

# Save USAID, Benefit America: Grassroots Outreach Toolkit

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## Background

The people who will stop this gutting of a Congressionally-authorized agency aren't in Washington. National press coverage is great, but it won't do the job. It takes constituents like you, all across the country, to make it uncomfortable for all Members of Congress to stand by and watch quietly as one of our country's most effective national security tools is dismantled.

**This toolkit is for friends and family of USAID - people who know the value of United States investments in stemming conflict, growing crops, protecting water resources, and more - both for the people in faraway places and for those of us here at home.**

On February 26, the Trump administration cancelled thousands of USAID programs – including hundreds of life-saving activities – to skirt its legal obligations. The administration claims it has conducted a “good-faith, individualized assessment of [each] contract or grant,” but this simply cannot be true after just 30 days in office, especially without the staff required to undertake such a review, because they have been put on administrative leave, terminated, or furloughed. ○

According to [Charles Kenny of the Center for Global Development](#): If the administration’s submission to the court that Secretary Rubio “**made a final decision with respect to each award, on an individualized basis,**” were true it would mean that the Secretary reviewed one award every minute and twenty seconds in the eight days between 2/18 and 2/26.

**It is urgent that we stop this destruction, before it’s really too late. YOUR voices across the country are needed urgently - before this story is out of the headlines.**

## Actions to Take Now

1. Check out the [key arguments](#) below and on [USAIDStopWork.com](#) and choose which ones you think are most important in your city, town, or state, or simply the one(s) you care about most.
2. Email, call, or meet with your [Members of Congress](#) - Democrat and Republican alike. (Meetings are most impactful!)
3. Help us get these arguments out to the press in your area: write an [op/ed](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).
4. Share accurate information about USAID on your social media accounts. Find posts you can reuse on [@USAIDStopWork](#) and [@FriendsofUSAID](#) on Instagram and Tik Tok, or make your own with a key fact or stat you find compelling.
5. Tell as many friends as you can - help everyone understand that USAID is an essential tool for protecting Americans at home and abroad. Combat misinformation one person at a time.

## Contacting Your Members of Congress

As a constituent, your Representatives and Senators work for you. This means that you don’t have to have any experience or any special expertise to email, call, or meet with them. Meetings have the most impact, followed by calls, and emails.

You can try to meet with the Member themselves, especially if you or someone in your group is a prominent member of your community or has some type of direct relationship to the Member,

such as a shared religious or professional affiliation. If that doesn't work, meeting with their foreign policy staff is just as good!

To find out who your Members of Congress are, click [here](#) and enter your address.

To request a meeting, start by contacting the district office closest to you. To call or email your comments, you can reach out to any district or Washington, DC, office.

**In-District:** To find your Members of Congress's in-district and Washington office locations and phone numbers check out their websites.

**In DC:** To reach a Washington office you can call the number on your Members of Congress's websites or call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to speak to your Representative's/Senator's office.

**Email:** You can email your Members of Congress through an advocacy campaign such as [USAIDStopWork.com](#) or [RESULTS.org](#), or you can craft your own email and send it directly.

- If you email using a pre-written campaign like these two, please make sure to personalize it - tell them why you care, as a constituent, and why they should care, as your representative.
- If you plan to email directly without using an online campaign, call their office first and ask for the name and email address of their foreign policy staffer so you get to the right person.

Additional tips and tools to support your Congressional outreach are available [here](#)

## What to Ask them To Do

Any action to prevent the further illegal dismantling of USAID is a useful action at this time.

There are a few ways you could phrase your call to action:

- I am asking you to speak out publicly about how the destruction of USAID will harm the American people, our economy, and our security.
- I urge you to hold the Administration accountable for implementing laws that created USAID and established many of its programs.
- Please support efforts to leverage the upcoming appropriations process to ensure that the Administration spends funds for foreign aid as Congress intended, and lifts the harmful freeze on foreign aid.

## Tips for Meeting with Congressional Offices

- **Request a meeting.**

- Find your Representatives and Senators' local phone numbers on their website.
- When you call, identify yourself as a constituent in the opening sentence and request a meeting with the staffer who covers foreign affairs, to discuss U.S. foreign aid.

