



USAID Alumni Association Annual General Meeting

REPORT ON THE USAID ALUMNI ASSOCIATION 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The USAID Alumni Association (UAA) Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on October 11, 2024, with both in-person attendance and via Zoom Webinar. Members attending in-person enjoyed seeing friends and former colleagues. Those not able to do so appreciated the virtual connection that enabled UAA members across the United States and in other countries to participate. This report summarizes the presentations and discussions conducted during the meeting. Portions of the AGM were recorded and can be viewed by clicking [here](#). The session with Administrator Power was not recorded at her request.

The overall theme of the meeting was the nexus between humanitarian and development assistance. The following were the meeting's principal agenda items:

- Opening remarks by USAID Administrator Samanta Power, followed by an extended period for questions and answers.
- Observations on humanitarian and development assistance by former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios.
- Two panel discussions on the meeting's theme, first the perspective from Washington based senior staff, and then the view from the Ethiopia field Mission.
- UAA Alumni of the Year awards for international and domestic service.
- Results of the UAA Board elections by UAA Co-chairs Ken Yamashita and Roberta Mahoney.

As has now become tradition, the AGM was held at the Center for Global Development (CGD) in Washington, DC. The UAA's members were welcomed by Mark Plant, CGD's Chief Operating Officer. He highlighted the close working relationship between CGD and UAA and the interaction between UAA members and CGD staff. He congratulated USAID Administrator Power in his welcoming remarks for her leadership, giving as an example her emphasis in addressing the lingering issue of reduced mental capacity of millions of children due to lead poisoning in developing countries.

The following will summarize what transpired during the meeting.

Administrator Power's opening remarks and response to UAA member questions



Administrator Power

The Administrator's keynote address provided her insights on the complexity of interlocking crises faced by the development and humanitarian community. She began by acknowledging the wise counsel that she has received over the years, from people like current UAA members Ken Yamashita and Chris Milligan. She also expressed her concern and condolences for those affected by Hurricane Helene, including many UAA retirees living in Florida and North Carolina. "What we are seeing now in our work is the impact of crises that fall on the heels of chronic crises, ones that have not been addressed. Those that can least afford it are the most affected, and there is a need to enhance economic progress to advance human dignity."

However, resources are not keeping up with the needs. She noted that as we defend our requests, we need to speak in terms of investments and think differently about what we are doing and how we achieve outcomes. From this has emerged the concept and ethos of Progress Beyond Programs. She commented that change is not a luxury; USAID must be a catalyst. The Agency's development investments, working with the private sector and creating partnerships, is one aspect, but the change USAID and its staff have embraced is utilizing their skills and diverse experiences better. USAID is now more diverse in its staffing; this year saw the most diverse class ever. This is in part attributed to the inclusion of Payne Fellows, but the Administrator also pointed to the conversion of many former contractors to Foreign Service Officers, and the addition of 900 civil service positions. She also acknowledged USAID's "superpower," which is its FSN staff.

All of this brings diversity to programming and implementation. She said streamlining the work process has also been a priority. They are working to reduce hurdles and burdensome processes, not only for USAID staff but also for those who would partner with USAID. In doing this, they are looking at workflows through a cost effectiveness lens and emphasizing knowledge and learning internally. They have created the EDGE Fund to attract and really partner with the private sector. Finally, USAID is acknowledging emerging issues and being catalytic within the international community. For example, it is championing the issue of lead poisoning and leveraging multi donor support. In their work, she said, they recognize the need for strong "Development Diplomacy," and she asked that UAA's members be a part of that and "talk up the Agency".

Questions and Answers:

What has surprised you?

A lot! First, the great overlap with the UN and UNHCR. Second, the huge amount of earmarking; she was briefed that it was 80 percent, but it is more like 93 percent. We have sought deviation authority in a world of scarce resources, but it is an uphill battle. However, I have also learned that in some ways earmarks protect us, protecting key program funding from being diverted to other USG agencies. We have actually created new earmarks for issues we consider critical.

Last, how little a share of our budget goes to local partners including local governments – 5.6 percent to local governments has increased to 10 percent. I have also been surprised by how hard our staff will work to help local organizations in these partnerships.

How does the Administrator see the direction of “development infrastructure”? How are we making our partnerships “thicker”?

