FY 2007 Report on the Implementation of Public Law 107-347: The E-Government Act of 2002

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Information Resource Management
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The Department of State is pleased to deliver the FY 2007 report on E-Government initiatives. The report outlines how the Department uses information technologies to improve services to our constituents including U.S. and foreign citizens, businesses, other governments, non-governmental organizations, and their employees more quickly and at a declining cost.

The report has two sections:

Section 1 describes the Department of State's initiative to establish Virtual Presence Posts (VPPs), which extend the reach of the Department's diplomatic and consular services to localities and people overseas that are not served by physical embassies and consulates.

Section 2 provides the links to the Department's public websites where information about our programs and activities is located.

Section 1: *Description of the Department of State's internal agency-specific E-Government initiative.*

A. Describe how the initiative is transforming agency operations;

Virtual Presence Posts (VPPs) are an innovative approach to extend the reach of State Department diplomatic services and consular information to cities and populations not served by physical embassies and consulates. The VPPs use information technology to deliver services cost-effectively, without the risks and challenges of staffing additional overseas posts.

The first VPPs were established in Russia as a demonstration program under the auspices of the Office of eDiplomacy. When they proved successful, embassies around the world picked up on the concept and established additional sites, centrally coordinated by eDiplomacy. The determination of where to establish a VPP is not driven from Washington, but rather is a decision made by an American embassy, and supported by central program elements. Currently, 41 VPPs are in operation in all regions of the world.

VPP web sites are designed to serve both local country residents and U.S. citizens. To accomplish this aim, most sites offer information on the local area in English for U.S. citizens, and serve the local community by delivering relevant content in the local language. VPP sites connect Americans and foreign nationals at the government to government, government to foreign national, and American citizen to foreign national levels. They provide a variety of services tailored to local requirements by the country team. These services usually include consular information, web-based engagement (through web chats and online forums) and other limited services. You can click on the following picture of our informative and friendly web site for South Island, New Zealand for a more detailed tour of a VPP.

VPPs leverage the expertise of our ambassadors, Foreign Service officers and Foreign Service Nationals, enabling them to reach populations in key cities and regions where the Department has no permanent physical presence. This is transforming the operations of State and overseas posts by pushing public diplomacy beyond currently served cities and regions to areas which have had little direct interaction with the USG. The VPP program facilitates this process by, in part, fostering and delivering innovative web-based information products for target audiences.

B. Explain how your agency maintains an ongoing dialogue with interested parties to find innovative ways to use information technology for the initiative;

State works with agencies and organizations in host countries to create and disseminate information, sponsor events and provide useful services to constituent individuals and communities. For example, in the Philippines shortly after the release of the annual Human Rights Report, the mission worked with NGOs, local government officials, journalists and students from local universities on a web-based discussion to

answer questions about the report and to underscore USG support for human rights in the country. Since many of the reported abuses occurred in Mindanao, where the mission's Davao VPP is located, post chose to hold the online discussion on the Davao VPP site. Several local newspapers ran articles on the chat, further increasing the event's reach. In another example, the U.S. VPP mission to the Seychelles worked with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth, Sports and Culture to sponsor cultural events which were publicized on the VPP web site. The mission provided follow-up stories and photographs on their web site after the events - thus reaching populations unable to participate in person.

Snapshop of South Island Virtual Presence Post website.

The U.S. Embassy in collaboration with the Seychelles Ministry of Community Development, Youth, Sports and Culture organized an educational workshop and public concerts with Terrance Simien & the Zydeco Experience. This international group from Lafayette, Louisiana held an educational workshop for Seychellois students and public concerts from August 10 through August 12, 2007. Prior to their tour in Seychelles, the group has conducted programs in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The Zydeco Experience during a jamming session with young students at a workshop held in Mauritius.

C. Identify external partners (e.g., Federal, State or local agencies, industry) who collaborate with your agency on the initiative;

In addition to host country institutions as discussed above, embassies enlist the participation of other U.S. government agencies operating at American embassies and consulates in VPP efforts. The Somalia VPP features a USAID initiative that brings school lessons to children in Mogadishu via radio broadcasts. This effort raises awareness of the USAID program across a broad segment of the community and also illustrates an innovative use of radio technology to increase educational opportunities for Somali children. Because only 20% of Somali children are enrolled in school and funding for public education is extremely limited. The efforts of the U.S. embassy and USAID to provide access to school lessons via radio are dramatically improving peoples' lives. Eight-year-old Najmo (pictured here) lives with her parents in the Hodan District in Mogadishu, Somalia. Najmo is among the fortunate few Somali students who have access to school, attending first grade at Al Imra School.

