



2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

THE POWER OF
MEGA-EVENTS

HONORING FRANCIS
FUKUYAMA

THE CPD EXPERIENCE

Established in 2003 at the University of Southern California, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) is a research, analysis and professional training organization dedicated to enriching the study and practice of public diplomacy in pursuit of a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Since its inception, CPD has become an ambitious and productive leader in the public diplomacy research and scholarship community and plays host to robust discussions about the future of public diplomacy.

RESEARCH

Our innovative research agenda bridges the study-practice gap and contributes to the intellectual foundations of public diplomacy scholarship.

CONVENING

Our events and conferences provide a space for the public diplomacy community to explore key topics and trends.

TRAINING

Our one-of-a-kind professional education and capacity-building programs equip practitioners with key skills needed to deploy effective and impactful public diplomacy.

AWARDS

Our annual awards celebrate exceptional public diplomacy practitioners in the public and private sectors.

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Message from the Director



As 2025 draws to a close, I am proud to reflect on a year that reaffirmed the role of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) as a global leader in advancing the study and practice of public diplomacy and shaping its future.

This year marked a significant milestone for CPD's professional development programs with the 20th anniversary of the Summer Institute in Public Diplomacy. The Summer Institute continues to train the next generation of public diplomacy practitioners by equipping them with the latest knowledge and tools in the field.

CPD continues to bridge theory and practice through research on the evolving landscape of global communication, including studies of global mega-events and the success of South Korea's soft power or Hallyu (Korean Wave). Our research fellows brought fresh insights on cultural and digital diplomacy, while our Fulbright Visiting Research Chair, Dr. Reza Hasmath, advanced new understanding of state-society relations and minority representation.

Our collaboration with the U.S. Department of State also continued through the Ameri Prize for Innovation in Public Diplomacy, honoring Andrea Stanford, press officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, for her pioneering communication initiatives on migration.

This year, we marked the passing of Joseph Nye, a longtime friend of the Center whose pioneering theory of "soft power" and generosity of thought continue to shape and inspire our work. We were honored to host Professor Nye for an October 2024 discussion about his memoir, *A Life in the American Century*, reflecting on the evolution of U.S. power since World War II and offering his vision for America's role in a changing world.

We were excited to present the Excellence in Public Diplomacy Award to the world-renowned scholar Francis Fukuyama. We had the privilege of welcoming him to Annenberg for a gathering with CPD's support community, then listening to his profound insights on identity, trust, and democracy at a public event that brought together many students and faculty and gave CPD significant visibility.

Through a series of engaging events, CPD examined key forces shaping contemporary public diplomacy, from women's leadership in foreign affairs to Professor Nicholas Cull's framework of reputational security. We continued our Stroum Arts & Diplomacy Series, highlighting the arts' unique power to inspire empathy and cross-cultural connection; and we launched the Olympic Ideals Series with the Consulate General of Greece in Los Angeles, exploring how the Games embody enduring values of excellence, unity, and peace.

Having served as France's Consul General in Los Angeles during preparations for the Paris 2024 Summer Games, I have seen firsthand how global mega-events can be powerful platforms for nations and cities to project identity and engage the world through culture and sport. As Los Angeles prepares to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, CPD is once again the go-to reference for analyzing and discussing sports diplomacy and city diplomacy.

As Interim Director, I am inspired daily by CPD's vibrant community of scholars, students, and global partners. Together, we are reaffirming the Center's founding vision: to illuminate, innovate, and lead in a field that is now more vital than ever for building mutual understanding and trust between nations.

Julie Duhaut-Bedos



The Power of Mega-Events

GLOBAL STAGES FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

From the Olympics to the World Expo and the FIFA World Cup, mega-events have long served as platforms for nations to project identity, shape narratives, and strengthen international dialogue. They are at once spectacles of sport and culture and strategic exercises in soft power—moments when cities and nations show the world who they are and who they aspire to be. As Los Angeles prepares to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) is deepening its research, convenings, and training around these defining moments in global engagement.