*Note: if you don't get through to a person, try again. If they refuse to meet with you, ask why. If they still refuse, follow up with a call to the Washington Office, and send an email as well.*

*Some offices have stopped answering their phones - while this is a dereliction of their duty to represent constituents, there is also nothing you can do about it. If you encounter that, send an email and move on.*

- **Prepare for your scheduled meeting.**

- Do a little research into your Representative/Senator to help choose an argument that might resonate with them.
  - Are they a member of a church that partners with USAID? Are they a farmer or a military veteran? Were they in the Peace Corps or did they do a Mission trip? What have they said about foreign aid in the past?
- Take notes on the points you want to make.
- Keep in mind what you want them to do.
- Note down any stories or statistics you want to mention, along with the sources. Write down more than you think you will need.
- Use whatever prep methods work for you - your goal is to feel confident and comfortable.
- If possible, bring along a "leave behind": a short (no more than 2 pages) document that succinctly makes the key points you want the office to remember.
  - For example you might print out the state-level agriculture impacts infographics linked [below](#), or create a document, drawing on a variety of resources, that highlights multi-sectoral impacts such as through health partners and universities, as well as job losses.
  - If you plan to write an [op/ed](#) or [letter to the editor](#), bring along a copy (even if it hasn't been published)

*Note: You can take meetings alone or with friends, fellow members of your house of worship, or any other group to which you belong.*

- **Dress professionally, stay calm, and be yourself.**

- Arrive at the offices 5-10 minutes before your scheduled meeting time. Be prepared to wait.
- Shake hands if offered, be respectful. Introduce yourself and thank the office staff for meeting with you.

- Open by telling the staff what you want to discuss and very briefly tell them why.
- If you have already written an op/ed or a letter to the editor, whether or not it was published, give the staffer a copy in your meeting and use it as the basis for your conversation.
- Tell them what you want your Representative/Senators to do. Then give an example or a data point about why it matters to you and your state or community.
- Be open to any questions they have. Answer them to the best of your ability.

*Note: It is better to say “I don’t know, can I get back to you” than to make up a response. You don’t have to be an expert in everything to have a valid reason to meet with your elected representatives!*

- Feel free to take notes.
- Before you go, ask for the business card(s) of the person/people with whom you’ve met, so you can follow up.
- Say thank you, again.

*Note: Try not to be offended or take it personally if the meeting is short or if the staff asks you no questions. There can be many reasons for a very brief meeting with limited interaction, and not all of them are bad.*

- **Follow up.**

- After the meeting, send an email thanking the person you met with.
  - Reiterate your ask of your Representative/Senator, and provide any additional information that you promised, or links and attachments that you think help to advance your argument.
  - If you publish a blog, an op/ed or a letter to the editor after the meeting, send it to the person you met with.
  - Close by offering to serve as a resource, or to connect the staff with others they may wish to speak to.

## Tips for Calling Your Members of Congress

You can call offices anytime, multiple times, and just leave a message. Or you can use a campaign like [5 Calls](#).

- Ask to speak to the staffer who handles foreign policy.
- If you are not connected to that person, leave a message.
  - Open by saying you are a constituent and you are calling to urge Representative/Senator [name] to take urgent action to stop the illegal dismantling of USAID.
  - Then use one sentence to express why your Member of Congress should care, drawing on the tips above for preparing for a meeting.
  - Close by saying you would appreciate a call back and leave your name, address (to prove you’re a constituent) and phone number.

## Tips for Emails to Congressional Offices

- Identify yourself as a constituent in the opening sentence
- Start with a clear point about why you are writing and what you want them to do about it.

*Example: I am a constituent and I am writing to encourage you to take urgent actions to stop illegal attempts to shutter USAID and to hold President Trump accountable for implementing relevant laws and spending Congressional appropriated funds accordingly.*

- Provide an argument, ideally one relevant to your state (see [below](#)).
- Repeat your call for action.
- Sign the letter respectfully.
- Provide contact information in case the office wishes to follow up.

## Media Outreach

### Op/Eds

Submitting an opinion piece or editorial (Op/Ed) to your local paper is a great way to start a conversation in your community and with your elected officials. Most Congressional offices have staff that read local papers to learn what their constituents care about, and you can use a published Op/Ed to continue conversations with your neighbors, houses of worship, and even with decision-makers in Washington, DC.

Anything that is timely and has broad public appeal makes a good topic for an Op/Ed. Topics on the periphery of national news often make for good Op-Eds because they're timely, and they face less competition from other submissions, versus front-page news that everyone is chasing.

**Right now, USAID is making national news, but the most important stories to most Americans aren't being told. That's where you come in.**

Usually, Op/Eds should be between 650-800 words, but check your newspaper's website for more guidance about what they publish and how to submit.