Radio programming is bringing school lessons to children in Somalia. (USAID)

D. Identify improved performance (e.g., outcome measures) by tracking performance measures supporting agency objectives and strategic goals;

State regularly tracks the activities of VPPs. The following table is typical of the program metrics captured and reported for many VPPs. This table shows the website usage statistics from the two VPPs under the supervision of Embassy Port Moresby for 2006:

VPP Solomon Islands and Vanuatu Website Statistics : 2006

Solomon Islands	Visits
January	2,459
February	1,516
March	2,937
April	2,652
May	2,802
June	2,554
July	2,776
August	2,683
September	2,553
October	2,927

November	2,747
December	849
Total	**29,455**
Vanuatu	**Visits**
January	2,070
February	2,116
March	2,524
April	2,204
May	2,673
June	2,377
July	3,857
August	2,702
September	2,552
October	2,648
November	2,212
December	638
Total	**28,573**

These statistics clearly suggest that the VPP websites have become an additional important resource for citizens in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and for external audiences interested in these two small island nations. The VPP is a significant supplementary resource which helps to reinforce America's interest in stronger relations with targeted communities.

The Department's Office of e-Diplomacy has recommended criteria for assessing the success of individual VPPs. The primary goal of a VPP is to increase the perception of a U.S. presence in the target community while also improving bi-lateral relations. Specific evaluation criteria used include:

- Improved media access and media coverage of U.S. in local press (as indicated by interviews, positive/negative coverage of U.S. policies and U.S. events in VPP regional media);
- Increased cultural exchange (as indicated by PAO/Embassy events sponsored in the target region as well as cultural delegations from the target region to the U.S.);
- Increased commercial activity between the United States and the target region (as indicated by FCS / FAS and Chamber of Commerce feedback);
- Increased tourism activity (as indicated by Visa applications from the target area and number of U.S. citizens visiting the target region);
- Support of U.S. positions on specific issues

E. Quantify the cost savings and cost avoidance achieved through implementing the initiative (e.g., by reducing or eliminating other investments in information technology);

The VPPs are a highly leveraged and cost-effective mechanism for promoting U.S. interests and engaging local populations around the world. The first five VPPs established in Russia, for example, cost a total of $10,000 to establish. The Department's Human Resources Bureau estimates that the costs to maintain a single U.S. Foreign Service Officer overseas can average $400,000 per year. Instead, for a modest cost technology cost, State can leverage existing human capital at the Embassy or Consulates to deliver current information and create a presence important cities and geographically dispersed areas. Additionally VPPs remain available in times of unrest or when security concerns prevent Officers from freely traveling, thereby offering opportunities to continue diplomatic contacts when the traditional tools of diplomacy are less available. While financial costs are minimal, a successful VPP requires mission management time and attention and effort to orchestrate. Nonetheless, the costs remain miniscule compared to operating even the smallest physical embassy or consulate.

Secretary of State Rice speaks often of transformational diplomacy in two ways: (1) working with local people governments, organizations, and citizens to transform people's lives for the better; and (2) dramatically increasing efficiency so the skills of our personnel are leveraged more broadly. The VPP program clearly enhances both of these elements of transformational diplomacy.

F. Explain how this initiative ensures the availability of Government information and services for those without access to the Internet and for those with disabilities;

A key element of the VPP concept is a customized web site, geared to the interests of local populations in important cities and regions around the world. However, better interagency collaboration and more strategic application of travel, program and media outreach resources are also dividends of established VPPs. Furthermore, Web technologies assist those with visual or mobility disabilities to access USG information. VPP websites are section 508 compliant and are easily accessible from anywhere internet access is available; homes, public locations such as American Corners, Binational Centers and internet cafes. This wide availability can be especially helpful to those who face difficulties in traveling to the nearest embassy or consulate. Where internet access is more limited, kiosks in libraries in VPP cities are also being established to broaden access to USG online resources. No sensitive information is included, so there are no security obstacles.

