The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
State Department Office of eDiplomacy

Organization URL:
http://www.state.gov/m/irm/ediplomacy/index.htm

Project Name:
eDiplomacy

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

The Office of eDiplomacy of the Bureau of Information Resource Management (IRM) was established in 2002 to overcome knowledge barriers contributing to 9/11 and improve State's ability to communicate and share knowledge. The office has led a culture change in information management from "need to know" to "need to share." eDiplomacy is a leader in innovating and promoting knowledge management and collaboration technologies to serve national foreign affairs goals as part of what Secretary Clinton has characterized as 21st Century Statecraft. Both internal and external innovations of the office aim at drawing the expertise, experience and knowledge of key constituencies into a new way of connecting and collaborating. The Diplopedia wiki, Communities@State blogs, Corridor networking platform and enterprise Search have created both a strategic framework and a toolkit for a unified and versatile global collaboration environment. People across State and interagency partners share their knowledge across traditional organizational and geographic boundaries every day. Overseas TechCamps, Tech@State conferences, and the Virtual Student Foreign Service represent multiple channels for cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders that otherwise would have little to do with each other -- a vibrant technology community on one hand, and diplomats, policymakers, aid workers and civil society organizations on the other. eDiplomacy envisions these endeavors shaping 21st Century Statecraft as a new force in American diplomacy in the years ahead. In concrete terms, the related IRM 2020 project is focused on creating a next-generation IT organization, with IRM becoming a true collaborator with other offices and agencies to advance diplomacy by providing effective knowledge-sharing initiatives and guidance on the convergence

of technology and diplomacy. eDiplomacy relies on surveys and metrics as varied as the types of activities in the office, ranging from the number of contributions and contributors to the Diplopedia wiki.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

eDiplomacy has developed a suite of low-cost, lightweight collaboration tools built on widely used open source platforms for use behind the firewall, and broke new ground in use of a microtasking platform for collaboration with students. This strategy has provided users with accessible solutions that are familiar and can be used effectively with very little training. The tools include: Diplopedia, an enterprise wiki with 15,000 articles, a collaborative knowledge repository used for wide ranging purposes such as Embassy website and preparing reports to Congress; Communities@State, an internal blogging tool, hosting more than 60 blogs that are used for sharing region or function-specfic news and information; Corridor (Appendix 1), an online platform for internal professional networking built on open source software, deployed to State personnel worldwide in 2011, now with over 8,000 users. Corridor advances knowledge leadership by connecting employee experience and expertise agency-wide, allowing users to form groups and locate subject matter, country and language expertise among State employees. Other technological innovations are incorporated in the Virtual Student Foreign Service (VSFS), which connects embassies abroad with college students in the U.S. to conduct digital diplomacy from their home universities. eDiplomacy faced technical and bureaucratic challenges with new platforms trying to change the "need to know" culture, including concerns about security, privacy, sharing of information, etc. Use of open source software and establishment of horizontal platforms for knowledge-sharing and opinions raised concerns in the enterprise setting. The office persevered to win necessary approvals to deploy these platforms and programs.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

Through new technologies eDiplomacy promotes openness behind the firewall, transferrable to transparency with the public, and in the last two years expanded its initiatives to connect with U.S. and global stakeholders. The office has organized several "Tech@State" conferences with more than 1,400 participants to connect technologists with foreign policymakers on issues such as use of technology for disaster response, open source software, and data visualization. Through TechCamps around the world, the office brought to fruition Secretary Clinton's Civil Society 2.0 initiative to cultivate citizen leaders and NGOs abroad, assisting them to use technology and social media to take ownership of significant world problems such as disaster response, Internet freedom, democracy and more. TechCamps are two-day events through which local and international tech leaders and practitioners pair with civil society organizations to build capacity for participants to harness low-cost, easy-to-implement connection technologies. Six TechCamps have involved more than 500 civil society and tech representatives. A few benefits thus far: custom online maps from an election monitor in Venezuela, who attended a Santiago event; a mobile communications solution for Save the Children from Jakarta; and a people-with-disabilities building-accessibility mapping solution from Vilnius (Appendix 2). Under a 2009 initiative of Secretary Clinton, the Virtual Student Foreign Service (VSFS) allows U.S. university students to work virtually with State offices on foreign policy tasks. From a few students in 2009, 209 students now work globally with 90 State offices and missions. The new microtasking tool in beta already yielded a student-prepared guide for newcomers to Guyana. Finally, eDiplomacy is using its expertise to help organize a conference in February 2012, bringing together global policymakers, technology practitioners, and innovators on use of information and connection technologies (texting, mobile, mapping, etc.) to advance sustainable practices.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

eDiplomacy recently was called a "small, agile innovation incubator" by the State Office of the Inspector General, which noted that the office and its current leadership win praise from many in the Department for creativity, energy, and positive attitude. One IRM executive suggested that an important measure of eDiplomacy's success is the degree to which its services or consultations are sought out. In a story the inspectors encountered several times, eDiplomacy was commended by a senior official at the White House as "the go-to group" for the Open Government initiative and for making the Department "one of the most responsive" of the federal agencies. Other senior Department officials extolled eDiplomacy's leadership for being highly responsive to last-minute, high-level taskings. The Virtual Student Foreign Service is an example of this responsiveness. An example of benefits to an organization is the network effects TechCamp engenders. The World Bank, which has been conducting research on Moldova's Open Government efforts, has pointed to TechCamp Chisinau as the primary driver of new local interest in open data. The World Bank Report, scheduled to come out in December 2011, states that the TechCamp event was the first time that government, technologists and civil society participants collaborated together. This event led to a number of follow-on meetings, with more slated for the near future. The professional networking platform Corridor has shown important benefits, although in operation less than a year. Department employees are using it as an enterprise-wide expertise exchange -- for example, the office that manages the Department's official messaging system now uses a group in Corridor as the principal means to convey updates and field questions from users. Another Corridor group has won accreditation from the Department as an officially recognized affinity group.