*Note: You can also publish your thoughts on a platform like Substack. These won't be picked up in Congressional press clips, but if you don't succeed in placing your op/ed in a more traditional*

*news outlet, don't waste your work! Look for other places to post it so you can make the most of it.*

## Steps to Take

1. Review the Op/Ed submission guidelines for your target newspaper, and be sure you follow them.
2. Write your op/ed (see below)
3. Find the name and email address of the Opinion and Editorial pages editor for your target newspaper.
4. Craft a pitch email of approximately 100 words that grabs the editor's attention right away, and then tells them why they should read your submission.

*Note: don't send attachments, instead copy-paste your op/ed into the body of the email, below your pitch.*

5. If they agree to publish, make a plan for using the published Op/Ed to continue your efforts. Options include emailing it to your Members of Congress, requesting a meeting with them to discuss it, posting it on your social media accounts, and more.

*Note: publishing the Op/Ed is exciting, but it doesn't close the deal. Using it as an entry point for more conversations helps take your efforts all the way.*

## Writing Tips

### **Know your argument:**

- Choose something from the [key arguments](#) below or research your own - but make sure you are clear about the point you want to make.
- Think about the counter-argument: what would people say who disagree with you? Can you counter that? If not, do a bit more research.
- Gather facts. Sources include links throughout this document, plus [www.foreignassistance.gov](http://www.foreignassistance.gov), [www.usaidstopwork.com](http://www.usaidstopwork.com), Friends of USAID, and many articles published around the world. You can also look at the data visualizations [here](#) for an easy way to understand the global impact of illegal terminations of USAID contracts and grants.

### **Make it easy and compelling to read:**

- Use active voice and plain language.
- Keep sentences short.
- Aim for a simple explanation of your argument. Every sentence should have a point - no fillers!
- Eliminate anything that doesn't support your core argument.

### **Structure your Op/Ed carefully:**

- Open with a short “lede” - an attention grabbing sentence that ties to current events and introduces your argument.
- Spend 1-2 paragraphs laying out your argument. It’s ok to include your own opinion alongside research, facts, stats, and quotes from experts.
- Dedicate one paragraph to countering those who disagree with you. Acknowledge the counter argument, but assert why you disagree (with more evidence you haven’t already provided above)
- Write a short closing that reiterates your argument. If you want, you can also add a call to action, such as urging people to call your Members of Congress.

*Note: If the newspaper or online journal agrees to publish your piece, you should expect your submission to be edited. As long as it remains accurate and retains the key messages you want to deliver, don’t worry too much about stylistic edits. HOWEVER, if an editor tries to change your message in a way that is no longer yours, don’t be afraid to speak up, or to withdraw your submission.*

## Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are another great tool for getting your opinion in front of your Members of Congress and your community. They are included alongside Op/Eds are other articles in clip books compiled by district staff, and can give you a great reason to follow up with them to discuss your published comments.

Letters to the editor generally must be in response to something the newspaper has already published. They are much shorter than an Op/Ed but still require you to make a strong argument.

## Steps to Take

1. Identify a recent article published by your newspaper to which you want to respond. Plan to submit your letter as soon as possible after the article is published - ideally within 24 hours.
2. Review the Letters to the Editor submission guidelines for your target newspaper, and be sure you follow them.
3. Write your letter, usually approximately 100-150 words (see below)
4. Find the name and email address that your newspaper uses to receive letters to the editor and send it off according to the instructions provided.

*Note: don’t send attachments, instead copy-paste your op/ed into the body of the email, below your pitch.*

5. Make a plan for how you will use your letter - whether it's published or not!

## Writing Tips

- Start with your first reaction to the article you are responding to. Did you spot an error or misinformation? Did you feel that part of the story was missing? Do you have a specific experience or expertise to add to the conversation?
- Write from your own perspective, in your own voice and in your own words. Letters are less formal than an Op/Ed but they can be just as powerful.
- You are allowed to express emotion in a letter to the editor, more so than with an Op/Ed, because letters generally prioritize reader reactions whereas Op/Eds are about making an argument.

### Structure your LTE carefully:

- Open by identifying the article to which you are responding and identifying any special connection you have to the topic.
- Directly refute or counter anything in the article that needs correcting - briefly cite your source if you can.
- Use a few sentences to back up your argument or claim, again briefly citing any sources whose data you use.
- Issue a call to action - for your community, the newspaper, or your Members of Congress

*Note: it's ok to name them directly - it increases the chances they will see it!*

- Sign the letter with your name and, if you want, your job title or other relevant information that gives you credibility on the topic.

