

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

JOHN BRADEMAS CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF
CONGRESS

Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

*MOVING FORWARD: A RENEWED ROLE FOR AMERICAN ARTS
AND ARTISTS IN THE GLOBAL AGE*

A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States of America

December 2009

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The 2008 election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States has offered an historic opportunity for the renewal of faith in the American political system and restoration of America's image around the world. In January 2009, the John Brademas Center of the NYU Wagner convened a group of experts to explore the public policy implications for American arts and culture of a renewed focus on U.S. public diplomacy and issued a call for an expansion of international arts and cultural exchanges in the service of this new direction. The following report is the result of their expert opinions and deliberations.

The mission of the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress is to increase the understanding of Congress—its role in making policy and its powers, processes, and responsibilities. The Center's nonpartisan work reaches scholars, students, public servants, policy makers and the general public. The Center conducts research, sponsors student internships, organizes academic conferences and public symposia, and hosts policy addresses by Members of Congress. As a part of the New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, the Center strives to help the next generation of public service leaders develop a deeper understanding of how and why Congress makes decisions. It is named for its founder, NYU President Emeritus John Brademas, who served in the U.S. House of Representatives for 22 years (1959-81).

The Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service of New York University is a leadership school of public policy, urban planning and non-profit management whose faculty members are widely recognized for reframing the way people understand and act on issues of public importance, and whose graduates are bold, well-prepared change makers who expertly navigate real-world complexity and produce results that matter

This report has been prepared and edited by Michael F. DiNiscia and Thomas M. McIntyre of the John Brademas Center and Professor Ruth Ann Stewart of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, studies have shown that public opinion in other countries – particularly in the Islamic world – has taken an increasingly unfavorable view of the government and foreign policy of the United States. Yet international opinion about the values and culture of the United States, as distinct from government policies, has remained more positive according to the most recent surveys conducted by the non-partisan Pew Global Attitudes Project even in Middle Eastern countries. The inclination to view the fundamental ideals of American society as positive provides a valuable opening for policymakers to utilize the arts and culture both to advance America’s international interests and enhance the cultural experience of its citizens and their understanding of America’s place in a rapidly changing world.

To these ends, this report recommends that international arts and cultural exchanges be integrated into the planning strategies of U.S. policymakers as a key element of public diplomacy. History has proven that a robust public diplomacy is essential to U.S. national security and the promotion of American interests around the globe. The arts community has observed firsthand the value of international artistic exchanges in promoting moderation and tolerance among widely diverse religious and cultural groups.

Recognizing the fiscal constraints imposed by the current economic downturn, the report advises policymakers and the arts community to first focus on new and better ways to utilize arts and cultural exchange initiatives that are currently underway in both the private and governmental sectors.

As responsibility for America’s public diplomacy initiatives is shared among the White House, National Security Council, Department of State, Congress, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Institute of Museum and Library Services, and other Federal agencies, this report offers specific suggestions and recommendations for fostering greater interagency cooperation in the integration of arts and cultural exchanges into their respective strategies.

At the same time, American arts groups feel a responsibility for promoting an understanding of the vibrancy of arts and culture in our country that both animates our democracy and nourishes international exchanges and America’s image. Thus, the report recommends a national conversation on the arts generally and their centrality to the quality of American life both home and abroad.

A NATIONAL CONVENING ON CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

- We recommend that a National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy be held in Washington, DC to bring together policymakers and leaders in the arts community. Such a meeting would be a way of directly engaging artists, at a time of domestic and international difficulty, in the efforts to tell anew America’s story and expand and to deepen our country’s understanding of foreign societies and the value of cultural diplomacy to the security and quality of American life.

The Convening would attempt to engage the relevant agencies of the Federal Government to make arts and cultural exchanges a strategic part of U.S. public diplomacy. While the meeting could be best organized by one or more nonprofit organizations working in this field, it would benefit greatly from the support and collaboration of the U.S. Department of State as the lead

Federal agency promoting international exchanges.

We believe that the meeting would be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of representatives from other countries who are leaders of international cultural initiatives.

We believe such a meeting, drawing together policy makers, artists, scholars and representatives of professional service organizations, foundations, and other nonprofit as well as for-profit groups involved in the arts, would provide an agenda for Congress and the Administration to build on current resources and programs to expand international arts and cultural exchanges – in both directions – in the service of America’s national security and quality of life.

BUILDING DEEPER AND BROADER EXCHANGES

- We believe it is critical that international arts and cultural exchanges be two-way, person-to-person endeavors in order to promote the human connection and that such connections be sustained over time and not just episodic events, as too often has been the case. As an example, we recommend that visual arts presentations include an educational component and performing arts, master classes to strengthen the value of these face-to-face interactions.