At a July 28 webinar moderated by USC Annenberg's Janine Hurty, panelists explored how sports foster "subnational diplomacy" and how mega-events can inspire civic pride and inclusive legacies. CPD Interim Director Julie Duhaut-Bedos, former Consul General of France in Los Angeles, reflected on lessons from Paris 2024, emphasizing that inclusivity and accessibility were key to its success.

"Paris overcame political divides and logistical hurdles through volunteerism, local partnerships, and programs that brought the Games to the people," she said, noting the 45,000 volunteers who powered the event. "Los Angeles can do the same—turning the Games into a celebration of civic unity."

Dilpreet Sidhu, Los Angeles's Deputy Mayor of International Relations, echoed that vision, describing efforts to make the 2028 Games a "legacy of belonging" through initiatives like Get in the Game LA and Shine LA. With 100,000 volunteers projected, Sidhu called civic participation "a form of citizen diplomacy" that strengthens both local and global ties.

CPD also co-hosted the launch of the Olympic Ideals Series with the Consulate General of Greece. The inaugural lecture featured Isidoros Kouvelos, President of the Hellenic Olympic Committee, who traced the enduring "Olympic Ideal" from ancient Greece to Los Angeles 2028. USC Viterbi Dean Yannis Yortsos celebrated USC's historic Olympic legacy, while Duhaut-Bedos led a discussion on translating those ideals into modern civic diplomacy.

MEGA-EVENT LEADERSHIP

Appointed Interim Director in 2025, Julie Duhaut-Bedos brings two decades of diplomatic experience across five countries. As France's Consul General, she championed subnational partnerships and the exchange of expertise between Paris and Los Angeles ahead of 2028. "Mega-events are moments when the world listens," she noted. "They test a city's capacity for cooperation and imagination, and CPD is uniquely positioned to help shape that conversation."

Also joining CPD this year, Visiting Scholar Shiori Iwanaga contributes her expertise in international event governance from Tokyo 2020 to LA 2028. A longtime official with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, her research explores how cultural programming, stakeholder collaboration, and community engagement at mega-events advance people-to-people diplomacy and inform global best practices.

RESEARCH, FIELDWORK & TRAINING

Committed to advancing research into mega-events and their public diplomacy potential, CPD Research Fellow Dr. Jessica Carniel of the University of Southern Queensland, is exploring how fans at the Eurovision Song Contest act as informal diplomatic agents. Carniel reframes the global mega-event as a "symbolic contact zone between cultures," a living laboratory of global sentiment, solidarity, and identity.

In early 2025, students in USC's Master of Public Diplomacy program, led by program director Jay Wang, visited Expo 2025 Osaka, producing essays and visual analyses that explored national pavilions as instruments of soft power. CPD Faculty Fellow Nicholas Cull explored the role of religion at the Expo, while César Corona, CEO of ExpoMuseum.com, documented the Expo's striking architecture and storytelling, including a powerful photo essay on Ukraine's pavilion, "Not for Sale."

At CPD's Summer Institute for Public Diplomacy, which marked its 20th anniversary this year, Corona led the session World Expos as Public Diplomacy Platforms, guiding practitioners through how these global gatherings advance foreign policy through storytelling and spectacle.

THE GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT AHEAD

As Los Angeles prepares for its turn on the world stage, CPD continues to convene, research, and train the next generation of public diplomats to harness the power of mega-events. From stadiums to soundstages to world expos, CPD's mission endures: to study how the world's grand stages can foster connection, empathy, and peace in a divided age.

"Mega-events test a city's capacity for cooperation and imagination, and CPD is uniquely positioned to help shape that conversation."



Research Reads

CPD released two in-depth research papers as part of our signature scholarly series, **CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy**.

- China vs. ASEAN: Digital Diplomacy Involving the #SouthChinaSea
by Dr. Zhao Alexandre Huang
- Indigenous Dissent and PD During Russia's War in Ukraine
by Dr. Anna Popkova

Download at USCPublicDiplomacy.org/Perspectives



Honoring Francis Fukuyama for Excellence in Public Diplomacy

CPD hosted the renowned political scientist for a packed autumn event

Francis Fukuyama was honored with the 2025 Excellence in Public Diplomacy Award during a special program at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism on September 17.

