

Public Diplomacy Council of America – The First Thirty Years
Present at the Creation

The founders – accomplished USIA Foreign Service officers, two USIA directors, a deputy director, and a scholar – had a compelling vision. They banded together in the 1980s to create a Public Diplomacy Foundation (PDF) to support the academic study, professional practice, and citizen awareness of public diplomacy. Articles of Incorporation were signed in April 1988. On the first board of directors were [Robert A. Lincoln](#), President, [G. Lewis Schmidt](#), Secretary, Fred D. Hawkins, Treasurer, [Lawrence J. Hall](#), [Arthur Hummel, Jr.](#), [Leonard Marks](#), [John Reinhardt](#), [Dorothy Robins-Mowry](#), [Hans N. “Tom” Tuch](#), [Abbott Washburn](#), [William H. Weathersby](#), Earl J. Wilson, and Yale historian [Robin Winks](#). Their goals were to create an endowed public diplomacy center and develop a public diplomacy course at the Foreign Service Institute.

In 1996, [Barry Zorthian](#), [Walter Roberts](#), [Leonard Baldyga](#), and [Charles Ablard](#) joined the Foundation’s board. The energetic Zorthian was elected president, and a year later [Jack Harrod](#) became the PDF’s first executive director (1997-1999), followed by [Dell Pendergrast](#) (1999-2001). Under Zorthian’s leadership, the PDF held monthly meetings, issued advocacy statements, and met with USIA and State Department officials to express concerns about USIA’s merger into State. PDF members pressed for more public diplomacy training, tried to find a university home for papers of USIA’s Historian, and looked for donors to fund a PD Center. Two were interested in the academic study of public diplomacy. Walter Roberts had taught public diplomacy courses for a decade at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs (ESIA). Tom Tuch taught classes and wrote his classic book, [Communicating with the World](#) (1990), at Georgetown University. Like later PD practitioners in retirement, these deeply committed public diplomacy professionals knew what they were talking

about and wanted to stay in the game. Most were members of the USIA Alumni Association, founded in 1982, and valued their association with both organizations.

In the late 1990s, the PDF recruited new members. Many were recent USIA retirees. A number were interested in teaching as well as strengthening professional practice and Americans' understanding of public diplomacy. Enthusiasm for advocacy and practice comes naturally to most former practitioners. Interest in academic study is more a reflection of personal experiences. This in no small measure was a driving force in the PDF's origins and journey.

Unable to fund an endowment, the Foundation embraced the idea of a PD Center at a Washington area university comparable to the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy. Len Baldyga, [McKinney Russell](#), and [Donna Oglesby](#) had recently taught courses at the Murrow Center on USIA-sponsored university year assignments. [Barry Fulton](#) became a PDF activist and research professor at GW's School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA). [Anthony C. E. "Tony" Quainton](#), elected PDF vice president, became a Distinguished Diplomat in Residence at American University. Donna Oglesby joined the faculty at Eckard College. [Juliet Antunes Sablosky](#) taught cultural diplomacy and other courses at Georgetown. [Pamela Smith](#) taught public diplomacy courses at Georgetown. [Mike Schneider](#) became the director of Syracuse University's Maxwell-Syracuse Program in Washington. After my USIA career and three years on the National War College faculty, I became the PDF's third executive director (2001-2004) and taught courses at GW and Georgetown.

On April 2, 2000, following months of discussion, Barry Zorthian hosted a meeting at Washington's Metropolitan Club with Roberts, Fulton, Gregory, and GW Professor of Media and Public Affairs [Steve Livingston](#) who, with strong support from SMPA director Jean Folkerts,

became the driving force in the PDF's affiliation with GW and in cracking the University's formidable bureaucratic code. After several hours of conversation, we had finalized plans for a Public Diplomacy Center. On July 17, 2000, Zorthian, Quainton, Folkerts, and Livingston signed a Memorandum of Understanding. SMPA agreed to establish the Center and support joint fund-raising activities with the PDF. The PDF committed to seek funding for "at least one SMPA graduate student" interested in pursuing a career in public diplomacy and support for a variety of academic and professional services. Arrangements for the merger were completed early in 2001. On Saturday morning, February 10, Dell Pendergrast and I moved several boxes of PDF materials from temporary space at the Atlantic Council to an office with a phone, computers, file cabinets, front office support, and auditorium access in SMPA's new high-tech building in Foggy Bottom conveniently located a few blocks from the State Department.