We believe that given the appropriate level of funding and commitment long term, cultural diplomacy programs can demonstrate – using evidence-based evaluation – their success and effectiveness in promoting the best aspects of America’s culture and democracy.

American culture is rich in its diversity and demographic make-up. Through the recruitment and exchange of outstanding representatives of all of America’s many cultures, we can demonstrate the multicultural nature of American society at its best, presenting a vision of openness and freedom of expression to societies where such opportunities are often lacking. Similarly, we urge a public diplomacy policy that welcomes the cultures of others to our shores.

We believe that cultural exchanges must not only be two-way but also sensitive to local needs, practices, and aspirations in selecting the type of American art to promote in a given country or region. The Internet has opened up to the world the rich variety of art and artists the U.S. has to offer and we should seek to meet those expectations and interests including for popular culture and the non conventional.

It would seem that a priority for arts and cultural exchanges would be with countries with which the United States has limited official relations as well as with countries where there is a low level of travel or interaction at the citizen level.

We think cultural exchanges that focus on restoration and preservation projects are especially productive as would be the exchange of experts in the areas of performing arts administration, museum policies and techniques, etc. Technical assistance exchanges have a long history of helping other countries to celebrate their heritage and promote tolerance between nations while at the same time giving Americans opportunities to learn about other cultures.

In the past, cultural exchanges organized by the Federal Government have on occasion raised suspicions that artists had compromised their artistic integrity. We believe in the importance of government at all levels – federal, state and local – working with nonprofits and NGOs both at home and in foreign countries to avoid the appearance that cultural exchanges are contrived solely to serve

U.S. foreign policy interests rather than the intended purpose of furthering mutual understanding. To that end, we urge that the international exchange process not be centralized in or overly coordinated at the national level but instead structured to draw in artists and arts groups directly at all levels.

RESEARCH

- Policymakers need credible evidence to help them determine the merits and value of expanding international exchange programs. We believe that a National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy would provide the appropriate forum for assembling a body of expert testimony and current and directed research that would facilitate a clear and focused examination of potential outcomes.

We believe it would be beneficial to such deliberations if a comprehensive inventory and review were undertaken of current programs by federal, state, and local governments and private groups in the international arts and cultural exchange area.

We recommend that a State Dept Working Group on Cultural Diplomacy be charged with responsibility for coordinating the effort to collect, examine and evaluate relevant reports and data generated by both government and civil society organizations as supplemented and supported by the Congressional Research Service, private foundations, and scholarly research efforts sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

We believe that a particularly productive part of the research process would be the opportunity to document actual experiences and impacts of both past and on-going cultural exchanges, especially the person-to-person encounters that have well established track records for generating significant and measurable goodwill toward the United States.

We believe that verification of such successes would not only help substantiate the case for international art and cultural exchanges as an important part of public diplomacy but would also enable us to identify and evaluate best practices in the field.

It is our hope that private foundations would support the research process and, working in collaboration with the arts community, help to determine a series of metrics for not only evaluating international programs but the adequacy as well of resources and work opportunities for the American artists and institutions who would fuel such efforts.

We recommend that the State Department be encouraged to be an active participant in the ongoing efforts by such international organizations as UNESCO and World Monuments Fund to map the world's cultural infrastructure toward the protection of important art objects, artistic forms, sites, and institutions located in disaster and conflict areas. The U.S. Defense Dept and Federal Emergency Management Agency might also be considered as a source of funding and assistance for such undertakings.

TECHNOLOGY & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- In recognition of the borderless nature of the Internet we urge that the latest and most advanced electronic social networking technology be utilized in cultural diplomacy programs.

We believe that stronger cultural exchanges would result from government moving beyond the older idea of technology as broadcasting medium to harness the new and most advanced social networking technologies that not only distribute message and art but also encourage civic engagement and social connectivity.

Given the effectiveness of the American public/private model, a National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy would explore opportunities to recommend to Government ways of working in association with private nonprofit and for-profit cultural organizations with popular social networking sites in order to expand the range of possibilities for sharing and exchanging cultural experiences.

We believe that the pairing of technology and culture would be especially efficacious through the dissemination of hardware and software (e.g., cell phones, wi-fi systems, low-cost computers, hand-crank radios, etc.) to more remote areas of the globe where cultural understanding and exchanges are especially needed.

We also recommend cultural exchanges involving scholars and experts in such specialties as performing arts management, conservation and preservation, museology, and curation, especially those with expertise in newer forms of media and technology. For example, we urge the expansion and integration into public diplomacy efforts of the Cultural Preservation Fund which currently sends conservators abroad to provide technical assistance and run education projects,

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

- We believe that the Government should encourage and promote two-way international exchanges, acting in a convening role to bring together private organizers and private funders, as the cost should not be fully assumed by American taxpayers.