*Note: don't worry if you aren't professionally tied to USAID or to the research community, being a reader of the newspaper is enough justification for writing a letter!*

## Basic Facts about USAID

Established by Congress and President Kennedy in 1961, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is the world's premier humanitarian and development agency. In 1998, Congress passed a law making USAID an independent agency of the Federal government.

USAID's 10,000+ employees work along-side America's diplomats and service members overseas, as a key part of national security and 'soft power'. As one former Marine General said, 'If we do not fund USAID we'll need to buy more bullets'. USAID's non-political career workforce and partners respond to crises in people's greatest hour of need, help uplift

communities to become free from poverty and hunger, and support human rights for people living under repressive regimes.

The Agency's mission contributes to America's prosperity as many of our key trading partners were once aid recipients, and it opens markets to U.S. business and farmers. It keeps America safer by preventing the spread of infectious diseases from reaching our shores. And, it wins over hearts and minds by demonstrating America's values abroad. Its annual budget of \$38 Billion (2023) accounts for less than 1% of all federal spending.

Since USAID's creation, 99 of its employees (Americans and local nationals) have died in the line of duty while carrying out its mission.

## Key Arguments

### Impact on Lives Around the World

- **For less than 1% of the Federal budget, the United States has an outsized impact on the lives of people worldwide. From disasters to disease and everything in between, America has a moral imperative to help. In turn, USAID efforts build goodwill with countries and communities that creates an unparalleled return on investment for Americans.**
  - **HIV and Tuberculosis:** USAID stop work orders have left HIV and tuberculosis patients in a lurch, unable to access essential medicines that can save their lives. When people don't finish their course of treatment, drug resistance becomes more likely - and so does death.
    - It is estimated that more than 2,000 people have already contracted HIV since the foreign aid freeze began, because they can no longer access prevention services and information once provided by USAID.
    - If USAID and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are dismantled, the HIV pandemic could fully resurge within four short years.
  - **New Diseases:** In January, a "mystery disease" began killing people in Democratic Republic of Congo. Without USAID support, it will be more difficult for public health officials to identify and contain this illness before it crosses borders.
    - As with the 2012 Ebola outbreak, diseases that start in remote corners of sub-Saharan Africa eventually make their way to American communities.
  - **Starvation:** In Bangladesh, one million refugees are now missing essential food provided by USAID humanitarian operations. In Sudan, two million people dependent on USAID-supported food pantries are now having to look elsewhere to eat.

- **Child Survival:** As many as 28 million children under the age of 5 would go without nutrition support each year if USAID is dismantled. These children could face physical stunting, cognitive delays, and even death without support.
- **Clean Water:** If USAID is not protected, we miss out on the chance to provide nearly 2 million people per year with clean drinking water, which not only keeps them alive but provides a return of \$4 for every \$1 invested.

## **Impact on American Farmers**

- **American farmers, food producers, and universities are proud partners in work to fight hunger at home and around the world. The stop work order on USAID partnerships combined with the near-total elimination of USAID staff will hit farm communities in their pocketbooks, and cost an estimated 200,000 jobs and \$65 billion in exports nation-wide.**
  - More than 450 large-scale American farmers across the country have lost funding partnerships to provide humanitarian aid with USAID.
  - USAID's inspector general estimated that nearly \$490 million worth of American-grown food is currently stuck in U.S. ports, rotting instead of increasing American economic returns and saving lives worldwide.
  - If American farmers can no longer sell their surplus to do good, they will lose. For example:
    - In **Iowa**, 8 large scale farmers fulfill direct orders for humanitarian assistance, while private sector partner Almaco is working with USAID to modernize soybean production - benefiting farmers everywhere.
    - In **Missouri**, 12 large scale farmers fulfill direct orders for humanitarian assistance, while the University of Missouri researches ways to modernize irrigation systems - benefiting farmers everywhere.
    - In **Texas**, 9 large scale farmers fulfill direct orders for humanitarian assistance, 8 public and private universities receive funding from USAID to support agricultural research that benefits farmers in America and worldwide, and 6 companies, including Kerurig Dr. Pepper, are USAID partners.

