as were a number of other Black scholars, because they could not teach at the historically white institutions.

The perspective that [these scholars] brought when they traveled the world, and in their writing and scholarship, was a kind of alternative American experience, if you will. What was interesting to reflect on is that [in her work and travels Tate] was really compelled to address these DEI issues.

In some of her remarks and statements [Tate] would say, “you know, I don't do Black American history or politics,” but of course she was always asked to speak to race relations in the United States. In some ways, that hasn't necessarily gone away, but it is interesting to reflect on how [these issues have] always been at the forefront of what African Americans, minorities and women are compelled to address even if that isn't necessarily their forte or [the focus of their scholarship].

I think what's interesting specifically about these early African American scholars are the unique, intentional, and oftentimes personal perspectives that they were able to bring to issues such as universal rights, the necessity to treat all peoples with dignity, or the promotion of social justice and democratic rights. We know that all these issues are very closely aligned with U.S. foreign policy goals.

[Here I'll mention] Deneysel's blog [in which she talks] about the unique role that HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and institutions like HBCUs can play in the promotion of public diplomacy and DEI on an international scale. [These institutions understand] the connections between these issues.

History has shown that minority groups--African Americans in particular--have raised the concept--the experiment of--American democracy more [forcefully than other groups] simply because they have so much to gain if we actually live up to the ideal of American democracy.

But I think they also recognized that these issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and whatnot are also necessary for international peace and security. Merze Tate wrote on disarmament [among other] issues. She was a diplomatic historian, but she also really understood the role of people-to-people ties and how these programs and engagements [can ensure] peace and security globally.

If we look [more broadly] at the scholarship of what some are now calling the Howard School of International Affairs or International Relations, [it is important for us to remember how this body of scholarship] sought to challenge incorrect preconceptions of international relations, preconceptions that devalue diverse peoples and local and Indigenous rights and practices.

[These scholars] pushed against the project of empire and imperialism and notions of civilizing missions and populations.

They [appreciated] that the mainstream frames of reference used to understand the international order and international affairs were in and of themselves biased.

[These scholars] also foresaw the growing role of the diaspora in international relations and international affairs. I think they predicted or certainly foresaw some of the failures of assimilationist strategies-- and even partitioned as a political strategy for managing diversity and difference, political strategies that were, of course, pushed in the post-World War II era.

And they also connected, in important ways, domestic politics with international politics, as Professor Cull mentioned. Understanding and appreciating that what is done here in the domestic context has reverberations in international politics.

I would like to build on two points from that [observation]. First—and this may preempt some audience questions--what are the DEI links to--or are there links that can be made between--DEI and U.S. national security interests?

A good body of literature out there recognizes and makes the case that discrimination and inequity correlate to greater risk of instability in countries. [They are] also linked to protest and radicalization. We have the data that demonstrates those connections.

Inequality and exclusion also undermine development. We know, again, through data, that there are social and economic costs associated with discrimination against women, minorities, LGBT peoples, et cetera. There are [discernible] social and economic costs.

These issues can't simply be addressed by increasing DEI programming. It important that we recognize the legacies of our biased frames of reference. [In reading the report, I] was inspired by the commendable anecdotes and stories that [often took place] in spite of [the larger foreign policy framework].

You know these frames, right? The dominant frames that still very much [guide U.S. foreign policy]. Oftentimes [these frames] hinder partnerships, collaboration, or collective global advancement. It's what Professor Cull said about walking the walk.

We are often seen to be selective in terms of the groups we promote, prioritize and elevate. And then there are the groups and other issues [about which] we seem to be silent. That's noted in the international sphere and makes us look a bit hypocritical at times, which is unfortunate.

The second point I just want to quickly make is that we need more training courses on DEI impacts in the international arena, and more diversity in the Foreign Service and among [those] who are engaged in these areas. [In graduate programs in foreign service and international affairs], we have had some advancement in recent years--increasing the number of courses that focus specifically on race and racism in the international arena and [even certificate programs in DEI issues].

