



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**LOCATION:**  
*Arlington, VA, US*

**ORGANIZATION:**  
Office of eDiplomacy / Department of State

**YEAR:**  
*2011*

**ORGANIZATION URL:**  
<http://www.state.gov>

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**PROJECT NAME:**  
eDiplomacy

**CATEGORY:**  
*Emerging Technology*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Office of eDiplomacy is a division within the Department of State that hosts a variety of platforms that equip State Department employees with innovative 21st Century web 2.0 tools to advance diplomacy. Formed in response to recommendations from the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel that the State Department improve its ability to communicate and share knowledge, eDiplomacy was set up under the direction of then Secretary Colin Powell to have a unique, interrelated three-part mandate: To promote end user involvement in decision-making on information technology; To improve the way the State Department connects to and works with its USG foreign affairs partner agencies, with other nations' diplomatic institutions, and with other entities involved in international affairs; and to foster knowledge management at State. The State Department presents unique challenges in communication and collaboration which include a geographically dispersed workforce of nearly 60,000 employees serving in more than 250 diplomatic posts around the world, region infrastructure challenges and frequent turnover rate in regard to two or three year assignment cycles. To this end, the Office of eDiplomacy uses innovative new media tools to provide creative, lightweight, user friendly solutions that are easily adaptable to region specific needs and job functions. Products, developed with the technical support of CACI International Inc, include:

- Diplopedia, an enterprise wiki, which is used as a knowledge repository and for collaborative projects like internal Embassy websites and annual reports to Congress.
- Communities@State, an internal blogging tool, hosting nearly 80 blogs that often replace existing internal distribution lists, and serve as collaborative one stop information shops for region specific news and information and shared job function.
- The Sounding Board, an ideation board that is now a way to increase transparency internally, bringing to light ideas for improving the department as a whole.
- The first in its class internship program, the Virtual Student Foreign Service, which connects embassies abroad with college students in the U.S. to conduct digital diplomacy from their home universities.
- Tech@State, a innovation program connecting technology leaders, development innovators, government personnel, and

others to work together on 21st century technology solutions to improve the education, health, and welfare of the world's population. • Corridor, a Professional Networking platform similar to LinkedIn, allowing users to form groups and locate subject matter, country and language expertise among State employees. The Office of eDiplomacy is moving the Department away from a stove piped "need to know" mentality established in the Cold war era, to an environment of innovation that embraces a "need to share" culture shift. By showcasing the innovative ways that offices and individuals within the State Department organically use these mediums, we are finding a greater use for these tools that continues to grow exponentially. While we have a long way to go before these tools are used by every State employee, today's social media environment is making the eventual adaptation of these practices possible and inevitable.

## **SOCIETAL BENEFITS**

Through the support and advocacy of new technology like blogs, wikis, professional networking and virtual student interns, eDiplomacy promotes an organizational culture for innovation that enables State Department Diplomats to effectively conduct diplomatic relations that benefit our national engagement strategy as a whole.

## **PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE**

In examining individual success stories, there are countless specific examples of eDiplomacy's proven ability to increase efficiency and streamline business processes within the organization. Some examples are as follows: • A fundamental new approach for responding to a Presidential directive, the Office of Democracy Human Rights and Labor used Diplopedia as a way to compile religious issue reports for a report to Congress. (Appendix 1) • Addressing a need for cataloguing institutionalized knowledge, State Department Desk Officers used the enterprise wiki platform as a knowledge repository for outgoing desk officers. • Geographically dispersed locally employed embassy staff used the Communities@State blogging platform to connect with other locally employed staff throughout the world and answer questions pertaining to their job function. • Transparent discussions about improving the Department of State brought to fruition plans to make the Department more green including the construction of showers for bikers at main state, greening the department cafeteria with recyclable products, and implementing additional measures for solar panels at our embassies. (Appendix 2) • Seeking a way to coordinate and distribute news and information to the inter-agency community, Embassy Tokyo used an internal state blog to post information concerning Japan economic indicators between Japan and Washington. • From a dorm room half way across the world, a student in the Virtual Student Foreign Service program was able to assist the Embassy of Iraq to build a virtual museum, and another assisted to engage local college students in Beijing concerning perceptions of American culture. (Appendix 3) Overall, the project has surpassed expectations. Over the past three years, the number of Diplopedia editors and articles has both grown by 300% each year, totaling nearly 4,000 registered editors and 13,000 articles. The "Secretary's Sounding Board" has grown in popularity, bringing to light a wide array of discussions, hosting 1600 ideas and 14 thousand comments with 27 thousand page views a month. Community blogs have expanded conversation outside of the constraints of embassies and Washington D.C. offices, creating global conversations that pull on the expertise of individuals throughout the department with shared interests. Embassies have shown great interest in virtual interns with over 107 positions from 79 embassies submitted, and the Tech@State initiative has seen increased visibility with speakers such as Tim O'Reilly, Founder and CEO, O'Reilly Media and Aneesh Chopra, CTO of the United States.



**IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE?** Yes

