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Review of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative

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Summary of Review

Prompted by a Department of State-wide exercise to revise all locally employed (LE) staff position titles, in FY 2014 the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources of the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R/PPR) launched an initiative to create updated LE staff position descriptions. The goal of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI)¹ was to enhance the ability of the approximately 2,600 public diplomacy LE staff at 186 missions worldwide to carry out more audience-focused, result-driven programs.² After OIG inspections from FY 2017 through FY 2020 identified concerns about the length of time required to implement the initiative worldwide and the resulting impact on section efficiency due to outdated LE staff position descriptions, OIG initiated this review of the Department of State's (Department) implementation of PDSI.³

Public diplomacy LE staff structures and job descriptions had not been significantly updated since the 1970s, despite dramatic changes in global communications and the 1999 merger of the U.S. Information Agency into the Department.⁴ The new PDSI position descriptions shifted the focus of LE staff work from programs and functions to audiences, strategic content, and resource management. OIG's objectives⁵ for this review were to assess whether R/PPR followed Department and public diplomacy guidance and best practices in developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the initiative.

In this review, OIG found that while R/PPR made efforts to modify procedures and implement lessons learned from the first few years of PDSI implementation, deficiencies in senior leadership involvement, project management, resource planning, communication with stakeholders, and training continued to hamper the implementation of the initiative. As of October 2020, just 36 missions, or 19 percent of overseas Public Diplomacy Sections, had fully implemented the initiative. Because of the low number of missions that had fully implemented the initiative at the time of the inspection, OIG was unable to fully assess the initiative's effectiveness. However, OIG made six recommendations to help improve PDSI's implementation procedures. In its comments on the draft report, R/PPR concurred with all six recommendations. OIG considers all six recommendations resolved. The office's response to each recommendation and OIG's reply can be found in the Recommendations section of this report. The office's formal written response is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix B.

¹ The initiative at different times had been called the Locally Employed Staff Initiative, the Staffing Modernization Initiative for Local Employees, and the PD Staffing Modernization Initiative. At the time of the inspection, R/PPR used the title, "Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative."

² Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, "2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan."

³ In 2016, R/PPR and the Bureau of Global Talent Management (formerly known as the Bureau of Human Resources) sent email guidance to embassies that discouraged filling public diplomacy LE staff vacancies or revising position descriptions until the staffing initiative was implemented at that mission. Over time, an increasing number of position descriptions became outdated as sections waited for implementation.

⁴ "Administrative Timeline of the Department of State 1990-1999," Department of State, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/timeline/1990-1999>.

⁵ See Appendix A.

BACKGROUND

History of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative

Approximately 2,600 public diplomacy LE staff positions at 186 missions worldwide support the Department's public diplomacy mission of promoting U.S. foreign policy goals by "informing and influencing foreign publics" and by strengthening the relationship between the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.⁶ The Department expended more than \$1.4 billion on public diplomacy activities worldwide in FY 2019. Public diplomacy LE staff structures and job descriptions had not been significantly updated since the 1970s, despite dramatic changes in global communications and the 1999 merger of the U.S. Information Agency⁷ into the Department.

In early 2014, R/PPR began a comprehensive review of overseas public diplomacy functions, structures, and LE staff position descriptions. The review was prompted by a 2013 exercise by the Under Secretary for Management's then-Office of Policy, Rightsizing, and Innovation⁸ to revise the Department's LE staff titles and position descriptions worldwide to achieve greater consistency. As R/PPR originally envisioned the initiative, PDSI's goal was to ensure that core LE staff position descriptions reflected 21st century public diplomacy work, thus enhancing public diplomacy support for the Department's policy priorities. In FY 2020, R/PPR incorporated the initiative into a comprehensive modernization effort that also included updated digital tools, enhanced training and professional development, and a revision of public diplomacy Foreign Service officer roles. As outlined in the Department's 2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan⁹ and Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework,¹⁰ PDSI would develop adaptive, data-driven, audience-focused U.S. public diplomacy outreach that achieved measurable foreign policy results. Specifically, the initiative was intended to promote four key priorities:¹¹

⁶ The Department's full mission statement for the public diplomacy function is "Public diplomacy and public affairs support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world."

⁷ The United States Information Agency (USIA) was created on August 1, 1953 as a consolidation of all the foreign information activities of the U.S. Government into one program. The exchange of persons program remained in the Department of State, but USIA administered the program overseas. In 1978, USIA was combined with the Bureau of Educational Cultural Affairs of the Department of State into a new agency called the United States International Communications Agency (USICA). Use of the name United States Information Agency (USIA) was reinstated in August 1982. On October 1, 1999, USIA was incorporated into the Department of State.

⁸ In January 2020, the Office of Policy, Rightsizing, and Innovation changed its name to the Office of Strategy and Solutions.

⁹ Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, "2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan."

¹⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, "Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework" (Summer 2020).

¹¹ Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, "Professional Development Unit Overview."

- New public diplomacy organizational structure organized around audiences, content, and resources.
- Accurate LE staff position descriptions to serve as the foundation of the new public diplomacy organizational structure.
- Improved structural ability to collaborate, both within a mission's Public Diplomacy Section and with other sections across a mission.
- Restructured Public Diplomacy Sections that engage employees around targeted audience and strategic results.