G. Explain how the project applies effective capital planning and investment control procedures;

The VPP program has been managed through State's capital planning as a minor investment. The central program is reviewed each year for the validity of its business case and resource needs in comparison with other requests for funding. As noted above, the decision to create a specific VPP is decentralized, and most funding is from mission resources within existing allotments. The framework and success criteria for the program are managed centrally.

Section 2: *Links to the Department's public website where the following information is located:*

A. Your agency's Information Resources Management (IRM) Strategic Plan;

The link to the Department's IT Strategic Plan, 2006-2010 is: http://www.state.gov/m/irm/rls/c13461.htm.

B. Final determinations, priorities, and schedules. Also include your agency's information dissemination product catalogs, directories, inventories, and any other management tools used to improve the dissemination of and access to your agency's information by the public;

The Department of State's FOIA web site provides a number of public information access services at the following links:

   a. A list of the Department of State's major information systems at http://www.state.gov/m/irm/exhibit300s/
   b. A list of Department of State collections that contain Privacy Impact Assessments at http://foia.state.gov/piaOnline.asp
   c. A list of information products with Privacy Act Issuances at http://foia.state.gov/issuances/priviss.asp
   d. The GPO Access / Government Information Locator Service Records (GILS) at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/databases.html
   e. The Department's records disposition schedules at http://foia.state.gov/RecordsMgt/recdispsched.asp

The Department of State maintains an internal records management website that employees can use to answer records management questions. An informed staff improves our ability to disseminate information to the public.

C. Your agency's FOIA handbook, the link of your agency's primary FOIA website, and the website link where frequent requests for records are made available to the public;

The link to the Department's FOIA Reference Guide and Handbook is: http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/c22737.htm

The link to the Department's primary FOIA website is: http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/

The link to the Department's Electronic Reading Room where frequent requests for records are made available to the public is: http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/c22790.htm

D. A list of your agency's public websites disseminating research and development (R&D) information to the public, describing for each whether the website provides the public information about federally funded R&D activities and/or provides the results of Federal research;

The Department of State does not perform research and development (R&D) activities.

E. An inventory describing formal agency agreements (e.g., contracts, memorandum of understanding) with external entities (e.g., partnerships with State and local governments, public libraries, industry and commercial search engines) complementing your agency's information dissemination program, briefly explaining how each agreement improves the access to and dissemination of government information to the public;

The Department of State has entered into the following formal interagency agreements that complement the Department's information dissemination program. There is no link to these agreements because they are not posted on the Department's public website.

- Federal Consulting Group, Department of Treasury, interagency agreement to provide American Customer Satisfaction Survey by the ForeSee Results web survey. This interagency agreement provides customer feedback on defined website components, such as content and site performance.
- Federal Consulting Group, Department of Treasury, interagency agreement to provide subscriptions to agencies to maximize Knowledge Platform software. This interagency agreement provides for website assessments of broken links, external links to inappropriate content, etc., to improve user experience.

F. An inventory that describes your agency's NARA-approved records schedules(s) or the link to the publicly-posted records schedules(s), and a brief explanation of your agency's progress to implement NARA Bulletin 2006-02. For the brief explanation please report the number of systems for which a record schedule was submitted to NARA in FY 2007 and the number of systems still requiring records schedules.

The following link provides publicly-posted Department of State records disposition schedules: http://foia.state.gov/RecordsMgt/recdispsched.asp

The Department of State is making progress in implementing NARA bulletin 2006-02. New questions were added to the eCPIC questionnaire for the FY 2009 budget process for major and non-major IT systems to elicit whether or not existing electronic information systems were covered by records disposition schedules and whether or not the system owners had completed an information system inventory form for the Department's records management staff to use in initiating the scheduling process. As a result of the eCPIC process, the Department's records management staff received over 70 completed forms and will be initiating the scheduling process for these IT systems. In addition, the Department's records management staff is beginning an electronic records management scheduling project to determine how many of the Department's IT systems have been scheduled, are in the scheduling process, and still need to be scheduled. The number of IT systems for which records schedules were submitted to NARA in FY 2007 was five.