

Office of American Spaces

FY 2019

BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE



FEATURING CONTRIBUTORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



American Spaces

American Spaces are safe places for exploration, conversation, self-discovery, self-expression and interaction that counteract negative narratives and develop leadership skills. Learning English, starting a business, using broadcast technology and recognizing disinformation are among many self-improvement opportunities.



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Tributes / Credits BACK COVER

The Office of American Spaces recognizes the life-changing challenges the world has endured in 2020 with the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 earlier this year.

Because the pandemic occurred outside the time frame covered in this report, the disease is not mentioned, but, as with every facet of life, COVID-19 left its mark of disruption on the development of this publication.

We are grateful to those who contributed to this report while working to temporarily close down American Spaces, departing post, taking on parent/teacher roles and accepting the many other challenges of the pandemic.



American Spaces

WELCOME

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Functional Bureau Strategy 2018–2022:

- Advance American foreign policy objectives
- Increase America's global competitiveness
- Counter disinformation and radicalization
- Encourage strong civil society institutions
- Achieve greater efficiency in ECA operations

Assistant Secretary Marie Royce Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

I am proud to welcome the Office of American Spaces team to ECA, including the Regional Public Engagement Specialists, the Foreign Service corps located around the world that provides expert guidance to American Spaces and the embassies and consulates that manage them on a day-to-day basis. Since May 2019, we have been delighted to see American Spaces build stronger partnerships and tighter integration with ECA programs.



American Spaces have long been delivering four major ECA programs to international audiences — English language learning, promotion of study in the United States, providing programming venues for alumni of exchange programs and promoting American culture and values. Through training and guidance from the Washington office and the Regional Public Engagement Specialists, this diverse network has evolved into delivering policy-driven, high-impact programs, strengthening our national security position in hard-to-reach locations around the world.

I am particularly proud that American Spaces provide a range of programs that empower entrepreneurs. One approach is through building high-technology skills among local residents, such as virtual technology training in Cairo. Other programs focus specifically on developing entrepreneurship skills among women. During my travels, I have personally witnessed many of these great programs in American Spaces in Yangon, Hanoi, New Delhi, Santo Domingo, Cairo, Monrovia and Jakarta.

I found the Nexus Startup Hub, a green-technology business incubator in New Delhi, particularly impressive. This innovative partnership with the University of Texas at Austin's IC2 Institute is tangibly executing our goals to promote entrepreneurship as a means of improving the climate for U.S. business interests in India and furthering regional economic cooperation. The incubator selects annual cohorts of 15–20 local companies, of which 33 percent are women-owned. U.S. and Indian experts provide 10 weeks of intensive training.

In addition, I am pleased that one of our key economic programs, the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, recently has been introduced in several additional American Spaces in Africa as well as Latin America. AWE equips women to create and grow their businesses, raise capital and network with successful business owners.

AWE is part of the White House's Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative.

I am both honored and gratified to contribute to the FY 2019 Office of American Spaces report. We welcome reader feedback on the report and what would make it most useful for you in future.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for ECA Academic Programs Caroline Casagrande

Since we formally welcomed the Office of American Spaces into the academic neighborhood in May 2019, we have begun to realize many avenues for innovation to strengthen and enhance the collaboration between American Spaces and some of our most in-demand programs, such as English learning and U.S. college advising through our EducationUSA program.



American Spaces often provide a community's first encounter with the United States and their integration with ECA provides our program offices with countless compatible resources for developing or expanding creative programs that fit within the policy objectives of the U.S. government, ECA and the embassies that manage American Spaces.

We are taking advantage of the natural affinities that exist with American Spaces. For example, 150 EducationUSA advising centers (approximately one-third of the network) are located in American Spaces, and English language clubs can be found in many more.

Last fall, the EducationUSA office in the American Center in Korea hosted a session at the Busan American Corner featuring a representative from Kapi'olani Community College in Hawaii. Community colleges are shining stars of our higher education system, offering incredible benefits to international students, and are an increasingly important pathway for international students to study in the United States. The so-called 2+2 option — to begin study at a community college before completing a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university — is an affordable, flexible path to earning a U.S. degree that we have been promoting around the world.

Learning English opens doors to study in the United States and creates an endless range of opportunities for integrating other ECA programs. For those who are unable to visit or study in the United States, American Spaces can bring a virtual experience that is also very rewarding, including online college courses and more.

The prospect of learning English is often a primary attraction of American Spaces to local residents, and American Spaces take advantage of that desire to incorporate current policy topics into the English learning process, enabling participants to speak about topics that they ordinarily might not feel comfortable discussing.

Like Assistant Secretary Royce, I've had many rewarding visits to American Spaces during my travels, and I am excited to see many new types of virtual programs being developed for American Spaces. With advanced technology, there are many possibilities for connecting American Spaces with the U.S. and across borders, where we can address common challenges, build networks of partners and deepen relationships.

A particularly exciting event on the horizon is a new online staff training program that the Office of American Spaces will offer to staff of American Spaces, including U.S. embassy and private-sector staff who manage American Spaces, as well as Washington-based staff. I want to thank the dynamic American Spaces team for getting this training off the ground within just months of my asking them to create the new virtual course. The potential exists for incorporating aspects of other ECA programs, such as study in the U.S. and English language programs, into the American Spaces virtual training.

We welcome ideas from American Spaces and their stakeholders around the world for working even more closely with ECA programs and how they would like to see the American Spaces programs develop in the future.

American Spaces Mission Statement

American Spaces are inviting, open-access learning and gathering places around the world that promote interaction among local communities and the United States in support of U.S. foreign policy.

American Spaces Vision Statement

American Spaces connect the world with the United States.

Office of American Spaces Director Carol Brey

Welcome to the Office of American Spaces FY 2019 report, the first since the office joined the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in May 2019. This report celebrates our new home by focusing on ways that American Spaces are implementing ECA's Functional Bureau Strategy and providing information about our processes and programs that our new ECA colleagues can use to build on our relationships worldwide.



When this report was first published in 2015, staff in Washington, D.C., generated all the articles, which were more directly aimed at external stakeholders and funding sources. This year's report features contributions on a broader scale, including contributors closest to the embassies, consulates and American Spaces: Regional Public Engagement Specialists, Foreign Service Generalist Officers and locally employed staff who interact directly with ECA and other colleagues in the field or in Washington. It provides many examples of high-impact programs that fall directly in line with ECA's Functional Bureau Strategy. We hope that everyone in the American Spaces community finds this year's publication to be a reader-friendly and useful resource throughout the year.

At the heart of this report is a key element: the values of the Office of American Spaces, which form the framework for every major initiative. In October 2018, we began our FY 2019–2021 strategic planning process by developing a short list of values we believed reflect the strength of American Spaces. Innovation, collaboration, learning, diversity and partnerships were among the strengths we wanted to capture in our plan.

From there, our plan began to take shape, incorporating initiatives directly tied to our values. For example, the first goal in the American Spaces Strategic Plan for FY 2019–2021 is “American Spaces support U.S. foreign policy through an evidence-based approach to funding, standards, innovation and setting policy.” Innovation is a common theme among American Spaces, since every country is unique and every American Space plays a unique role in its community. Based on this and other goals in our strategic plan, one of the most important issues we identified was how to accurately evaluate the impact of American Spaces in meeting both country-specific and U.S. policy objectives.

Upon completing our plan, the first implementation step was to develop an American Spaces field survey sent to all stakeholders in February 2019. This survey generated an outstanding 77 percent response rate. Based on those results, with the help of ECA's Evaluation Division, we developed an Evaluation Pilot Project that will take place in FY 2020 (see pages 24–27) to provide an accurate, credible process for evaluating the policy impact of American Spaces.

We feel very much at home in our new bureau. We believe we have enriched ECA as well, adding 630 American Spaces to ECA that receive at least 66 million visits around the world each year, providing visitors with a truly

American experience. (The total number of spaces fluctuated during the two years this report covers for many reasons, including conflicts in local countries forcing the closure of several American Spaces.)

The Office of American Spaces has embraced ECA's Functional Bureau Strategy in American Spaces programming and resources, on topics such as disinformation and media literacy, entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, countering violent extremism, strengthening civil society and of course highlighting U.S. culture and values — including American Music Abroad programs and the ECA Speakers programs featuring U.S. authors, musicians, dancers and others who represent U.S. values.

For the first time, this report highlights the unique value of our network of binational centers, most of which are in Latin America, where they have deep historic community roots. Many binational centers are long-term American Spaces (the first was established in Buenos Aires in 1928) that continue to support a variety of ECA programs while working closely with their U.S. embassies or consulates to accomplish strategic goals. We are proud to congratulate these vital institutions for their efforts to strengthen their alliances through the Association of Binational Centers of Latin America, which they founded about 20 years ago. In 2019, ABLA took the step of becoming a formal nonprofit organization with its own board of directors to provide additional support for its members and strengthen its relationship with the United States.

Throughout this report, you will find many examples of notable initiatives and accomplishments in 2019 (and 2018) as seen through the eyes of those who are implementing them in the field. You also will have the opportunity to read a first-person account of a Regional Public Engagement Specialist, also known as REPS (yes, singular and plural!), from Linda Parker, who has filled this role for 13 years and is currently assigned to Islamabad.

Serving the world of American Spaces as Office Director since mid-November 2018 has been a profound privilege. We faced a number of challenges in 2019 — including a furlough, the transfer of our office to a new bureau and the physical relocation of our Washington staff to a new office — and I am proud of the initiative that each person has shown in keeping our American Spaces strong, including our Regional Public Engagement Specialists, Washington- and Vienna-based staff, American Spaces staff (partners and U.S. employees), Foreign Service officers and locally employed staff. My deepest thanks to each of you for your efforts.

We are delighted to be part of ECA, and we are grateful to Assistant Secretary Royce, Deputy Assistant Secretary Casagrande and the rest of the ECA leaders for displaying their confidence in the resources, ideas, people and programs that American Spaces bring to the policy-driven ECA assortment and for recognizing the potential of the Office of American Spaces to play an integral role in bureau and department future planning and programming.

As we move forward, I am more confident than ever that we will find additional innovative ways to promote our vision for American Spaces:

American Spaces connect the world with the United States.

THE OFFICE OF AMERICAN SPACES: SUPPORTING A COMPLEX SYSTEM ★

American Spaces are, and have always been, places where people meet people, talk to people and listen to people. They are places to learn and share ideas, express thoughts and participate in programs that build economic and critical thinking skills. The term “American Spaces” is a relatively recent description of this diverse universe of venues located in universities, shopping malls, libraries, nongovernmental organizations, other public places, inside U.S. embassies, on embassy compounds or in their own dedicated buildings. While the number fluctuates for many reasons, generally more than 620 American Spaces can be found in 143 countries.

The Office of American Spaces, part of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, has 18 staff members in Washington, four in Vienna, Austria, and 30 Regional Public Engagement Specialists dispersed among strategic locations around the world. Together, they support a complex web of other Washington-based bureaus and offices, other country-based U.S. offices and the 172 embassies that contribute to the operation and success of the various types of American Spaces in promoting U.S. foreign policy objectives in their local communities.

American Spaces fall into three predominant categories, with significant variation within each. Most American Spaces are the result of an embassy-driven movement in the early 2000s to set up agreements with local “host partners” (universities, libraries, nongovernmental organizations, etc.). These are American Corners, which make up about 70 percent of American Spaces. These “hosts” help defray the cost of the American Corner in exchange for the relationship with the embassy. The other partnership-type American Spaces are binational centers, some of which date to the early 1900s (see articles on pages 17–18).

The U.S. government owns or operates nearly 100 American Spaces, known

as American Centers, about 30 of which are large flagship American Centers, including those in Kyiv, Jakarta and Yangon. Historically separate from the embassy, American Centers typically offer a wide range of resources. In some cases, the United States has owned the facilities for decades, according them respected positions in bilateral relationships. Others are former Information Resource Centers — smaller libraries moved into embassies and consulates in the 1990s (see page 21).

The embassies or consulates oversee the day-to-day operation of American Spaces in their countries, while the Office of American Spaces provides global strategic guidance, support, funding, training and programming. The Regional Public Engagement Specialists provide direct support to their assigned American Spaces, the embassies and other field-based representatives — regional English language officers, alumni coordinators and the staff of educational advising centers — all of whom support a number of ECA programs in American Spaces.

