



## Recommendations from Four Generations of Leaders

New administration transition periods provide an opportunity to reflect on what the new administration should understand as it moves forward on implementing the U.S. government's foreign assistance program. Thomas Adams' January *FSJ* article, "Foreign Assistance, Time to Sharpen a Vital Diplomatic Tool," was an excellent piece on this topic.

The USAID Alumni Association is also a great source of knowledge. UAA's 2016 Annual General Meeting, held in October at the Center for Global Development, featured a panel of previous USAID Administrators offering guidance to the new administration.

John Norris, of the Center for American Progress, moderated the panel of four: Peter McPherson (who served from 1981 to 1987 under President Ronald Reagan), Brian Atwood (1993-1999; Bill Clinton), Henrietta Holsman Fore (2007-2009; G.W. Bush) and Gayle Smith (2015-2017; Barack Obama). A detailed account of the discussion is available from the UAA website, [www.usaidalumni.org](http://www.usaidalumni.org).

A blog post from the Center for Global Development highlights four recommendations for the new administration and the next USAID Administrator from these experienced leaders.

### 1. Review congressional directives and presidential

**initiatives.** Gayle Smith discussed the need for the next administration to review existing directives and initiatives for consolidation or elimination before adding new ones.

A 2016 CGD policy brief, "The White House and the World: Practical Proposals on Global Development for the Next U.S. President" calls for a full review of the agency that accounts for presidential initiatives and a commissioned report on existing congressional directives. Old directives and initiatives can be constraints to fundamental reform and adaptation at USAID.

**2. Get USAID a seat at the policy table.** Several administrators asserted that USAID needs to have a seat at the policy table, perhaps by including the Administrator in the Cabinet, so the agency can communicate the development perspective to others.

Atwood stated: "If you don't have a voice at those tables, you're going to see your own development initiatives undercut."

Smith agreed, adding that other agencies are often eager for USAID's input because of its expertise in development.

The CGD proposes: (1) the next president should provide USAID with budgetary and policy primacy over areas in which the agency demonstrates efficacy and focus;

(2) the State Department's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources should be moved back under the USAID Administrator.

**3. Lead the interagency process without dominating.** Smith said: "It's leadership of all the various parts of government that have a role to play. That means working with other agencies and learning how to do that."

Fore highlighted USAID's expertise in bringing together partners for initiatives such as public-private partnerships.

USAID is also working to expand partnerships through its Local Solutions initiative and has increased the proportion of funds that flow through local partners.

CGD argues that working with other agencies is especially critical during the presidential transition.

**4. Spend as much time on the inside as the outside.** The next USAID Administrator needs to spend time and resources improving USAID's internal capacity, human resources, procurement, hiring and data management.

McPherson said getting the agency working well "should be a stated, up-front" priority. Smith, who initiated a strategy to transform human resources, added that the next Administrator needs to pick up the baton to ensure continuity on these issues.

CGD recommends that internal weaknesses at USAID must be addressed, especially hiring procedures. USAID should focus on hiring for specific skill sets and providing more funds for staff preparation and training.

Further suggestions by the panel included:

- Take time to understand how USAID projects work and the history of USAID's successes and failures.

- Listen to staff to benefit from their field experience and insights and to assess staffing needs.

- Focus on the balance between field missions and headquarters, decentralizing as much as possible.

- Develop a strong policy staff that links development objectives to broad U.S. foreign policy objectives.

- Improve information management to build on the knowledge base and to improve communications with field staff, partners and congressional staff and members.

USAID currently has bipartisan support in Congress, as reflected in the passage of legislation such as Power Africa and Feed the Future. USAID FSOs drive American foreign policy toward its objectives of global peace, stability and prosperity.

A responsibility as noble and monumental as this requires and deserves thorough discussion and support throughout the transition. ■