Implementation Roles and Responsibilities

At the time of the inspection, the Director of R/PPR's Professional Development Unit led the PDSI implementation effort, which required coordination with multiple other entities, as described below. The unit's 2020 staffing was 25 direct-hire and third-party contractors, up from 4 full- and part-time staff in 2014. New FY 2020 funding supported a dedicated classification center, additional implementation coaches¹² and administrative staff, the creation of units to prepare Public Diplomacy Sections before, and support them after, implementation, enhanced training, and surveys to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of PDSI's outcomes.

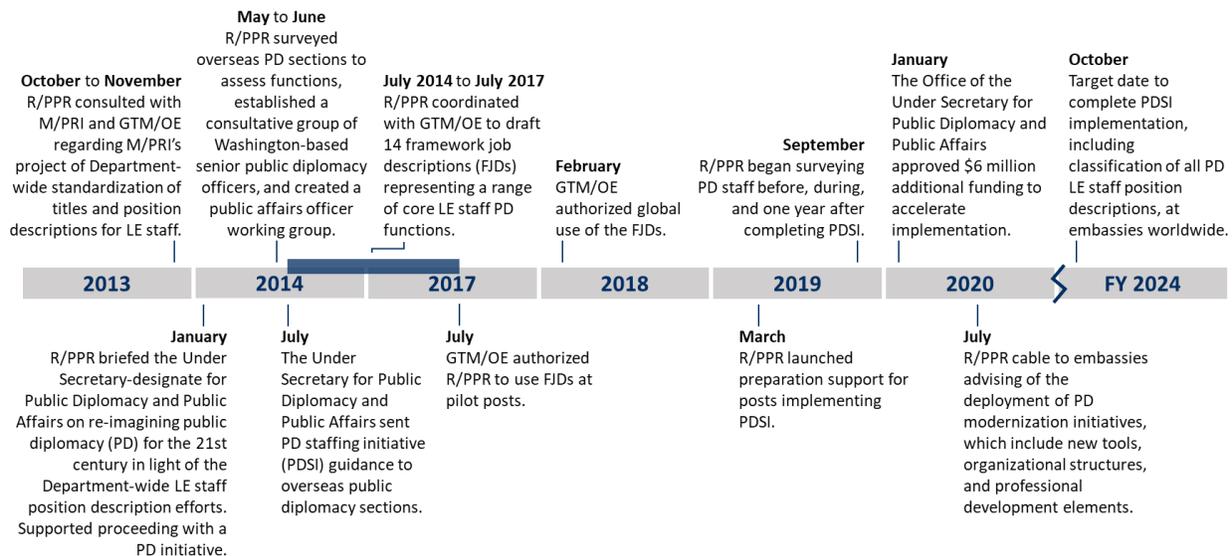
The Bureau of Global Talent Management¹³ (GTM) also played an important role in the initiative. From FY 2014 to FY 2017, R/PPR and GTM's Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE) coordinated to establish 14 framework job descriptions¹⁴ (FJD) representing core public diplomacy functions, to be used for public diplomacy LE staff positions worldwide. Final approval of the FJDs occurred in 2018. PDSI implementation, which R/PPR conducts on a rolling basis at individual embassies, includes four steps requiring approximately 12 months to complete for each embassy. This process is discussed more fully in Appendix C.

Embassy public affairs officers (PAO), in coordination with R/PPR, are responsible for re-imagining the structure of their Public Diplomacy Sections and leading their staff through the PDSI implementation process. Regional bureau public diplomacy offices play a consultative and scheduling role. Finally, regional bureau classification centers and embassy Management Sections carry out position classification and other administrative responsibilities associated with the initiative. A timeline of key activities related to PDSI is shown in Figure 1, below.

¹² Coaches are R/PPR staff who lead embassies through PDSI implementation.

¹³ Formerly known as the Bureau of Human Resources, the bureau changed its name to the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) in February 2020. For consistency, this report uses GTM throughout.

¹⁴ In Framework Job Descriptions, at least 80 percent of the position elements are described with language that is fixed and pre-classified by the Department. If more than 20 percent of the Framework Job Description changes, the position becomes a mission-revised framework position and must be classified individually, taking into account the mission's customization.

Figure 1: Public Diplomacy Locally Employed Staffing Initiative Timeline

Source: OIG generated from information obtained from the Department.

As of October 2020, 36 missions, or 19 percent of Public Diplomacy Sections in 186 missions worldwide, had completed PDSI; another 24 missions were in the process of implementation. R/PPR's target date for all missions to complete implementation is the beginning of FY 2024.

FINDINGS

OIG assessed R/PPR's process of implementing PDSI, including reviewing leadership and strategic direction, project management practices, communication and coordination with Department stakeholders and embassies, and monitoring, evaluation, and training strategies. As described below, OIG found that from its beginnings in 2014 to the time of the inspection, PDSI evolved from a largely human resources exercise to an overhaul of how embassy Public Diplomacy Sections operate. In addition, OIG found that R/PPR took several steps to improve PDSI implementation, such as strengthening its strategic focus, increasing dedicated staff and financial resources, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation measures. Despite this progress, OIG found that deficiencies remained in senior leadership involvement, project management, resource planning, communication with embassy and Department stakeholders, and training. These deficiencies, and recommendations to address them, are detailed below.