To ensure that American Spaces operate consistently around the globe and provide strategic programming aligned with both country-specific and broader U.S. foreign policy goals, the Office of American Spaces provides extensive training, as well as pre-packaged programs, to both U.S. and non-U.S. government employees who staff or oversee American Spaces.

From 2013 through 2018, the Office of American Spaces focused on improving the physical appearance of American Spaces through grants for remodeling as well as to provide modern furniture, wall graphics of U.S. landmarks, high-end technology, excellent internet service, a similar design, a color palette and logos to promote an American Spaces brand. This effort, executed through an agreement with the Smithsonian Institution, has shifted toward a focus on programming, but design catalogs, such as the “Idea Book 2.0” and “Reimagining an American Space,” are still available.

Local host partners provide space, support and more for American Corners, furnishing local embassies with highly cost-effective, powerful public diplomacy venues to provide their target audiences with rich policy-based experiences. In some countries, American Corners are the only public outreach tools available to embassies and consulates.

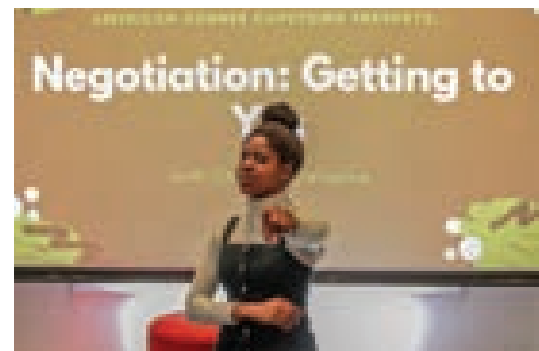
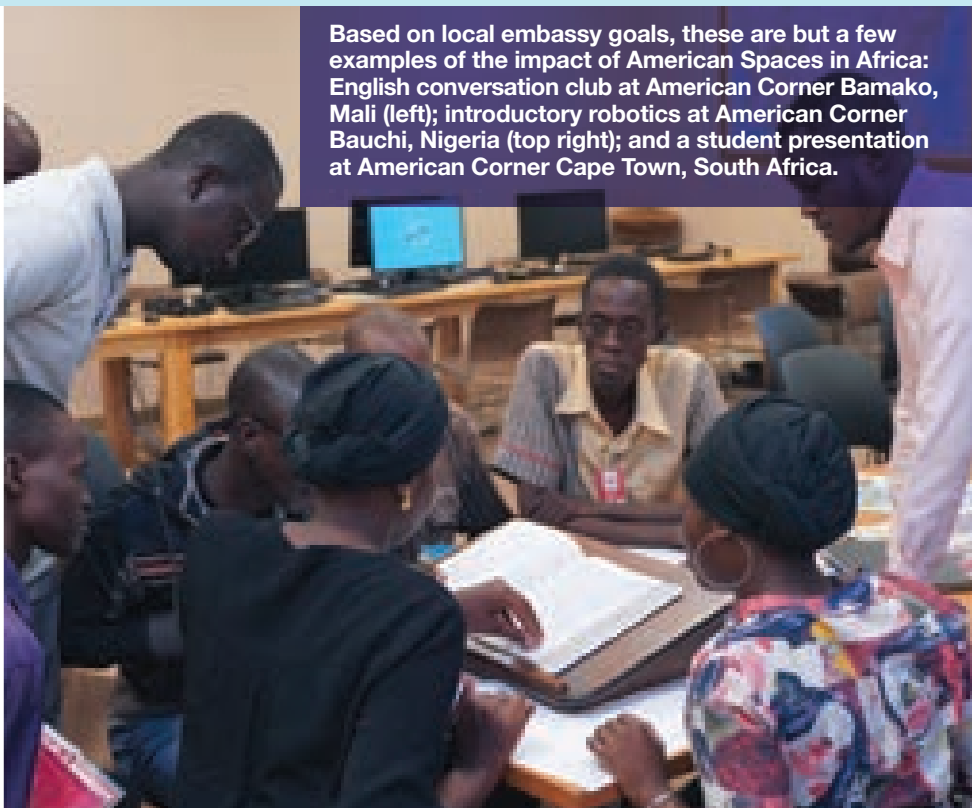


GLOSSARY ★

The list below includes some abbreviations and other terms used in this publication.

- **Alumni** – Individuals who have participated in U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs
- **Deputy Chief of Mission** – Person second in charge of an embassy below the ambassador, abbreviated DCM
- **EducationUSA** – ECA's post-secondary educational advising program that explains how students in other countries can apply to study in the U.S.; about one-third of EducationUSA advising centers are based in American Spaces
- **eLibraryUSA** – A digital collection of trusted information resources from the United States with quality newspapers, magazines, journals, books, dissertations and award-winning films and videos available at American Spaces
- **Five Core Programs** (or Pillars) – Original and ongoing programs all American Spaces offer; although format and delivery vary widely, generally, they are English learning, policy-based or strategic cultural activities, alumni-focused or -delivered programs, U.S. educational advising and information about the United States
- **FSI** – Foreign Service Institute (also known as the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center); the department facility that provides intensive instruction in over 60 languages for Foreign Service officers and other U.S. government employees assigned overseas; also provides an extensive range of other training and courses
- **Fulbright** – The U.S. government's flagship educational exchange program, administered in partnership with foreign governments around the world; provides recipients opportunities to study, teach, conduct research and exchange ideas in more than 160 countries and the United States
- **FY** – Abbreviation for fiscal year, a 12-month budgetary cycle; the U.S. government's fiscal year is from October 1 to September 30
- **IVLP** – International Visitor Leadership Program; ECA exchange program for distinguished current and emerging foreign leaders that provides opportunities for intensive short-term visits to the United States
- **MOOCs** – Massive Open Online Courses; free online courses in a variety of subject areas, some of which can lead to degrees; American Spaces have provided various incentives to ensure students complete the courses, such as certificates and other benefits
- **NGO** – Nongovernmental organization; NGOs, which vary in size and expertise, often contract with the embassy to provide specific programs and services to American Spaces, including managing larger American Centers or a network of American Spaces
- **Number of American Spaces** – This typically fluctuates from year to year based on several factors, such as in-country conflict, the closing of underperforming American Spaces, the opening of new American Spaces and other factors; during the period covered in this report, the number ranged from 620 to 640
- **PD** – An internal abbreviation for public diplomacy, which analyzes foreign audiences to build targeted public engagement strategies employing communications and programs and evaluating progress toward achieving foreign policy goals
- **Post** – An internal term for embassy or consulate
- **Regional or Geographic Bureaus** – Responsibility for conducting foreign policy resides in six geographic bureaus: Africa; East Asia and Pacific; Europe and Eurasia; Near East; South and Central Asia; and Western Hemisphere. The specific countries within each region can be found on the State Department website.
- **Regional Public Engagement Specialist** – Abbreviated as REPS and used as singular and plural; roughly 32 REPS provide direct services to embassies, consulates and American Spaces
- **TDY** – Temporary tour of duty; an assignment away from an employee's permanent or "home" location

Based on local embassy goals, these are but a few examples of the impact of American Spaces in Africa: English conversation club at American Corner Bamako, Mali (left); introductory robotics at American Corner Bauchi, Nigeria (top right); and a student presentation at American Corner Cape Town, South Africa.





Lutfullo Tagoev is one of many who find direction through programs in American Spaces. His experiences as a Fulbright student and his U.S. education will enable him to improve the lives of others when he returns to Tajikistan.

PROGRAMS IN AMERICAN SPACES: WHAT HAPPENS THERE? ★

By Jeff Ridenour, Programming Strategist, and Myles Marken, Program Analyst

Lutfullo Tagoev grew up in a small conservative town in the mountains of Tajikistan during its five-year civil war after the fall of the Soviet Union. He moved to the capital city of Dushanbe for his university education and started visiting the American Space, where he became fluent in English, attended programs about the United States, joined a debate club and learned to code and build computers at the makerspace. In 2019, Lutfullo was selected as a Fulbright Student, and through this ECA program, he currently is getting his master's degree in education technology in the United States.

This is what the American Spaces do: They connect the world with the United States. Their success comes in part from being “embassy-driven.” The embassy or consulate manages its own network of American Spaces within a country or region, ensuring that the American Spaces, located in more than 140 countries, are able to tailor programs to their audiences.

Many American Spaces share the American value of innovation through makerspaces outfitted with an assortment of advanced U.S. digital equipment to promote foreign policy goals of entrepreneurship and economic stability. These makerspaces also serve to attract new and large audiences through access to high-end technology.

In some cases, however, creating programs on topics that are difficult to approach in certain countries, or finding the best programming resources, takes time, and sometimes resources, that embassies may not be able to provide to their network of American Spaces.

To bridge this gap, in FY 2018, the Office of American Spaces created a position dedicated to developing “packaged” programming on the most topical or current events (see “Packaged Programs” below). These packages, developed in the Washington-based Office of American Spaces, assist in providing new ideas or ways for embassies or American Spaces to deliver long-term programs on topical or current subject matter.

These policy-focused programs complement or integrate with the types of programs that all American Spaces are expected to deliver in five core areas: English language teaching and learning, strategically policy-focused cultural programs, educational advising, engaging U.S. exchange alumni and providing information about the United States.

A crucial element to connecting with the United States is language. Young people, professionals, journalists, parents and local residents from all walks of life come to American Spaces to learn and practice their English language skills. This is one of the most popular programs. ECA also sends American musicians, dancers and artists who reach audiences with key policy themes through classes and training.

American Spaces provide educational advising to visitors either through an onsite EducationUSA advising center or through resources that explain the methods and advantages of pursuing higher education in the United States. American Spaces are perfect locations for connecting alumni of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs with visitors. Alumni are encouraged to share their experiences in the United States and lead programs on topics of their interest or expertise.

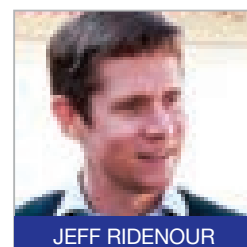
Maintaining their historic role as resources for information about the United States, American Spaces provide access to collections of printed books, magazines and newspapers. In addition, a wealth of online resources, including films and videos, professional journals and additional newspapers, are available through eLibraryUSA, a collection of proprietary databases available only in American Spaces.

PACKAGED PROGRAMS

Thematic Programming Toolkits – These kits are designed to help embassies and consulates create programs on specific themes. They share best practices, topical overviews and links to curated articles, videos, lesson plans, online games and courses. Examples include media literacy and countering disinformation, global health and U.S. 2020 elections.

Discussion Guides – To provoke thoughtful discussions, the Office of American Spaces has created over 50 discussion guides on American movies, videos and ECA's 22.33 podcasts.

Activity Guides and Debate Kits – These guides and debate kits provide handouts and lesson plans to run engaging sessions on key topics.



JEFF RIDENOUR

Case Studies: American Spaces Pay Unexpected Dividends ★

SRI LANKA

YOUTH FORUMS IN SRI LANKA'S AMERICAN SPACES AMPLIFY EMERGING VOICES

By Sanjay D Mailvahanan, Director, American Spaces Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, a group of young people have accepted a big job. By working together, the Youth Forums in each of the country's American Spaces — Jaffna, Kandy and Matara — are building trust across diverse communities, enabling U.S. Embassy Colombo to advance key policy objectives through amplifying the voices and leadership of Sri Lankan youth. The forums serve as living laboratories for strategic messaging and engagement, provide volunteer resources for ongoing initiatives and offer engagement for American Spaces program graduates. The Youth Forum provides the first opportunity many Sri Lankan youth have to engage with peers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.



American Spaces in Sri Lanka began establishing the forums in 2013 to nurture leadership among devoted young patrons. Thanks to a formal structure for membership, the forums became anchors for the embassy's youth engagement efforts. Personal and professional development form the cornerstone of Sri Lanka's Youth Forum model, along with community service. Forum volun-

teers are asked to commit to at least six months and 60 hours of service. During their tenure, Youth Forum volunteers receive leadership training, gain project management experience, participate in inter-island cultural exchanges and build networks with like-minded youth and community partners across the country.

