

Position Description

Supervisory Web Publishing Specialist, GS-1001-14

This position is located in the Office of Electronic Information and Publications (PA/EI), Bureau of Public Affairs. The office is responsible for comprehensive, accurate, and timely dissemination of information via the Internet, special hard-copy publications, or other appropriate means. In particular, PA/EI manages the main State Department web site at www.state.gov and develops specialized web sites, such as for students or the US-Afghan Women's Council. PA/EI has general oversight over domestic sites managed by other bureaus to help ensure consistency of State Department branding on the web, compliance with Privacy Act and other regulations. PA/EI goals are to proactively provide the American public with information on foreign policy, the President's and Secretary of State's initiatives, and about the State Department.

Along with the fast pace of Internet technologies, PA/EI responsibilities continue to grow in scope and complexity, notably in the past few years, with the introduction of state-of-the-art content management systems supported by backend Oracle databases and the need to assess and develop interactive web information programs. The explosion in computer technology, particularly as it relates to the Internet, has greatly expanded the type of information that can be distributed; it must be managed effectively to ensure that the public can easily find it. Assessing usability and accessibility are critical to this effort, as well as an understanding of any specific audiences (such as students), which requires focus groups and other interaction with users. The State Department's site now disseminates multi-media information that features graphics, photos, audio, video, and hypertext links to an increasingly broad or a specifically focused audience.

Content is the *raison d'être* of any web site. PA/EI writes, edits, and designs content for publishing on the web. Content organization, presentation, conciseness, and consistency are key for web publishing and as important as technological advances. PA/EI manages the content of all policy bureaus, from African Affairs to Resource Management, on the web. The office also develops web content and works with other bureaus, such as Administration, who maintain their content within state.gov and coordinates with the few remaining bureaus who maintain independent servers outside state.gov.

MAJOR DUTIES and RESPONSIBILITIES

General Web Management: 30%

- Serves as a catalyst for creating new ways to use the web to carry out the Department's mission and provide customer service.
- Advises the Office Director and PA and R senior management on matters concerning the use of web sites to advance the Department's goals with regard to public affairs and the dissemination of information to the American public, the press, and specialized audiences
- Serves as senior technical web expert, responsible for providing oversight and expertise to PA/EI Director and staff as well as office and bureau public affairs advisers or program managers, providing expert advice on technology, usability,

and accessibility; resolving complex problems with respect to technological development.

- Provides advice on feasibility of web site design vis-à-vis technology/usability along with graphic designer assigned to incumbent's team.
- Serves as liaison with Diplomatic Security on security issues.
- Oversees integration of new technologies and databases into the web environment; assesses existing technologies (such as search engine) to make sure they are up to date and meeting new/existing requirements.
- Provides consultation to those under the office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, including the Office of International Information Programs to leverage technical resources relating to the public Internet sites.
- Researches technical capabilities of contractors, develops estimated costs, drafts technical Requests for Proposals, assesses capability of contract experts, provides advice to Office Director on final selection, and totally manages the contract vehicles set in place to deliver requirements.
- Reviews and gathers pertinent information regarding the redesign, restructuring, and refinement of the Department's web site and recommends specific actions concerning aspects of restructuring, and refinement.
- Makes changes to or revises sites based on public and internal feedback.
- Develops performance measures; monitors, analyzes, and reports on web site statistics and other means related to performance measures to effectively allocate web resources.
- Works with Chief Information Office and Information Resource Management Bureau (IRM) as necessary to address technical issues and discuss new directions and technology.
- Co-chairs Department's webmaster working group with IRM, focusing on day-to-day technical issues and web policy implementation.

