US-Russia Peer-to-Peer Dialogue Program

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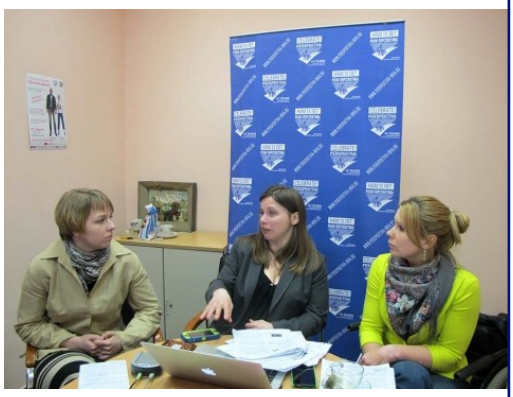
Newsletter, Issue 2

July 15, 2014

Congratulations to the finalists of the FY14 Peer-to-Peer Dialogue competition! We are pleased to support 28 additional partnerships under this year's competition. We will have a brief description of each partnership on our website shortly.

Training on Inclusive Education Takes Place in Moscow

Representatives of the Boston-based Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) traveled to Moscow in April for a week of training on inclusive education. The training program was co-organized by the Russian NGO Perspektiva, which promotes the rights of the disabled in Russia. During the week's training, three representatives of IHCD met with teachers, students, and parents at one of Moscow's only inclusive schools. The program also included a video conference on technology in inclusive education and a presentation at Moscow Pedagogical University.



One of the main goals of this project is to break down myths and counter negative preconceptions about including disabled children in groups with other children in school. The experts demonstrated during their visit how schools and communities in the U.S. have dealt with this issue over the years. This training was particularly timely after the recent passage of a Russian law requiring schools to adopt inclusive education policies. Russian schools need more information on how to adapt their infrastructure and curriculum to accommodate all students.

New Educational Program on Salmon Soon Launch in Far-Eastern Schools

Spring was a busy time for one of the leading Vladivostok-based environmental NGOs, the Phoenix Fund, and the Vladivostok Aquarium. Along with their U.S. counterparts, the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Wild Salmon Center, they organized and conducted a series of ecological events and activities that brought together more than 40 environmentalists, biology school teachers, and representatives of national parks and eco-centers from Primorye and the Far East of Russia. Seminars, video conferences and educational theater performances were all aimed at sharing positive experiences and success stories about the protection and sustainability of marine ecosystems (wild salmon, in particular) and developing joint educational initiatives to make the public more environmentally literate and accountable. One of the outcomes of this project will be the development of a specialized educational program on salmon for junior and high school students, as well as for visitors of national parks and reserves.

Iowa-Kazan Students' Exchange Challenges Biases

Students from Hawkeye Community College in Iowa, United States and Kazan Federal University have built a long-lasting relationship and gained a greater understanding of each other's countries as a result of the exchange project "Challenge Our Bias: Midwest-Russian Alliance on Dialogue & Education."

During their visit, Hawkeye students were interviewed on a TV talk show that is produced by the Faculty of Journalism at Kazan Federal University. "It was an eye-opening experience," commented one student. "This trip has changed my life," shared another impressed student during the talk show. The TV show was only one of many events scheduled by Russian students and faculty for the visit of American peers to the city of Kazan. The schedule was designed to familiarize Americans with various facets of Russian life. They had a chance to visit Kazan Federal University and the Museum of Soviet Lifestyle, go to the theatre, shop at a local market, visit a children's hospital, and see major historical sights of the city.

The program was oriented towards youth and was an excellent way for young Americans to get first-hand experience of Russian youth culture and way of life. In addition to scheduled visits, the young people spent a lot of time together. Russian students introduced them to how they spend free time in Russia. One of the events organized for Americans was *kvartirnik*, a gathering of students at somebody's apartment.

Prior to their visit, the Hawkeye students took a class on contemporary Russia and had basic knowledge about Russia, but what they learned and saw in Kazan was "beyond their expectations," said one student.

During this visit the Russian host students recalled their experience in the U.S., where they had been two months ago. Russian journalism students took part in a journalism-focused program while in Waterloo, Iowa. They visited a radio and TV station, the editorial office of the newspaper "The Courier," Hawkeye Community College, the Iowa House of Representatives, and more. Kazan students said that they did not expect that so many people in America would want to meet with and talk to them. The brightest memories they had were from a TV station, where they were allowed to watch how a news program is created. They said they were impressed by the fact that a local station could afford state-of-the-art technology and subscribe to news from such media giants as CNN. One of the Russian participants made an observation that in the U.S. the news is presented without emotions, only pure facts, while in Russia journalists rely heavily on emotions when covering events.