Forum volunteers create and conduct local programs within their American Corners to advance policy goals. As deputy program facilitators, they gain valuable experience as leaders and mentors. Forum members collaborate actively with the embassy's English language programs, including the successful launch of an English on Wheels mobile outreach initiative. They regularly facilitate site visits for English Access Microscholarship students to the American Corners, introducing new audiences to American Spaces.

Youth Forums have helped transform Sri Lanka's American Spaces into platforms for program innovation and multi-dimensional engagement. The American Corner Kandy was among Deputy Chief of Mission Martin Kelly's first stops during Sri Lanka's 2019 presidential elections-related outreach visit to the Central Province. His visit provided a platform for Kandy Youth Forum members to reflect on what they learned about civic engagement by completing a Massive Open Online Course focused on the theme of democracy. The MOOC appeared simultaneously across all Sri Lanka's American Spaces to mark the International Day of Democracy, with Youth Forum participants trading insights via Zoom.

The Sri Lanka American Space Youth Forums, and similar groups in American Spaces in other parts of the world, give young people voices and direction that counter disinformation and radicalization and build strong civil and social institutions.



Forum volunteers serve as junior ambassadors for visiting U.S. government delegations. They proudly represent their American Corners at embassy events, including National Day, and often assist with large-scale events where their logistical assistance is valuable, as is their presence as American Corner spokespeople. For instance, Youth Forum members supported the American Center Colombo's October 2019 Maker Fair that attracted more than 7,000 visitors. They also participate in island-wide EducationUSA fairs and Diversity Visa presentations that draw thousands.

Connecting emerging leaders from Youth Forums across the island, U.S. Embassy Colombo hosted a multi-day, multi-city leadership and public service program for Youth Forum volunteers in late 2019. Forum members came together first in Colombo for facilitated skill-building training in media literacy, peer mentoring and civic engagement. The participants engaged in wide-ranging discussions about the bilateral relationship and how they can contribute as future leaders.



Forum members deployed their newfound knowledge, awareness and presentation skills to conduct outreach and mentoring with peers from underserved communities in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. By way of subsequent in-person and virtual programming and service, Youth Forum members continue their personal and professional development through understanding the value of diverse teams, collaboration (how to identify and work with like-minded partners), community activism and fact-based communication.

Public service is a key component of Youth Forum activities. Sri Lanka's Youth Forums bolster and inform people-to-people engagements by listening and giving voice to emerging leaders, connecting them across U.S. government programs and agencies and their diverse communities. In FY 2019, the embassy set up pilot programs to expand the critical thinking skills of Youth Forum members.

U.S. Embassy Colombo will conduct follow-on programs in partnership with local nongovernmental organizations, which will help broaden the reach of these initiatives and help Youth Forum members grow further as mentors and trainers to promote inclusion, reconciliation and social cohesion. Youth Forum members are both leaders and multipliers for these initiatives, helping their peers and communities chart a course toward a Sri Lanka that protects the rights of all its citizens.





AMERICAN CORNER TRIESTE STEPS UP TO TAKE ON THE FACE OF THE FORMER CONSULATE

By Anne Johnson, Regional Public Engagement Specialist, retired

The city of Trieste, on the Adriatic coast in northeastern Italy, has always been at the crossroads of cultures. Part of the Habsburg empire for over 500 years, it was host to one of the oldest U.S. consulates in Europe, established in 1797. It became an Italian territory after World War I and a disputed area after World War II; it remained under United Nations control with some 5,000 U.S. troops until 1954. With the 2006 closing of the U.S. consulate in Trieste, in 2007, the U.S. Embassy in Rome opened an American Corner, which quickly became the new face of America in the region.

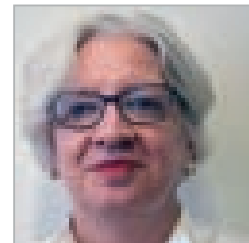
The nonprofit Italian-American Association (Associazione Italo Americana del Friuli Venezia Giulia or AIA FVG) operates the Trieste American Corner and provides day-to-day leadership. The American director and coordinator work with a board of directors of Trieste residents, one of whom is a former consulate employee. In the foyer hangs a plaque listing all the former consulate generals, further proof of the long American presence in the area.

Located 10 miles from the Slovenian border and 20 miles from Croatia, Trieste is still a hub for international transit, boasting the largest commercial port in Italy, and it is a key European maritime node. Refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq enter Italy through Trieste and frequently stop for processing in the area.

In 2018, the Trieste American Corner developed an innovative "Integration Through Entrepreneurship" program that offers sewing classes to refugees. Feeling at home in the American Corner has been helpful to many Afghans, who were familiar with American Corners known as Lincoln Learning Centers in their home country.

Capitalizing on refugee skills in tailoring, the American Corner created the Refugee Bear project, which includes both sewing and marketing of hand-crafted products. With the help of ECA Fulbright alumna Lydia Witt, over 200 colorful bears have been made and promoted at local craft fairs. Witt has volunteered her time to work with the tailor-entrepreneurs on product design and marketing.

Other Trieste American Corner programs involve STEM activities, a girls leadership development program, cultural events such as American film showings and Thanksgiving and July 4th celebrations. The American Corner hosts nearly 400 programs a year and sees some 35,000 visitors. The embassy in Rome and consulate in Milan enhance programming options with alumni speakers, officer presentations and VIP visits. All of the programs in the American Spaces are free of charge.



Trieste's international connections stretched beyond its borders through a volunteer American couple who taught English classes at the American Corner in Trieste, an American Corner in Chile, and most recently at Dar America, the American Space in Casablanca.



Separate from the American Space, AIA FVG offers a full course schedule of English language classes for children and adults, for which it charges a fee. AIA FVG staff founded and host a local TESOL group and is active at the national level in English education.

The city's long history as a crossroads continues, and the American Corner Trieste is at the center of it, with a warm and welcoming American presence and an international profile beyond its corner of the Adriatic Sea.

In line with innovative approaches to entrepreneurship as a primary American Spaces objective around the world, the Trieste Refugee Bear project combined the American Corner's exceptional role in the community with its recognition of the skills and the needs of a diverse immigrant population to provide them with a unique source of income.

High-impact Programming in American Spaces ★

MOSCOW

THE MOSCOW MEDIA LITERACY LAB: PROGRESSIVE MEETS PRACTICAL

By John Fer, Foreign Service Officer and Regional Public Engagement Specialist



American Spaces are incubators for ingenuity in public diplomacy. While the programming “pillars” (alumni engagement, English language teaching, educational advising, policy-focused cultural activities and information about the U.S.) remain consistent, the Regional Public Engagement Specialist corps exists to stimulate progress and drive innovation, setting the stage to showcase the best of our public diplomacy efforts at American Spaces.

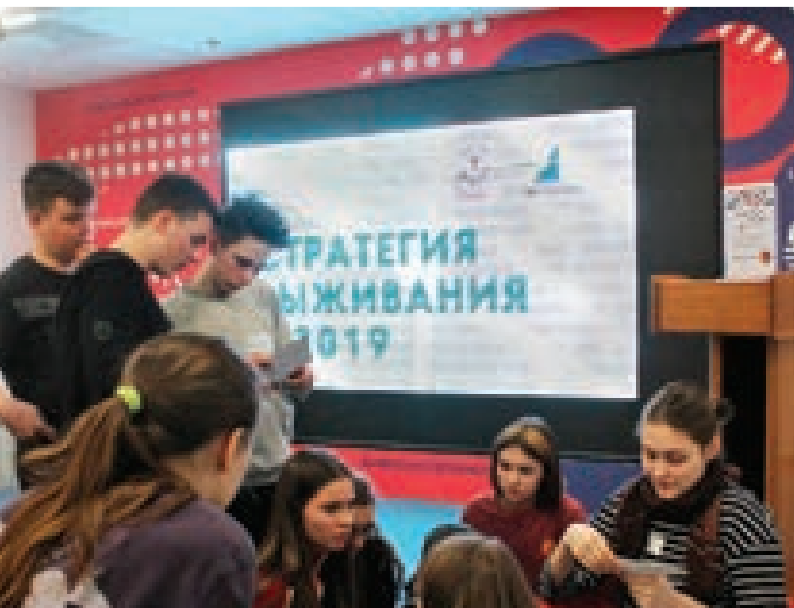
visitors access to technology and resources that allow them to fact-check, connect with other citizen journalists and produce products such as podcasts and videos that add to the conversation.

At the American Center in Moscow, a director and an “expert in residence” staff the media lab, which, as of the end of FY 2019, had hosted more than 5,000 visitors since its inception in 2018. Lab staff members provide classes, design course materials and run an exchange program for young journalists, called Media Exchange for Global Achievement.

Features such as these advance our support for free speech, particularly in light of difficult relationships between governments, shore up people-to-people ties and highlight the fact that Russians and Americans can work together in many areas, despite political differences.

When they were established during the Cold War, American libraries and information centers — the forerunners to today’s American Spaces — were the only game in town for foreign audiences to learn more about U.S. policy and culture. That is no longer the case. Increased global connectivity, social media and the 24-hour news cycle (that includes equally steady streams of disinformation) have changed the way people receive and consume information.

By teaching 21st century skills, such as media literacy, American Spaces showcase the best in American values and significantly contribute to ensuring that in an increasingly interconnected world, people can continue to converse in a fact-based, constructive manner.



True to their foundation as adversaries of censorship and false information, American Spaces around the world recognized the need to provide media literacy skills, especially as social media became a dominant source of information among young people. As in the Moscow lab, programs in American Spaces continually evolve in sophistication.

In 2003, the public affairs staff in Moscow ventured beyond the capital city to create a network of 22 “corners” in major cities across Russia, providing a broader swath of the population with information about the United States, access to internet, print resources and the chance to learn and practice English. The corners proved to be such a winning concept that Congress noted their effectiveness in H.R. 1646, encouraging their replication worldwide.

A decade later, American Corners covered the globe, when staff again innovated to create “Science Corners,” which promoted STEM in partnership with technical universities. Then, as early adopters of the “maker” movement, American Spaces quickly learned the value of makerspaces, which featured 3D printers, laser cutters and on-site professionals to conduct classes and mentor budding designers, inventors and builders.

Recent efforts were no different. In response to a dire need for media literacy around the world, many American Spaces set up media labs. These classrooms host workshops that enable visitors to become more discerning consumers of information. Many labs tailor their content to local and global issues, giving



CHINA



CHINA: DESPITE RISK, VISITORS FLOCK TO EMBASSY-BASED AMERICAN SPACE

By Rita Botts, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

A visit to the Beijing American Center isn't made easily. Whether traveling by bus, subway or electric scooter, visitors to the Beijing American Center traverse a city of more than 1,600 square miles and 20 million inhabitants. Some travel for more than an hour, sometimes from outside the city or even from other provinces. As guests approach the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, they are required to navigate a slew of stanchions and present national identification cards to local police who decide whether they can enter the embassy. If they are allowed to proceed, they continue to a second gate where national police film and photograph them. Past this gate, they are finally on embassy grounds, where embassy guards welcome them, and they enter the American Center. Why are visitors willing to negotiate all these steps? Inside the center, they find a unique community:

- They engage in lively debates with Americans and diplomats from a wide variety of backgrounds, discussing topics ranging from the 2020 U.S. presidential election to LGBT rights. Guests often engage in discussions that are considered sensitive in China, including conversations about democracy and religious freedom. It is almost impossible for Chinese citizens to engage in these kinds of conversations in any other venue throughout China.
- They receive transparent public health information that's rarely available in the rest of the country. Guests have told staff that they turn to the Beijing American Center for health-related information they can trust.
- They hear firsthand about the five steps to study in the United States.
- They converse with native English speakers on a range of topics.
- No tickets or fees are required, and visitors enjoy uncensored internet access.

- When Beijingers traveled to the U.S. Embassy for a panel presentation honoring the 71st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2019, police prevented some from entering the center. Those who were able to attend participated in a lively dialogue with U.S. and EU diplomats, who spoke not only about their human rights successes in their own countries, but also about areas for improvement.



By providing a unique forum for honest reflection on sensitive topics, the Beijing American Center connects audiences with a range of perspectives absent from China's public sphere. This open discourse exemplifies U.S. democratic values by underscoring our country's commitment to free speech, while supporting a key pillar of American Spaces: access to accurate information about the U.S.

