

Excerpt

Strengthening Identity

AMERICAN SPACES

Idea Book



Message from the Under Secretary

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Tara D. Sonenshine

*Under Secretary for Public
Diplomacy and Public Affairs*

In a rapidly changing world, powered by social media and instant information, the United States must continue to be part of the world's vibrant conversations. At a time when so many of our embassies are forced by necessity to protect our diplomats, it's critical that we can go outside our compounds to engage in what Edward R. Murrow called "the last three feet—one person talking to another."

I have prioritized American Spaces as one of the most effective and vibrant forums for our public diplomacy outreach. Since the beginning of my tenure as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs I have seen exciting learning taking place in Information Resource Centers, American Centers, Bi-national Centers, and Corners where foreign audiences come to engage with us on matters of common interest.

Just as traditional libraries are evolving into dynamic community spaces, our American Spaces must be dynamic as well. Over the course of the last year many people have come together, from all over the world, to work on this idea of creating Model American spaces to showcase the types of dynamic learning centers we hope all our spaces will become.

Since we began this project our vision has been clear: to further develop American Spaces that engage audiences with compelling learning environments that reflect the dynamic nature of the United States and welcome spontaneous interaction, shared ideas and warm conversations. We have

made it our goal to provide what I call CARE for every Space: Content, Access, Resources, Evaluation and robust connectivity.

Working with experts from the Smithsonian, we have created an exciting partnership to realize that vision—and take it to the next level: advancing the role of American Spaces as symbols of meaningful relationships and commitments between the U.S. and host communities.

Through this Idea Book we will provide Posts the means to improve and standardize the quality of American Spaces and their core programs. Our aim is to provide the best multifunctional platform for public diplomacy programs to promote open dialogue, counteract negative preconceptions and build bridges of understanding. Bringing our partners and Smithsonian experts together we anticipated an explosion of ideas and practical solutions, and we had just that.

We hope you will use this Idea Book as a resource to invigorate your Spaces which are, now more than ever, one of our key platforms for advancing U.S. foreign policy through the lively sharing of information and ideas. Flexible spaces, welcoming environments and state-of-the-art technology can help create opportunities for learning about America, through participatory experience, casual exchanges, and social media, breaking down barriers around the world.



Smithsonian
Institution



Message from the Under Secretary



Elizabeth Duggal

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*Photo Credit: James DiLoreto,
Smithsonian Institution*

The Smithsonian is pleased to submit this Idea Book as the final deliverable of our American Spaces Assessment and Redesign Project. We hope it will serve as a guide for all American Spaces eager to refresh their facilities with a new look and new content for use by their visitors. The Idea Book contains design concepts, finishes and furnishings, and programming and IT/social media recommendations, supported by narratives explaining how our recommendations might be implemented in different types of American Spaces.

American Spaces, from my perspective, are terrific assets for this country and offer enormous opportunity. It is a great privilege for the Smithsonian to work with all of you on this important and vital project, particularly because our mission is the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.” We are passionate about engaging our visitors and our role in the world of cultural diplomacy.

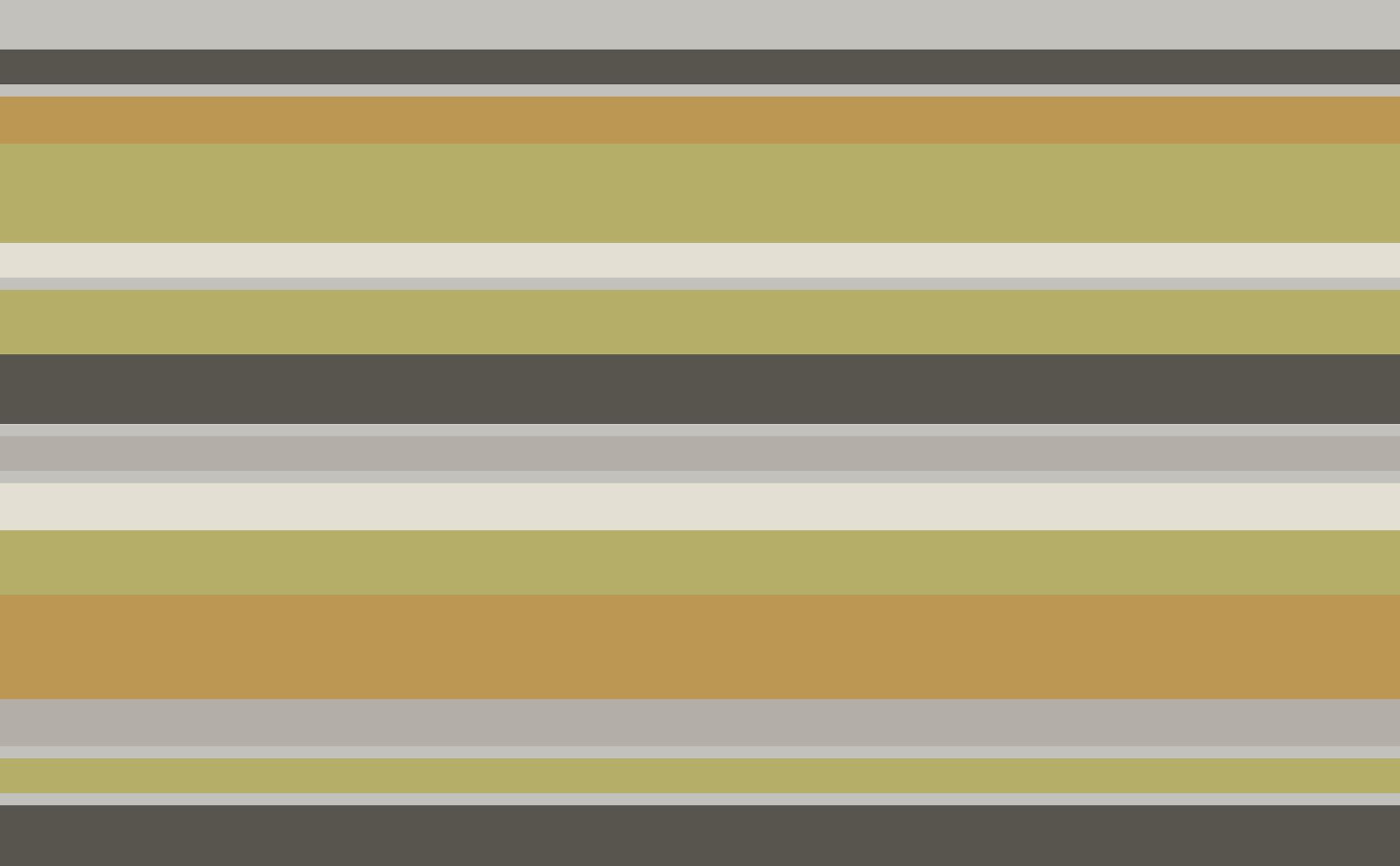
From the initial discussions with State to the team visits to the American Spaces, from the design efforts to the planning and convening of the project workshop, this has been a wonderful and rewarding partnership all around. Collaboration and shared commitment have been central to this project: when our delegations visited the American Spaces