Senior Leadership and Strategic Direction

Inconsistent Support and Leadership Gaps Weakened Reform Process

OIG found that, until early 2020, the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs did not provide consistent support for PDSI. This left the initiative without sufficient staff or funding to efficiently implement the project. OIG determined that R/PPR

episodically stressed the initiative's strategic importance in worldwide cables¹⁵ and seven of the eight confirmed or acting Under Secretaries or Senior Bureau Officials acting in that capacity from 2014 to the time of the inspection¹⁶ expressed verbal support for PDSI. However, the initiative did not receive the resources and direct engagement by leadership required for a successful reorganization of a Department function until January 2020, when the Senior Bureau Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs approved a \$6 million annual increase to R/PPR's budget for PDSI implementation. Moreover, the lack of strategic direction generated confusion in Public Diplomacy Sections overseas. Although R/PPR presented PDSI as a "field-driven" exercise, meaning that overseas PAOs would have a major role, PAOs told OIG they believed their ability to tailor PDSI outcomes was limited by decisions the Department had taken previously. For example, PAOs lamented a lack of flexibility in defining local audiences and LE staff roles. Guidance in 1 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 014.2(1) regarding major Department reorganizations states that to the extent possible, top leadership should drive the transformation, while 3 FAM 1214(2) states that Department leaders should plan strategically by developing and promoting attainable, shared short- and long-term goals with stakeholders, and providing a clear focus, giving direction, and monitoring results. Guidance in 1 FAM 046.2(b) states that the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs coordinates the human and financial resources that support the Department's public diplomacy and public affairs programs and activities.

In addition to the frequent turnover and inconsistent support from the confirmed or acting Under Secretaries, OIG found that frequent turnover also in R/PPR leadership—which had five assigned or acting directors from 2014 to 2020—exacerbated the challenge of implementing such an ambitious and under-resourced global reform initiative. OIG found that, since the initiative's beginning, R/PPR officials briefed the Under Secretaries but rarely sought their strategic direction or engagement, other than when seeking funding or needing to address bureau concerns on issues such as R/PPR's guidance to freeze LE staff hiring until PDSI had been completed at that mission. R/PPR also missed opportunities to promote advocacy by the Under Secretary with Department and mission stakeholders whose support could have accelerated understanding of, and progress in implementing, PDSI. For example, OIG found evidence of only one Under Secretary who, in 2018, reached out to ambassadors whose missions were in line for implementation. However, because this official's tenure covered only 68 days, the impact was limited.

Without senior leadership providing strategic direction and driving the transformation, R/PPR risks missing its target date for PDSI implementation or falling short of its goal to develop a

¹⁵ For example, Department cables 14 STATE 93352, "What's in a Name: Aligning Public Diplomacy Locally Employed Staff Position Titles and Position Descriptions Worldwide," July 31, 2014; 17 STATE 61516, "PD Issues, June 2017," June 15, 2017; 18 STATE 90236, "Public Diplomacy Locally Employed Staff Initiative – Next Steps for Implementation," September 1, 2018; 20 STATE 67942, "2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan," July 16, 2020; 20 STATE 73276, "Public Diplomacy Modernization Initiatives," July 30, 2020; and 20 STATE 72182, "The Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework" July 28, 2020.

¹⁶ Of the eight confirmed or acting Under Secretaries or Senior Bureau Officials, only two were confirmed and another three were double encumbered, fulfilling other Department duties while they served as acting Under Secretary or Senior Bureau Official.

public diplomacy approach that is audience-focused and achieves measurable U.S. foreign policy results. Because at the time of the inspection there was no confirmed Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, OIG suggested to R/PPR officials that they, in coordination with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, develop a plan for the next confirmed Under Secretary's active involvement in the PDSI, including engaging with senior leadership throughout the Department. The R/PPR officials agreed with OIG's suggestion.

Project Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The Office of Policy, Planning and Resources Did Not Use Project Management Best Practices to Develop the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative

OIG found that R/PPR did not use Department project management best practices when developing PDSI. While framed as a review of overseas public diplomacy functions and structures as well as of LE staff position descriptions, the initial FY 2014 communication to overseas Public Diplomacy Sections focused on creating the new FJDs, neglecting the larger implications of changing how the sections function. R/PPR continued to focus on FJDs and other administrative aspects of PDSI even though its strategic planning documents¹⁷ stressed PDSI-related functions such as audience analysis and strategy development as foundational "pillars" in public diplomacy's role in advancing U.S. strategic priorities. Guidance in 1 FAM 014.2 states that major Department reorganizations should follow eight key practices.¹⁸ Furthermore, guidance in 18 FAM 301.4-2, 3, and 4 describe Department requirements for program design, monitoring, and evaluation. However, OIG found no evidence that R/PPR applied these practices to its vision of PDSI. For example, following two practices in 1 FAM 014.2—establishing a coherent mission and integrated strategic goals and focusing on a set of key principles and priorities at the outset of the exercise—would have assisted R/PPR to comprehensively convey the transformational nature of the exercise to Public Diplomacy Sections and Department stakeholders. R/PPR did not embrace strategic project management because of its limited PDSI resources and the need for PDSI staff to focus on creating the FJDs. This resulted in Public Diplomacy Sections viewing PDSI largely as an administrative exercise that left them unprepared for the significant changes¹⁹ it brought to their work.

¹⁷ For example, the 2017 Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework.