The project has served its goal to challenge respective stereotypes. The young people realized that all people essentially have similar aspirations and there are a lot of things to learn from each other.

American Experts in Green Building Travel Across Russia to Foster Cooperation with Russian Counterparts

In April, representatives from the Pittsburgh-based Green Building Alliance visited Russia for a five-city tour, reaching out to more than 700 Russian architects, designers, engineers and other green building trades and product manufacturers. Together with their Russian partners, the Green Development Forum and the Russian Green Building Council, the American guests conducted in-person seminars and informational sessions on green building practices and examples throughout the U.S. and the world. This was a reciprocal visit to build on the success of the Russian partners' visit to the U.S. in November-December 2013.

While in Moscow, the partners taught a class on green building standards and held a roundtable discussion sharing successes of the 20-year green building experience in the U.S. with participants at

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Russian NGO Experts Discuss NGO Development with their American Counterparts

On March 10-21, the Henry Jackson Foundation hosted a delegation of Russian NGO representatives in Seattle and Washington, D.C. In both cities the delegates were involved in discussions about the current state of the NGO sector in Russia and the U.S., focusing on challenges, opportunities and perspectives for further development. While learning more about best practices of U.S. NGOs in working with the government, media, and potential donors, the Russian NGO leaders were able to share their own experience, present ideas and answer questions from the American civic community. The delegation noted that the American NGO community was enthusiastic to meet with them, exchange information, and find common ground during a time fraught with tension in the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship.

A wide range of important themes emerged during the discussions, such as communicating with internal and external audiences, marketing and branding for nonprofits, fundraising and membership development, and creating effective networks. As a result of the meetings, participants willingly shared their impressions and agreed to take some of the ideas to implement back home. One participant commented: "When I return to Russia, I will make it a priority to share information with the network and initiate a new level of partnership to revitalize and strengthen our network." Another participant was struck by the intersection of the private sector and the NGO community: "I will return and focus more on fundraising, as I was impressed by what NGOs do here to get private donations."

As a follow-up of the March study tour, the Henry Jackson Foundation's senior representatives visited Moscow in late May to participate in a roundtable on NGO development in Russia along with their Russian partner, Agency for Social Information. The roundtable brought together more than 20 NGO experts from various fields and let the attendees analyze current trends in the NGO sector, share the most inspiring moments of their U.S. experience, and discuss the best practices that would work in Russia, based on Russian and American case studies.

American Experts in Green Building Travel Across Russia to Foster Cooperation with Russian Counterparts

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MosBuild, Russia's largest construction industry conference. In Kazan, they spoke to students at the Kazan State University of Architecture and Planning. In Nizhny Novgorod, they were involved in events organized by the Ministry of Environment, including a roundtable on investment projects implementation and environmental sustainability of newly built infrastructure. In Sochi, the delegation visited a number of indoor and outdoor 2014 Olympic Games venues, some of which received international recognition and certification for their green building strategies and practices.

This extensive five-city tour encouraged dialogue and the exchange of knowledge and experience in the financing, design, construction, operation and maintenance of healthy and high-performing places, resulting in the creation of direct personal relationships between U.S. and Russian citizens and companies.

The larger goal of this Peer-to-Peer project is to continue an active exchange of information on green building between the U.S. and Russia, resulting in a strong working relationship between the two countries long after the 12-month program is completed.

Professors of Foreign Languages Meet to Discuss Challenges of U.S.-Russian Intercultural Communication

Professors of foreign languages from John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio traveled to Volgograd to meet with their peers at Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, a leading institution in foreign language training in the South of Russia.

The visit was designed to give professors of foreign languages an opportunity to share best practices, ideas, and tools to help their students excel in foreign language acquisition.

This project aims to compensate for a lack of interaction with native speakers due to geographic distance and lack of resources to run study-abroad programs at both universities. Teachers of foreign languages know well that learning a foreign language is different from understanding the culture and relating well with people.