Many U.S. government-owned American Centers are important in authoritarian environments where the embassy can conduct public outreach only in U.S.-controlled facilities. Programs in the Beijing American Center have involved sensitive topics that would be difficult or impossible to hold at an outside venue due to Chinese interference and censorship, including China's workplace safety, the country's "996" (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week) expectation and a documentary on China's abandoned girls.



High-impact Programming in American Spaces ★

ERITREA

ERITREA: FINDING WORK-AROUNDS WORKS

By Stacia Clifton, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

CONNECT. DISCOVER. ACHIEVE.

The operating environment for public diplomacy in Eritrea is among the most challenging in the world. Freedom House consistently ranks Eritrea among the least free nations in the world when it comes to freedom of expression, belief and assembly. The State of Eritrea requires advance notice for, and must approve all, public diplomacy programming. Nongovernmental organizations, with which the U.S. Embassy in Asmara could partner, are not allowed in Eritrea. Exchange programs are nearly impossible to implement due to difficulties Eritreans face obtaining passports and exit visas, and U.S. restrictions on issuing visas.

Creativity and ingenuity thrive in highly restrictive programming environments where programs are subject to approval of national authorities and appear to be “fun,” such as robotics classes, which build technology skills, or innocuous English classes, which happen to incorporate media literacy skills. In Eritrea, the American Center found that it could distribute magazines bearing its logo to libraries and other public locations where Eritreans may face deterrence to visiting the center. These periodicals build skills and provide broader access to uncensored media.



The current political and educational environment in Eritrea offers few opportunities for young people to develop the leadership and critical thinking skills they need to fully realize their talents, improve their livelihoods and contribute to the change they want to see in their communities and their country.



Meanwhile, the goals of the American Center in Asmara, the country's capital, are to equip young Eritreans with practical skills and help them build their own futures, inspiring them through increased exposure to Americans and the American values that nurture civil society development, such as volunteerism, tolerance, respect for multiple viewpoints and freedom of expression.

The American Center in Asmara is an indispensable platform for the embassy to engage with young Eritreans. The center offers the only free, accessible, reliable internet connection in Asmara, and as such it draws capacity crowds daily. Thanks to a 2018 Office of American Spaces-funded renovation project, what was once a static, dark, quiet study space is now a vibrant, open, engaging hub of activity, connecting young Eritreans with one another and with the world beyond them, while building their capacity in everything from English language to robotics and coding skills.

With minimal cost, the redesign dramatically improved the look and feel to visitors, making the center more engaging, more welcoming, more “American.” Along with the new look, the center has a new tagline — Connect. Discover. Achieve. The objective is to convey future possibilities available to young Eritreans.

The physical overhaul of the American Center Asmara was strategic, and the results are striking. Most impressive, and most important, is that the center increased the quantity, quality and diversity of programming. From introducing a weekly “Internet for Beginners” course and launching Saturday English language classes for middle school students, to running monthly discussion groups for women and youth exchange program alumni, to offering a webinar series with interns from the Virtual Student Federal Service, the center's reach continues to grow. Center staff are cultivating a committed group of volunteers who assist with the operations and run programs — especially impressive given that Eritrea has no tradition of volunteerism.

The American Center Asmara is critical to advancing the embassy's overarching goal: an Eritrea with strengthened civil society, improved governance and protected human rights.



TURKMENISTAN



TURKMENISTAN: CONSIDER ALL ANGLES – THEN CONSIDER THEM AGAIN

By Tracci Gabel, Foreign Service Officer and Regional Public Engagement Specialist

Turkmenistan's network of four American Spaces — an American Center in the capital of Ashgabat and three American Corners in the regional centers of Mary, Turkmenabat and Dashoguz — face universal and unique hurdles to delivering strategically relevant programming. The embassy in Ashgabat helps overcome those obstacles by focusing on the fundamentals: investing in people, creating engaging and strategically substantive programs with the resources at hand and putting American Spaces at the heart of the embassy's objectives.

In an environment where the internet is among the world's slowest, with low internet penetration, a single state monopoly internet provider and heavy censorship of websites and social media, American Spaces in Turkmenistan rely on ingenuity and elbow grease to augment traditional tools, such as MOOCs and virtual speaker programs. These obstacles underscore the vital role that Turkmenistan's American Spaces play as information and resources hubs. Their efforts to find creative ways to deliver quality strategic outreach programming keep around 200,000 visitors walking through the doors each year. These are among the tactics:

- **TAKE IT OFFLINE:** Turkmenistan's American Spaces adapt existing State Department resources to make them available even without a strong internet connection by packing flash drives with English teaching resources and stocking iPads with pre-downloaded podcasts and offline apps.
- **BUILD AROUND "LIGHT" AND ACCESSIBLE SITES:** Turkmenistan's American Spaces maintain strategic focus with activities that use sites easy to access in Turkmenistan, without heavy content like streaming video. In 2019, a hack-a-thon to increase Turkmen language representation on Tatoeba, a crowdsourced translation website, added more than 6,200 sentences, promoting English language use and access to information. Another favorite activity is an information "scavenger hunt" that relies on low-bandwidth sites to build information literacy skills.
- **DO IT YOURSELF (LITERALLY):** In 2019, Turkmenistan's makerspace introduced MediaMaker to give visitors basic skills in graphic design, desktop publishing, podcasting and video production. With these tools, visitors and American Spaces staff create their own newsletters, visual materials and videos that can be shared and accessed online and offline.
- **DON'T FORGET PRINT:** Print books and magazines remain some of the most popular resources in Turkmenistan American Spaces. Collections are regularly updated based on user data and surveys, with special collections tailored to English teachers and learners, entrepreneurs and makerspace tinkerers. The annual October "Read This Book!" festival boosts circulation by 50 percent, with more than 2,300 print materials loaned in 2019.

Institutional challenges: Barriers to access and difficult conditions for staff members

Some challenges faced in Turkmenistan do not lend themselves to simple solutions. The embassy and the American Councils operate and staff Turkmenistan's American Spaces due to the lack of an agreement with the government of Turkmenistan and barriers to partnering with local institutions. Local authorities likewise restrict off-premises activities, enrollment-based educational programs and even certain topics (human rights, civic engagement) and formats (no "clubs," "classes" or "debates"). Groups that stand to gain the most from American Spaces — English teachers, university students, and young professionals in government — are warned not to attend, and staff members

face harassment and bureaucratic challenges. Nonetheless, American Spaces in Turkmenistan regularly demonstrate their ingenuity, focusing on these principles:



- **TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE FIRST:** American Spaces in Turkmenistan have developed a robust year-round program of experiential exchanges, trainings, strategic planning summits and peer mentoring, creating a supportive network that provides not only a strategic compass but a helping hand and sympathetic sounding board.
- **BUILD BUY-IN THROUGHOUT THE EMBASSY:** Leaders send a clear message that all sections and agencies play a role in supporting American Spaces. Visitors, those on TDY assignments and family members are encouraged to visit American Spaces around the country. Nearly all visiting cultural and speaker programs include an American Spaces outreach component. Widespread engagement in American Spaces sends a clear message that the embassy cares about and values the American Spaces and will fight for their continued success.
- **EMPOWER COMMUNITY MULTIPLIERS:** Turkmenistan's American Spaces could not function without the tremendous contributions of U.S. government exchange alumni. In addition to giving thousands of volunteer hours to run American Spaces programming, alumni act as bridges to groups that don't feel comfortable visiting American Spaces in person, sharing resources and information.
- **FIND WORK-AROUNDS THAT WORK:** After numerous unsuccessful attempts to secure permission to run structured English courses or camps in American Spaces during school breaks, the Turkmenistan American Spaces created Englishpalooza, an alumni-led blitz of semi-structured English-language games and activities. In 2019, Englishpalooza drew more than 13,300 American Spaces visits and became the single most effective tool to recruit regular visitors.

An American Spaces success story sums up Turkmenistan's approach to creating long-term relationships: A high school student's connection with American Spaces began when she stopped by to use the free internet. She stuck around, curious about friendly laughter she heard. She transitioned from casual observer to active participant to volunteer and activity leader, strengthened her English and joined the Undergraduate Cohort Advising college onboarding program. While studying graphic design in the United States on a full scholarship, she referred to American Corner staff and friends as "her second family."

High-impact Programming in American Spaces ★

KOLKATA

KOLKATA: TELLING “ONE STORY AT A TIME” GIVES VOICE TO TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

By Sarah Ziebell, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

At American Center Kolkata, a group of women trafficking-in-persons survivors created short films capturing the harsh realities of trafficking in India, while also offering hope through activism and resiliency.

“One Story at a Time,” an ECA storytelling program, enabled women from South Asia’s India, Nepal and Bangladesh to tell their stories while building their skills as activists to design and implement anti-human trafficking campaigns in their own communities.

The program highlighted the stories of survivors while advocating for their inclusion in policymaking, rehabilitation and preventative strategies during the eighth annual Anti-Trafficking in Persons Conclave on March 13–16, 2019, at the American Center Kolkata.

The “One Story at a Time” digital storytelling program brought together alumni from past storytelling programs who worked with the group of women



ECA Assistant Secretary Marie Royce (left) offered her support to girls who are struggling to build self-esteem and leadership skills to fight human trafficking and gender-based violence.

trafficking survivors and two American mentors — digital storytelling expert Amy Hill working with another anti-trafficking activist — to create the films, contributing extensively to the success of the anti-trafficking conclave.

The consulate released the films as a campaign leading up to July’s World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. ECA’s speaker program sent Dr. Vanessa Bouché, Texas Christian University professor and trafficking expert, to Kolkata, along with eight of her students. The TCU group partnered with South Asian activists at the anti-trafficking conclave to share best practices for anti-human trafficking fundraising and awareness campaigns.

Cultural tools also helped to build empathy and understanding about trafficking among non-expert visitors. The American Center hosted a musical performance, a women’s empowerment fair, a screening of the anti-trafficking digital stories and a dance piece, alongside the anti-trafficking conclave, to capacity audiences.

The consulate has seen significant results from the anti-trafficking conclave. Youth leaders have implemented the campaign through partnership mobilization, workshops and extensive use of print and social media that have reached approximately 200,000 people, including more than 110,000 at-risk adolescents. In trainings across the country, the films have reached more than 3,500 judicial and law enforcement officers, and 56,500 students on college campuses have viewed them.



RWANDA

RWANDAN BUSINESSWOMEN TURN BARRIER INTO CONNECTION

By Elizabeth Stromme, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

Sometimes, just a day can make a difference. Located within walking distance from the border to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the American Corner Rubavu in Gisenye, Rwanda, is in a unique position to plan programs that can reach communities in both countries. The border is a bustling place, with people crossing daily by foot and vehicle for trade and commerce, to visit family or to go to school.

A walk through the parking area reveals vast numbers of small traders taking advantage of cross-border customers to purchase their goods. And many of these traders are women.

Noticing this, in 2018, the American Corner Coordinator and a U.S. Fulbright Scholar based in the region planned a workshop for 40 women traders — 20 Rwandan and 20 Congolese — focusing on entrepreneurial skills and women’s empowerment. With an eye toward fostering cross-border relationships and building business opportunities, the agenda included a chance for the women to share their experiences, challenges and expertise.

As a result, local trade associations and cooperatives recruited these women, who represented a range of experience levels that fostered a mentoring atmosphere. These small-scale businesswomen have little opportunity for training or the chance to talk about themselves and their lives. This program provided a rare setting that focused on them and their successes, acknowledging their hard work and their contributions to the community.

The American Corner often welcomes students from across the border to practice their English, but this was one of the first programs explicitly planned to include both Congolese and Rwandan audiences. These women rely on the trade across the border for their livelihoods and support for their families. Enabling them to make these connections with their “sister” traders enhanced their economic opportunities.

Rather than seeing the border as a divider, spending the day sharing instead of competing helped these women traders, who see each other every day, learn to view it as a bridge to a better future.

Participants in a workshop for women who sell their handiwork in Gisenye learned the difference a day can make in learning how to cooperate rather than compete to increase sales for everyone.