The event, titled “Navigating Identity and Trust in 2025,” featured a conversation between Fukuyama and CPD Interim Director Julie Duhaut-Bedos, following opening remarks by USC Provost Andrew Guzman and USC Marshall Dean Geoffrey Garrett.

Fukuyama, the Mosbacher Director of Stanford’s Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, reflected on themes from his landmark works *Identity* and *Trust*. “It is a huge honor to receive this award,” he said. “I admire this school and your program tremendously.” He also underscored CPD’s role in “rebuilding international trust after the closure of long-standing soft power institutions such as Voice of America.”

Duhaut-Bedos praised Fukuyama’s influence, noting, “His scholarship has transformed the way we understand democracy’s promise and its vulnerabilities... His insights are essential for public diplomacy practitioners navigating today’s fractured and contested international landscape.”

Established in 2023, the Excellence in Public Diplomacy Award recognizes private sector leaders whose work advances international cooperation through global engagement. Its inaugural recipient, Blackstone Chairman and CEO Stephen A. Schwarzman, received the award during CPD’s Engaging with the World Gala, where he was in conversation with financier Michael Milken.

“It is a huge honor to receive this award,” said Fukuyama. “I admire this school and your program tremendously.”

Celebrating an Innovative Approach to Migration Communication

A

ndrea Stanford, Press Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, was recognized by CPD and the U.S. Department of State as the 2025 recipient of the Ameri Prize for Innovation in Public Diplomacy during a ceremony held September 29, 2025, at USC's Capital Campus in Washington, D.C.

The Ameri Prize, established in 2021 and endowed by former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Goli Ameri, celebrates foreign and civil service officers whose creativity and leadership advance the practice of public diplomacy worldwide. “Public diplomacy delivers significant impact when creative minds break barriers to reach people in impactful ways,” said Ameri. “Andrea Stanford embodies that spirit. She has transformed how the U.S. government communicates about illegal immigration.”

Stanford was recognized for her groundbreaking initiatives using digital and community engagement tools to counter misinformation and build trust on migration issues. Her campaigns—including a Facebook Live series reaching nearly one million viewers and QR-coded messages printed on 700,000 tortilla wrappers—helped the U.S. government reach migrants directly with accurate information and reduce illegal immigration flows. “I feel deeply honored to receive the Ameri Prize,” Stanford said. “When we apply public diplomacy strategically, we can use it as a powerful tool to address some of the world’s most entrenched and difficult challenges.”



(L-R): Goli Ameri, Barry Sanders, Lloyd Stanford, Andrea Stanford, Steven Corey-Bey, Jon E. Piechowski, Kerri Hannan, Julie Duhaut-Bedos, Marie Royce, Glenn Osaki

Past Ameri Prize honorees include Morgan O'Brien, Alexander Hunt, Alys Spensley, and Gretchen Franke and Chad Houghton—each recognized for innovations ranging from global visa communications to AI-driven disinformation countermeasures.

The 2025 ceremony brought together leading diplomats, CPD faculty, and partners, reflecting CPD's commitment to advancing the study and practice of global public diplomacy and celebrating those whose innovation strengthens trust, understanding, and cooperation around the world.



Event Highlights

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Cynthia Wade, Academy Award-nominated filmmaker, gave a presentation on the intersection of storytelling, culture, and diplomacy, showing clips from *The Flagmakers*, a film by Wade screened across the globe through the U.S. Department of State's American Film Showcase program. Part of the Stroum Arts and Diplomacy Series, which focuses on the intersection of public diplomacy and the arts, the event explored how film can serve as a diplomatic tool to foster understanding and meaningful connections across cultures.



↑

2025 Ameri Prize: Left to right, entrepreneur and diplomat, Goli Ameri, with Ameri Prize winner Andrea Stanford, honored for her creative approach to migration communication at a packed event at USC's Capital Campus in Washington, DC.

←

The Man in the Red Hat. Left to right, White House correspondent Kevin Cirilli with Annenberg alumna, award-winning theater producer and former U.S. Ambassador, Cynthia Stroum, debuting

Cirilli's new play, *The Man in the Red Hat*, during a table read and discussion with actors from the USC School of Dramatic Arts.



