



## 2014 BASICS AWARD FOR INGENUITY AND RESULTS

Presented by the Partnership for Public Service and sponsored by Sheila C. Bair,  
former chairperson of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

**Winner:** FLEX Connect (interagency)

Alyce Abdalla (State), Eleni Anagnostiadis (FDA), Shannon Bennett (NTSB),  
Amy Christianson (State), David DeWitt (DHS), Paul Justice (Executive  
Office of the President), Blakeney Vasquez (State)

**Achievement:** Optimized the State Department's most valuable resource, its employees, by developing a platform to match managers and employees with short-term job assignments.

Filling short-term staffing needs and skill gaps is a major problem for most federal agencies, one that often leaves managers with nowhere to turn when a crisis develops or a project must be quickly completed.

An interagency team of seven federal employees participating in the Partnership for Public Service 2012-2013 *Excellence in Government Fellows (EIG)* program found a solution to this dilemma by developing an innovative online system to help the State Department rapidly respond to urgent, unexpected and temporary staffing challenges, and to make use of in-house expertise.

Utilizing their knowledge and diverse backgrounds, the team created an online platform called *Functional and Leadership Exchanges (FLEX Connect)* to match State Department employees with temporary rotational assignments. After first pitching the idea to senior leaders, including State's director general, the team worked with the e-Diplomacy IT office to build the website and create a virtual marketplace to facilitate matches.

The website allows managers to post available temporary job assignments and the necessary requirements, and is designed to empower employees and managers to find each other.

Almost as soon as it was built, the system was put to the test. In September 2013, several staff members at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo had been temporarily evacuated due to the unrest following the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood government. Using *FLEX Connect*, one embassy staffer was quickly assigned to a temporary position with the U.S. delegation at the United Nations that needed additional support.

"*FLEX Connect* created a more nimble State Department that is able to identify the right resources for emerging projects in a way that the department could not do before," said Kennerly Chapman, an *EIG* graduate and mentor to the *FLEX Connect* team.

More recently, as tensions between Russia and the Ukraine intensified, the workload of the Bureau of European Affairs sharply increased, and the bureau used *FLEX Connect* to quickly fill the critical need for another Ukrainian desk officer. Assignments also have been made for specific projects. For example, a civil society office received the help of an employee from a cultural affairs unit for two months to help develop a communications plan.

Beyond the benefit of filling short term surge capacity and expertise on specific projects, the system helps employees diversify their skills and provides a broader understanding of the Department as well as networking opportunities.

“The *FLEX Connect* project has received significant acknowledgement throughout the State Department and is widely-recognized as a great resource for staff,” said Raymond Limon, Director of Civil Service Human Resource Management at State.

After a successful 60-day pilot, the State Department formally institutionalized the program in February 2014. This effort has inspired other agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Food and Drug Administration, to develop similar versions of the program.

*FLEX Connect* has been recognized by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as an innovative staffing program, and OPM is working to build a similar program—*GovConnect*—to simplify interagency details and facilitate staff flexibility following a similar model.