But there is no systemic understanding that DEI issues must be taught to and reflected on [by] the students we are training to become Foreign Service Officers. I would argue we need to teach [about scholars like] Merze Tate and others. [We need] more courses that teach race and racism not just as aberrational artifacts of the past but as [issues] that lie at the heart of the American project.

That's, of course, a very uncomfortable thing for us to have to grapple with in our own domestic context. Imagine, then, [the challenge of bringing] this into the international sphere.

Students need to understand how U.S. history and contemporary domestic discord influence global affairs and U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the digital age. The world witnessed the murder of George Floyd in real-time, just as we all did. And how do you address that?

At Howard, we host the Pickering and the Rangel Fellowships, which were created to bring more diversity into the Foreign Service—the State Department. But I think we do also need to recognize it's an alternative track. [The] reason why we have a Pickering and a Rangel is that the main channels of ensuring that we have diversity, equity, inclusion, et cetera in the Foreign Service are broken or certainly not as effective [as they should be].

[The other issue is that while] the Rangel and Pickering programs are hosted at Howard University, those students go to Georgetown and elsewhere. There's a real disconnect there. [The] reach of these programs on Howard's campus, is minimal, which is unfortunate.

Certainly, there are those of us who [aspire to start] a new School of Foreign Service at Howard, something that we need to consider seriously. Of course, we need funders to really consider that along with us.

[There is a lot of work to be done with] training, and not just in terms of diversity. It is not just a matter of having diverse faces but of teaching this history and the importance of diversity in our foreign policy priorities, and in the search for peace and security and stability in the international arena. I'll stop there.

Vivian Walker: Great, thank you. So much to think about, from the connection between the domestic and the international, the linkages to national security, and the presence of race and racism at the core of the American experience.

Let's turn now to Brian Williams and his extraordinary perspective as a cultural ambassador, among many other incarnations.

C. Brian Williams: Thanks so much for having me. As a Founder of Step Afrika!, I've enjoyed partnering with American embassies and cultural and artistic exchange programs across the globe for more than 30 years. So, it's a privilege to address this Commission whose work is instrumental in shaping the trajectory of U.S. public diplomacy. I'm learning so much just being here.

I believe so strongly in the power of cross-cultural exchange, and I really feel that our country should double down on such efforts in the years to come. I think we need to do as much as we can to connect people.

Step Afrika! is an arts organization dedicated to the transformative power of dance. And we began as a cultural exchange project between American and South African artists in December 1994, just six months after the election of President Nelson Mandela, in the historic Township of Soweto. In fact, I'm working now on a return to South Africa in August 2024 to commemorate that moment.

The company is recognized worldwide for its performance of stepping. For those in the audience who don't know, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to stepping-- I'll explain what that is. [It is] one of the largest African-American dance companies in the world today, and we're based here in DC.

We're known mostly for stepping, [which is] a uniquely African-American art form created by college students. That, for me, is not just a series of percussive movements, but a window, if you will, into the story of a community, its struggles and its triumphs. And I've always said that by studying the art form of stepping, one can learn so much about the African-American community and America as well.

For example, you can learn about the fraternity and sorority systems on American campuses, and the good things, as well as the other things, that our young students do while in school--I'm sure you all know about that. You can explore the development and culture of historically Black colleges and universities or investigate how the body came to be used as a percussive instrument in African American communities.

All of this can be experienced through witnessing a performance. Part of our mission is to provide a more complete image and understanding of African Americans to audiences worldwide, and in so doing, to foster a deeper understanding of the United States. I must say that these opportunities exist in whatever art form that may be partnered with public diplomacy. From Appalachian Bluegrass to Indigenous or contemporary dance, to the visual arts, there are so many stories behind every one of the art forms produced in this wildly diverse, rich country that it really would be a travesty to not invest in telling that story to the world around us.

In our 30-year history, Step Afrika! has had the privilege of collaborating with American embassies in over 50 countries. And there is still so much more to do. For example, we hosted performances for 1,000 Ecuadorians deep within the rainforest. I'll never forget that, watching the people from the villages come to see us--I don't know what they expected--and having a great time.