↑

Joseph Nye, a longtime friend of the Center who passed away in early 2025, joined us in the autumn of 2024 for a virtual discussion with USC Master of Public Diplomacy Director Jay Wang about Nye's memoir, *A Life in the American Century*, a compelling perspective on the evolution of American power.

Women in Diplomacy. In celebration of Women's History Month, CPD and Los Angeles World Affairs Council proudly hosted a panel featuring Sophie Hottat, Consul General of Belgium in Los Angeles; Maria Alnee Gamble, Deputy Consul General of the Philippines in Los Angeles; and Julie Duhaut-Bedos, CPD Interim Director and former Consul General of France in Los Angeles, discussing the significance of representation in international affairs and how women in diplomacy can shape global policies. Attendees were able to engage with these accomplished leaders in an insightful Q&A.

↓

Excellence in Public Diplomacy Award. Left to right, Glenn Osaki,

Julie Duhaut-Bedos, Andrew Guzman, Francis Fukuyama, Barry Sanders and Geoffrey Garrett honor Fukuyama. One of the most influential thinkers in international relations, he shared insights into how identity politics and social trust shape democratic institutions and global stability through the lens of two of his celebrated works: *Identity* and *Trust*.

↓

Isidoros Kouvelos, President of the Hellenic Olympic Committee, gave the inaugural lecture in a new "Olympic Ideals Series" co-hosted with the Consulate General of Greece in Los Angeles. The discussion traced the evolution of the Olympic ideal, from its roots in ancient Greek values of excellence, unity, and peace; to Pierre de Coubertin's vision for the modern Olympic Games; and how those principles continue to guide the Movement amid the global challenges of today.



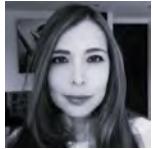
Refocusing Public Diplomacy for a Dangerous World. CPD Faculty Fellow Nicholas Cull joined us for a discussion about his new book, *Reputational Security*, which dives into the role of public diplomacy and national image as core elements of state security rather than optional extras.



Research Networks

2024 CPD DOCTORAL DISSERTATION GRANT RECIPIENT

2025-27 CPD RESEARCH FELLOWS



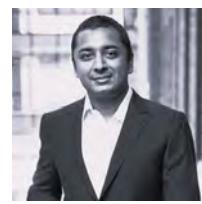
Sandra Montoya
Researcher, Latin American Institute of Higher Studies (ILAE)
Disruptive Cultural Diplomacy as a Peacebuilding Platform: Cases of Chile, Cuba, and Colombia



Minsoo Kim
Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tennessee
Kim's research focuses on measuring the opinion of foreign publics using relational and network approaches.



Petrit Selimi
Former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kosovo
Public and Digital Diplomacy in Post-Conflict Nation-Building: The Case of Kosovo



Reza Hasmath
Professor, University of Alberta
His research examines how state, society, and individual actors shape public management, development, and global affairs across diverse political and cultural contexts.

2025-26 VISITING SCHOLAR



Shiori Iwanaga
Tokyo Metropolitan Government

Tell us about your research at the Center.

My research at the Center focuses on how cities can strategically leverage the opportunities created by hosting large-scale international events, using Los Angeles' preparations for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games as the primary case study and Tokyo 2020 as a comparative reference.

By analyzing stakeholder coordination and communication strategies in both Los Angeles and Tokyo, the research examines how cities can effectively engage local communities and attract international interest across multiple dimensions, including tourism and foreign direct investment. It also explores approaches to showcasing a city's unique character and shaping a coherent and compelling global city narrative.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to produce a practical, policy-oriented toolkit that enables cities to use mega-events not only as sporting spectacles, but as long-term instruments of public diplomacy and international collaboration.

What do you see as your work's broader impact, both on the field of public diplomacy and beyond?

Through my work in international affairs at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, I have witnessed how cities can act as powerful diplomatic actors. The Government's advocacy for "multi-city lateralism"—which encourages cities to collaborate closely with one another—has highlighted for me the value of intercity cooperation in achieving more effective international engagement.