¹⁸ 1 FAM 014.2 Key Organizational Practices include:

- (1) Ensure top leadership drives the transformation.
- (2) Establish a coherent mission and integrated strategic goals to guide the transformation.
- (3) Focus on a set of key principles and priorities at the outset of the transformation.
- (4) Set implementation goals and a timeline to build momentum and show progress from day one.
- (5) Dedicate an implementation team to manage the transformation process.
- (6) Establish a communications strategy to create shared expectations and report related progress.
- (7) Involve employees to obtain their ideas and gain ownership for the transformation.
- (8) Use the performance-management system to define responsibility and assure accountability for change.

¹⁹ The significant changes included a Public Diplomacy Section re-organized around audiences, content, and resources, and new position descriptions and duties for all or most of the LE staff.

In 2020, R/PPR took several strategic planning and project management steps that OIG determined effectively conveyed PDSI's significance and instituted required planning documents. For example, in July 2020, R/PPR sent three cables²⁰ to overseas embassies explaining PDSI in terms of public diplomacy strategic planning and modernization efforts. R/PPR also revised and enhanced existing handbooks for PAOs and R/PPR coaches and established two units in R/PPR to assist Public Diplomacy Sections before and after implementation. Finally, R/PPR began aligning Foreign Service officer portfolios with the strategic priorities reflected in the new LE staff structure. Department staff within and outside R/PPR characterized these enhancements as generating a more benchmarked, inclusive, and strategic approach to PDSI implementation. Because of these improvements, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue.

Initiative Lacked a Monitoring and Evaluation Structure

OIG found no evidence that R/PPR established an initial monitoring and evaluation structure to measure the effectiveness of PDSI implementation. Having in place a process to collect data and evidence to effectively measure an initiative's goals is a central part of change management and is integral to ensuring the success of an initiative, according to a Government Accountability Office study on re-organization best practices.²¹ R/PPR did not establish a monitoring and evaluation structure due to the minimal staff and limited financial resources initially dedicated to the initiative. In September 2019, R/PPR initiated an assessment of the accuracy of the new Public Diplomacy Section position descriptions and a survey to measure audience engagement and post-PDSI collaboration by public diplomacy officers and LE staff. In September 2020, recognizing the need to provide greater embassy support for sections implementing PDSI, R/PPR created dedicated teams to offer change management assistance as well as pre- and post-PDSI support. R/PPR told OIG it also planned to conduct a qualitative study to collect data on LE staff understanding of their new roles, starting with the newly created position of strategic planning coordinator. R/PPR also committed \$1 million for a public diplomacy occupational needs assessment to define the core skills needed for conducting audience analysis, strategic planning, and effective program management. Because R/PPR took steps to address monitoring and evaluation aspects of PDSI project management, OIG did not make a recommendation regarding this issue.

Administrative and Human Resources Issues

Office Did Not Sufficiently Plan for Embassies' Potential Costs Related to the Initiative

OIG found that R/PPR did not develop a strategy for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections that may face additional costs after PDSI implementation. For example, PDSI may result in greater recurring salary costs due to increases in LE staff position grades. These costs are not

²⁰ Cables 20 STATE 72182, "The Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework," July 28, 2020; 20 STATE 67942, "2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan," July 16, 2020; and 20 STATE 73276, "Public Diplomacy Modernization Initiatives," July 30, 2020.

²¹ Government Accountability Office, *Best Practices for Government Re-organization: Key Questions to Assess Agency Reform Efforts* 15-16 (GAO-18-247, June 2018).

offset by savings from any reduction in grades for other LE staff since Department standards in 3 FAM 7393.1 state that LE staff who are involuntarily downgraded are entitled to 52 biweekly pay periods of grade retention.²² R/PPR told OIG that it refers sections facing increased salary costs to their regional bureaus²³ for assistance. However, R/PPR did not coordinate PDSI across the regional bureaus, as discussed later in this report. Moreover, R/PPR reserved only limited funding to assist Public Diplomacy Sections in case of any severance costs.²⁴ According to 1 FAM 046.4(2)(b), R/PPR is tasked with strategic management of all public diplomacy human and program resources under the authority of the Under Secretary.

The failure to dedicate sufficient resources occurred because of funding and staffing limitations as well as frequent turnover of senior leadership in R/PPR and in the Office of the Under Secretary. While PDSI received additional staffing and funding in 2020, the failure to develop a plan for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections that face increased salary costs or severance pay requirements could jeopardize PDSI's successful implementation.

Recommendation 1: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the regional bureaus, should develop and implement a plan for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections' needs for increased salary costs and severance pay, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA)

Guidance Resulted in Inaccurate Locally Employed Staff Position Descriptions

OIG found that R/PPR's guidance to PAOs not to revise LE staff position descriptions before PDSI implementation occurred at their mission resulted in inaccurate LE staff position descriptions and missions being unable to fill vacant public diplomacy LE staff positions. In 2016, R/PPR and GTM/OE issued guidance to Public Diplomacy Sections worldwide discouraging them from revising LE staff position descriptions or filling all but urgent vacancies until PDSI was implemented at their mission. For example, OIG inspections of Embassies New Delhi, Dhaka, and Windhoek²⁵ found inaccurate and obsolete public diplomacy position descriptions. In addition, OIG's inspection of Embassy Canberra²⁶ found that the mission expected its six vacant public diplomacy LE staff positions would remain unfilled until PDSI was implemented. Public diplomacy officers and LE staff conveyed frustration to OIG over chronic inaccurate position descriptions and the resulting adverse effect on LE staff morale.

