

USAID Alumni Association
 2019 Membership Survey Results
 Prepared by Sarah Clark

Participation rates in the UAA annual membership survey have fluctuated over the years. In spite of a more streamlined survey, participation rates were on the lower side, with 80 individuals, or 8% of the membership responding.

Year	# responses	% responding	% change, year over year
2014	124		
2015	45		-64%
2016	94		109%
2017	88		-6%
2018	134		52%
2019	80	8.0	-40%

As in past years, the survey was sent in January to all registered members (1,000) of UAA and was followed up once.

Demographic Characteristics: As in past surveys, half of the respondents were from the DC area and half were from outside.

Years since separation		
Number of Years	Number of Responses	% of total
Less than 5	18	22
5 to 10	12	15
10 to 15	18	22
15 to 20	10	12.5
Over 20	22	27.5
Total	80	100 per cent

For the first time, the survey included a question about long since the responder had been retired or separated from USAID: twelve respondents or 15% were retired within the last five years; 18 or 22% for more than 5 years but less than 10 years; ten respondents (12.5%) between 10-15 years; and the largest segment 22 or 27.5% for over 20 years.

The emphasis on this year's survey was on outreach to members including by newsletter and website. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the newsletter and either said so or offered no suggestions for improvement. There were 33 substantive comments from 25 different respondents.

UAA newsletter: Overall, respondents wanted to continue the current topics of the newsletter. Among those who suggested enhancements to the newsletter, the responses clustered around two topics: current news about USAID and more news about USAID alumni. By far the largest number of topics -- nine of the 33 substantive comments -- were about USAID. These include requests for more information on the status of reform efforts, the status of legislation and funding, policies, leadership, and procedures. There was one mention of the ever-popular but not available report on current assignments of USAID officers. To use their own words, we want more info on policies and procedures "under the current President" or "in these difficult times." Along a similar line, one respondent requested updates on general international development trends.

Respondents also indicated a lively interest in their fellow retirees, in their codified responses as well as their comments. For example, several responders included requests for the newsletter to share more information about life after USAID to include both those who continue to contribute internationally and to their communities as well as those who are just enjoying retirement. Suggestions included requests for more photos and short vignettes on more retirees; whether retirees are working, and how they are adjusting to retirement. There was only one exception to this, as one person offered the suggestion to drop alumni profiles, but this was an outlier. Suggestions are also to share more information about job possibilities and general lifecycle issues. One person suggested identifying and profiling the oldest USAID retiree.

UAA Website: The responses and comments on the UAA website echo the comments on the newsletter. The vast majority of the respondents value and support the website as is, but note that it should be flexible and adjust over time. This verbatim comment sums it up: “I can think of nothing to add since the UAA website is very well done with all this information for alumni to enjoy.” For those who offered suggestions as to what to include, the majority centered on professional news about USAID: policies and procedures, major legislation and staff and leadership rosters. Two respondents specifically requested that the website include a mechanism for linking alumni together, so they can identify other alumni in the region where they reside. There were three unique suggestions: include a tab on public outreach, include more on oral histories, and a tab linking UAA website to USAID’s temporary rehiring mechanisms such as the “surge list,” the “firehouse response,” and USPSC openings.

UAA Events: Half of the respondents had attended a UAA event in person. That number corresponds precisely to the number of alumni who reported that they live in the DMV region. Fifteen people had ever listened to the recorded events on the website, but others reported that they hadn’t been aware of that function and urged that it be continued. The majority of the “out of DC area” respondents reported that they would or might attend a local event for USAID alumni. Only two reported that they probably would not. There were several creative ideas of what type of events, including programs at local universities, socials, pot-lucks, speakers. The biggest obstacle seems to be linking alumni together in the other sites outside the DMV area. Respondents reported from southern MD, Bloomington ID, SeaTac WA, Austin TX, Detroit MI, northern and southern CA, and Botswana.

Participation in UAA Public Outreach: As in previous years, respondents were asked if they would be willing to speak on behalf of USAID or represent it regardless of where they live. Slightly less than half, or 47.5%, of the respondents to that question said they would be willing to speak on behalf of USAID, while a little more than half (52%) said they were not interested. This was the same level of participation as in 2017 and higher than the 40% recorded in 2018. Thirty-three of the 38 willing to speak on behalf of USAID (87%) are willing to take the training from LPA, virtually the same as 2018 rate of 88%. It is not clear what the next steps are for these interested people.