We have advocated for reforms in the IFIs to make them more fit for purpose. We have seen some progress, such as the IDA replenishment. There is a real need for large investments in climate change infrastructure that these partners can do, and we are pushing for them to evolve in that direction. As for the UN, we will probably never see real Security Council reform. The US supports 2 African seats, a small island state, India, Germany and Japan membership but with all the competing interests this is unlikely. The veto of original members will remain – I’d never give that up. The G20 will more likely take up critical issues. UN differences may impede progress, but several parts are essential, and we share close agendas with them, such as the WHO and UNHCR.

What is USAID’s role in the Sahel?

It is not just a matter of coups; it is the level of military involvement in local entities with which we traditionally work that makes our work difficult and dangerous. They are present in most of the areas we work in. We will continue to do as much as we can for as long as we can.

How is USAID publicizing climate change?

Climate change is affecting everything USAID does. But it is often hard to find funding, since many in Congress deny that climate change exists. Hopefully, the impacts that we are seeing nationally may change Congressional thinking on the issue and provide additional space.

Given their investments, are we ceding space to China and Russia and how do we reverse that trend?

China’s portfolio is 9:1 loan to grant, ours is the reverse. We continue to impress this on our partners, but their needs are great. A bright spot is that the Development Finance Corporation is now showing up and growing its portfolio. Many countries have buyers’ remorse as they experience debt distress and rising anger in their countries. But it is hard to counter. Congress cuts budgets and yells about China, and we are not very good at telling our story. The Global

Infrastructure Investment program is not to the scale of China, but it may provide countries some fiscal space.

How are you measuring short-term and systemic results?

Knowing what the USAID budget will be, with repeated continuing resolutions, is now incredibly short term. We can never expect a long-term budget, so we must create stability through partnerships and leverage, by using private sector partnerships, government to government programming, and strengthening coordination with international organizations.

How have you managed dissent on West Bank/Gaza?

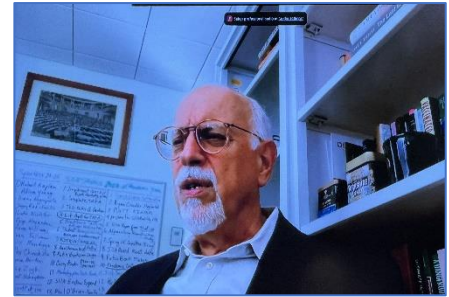
This is the hardest issue I've had to deal with. We are asking for all the right things for WBG but are not getting them. I would worry if I wasn't getting asked about this situation. We are focused on protecting humans and human rights and constantly asking ourselves, "What can we do today?" We will continue advocating for the right things, against a backdrop of frustration.



USAID Administrator Power with UAA Members at 2024 AGM

Observations on USAID’s Humanitarian/Development Assistance Nexus by former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios

Andrew Natsios, former USAID Administrator and former head of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance and Food Aid, shared observations on the evolution of USAID’s humanitarian assistance response system. He noted that Alex de Waal’s 2017 book Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine credits the decrease in famines beginning in the 1980s in part to the disaster response system developed by USAID. Most famines now result from civil wars. Under Natsios’s leadership the USAID OFDA borrowing authority increased from \$50 million in 1989 to \$250 million 3 years later. It is now \$9.8 billion, and USAID is now considered the premier disaster assistance agency in the world. Staffing has increased from 45 when he established OFDA to some 1000 currently. Prior to the recent upsurge in complex humanitarian emergencies resulting from war and political upheaval, most famine deaths were due to civil war, earthquakes, and other natural disasters.



Former Administrator Natsios

The OFDA response system deploys Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART teams) that conduct assessments, deliver relief supplies, provide technical assistance and more. This model and its name have been adopted by other donor organizations, including the EU and Japan. Other enduring components of the response system includes the existence of three regional warehouses for procurement of relief supplies, a field officers’ guide for teams to reference, creation of Response Management Teams in Washington, and special spending authority. Subsequent developments included the initiation of local food purchasing and provision of vouchers and cash distribution, as well as distribution of drought resistant seeds to aid the transition from relief to development, with an emphasis on building resilience into programs. Other subsequent developments include the establishment of The Office of Transition Initiatives, the Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation, and the Humanitarian Information Unit.