²² Grade retention ensures that the downgraded employee receives wages at the pre-downgrade level. The FAM further states that at the end of 52 pay periods, although grade retention ends, there are Department provisions that ensure the employee retains his/her pre-downgrade salary.

²³ These are the Bureaus of African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central Asian Affairs, and Western Hemisphere Affairs.

²⁴ While rare, involuntary separations of LE staff are possible in PDSI implementation. If this occurs, the mission may be required to provide end-of-service benefits such as severance pay.

²⁵ OIG, *Inspection of Embassy New Delhi and Constituent Posts, India* (ISP-I-19-10, December 2018); *Inspection of Embassy Dhaka, Bangladesh* (ISP-I-20-17, June 2020); and *Inspection of Embassy Windhoek, Namibia* (ISP-I-20-32, September 2020).

²⁶ OIG, *Inspection of Embassy Canberra and Constituent Posts, Australia* (ISP-I-20-07, February 2020).

According to 3 FAM 7313.1(3-4), supervisors are responsible for adding, removing, or changing the duties and responsibilities, type of work, or level of complexity at any time and for ensuring that LE position descriptions adequately and accurately reflect currently assigned duties and responsibilities. In addition, 1 FAM 014.2(4) states that major Department reorganizations should set implementation goals and a timeline to build momentum and show progress from day one. R/PPR issued its guidance in an attempt to avoid re-classifying position descriptions multiple times. R/PPR established a procedure in 2017 for PAOs to request approval to provisionally revise inaccurate position descriptions relating to urgent vacancies. However, OIG found no evidence of written guidance on revising position descriptions since 2018. Moreover, OIG found a wide range of PAO responses to R/PPR's guidance, with some PAOs successfully submitting revision requests while others interpreted the policy as a "moratorium" on position description revisions. Lack of clarity on R/PPR's policy on revising chronically outdated and inaccurate position descriptions resulted in diminished internal coordination and lowered morale among Public Diplomacy Section staff.

Recommendation 2: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Talent Management, should review and issue worldwide guidance for Public Diplomacy Sections seeking to revise locally employed staff position descriptions before the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative is implemented at their embassy. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with GTM)

Pattern of Reduction in Grade of Senior Press Positions Generated Concerns About the Classification Process

OIG found that a pattern of reductions-in-grade of senior press LE staff positions,²⁷ which were reclassified as part of PDSI, generated consternation among PAOs and LE staff about the classification process. In interviews and surveys, PAOs and LE staff told OIG they were concerned that the reclassified position descriptions insufficiently valued senior press functions. Guidance in 3 FAM 7313.1(4) requires managers to ensure that LE staff position descriptions adequately and accurately reflect currently assigned duties and responsibilities, while 3 FAM 7312.1(A) states that a sound position classification system provides the foundation for, and is an integral part of, properly compensating local employees. After implementation began in 2017, R/PPR observed that the Press and Media Coordinator position, one of PDSI's 14 FJDs, tended to be classified at grades lower than those already held by those employees, and that this pattern was inconsistent with the FJD classification outcomes of other public diplomacy LE staff positions. In response to this anomaly, R/PPR created a new job description for a Press and Media Specialist²⁸ that is an alternative to the Press and Media Coordinator position. R/PPR told OIG it plans to collect data on the classification of senior press and media positions to more

²⁷ Typically, press LE staff monitor host-country press and media coverage of issues of importance to the United States; advise mission leadership on strategies for promoting accurate and balanced host-country media coverage of U.S. foreign policy and American interests; correct misinformation and counter disinformation; and build productive relationships with press and media professionals, including at senior-levels.

²⁸ At the time of the inspection, R/PPR had yet to submit the new Press and Media Specialist position description to GTM for approval as an FJD. Instead, it shares the position description with embassies on an as-needed basis.

accurately determine why these positions are often downgraded during the classification process. A pattern of downgrades without explanation risks undermining confidence in the classification process that is central to PDSI implementation.

Recommendation 3: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should evaluate the classification of senior press locally employed staff positions at missions that have completed the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation process, make any necessary adjustments to the framework job descriptions so that classification of these positions is consistent with similar positions at other missions, and apply any lessons-learned for missions awaiting implementation. (Action: R/PPR)

Communication with Embassy, Department Stakeholders

Insufficient Communication and Coordination With Public Diplomacy Sections Led to Inconsistent Implementation

OIG found that R/PPR did not sufficiently communicate and coordinate with Public Diplomacy Sections regarding PDSI, leaving them unprepared for implementation. For example, in a feedback exercise that R/PPR's Professional Development Unit conducted in May 2020, 12 out of 13 PAO respondents commented on their lack of preparedness for what PDSI would entail for their sections. Moreover, LE staff told OIG they knew little about the initiative before the R/PPR coaches arrived and that R/PPR was not transparent about the overall process, including the possibility and repercussions of reductions in grade. In an OIG survey, LE staff responses rated R/PPR coaches' communication on average as 2.87 on a scale of 1 to 5. Of the survey responses that included comments on communication, 64 percent were critical of communication on PDSI. In addition, fewer than half—41 percent—of all LE staff survey respondents believed they had input into the classification process. Guidance in 1 FAM 014.2(6) states that offices undertaking major reorganizations should involve employees to obtain their ideas and gain ownership for the transformation and to communicate early and often to build trust, ensure consistency of message, encourage two-way communication, and provide information to meet specific needs of employees. The lack of communication and coordination was caused by R/PPR's limited staff focusing on creating the new FJDs and shepherding them through the approval process rather than on providing change management guidance and fully describing to sections how PDSI would transform the conduct of public diplomacy at their embassies.