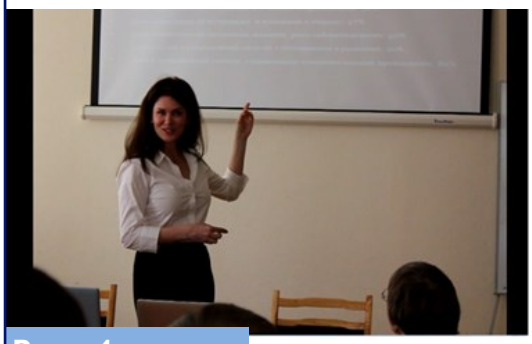
During the roundtable discussion professors from both John Carroll University and Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University shared their approaches to getting students to understand the culture and customs of people from another country through foreign language. American and Russian professors discussed how to enhance their students' classroom experience by means of multimedia, on-line resources and tools. They also talked about possible joint research projects.

In addition, the Russian faculty introduced their American colleagues to several language training and resource centers at the University. The American Studies Center, which was launched by a group of enthusiastic professors in 1993, offers various courses on U.S. History, Geography, Literature, Political System, and American English. During this visit, participants from John Carroll University met with students and alumni of the Open World program, attended a party for the graduates of the American Studies program and saw major sights of Volgograd such as the Mamayev Hill and Panoramic Museum of the "Stalingrad Battle."

The Russian faculty plans a return visit to Cleveland this fall.

American Specialists in Orphan Child Care Get Acquainted with the Russian System

On June 2-6, representatives from Duke University and other U.S. and international organizations dealing with issues of children's psychological well-being within institutional settings visited their Russian counterpart, the NGO Stellit of St. Petersburg, for a week-long study tour. The visit started with a successful seminar at the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences for academic researchers and specialists providing care for orphaned and separated children.



The partners shared information about findings from multi-country studies, anthropological research, and other sources as they relate to care provided in institutional, or group home settings.

The team also visited one of the largest orphan institutions in St. Petersburg, one that provides technical training for older youths. The delegation members met with the director and some of the young adults living at the institution, and had extensive discussions with the leader of a youth volunteer initiative. These meetings allowed them to gain additional knowledge on how the system of care for older youths works in Russia. "We were deeply impressed with the amount of resources that the Russian government is putting into caring for orphaned and separated children," said one attendee. "It was easy to see that great care was provided for the youths in the institution – you could see it in their eyes and in the pride with which they described their work."

U.S. and Russian Counterparts Discuss Balanced Ways of Addressing Placement of Radioactive Waste Sites

A roundtable with participation of the U.S. experts on "The role of regions and municipalities in decisions on atomic objects" took place in St. Petersburg in mid-March. The meeting focused on examples for regional-level decision-making related to decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

The purpose of the roundtable was to find an optimal balance between strategic government interests and the interests of local people and communities by means of proposing mechanisms for the inclusion of public opinion when deciding on the placement of nuclear and radiation hazardous sites. The American expert made two separate presentations on how decision-making is handled at the U.S. state level as it concerns decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

Roundtable participants included representatives of the state authorities of the Leningrad and Murmansk regions, local authorities of Sosnovy Bor, and representatives of non-governmental organizations from Chelyabinsk and Leningrad Oblasts. The roundtable resulted in the signing of a resolution that was addressed to the Russian federal and regional authorities, public associations, nonprofit organizations and all other parties involved in working on this important issue.

Tales of Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyan are Passed on to Russian Students in Rural Schools

American high school teachers visited Russian rural schools in Bryansk Oblast, where they shared American folklore stories and learned about Russian folk traditions. They had a unique opportunity to experience traditional Russian culture at a grass-roots level that is often inaccessible to casual tourists yet is crucial to a cultural understanding of a country and its people. School officials and students in every school were very excited to welcome and meet with the American teachers. The meetings were attended by students of all grades.

During their visit, American teachers gave presentations about American folklore and answered many questions about different aspects of American society, including American cuisine, holidays, school traditions, sports, etc. In return Russian teachers and students showed American guests how Russians celebrate Maslenitsa (Shrovetide) traditions.

This cultural exchange was a unique chance for American and Russian teachers to get together in an informal atmosphere and talk about everything that affects teachers in both countries. Russian teachers asked many questions about the school system in the U.S. American teachers presented flower and fruit seeds, which they brought from the U.S. and wished to be planted around the Russian school yards.

Besides visiting schools, American teachers met with ordinary villagers, who are traditionally closer to folk traditions, and recorded their traditional songs and stories. The American teachers plan to include them in their teaching curriculum back in the U.S. As educators, secondary school teachers are in a position to positively influence Russian-American relationships in the long term by facilitating greater mutual understanding of Russian and American culture among their respective students through exploring folk traditions.