My involvement in international and city-level exchanges has demonstrated that local governments can shape global perceptions through events, partnerships, and community engagement.

The broader impact of this work, I believe, lies in showing that public diplomacy is not only a tool for national-level actors but also a practical, place-based approach to fostering meaningful international collaboration, advancing both the field of public diplomacy and the communities it serves.



CPD Summer Institute, Class of 2025

Celebrating its 20th anniversary this past summer, CPD's flagship two-week training program brought mid-career public diplomats and international communication professionals to the USC campus, where they sharpened their public diplomacy skillsets, engaged with cutting-edge scholarship, and teamed up with fellow practitioners to tackle real-world challenges.



Training Highlights

For twenty years, CPD has been the leader in training public diplomats and international communication professionals.

CPD Mini-Course trainings, sampled below, are regularly conducted on the USC campuses in Los Angeles, California, and Washington, D.C., as well as virtually.

DATA-DRIVEN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Computational Thinking and Data Types

Fundamentals of Machine Learning and AI

Real Time Analytics and Digital Insights

INTEGRATING AI INTO YOUR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGY

AI for Public Diplomacy Storytelling
How Will AI Shape the Future of Public Diplomacy

Current Policies and Practices of AI in Public Diplomacy

Fundamentals of AI and Applications in Public Diplomacy

CUSTOMIZED TRAINING FOR FOREIGN MINISTRY

Public Diplomacy Strategy and Program Planning

Public Diplomacy Monitoring and Evaluation Techniques

Understanding Theory of Change for Public Diplomacy Impact Assessment
Survey Design and Best Practices

Virtual Reality and Immersive Storytelling



Celebrating Two Decades of Impact

When the Center on Public Diplomacy launched its Summer Institute twenty years ago, the program was built on a simple but ambitious vision: to bridge theory and practice for the professionals shaping global engagement. That idea came from Eytan Gilboa, CPD Visiting Scholar and Professor at Bar-Ilan University, who recalls proposing “a training program for mid-career officials, diplomats, and officials from international organizations to bring them here for a two-week program on public diplomacy.” The goal, he said, was to build “a gathering place, where theory meets practice.”

Working with then-Dean Geoffrey Cowan, Gilboa helped design a curriculum that combined cutting-edge research with real-world strategy. “The vision was to offer lectures, present the most recent research on public diplomacy and connect the curriculum with contemporary issues in the field,” he noted, emphasizing the Institute’s early blend of scholars and seasoned practitioners.

“It worked very well from the beginning because there was such a need for it,” Gilboa said. In the early years, many attendees arrived with limited exposure to public diplomacy. Over time, the Institute began drawing professionals with ten to fifteen years of experience, arriving not for an introduction but to “upgrade their capabilities.” Today, alumni span every region—from Australia, Asia, and Africa; from Europe, Latin America, and the Gulf States, as well as Canada and the U.S.—and many now lead PD units, embassies, and NGOs.

As the field transformed, the curriculum evolved in step. “In 20 years, the world has changed,” Gilboa reflected. Storytelling endured as a constant, but digital platforms, social media, and now AI reshaped the training. The Institute also emerged as a forum for grappling with global inflection points—welcoming participants from the Gulf States during the Abraham Accords, for example, or from Ukraine amid the war with Russia—who brought firsthand perspectives to discussions on information warfare and other rapidly evolving challenges.

This summer’s program reflected both continuity and reinvention. Modules explored foundational principles of public diplomacy and its future; the contemporary information environment; computational thinking and data types; machine learning and AI; global attitudes research; crisis narrative strategy; immersive and mixed-reality storytelling; youth creator culture; and the role of mega-events such as World Expos. Specialized sessions examined climate policy, cultural diplomacy, and innovation-driven foreign policy practice.

For Gilboa, the Institute’s longevity underscores public diplomacy’s enduring importance, even in an era of geopolitical fragmentation. While some governments have reduced PD investment, he argues that academia must do the opposite: “Public diplomacy remains the most effective vehicle of promoting international community and global cooperation.”

Twenty years on, CPD’s Summer Institute continues to prove him right.