Content Development, Marketing, and Outreach: 45%

- Keeps up to date with ongoing policy and Department issues to anticipate and ensure that web site provides an up-to-date and comprehensive body of information to support the Department's policy initiatives, public affairs outreach, and range of information services; oversees development and release of content for Secretary of State's web site at state.gov/secretary.
- Substantively organizes, or develops as necessary, information architecture to ensure that it is user friendly; writes and edits segues and other content as needed.
- Reviews content of immediate staff to ensure that it is written in appropriate style and tone for audience it servers; coordinates with other offices as required to support staff in issues dealing with content; reviews staff web page development/organization to ensure that consistent with guidelines and well organized.
- Analyzes use of web site content and design; takes steps as necessary and affordable to improve information content architecture and design.
- Advises management officials on possible public and media reaction to proposed policy statements or agency actions as they relate to release via the Internet.

- Responds to questions from senior management, staff, the media, and the public regarding the Department's technical web activities and resources.
- Promotes Department's web sites among intended audiences and reaches out to citizens in general and specialized audiences to determine what they are looking for in terms of web site information and assess how the Department can address those needs via the web.
- Reaches out to audience groups to get feedback on Agency's web products through focus groups, surveys, web statistics, email, etc.; uses feedback to improve web content.
- Oversees system responding to web-generated email to ensure that it is as technically efficient as possible and that email responses are effectively relating to available web content.
- Ensures that bureau employees are aware of web products to extent possible; train bureau employees to use web products effectively to help citizens and partners use our web resources as well.

Supervision: 25%

- Supervises a staff ranging from GS-13 to GS-9 and one in-house graphic design contractor.
- Supervises various contractors working on content (information) architecture, web design, and technical infrastructure.
- Performs supervisory duties, ranging from developing performance standards and writing evaluations to counseling/disciplining staff.

FACTORS

1. Program Scope and Effect

Incumbent directs and designs the content and technical development of multiple, complex web sites as well as implementation of new applications. These web sites are critical to the public outreach of the foreign policy initiatives of the President and Secretary of State.

In developing these web sites, the incumbent provides the main way in which the Department communicates and/or interacts with the largest single audience of Americans. His/her efforts are central to shaping State Department program to provide current information so that they understand why foreign policy is important to them personally. These web sites directly reach audiences in the millions (the main State Department site at state.gov averaged hits of 4 million hits per month in 2002).

In addition to a general public audience, the incumbent also must tailor the content and presentation of certain web sites to particular audiences, such as high school students. The student web site, for example, is the main way in which the PA Bureau particularly works to provide students, America's future leaders and opinion makers, with foreign policy information in a web site oriented specifically to them.

These efforts greatly affect the perception or understanding of U.S. foreign policy and the State Department itself, contributing substantively to the effectiveness of the Department's public affairs efforts. All of these efforts are highly scrutinized by the media and the public. During periods of crisis and controversial foreign policy initiatives, information presented on the web reaches the largest audience possible, thus having

significant impact on public perception of the Administration's foreign policy. Overall, the web is the central and most important way the State Department has to reach the American public.

In general, information on the web site is used by the general public and American business representatives for travel abroad. Information on the web sites also is used by the White House and the Secretary of State for briefing purposes and for dissemination to Members of Congress, foreign embassies, the media, foreign policy organizations, libraries, and academicians to assist in understanding or presenting official U.S. foreign policy. As such, these efforts receive frequent and continuing congressional and media attention.

2. Organizational Setting

Serves under the broad supervision of the Director of the Office of Electronic Information and Publications who reports to an SES Deputy Assistant Secretary. The Director makes assignments in terms of broadly defined missions, functions, and objectives. The incumbent provides proposals for new initiatives that include detailed cost analyses and, when appropriate, anticipated public responses. The incumbent, considered to be an expert in the application of web technologies, plans, initiates, and adjusts the scope of effort necessary to achieve specific goals. Approaches to work are developed independently and involve analysis of complex variables and coordination with the PA/EI Director and, as appropriate, senior PA and R (Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Diplomacy) or International Information Programs management, the Chief Information Office, and the Bureau of Information Resources and Management. Completed written products are considered authoritative and are accepted without significant change, and are reviewed in terms of satisfying the expected results of the assignments and the reaction of the public to the material contained in the work products. In certain instances, higher-level officials in the Under Secretary's office or Department will review work products for clearance.

