

Communicating Fulbright

On finding and encouraging Russians and Americans whose participation in each other's countries would fulfill the Fulbright dream.

The essential Fulbright vision is startlingly simple and compelling:

The purpose of this chapter is to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.

—Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961

Established in 1946, the Fulbright Program aims to increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries through the exchange of persons, knowledge and skills.

—www.fulbrightonline.org

The Fulbright Program has provided more than 279,000 participants with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research, to exchange ideas and to contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns.

—Fulbright-mtvU Fellowships (www.mtvu.com/uconnect/fulbright/about.jhtml)

Taglines found at us.fulbrightonline.org/home.html:

- **Fulbright—breaking the language barrier**
- **Fulbright—the power of exchange**
- **Fulbright—commitment and partnership**

Fostering leadership, learning and empathy between cultures was and remains the purpose of the international scholarship program.

—Senator J. William Fulbright (quoted at foreign.fulbrightonline.org/about.html)

The vision may be simple—and urgent—but the implementation is not. Worldwide, a variety of programs reach out to very different groups of potential participants; in turn, these candidates are recruited, evaluated, chosen, placed, and overseen by a complex network of implementers. Even the variety of Fulbright program descriptions sampled above demonstrates the marketing challenge: communicating a powerful vision coherently when the delivery mechanisms seem anything but coherent.

However, in relating to any given potential participant, we're not required to deliver the entire complex picture—at least, not all at once. We simply need to establish a broad enough channel of communication that we can mutually answer the following questions:

- Do we have a crucial minimum set of values in common with this candidate? (Have we successfully communicated the Fulbright vision, and does it resonate with him or her?)
- Can the candidate see a connection between the powerful social benefit of the Fulbright vision and their own desire to advance themselves and their field?
- Is there a match between the candidate's academic or professional interests and the Fulbright programs' (note plural!) resources?

We should evaluate each of our communication channels to see how well it can be made to serve this basic exchange. Can our Web site, for example, express the Fulbright vision so powerfully that audience members select themselves? Have we also translated the vision's broad social benefit to include legitimate personal benefits? And, once we have established a relationship with this audience member, have we provided a respectful, attractive pathway to the specific program that would suit them best?

To guide these evaluations, and to provide a basis for comparing results after making changes, we should also consider these outcome-oriented questions:

- Is our applicant pool what we'd like it to be? What groups are overrepresented, and what groups are missing? Do we need more research on the profiles of our "missing" applicants?
- What do our applicants report about going through our approval process? What do our successful candidates tell us; what can we find out about those who are not approved, who drop out, or who end up not making a full application? Again, do we need more research? (If so, do we at least know enough to make a start?)
- What are we learning from those who complete their placements and return home? Where are they on the range from five-star cultural ambassadors to hopeless boors, and how might the recruitment and application process have helped us anticipate these outcomes?
- What role do intermediaries (referring institutions, alumni mentors, third parties of any kind) play now?

The Fulbright family of programs represents over sixty years of solid accomplishment and a quarter million alumni, and is arguably one of the broadest-based and most successful ongoing expressions of American leaders' post-WWII idealism. Those hard-won ideals of "fostering leadership, learning and empathy between cultures" are under constant worldwide challenge from various flavors of xenophobia, making Fulbright's work more important than ever. It would not be surprising if the Fulbright institutions succumbed to the temptation that all institutions experience: to put self-description at the center of their communication. The temptation is to catalog and inventory their offerings, describe their history, list their achievements, and, in general, prove their credibility. In fact, all of these tasks are important, and some are required (perhaps by statute in some cases)—but none are the first step. That first step must be to establish the value link with the individual audience member.