We had a massive celebratory performance for 5,000 in a park in Haiti that had been a critical site for people after the earthquakes had ravaged the country.

For seven years, Step Afrika! traveled to Croatia with one of my favorite programs ever, the Step Afrika! International Step Camp. Here, we shared stepping with young people from across southeastern Europe and beyond as a means to create community and connection.

Just as an aside, Croatia at the time had just entered the European Union and was dealing with integration issues and [becoming a part] of a broader Europe. The project really helped to answer some questions and launch that [process].

These partnerships, along with many more examples, have allowed us to serve as cultural ambassadors, sharing the diversity, expressive freedom, and creativity that many say define the American spirit. And as we engage with audiences from different corners of the globe, I understand deeply the profound impact that cultural diplomacy can have in building bridges and fostering connection. My only regret sometimes is we don't invest as much in the follow-up as we do in the moment.

Artistic and cultural exchange programs are a potent force in public diplomacy, and the arts can really provide a platform for genuine human connection. Where words can sometimes fall short, the universal language of dance speaks volumes. This point for me has been incredibly humbling.

One of the things we hear before we perform is, “don't be upset if the people don't respond to your performance” or “don't be offended if they're very quiet.” I don't know if you've ever seen a show, but it's very engaging. At the end of the show, when the audience has been yelling and cheering for the past 75 minutes, I sit down with my partners, and we talk about the power of the arts to shatter any preconceived notions--how we think people may respond to American artists, culture, and experience, and how the arts can truly break down cultural barriers and invite audiences to join in celebrating the shared humanity that unites us all.

Thanks so much to inviting me for the panel. I'm looking forward to the discussion. Step Afrika! is very honored to partner in this mission for years to come.

Vivian Walker: Thank you so much. I love what you had to say about offering a window into the story of a community and the power of art to shatter previously held expectations. Wonderful points to remember.

Let's turn now to our final speaker, Yolonda Kerney, to give us her perspective on the issues as a public diplomacy practitioner in her own right. Yolonda?

Yolonda Kerney: Thank you for having me. I want to also thank the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy for your tremendous work and for this wonderful report. I hope that people will read it and really take the recommendations to heart.

Just a couple of thoughts on accessibility as a PD practitioner. First, I must note for my fellow PD practitioners out there how committed they are to the work of telling America's story. Right now, I promise you, there is a public affairs officer or a press attaché who is being roused from slumber by some reporter's text messages or calls. Those who are in a different time zone

than the United States can appreciate when American news breaks. It doesn't matter what time that is. The PD officer is going to get a call and/or several texts.

Somewhere, [a PD officer] is comforting an anxious Fulbright scholar about whether they're going to be able to complete the research that they are in that country to conduct. And somewhere, there is a PD practitioner who is hastily drafting last-minute remarks for an ambassadorial speech. These things are part and parcel of what we do daily. And that's in addition to thinking about the larger framework in which we're operating.

Just a couple of comments because I want to leave plenty of time for questions. First, the DEIA acronym may be new-ish, but this concept goes back to our founding. We have always been really interested in making sure that we are more than the sum of our parts. That pathway has been flawed, obviously, when it comes to Native Americans, to African Americans, to the immigrant experience, or to the rural experience.

I am from a small town in Florida--from the metropolis of Sebring, Florida. If you have ever gone to Disney World, you may have stopped in my hometown to gas up and continue going. It is a place of dairy cows and orange groves.

My rural perspective matters because what I bring to the table from Sebring is a little different than the perspective from someone from Miami or from Tallahassee. [Talking about] diversity, diversity of thought, or geographic diversity really matters because we want to make sure that we are not creating an echo chamber-- not just here in the United States and the State Department, but also when it comes to our locally employed staff overseas.

It does no good for us to have only employed the children of elites, or those who have a particular mindset, if we are ignoring other voices in the host country. This is how we sometimes get tunnel vision, when those who are employed to advise us, to help us navigate the country, do not [have diverse backgrounds.]