CAIRO'S VIRTUAL REALITY: A REAL WINNER FOR JOB CREATION

By Heather Ward, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

In 2016, the American Center Cairo offered a training program called Introduction to Virtual Reality. By 2019, the Virtual and Augmented Reality Diploma had become one of American Center Cairo's flagship programs, a unique opportunity for young Egyptians to develop professional skills that they would have access to nowhere else. The American Center offers this eight-week course several times a year in partnership with a local company owned by Egyptian-American entrepreneurs.

Competitive job skills are especially important given that more than 60 percent of the population is under 25 and the youth unemployment rate is over 30 percent. Since the center's virtual reality/augmented reality diploma was first awarded, 100 participants have successfully completed the course. The fact that graduates have traveled from 14 different Egyptian governorates to participate demonstrates the uniqueness of the program.

Participants have represented a wide demographic range, almost one-third of them young women. They have applied their skills to develop college graduation projects, to work for partner companies and to do freelance work for clients in Egypt and abroad. Of the graduates, 35 have become full-time virtual reality/augmented reality developers and five have launched their own startups.

The course is a complete introduction to the world of virtual reality and augmented reality programming. It assumes no prior experience and equips

participants with concepts they can apply to any interface. The program takes 80 hours to complete, including eight lectures, eight labs and two weeks for the final project. Participants develop projects from idea to design to implementation and present it to others in their group. Among fields in which graduates have completed projects are education, entertainment, ecommerce, health care, tourism and gaming.

Other embassies and American Spaces have demonstrated strong interest in incorporating virtual reality technology into public diplomacy programs that further policy goals, such as supporting economic development and empowerment through providing skills-building opportunities, including in Brazil, which also has a high unemployment rate. In recent years, the Office of American Spaces has been seeing an increase in American Spaces Support Fund requests for virtual reality equipment for public diplomacy programs in American Spaces.

Based on the proven capacity of this program to raise the economic status of participants, American Center Cairo is developing an advanced diploma program to enable graduates to develop highly specialized skills to increase their marketability.



Since the technology became widely available in recent years, the possibilities for virtual and augmented reality applications are literally endless, as is the resourcefulness of those in American Spaces in finding new ways to assist people in putting their ideas to work for themselves instead of going in less productive directions. On a visit to Cairo, ECA Assistant Secretary Marie Royce (right) took the opportunity to view some of the projects.

A Personal Perspective in American Spaces ★

WITH A LOT OF FLEXIBILITY AND A LITTLE SENSE OF HUMOR, A PERSON IN THIS ROLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Linda Parker, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

Explaining a “typical day” as a Regional Public Engagement Specialist, or REPS, is difficult, since what happens each day depends on where we are. A field REPS can be in his or her home embassy or consulate, developing training, planning outreach and development trips and interacting virtually. The day may involve meetings, procurement decisions and budget planning. On a TDY (working in a different location), the REPS may be reaching out virtually to the home post, dealing with technology and infrastructure issues for conducting a program, meeting with local nongovernmental or education contacts and ensuring that the local embassy and American Space staff have the training they need.

Life as a REPS is typical of the Foreign Service, but even more concentrated. All Foreign Service members leave extended family behind to go abroad. REPS do that, but then we leave this new comfort zone as we travel within our assigned regions to the American Space locations.

The traveling can sometimes feel like a solo adventure, and it could mean a lot when someone at a TDY post would invite me to dinner. On the plus side, I’ve seen many of the countries in the regions where I served beyond my home post. Watching Mount Everest as the dawn sun turns the snow to crimson while sipping tea is worth the chill.

“Watching Mount Everest as the dawn sun turns the snow to crimson while sipping tea is worth the chill.”

Usually a Foreign Service assignment lasts two to three years, so everyone is expected to “hit the ground running” and make an impact in that two- or three-year slice of time. For a REPS, this is no different, but making a post visit requires distilling those years into days. That is why virtual outreach before a visit is essential — by the time I arrive, I have completed the groundwork and already have a feel for what needs to be done next.

Each American Space, each time, is different. As the assignment ends, I begin telling everyone how great their replacement will be and realizing how much I will miss this group. Sometimes it turns out that the most difficult places or people are the ones I miss the most — maybe because they were the ones who challenged me to be better than I thought I could be.

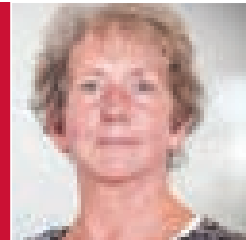
Most people join the Foreign Service for a combination of adventure, altruism and service to their country. There again a REPS has a heady experience. From the beginning, a REPS travels the unknown roads and meets the people who live there face to face — including the visionaries who will shape their countries’ futures. Some adventures are good; some not so much — monkeys at the window, giraffes in the market parking lot, gunfire late at night, mortars on Christmas Day — but all of them matter.

A REPS won’t conduct a demarche; we rarely are the notetakers when the high-level political meetings happen. We don’t shape economic policy. We tap into the grassroots of a society, creating safe spaces to discuss difficult topics, enabling people access to an education they may never have dreamed of, and to experience ideas that inspire them to work for positive transformation in their own communities.

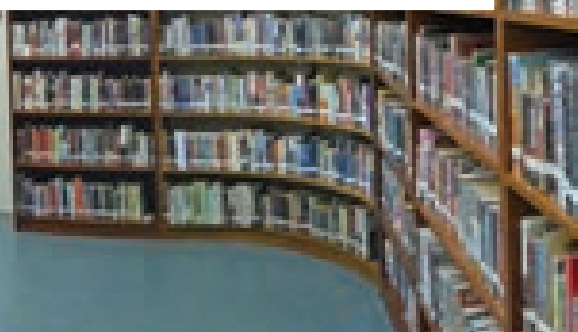
As a REPS, you will change people’s lives.

LINDA PARKER

regional public engagement specialist, has held this position for 13 years



When I was the regional public engagement specialist for Myanmar, formerly Burma, I met two brothers who had just returned from five years in a “re-education camp.” Their crime was opening a library in their living room containing unauthorized books. While they were in the camp, their family was harassed and their parents died due to malnutrition and lack of access to medical care. When they returned, they sent their youngest brother away to Australia before reopening the illicit library. It happened that we had a moratorium on opening American Spaces that year, but I lobbied for one for Myanmar anyway because I believed that we needed to support the freedom to read in that country. It turned out two new American Spaces were funded worldwide that year, and Myanmar got one of them. The brothers did not have to reopen their dangerous secret library.



Binational Centers: A Special Report ★

ABLA

BINATIONAL CENTERS HANDLE TOUGH ISSUES WITH FINESSE

By Mark Burrell, Regional Public Engagement Specialist



Whether in Uruguay conducting online courses, in Venezuela providing a safe haven for independent thought and discourse, in Mexico launching makerspace challenges for public school students, or in Peru providing bilingual support for American emergency repatriations, binational centers repeatedly demonstrate their value as American Spaces.

Binational centers are independent cultural institutions founded indigenously to foster strong relationships with the United States, serving as major hubs for English language learning and cross-cultural dialogue. About 100 binational centers are American Spaces, mostly in Latin America, where they have strong historic roots.

“The longstanding partnerships between binational centers and U.S. embassies and consulates has improved relations between their host countries and the U.S. throughout the Western Hemisphere,” said Carol Brey, director of the Office of American Spaces. “Binational centers promote strategic programs in high-demand, successful topics such as English language learning, U.S. culture, entrepreneurship and science and technology.”

Binational centers promote better understanding of the United States through their relevant and timely awareness of current issues as well as their expertise in U.S. culture, values and institutions. The Office of American Spaces consults with the regional bureau of the State Department that represents the Latin American region of the Western Hemisphere and with the embassies and consulates that manage binational center networks to ensure these institutions remain viable and effective. Washington office representatives participate in monthly virtual meetings with binational centers.

BINATIONAL CENTERS: 1920s TO TODAY

To understand how the relationship with binational centers came about, it's helpful to understand their history. Given that the State Department did not have responsibility for cultural and academic exchanges in the 1920s and 1930s, Latin American elites who had ties through education or family in the U.S., along with U.S. residents and American nongovernmental organizations, established these centers for the promotion of scholarly and cultural exchange.

The Instituto Cultural Argentino Norteamericano, known as ICANA, is the oldest binational cultural institute. Founded in Buenos Aires in May 1928, ICANA served as a model for those that followed. Although the centers varied in size, their designs were similar. Each renovated or built an attractively furnished building located in the central business section of the city with classrooms, a large auditorium, a well-stocked library/reading room, offices, a lounge and a tearoom. All had outside patios and gardens for cultural events. English language teaching provided sustaining financial resources.

During the years surrounding World War II, the State Department started to recognize the value of these U.S.-focused centers and began to channel funding to them through the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Library Association. These U.S.-centric organizations provided venues for demonstrations supporting the United States.

ABLA: THE NEXT STEP AS FORMAL AMERICAN SPACES

The development of the Association of Binational Centers of Latin America in the early 2000s enabled the binational centers that had joined the network of American Spaces to become a stronger presence in Latin America, and ABLA has continued to fortify that presence.

In 2018, ABLA's conference in Buenos Aires celebrated the 90th anniversary of the ICANA, while the binational centers demonstrated their renewed dedication to the strategic impact and foreign policy value of the partnership between the United States and the network of binational centers in Latin America.

Programs at the 2018 conference focused on management of binational centers, strategies for English language learning, educational advising and methods for increased community engagement — all of which were aimed at taking the centers to the next level as well-placed, reliable partners that can reach and influence key audiences.



“ABLA energetically advocates for the modernization of English teaching and professional development for its members, ensuring its goals remain aligned with those of the State Department,” said Elenita Tapawan, a Regional Public Engagement Specialist in Latin

America. “Binational centers value their special relationship with the local embassy and the Department of State. Visits from non-State Department employees of the embassy contribute to strengthening these relationships.”

For example, strategic deployment of first- and second-tour Foreign Service officers, or mid-level and senior officers who are country team members as part of an embassy speakers bureau, can bring policy-focused discussions to binational center audiences, deepening the embassy's links with a range of audiences. The Regional Public Engagement Specialists from the Office of American Spaces are positioned throughout Latin America to provide essential support for binational centers as American Spaces, ensuring that these networks function smoothly. Regional Public Engagement Specialists, along with experts from other ECA programs, expand the use of digital engagement tools at binational centers, enhancing the embassy's ability to bring policy-focused programming to a broader audience.

Binational centers enrich country relationships with the United States in highly creative and critically important ways. During the 2018 civil unrest in Venezuela, U.S. Embassy Caracas invited a speaker from Washington to interact via videoconference with journalists, university students and civil society leaders involved in grassroots community organizing to share ideas based on the U.S. democratic process.

Binational Centers: A Special Report ★

VENEZUELA

BINATIONAL CENTERS IN VENEZUELA: MODELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

By Sheila Weir, Regional Public Engagement Specialist



As economic, social and political conditions deteriorated in FY 2018, Venezuela's American Spaces — including five binational centers, known as Centro Venezolano Americanos, and three American Corners — continued their operations as strong, established cultural institutions, essential during periods of rapid unpredictable change.

In August 2018, the United Nations warned of a migration “crisis,” estimating that economic deterioration, along with shortages of food and medical supplies, caused more than two million Venezuelans to leave their country since 2014.

In January 2019, all the American Spaces were open, according to Marta Garcia, the American Spaces and EducationUSA coordinator at the U.S. Embassy Caracas. All were planning to continue functioning as safe places for democratic dialogue, English language instruction, educational advising and community development projects.

The embassy in Caracas developed an aggressive strategy of integrated programming to refine and enhance the operation of binational centers to advance focused policy goals. It invested substantial staff time and funds to ensure all Venezuela's American Spaces remain dynamic, high-functioning modern venues to serve as the embassy's primary platforms for public engagement.