Natsios expressed concern about the risk for broader expansion of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as the potential for conflict in Asia, and a collapse of the international systems established after the second World War.

Panel on Humanitarian Aid/Development Assistance nexus – view from Washington



Julien Schopp

Marchia Wong

Chris Milligan

Anita Menghetti

Philip Gary

Moderator Chris Milligan introduced the sessions' theme, noting that the future is being defined by increasing conflict, more contested spaces, and significant humanitarian aid and peacebuilding needs. At a time when development progress has plateaued, this creates a greater need for coordination between development, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. Yet, there are significant challenges that keep these interventions as distinct siloed efforts.

He then asked Marcia Wong, DAA of the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, what has been the impact of the dramatic increase in workload on the Agency? Has an increasing focus on emergency issues impacted BHA's ability to work with other Bureaus on resilience and sustainability? She noted, in terms of context, that in 2024 a total of 152 million people needed assistance and another 120 million will be added to those numbers by the end of the decade. Of those, 103 million needed food assistance.

At UNGA, Germany, the second largest provider of humanitarian assistance, announced it will have a 50% reduction in humanitarian assistance from the level they have been providing. Globally, needs far exceed resources.

Development assistance efforts can help reduce the need for humanitarian assistance and is therefore directly connected. While we have made progress in coordinating between humanitarian assistance and development, there is still progress that needs to be made.

Peace-building programs are most important as a foundation for all others, given the impact of conflict on the need for HA and development progress.

Chris Milligan then turned to Anita Menghetti, Senior Policy Advisor, USAID Office of Policy, who has been overseeing efforts on USAID's first policy on the humanitarian, peace, development (HDP) nexus, which is still in early stages. He asked her, "Where are we on the policy? How should this policy intersect with the Global Fragility Act?"

Anita responded that work on the new Humanitarian -Development -Peace (HDP) policy will begin in October. The discussion about the nexus between DA and HA is old and continuing. Actually, HDP should be PHD as Peace should come first. Eighty percent of the population affected by humanitarian crises are due to conflict. Peace leads to development. Crisis situations keep increasing while the DA budget is flatlined.

In January the task team will begin sorting out the policy document in terms of how HDP can become the “DNA” of the agency. How do we look at it? How do we make the linkages real? It takes time to address both issues of humanitarian and development assistance, especially incorporating peace.

Localization will be very helpful in addressing the nexus of these complementary programs, as well as counting government to government assistance. HDP is a core concept in the Fragility Act.

Chris next commented to Julien Schopp, Vice President for the Humanitarian Team at InterAction, that the international humanitarian system has tended to operate apart from the development system. How is the international community grappling with coordination and building synergies between humanitarian assistance, peace building and development?

Julien responded that humanitarian assistance cannot solve underlying political problems, and these must be solved to allow shift from HA to DA. He also noted that humanitarian assistance tends to be horizontal and development assistance vertical. The international humanitarian assistance system is very coordinated and inclusive--maybe even too coordinated given how much time is spent on it. Bilateral development assistance tends to be structured vertically— from donor to host country government. The World Bank is now taking humanitarian needs into consideration. USAID is in a unique situation as it has all the actors under one roof. Other donors need more unified structures.

Chris then commented to Philip Gary, Retired USAID Senior Foreign Service Officer, that humanitarian assistance does not address the underlying causes of conflict, which can be political in nature and require close interagency coordination. What can be done to improve interagency coordination and to better address the root causes of conflict and return countries to a more developmental path?

Philip responded that improving inter-agency coordination is a challenge. USAID staff are organized in silos, and that needs to change. In interagency confabs, not all partners are equal and often not on the same page. Need dedicated inter-agency team for these crises. He then commented that HA strategy teams need a dedicated foreign service press corps to counter outside stories and press coverage that distracts partners from their tasks. He also noted that DOD is good partner with a long history going back to Vietnam war days. Sending in special Ambassadors to coordinate is not helpful. DOD team authorities are based on military rank which helps. USAID needs a more organized system.