In Their Own Words

CPD BEHIND THE SCENES



Juliana Maitenaz
CPD Assistant, USC Master of Public Diplomacy Candidate

My interest in public diplomacy stems from my study of culture, and the connection I sought out between my undergraduate dual degrees: classical percussion performance and international studies. My senior thesis was about the evolution of percussion as a tool of hard power and warfare to one of soft power and cultural diplomacy, drawing from case studies such as the Ottoman Empire, the United States, and Brazil. As I began my research, Jim Ketterer, my undergraduate professor and a former visiting scholar at CPD, pointed me to the Soft Power Index and Professor Nicholas Cull's scholarship. That was my introduction to USC's Master of Public Diplomacy program and CPD. I later continued to explore the field as a Fulbright Research Grantee in São Paulo, Brazil.

A highlight of the MPD program has been the opportunity to work on an array of incredibly interesting projects at CPD as a graduate intern and for the Center on Communication Leadership and Policy (CCLP) as a Geoffrey Cowan Scholar. Aiding with the CPD Summer Institute and conducting research for journalist and culture critic, Julia Turner, in particular, stand out as unique educational experiences. The diversity within the program, both its student body and the paths of study offered, have also been a tremendous asset in my study of public diplomacy. I have learned so much from my peers and professors during my time at USC.

REPUTATIONAL SECURITY



Nicholas Cull
CPD Faculty Fellow; Professor & Founding Director, Master of Public Diplomacy Program, USC Annenberg

Reputational Security (Polity Press, 2024) grew out of my experience in the field, looking at how public diplomacy is practiced and talking to people who are trying to manage the reputation of their countries in an increasingly disrupted environment.

Public diplomacy has traditionally been seen as a way of broadcasting one's culture, ideals, and achievements in hopes of winning goodwill abroad. Too frequently, this approach assumes that such outreach is merely a luxury for states that already enjoy stability and strength: a pleasant add-on. Why not add a little soft power just to get a few more tourists and a little more leverage in the United Nations?

But in speaking with the head of Kazakhstan's diplomatic academy, it became clear that he viewed public diplomacy not as a tool for advantage but as a means of survival. The lesson he drew from Ukraine in 2014 was stark: when a nation is unknown, terrible things can befall it. I responded that what he was describing was not soft power at all, but a form of "reputational security."

History offers many illustrations of this dynamic, from Poland's visibility in interwar Europe to Kosovo's Olympic triumphs and Ukraine's transformation between 2014 and 2022, moments when simply being known shaped the level of international concern and support a nation could command.

Reputational security is more than polishing a country's image. It requires reshaping the underlying reality. It demands not only projecting virtue but committing to policies that make a nation genuinely better. This insistence on aligning outward reputation with inward reform has long been central to my understanding of public diplomacy, yet it remains largely absent from the broader literature.



Robert Hernandez

CPD Faculty Fellow; Professor of Professional Practice of Journalism, USC Annenberg

At its core, public diplomacy is about helping people connect with a country, a culture and communities. The tools we teach at USC Annenberg—from 360-degree video, to volumetric capture, to gaussian splatting, to AR/VR—can allow that connection to happen in a deeply personal, immediate way, and I've been fortunate to guide students through those experiences around the world.

During the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, the Korea Foundation supported a trip for me, two students, and a CPD staff member. We set out to document historic towns, neighborhoods, and Olympic sites, producing immersive material that eventually appeared in outlets like *NPR*, *NBC*, and *USA Today*. The experience became a rare opportunity to engage simultaneously with sports diplomacy, tourism diplomacy, and the rapidly evolving craft of immersive storytelling.

A similar opportunity arose in Qatar. After a summer workshop, they asked whether I would bring students to Doha, and my answer was an enthusiastic yes, as long as we could frame the trip around tourism storytelling. They opened doors to museums and cultural sites, and, just before the World Cup, we captured a Club World Cup match and produced an immersive story about falconry and even an experience built around virtual portals that allowed audiences to step into Doha's spaces.