Public Diplomacy Institute / Public Diplomacy Council Merger

At a PDF meeting in April 2001, Livingston explained GW's rules on centers and institutes. One academic department could create a center. Two were required to create an institute. He reported that GW's Elliott School Dean Harry Harding had agreed ESIA would join with SMPA and the PDF in co-sponsoring a Public Diplomacy Institute (PDI). Organizers developed five core objectives: (1) Increase understanding of PD among the American people, Congress, and the executive branch; (2) Encourage teaching, research, and writing in the academic study of PD and foster high standards of professional practice; (3) Maintain cooperative relations with the State Department, other USG agencies, and NGOs with similar goals; (4) Issue studies and statements on the public dimension of diplomacy and its value to American foreign policy; and (5) Further understanding of PD through research, scholarship, and preservation of archival materials.

The inaugural meeting of the PDI's 12-member board of directors was held on May 8, 2001. Pursuant to a motion by Walter Roberts, seconded by Tom Tuch, Steve Livingston was unanimously elected board chair. On taking the gavel, he spoke about GW's vision for the PDI and announced that Barry Fulton would be the Institute's director. He also cautioned that its continued viability would depend on finding sources of funding. Board members representing SMPA were Livingston, Fulton, Jean Folkerts, and communications professor [Jerry Manheim](#). Representing the Elliott School were its former dean [Mickey East](#) and international relations professor [James Goldgeier](#). Board members for the PDF were [Wilson Dizard](#), Bruce Gregory, Tony Quainton, Walter Roberts, Tom Tuch, and Barry Zorthian. Present also was former USIA director [Henry Catto](#) who had agreed to chair a PDI Advisory Council. Convivial discussion occurred with members speaking about the synergy the PDI would provide between SMPA and ESIA and their vision for encouraging students and faculty in both schools to pursue public diplomacy studies and research.

In 2002, the PDF changed its bylaws and became the Public Diplomacy Council (PDC), an organization with a board, logo, brochure, and now 40 members. McKinney Russell succeeded Barry Zorthian as president. With excellent legal advice from Charles Ablard, the Council obtained tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3) organization from the IRS. It met regularly and collaborated closely with the PDI in the activities of this first multi-disciplinary academic institute in the United States devoted to the study and practice of public diplomacy. The Institute's board met thereafter at the call of Livingston as chair with a changing rotation of board members from GW and the PDC. Walter Roberts and Barry Zorthian joined the PDI's Advisory Council, which also included journalist and Democratic activist [Hodding Carter](#), former USIA deputy director [Eugene Kopp](#), career diplomat [David Newsom](#), former Heritage

Foundation President and US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy Chair, [Edwin J. Feulner](#), career diplomat [Brandon Grove](#), and former ambassador to China and CIA operative [James Lilley](#). Materials documenting the decisions and activities of the Public Diplomacy Foundation and the Public Diplomacy Institute are located in the [Walter R. Roberts Papers](#) at George Washington University's Gelman Library.

Academic Study, Professional Practice, Responsible Advocacy

For the next eight years, the PDI/PDC engaged in a robust array of activities, most of which continue today. Livingston remained the board chair. Barry Fulton served as Institute director until 2004. I succeeded him as Institute director (2004-2008). McKinney Russell continued as PDC president until 2006, followed by [Bob Coonrod](#). [William P. Kiehl](#) became the PDC's executive director in 2004, followed by [Bob Heath](#) in 2008. The Institute's board changed over time. GW's members included [Sean Aday](#), Mickey East, [Kristin Lord](#), [Steve Roberts](#), [Robert Entman](#), and [Janet Steele](#). The PDC's members included [Ellen Frost](#), Barry Fulton, [Adam Clayton Powell III](#), McKinney Russell, and Mike Schneider. The PDI/PDC's agenda divided into the following categories: academic study, professional services and consultations, fundraising, forums and publications.

Academic Study. Beginning in fall 2001, several full-time GW professors and PDC members began teaching graduate and under-graduate level courses on public diplomacy, strategic communication, media and national security, and related topics. Numbers grew, and over the years more than two dozen PDC members have taught courses at GW and other universities. In November 2004, Barry Fulton met with Foreign Service Director General Robert Pearson and Foreign Service Institute Deputy Director Ruth Whiteside to initiate discussions leading to year-long assignments of senior State Department PD officers to GW's Public Diplomacy Institute. At first hesitant, State soon agreed "that it is in the best interests of the

Department to place a senior PD officer on assignment to PDI.” In May 2005, State announced academic year opportunities and selection criteria. The assignment of PD Fellows to teach courses, mentor students, engage with faculty, and benefit from professional education is among the most enduring and productive consequences of the PDI/PDC merger. Beginning with [Bob Callahan](#) in 2005, there has been a steady stream of talented PD Fellows at GW: [Mark Taplin](#), [Mark Asquino](#), [Mary Jeffers](#), [Jonathan Henick](#), [Patricia Kabra](#), [Tom Miller](#), [Robert Ogburn](#), [Karl Stoltz](#), and [Emelia A. Puma](#).