We propose the following steps to analyze the Russian Fulbright office's external communications and make recommendations:

1. Needs assessment
 - a. revisit and review Fulbright recruiting practices, including attending the Washington, DC. orientation, interviewing grantees, and meeting with Ed Roslof and Andy Riess
 - b. recommend higher education marketing writer/editor to join team for next steps.
3. Short-term steps to establish value links
 - a. agree on recruiting goals and priorities (**recommendation:** for recruiting Russian participants, I suggest focusing on increased numbers of applicants to ensure desirable level of selectivity)
 - b. edit and align the Web site to make it more audience-centric, using present text wherever possible; consider carefully where Russian and English sites should be parallel and where exact parallels are not necessary (**recommendation:** as first step, rewrite opening pages with a values focus and a clear, simple call to action: *send pre-application!*)
 - c. design inquiry form (online version and paper version) to serve as a pre-application to anchor the developing relationship and help identify the specific program for the potential applicant
 - d. compose a suite of standard letters for routine contacts with inquirers, applicants, and nominees
 - e. review current poster series; recommend modifications if necessary; consider an additional wide-spectrum positioning poster
 - f. edit flagship brochure, align with Web site
 - g. write brochure for intermediaries
4. Long-term research and action to strengthen the Fulbright brand in Russia
 - a. assemble marketing team for Fulbright in Russia, with these capacities: writing, bilingual editing, design, research
 - b. research—separate for the two nations when necessary, but coordinated for both Russian and USA audiences
 - determine common statutory, regulatory, and diplomatic requirements
 - learn how audiences describe Fulbright (applicants and their non-applying peers; participants; alums; participants' home institutions; host institutions)
 - study the history and range of Fulbright program self-descriptions, tested against staff and participants' experiences
 - c. create new messages, separate but aligned for both Russian and American audiences
 - first principles: what *information* and what *values* must messages always include?
 - promise: what benefits can Fulbright programs *reliably* offer that reflect Fulbright's unique vision and values?
 - openings: what word, phrase, tagline can open the values conversation with the desired audience? (*Not* what words will deliver the entire inventory, but what opening message will ethically and respectfully attract the first three seconds, then the first thirty seconds of the audience's attention, while remaining consistent with the first principles and promise?)

- channels: what are strategically the most effective media for each audience? . . . and for each audience, what is the most suitable proportion of positioning messages (cultivating the community and building familiarity with Fulbright) and recruiting?
 - messages: for each channel, consider *context, audience, voice, experience*—all with the goal of crafting messages that are personal, engaging, relationship-building
 - design: what graphic elements can enhance the openings, express accessibility and hospitality, and build familiarity and warmth for the Fulbright identity in Russia?
- d. consult with wider Fulbright community to assess next steps in designing greater coherence or common access points and pathways throughout the Fulbright world.

Proposed services:

Needs assessment has been completed by Karen Fox, Fulbright alumna and professor of marketing at Santa Clara University.

Short-term steps, February-March 2008: Professor Karen Fox recommends Johan Maurer to serve as the writer/editor for the following tasks:

1. Identify top priority writing tasks and implementers (mutual, by correspondence and phone)
 - writing (Web opening pages; inquiry form ("pre-app"); poster modifications; suite of letters; brochure; intermediaries' brochure?)
 - design (especially posters and brochures)
 - Web implementation (integrating new content without unnecessary disruptions in short term)
- Issue purchase order (Ed Roslof and colleagues) *How soon could this be done?*
- Reply with suggested changes and memo of agreement (Johan, copying all to Karen) *within a week of above*
- Initial drafts in priority order, to Karen and Ed (Johan) ten to fifteen working days after concluding agreement
- Ongoing implementation per mutual agreement (timing depends in part on other collaborators, such as Russian translators and editors)

As writer/editor, Johan Maurer would continue to be available during implementation to be sure English and Russian versions are faithful equivalents, to help with modifications, and so on. He would continue to collaborate with Karen Fox, who remains available as an expert resource and consultant for this program.

Next steps. Professor Fox and Johan Maurer encourage the Fulbright program to develop a request for proposals and assist in identifying firms with the required capacities for branding Fulbright in Russia.

More about Johan Maurer: After seventeen years in national and international NGO management, Johan began working with a leading marketing company for educational institutions and nonprofits, Crane MetaMarketing Ltd. During his three full-time years with them, he worked with such clients as Calvin College, Houghton College, Pace University, the State Bars of Texas and Georgia, the Georgia Civil Justice Foundation, California Western School of Law, and three independent schools. He wrote marketing and positioning analyses for the clients' own internal use, as well as publications, ads, radio and video scripts, and web text for their external audiences.

Johan Maurer remains on call with Crane MetaMarketing Ltd., but in the fall of 2007 he and his wife began their long-anticipated move to Russia, where he serves on the faculty of the New Humanitarian Institute in Elektrostal, teaching conversational English and American studies.

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