Participation in Mentoring Program: Of those who responded to that question, less than half were willing to mentor new USAID employees. This is a higher rate than the 39% of those who answered this question positively in 2018. However, in 2017, 54% indicated that they were interested in mentoring. Only seven respondents did not reply to this question.

Payne Mentoring Program: For the first time, respondents were queried as to their interest in participating specifically in the Payne Fellows mentoring program. Only 17 respondents (21%) were interested in participating, while more than two-thirds were not interested. Twelve percent did not answer this question.

Participation in UAA Activities: As in prior years, the remainder of the questionnaire focused on the willingness of respondents to get involved or more involved in UAA activities. Also, as in prior years, the names of volunteers were reported to specific committee chairs for follow up. Those who responded to the questionnaire want to be engaged in the following ways. Twenty-two percent* of the respondents to this question, or 18 alumni, volunteered to help with the next Annual General Meeting, and eight, or 7.5%, volunteered to be considered for nomination to the UAA Board. With respect to UAA's Strategic Goals, six new respondents (19.2%) volunteered for the Membership committee for Goal 1. Thirteen volunteered for Goal 2. Goals 3-5 each attracted 22% of the respondents and the Finance committee attracted 4 volunteers for 5% of the total.

What else should the UAA do? The open-ended question about what else the UAA should be doing elicited a wide variety of responses from 28 people. Many of these listed more than one comment. The discussion below is based on responses, not responders! The most common response was from six persons who claimed that they are happy the way it is and do not have any further suggestions. There was one dissension: "I am not sure why the organization is needed." But that was the only negative response.

Four people digressed on their own personal situation as a way of explaining why they were not more involved; and two separate people commented that they wanted more ways to get together socially and in networks where they live. One respondent asked that more information be shared on what people do after their

*Since the number of respondents was different for each question, the base of the calculation of the percentage also differs.

retirement, especially wanting to know how many people stayed connected to USAID as PSCs or with participating agencies and how they ended up doing that. There is a minority who want to stay more professionally connected to USAID: they suggested several ways to do so. For example, sharing more info on development projects, or sharing more forward-looking development thinking. Another idea was to introduce a “Retired Mission Director” forum, although it was not clear if this should be through the newsletter or AGM. Others suggested activities that fall under Goals 1 or 2: including more FSNs and their experience or more on connection with USAID.

In suggestions that were further afield, one suggested that Goal 5 or outreach could be broadened to use UAA members to carry out general civic education and the role of government. Another suggested that UAA should partner with academic institutions to develop or to contribute to course materials and curricula on development.

Attracting New Members: In the final group of questions, UAA members were asked to suggest ways to attract new members to the association. In this open-ended question, 32 responded with 48 separate suggestions. Some of these suggestions had been given in response to earlier questions, so we focus here on unique suggestions. Some mentioned below are not easily implemented if feasible at all.

Seven members note the importance of informal and personal networking of the current membership including connections to continuing USAID employees, and contact member’s “rolodexes.” Three suggested the importance of early outreach to employees, those who are not retired yet. For example, one respondent suggested reaching out to speak at USAID events and another, to forward UAA newsletter and activity schedule of events available to U.S.-based employees, and sharing alumni life events. A similar number (3) concluded that people are not joining because they do not know about UAA, its story and its benefits for members (but there were no specific suggestions about how to publicize them better).

Four suggestions clustered around the retirement seminar including strengthening the inclusion of UAA in retirement seminar and urging more participation by UAA in the retirement seminar. Two suggested differentiating

the benefits to each of the three groups: retired FSOs, retired civil servants, and retired FSNs or for those moving into new jobs versus those fully retired development professionals. As a prelude to that breakdown, another respondent suggested that the membership be compared to the baseline of those available for membership in UAA by sub-group. Another suggested direct outreach of FSNs about what they would like in the organization and why they have not joined; one means to do this might be to involve non-member FSNs and others in a visioning exercise for the organization to get their input.

In a more general suggestion, the UAA was requested to share more onward employment opportunities. And, another suggested that the mentoring program be promoted more by sharing stories from mentors and mentees, and perhaps asking USAID for funding for UAA for the mentoring program.

Another shared his or her personal advice for staying relevant: stay in the DC area and attend available foreign policy and development forums; read the Washington Post or NY Times and discuss issues with former colleagues; and keep in touch with current and former colleagues, including FSNs and TCNs. In a debatable assertion, this responder listed possible benefits accruing to this approach as keeping mental acuity and not fading away, and perhaps even greater longevity compared to those who retire in the hinterlands.