Other initiatives included a series of academic seminars with resident and visiting scholars. In February 2002, the PDI/PDC hosted a roundtable with [Mark Leonard](#), now the director of the European Council on Foreign Relations and author of *Public Diplomacy* (2002). Later that year the distinguished UK diplomacy scholar [Brian Hocking](#) engaged in a roundtable with GW faculty and PDC members. In 2005, the PDI/PDC hosted a faculty development roundtable for former public diplomacy practitioners teaching at GW, Georgetown, the National Defense University, Syracuse University, and the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute. That same year the PDI/PDC organized a panel at an American Political Science Association conference on “Mapping 21st Century Public Diplomacy.” Panelists included Donna Oglesby, Kristin Lord, Bruce Gregory, and Josh Fouts. In 2009, the PDI/PDC sponsored a presentation by Leiden University scholar and founding editor of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* [Jan Melissen](#) for faculty and students at GW and Washington area universities.

Professional services and consultations. PDC members and GW faculty engaged in a variety of practitioner-oriented professional activities. These included project proposals and meetings with members and staffs of Congressional committees, diplomats at foreign embassies in Washington, non-profit organizations, and officials in the State and Defense Departments,

Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and Foreign Service Institute. In May 2002, the PDI/PDC developed seven proposals for strengthening the conduct of public diplomacy in response to a request from the staffs of the House International Relations Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A number were incorporated into a bill introduced by Representatives Henry Hyde (R-IL), Tom Lantos (D-CA), and Howard Berman (D-CA). In response to a follow-up request from the Senate Committee's staff, the PDI/PDC submitted a statement in July 2002 explaining its reasons for supporting repeal of Smith-Mundt legislation restrictions on dissemination of information within the United States using public diplomacy funds appropriated to the State Department. That same year, the PDI/PDC submitted a detailed proposal to develop under contract a database for a Public Diplomacy Reserve Corps to State's Senior Coordinator for Public Diplomacy Christopher Ross – an idea that did not prosper then but was advanced in diplomacy reform agendas two decades later. The PDI/PDC wrote frequently to lawmakers in support of increased funding for public diplomacy, broadcasting, and educational exchanges.

In May 2004, the PDI/PDC conducted a four-week professional post-graduate course on “Fundamentals of International Communication” pursuant to a contract with the Embassy of Kuwait's Information Service. Led by course coordinator Barry Fulton, a mix of scholars and practitioners prepared course materials on a broad range of topics and gave presentations: Jeff Biggs, Mike Canning, Chuck Dolan, Ellen Frost, Bruce Gregory, Kenton Keith, Steve Keller, William Kiehl, Steve Livingston, Tony Quainton, Steve Roberts, Bill Rugh, McKinney Russell, Mike Schneider, and Janet Steele. The course was offered again the following year. Discussions with diplomats at the Embassy of Mexico to offer a similar course were inconclusive.

Other initiatives included an agreement to assist the BBG's prime contractor InterMedia on projects for which PCI/PDC members had relevant expertise. The Institute engaged in consultations with Sweden's Ambassador Gunnar Lund, the Embassy's Political Counselor, and the Director -General of the Swedish Institute. Consultations with Ambassador James Lambert, Director-General of Canada's Public Diplomacy Bureau led to a meeting with Canada's PD diplomats in Ottawa. PDI/PDC members consulted with FSI's directors of PD training (Janet Miller in 2005 and Matt Lussenhop in 2007) to discuss the PD curriculum and possible areas of collaboration. In 2006, Steve Livingston developed a training program on media relations, press freedom, and public diplomacy attended by Chinese diplomats in Washington. The course was offered annually and became a revenue source for the PDI. In 2007, PDI/PDC hosted a screening of Layalina Production's documentary "On the Road in America," a reality travelogue series featuring the experiences of Arab university students on a ten-week journey across the United States.