Audience questions:

*What should be the objective of coordination? Is that clearly spelled out?
Is it possible to completely reorganize USAID's structure to eliminate silos?
Is there a danger of "militarizing" HA responses?*

Answers:

Humanitarian responses need to be government-led, but NGOs must be included, which requires coordination. There have been many efforts to eliminate the silo structure of USAID, but this has had little impact. It may not be critical to effective response to HA and DA coordination. Militarization may not help, and sometimes DOD involvement undermines efforts, so there are dangers.

Audience questions/comments:

*Why have past efforts to bridge the development to humanitarian gap failed?
In the Rwanda situation, the gov't insisted that the communities be consulted about their needs. Localization has been the least successful for BHA. How can they build local capacity?
Why aren't HA efforts built into DA programs?*

Answers:

Currently the norms of humanitarian assistance are under siege. Unfortunately, there is no repository of "best practices" in BHA. Also, FS officers are not rewarded for things that cannot be counted or are difficult to count, like capacity building. That system needs to be changed. There are many myths about how to program in HA. A myth-busting website that includes what does work is needed. Joint training of DA and HA staff would help, as is done in the UNDP.

Final thoughts:

"Localization beyond programs" is needed. Capacity development should also include working with local policy think tanks on HA issues. Respect for humanitarian law is a crumbling value and that must change.

Panel on Humanitarian Aid/Development Assistance nexus – view from Ethiopia



Abby Maxman

Mia Beers

Tom Staal

Dubale

Scott Hocklander

Tom Staal moderated the session. Panel members were Scott Hocklander, USAID/Ethiopia Mission Director (virtual participation); Dubale Admasu, USAID/Ethiopia Resilience Coordinator; Mia Beers, AID/W Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Resilience, Environment, and Food Security; and Abby Maxman, President and CEO of Oxfam America. The discussion was wide-ranging but focused on several key issues: the need for collaboration and common understanding of problems, the need for greater understanding of what works, the need for more flexible funding, the need to strengthen local capacity, and the need to address the current culture of impunity and lack of respect for international humanitarian law.

Tom Staal began the session by noting that resilience has become an increasingly common theme and objective for USAID. He reminded participants how, in designing agricultural projects, we often in the past added the assumption that there would be "no droughts." By the time he returned to Ethiopia as USAID Mission Director in 2009, USAID had developed a new strategic approach that managed drought. One important step was the Productive Safety Net program that integrated response to shocks with capacity building to manage them. While periodic droughts have hit Ethiopia over the years -- and there have been food security issues -- there has not been famine in Ethiopia since 1985.

Mr. Staal then asked the panelists to identify factors that have contributed to successful resilience programs. Scott Hocklander spoke about the importance of culture, including the need for collaboration, not only within USAID but with all partners. However, such collaboration can happen only if there is a common understanding of the problem and the need to tailor responses to individual contexts. The USG can play an important role, bringing together donors, the private sector, and local groups to achieve this common understanding. This includes recognizing the unique strengths of all partners, thus enabling everyone to work where their efforts can be most effective. Dubale Admasu highlighted the learning process used in designing the Productive Safety Net program. It began in the lowlands with a focus on asset-building; over time, with lessons learned, it was adapted to work in the highlands. This includes co-creation with local organizations, local governments, and INGOs on the ground. Activities have been at the broader systems level (e.g., on markets) and at local levels most at risk of conflict. He also cited the importance of flexible funding, citing their use of Feed the Future funds for water activities. Lastly, he spoke about the importance of data and independent evaluations to assess

what is working or not working. Such analysis enables more targeted investments. Abby Maxman, before becoming CEO of Oxfam America, had worked for a USAID implementing partner in Ethiopia. She credited the Productive Safety Net program as being groundbreaking and applauded USAID's outreach to other donors and partners, thus changing global perspectives. She emphasized the importance of localization and building the capacity of local organizations to do humanitarian work.

