

Recommendation Report

DiplomacyRISE Strategy Session on Fostering Diversity in Diplomacy

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 support the policies, programs, and stakeholders needed to create an American diplomacy ecosystem that cultivates ethnic and racial diversity as well as diversity of perspectives. The session was designed to hear the viewpoints of a cross-section of experts, practitioners, and stakeholders invested in creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive State Department. The 13 participants included representatives from the State Department and foreign ministries, advisory groups, multinational corporations, higher education institutions, and non-profit organizations focusing on youth engagement. These are their top recommendations.

ENGAGE WITH EXISTING COMMUNITY STRUCTURES

Meridian should utilize existing community engagement structures when building out its DiplomacyRISE efforts. This includes prioritizing working with high school teachers to expand knowledge of careers in international affairs and diplomacy, for they have the most sustained engagement with students, often shape conversations on future career paths, and can amplify the reach of the initiative. It may be useful for Meridian to catalogue existing teacher exchanges and explore teacher education and exchange programs as a future pathway to expand engagement at the formative level. Furthermore, participants recommended partnering with Model United Nations clubs and other organizations within schools that allow students to express interest in diplomatic careers. Providing summer programming in partnership with these organizations may be a future pathway for Meridian to expand student interest in diplomat careers and provide engagement outside of an academic environment. Moreover, continuing to utilize the virtual frameworks and tools built out over the past-year could allow Meridian to broaden its outreach across the country in a scalable manner or provide new internship or programming opportunities to those without the ability to travel to DC to participate in diplomatic educational programs.

EXPAND HOMETOWN DIPLOMATS PROGRAM

The State Department's Diplomat-in-Residence and Hometown Diplomats Programs are two effective community recruitment programs. The former posts Foreign Service Officers in universities regionally to provide guidance and advice on careers, internships and fellowships to students and professionals in the communities they serve. The latter provides a framework for diplomats to volunteer their time on scheduled trips back to their hometown to talk to local organizations, elected officials and schools about the importance of global affairs and U.S. engagement with the world. Meridian can augment the scope and impact of the program by opening it up to all international affairs professionals. This includes those in the federal government, such as USAID officers, Foreign Agriculture Service members, as well as those who work in international organizations, international NGOs, and multinational corporations. Meridian could start by having their own staff engage with their high school alma maters. This achieves the goal of reaching the target audience where they are versus bringing them to Washington and broadens the impact area of the initiative as desired.

YOU CAN'T BE WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE

Participants noted that despite the increasing number of outreach efforts to diverse communities, many of those doing the outreach or in leadership positions do not reflect the diverse identities of the communities they engage. Especially at the high school level, it can be difficult for students to imagine themselves in careers where they cannot see themselves reflected in leadership. Even the foreign ministries that are well regarded in terms of their focus on diversity and inclusion often struggle with retention and reflecting diversity in their top ranks. As such, Meridian needs to enlist, speakers and career coaches from a range of backgrounds and who can relate to the experiences of those whom they engage with.

ACTIVELY INCLUDE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

According to the [American Association of Community Colleges](#), community college students make up 41% of all American undergraduates. These colleges often facilitate partnerships with high schools for highly motivated students to expand their educational opportunities through dual degree programs and serve students from a variety of underprivileged backgrounds. As a result, partnerships with community colleges can serve as a key pathway for engaging motivated students from communities not traditionally represented. Meridian should purposefully partner with community colleges to expand outreach efforts that educate students on different careers in international affairs. A first step is to incorporate community colleges in all DiplomacyRISE materials for students and faculty often assume they are not eligible for opportunities marketed towards universities. It may also be useful for Meridian to facilitate partnerships between community colleges and private sector corporations.

TRAIN CAREER GUIDES AND COACHES WELL

Fostering as inclusive and welcoming culture can be one of the main challenges in building an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace and retaining diplomats from underrepresented backgrounds and identities. While Meridian cannot directly address culture within the State Department, participants recommended training the diplomats and international affairs practitioners who Meridian taps to serve as career guides to be best equipped to engage with teens and young professionals. A goal is to minimize the appearance of elitism and privilege within these careers that might discourage students from pursuing them. Try to best match coaches with the communities they reach out to so that they can best relate with students and discuss their background and experience. Providing unconscious bias training for those participating in outreach efforts may be useful as well.

MEASURE THE IMPACT

Monitoring and evaluation need to be a central part of DiplomacyRISE. A combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics are required to assess the reach and effectiveness of the initiative. Pre- and post-program surveys should be employed, and Meridian should remain in touch with participants for as long as possible to track outcomes. Forming a LinkedIn group is one method to do so. Data is the key to funding. Foundations and corporations alike are more likely to support programs that have data to back up claims of program effectiveness and assist in their return-on-investment evaluation.



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