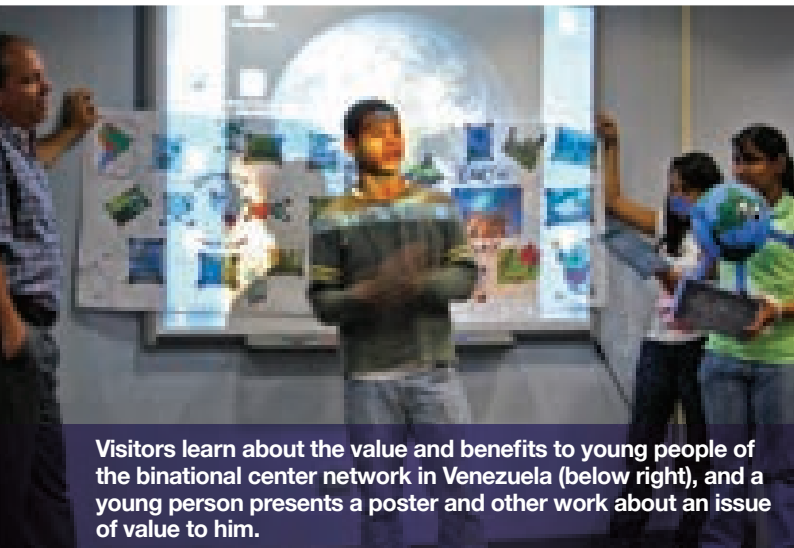
As Venezuela's American Spaces directors recounted at an ABLA (see page 17) conference in Buenos Aires, innovative programs such as “pop-up American Spaces” in collaboration with local institutions, combined with continued high demand for English classes, have helped Venezuela's American Spaces remain open despite hyperinflation and violent demonstrations.

In areas where no physical American Space exists, members of Venezuela's American Spaces network, including U.S. exchange program alumni, have traveled to conduct programming, and rural-area hosts welcomed them with open arms and requests for more. Traveling alumni offer training and mentoring for civil society organizations and startup entrepreneurial enterprises for young community leaders.

Travel and interpersonal interaction have been ever more important as indications have shown that poor internet connectivity and the prohibitive cost of quality smartphones have been affecting online access for many young non-elite residents throughout the country who lack access to accurate, credible news and information.

The FY 2018–2019 objective has been to consolidate the Venezuelan American Spaces into a dynamic, highly functional network with these goals:

- Increase regional integrated strategic content programming
- Expand audience outreach and engage with the alumni network in Venezuela
- Develop an assertive strategy of integrated engagement programming



Visitors learn about the value and benefits to young people of the binational center network in Venezuela (below right), and a young person presents a poster and other work about an issue of value to him.

“I am honored and proud to work with this team of indefatigable colleagues that have shown me a new meaning to the word ‘resilience,’” Garcia said.

American Spaces represent one of the few safe places where the Venezuelan public can convene freely for dynamic public debate about policy issues ranging from democracy and governance to economic prosperity for all. During the unrest, university communities, students and faculty alike, were seeking alternative locations for dialogue as Maduristas, government supporters who rejected classroom discussions critical of the government, blocked access to Venezuela's universities and the government threatened independent news media and social media users.

The Centro Venezolano Americanos, like most of the nearly 100 binational centers in South and Central America, operate under a board of directors — community leaders who understand and care about continuing their roles as a source of stability, as well as maintaining their relationships with the embassy, which has regarded support for these institutions and the people they serve as essential to its public diplomacy strategy.



Nuts and Bolts ★

TRAINING: EMPOWERING AMERICAN SPACES STAFF TO BECOME CHANGEMAKERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

By Magia Krause, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

Since the Office of American Spaces launched a centralized global training program for American Spaces in 2015, nearly 2,300 individuals have participated, creating a ripple effect that elevates the impact of these public diplomacy hubs worldwide. With a focus on strategic planning, innovative digital engagement and 21st century methods, American Spaces training continually evolves to meet the needs of a diverse community working to advance U.S. foreign policy goals.

Amerika Haus, the Vienna, Austria, Satellite Office and training facility, is a U.S. government-owned building that is easily accessible to U.S. government and non-U.S. government participants. No costs beyond salaries are incurred to host training, and the Vienna Satellite Office has partnerships with neighboring hotels to keep lodging costs 40 percent below per diem. Since 2015, the Office of American Spaces has invested approximately \$100,000 to upgrade the training facility to meet tech-forward requirements.

The facility offers three rooms well-equipped with high-speed fiber optic internet and Wi-Fi, 30 Chromebooks, 16 internal computers, projectors and makerspace equipment (3D printers, virtual reality kits). It resembles a model American Space and inspires trainees to implement modern designs that often are the first impressions of America for their visitors. The Vienna office also coordinates with FSI to offer use of the facility for other public diplomacy courses, including ECA's alumni or International Visitor Leadership Program courses.

FY 2018

In 2018, the Vienna facility held eight FSI-accredited American Spaces courses (introductory and advanced). Brasilia hosted one introductory course to address the needs of binational centers. Almaty, Pretoria, Kyiv and Mexico City American Spaces held 15 regional workshops.

Disinformation Training: In Kyiv, American Spaces managers from more than 20 countries in Europe gained critical thinking and media analysis skills through IREX's Learn to Discern curriculum as a way to build skills to evaluate disinformation in their countries.

FY 2019

In FY 2019, the Office of American Spaces delivered eight FSI-accredited courses — six PY351 (introductory) courses and one PY352 (advanced) course at the Vienna facility and one PY352 course in Kathmandu. In addition, the Vienna office supported five regional workshops in Africa, East Asia, Europe and South Central Asia for 286 participants.

Online Training: Following her visit to the Vienna facility in 2019, DAS Caroline Casagrande suggested that the range of available technology would allow many more American Spaces staff to be trained, using online resources, while tailoring training to specific needs. As a result, the Vienna office and the Office of American Spaces are developing online, blended learning courses for 2020, which will become prerequisites for in-person training. The Regional Public Engagement Specialists will facilitate the online courses, which will offer opportunities for American Spaces managers to interact online, build their professional networks and showcase their best practices.

Curriculum Updates: Also for FY 2020, the Office of American Spaces is consulting with ECA's Global Educational Programs Office, Collaboratory and the English Language Office to incorporate more ECA elements into American Spaces training. Regional Public Engagement Specialists will form a working group that will review existing agendas, learning objectives and course materials, with the goal of updating and improving the American Spaces training curriculum.

The Vienna office evaluates American Spaces training through structured online surveys, behavior assessment, group activities, input from trainers and

updates from Regional Public Engagement Specialists. "Next Steps" surveys are sent to PY351 participants a few months after the training to measure how participants implemented what they learned. Participants are asked to provide concrete results, ranging from sharing the course materials with colleagues to completing their project goals.

American Spaces training provides a solid foundation for understanding U.S. national security and integrated country strategies. For partners, this is often their first exposure to these goals, which are reinforced throughout the training in relation to strategic planning and program development. Training helps to motivate, inspire and energize American Spaces managers, particularly partners that do not receive compensation for their work from the U.S. government.



The table in the shape of a map of the United States is an example of furniture that is available to American Spaces to provide a visual U.S. connection.

Regional Public Engagement Specialists have noted several specific outcomes from the training, including

- Implementation of a Youth Leadership Program at American House in Kyiv to recruit and train university students to assist with communication and programming for young audiences
- Marked improvement in programming at a binational center in Sao Paulo since the director attended a PY351 course in September 2018; she proposed a National Maker Day, which started with 16 American Spaces in 2018 and grew to 25 in 2019
- Implementation of a project to engage visually impaired students at a binational center in Brazil
- Use of Facebook Live to improve Future Leaders Exchange Program recruitment at a Slovenia American Corner

Overall, training empowers staff at U.S. government-operated and partner American Spaces to design innovative ways to connect with their audiences and share U.S. values. Staff who attend our training are using new tools to poll their audiences, gather valuable feedback and more effectively market their programs. As an American Spaces staff member from Burkina Faso noted, "I really felt empowered and now have a different approach to my job."

Nuts and Bolts ★

ECA AND AMERICAN SPACES: THE EVOLUTION OF A PARTNERSHIP

By Lynne Scheib, Partnerships Coordinator

Women's economic empowerment is integral to helping countries achieve self-sufficiency and become capable trading partners. Women still confront legal and other barriers to success, including significant gaps in access to the credit, markets, networks and mentorships that would allow them to fund and grow their own firms.

In February 2019, the White House established the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, the first whole-of-government approach to advancing women's economic empowerment around the world. W-GDP seeks to empower women to fully participate in their local economies to increase stability, security and prosperity for everyone.

Pillar One of W-GDP is Women Prospering in the Workforce. Pillar Two is Women Succeeding as Entrepreneurs. In support of the W-GDP mission, in March 2019, ECA created, funded and launched the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs program to provide women around the world with the resources, networks, and mentorship needed to start and scale their businesses.

AWE uses the core curriculum of DreamBuilder, an online course that traces its history to an Office of American Spaces agreement with the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues to host the DreamBuilder gateway on its website in 2017. The brainchild of the Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management and Freeport-McMoRan, a U.S.-based mining company, DreamBuilder found its way to the State Department through a partnership with enterprising Foreign Service officers in Chile and Peru.

As DreamBuilder is strictly online, AWE incorporates extensive in-person facilitation and additional partnerships, through entrepreneurship fairs, seed-fund competitions and connections to successful business owners,

providing the hands-on support participants need to turn their business ideas and plans into reality. While DreamBuilder thrived primarily in Latin America, AWE takes it around the world. To formalize the AWE program partnership, ECA Assistant Secretary Marie Royce signed memoranda of understanding with Arizona State and Freeport. Accelerating women's economic development has long been a major



BUILDING A DREAM

Yolanda Ibarra, who is from the Amazonian city of Madre de Dios, Peru, is one of many DreamBuilder success stories. Ibarra started her natural products business in 2016 with very little capital. After completing the DreamBuilder course, she won \$1,000 in a business plan competition, and she used the money to obtain Peru legal and sanitary permits. DreamBuilder helped her find suppliers and customers and set pricing. She increased her product line from one to six and registered a brand name, Warayo. Her products use natural ingredients sourced from Peru's indigenous communities — another boost to the local economy. "My next goal is to grow my market share," she said.

American Spaces program element. That ECA is taking DreamBuilder to the next level is yet another example of the long-time symbiotic relationship between ECA and the Office of American Spaces.

AMERICAN SPACES AS INNOVATION INCUBATORS: PARTNERSHIPS ARE IN OUR DNA

Public-private partnerships, a proven impetus to innovation, come together through American Spaces, combining the global reach of the U.S. government with the latest private-sector technology and other assets. With open, public-engagement platforms around the world, the Office of American Spaces manages laboratories of capacity building, whether bringing skills and inspiration to women entrepreneurs or assisting other emerging leaders. Like all good laboratories, the Office of American Spaces is constantly learning, adapting and innovating.

With assistance from the Secretary's Office of Global Partnerships, the Office of American Spaces conducts outreach with private-sector partners and shares findings with the Regional Public Engagement Specialists. U.S. embassies/consulates also independently seek and launch partnerships, with an eye towards supporting workforce development and increasing the competitiveness of U.S. business interests. Below is a snapshot of these partnerships.

Africell – Sierra Leone, American Corner Freetown

- Established in 2013 (and still thriving) through an agreement between U.S. Embassy Sierra Leone and Africell, a telecommunications company whose business strategy includes a goal to "connect and empower local communities"
- Provides office space in a vibrant area of Freetown that attracts young people to events promoting peace and prosperity
- Notable activities include skill-building for journalists, a nationwide initiative on civic engagement, youth voting and many U.S. art and music programs

Chevron – Kazakhstan, American Space Almaty

- Made a donation to help establish Kazakhstan's makerspace in February 2019
- Works with the embassy through an agreement with a nongovernmental partner to implement programs

Spirit of America – Tajikistan, American Spaces Tajikistan

- For the American Space in Khujand, this U.S.-based NGO paid renovation fees and three years of rent and salary supplements
- For the American Space in Dushanbe, the organization provided partial renovation funding
- Countrywide, the NGO supported technology and arts festivals, including the technology-focused Go Viral Festival



AMERICAN CENTERS: THE ONLY U.S. GOVERNMENT-OWNED OR -OPERATED AMERICAN SPACES

While partnerships are the backbone of most American Spaces, potentially, the most influential are the roughly 30 large U.S. government-owned or -operated flagship American Centers. In some cases, the United States has owned the facilities for decades, according to their respected positions in bilateral relationships. Several are in areas where local organizations are reluctant to partner with the U.S. government.