and peer institutions around the world and met with Embassy and American Spaces staff, partners, and visitors, all were unstinting in their generous contributions to the project. All of these stakeholders are key to the success of this endeavor, and ownership of the final recommendations will be in the hands of the American Spaces themselves.

We have benefited greatly from the support of our State Department partners throughout. Our ideas have been strengthened through communication and feedback, and we have all learned so much from you. On behalf of the entire International Museum Professional Education Program team and the broader Smithsonian Institution, we want to thank the State Department—particularly the Bureau of International Information Programs—for the opportunity to work on this project. Members from several Smithsonian Institution units have enthusiastically participated in the program, drawing expertise from the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of American History, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), and the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations. We look forward to the possibilities ahead and to continuing this partnership and supporting you in any way we can.



Message from the Program Director



Strengthening Identity

Visit seven American Spaces and you will find seven distinct places. Seven variations on how to engage an audience. Seven flavors of the United States. Just as America is a mosaic—of people, cultures, interests—so, too, must IIP’s spaces of diplomacy represent that diversity. So why discuss brand identity—what is the purpose?

Any company or organization that hopes to find a place in the lives of its public must develop and foster its brand. A brand is much more than a logo or visual identity; it is a desirable idea made manifest through products, services, people, places, and experiences. Successful brands evoke positive emotions; they foster pride of association among staff and audiences.

A stronger and more cohesive identity makes American Spaces part of a community—a network. A stronger identity helps us create greater solidarity, goodwill, and cooperation and allows us to tap into the potential that comes with being part of something “bigger”—a sense of belonging. A student walking into an American Corner in the far reaches of Ukraine—Chernihiv, Donetsk, or Kyiv—can feel instantly connected to students all over the world who are also learning English or curious about American universities. This initiative seeks to strengthen each of our American Spaces, to go beyond our local programs and strengthen international relationships, build on successful ideas that we share with one another, and create links between and among Spaces around the globe

more deeply and frequently. Let’s help each other and our visitors to American Spaces feel like part of a network. America values community and connection—we can help our visitors find those things. We are fifty states, but we are united.

Strengthening our identity will not make American Spaces uniform. IIP will continue to recognize differences in space needs and audiences, acknowledging that individual communities help shape their spaces. We want to keep American Spaces dynamic while ensuring they reflect American culture and values and provide accurate information. With a more recognizable and established identity, we can provide users with a clearer understanding of what they can expect from us and what they can gain from a sustained relationship with an American Space.



Brand Purpose

American Spaces can be both lively and reflective, conducive to both collaborative activity and independent inquiry. They offer opportunities for learning, exploring, conversation, and discovery. American Spaces provide literal safe spaces and material resources, but fundamentally they also foster environments that build bridges of understanding, counteract negative preconceptions, and ultimately help develop new generations of global leaders.

Each American Space should be a place to connect—with peers, with opportunity, and with America. Each should sit comfortably within its community, bringing American spirit into a space that feels positive, welcoming, and inviting—to users, to self-expression, to community engagement, and more.

Each space will develop its own feel, but we believe all American Spaces should be:

- **A place of exploration.** American Spaces should introduce the U.S. as a place of opportunity, whether it's pursuing a dream, inventing and developing an idea, or making things with pride. A place of exploration supports the curiosity, fearlessness, and tenacity of the explorer.
- **A place of collaboration.** American Spaces should enable visitors to share their experiences, whether that means alumni returning to speak about their time in the U.S. or students working together to overcome their struggles learning English or their concerns about attending college in the U.S.
- **A place of surprises.** Users of American Spaces should feel curious about what they might find and eager to return. Dynamic programming, responsive to the interests of the users, keeps people engaged. Whether learning a new recipe, speaking with a class of American high school students, watching films, investigating online a new exhibition at the Smithsonian, or having a discussion group based around current events, a mix of activities and media can keep spaces feeling fresh.



Brand Personality