



Office of the Month

A strategic goal of the Bureau of Administration is the use and protection of the Department's information, and to this end, the bureau has three offices under its Global Information Systems umbrella, including the Office of Directives Management.

The office's products and services seem simple: design and maintenance of the Department's forms, publishing and maintaining the Foreign Affairs Manual and Foreign Affairs Handbooks, submitting to the Office of Management and Budget requests to collect information from the public and coordinating the Department's rule-making with public participation. Implementing Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's commitment to government transparency, public participation, collaboration and innovation, the office works with clients to develop new ways to access, collect and use information, aiming to streamline work processes and save time and money.

For instance, DIR is assisting clients with the collection and practical use of information by integrating individual forms with such Microsoft Office applications as Outlook, Excel and Access, and with such databases as Oracle and SQL Server. So far, the office has developed tools and prototypes that allow its clients to develop end-to-end information flows. Although 85 percent of work processes start with a form, it's possible that using a form to just collect information written in pencil in a form's fields may therefore someday be passé.

Recently, DIR and the A Bureau's Office of Logistics Management collaborated on data collection with Form DS-0859, "Receipt for Consular Accountable Items." DIR installed warehouse bar codes in several important fields to help A/LM track inventory more easily, and then reviewed the resulting database and suggested some changes to have fields align with the form. Next, DIR provided a prototype application that searches a computerized folder for forms that have been submitted and imports the data in the forms to the new database. This "user-driven on command" application allows A/LM to import data as often as needed.

DIR also produced a form and "event driven" application for the Global Partnership Initiative in which users completed a form and e-mailed it to a special mailbox set up for it. The application notes the arrival of an e-mail and imports the data to the GPI database.

"DIR's strategy is to provide Department employees with Department policies and procedures through effective directives management, and to provide Department personnel with the information needed in the right place, at the right time and in a useful format," said Office Director T.J. Furlong.

Functional Forms

Directives Management
office keeps info flowing ///

*By Jonathan Mudge and
Dan Martinez*



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Forms Team

One of the office's recent accomplishments was making all Department forms available via the e-Forms system and thus accessible to the public, including the visually impaired (under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). DIR's forms team used commercially available text-to-speech software and collaborated with the National Federation for the Blind to train DIR staff on the software. Once the software was installed on the form designers' workstations, the team established standards for design of the forms and redesigned and published almost 700 forms. Because, by some studies, almost 11 percent of the American public needs some sort of accessibility technology to read, the project will have a broad impact. It has also placed the Department at the forefront of Section 508 compliance.

Recently, Forms Manager Kirk Masterson made a presentation on the team's work to the Business Forms Management Association's annual conference, reflecting how the Department is being looked to as a source of best practices when it comes to forms.

The forms team also developed a Section 508-compliant electronic signature, the NT Domain signature, and is converting more than 300 forms that permit electronic signatures to this new format. NT Domain works by authenticating the user through the Department's OpenNet directory, matching users' network usernames and passwords. This breakthrough will make signing a form easier and provide stronger confirmation of the signer's identity.

Another challenge DIR is addressing is getting useful information quickly to the fingertips of a consular officer as he or she sits across from a visa applicant.

The FAM team is collaborating with the Bureau of Consular Affairs to help the bureau find solutions to its information access challenges.

FAM Team

The FAM team manages 16 volumes of FAM material and 32 FAHs, encompassing 25,000 pages of policies and procedures. The team works with coordinators for FAM volumes in the program offices, helping keep FAM volumes updated and written in plain language and ensuring that past policies are archived for future reference.

A challenge the team is helping customers address is how, in a world of fast search engines, to have a FAM or FAH that can be easily and quickly searched, say, for the policy on family medical leave or on preparing official correspondence. Another challenge it's helping with is how to streamline the approval and codifying process, which will let the FAM and FAH be updated as policies are announced in ALDACs or Department Notices. Archived policies dating to 1960 are

online at http://arpsdir.a.state.gov/archive/fam_archive.html.

Regulatory Compliance

One question DIR has wrestled with lately is whether the Paperwork Reduction Act applies to data gained by the Department via social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs. The act requires federal agencies that collect information from the public to keep their paperwork minimal. It also requires that the information collected and the collection method get prior Office of Management and Budget approval. DIR's Information Collections Team is the Department's liaison with OMB on information collection and collaborates with Department bureaus and offices to ensure the Department is reducing the paperwork burden on the public.

In a sign of the times, OMB this year issued a memo exempting Web-based social media from the act—if the agency is not collecting additional materials or conducting surveys. The Information

Members of DIR's information collection team include, from left, Mary Remmers, Ray Ciupek and Dennis Andrusko.



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Right: Members of DIR's FAM team include, from left, Denise Dunaway, Denise West, Kevin Cross, Maureen Whitsett, Barbara Shacklock and Tim Egert. **Below:** Members of DIR's forms team are, from left, Kelli Delaney, Yvonne Romano, Kim Ahern, Kirk Masterson, Matt Arritt, David Record and Kim Waggoner.



Collections Team is working with OMB to assess what this means for Department Web sites and the Department's use of social media.

The Department collects information through applications for passports and visas; reports demonstrating compliance with federal rules, grant and contract

agreements; and focus groups and surveys. If an office's survey has identical questions and 10 or more respondents, the office should contact DIR's experts for guidance on the Act's requirements, exemptions and exclusions.

The Information Collections team also processes public notices in the Federal Register, all delegations of authority and presidential determinations.

The regulatory and customer service commitments of federal agencies mean the Department needs to provide employees, contractors and the public with easy access to information while protecting confidential, classified and personally identifiable information, and archiving it as well. DIR's role is key to helping the Bureau of Administration reach this goal. ■

The authors are Foreign Service officers in the Office of Directives Management.