We must practice that commitment to diversity of thought not just in our American staff, but in our locally employed staff, who make up the vast majority of our Foreign Service employees.

Second, accessibility really does have to be purposeful. I greatly appreciate the report's [recommendation to fund accessibility]. It's one thing to talk the talk and make a great speech about how we stand for accessibility, how much we love the Americans with Disabilities Act, but then our American spaces, our American corners, our embassies--in some cases, our chanceries-- are not always ADA-compliant.

Accessibility also means making sure that we can tell our story in as many languages as possible, that we are reaching as many host country nationals as [we can]. I want to commend the Advisory Commission for a prior recommendation from, I think, the 1980s, about expanding language opportunities and the ways that we not only translate but message.

In 2019, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Voice of America established service in Lingala. That service provides a platform for us to speak to some 80 million speakers of Lingala

in both Congos and the Central African Republic. It's that kind of forward-looking planning that makes it possible for PD practitioners to do the work.

There's something else in the report. You talked about training. I cannot thank you enough for making the recommendation. [While mentoring and short-term training are great], I would love to see something that mirrors the nine-month deep dive course for economic officers] for public diplomacy practitioners. With that, I'll stop, and I look forward to your questions.

Vivian Walker: Thank you so much, Yolonda, I really appreciate that acknowledgment of the role of public diplomacy officers. But I also appreciate your mention of the role of locally employed staff. As we tried to indicate in the report, the locally employed staff really are on the front lines of interpreting, translating, and communicating DEIA principles to make them accessible in the local context. And potentially at some cost.

I'd like to take the right of the moderator and ask the first question, moving from that acknowledgment of the role of the LE staff and drawing from the historical role the USG has had in trying to create democratic spaces for marginalized communities. How can the U.S. government understand and program effectively when there are differences between the U.S. and many countries on issues of race, religion, or sexual orientation?

This is a very important challenge. How do you see it?

C. Brian Williams: I could start by saying that that, from the artist's perspective, sometimes we can speak just by what we present-- like pictures sometimes are worth a thousand words. That we don't have to beat an issue over its head. I'm thinking about the African continent [with respect to] LGBTQ issues.

How do we softly have that conversation? Maybe it is more in the demonstration of how we embrace freedom and highlight LGBTQ issues [instead of] enforcing them. It is a very sensitive issue, something I think about a lot whenever we travel around the world. Actions, I think, can speak louder than words in terms of what we present and how we bring it into the community itself--the program that we choose.

Vivian Walker: I like that--the soft voice and the modeling rather than imposing.

Yolonda Kerney: Briefly, I think the first step is just to accept that we are not always going to agree. That's just the way that it is. When we are messaging on child labor alleviation, for example, from our perspective, we are telling parents, you need to make sure that your daughters go to school, you need to make sure that your sons do x, y, and z thing.

From the parents' perspective, they are doing a very loving thing by teaching their child a trade that is going to be able to allow them to take care of themselves. There's not always going to be agreement. Meeting in the middle, getting people to see both sides of an issue, that is huge.

When it comes to the engagement of women in some countries, we're just not going to agree [in every case]. Likewise, on LGBTQI+ issues--we simply are not [always] going to agree. That

does not stop us, however, from making sure that people are safe, and that there is respect for that difference of opinion. Sometimes that is the victory.

Nicholas J. Cull: I wanted to jump in at this point, if I may, Vivian, and say that in the 21st century, public diplomacy has evolved significantly from its historical practice. In the past, a public diplomat would ask themselves, what can I say to connect to my audience? Now I think the issue is, who can I empower to connect to my audience?

Other public diplomacy agencies around the world are doing this very well. I was really interested [to learn] when talking to the Goethe Institute in Beijing that their priority is not to promote Germany at all, but rather, to think, “what are German values and who might represent the issues that are important to Germany and China?”