In response to the moderator's question about bureaucratic constraints at the field level, Mia Maxman spoke about changes in USAID's newly issued Resilience Policy (June 2024). Unlike the previous policy that focused on food and agriculture, the new policy looks more systematically at the country and communities. It thus builds more explicitly on USAID's development work. The new "Humanitarian-Development-Peace" (HDP) focus is critically important. USAID is currently promoting greater flexibility and innovation in the use of funds to improve resilience. Major efforts are being made to counter the "we can't do that" mentality, thus making it easier to apply "crisis modifiers" and adjust programs to shocks. Scott Hocklander built on this by again emphasizing the importance of culture. Besides working on development programs in his career, he personally had experience working with OFDA, OTI, and Food for Peace. He encourages USAID to do more cross training across these skill areas, including in missions. He also recommends that humanitarian relief staff be brought into the USAID mission's strategic planning process, as this is the best way to ensure common understanding of problems. He applauded the effort to seek more flexibility in funding, but urged that much more needs to be done, including breaking down myths on how funds can be used. Abby Maxman acknowledged the challenges with funding, that it is still too difficult to try new things and to invest in local capacity. She noted the importance of USAID leadership and influence on other donors, e.g., in USAID's use of multi-year commitments that is essential to achieving results. She lastly noted again the importance of localization, that not using local organizations undermines their confidence and long-term ability to lead relief efforts.

During the Q and A session, questions were raised about the impact of INGOs on local capacity; about cultural constraints; about the use of delegated authorities; and about international humanitarian law. In responding, panelists highlighted the impact of evaluations being done in Ethiopia, that these are being used to move programs to the more difficult highland areas and to guide co-creation efforts with local organizations and local governments. On the cultural front, the challenge is to bring together the sense of urgency and operational teamwork of OFDA; the on-the-ground problem solving orientation of OTI; the logistical skills of FFP, and the longer-term development vision of the non-BHA staff.

The importance of local leadership was highlighted, especially if one recognizes that 95% of the staff working on emergencies are from the countries in question. This suggests there should be much more consideration of HR concerns across the spectrum of international and local organizations. Regarding the need for flexible funding and/or more creative use of existing funds, Mia Beers noted that USAID is working with procurement and legal experts on a "myth busting" initiative to clarify what can and cannot be done. Panelists noted that the erosion of international humanitarian law is not limited to the issues in Gaza that we see on TV screens; it

is much broader, and the climate of impunity is threatening norms. Reform of the post WW II international architecture is needed. In response to a question about lessons learned from his earlier experience in crisis countries, Scott Hocklander noted that everything today is more difficult, complex, and political. He argued that many missions need to give greater priority to conflict and peace building throughout their programs -- that every activity should be viewed through this prism. This will require pushing people and systems. He also noted the need for greater attention to mental health challenges within USAID, as well as with implementing partners and local populations.

UAA Alumni of the Year Awards

Bette Cook, chair of the UAA Awards Committee, managed and hosted the annual Alumni of the Year Awards, as she has done in past years. This has been an annual UAA event since its inception in 2014. It recognizes and celebrates USAID Alumni who choose new paths to provide services to their communities and make lasting contributions to others, both at home and abroad, after they retire from their successful careers with USAID. Since 2014, this award has honored twenty-one outstanding alumni.

Before announcing this year's winners, Bette thanked the Awards Committee members who devoted their time and deliberation to this rewarding task. Bette also appreciated those who made the effort to nominate accomplished UAA members for these awards and for their strong justifications for excellent nominees. She encouraged all UAA members to consider submitting nominations for the 2025 Alumni of the Year Awards for UAA alumni, former colleagues and friends, who have made special or exceptional contributions.

The UAA Alumni of the Year awards for 2024 went to Gul Afghan Saleh and, posthumously, to Frank J. Young. Frank Young passed away last month. His daughter, Andrea, accepted her father's award on his behalf.

Dr. Gul Afghan Saleh



Dr. Gul Saleh

Dr Saleh is recognized not only for his courageous service as a Senior Engineering Foreign Service National to USAID Afghanistan, as one of its first FSNs following the dispersal of the Taliban after 9/11, but also his steadfast continued professional engineering contributions in the United States and his dedicated voluntary services since his arrival in the USA in 2014.

Dr. Saleh has over 35 years of professional experience in engineering, and has worked or studied in many countries, including Japan, Egypt, Thailand, India, Germany, Pakistan, and many more. His impressive experience included working directly with USAID for eleven years; the United Nations World Food Program and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for five years; The Afghan NGO Pamir Reconstruction Bureau for another five years;

The Afghan government for ten years; and The United Nations Institute for Training and Research, or UNITAR. During these decades, he worked and was consulted on countless engineering and environmental projects, including much philanthropic work and humanitarian aid.