Work is evaluated in terms of results achieved and objectives met. Decisions and plans are accepted as technically authoritative.

3. Supervisory and Managerial Authority Exercised

Incumbent plans and supervises work of four FTE subordinates--two GS 13s, one GS-12, and one GS-9, as well as one in-house design contractor and three contract firms providing information architecture organization, technical content management, web design, and hosting services.

Plans work for FTE staff; this entails setting priorities for staff, adjusting work schedules and deadlines to meet unexpected crises or higher priorities set by more senior management. Incumbent develops performance standards in coordination with other supervisors in the office, conducts regular performance reviews, and writes performance evaluations, and assesses training and other developmental assignments to enhance performance. As employees depart, incumbent is responsible for reviewing requirements for the position in light of any changed requirements, writing position descriptions, and interviewing candidates for position.

Incumbent, considered the technical expert within the office, trains and/or instructs not only her/his immediate staff members but also those that are not formally under his direct supervision, as necessary, in the technical accomplishment of specific tasks or special efforts, such as development of special web pages or new features. As the

office's technical expert, incumbent also assesses ways to improve technical ability and procedures of immediate staff and those reporting to other supervisors. Incumbent is responsible for counseling his/her staff and resolving conflicts among staff or between them and other teams within or outside office and using experienced judgment to refer unresolved conflicts to senior management. Effect minor disciplinary actions as needed.

Incumbent exercises oversight over contractors providing technical content management and hosting services. He/she assesses work proposals by new or existing contractors, determining whether or not work should be undertaken by staff or outsourced. This includes providing technical requirements and writing Requests for Proposals, serving as lead on technical evaluation of contractors and advising on the final selection. For existing contracts, incumbent tracks progress and costs, decides on acceptability of services, and works with contractors to determine expeditious and cost-effective deadlines as well as negotiating changes in schedule if priorities change or new circumstances occur affecting project(s).

4: Personal Contacts

Nature of Contacts

Personal contacts within the State Department include assistant secretaries and other senior officials; bureau public affairs/public diplomacy officers; senior officers in electronic information dissemination; officers involved in public affairs outreach via the web, bureau database administration, content management, technical and substantive web development, and similar issues. Contacts with the Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Diplomacy are at senior levels to discuss strategies for outreach using technical innovations that are ever-changing for the web. The incumbent has contact with members/staff of Congress and White House officials on special programs, such as student outreach via the web, and various officials in foreign embassies and the foreign affairs community. The employee also interacts with managers and staff from other government entities at the federal, state, and local level. Nongovernmental contacts include high school principals, teachers, and students; contractors at the vice president level for web site technical requirements. Other contractor contacts at various levels are with respect to information architecture, database development, content management, usability, search engines, etc. Incumbent also deals with media concerning web site developments and issues, such as news stories on how State Department is using content management or similar technical innovations.

Purpose of Contacts

Interactions with State Department executives, managers, and staff are for the purpose of developing and implementing strategies to create, plan, develop, market, and maintain the Department's primary web products. Contacts with other public affairs officers are in context of developing content, leading meetings, coordinating/negotiating positions for course of the effort, or determining deadlines. Such contacts also involve negotiating with them to have them volunteer support and content for web sites or to accept the concept of web development content and design to keep a consistent approach across all bureau web pages. Contact with subordinates is for supervision of web content and technical development, technical training in new systems or procedures, and resolution of conflicts.

Contacts with other government officials are made to develop strategies for release of information and present highly technical applications of the web site as interrelated to internal and public web site usability and design. Other external

interactions are to develop and coordinate partnerships to achieve common goals. Other Department contacts may be made to negotiate and reconcile internal needs with public needs or internal issues. Contacts with contractors ensure that web site projects remain focused on requirements, are on schedule, within budget, and that quality standards are met. Contacts with senior level contractors are to assess/convey technical requirements, develop timelines, negotiate costs/services, and concepts of web information architecture and design.