Survey of Legal Obstacles to Innovation in Russia

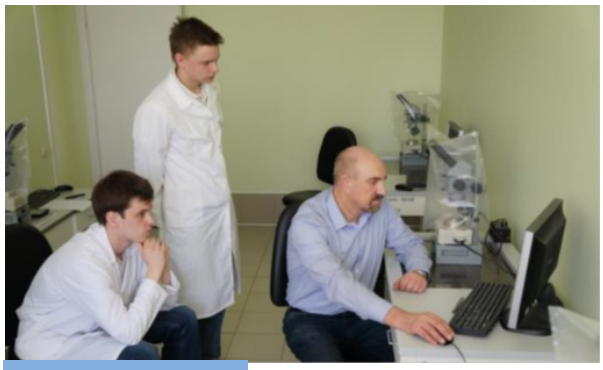
In January and February 2014, the Berkeley Center for Law, Business and the Economy (BCLBE) drafted a report that outlines key legal issues affecting innovation in Russia. To draft the report, BCLBE conducted independent research and relied upon comments obtained at a seminar held at the Open Innovations Forum (Moscow October 31, 2013).

In March, a team from the Higher School of Economics in Nizhny Novgorod (HSE) began interviewing a set of legal experts in Russia about the issues raised in the report and provided additional comments to BCLBE on the report's content. The finalized report will identify the legal issues that will be addressed in a survey to be conducted later this year with key enterprises and individuals identified by HSE and BCLBE. The partners are currently planning the questions and procedures that will be used in the survey.

BCLBE is identifying the types of questions that should be asked and HSE will review their work and provide comments. With those comments in hand, BCLBE will create a final survey questionnaire.

Engineering Students Get to Use Innovative Tools for Interactive Online Learning

Faculty from some of the leading engineering institutions in the U.S., including the University of Maryland at College Park, have been collaborating with faculty from two Russian universities, Moscow State Technical University of Radio-Engineering, Electronics and Automation (MIREA) and Yaroslavl State University (YSU) on the development of online modules for students using virtual X-ray equipment and interactive simulations. During a collaborative workshop at Yaroslavl State University, the students were exposed to virtual experiments for the very first time and were excited to learn about a wide range of ways an interactive virtual laboratory can be used, including lectures, distance learning courses, hands-on practice in combination with real experiments, and performance-based assessment. The students and faculty have also been having discussions through web conferences, which proved to be a very useful communication tool as it helped link participants from different sites, including the project coordinators in Massachusetts and Maryland and students from Yaroslavl, St. Petersburg, and MIT in Boston.



The overall goal of the project is to establish a collaborative network between participating institutions. This will enable effective and sustainable organizational partnerships and personal contacts between U.S. and Russian engineering faculty and students by sharing best practices at workshops and facilitating participant exchanges.

"CharmAlarm" Project Exchange in the U.S.

A Russian team from the NGO "Safe House" went to the U.S. as part of an exchange project with a similar American NGO called "FAIR Girls." The project is aimed at strengthening their capacities to fight human trafficking online. Project activities include adapting an American online resource, the "Charm Alarm" website on how to stay safe, into a culturally relevant resource for vulnerable Russian youth, and training Russian direct-service professionals on how to work with it.

During their stay in the U.S., the Russia team met with key local partners, including the Polaris Project and Metro Teen Aids, who work with youth and vulnerable populations. They also observed the U.S. staff teaching prevention education workshops at the Sasha Bruce youth homeless shelter. Both teams begin to develop innovative ideas on how to better reach at-risk youth through the CharmAlarm quiz. FAIR Girls also had their annual gala, Pearls of Purpose, where the Russia and U.S. team met with a number of service providers, diplomats, politicians, and policymakers to discuss the dynamic components of the CharmAlarm project.

Finalists of the Global Travel & Tourism Partnership Project Announced during the "Future You Conference"

Representatives of the Global Initiatives group travelled to Moscow to meet their project partners from Junior Achievement Russia and announce the finalists of their project competition, who will go to the U.S. to meet with their teammates with whom they have been virtually working for the last several months. This project was designed to stimulate communication and collaboration between U.S. and Russian students who are interested in careers in the travel and tourism industry.

Under the project, two schools in Moscow and two schools in Miami, Florida, USA, were paired up to communicate, interact and jointly develop small tourism-related businesses for their respective hometowns. The participants registered at the project website, developed their profiles and uploaded the description of their ideas. Through the project website they learned about other teams' ideas and activities, and found a partner from among registered teams in the other country. A jury composed of travel and industry professionals selected a winning team consisting of eight young people in each country, who would meet together in Moscow and Miami in the summer of 2014.