While R/PPR developed additional briefing materials and workshops in 2019 and 2020 to prepare Public Diplomacy Sections for implementation, these actions did not ensure preparation throughout the public diplomacy corps. For example, newly arrived PAOs at missions where PDSI already had been implemented told OIG they had received only minimal information about PDSI's impact on the section before they arrived, making it difficult for them to ensure a successful post-PDSI transition. A lack of communication and coordination on PDSI implementation puts at risk the 2020 Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan's goal of creating a new public diplomacy organizational structure organized around audiences, content, and resources.

Recommendation 4: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the regional bureaus, should establish two-way communication procedures and create and distribute Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative briefing materials to all public diplomacy officers, including to public affairs officers before beginning their overseas assignments, and to locally employed staff. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA)

Inconsistent Communication Contributed to Regional Bureau Public Diplomacy Offices Lacking Performance Management and Budget Information

OIG found that R/PPR's inconsistent communication with regional bureau public diplomacy offices contributed to those offices lacking PDSI performance management and budget information. Regional bureau staff told OIG that R/PPR failed to communicate information on the status of PDSI in their regions, provide information on the new public diplomacy FJDs, or address PDSI's budgetary implications (e.g., increased salary costs or severance pay packages). Guidance in 18 FAM 301.4-3b states that offices must develop monitoring plans for their programs and projects and that monitoring data helps determine if implementation is on track, while 1 FAM 014.2(6) states that Department offices undertaking major reorganizations should establish a communications strategy to create shared expectations and report related progress. The deficiencies occurred because of limited PDSI staff and because R/PPR initially designed the exercise to be field- rather than Washington-driven.

R/PPR leadership told OIG it recognized the need for improved communication with regional bureau public diplomacy offices and created and launched a system to provide monthly implementation status reports. However, this needs to be complemented by regular updates on PDSI performance evaluations and steps to address budgetary implications. A lack of communication with regional bureau public diplomacy offices risks undermining the bureaus' role in determining regional coordination, public diplomacy strategies, and budgets. Moreover, bureaus with limited information are unable to effectively evaluate PDSI outcomes.

Recommendation 5: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should provide regional bureau public diplomacy offices complete information on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative, including monitoring and evaluation results and budgetary implications, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR)

Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources Insufficiently Prepared Regional Bureau Executive Offices and Embassy Management Sections for Implementation

OIG found several instances in which R/PPR had little to no advance communication with regional bureau executive offices or with embassy Management Sections prior to implementing PDSI. As a result, bureau executive offices were unprepared to provide guidance to embassy Management Sections which, in turn, hampered those sections' ability to coordinate human resource aspects of PDSI implementation with R/PPR and embassy PAOs. For example, R/PPR notified the Human Resources Section at an embassy in Europe 3 weeks in advance of its visit and had its first conversation about PDSI with the section only 7 business days before the

coaches arrived. During the visit, the Human Resources Officer was involved only in an initial courtesy call and a meeting before the coaches departed. The officer told OIG that the limited advance notice and Human Resources Section involvement in the entire restructuring of an embassy section contributed to the LE staff's lack of clarity about the process and the content of the new position descriptions.

Guidance in 1 FAM 014.2(6) on major reorganization efforts states the need to establish a communications strategy to create shared expectations and report related progress, while 3 FAM 7313.2 states that embassy human resources staff need to provide relevant materials, advice, and guidance to help managers and supervisors discharge their position management responsibilities. Greater advance communication with regional bureau executive offices and embassy Management Sections would allow them to become familiar with the FJD process and to adjust workloads to accommodate and expedite PDSI implementation. R/PPR's handbooks for PAOs and coaches included briefings for embassy human resources officers at the beginning and throughout PDSI implementation at an embassy. In addition, during the inspection, R/PPR outlined its intention to increase communication with GTM and regional bureau executive directors. Therefore, OIG did not make a recommendation on this issue.

Training

Lack of Training Hindered Implementation of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative

OIG found that R/PPR launched PDSI without a systematic training plan. Although the Department's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) added information in 2018 about PDSI to its standard PAO and Public Diplomacy tradecraft curricula, comprehensive training on PDSI was occasional and ad hoc, reaching only a small number of PAOs and LE staff. Neither R/PPR nor FSI dedicated resources to create tailored PDSI courses that would assist LE staff to fulfill their new duties. Forty-four percent of LE staff who responded to an OIG survey believed they lacked adequate training to fulfill their new, post-PDSI duties. Guidance in the Government Accountability Office's *Streamlining Government: Key Practices*²⁹ addresses the need to provide training when implementing Government initiatives. Staff told OIG that delays in delivering training were due in part to contrasting visions on course design and training methodologies, which contributed to lengthy negotiations between R/PPR and FSI on how to conduct the training. As a result, public diplomacy officers and LE staff lacked training on the steps involved in implementation and its desired outcome. To address these issues, R/PPR, in 2020, identified a training lead among its staff and worked with FSI to temporarily embed FSI's Deputy Director for Public Diplomacy Training in R/PPR to develop training needs for PDSI implementation. Without a comprehensive training plan, R/PPR's goal of creating a modern organizational structure that enhances Public Diplomacy Sections' ability to work across the mission to meet strategic challenges and further mission and Department goals will be diminished.