Whether we like it or not, technology keeps reshaping how stories are told. My message to public diplomacy practitioners is twofold: you will be uncomfortable, and that's part of the process; and you must stay proactive rather than reactive. These emerging tools will influence your work whether you prepare for them or not. Understanding them—how they might enhance your mission, help you serve communities, or strengthen engagement—is essential. Bring your values, your creativity, and your goals into these new spaces, and use the technology intentionally to advance the work you care about.

At its core, public diplomacy is about helping people connect with a country, a culture, a community.

THE OSAKA WORLD EXPO



Maelee Blancaflor

USC Master of Public Diplomacy Alumna

Directly after graduating from the Master of Public Diplomacy program in May 2025, I had the incredible opportunity to join a two-week Maymester at the 2025 World Expo in Osaka, Japan.

Over the course of the program, my colleagues and I met with Pavilion Commissioner Generals, Deputy Commissioner Generals, Pavilion Directors, and media teams. We visited an impressive range of pavilions including Canada, Japan, the United Nations, Czechia, Germany, Australia, the United States, Switzerland, France, South Korea, China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Nigeria, and many more. Each visit offered a new perspective on how countries design strategies to reach international audiences while also engaging the Japanese public, who made up about 90% of Expo visitors.

It was fascinating to see how pavilions had to balance audiences: Families visiting on weekends, delegations of government and business leaders, and influencers and journalists looking for meaningful stories.

Many officials spoke candidly about the challenge of sustaining media relevance. While local outlets could cover daily happenings, international media needed longer, more cohesive narratives. The question became, how do you craft a storyline arc that lasts six months, not just a single news cycle?

The design choices we observed reflected those pressures and priorities. Some countries focused on innovation and technology, others on cultural heritage or investment opportunities. Each pavilion blended policy, identity, and imagination into a space where narrative and architecture worked hand in hand.

Our time in Tokyo added another layer of learning. We met with public diplomacy counterparts at institutions like The Japan Foundation and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Global City Network for Sustainability. These conversations highlighted how subnational actors, like cities and cultural organizations, are becoming increasingly central to international engagement.

For me, the most exciting part is thinking about how to bring these insights home. Los Angeles will soon host two of the world's biggest mega events, the FIFA World Cup in 2026 and the Olympics and Paralympics in 2028. As a board member with Young Professionals in Foreign Policy Los Angeles, I am already thinking about how to apply what I learned in Osaka to help prepare for these moments.

Message from the Chair

This past year has been one of continued momentum for the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, as it reinforced its global leadership through pioneering research, transformative training, and dynamic events that address the mounting challenges facing public diplomacy in an era of rapid geopolitical and technological change.

We were delighted to welcome Julie Duhaut-Bedos as Interim Director. A career diplomat and former Consul General of France in Los Angeles, Julie brings to the Center a wealth of international experience and vision. She has already expanded partnerships, enriched programming, and strengthened the Center's global profile, bridging scholarship and practice with the insight of someone who has represented her nation on multiple continents. I also extend my deep gratitude to Glenn Osaki, whose steadfast leadership as Managing Director continues to ensure the Center's strength and stability while advancing its strategic vision across USC and the global public diplomacy community.



Barry A. Sanders
Advisory Board Chair

We pause this year, too, to honor the legacy of Professor Joe Nye, whose concept of soft power transformed the way the world understands influence. Joe was a titan of the public diplomacy world. He defined it. Yet he was also a man of humility and generosity, freely giving his time and wisdom to our Center.

Among the year's highlights, we were proud to recognize Francis Fukuyama with the Excellence in Public Diplomacy Award and Andrea Stanford with the Ameri Prize for Innovation in Public Diplomacy at USC's Capital Campus in Washington, D.C.—both exemplars of the creativity, intellect, and courage that define the field.

As our Summer Institute in Public Diplomacy celebrated its 20th anniversary, the Center reaffirmed its leadership as the world's premier hub for training, research, and dialogue, continuing to shape the future of global engagement for decades to come.

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CPD is grateful for the generous support of individuals, foundations and institutions committed to building the field of public diplomacy. We are pleased to acknowledge the following contributors over the past year.

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Thank you!

USC Center on Public Diplomacy

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