We urge the State Department to consider ways in which it might utilize its administrative capacity and area expertise to explore possibilities for working with foundations and U.S. corporations to increase grants for international exchanges, as well as to investigate the potential of coordinated activity with the many arts and media industries engaged in the international marketplace of culture.

At the same time, we recognize the importance of members of the arts community keeping informed about policy changes and shifts in the national agenda. We believe that over time and in evolving ways, cultural exchanges could render service in partnership with government (as well as foundations and corporations) that would continue to enhance America's public diplomacy process.

We believe that through the export of a wide diversity of American arts and artists, and the import (and ready admission through the passage of the Arts Require Timely Service Act [H.R. 1785 and S. 1409]) of a broadly representative group of foreign arts and artists, America's best foreign and domestic cultural interests would be served.

LEADERSHIP AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

- We believe that the effectiveness of American public diplomacy would be advanced by the integration of cultural diplomacy into the policy-making process of the White House and the State Department.

We propose that a National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy incorporate into its agenda an examination of the recent call by various nongovernmental study groups concerned with Federal

support of the arts generally for the creation of a full time White House post specifically charged with promoting the arts and culture as part of the Domestic Policy Council. Arts and cultural professionals agree that without a strong and healthy cultural sector at home (frequently characterized as cultural vibrancy), the U.S. would not have the rich pool of diverse talents in place and available when selecting art and artists to represent the nation at its best internationally.

We further recommend that a National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy be given the opportunity to propose the creation by the President of a position on the National Security Council (NSC) to oversee public diplomacy, including the coordination of relevant arts and cultural exchange efforts with the Domestic Policy Council, State Department, and the Federal cultural agencies.

We further recommend the National Convening agenda include a proposal for the creation of a Standing Committee to advise the Secretary of State on ways in which the State Department could begin to renew its diplomatic strength and expertise in the area of culture. Committee members would be persons in the arts world involved in both informal and formal international exchanges.

We would also recommend that a Special Envoy for Culture be appointed by the State Department to work on building relationships and partnerships with foreign governments and international bodies such as UNESCO, International Council of Museums, World Heritage Alliance, et al.

EXPANDING FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- We believe that it is both timely and desirable to urge the creation of a new direction for public diplomacy through the expansion of Federal cultural programming.

We believe that key to this new direction is an expansion of the budgetary capacity of the State Department to increase the number of cultural affairs officers stationed at embassies and consulates and their capabilities for carrying out cultural programming as the ones most informed about what exchanges would be best coupled with which country.

We recommend that, in addition to increasing its personnel numbers, the State Department further enhance its ability to attract good people by creating parity in career advancement and status between cultural affairs officers and political officers.

We believe that the State Department would benefit as well from the creation of a Cultural Diplomacy Fellowship Program that would increase the flow of personnel through the cultural diplomacy system; rotate outside cultural experts through the Department; and enable State Department employees to go for further training at cultural institutions in the U.S. and abroad for fixed periods of time.

Additional recommendations that have been proposed for consideration by a National Convening on Cultural Policy include:

- A publicity campaign coordinated by the State Dept., NEA, NEH, and IMLS to alert more U.S. and foreign artists and cultural institutions about the opportunities available for international cultural exchanges, including Fulbright fellowships.
- Ways for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support cultural programs that are consistent with their development goals (i.e., cultural preservation projects and arts and crafts programs).
- Ways for the Peace Corps and Americorp to develop cultural projects and recruit artists into both organizations.
- Ways for the Commerce Department to promote cultural tourism that would direct Americans to cultural programs abroad and market cultural activities in the U.S. to foreign tourists.
- Increase funding for arts and cultural exchanges in departments other than State and the Federal cultural agencies (e.g., Defense Department, Commerce Department, etc.) to

encourage the sending of artists and technical assistance to localities deemed to be less developed and comfortable.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

- We encourage the relevant committees in Congress, in particular the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committees, to hold a series of public hearings on the proposals coming out of the National Convening on Cultural Diplomacy.

We believe that congressional hearings are key to the development of new and expanded legislation and programs in support of two-way cultural exchanges, for all the reasons and recommendations outlined above.

We offer the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act of 1975 for consideration by the Congress in its deliberations as a legislative model of the time proven success of international cooperation and cultural exchange.

We recommend the inclusion in such hearings of a broad representation of knowledgeable parties, especially representatives of state and local arts and humanities councils and agencies and of professional service organizations.

Finally, we again urge the reintroduction and passage by Congress of the Arts Require Timely Service Act [H.R. 1785 and S. 1409] as an essential component of cultural exchange and the enrichment and diversity of the cultural experience of the American public.

This report was based on working group discussions from a January 26, 2009 colloquium, "Moving Forward: A Renewed Role for American Arts and Artists Abroad in the Global Age," convened by the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress and New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. The report was prepared and edited by:

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