Recommendation 6: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training plan with short-,

²⁹ Government Accountability Office, *Streamlining Government: Key Practices 29* (GAO-11-908, September 2011).

medium-, and long-term objectives that address how to train public diplomacy officers and locally employed staff in core competencies based on new position descriptions for Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with FSI)

RECOMMENDATIONS

OIG provided a draft of this report to Department stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings and recommendations. OIG issued the following recommendations to the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources. The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources' complete response can be found in Appendix B.¹ The office also provided technical comments that were incorporated into this report, as appropriate.

Recommendation 1: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the regional bureaus, should develop and implement a plan for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections' needs for increased salary costs and severance pay, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation. The office noted an estimated completion date of September 2021.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources implemented a plan for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections' needs for increased salary costs and severance pay, in accordance with Department guidance.

Recommendation 2: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Talent Management, should review and issue worldwide guidance for Public Diplomacy Sections seeking to revise locally employed staff position descriptions before the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative is implemented at their embassy. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with GTM)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation. The office noted an estimated completion date of July 1, 2021.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources reviewed and issued worldwide guidance for Public Diplomacy Sections seeking to revise locally employed staff position descriptions before the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative is implemented at their embassy.

Recommendation 3: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should evaluate the classification of senior press locally employed staff positions at missions that have completed

¹ OIG faced delays in completing this work because of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting operational challenges. These challenges included the inability to conduct most in-person meetings, limitations on our presence at the workplace, difficulty accessing certain information, prohibitions on travel, and related difficulties within the agencies we oversee, which also affected their ability to respond to our requests.

the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation process, make any necessary adjustments to the framework job descriptions so that classification of these positions is consistent with similar positions at other missions, and apply any lessons-learned for missions awaiting implementation. (Action: R/PPR)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources evaluated the classification of senior press locally employed staff positions at missions that have completed the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation process, made any necessary adjustments to the framework job descriptions so that classification of these positions is consistent with similar positions at other missions, and applied any lessons-learned for missions awaiting implementation.

Recommendation 4: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the regional bureaus, should establish two-way communication procedures and create and distribute Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative briefing materials to all public diplomacy officers, including to public affairs officers before beginning their overseas assignments, and to locally employed staff. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources established two-way communication procedures and created and distributed Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative briefing materials to all public diplomacy officers, including to public affairs officers before beginning their overseas assignments, and to locally employed staff.

Recommendation 5: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should provide regional bureau public diplomacy offices complete information on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative, including monitoring and evaluation results and budgetary implications, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources provided regional bureau public diplomacy offices complete information on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative, including monitoring and evaluation results and budgetary implications, in accordance with Department guidance.

Recommendation 6: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training plan with short-, medium-, and long-term objectives that address how to train public diplomacy officers and locally employed staff in core competencies based on new position descriptions for Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with FSI)

Management Response: In its April 6, 2021, response, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources implemented a training plan with short-, medium-, and long-term objectives that address how to train public diplomacy officers and locally employed staff in core competencies based on new position descriptions for Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

This review was conducted from August 31, 2020, to January 26, 2021, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2012 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspections Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. Consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, this review focused on the process of implementing the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI).

OIG's specific inspection objectives were to:

1. Review whether, in implementing PDSI, the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs' Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources (R/PPR) followed Department guidance for major organizational changes, specifically related to goal setting and performance management, communication and coordination with stakeholders, and strategic direction by senior leadership.
2. Assess whether R/PPR developed plans for monitoring and evaluating the initiative's outcomes, consistent with Department guidance and the Public Diplomacy Strategic Framework.
3. Determine whether the Department developed and implemented training on PDSI for public diplomacy officers and locally employed staff.

For this review, OIG conducted interviews with Department staff, surveyed public affairs officers and public diplomacy locally employed staff, and reviewed documentation associated with PDSI. Finally, OIG used professional judgment, along with documentary, testimonial, and analytical evidence collected or generated, to develop its findings and actionable recommendations.

Amy Bliss (Team Leader), Thomas Mesa (Team Manager), Ronald Deutch, Christine Elder, and Thomas Leary conducted this review. Other report contributors include Ellen Engels and Caroline Mangelsdorf.

APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

UNCLASSIFIED

April 6, 2021

THRU: The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs – Jennifer Hall Godfrey, Senior Official

TO: OIG – Sandra Lewis, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections

FROM: The Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR) – Robert Raines, Acting Director

SUBJECT: Response to Draft OIG Report – Review of the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative

The Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR) has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report. We provide the following comments in response to the recommendations provided by OIG:

OIG Recommendation 1: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the regional bureaus, should develop and implement a plan for responding to Public Diplomacy Sections' needs for increased salary costs and severance pay, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA)

Management Response: R/PPR and the regional bureaus concur with this recommendation. R/PPR will formalize a plan by September 2021, in coordination with R and regional bureaus, to continue to ensure that post and bureau budgets are adequate to cover any staffing cost increases associated with PDSI implementation. R/PPR currently funds any severance costs that may result from PDSI and coordinates with regional PD budget offices. No post or bureau thus far has experienced a shortfall in their PD budget resulting from PDSI implementations at the 49 missions completed to date; R/PPR will ensure this approach continues.