PDI/PDC members were major contributors to the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force Report, ["Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating U.S. Public Diplomacy"](#) in 2003. Members also were leading participants in three year-long studies by the Defense Science Board (DSB): ["Managed Information Dissemination"](#) (2001), ["Report of the Defense Science Board on Strategic Communication,"](#) (2004), and ["Report of the Defense Science Board on Strategic Communication"](#) (2008). The DSB's finding that flawed policies were more significant contributors to America's negative image and diminished ability to persuade than problems in public diplomacy and strategic communication drew national news coverage. Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) introduced bills to enact DSB recommendations calling for reforms in the "interagency process

for communication and engagement planning” and creation of a non-profit global engagement center comparable in structure and funding to the National Endowment for Democracy and the military’s federally funded research organizations. The PDI/PDC organized meetings with Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes and at GW with diplomats, think tank representatives, and university faculty to discuss the DSB’s recommendations.

Funding raising. Attracting sources of sustainable funding had been a challenge for the Public Diplomacy Foundation and remained so for the PDI/PDC. Members worked closely with the chair of GW’s board of trustees and GW’s vice president for advancement to create a fundraising plan and support initiatives leading to an endowment. Presentations to corporations with ties to the University and potential major donors in the public diplomacy community proved unsuccessful.

In 2004, the PDI/PDC tried a different approach. It developed a business plan for a Congressionally mandated non-profit center, as recommended by the DSB, that would leverage knowledge and skills in America’s academic, business, media, and NGO communities in support of public diplomacy. A PD center had also been recommended by the Council on Foreign Relations and an advisory panel chaired by Ambassador Edward Djerejian on public diplomacy in Arab and Muslim countries. The business plan identified the center’s goals, functions, and an initial \$1.2 million budget. Its deliverables included a planning workshop, strategy papers, needs assessments, websites, and a national conference. The plan made clear that the PDI/PDC did not aspire to be the center or duplicate effective government public diplomacy activities.

With strong support from GW’s Vice President for Government Relations Richard Sawaya, the plan was refined and presented to Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), then chair of the State

Department's appropriations subcommittee. In a meeting with Wolf, Sawaya and PDI/PDC members requested an earmark for a nonprofit center in State's forthcoming appropriations bill. Wolf was receptive to the idea and at the invitation of GW president Stephen Joel Trachtenberg appeared as the keynote speaker at a PDI/PDC forum in SMPA's Jack Morton auditorium. Conversations with Sawaya and Wolf's staff continued for two years. Council on Foreign Relations chair Pete Peterson and Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-TX) wrote to Wolf in support of the initiative. In the end, Sawaya and the PDI/PDC concluded that funding for a center was not forthcoming due to lack of support in the State Department.

A third fundraising initiative was more successful. In 2005, Walter Roberts made a generous lead gift to GW to create the "Dr. Walter R. Roberts Endowment for the Public Diplomacy Institute" an endowed fund to advance excellence in the study of public diplomacy. A Memorandum of Understanding signed by Roberts, Livingston, and GW President Trachtenberg stated the Endowment "will provide income to award an annual Roberts Award, as established by the Roberts Endowment Board . . . [and] also be used to support research, organize lectures, sponsor public forums and for other purposes." Trachtenberg hosted a signing ceremony attended by Gisela Roberts, William Roberts, Elliott School Dean Michael Brown, Steve Livingston, Barry Fulton, Bruce Gregory, Barry Zorthian, Kristin Lord, and McKinney Russell. Since 2005 the Roberts Endowment has grown with gifts from the Roberts family and other contributors. It funds an annual student award, an annual Roberts lecture, and an annual micro-grant to an organization in the district or state of a member of Congress who has shown outstanding support for public diplomacy among other activities.

Forums and publications. The PDI/PDC co-hosted public forums, often with interested non-profit organizations. Panelists at a forum on the future of international exchanges in

November 2001 included Hungary's Ambassador to the US Geza Jeszensky, GW President Trachtenberg, and Harriet Fulbright. In 2003, a program in collaboration with the US embassy in Jakarta, the US-Indonesia Society, and Weber Shandwick, conducted via satellite link, focused on *Common Values and Common Challenges*. Later that year the PDI/PDC and the Alliance for International and Educational Exchange co-sponsored a forum on *Sustaining Exchanges While Securing Borders*. Panelists included Maura Harty, David Ward, Miller Crouch, Peggy Blumenthal, Marlene Johnson, Jean Pritchard, Sherry Mueller, and William Rugh. A day-long forum in 2004 focused on *Engaging the Arab/Islamic World*. Speakers included Harry Harding, Shibley Telhami, James Larocco, Donald Camp, Congressman Frank Wolf, Nathan Brown, Tamara Wittes, William Rugh, Steve Roberts, Judith Milestone, Marc Lynch, Norman Pattiz, and Tony Quainton. The forum led to publication of the PDC's first book, [*Engaging the Arab & Muslim Worlds Through Public Diplomacy: A Report and Action Recommendations*](#), (2004) edited by William Rugh.

