

## **Cultural Diplomacy Gets a New Worldview** **By Jacqueline Trescott**

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The State Department has enlisted four national cultural organizations to broaden exchanges between American artists and foreign audiences and share the country's arts management expertise.

Global Cultural Initiative, an effort to coordinate and expand many of the activities underway in cultural diplomacy, was announced yesterday by first lady Laura Bush. "One of the best ways we can deepen our friendships with the people of all countries is for us to better understand each other's culture by enjoying each other's literature, music, films and visual arts," said Mrs. Bush at a program in the White House East Room.

This is not new business for State. But in the past, cultural exchanges were built around a single organization or well-known person -- say, B.B. King does Argentina, or Yo-Yo Ma in Sri Lanka. This umbrella effort is taking a number of programs that federal cultural agencies and national organizations have underway that are more on-the-ground than marquee.

The primary partners in the new program are the Kennedy Center, American Film Institute, National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities. Also participating are the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

The State Department now allots \$4.5 million for a variety of cultural exchange programs that serve about 30,000 participants per year. Money for the programs has tripled since 2000. Dina Habib Powell, assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, said, "Cultural diplomacy can't be the job of government alone and we are expanding what cultural exchange means."

Karen P. Hughes, undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, said the American examples would represent every art form. Recently a group of New Orleans musicians toured countries that had offered help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. "Working together with our diverse American cultural community, we will empower a new generation of citizens committed to freedom of expression, rights for women and minorities and citizen participation in government," Hughes said at the event.

In this updating of cultural exchange, the Kennedy Center will study what form of arts management training is needed in various countries. For the past six months Michael Kaiser, the center's president, has been working with Pakistan; the need there is for technical training in the theater. For the State Department program, the center will

conduct a children's theater series and international arts festivals and produce programs with disabled artists through the VSA Arts organization. "Americans don't know enough about other cultures," Kaiser said. The center currently holds training programs in Mexico, China and Pakistan. "You learn they are not like us and so much like us. Through the arts you discover what they find beautiful, what they are frightened by," he said.

Last week the first lady provided a forecast of one of the new twists in cultural diplomacy. With Begum Sehba Musharraf, the first lady of Pakistan, Mrs. Bush took the stage at the Kennedy Center to introduce Gift of the Indus, a Web site devoted to Pakistani arts and culture. Geared to schoolchildren, the pages include explorations of architecture, visual arts and music, along with a supervised blog for students from both countries.

The NEA will broaden its literary exchanges. Right now the agency is building a translation program with Mexico, Russia and Pakistan. The agency will give grants to translate foreign works into English and U.S. writers into other languages. The publishing projects will be followed by artist exchanges. "We should make the culture of other nations more available in America and we should find chances for American artists abroad," said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia.

For four years, the NEH has held workshops for American teachers at landmark sites, and this year the program will be extended to educators from other countries. The lessons on immigration, for example, are taught at Ellis Island, and civil rights courses are held in Birmingham.

"This shares perspectives on critical moments in American history and brings it alive in the classrooms," said NEH Chairman Bruce Cole.