So, they gave center stage to China's leading trans singer to empower her to speak to and sing for Chinese people in a way that hadn't been possible before. They saw that as more relevant to the world that Germany wants to build than, you know, another concert by Anne-Sophie Mutter or something similar.

I think understanding that we're moving into the era of the public diplomacy of empowerment and treating somebody [from a diverse background] with respect and providing a platform for them can accomplish what we want and what we need. [That can] make a tremendous impact over and above presenting as if we have all the answers.

Sim Farar: I just want to mention a couple of things. First off, I want to thank Nicholas for being here, and Krista, and Brian, and Yolonda. Very informative meeting. But I think we should move to questions from our online and in person audiences.

Vivian Walker: Just introduce yourself as you ask your question for the benefit of our online audience.

Mark Parnell: My name is Mark Parnell, State Department, Foreign Service Officer, 21 years, public diplomacy. Currently I work at the OIG (Office of the Inspector General). I can tell you that we are looking at how to incorporate greater DEIA in our inspections. Right now, that focus, DEIA, is mostly in the executive leadership aspect of our inspections. But we are also looking at how to incorporate it more into public diplomacy.

One of the areas in public diplomacy that have been challenging for us as practitioners is measuring success. I think the challenge is somewhat similar in measuring progress on DEIA. What we find as inspectors is when we go out and look at posts, we need to have clear criteria that we can hang our hats on. Is the post doing well in this area or does it need to improve? And where exactly does that improvement need to be done?

What we need to do better in Washington is to provide the assessment criteria and metrics to posts to help them measure their own progress and success. My question to you all is, what would you suggest in the way of measurement for DEIA in public diplomacy specifically and how do we put that into practice in the field?

Vivian Walker: Probably the most important question in the room--how do you measure program impacts? You all have very different perspectives. Let's hear from you.

Krista Johnson: I'm not restricted by being in government. I appreciate that you must have measurements and benchmarks. And often the time frame is so short. As Yolonda and others have said, that is the real challenge--your progress might be slow, and you might not even be able to identify it for a while.

What I found interesting in the report is that you have a set of tool kits or even benchmarks, if you will, that are from Washington, but invariably, post modifies them into a format that's going to be appropriate to the context.

It is going to be hard to get suitable benchmarks from DC. We need a hybrid system in which we all agree there are certain benchmarks that we'd like to meet, but there's going to have to be some flexibility in terms of you measure the results.

Vivian Walker: That's absolutely true.

Yolonda Kerney: Thank you for the question. As a public affairs officer who has been part of an OIG inspection, [there are a couple of basic question sets to ask].

First, are there interpreters available for your programs? Are there translators available? And if not, is it because, as the report points out, you've had to make a difficult decision, as in do I pay out of my local budget for a translator that's going to be able to provide services for perhaps 10 or 15 people at an event? Or do I use that same money that would be programmed for an interpreter or translator for something else?

That's not a dig at our Undersecretariat for Public Diplomacy, but it is to say that if we really want to be inclusive, we also must be able to fund it. So that's the first thing.

Second set of questions. Is your programming primarily in the capital city? How often are you out and about? Are the grants primarily awarded to the dominant ethnic group?

These are just some baseline questions that many PD practitioners ask themselves as they're thinking about what diversity and inclusion looks like in the host country. Putting aside the United States for a moment, and thinking about messaging in that country, what is it that I'm doing with my programming? Is it reaching all or as much of this population as possible? We have—and we know this to be true--created echo chambers in some countries because we continue to have conversations with either just the dominant ethnic group or a particular group of or type of people.

C. Brian Williams: I would just add from the artistic side that when you talk about measurement, you are talking about value as well. As an artist traveling around the world, [I wonder how much] these programs are really valued.

I know that historically, public diplomacy always feels slightly underfunded, undervalued, and that raises a question for me--what is the real value of soft power? And how do we measure how important that is to the country?

Sim Farar: Brian, when you perform, you have 5,000 people in the audience. You can get a read on that situation, can't you?

C. Brian Williams: I think so, but then they might say that was a once-in-a-lifetime thing. Do I value it? Do I want to do it again?