In the United States, he adjusted to life in the Northern Virginia area with his family, helping his seven children continue their higher education, and successfully found work as a quality control professional engineer for an international construction management corporation. Dr. Saleh pursued and recently received his U.S. Professional Engineer license. He continues his philanthropic and volunteer work. His volunteer activities include serving as a member, founder or board director of several professional and voluntary organizations.

In the Fall of 2021, when USAID asked the UAA to help the large group of Afghanistan FSN evacuees with their job searches here in America, Dr. Saleh volunteered and assisted 50 UAA alumni in providing this support.

After accepting the award, Gul thanked the UAA members for his nomination and the continuous support of USAID's colleagues during his move to the US. Gul's family were present to celebrate his achievements

Frank J. Young

Frank is known personally to many of UAA alumni who are greatly saddened by his passing. Bette, on behalf of UAA members, expressed deepest condolences to the family for their recent loss.

Frank's career included serving with USAID missions in the Philippines, India, Bangladesh as Deputy Mission Director, and Ghana as Mission Director. He advanced to several senior positions within USAID including as Acting Administrator for Asia, before returning to Thailand and India as Acting USAID Director.

Following a distinguished career with USAID, upon retirement in 2016, Frank turned his full attention to skillfully promoting the welfare of development professionals, the USAID officers, and the Foreign Service. Frank's accomplishments following "retirement" were simply a reprise of his multi-faceted achievements prior to retirement.

Frank was exceptionally successful in drawing on his development expertise to advance the larger interests of our profession here in the United States, and to inform the American public about the meaningful impacts of U.S. development assistance to American interests and security. Frank actively helped shape and nurture a rising new generation of development professionals and leaders. Frank participated actively in this process by serving on boards, speaking to local groups, teaching and mentoring students, and organizing and moderating discussions on critical local and global issues. His public speaking and teaching were an outgrowth of his determination to build domestic support and commitment to our profession.

He was most proud of bringing in over 900 new foreign service officers to USAID between 2008-2011 as head of the USAID Development Leadership Initiative

Frank built upon his transformation from Senior USAID Officer to USAID champion. He played a seminal role in the founding of the USAID Alumni Association and putting it on a path to becoming a dynamic, informative, and excellent resource for hundreds of USAID retirees throughout the world who want to remain connected with their profession and colleagues.

After receiving the award on behalf of her Father, Andrea expressed her gratitude for the recognition of her father's lifelong accomplishments. She shared her experience observing her dad's dedication to USAID's work, and after his retirement, to influence and promote development assistance within young generations. She confirmed that he was her hero.



Andrea Young

The award is a beautiful Howard Miller World Time Arch tabletop clock, with an engraved plaque displaying the honoree's name.

Results of the UAA Board elections



Ken Yamashita and Roberta Mahoney thanked all who voted in the election for board members. The two new Board members are Anthony (Tony) Chan and Carl Anthony (Tony) Pryor. Tony Chan has been an active member of the UAA since his retirement in 2019, focusing his talent and energy on mentoring junior and mid-level staff across all hiring categories at USAID. Tony Pryor retired in October 2022 after 38 years as a Direct Hire and contractor for USAID. With a worldwide expertise that spans over 40 countries, Mr. Pryor conceptualized policies and designed innovative program process improvements across USAID. Board Member Chris Milligan was reelected to a second term. The UAA Co-chairs thanked outgoing Board Members Joy Riggs-Perla and Miles Toder for their valuable contributions to the UAA.

The photo taken at the end of the AGM includes the UAA Board members (left to right) Tony Pryor, Ken Yamashita, Denise Rollins, Tony Chan, Roberta Mahoney, and Chris Milligan. Owen Whyche-Shaw was not able to attend the AGM.

MEETING WRAP-UP

The two co-chairs of the UAA Annual General Meeting Committee, Terry Brown and Steve Wingert, concluded this year's in-person and virtual Annual General Meeting by thanking the participants for their valuable contributions, and the UAA members for their support. They also thanked the members of the AGM Committee for their work.

The meeting was attended in-person by 74 UAA members, 6 more than in 2023, and 28 guests and speakers, and virtually by 37 members and 11 guests and speakers. These numbers are an increase over last year.