Nongovernmental contacts are made to keep up-to-date with highly technical web site applications or to gain feedback or develop partnerships to reach out to specific audiences. Contacts are made with the general public to inform them of the importance of the office's programs, to answer highly technical questions relating to the Department's web site development and implementation, or to gain feedback to help the Department consider public feedback in its web products.

5: Difficulty of Typical Work Directed

The incumbent develops and implements procedures and coordinates a range of activities from content development to technical requirements and deployment. For example, incumbent needs to research and develop appropriate content for new web sites as well as technically assess search engine or database requirements and develop appropriate design and information architecture content for new web sites and specific audiences based on Department objectives and initiatives. Much of the media and public audiences may be indifferent to the Department's policy and/or approach. The incumbent analyzes the needs of the web audience and proposes strategies for innovations and solutions to improve service and meet specified goals. The incumbent advises the PA/EI Office Director and PA senior management on issues and recommends solutions based on experience and analysis.

Decisions regarding what needs to be done involve assessing the information needs of audiences and Department and Bureau goals as well as technical issues as well so that electronic publishing efforts are designed to present complex information effectively and gain public understanding of such material. This involves assessing the technical, design, and content needs of both the public and internal audiences. Incumbent must have a high level of ability to explain these technical aspects as they interrelate to design and content to non-technical public affairs/diplomacy officers or senior personnel with no background in web site functionality and design. It also requires the ability to judge the balance between the internal and public needs for the site and effectively communicate this decision to these officers.

Projects often involve major departures from traditional approaches in addressing new needs for publication content, format, and means of dissemination. Technical aspects of the position are concerned with fast changing web publishing. This entails analyzing, planning, designing, and implementing highly technical improvements to web sites, from the analysis of web site information architecture, to usability studies, or to development of a new medium of dissemination, such as to dissemination to personal digital assistants (PDAs). The incumbent must have a high level of expertise in web technology to train and review work of staff since the content management system for the small student site is maintained internally rather than contracted out. Incumbent also is responsible for oversight of the major content system for state.gov, which is contracted out.

6: Other Conditions

Projects for which the incumbent has responsibility are complex as they involve departure from traditional approaches due to need to address new technical needs in a rapidly changing technical world of web site and database development. It also requires a high level of expertise in dealing with contracting vehicles and project management in dealing with the contractors themselves. At the same time, substantive content development and information architecture are critically important, as the incumbent must understand foreign policy issues to develop the appropriate information architecture and supervise employees on a daily basis to ensure that priority information is presented with the most impact.

Web design and development work is highly technical as well as creative; flexibility is required to understand when guidelines apply and when an innovative approach should be considered. Writing and developing content for the web is a relatively new arena and not well understood by the Department, although it is critical for effectively reaching out to a web user which research shows typically spends a few seconds on a page before clicking on to something else. Dealings with other bureaus may require extensive persuasion to get them to buy in to an approach. Working effectively with creative contract designers (keeping them creatively engaged) requires the ability to work “outside the box” while understanding and ensuring the appropriateness of State Department presentation and reality of funding limits and legal requirements, such as Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act.

The work of subordinates and contractors must be coordinated with senior management as well as various bureaus/offices throughout the Department who may not be in agreement with the creative or technical approaches to the project or willing to develop content specifically for web audiences. Written and graphic content that will most effectively reach web users is different from what with which most Department officials are familiar. Decisions have a direct and substantial effect on the public affairs outreach programs of the State Department, which is heightened during periods of foreign policy crisis when programs change due to unforeseen events and deadlines may be ever shifting.

Change in web technology is ever changing as well and requires incumbent to be constantly in tune with new trends and be able to quickly apply them to programs. This by extension requires that the incumbent constantly develop new procedures and process and train and review the work of subordinates. The work of contractors with various areas of expertise in this web technology and content management, from design to database programming languages to information architecture specialists, must be overseen, reviewed, and deadlines constantly reassessed to meet changing requirements.