Krista Johnson: And did you change hearts and minds or is it just a feel-good experience here?

C. Brian Williams: Oh, absolutely. I believe we are. But can you measure that we've changed their minds? Is their [participation measurable]? And what do we need to do to go deeper, to go beyond that initial participation to really connect?

Sim Farar: I think what you're doing is very, very important work. Really important.

C. Brian Williams: Well, thank you.

Sim Farar: Thank you for doing it.

Vivian Walker: Nick, from your historian's perspective, what is the long view on this issue? Yes, I'm putting you on the spot, but I know you have something to say.

Nicholas J. Cull: This is a tricky one because there's lots of indications that soft power makes a difference in the world. It's surprisingly easy to measure, but it just doesn't change quickly. That can be an advantage when you had a good reputation but then start doing bad or counterproductive things—your good reputation remains for a long time afterwards.

Despite what you might read in the newspapers or what columnists might say they heard from a taxi driver on the way to the airport, reputation is almost boringly stable in the world. The only way to build a good reputation is to do good stuff for a long time.

Sometimes, the role of the public diplomat is to put a [stronger and better reality] into the policy conversation [rather than] more image. Maybe sharing the good things that are possible, showing value in a community overseas, is the last part of the process. Unless we are doing the right thing within our societies, we're not going to convince anybody internationally.

It has always been important to share the value and to give the gift of the diversity of the United States to international audiences. These communities have had tremendous self-respect. Go all the way back to Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he talks about the Black gift of song. He's talking about something that was already shared internationally by people like the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They were not traveling on U.S. government funding, but they were doing an amazing job in representing the diversity of the United States and winning friends and admirers for the United States everywhere they went in the world.

I know from my own work that people in South Africa have been profoundly influenced by the memory of the Fisk Jubilee Singers more than 100 years later. That became an amazing moment, a generative moment in South African musical history. That is a wonderful thing to carry forward. That is a tremendous performance indicator. If 150 years later, people still remember you, that makes a difference.

Vivian Walker: That is right in line with what Brian was saying about modeling the behavior. This also goes back to what you said earlier, Nick, about the power of change and how the most compelling part of the story is our ability to recognize a problem and then try to fix it. Our failure to fix the change also makes a profound impression.

I'm sure there are more questions or comments. Yes, please.

Audience: I work at CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) in a program that focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion within international affairs and the foreign policy space. I'm not sure if this is a question as much as it is a comment. How do we assure that folks don't feel like there is a disconnect between these executive orders on DEIA and what U.S. has been doing on the global stage? I've been hearing this quite a bit.

I think this goes to Professor Cull's point on reputational security. People from marginalized backgrounds may feel that there's some hypocrisy in decisions that are being made, especially in specific parts of the world, [that suggest] those executive orders are not really making an impact.

I think that's also an important point in terms of recruitment. [People need to feel] like they're not only being represented— [that it is not] just lip service--but that things are being implemented. It is important that [with respect to] recruitment and retention, there is no disconnect between these ideals and values. What does our country do on the global stage when it comes time to be an ethical leader?

Krista Johnson: [You just expanded on] one of the points that I was trying to make. [We must appreciate] that the international audience is savvy enough [to distinguish] between American values, the American people, and U.S. government policy on some issues. As we do with other countries and populations.

I take your point. Sometimes there is a disconnect. [That's when people-to-people engagements become even more important.] Like Step Afrika! or academic exchange programs that bring people to campuses such as ours.

Vivian Walker: Let's turn now to our online audience.

Jeff Ridenour: We have a couple questions--I'll summarize them.

This one is for any of the panelists. It has to do with the ways in which supporting or promoting DEIA helps in terms of our national security in addition to promoting the values of democracy and human rights. What more can be done to make the case for [DEIA] promotion, both in terms

of how our core [values] reflect the global majority, and in terms of how we can do better to improve America's image around the world?