These large flagship American Centers typically have more resources and a stronger presence in locations surrounded by disinformation, so they may be the only places visitors can find accurate information about the United States and build trust in the American people. These centers also offer advanced technology for simultaneous virtual programs, makerspace activities and more. Another advantage of the larger U.S. government centers is that high-level representatives of U.S. government and military organizations often can be found using them, providing local audiences the rare chance to engage with these U.S. diplomats and officials from many areas of government.

In case you were wondering: A number of partnership-based American Spaces around the world prefer to use the term American Center rather than American Corner. However, only U.S. government-owned or -operated American Spaces are actual American Centers.

THE NEWEST AMERICAN CENTERS

In November 2017, the Office of American Spaces determined that another group of U.S.-owned American Spaces, known as Information Resource Centers, should be included among American Centers. While IRCs had once been freestanding “libraries,” in the 1990s, they moved into embassies, closed to the public and provided web-based services.

The Office of American Spaces modernization project allowed many to reopen as American Centers. Through grants from the Office of American Spaces, embassies and other sources, roughly 64 former IRCs reopened to the public and transformed themselves into technology hubs that broadcast virtual programs to the country’s network of American Spaces, often training local residents how to use the technology.

For example, the embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia, obtained high-end technology and turned its former IRC into a modern American Center it calls the iSpace, which is the hub of the country’s American Spaces network and conducts virtual programming. Local residents are involved in learning how to use the broadcasting equipment.



American high school students learning Korean and Korean students in the English Access program gather at the American Center in Korea to share their culture and aspirations in the language they are learning. Large American Centers often host major exchange programs that would be too expensive for smaller American Spaces.

Nuts and Bolts ★

AMERICAN SPACES SUPPORT FUND: RELIABLE AND CONSISTENT

By Valorie Lee, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

Upon its founding, the Office of American Spaces was charged with implementing “a new strategic approach” to managing American Spaces as “primary public diplomacy platforms,” recognizing that “making progress on our top foreign policy priorities requires complex, multi-dimensional public engagement to build partnerships, mobilize broad coalitions, and galvanize public opinion.”

This approach provided an increase in funding for American Spaces and promised a new emphasis on helping embassies/consulates improve the impact and sustainability of their American Spaces, specifying that the majority of the increase “would be devoted to the improvement of technology, physical upgrades to existing American Spaces, creating model [American] Spaces for others to emulate and the provision of content.”

True to its original purpose, the American Spaces Support Fund has assisted in implementing strategies aimed at improving the effectiveness of American Spaces as primary public diplomacy platforms.

The fund is awarded annually through a coordinated proposal and review process, typically beginning in

the fall with a cable announcing a call for funding proposals and ending the following summer, when the funding is typically distributed. The Office of American Spaces collaborates with the six regional bureaus, the Regional Public Engagement Specialists and ECA leaders to evaluate requests.

All American Spaces are eligible to apply for funding to support programming, technology, multimedia equipment and design/furnishing as long as they adhere to the American Spaces standards. In addition, strategically located American Spaces have received additional funding to support building expenses and staff salaries.

American Spaces also receive funding through other State Department sources, third-party donors, direct congressional funding and the in-kind support of partners who host American Spaces.

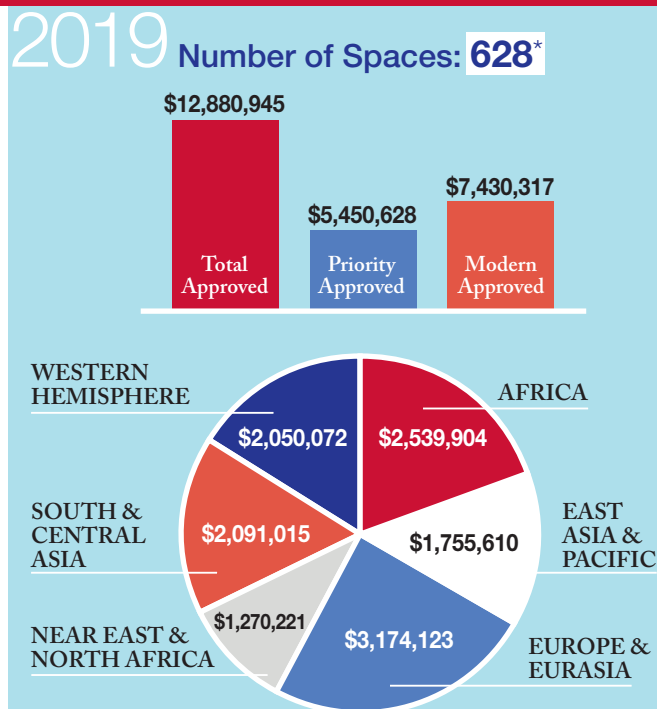
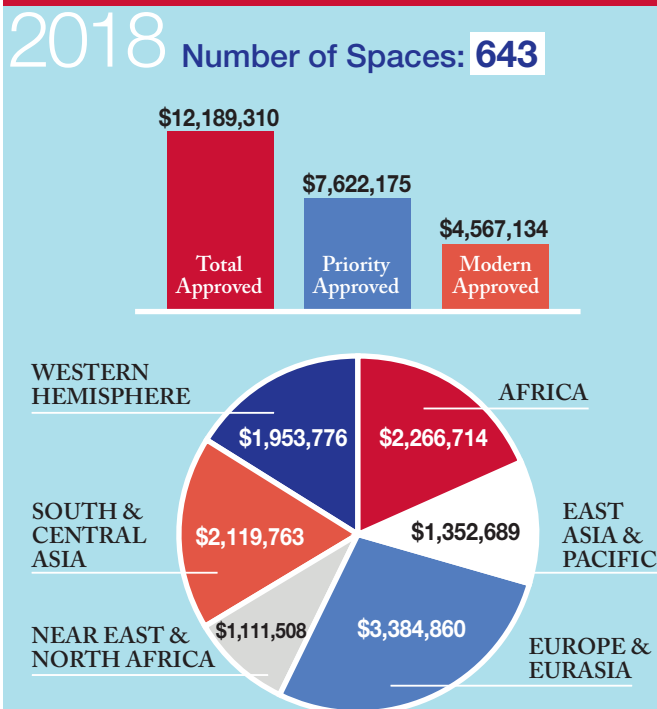
In FY 2018, the call for proposals adopted for the first time a network approach requiring that embassies and consulates submit one unified proposal to cover all of the American Spaces that they manage, to prioritize the resources and programs for their American Spaces and to request funds for items that would maximize the performance of their entire American Spaces networks.

The Office of American Spaces emphasized that it would favorably consider requests that invest in developing shared/coordinated programming and clearly identify the policy outcomes the programming is intended to achieve — integrating public diplomacy goals and working with ECA field representatives including Regional Public Engagement Specialists, regional English language officers, alumni coordinators and local educational advisers.

For FY 2019 funding requests, the Office of American Spaces encouraged embassies and consulates to focus on programming that advances local policy goals, expands the reach of American Spaces via virtual programming, maintains well-coordinated American Spaces networks, identifies a clear justification for high-cost technology and continues prioritizing resources and program needs across their entire networks, while identifying and closing low-performing American Spaces. Other requirements were the submission of complete FY 2018 statistics and having current agreement memoranda with partner-based American Spaces.



AMERICAN SPACES FUNDING

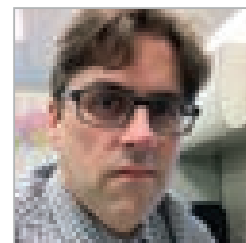


*Reflects a change in counting binational centers that have several branches



NUMBERS TELL MANY IMPORTANT STORIES

By Chris Zammarelli, Data Specialist

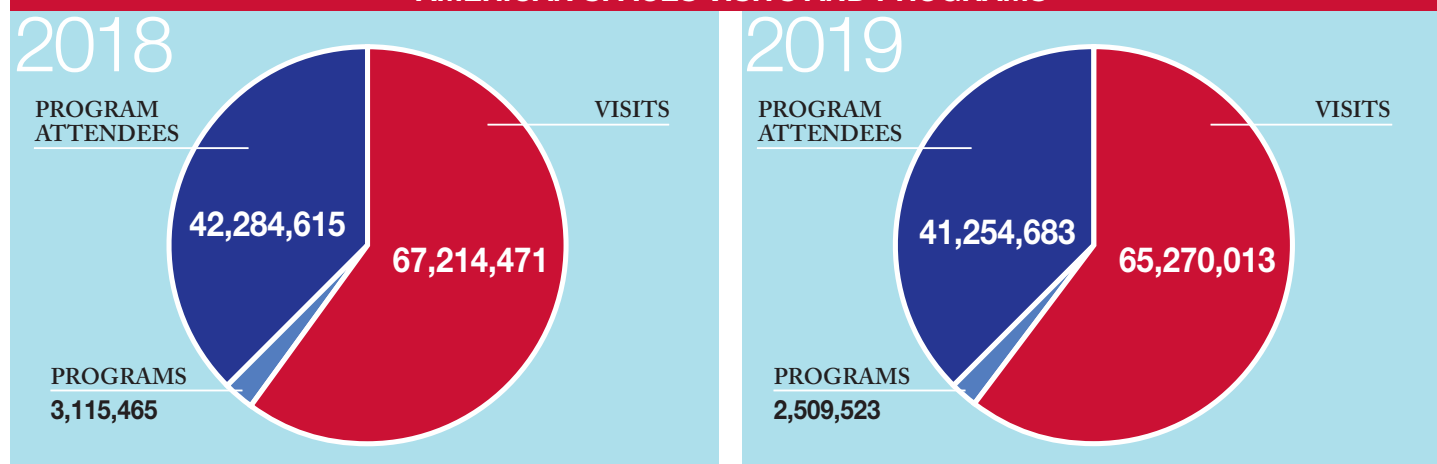


The number of visits to American Spaces fell globally by 1.94 million from FY 2018 to FY 2019. Approximately half this decrease was due to political unrest in Venezuela, where American Spaces reported a drop of over 820,000 visits from FY 2018 to FY 2019.

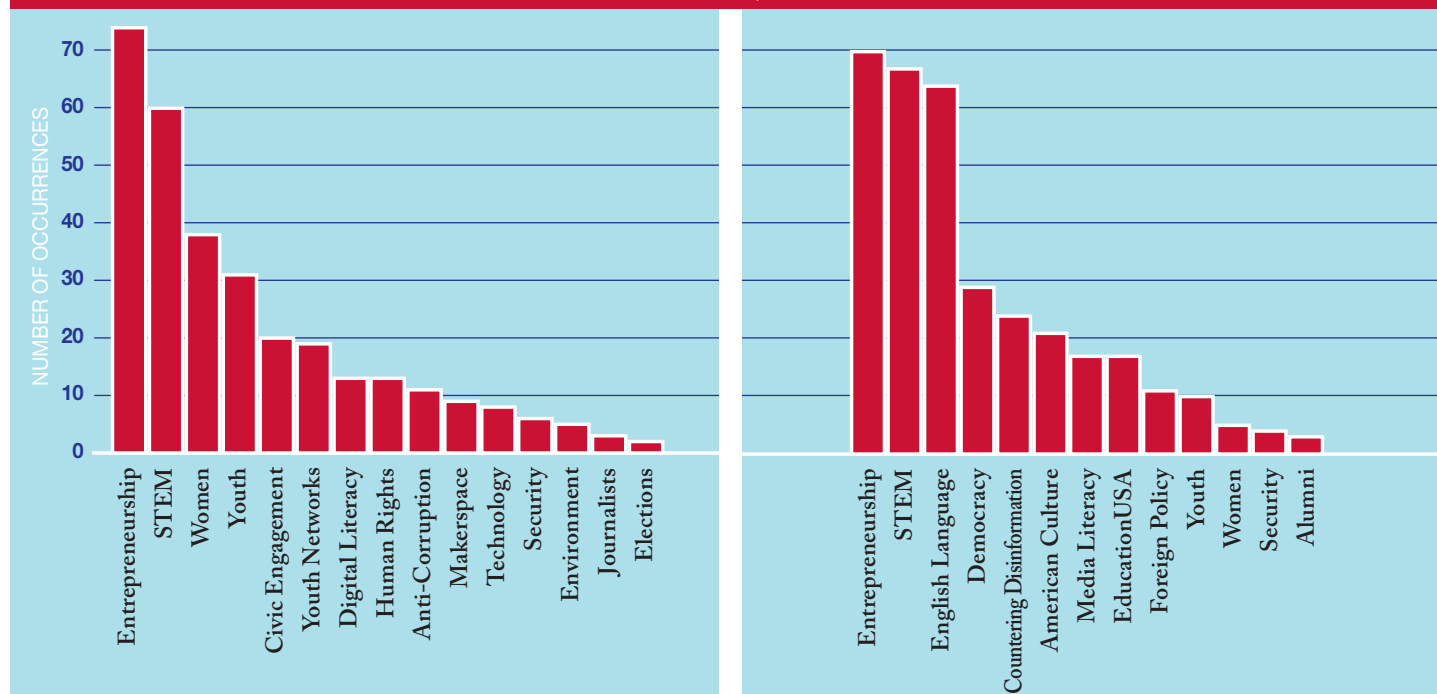
FY 2019 also saw other challenges that reduced the number of visits, such as natural disasters, renovations that suspended programming in some American Spaces, the closing of selected American Spaces, the opening of new American Spaces late in FY 2019 and similar factors.

