

Recommendation Report

DiplomacyRISE Strategy Session on Developing Contemporary Critical Issue Area Expertise

On April 16, Meridian held a strategy session on the sidelines of the Meridian Diplomacy Forum to explore the direction the institution should take on a key investment area of the incipient [DiplomacyRISE initiative](#): how the organization can strengthen American diplomacy by increasing the comprehension and capacity of diplomats and international affairs professionals on the most crucial modern global issues, including climate change, global health, cybersecurity and 5G. The session was designed to hear perspectives from a cross-section of experts, practitioners and stakeholders from these fields and at various stages of their careers. The 16 participants included representatives from the State Department and foreign ministries, academia and research labs, multinational corporations, strategic advisory firms, the think tank community and other federal government agencies. Fields ranged from astrophysics, nuclear engineering, and biochemistry to epidemiology, telecommunications and information technology among others. These are their top recommendations.

FRAMING THE ENVIRONMENT

Meridian needs to underscore the evolution of diplomacy and of the sciences when explaining the need for this initiative with prospective partners, funders, and other stakeholders. There was a time in history when diplomacy was focused on the fates of royal dynasties. Following the American and French Revolutions, a second phase arose around nation-states and having global powers controlling the international system to prevent war and ensure economic progress. Now, we are in a third phase of diplomacy where functional problems, like global warming and disinformation, are surpassing the nation-state complications in significance. Therefore, we need to expand the scope of diplomacy to tackle these functional challenges before they become conflicts. On the science front, discoveries, breakthroughs, processes, and realities are occurring at such a rapid pace that international affairs practitioners with a science background are not sufficient to meet today's dilemmas. Constant and continued engagement with doctors, cyber security analysts, and environmental scientists honing their craft in their respective labs is vital for effective international policies and agreements. Diplomacy needs to adapt to be in service with science.

LOOK TO EUROPE

As science diplomacy begins to gain traction in the United States, Europe is already embracing it. European universities and academic institutions are actively engaged on science diplomacy due to support and encouragement provided through Horizon 2020, an EU funding program for research, technological development, and innovation. These include [S4D4C](#) and [InsSciDE](#). Foreign ministries of many European nations outside of the EU are also incorporating science diplomacy into their training, policies and structure. For example, Switzerland has designated a new office for science diplomacy to strengthen their comprehension around these issues, and their Agency for Development and Corporation created an [e-learning tool](#) alongside the UN to foster better understanding of the science behind climate change. Meridian should take advantage of Europe's progress to explore their models and case studies and engage them as partners and speakers.

REACH DIPLOMATS WHERE THEY ARE

While Meridian's Washington, DC location affords the ability to interact in person with the most foreign and civil service officers of any city on the planet, the bulk of diplomats and international relations professionals remain outside of the United States in posts around the world. This includes locally employed staff and other close embassy partners. DiplomacyRISE needs to maintain virtual and OnDemand programs alongside in-person gatherings to maximize the reach of the initiative in a cost-effective manner. Regional endeavors that gather staff from various embassies and consulates would also have a significant impact. Moreover, to effectively advocate for the American position globally, you must understand where the U.S. lies domestically. Meridian programs would benefit diplomats by exploring the American internal landscape and position(s) on the topic at hand.

PROVIDE PRACTITIONERS WITH SOFT SKILLS

Studies have shown that computer programmers and cyber security experts as well as engineers and scientists often lack communication and people skillsets that are central to diplomacy. Meridian should provide trainings on these soft skills, such as cultural competency, protocol, negotiation and storytelling to critical issue area professionals interested in becoming international affairs practitioners. In terms of the talent pipeline, this can be useful for the Ph.D. holder in their late 20s who is overqualified for junior positions, overeducated for mid-tier opportunities and underqualified in terms of work experience.

FORM A COHORT OF TRANSLATORS

Given their different skillsets, one can recognize how researchers in the lab and diplomats in the field often communicate in separate languages. There is a need to involve a third party that has a foot in each camp. Positioned at the intersection of policy/soft skills and scientific/research know-how these translators can traverse between the two communities and the two conversations. They will fill in that gap where misunderstanding lies and harness each side's assets to ensure the most-informed decisions are being made.

UNBIASED AND EVIDENCE BASED SOURCES

There is no longer difficulty finding information on anything thanks to the internet. Rather the challenge is sifting through the abundance of available materials and having the media literacy to assess fact from fiction. Furthermore, and unsurprisingly, industry has achieved the most breakthroughs and encompasses the greatest comprehension around many of today's innovations, such as 5G. Yet, businesses are inherently biased. Diplomats then find themselves at this cross-roads wading through American, foreign, and market positions in search of independent and impartial perspectives and data-based evidence.

DEVELOP ADVISORY COMMITTEES

A proliferation of task forces, inter-agencies and advisory councils are needed to break down sector silos and provide neutral or at least a multitude of perspectives. As a nonpartisan NGO, Meridian should concentrate on building cross-sectoral issued-focused advisory councils comprised of translators who exhibit the skills and knowledge to interface effectively with diplomacy and independent voices equipped with data-based evidence. Academia, government and industry all have a place on the councils, which should be a balance of senior preeminent voices who provide credibility with those closest to emerging trends in science and who have deep technical knowledge. These are often doctoral and postdoc students who are most engaged in the research. In this manner, the most contemporary technologies and science remain in the conversation even if the cybersecurity and STEM-trained diplomats are no longer following the literature. Look to professional societies, such as the National Science Policy Network, Aspen New Voices Fellowship, and WEF's Forum of Young Global Leaders to build out a diverse ensemble of council members. Additionally, by serving in these groups, professional society members have already self-identified as translators at the intersection of policy and research.



For more information on DiplomacyRISE, please contact Frank Justice, Vice President of the Meridian Center for Diplomatic Engagement at fjustice@meridian.org.

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