C. Brian Williams: One of the things that I've learned in traveling around the world is what is really distinct about the USA is that we can find a natural and rich connection to every other nation on the planet somewhere within the 50 states, within the towns and cities.

There's so much diversity and demographic richness that connects with every single part of the world. I don't see why it's not in our interest to put that forward as much as possible. It is such a strength, such a positive--even with [all the historical challenges].

[Because] the world is already so connected, it is difficult to promote something [without being questioned or challenged by alternative sources]. We must be aware that this is a much more complicated space to work in.

I'm thinking about this a lot in terms of our work and what we can do to deepen connections with people. Because once you know and connect with people from around the world, it's much more difficult to make generic assumptions about a country and its policies and politics.

Yolonda Kerney: If I just can put a fine point on the piece about making sure that our locally employed staff is also diverse. Again, I'm from a small town in Florida. If you only took people from Miami and Jacksonville and discussed what the State of Florida was like and you didn't have my voice to tell you about orange groves and dairy cows, you're going to miss something. We are [creating] the same types of omissions when it comes to our locally employed staff in some countries.

Vivian Walker: That's a good point. How about another question?

Audience: I went to a private school in the mid '70s. We had a stepping group at my school. [LAUGHTER]

Krista Johnson: How cool is that?

C. Brian Williams: Nice.

Audience: I have a question for Professor Cull. You talked about music influencing people and the need to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. Sounds a little bit like censorship, like a CTI file that's a little bit Orwellian. So how do we ensure free speech, essentially?

Nicholas J. Cull: No, I'm so sorry, you misunderstood my point. I'm saying [it is important to] accentuate the positive in the presentation but eliminate the negative in reality.

You don't just eliminate or stop talking about the negative. You stop the negative from happening. [Several American administrations have taken this position.] President Eisenhower and President Kennedy both decided, we now know from the archives, that they needed to respond to Soviet propaganda about the United States and its racism not just by saying "it's

great. There are opportunities for African Americans. Why don't you have a visit from the Harlem Globetrotters?"

What both Eisenhower and Kennedy realized was they that they had to respond on issues of civil rights and make life better for African Americans. Kennedy, for example, was incredibly embarrassed that African diplomats from newly independent countries had problems when they were traveling [in the U.S.] There weren't desegregated washrooms between Washington and New York. Things had to change.

Sure, they were going to accentuate the positive and talk about the good things that were possible in the United States, but they also had to make real changes to policy. We [must never] stop talking about things. Rather, [we must] insist for foreign policy reasons that we need to change the reality.

This is the situation facing the United States now. It has negative realities which are undermining its position in world affairs. Senior American diplomats have told me that they have problems recruiting for exchange programs because of the perception of violence in American society. Kids are scared to come to American schools because of a perception of gun violence. Now you're not going to get rid of that [perception] just by giving a statistic that gun violence is rare. You must also be seen to be diminishing these and other social problems.

I hope that explains what I was trying to tease out. It was certainly not that we should remove negative stories. Rather, we should remove the cause of those negative stories, which is a negative reality.

Image in world affairs is always based on a reality. International audiences are incredibly good at working out who's telling the truth and who is exaggerating and puffing up an international image.

Vivian Walker: Thank you. I think this return to the importance of not only projecting a positive image, but taking the actions necessary to make the case that we are trying to change, we are trying to make a difference, that is the true source of reputational security.

With that, we have come to the end of our time Thank you all for your great questions and to our panelists for your wonderful comments. Now, I would like to turn to the ACPD Vice Chair, Bill Hybl, to close out this public meeting.

Bill Hybl: On behalf of the Commission, let me express my sincere thanks to our distinguished panelists for their insights and to the members of the audience for their thoughtful questions.

We appreciate your sustained interest in and support for USG public diplomacy activities and look forward to seeing you at our next quarterly meeting, which is currently scheduled for February 2024.

In this meeting we will focus on the ACPD's 2023 Annual Report, due to be published later this month—as well as the 75th Anniversary of our Commission!

With that we conclude today's event. Thank you, again.

END OF TRANSCRIPT