While the number of programs offered fell by 23 percent from FY 2018 to FY 2019, only a 2 percent decrease occurred in the number of program attendees over the same period, suggesting that American Spaces successfully increased the impact of their programming efforts where they could not increase or maintain the number of programs.

AMERICAN SPACES VISITS AND PROGRAMS



WORLDWIDE TOP PROGRAM REQUESTS AT AMERICAN SPACES



Where We're Going ★

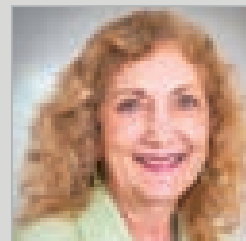
THE AMERICAN SPACES 2019-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN Office of American Spaces Director Carol Brey

In writing our strategic plan for 2019–2021, one of the most important issues that we identified was the need to better evaluate the impact that American Spaces have in the world. Based on the data that American Spaces already submit (number of visits, number of programs held, and number of program attendees), we know that American Spaces are popular places to visit, but we don't really know their impact on visitors.

Do American Spaces change hearts and minds? Connect potential entrepreneurs to the U.S.? Inspire students to study in the U.S.? We think that the answer to all of these questions is a resounding “yes” but we want to be able to base that answer on tangible data.

In my introduction, I said that our values drive our goals and set our direction. Based on the results of our preliminary field survey conducted in 2019 (see article below), we believe even more strongly than ever that the values we outlined — innovation, collaboration, learning, diversity and partnerships — in our FY 2019–2021 strategic plan will reflect the strengths of American Spaces in supporting U.S. and country-based policy goals.

Beginning in FY 2020, the Office of American Spaces will launch the Evaluation Pilot Project, a major research undertaking that will provide a process for measuring the effectiveness of American Spaces in advancing foreign policy goals. Through this project, we will be able to determine best practices, measure the effectiveness of programs and develop a monitoring and evaluation guide that embassies and consulates can use to evaluate their American Spaces. We are excited to see how the findings from this evaluation will help mold the future of American Spaces.



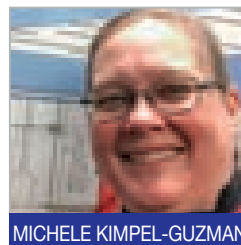
SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE EVALUATION PILOT PROJECT: AMERICAN SPACES WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY ARE DOING By Michele Kimpel-Guzman, Policy Officer, and Cynthia Nichols, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

The Evaluation Pilot Project will provide the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of American Spaces in advancing foreign policy goals. This evaluation will explore, among other things, how American Spaces:

- Contribute to achieving local country and broad U.S. foreign policy goals
- Affect participant and visitor knowledge of, as well as attitudes and practices toward, the United States
- Contribute to core programmatic areas
- Affect the relationship between embassies/consulates and foreign officials

To prepare for this project, in February 2019, the Office of American Spaces

conducted a field survey of 1,000 American Spaces stakeholders that included about 30 questions covering many aspects of the operations and needs of American Spaces. To prioritize the needs of the field to the fullest extent possible, one purpose was to build goodwill by seeking input that would guide aspects of the strategic plan implementation. A secondary purpose was to establish a baseline to guide the upcoming evaluation activities.



MICHELE KIMPEL-GUZMAN



CYNTHIA NICHOLS

American Spaces stakeholders responded enthusiastically; many of them expressed appreciation for seeking their input. Responses represented each stakeholder group well and spanned a variety of experience levels. Responses also reasonably paralleled the number of embassies/consulates and American Spaces in each of the six regions.

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF TOTAL (approx.)*
Regional Public Engagement Specialists	25	100%
Public Affairs Section Officers	74	43%
Public Affairs Section Locally Engaged Staff	116	67%
Binational Center Staff	100	96%
American Corner Staff	353	82%
American Center Staff	98	90%
Total	766	76%

*Note that these percentages are correct if all respondents followed instructions. To provide maximum privacy to survey takers, precise tracking was not possible.



SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE EVALUATION PILOT PROJECT: AMERICAN SPACES WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY ARE DOING (continued)

EVALUATION PROJECT GUIDES:

Feedback indicated that the monitoring and evaluation guide that results from the Evaluation Pilot Project should be as simple as possible to accommodate the small staff sizes of most American Spaces.

TOP FIVE POLICY TOPICS REQUESTED	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS WHO SELECTED EACH TOPIC
Evaluation Toolkit	49%
Public-Private Partnerships	48%
Staffing Issues	47%
Memorandum of Understanding Template for American Corners Partners	40%
Collections Development	36%

TYPE OF SPACE	PERCENT WITH FEWER THAN FIVE STAFF MEMBERS
American Corners	90%
American Centers	79%
Binational Centers	35%

SUPPORT FOR MAKERSPACE PROGRAMMING:

As many as 54 percent of all stakeholders working in American Centers, American Corners and binational centers operate makerspaces. As a result, the Office of American Spaces developed a plan to offer stronger support for using these technologies to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. A series of Facebook Live seminars enable American Spaces staff who are highly experienced with makerspace programming to share best practices with other interested American Spaces stakeholders.

TRAINING ENHANCEMENTS:

In view of small staff sizes, the Vienna Training Office modified core training programs to include a set of case studies that illustrate each training session, simplify the action plan that trainees develop, incorporate a pitching session to help trainees explain their projects and increase emphasis on the top training topics requested.

TOP FOUR TRAINING TOPICS REQUESTED FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF AND AMERICAN SPACES STAFF	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS WHO SELECTED EACH TOPIC	
	FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF	FOR AMERICAN SPACES STAFF
Program Development	64%	78%
Strategic Planning	62%	72%
Audience Engagement	58%	67%
Marketing and Media	43%	64%

**SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE EVALUATION PILOT PROJECT:
AMERICAN SPACES WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY ARE DOING** (continued)
By Michele Kimpel-Guzman, Policy Officer, and Cynthia Nichols, Regional Public Engagement Specialist

TECHNOLOGY IN
AMERICAN CENTERS:

Based on feedback regarding the popularity of makerspaces and the security concerns inherent in U.S. government-operated American Centers, the importance of Wi-Fi service and allowing personal electronic devices, such as cell phones and laptops in American Centers, will be used to inform discussions with Diplomatic Security, the Overseas Buildings Operations office and Information Resources Management.

TYPE OF SPACE	HAVE OPEN ACCESS*	OFFER WI-FI TO VISITORS*	ALLOW PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES*
American Corners	92%	88%	87%
Binational Centers	90%	93%	93%
American Centers	74%	49%	49%

*These percentages represent the number of stakeholders working in each kind of American Space who said their American Spaces adhere to the Open Access Principles.

TYPE OF SPACE	VALUE OF OPEN ACCESS*	VALUE OF WI-FI TO VISITORS*	VALUE OF ALLOWING PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES*
American Corners	87%	79%	85%
Binational Centers	88%	79%	87%
American Centers	78%	73%	79%

*These percentages represent the number of stakeholders working in each kind of American Space who said their American Spaces adhere to the Open Access Principles.

BUILDING DATA DASHBOARDS AND GUIDES:

Due to stakeholder interest in how statistics that respondents provide are used in Washington, D.C., the Office of American Spaces launched an initiative with the State Department's Center for Analytics to build data visualization references. These dashboards will not only improve data management within the Office of American Spaces, but they also will allow stakeholders in the field access to data relevant to their American Spaces and will provide information about efforts of competing countries, based on publicly available data, to influence the same audiences.



FUNDRAISING FOR AMERICAN SPACES:

The survey results showed that American Spaces stakeholders would benefit from more resources. Only 11 percent of American Spaces stakeholders reported any prior fundraising for their American Spaces due to the lack of tools, resources and knowledge. As a result, the Office of American Spaces will develop a fundraising guide to be integrated in training.

TOP FIVE REASONS FOR NOT FUNDRAISING	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS CITING THIS REASON
Unsure of Regulations	49%
Unsure of How to Pursue	38%
Difficulty Identifying Appropriate Mechanisms	35%
Not My Role	30%
Lack of Sufficient Staff Resources	23%

IMPROVED EFFICIENCY IN COMMUNICATION:

Based on survey feedback, the Office of American Spaces revised channels for sending programming packages through enhanced email distribution, Facebook Live seminars and reorganization of program packages on the American Spaces website.

TOP THREE SOURCES OF PROGRAMMING RESOURCES	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS SELECTING SOURCE
Email from Office of American Spaces	92%
American Spaces Website	58%
American Spaces Facebook Group	38%

TOP THREE SOURCES OF OPERATING INFORMATION	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS SELECTING SOURCE
American Spaces Website	39%
Email	34%
American Spaces Facebook Group	22%

TOP THREE FORUMS FOR SHARING BEST PRACTICES	PERCENT OF STAKEHOLDERS SELECTING FORUM*
Email to Post	43%
Email to Regional Public Engagement Specialists	38%
American Spaces Facebook Group	34%

*Not all stakeholders were presented with every option.

REGIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS RETIRING IN FY 2018–2019

- Anne Johnson (to retire March 2020) – Anne joined the REPS corps in 2006 and served in Accra, Pretoria, Washington, D.C., Buenos Aires, Yangon and Rome.
- Bill Middleton (November 2019) – Bill joined the Foreign Service in 1993 and served in Almaty, Lagos, Buenos Aires, Dakar, Vienna, Washington, D.C., New Delhi and Pretoria.
- Holly Murten (December 2018) – Holly served in South Africa, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rome and Islamabad.
- Mary Sommers Pierce (April 2019) – Sommers joined the Foreign Service in 1997 and served in Baghdad, Tokyo, Vienna, Washington, D.C., Berlin and Kabul.
- Myra Michele Brown (November 2019) – Myra Michele joined the REPS corps in 2006 and served in Rome, Accra (two times), Jakarta and Kigali.
- Suzanne Miller (September 2019) – Suzanne joined the REPS corps in 2010 and served in Warsaw, Abuja and Cairo.
- Linda Parker (to retire September 2020)

INCOMING MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS CORPS

(Assignment includes countries listed
after the designated home country)

- Ana Ayala will be assigned to Pretoria: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe
- Alison McKee will be assigned to Accra: Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Togo
- Cynthia Nichols will be in language training and is expected to be assigned to Kyiv: Moldova
- Donna Wiss will be assigned to Nairobi: Comoros, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Republic of Djibouti, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania
- Mark Burrell will be assigned to New Delhi: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka
- Rita Botts will be assigned to Beijing: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan

REMEMBERING OUR DEPARTED COLLEAGUES

- Martin Manning was an author, historian, researcher, librarian and a recognized authority on the history and practice of U.S. public diplomacy. His career spanned nearly 45 years with the U.S. Information Agency and the State Department.
- Sandy Bruckner was a member of the Field Services team whose career included more than 40 years with the State Department.
- Valerie Colby was a Foreign Service Officer who was the first policy officer in the Office of American Spaces.
- Wendy Zaman was a REPS who served from 2003–2017. Her tours included Washington, D.C., India, Bangkok, Brasilia and Kabul.
- Karen Hartman was a REPS and Deputy Director in the Office of American Spaces. She joined the Foreign Service in 2002 and served in Kenya, South Africa and Italy.

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