

Evaluation Matters: AFCP Case Study on Learning



Conservation of the Temple of Phnom Bakheng at Angkor Park, Cambodia

THE EVALUATION

Why: The evaluation was intended to help ECA and CHC management make decisions about AFCP administration and address accountability objectives.

What: The evaluation addressed the following four questions:

1. What have been the strengths and challenges of AFCP administration?
2. What are the impacts of AFCP projects on foreign publics?
3. To what extent are AFCP projects supporting foreign policy priorities by meeting or exceeding the embassy's stated goals for the project as expressed in the application? Why or why not?

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THE PROGRAM

The ECA Evaluation Division conducted an evaluation of the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Established in 2001, AFCP provides an avenue for the United States to lead cultural heritage preservation efforts and demonstrate respect for other cultures by protecting cultural sites, objects, and traditions. By preserving cultural heritage overseas in a noncommercial, nonpolitical, and nonmilitary way, the fund also satisfies U.S. treaty and other bilateral obligations, creates opportunities for economic development, and contributes to post-disaster and post-conflict recovery. Each year the AFCP awards approximately \$6 million to an average of 40 projects across the globe. Since its inception, the AFCP has supported more than 1,000 projects in 133 countries. The Cultural Heritage Center (CHC) in the ECA Bureau within the U.S. Department of State administers AFCP.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Key findings and conclusions from the evaluation include:

- » **Application and administration processes.** The AFCP grant application and administrative processes worked well and received high levels of satisfaction by DoS and grantees alike, with particular appreciation for communication channels and styles. Areas for improvement include aligning skills and time to support and complete the application, and surmounting financial management barriers.
- » **Limited awareness of projects.** Public awareness of the sampled projects and U.S. funding for them did not appear to be widespread, potentially limiting the program's impacts on foreign publics. For those who were aware, the response was generally positive, with few documented cases of negative criticism.
- » **Positive impact of media.** Media impacts on foreign publics have generally been positive for sampled projects. However, projects and countries varied in the amount and type of media U.S. Embassy/Consulate and grantees generated, as well as the amount of media attention from external media sources.
- » **Alignment with national and foreign policy goals.** AFCP projects were aligned with a variety of foreign policy and national policy goals, though these goals were sometimes different from those cited in the grant applications.



THE EVALUATION

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4. What has the impact (either positive or negative) of AFCP projects been on the embassy's relationship with foreign officials?

Who: ECA's Evaluation Division contracted Social Impact (SI) to conduct the evaluation

When: October 2018 – August 2019

How: SI conducted data collection in the United States and six countries covering 12 recent AFCP projects using a mixed-methods evaluation design consisting of a document review, key informant interviews, direct observation, and rapid surveys.

How Much: \$384,190



Signage about the restoration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church in Causeni, Moldova.

- » **Positive impacts on relationships with foreign officials.** In general, AFCP programming has had positive, but varied, impacts on the relationships between U.S. Embassy/Consulate staff and their national government counterparts. The extent of the impact, however, is not known definitively because of a lack of consistent data.

INTEGRATING RECOMMENDATIONS

The CHC has already begun implementing recommendations from the evaluation report. Several revisions were made for the 2020 AFCP grants process, including:

- » **Media Requirements.** Grantees are now required to provide a Public Awareness Plan describing how the applicant intends to highlight and amplify the AFCP-supported activities through print, electronic, and social media platforms. Similarly, Embassies are required to provide a Media Plan describing how the Embassy intends to highlight and amplify AFCP-supported activities.
- » **Recognition of U.S. Support.** Embassies are now required to continue recognition of U.S. support (e.g., through signage, acknowledgement in pamphlets or websites) and use AFCP sites for public diplomacy activities, including VIP visits.
- » **Leveraging Resources.** Embassies are now encouraged to package AFCP projects with other ECA and USG programs to maximize public diplomacy outcomes. Proposals that include a strong Program Packaging Plan will receive extra points during the review.
- » **Capturing Program Success.** Based on the ECA Evaluation Division's Success Story pilot, each AFCP awardee will be required to produce an annual success story survey as a deliverable to better capture the impact of AFCP projects on Embassy diplomatic efforts.
- » **Measuring Impact.** The CHC will be among the first ECA divisions that will be rolling out new measures next year to capture results to assist in better understanding AFCP's long-term impact on a global scale.