

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ACTIVITIES

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Basic Philosophy and Approach

Public Diplomacy -- as distinct from traditional diplomacy which involves non-public, government-government communication, and from public affairs, which involves communication with various sectors of the American public -- encompasses the U.S. government's efforts to communicate publicly with foreign audiences.

The aim of public diplomacy is to understand, inform, influence, and persuade foreign audiences with regard to U.S. foreign policy, and to inform them about the political, economic, social, and cultural context within which that policy is made.

The targeted audience has shifted over the years. USIA operated on a dual track, targeting on the one hand elite decision-makers and multipliers, and on the other hand reaching out to mass audiences through VOA, magazines, and American Centers. With the end of the Cold War and ensuing budget cuts, the focus was largely on elites only. Since 9/11, there has been a return to the dual track Radio Sawa, "Hi" magazine, and websites.

The underlying philosophy is that we share many common values with societies and audiences overseas, from policy issues (peace, democracy, prosperity) to every-day life (family, religion), and that we should build on these to get understanding for, agreement with, and even support for our policies.

There are two aspects to public diplomacy: the short-term aspect, which aims at explaining and garnering support for current policies, and the long-term aspect, which aims at building understanding of the broader American context within which policy is made and building long-term friendships.

Adapting the Basic Approaches to Audiences and Circumstances

The basic, traditional public diplomacy nostrum has been "our overseas posts know their audiences and what will work better than anyone else," as distinct from traditional diplomacy's approach of "Washington knows best." Understanding and even support for the public diplomacy approach has been growing among traditional diplomats since consolidation of USIA into the Department of State on October 1, 1999.

It is an art to balance the need for consistent policy pronouncements world-wide with the need to avoid cookie-cutter approach and instead to shape the message so that it will be understood and will persuade local audiences.

Key to the success of this art of communication is the public diplomacy professional at post, both Foreign Service Officer (FSO) and Foreign Service National (FSN), who understands local audiences' perspectives, filters, priorities, etc. as well as the essential features of the U.S. policy message that has to get across.

In turn, key to the success of these professionals are the personal relationships that they establish. As former USIA Director Edward R. Murrow said, "the real art in this business...is moving it the last three feet." These relationships enable the public diplomacy professionals to understand their audience, be sensitive to language, style, and timing, and to craft their message in such a way so that U.S. policy is both understandable and persuasive.

Research and Analysis

Overseas posts are continually appraising their audiences and the effectiveness of their approaches. This is pulled together formally once a year in the exercise of putting together the Mission Program Plan (MPP). The Washington counterpart is the Bureau Program Plan (BPP). In addition, the Dept. of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) carries out polling during the year and generates analyses and reports. Regarding the media, each post prepares a daily report on local media coverage of issues of interest to the U.S. Government for the Ambassador and shares this with various Washington offices. One improvement would be greater standardization of these reports and quicker sharing of global summaries throughout the Department.

Activities in Washington

Foreign Media Outreach: Dept. of State's Public Affairs (PA) Bureau holds daily press briefings and maintains a website. Both of these are open to domestic as well as foreign media. Coordination of message and tactics both within PA Bureau and, through the new Office of Global Communication (OGC) in the White House, with other departments and agencies. Foreign Press Centers focus efforts on foreign media.

Foreign Press Centers activities comprise briefings, including, since Spring 2003, special briefings for journalists from Arab and Muslim countries; website with transcripts, studies, reports, and links; reporting tours; assistance with interviews; research results on complicated issues; and the personal touch – assistance with visa renewal, obtaining driver's license, discussions over coffee or lunch, etc.

Office of International Information Programs (IIP) supports both short-term policy efforts and longer-term building of understanding and support through sending experts overseas as speakers, producing Electronic Journals on key topics, drafting template op-eds for editing and publication by overseas posts in local media, publishing brochures and books on basic aspects of the U.S. and maintaining a website specialized for foreign audiences.

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) supports the longer-term goal of building understanding and support through exchange programs (Fulbright, Humphrey, Ron Brown, International Visitor, Voluntary Visitor, etc.), English language training, and assistance to overseas student advising efforts on study in the U.S.

Activities at Overseas Posts

Prioritize policy issues that need attention in communications efforts; identify and prioritize long-term communication needs.

Public Affairs Officer (PAO) coordinates communications activities of other agencies and sections present at the Embassy.

PAO issues press releases, especially on Mission activities within the host country, maintains website, organizes interviews and briefings by the Ambassador, prepares op-eds for Ambassador's signature.

PAO uses awareness of and sensitivity to local language, culture, history, and timing to craft messages and programs, working with Washington bureaus and other Embassy sections.