In 2005, the PDI/PDC and the American Academy of Diplomacy co-sponsored a forum on *America's Dialogue with the World*. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes gave the keynote address. It was covered live by CNN and Al Hurra TV with follow-up coverage in national and global media. Panelists were a cross-section of scholars, journalists, and practitioners: Steve Livingston, McKinney Russell, Bruce Laingen, Ralph Begleiter, Michael Mandelbaum, John Hughes, Tony Quainton, Marvin Kalb, Alice Ilchman, Joe Johnson, and Dan Sreebny. It led to the PDC's second publication, [*America's Dialogue with the World*](#) (2006), edited by William P. Kiehl.

A second panel in 2005, *Telling It Like It Might Be: Can the Media Report on the Reality in Iraq?* featured panelists Robert J. Callahan, Khaled Dawoud, John Diamond, Alberto

Fernandez, and David Kerley. In 2006, the PDI/PDC sponsored a forum on *International Broadcasting: The Public Diplomacy Challenge* with an array of experts: McKinney Russell, Karl Inderfurth, Ken Tomlinson, Jeff Trimble, Sandy Ungar, Salemeah Nematt, Paul Blackburn, Bob Coonrod, Adam Clayton Powell III, Graham Mytton, Myrna Whitworth, Mark Helmke, and Bob Callahan. A third PDC publication followed, [Local Voices / Global Perspectives: Challenges Ahead for U.S. International Media](#) (2008), edited by Alan L. Heil, Jr. In 2012, the PDC published [The Last Three Feet: Case Studies in Public Diplomacy](#), edited by William P. Kiehl. Funding for the PDC's books was provided by the Stuart Family Foundation and former USIA director Bruce Gelb.

In 2008, the PDI/PDC and the Alliance for Educational and Cultural Exchange co-sponsored a forum on *Rebuilding America's Public Diplomacy: Proposals for a New Administration*. Panelists included Steve Livingston, Bob Coonrod, Bob Callahan, Peter DeShazo, Stuart Holliday, Kenton Keith, Pamela Smith, Thomas Miller, Mark Maybury, and Mike Canning. The PDI/PDC's forums benefited from access to SMPA's Jack Morton Auditorium, with seating for about 200 and high-quality facilities for television coverage, the volunteer efforts of PDC members serving as coordinators, and a continuing supply of paid student interns.

New Beginnings

Key decisions in 2008 brought changes for the PDI and PDC. After eight years as chair, Steve Livingston turned the gavel over to Institute co-chairs, SMPA professor Sean Aday and ESIA professor Marc Lynch. They appointed PD Fellow Mark Taplin to serve as the PDI director for a year. In 2009, GW replaced the PDI with the Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication (IPDGC) and gave it a new charter. In lieu of a board of directors, a GW faculty member would direct both the IPDGC and a new MA degree program in Global

Communication for SMPA and ESIA students. The university established an operating budget of \$20,000 per year to be shared by the two departments and authorized a part time assistant. Sean Aday served as IPDGC director until 2016 when he was succeeded by SMPA professor Janet Steel. Six years later SMPA professor Will Youmans became IPDGC director in January 2022. The IPDGC continued to host forums on public diplomacy topics and work closely with the Roberts Endowment on its awards, micro-grants, and annual lecture. The Institute also benefited from a steady stream of State Department PD fellows and retired public diplomacy practitioners serving as adjunct professors.

The Public Diplomacy Council maintained informal ties with GW, but broadened its relations with other universities and public diplomacy-oriented NGOs. The Council vacated its office in SMPA and moved to an office at the Alliance for International Exchange. PDC members continued to serve on the Walter Roberts Endowment Board, and IPDGC directors were ex officio members of the PDC's board. Led by talented scholars and practitioners – [Morris E. “Bud” Jacobs](#), [Donald M. Bishop](#), [Adam Clayton Powell III](#), and [Sherry Mueller](#) – the Council expanded its membership, kept its core vision, and pursued new initiatives. Associate memberships for currently employed practitioners. “Rising Professional” memberships for graduate students, interns, and research fellows. A robust website. Thoughtful blogs. The [Hans N. Tom” Tuch PDC Fellowship](#). And highly successful [First Monday Forums](#) co-sponsored with the [USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership and Policy](#) and the [Public Diplomacy Association of America](#) (PDAA).

In 2022, the PDC and PDAA completed the transition to their welcome and promising merger into a new organization, the Public Diplomacy Council of America. The opportunity

belongs to a future chronicler to record the PDC's achievements in the years after its association with GW and those to come as the PDCA.

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