OIG Recommendation 2: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Talent Management, should review and issue worldwide guidance for Public Diplomacy Sections seeking to revise locally employed staff position descriptions before the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative is implemented at their embassy. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with GTM)

Management Response: R/PPR and GTM concur with this recommendation. In consultation with GTM, R/PPR will develop and distribute globally by July 1, 2021 written guidance for

posts and regional bureaus on procedures for revising LE staff position descriptions prior to a post's PDSI implementation. R/PPR currently has an individual PDSI staff member assigned to each geographic region to advise posts and process on-demand requests for this type of pre-implementation relief but concurs that written guidance will further support posts' needs.

OIG Recommendation 3: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should evaluate the classification of senior press locally employed staff positions at missions that have completed the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation process, make any necessary adjustments to the framework job descriptions so that classification of these positions is consistent with similar positions at other missions, and apply any lessons learned for missions awaiting implementation. (Action: R/PPR)

Management Response: R/PPR and GTM concur with this recommendation. R/PPR will analyze classification results for press positions from all missions that have completed PDSI implementation, including a comparison with grade changes for all PDSI positions at posts of various Overseas Staffing Model (OSM) rankings. In consultation with GTM/OE, R/PPR will develop a second Framework Job Description (FJD) or Standard Job Description (SJD) for a Press Specialist position to complement the current, lower-graded FJD for Press & Media Coordinator, which will also match the Specialist options for other PDSI job clusters.

OIG Recommendation 4: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should establish two-way communication procedures and create and distribute Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative briefing materials to all public diplomacy officers, including to Public Affairs Officers before beginning their overseas assignments, and to locally employed staff. (Action: R/PPR)

Management Response: R/PPR and regional bureaus concur with this recommendation, and requests that this recommendation be directed toward R/PPR, in coordination with AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA, and WHA. R/PPR will offer updated briefing materials for regional bureau PD offices and continue to provide such materials to FSI PD Training courses for all out-bound PD officers and training participants (including Locally Employed Staff). In March 2021, R/PPR piloted a workshop to train PD officers who arrived at post after a mission implemented the PDSI. R/PPR will offer similar workshops throughout the summer 2021 transfer season for out-bound PD officers going to the 49 missions already working in their new structures, along with continued workshops for PD officers preparing to lead their sections through the initiative. Currently, R/PPR briefs regional PD offices about PDSI at weekly office director meetings, and addresses questions from domestic and overseas PD practitioners as they occur; more robust and regular communications will be developed and deployed.

OIG Recommendation 5: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources should provide regional bureau public diplomacy offices complete information on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative, including monitoring and evaluation results and budgetary implications, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: R/PPR)

Management Response: R/PPR concurs with this recommendation. R/PPR began providing regular monthly PDSI status and progress reports to regional bureaus in August 2020, and will expand information included in those reports. R/PPR will provide regular PDSI briefings to regional bureau PD offices regarding PDSI, including ongoing results and any budget

implications. R/PPR will also share results from ongoing PDSI surveys and any future monitoring/evaluation results on a regular basis with regional bureaus.

OIG Recommendation 6: The Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources, in coordination with the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training plan with short-, medium-, and long-term objectives that address how to train public diplomacy officers and locally employed staff in core competencies based on new position descriptions for Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative implementation. (Action: R/PPR, in coordination with FSI)

Management Response: R/PPR and FSI concur with this recommendation, while noting a need to correct one of OIG's conclusions. R/PPR will convene a Public Diplomacy Talent Management Steering Committee with membership from across the PD community in 2021 to advise on workforce needs, including training. R/PPR will work with FSI to develop a training plan in FY22 to guide resource decisions to meet short-, medium-, and long-term objectives.

R/PPR and FSI do not concur with OIG's statement on page 12 that contrasting visions on course design and training methodologies resulted in failure to deliver training, and note that both have worked closely and extensively together for at least two years to coordinate, review, and provide consistency with each other's trainings and materials related to PDSI.

FSI also requests that OIG remove footnote 28 as it is an inaccurate description of processes, and not related to the content of the section.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Kelly Daniel (R/PPR).

APPENDIX C: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STAFFING INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI) implementation, which the Office of Planning, Policy, and Resources (R/PPR) conducts on a rolling basis at individual embassies, includes four steps requiring approximately 12 months to complete:

- Preparation: Total time: 2-4 months
- Implementation: Total time: 3-4 months
- Classification: Total time: 2-4 months*
- Post-Implementation: Ongoing
- Total Time: 12+ months**

As part of PDSI implementation at each embassy, R/PPR and public affairs officers collaborate to create a new section structure based on the 14 functional job descriptions (FJD). R/PPR then drafts the new position descriptions and submits them to a regional classification center to determine the grades of the positions.

*Due to a limited number of classifiers, their initial unfamiliarity with the public diplomacy FJDs, and the Bureau of Global Talent Management's Office of Overseas Employment's policy of prioritizing missions' vacant positions, FJD classification could take longer than 4 months, particularly at the start of PDSI. In addition, the Bureau of African Affairs in April 2019 suspended implementation of PDSI because its classification center lacked the capacity to handle PDSI classifications in addition to its other workload.

**The 2017 Department-wide hiring freeze and the January 2019 Federal Government shutdown contributed to delays in PDSI implementation. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting travel restrictions forced R/PPR to postpone PDSI implementation at 20 embassies, the staff used the time to process hundreds of position descriptions and other documents. Beginning in July 2020, R/PPR began conducting its preparation sessions remotely for embassies starting the implementation process.



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