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USC Organization Awards 2 State Department Officers with Inaugural Innovation Prize

First Awardees of the Prize Recognized for Countering Disinformation in Poland

LOS ANGELES—Two U.S. Department of State diplomats have received the inaugural Public Diplomacy Innovation Prize from the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) at the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

The annual Prize was developed by CPD in collaboration with the State Department to recognize programs and practices that create innovative and scalable solutions to vital challenges in contemporary public diplomacy, a critical facet of foreign relations that aims to cultivate relationships with publics in other societies to advance policies and actions.

Gretchen M. Franke and Chad D. Houghton, both mid-career members of the U.S. Foreign Service, were selected by a distinguished committee of leaders in public diplomacy, technology, the arts and academia who identified the diplomats' exceptional innovation and creativity in implementing a public diplomacy program focusing on countering disinformation in Poland. The Prize attracted two dozen submissions representing work by U.S. public diplomacy officers.

Franke and Houghton demonstrated innovative use of data and technology to create a customized disinformation solution. The tool and approach can be adapted for any country's media market and policy issues for broader impact.

"Digital technology provides a key capacity for public diplomacy to grow and expand," said Dr. Jay Wang, CPD director. "Pursuing new approaches and daring experimentations is essential to advancing the practice. Through programs such as this Prize, we are very proud of playing a role in building the field of public diplomacy into a strong and sustainable aspect of international affairs."

In addition to a cash prize to recognize their work, Franke and Houghton will participate in a specialized residency program the week of Oct. 25, 2021 at USC, where they will engage with students, scholars and members of the broader community in the global city of Los Angeles.

The Public Diplomacy Innovation Prize is designed to promote public diplomacy as a critical tool for foreign policy and international relations within the U.S. Department of State and beyond. These innovations will not only demonstrate public diplomacy leadership on behalf of the United States, they will serve to further build the field at a moment when public diplomacy is needed more than ever. As the leading academic center dedicated to the study and practice of public diplomacy, CPD is well-positioned to promote and share these successes with a global audience of practitioners and scholars in the field.

ABOUT CPD

The mission of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD), founded in 2003, is to enrich the study and practice of public diplomacy in pursuit of a more peaceful and prosperous world. Through its research, convening and training, CPD serves as a gathering place for scholars and practitioners to exchange ideas, learn new skills and translate research into practice.