*More state level agriculture partnership data is available [here](#). National level data is [here](#).*

## **Countering Terrorism**

- **In critical countries around the world, USAID initiatives to prevent terrorists from gaining ground are currently frozen globally, suspending essential U.S. national**

**security activities that train local security personnel and law enforcement, combat the smuggling of weapons, and work with local institutions to detect terrorism financing that could ultimately be used to target Americans.**

- According to USAID's own [Inspector General](#), the dismantling of USAID creates a risk of U.S. dollars falling into the hands of terrorist groups.
- Just as Syria's new government takes shape, critical civilian stabilization programs – that work alongside the U.S. military – to hold back an ISIS resurgence were suspended in the region. At the Al Hol and Al Roj camps, where close to 10,000 ISIS fighters and 40,000 women and children remain detained and displaced, security guards walked off the job at the camps following the initial freeze.
- USAID's programs to provide basic services, such as water, toilets, schools, and health clinics, are also frozen, and most have now been terminated. This creates an opening for extremist groups and terrorist organizations to offer a solution for people to meet their basic needs. In turn, this makes America less safe.

## **Countering China and Russia in the Great Powers Race**

- **USAID offers countries around the world an alternative to making deals with autocratic governments of China and Russia. By receiving grants, not loans like the ones China's government provides, partner countries receive assistance that doesn't compromise their economies and improves conditions for their people. In turn, positive relationships make it easier for USAID to counter harmful propaganda targeting the United States.**
  - Reports suggest that China is already stepping into the void left by the U.S, pause on foreign assistance - offering to finish construction projects left half built.
  - [Research](#) suggests that China deploys aid projects as a tool for securing influence ahead of elections around the world.
  - "I have felt for a long time that USAID is our way to combat the Belt and Road Initiative, which is China's effort to really gain influence around the world, including Africa and South America in the Western Hemisphere," Republican Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi told reporters.
  - Allies of Putin have also [praised](#) the dismantling of USAID, which only strengthens Russia's presence in Africa and the Middle East.

## **Countering the Flow of Narcotics Into the United States**

- **Civilian programs in Central and South America that combat transnational criminal organizations and drug trafficking have been halted, which risks opening the door for more illegal narcotics, including fentanyl and other synthetic opioids that are killing thousands of Americans.**
  - As one example, funding for narcotics interdiction in Colombia is paused, which totals \$380 million annually. This suspension is relieving pressure on

cocaine-funded transnational criminal organizations and gangs, and risks driving increased chaos and mass migration to the U.S. southern border.

## **Protecting US and Allied Troops**

- **USAID and the Department of Defense are long-time partners because the American Armed Forces know that USAID’s humanitarian, health, and development programs build goodwill that prevents conflict and extremism, and protects soldiers’ lives.**
  - General Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.) [stated](#) of the pause on U.S. foreign assistance: *“I worry that the call for a freeze on all U.S. foreign assistance – at a time when our rivals are playing to win – takes the U.S. off the playing field and diminishes U.S. strength around the world. America’s military leaders understand that Peace Through Strength rests on the three-legged stool of our defense, alongside diplomacy and development. This is a moment to use a strategic approach to strengthen all our tools of U.S. national security, so we are as effective as possible to help protect the security of American people.”*
- **USAID and the U.S. Armed Forces collaborate regularly to bring the best of each to the most critical places in the world:**
  - Led by U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), the Justified Accord exercise brings together 20 countries, alongside USAID, to increase readiness for peacekeeping missions and crisis response that protect Americans, enhance humanitarian response that demonstrates American goodwill, and build the capacity of partner governments to disrupt activities that would hurt America and our allies.
  - Through the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course, USAID trains the U.S. Armed Forces, including the Army Reserves, to understand and coordinate with government and civilian responses to disasters and crises. The U.S. Department of Defense is often the first representative of the United States to reach the scene; this knowledge keeps them safer and more effective, protecting U.S. tax dollars and our troops alike.
- **USAID programs enhance the safety and security of American troops around the world by reducing the number of weapons and mines in threatening environments, and reducing potential hostility to our troops by building positive relationships with communities worldwide, on behalf of the American people.**
  - U.S. efforts to properly dispose of weapons in conflict zones are currently frozen, jeopardizing fragile ceasefires and peace agreements in places like Lebanon, which is critical to protecting Israel.
  - Demining programs have also stopped globally, putting thousands of people at risk including U.S. military personnel. Program halts include Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vietnam – all in a region where the U.S. is vying for influence and partnership as we compete with China.

## Loss of American Jobs

- **When a major U.S. Government Agency goes out of business, the consequences ripple across the country. Already, nearly 52,000 people have lost their jobs as a result of the foreign aid freeze - across 43 states and counting. The longer the freeze is in effect, the more this number will grow, taxing state unemployment benefit coffers and reducing local consumer power.**
  - The majority of USAID's 10,000 person staff around the world is now in limbo. Many have been told their jobs will be terminated on April 24. Others have been terminated effective immediately without cause. Job losses continue to grow as a result of program cancellations and the ripple effect on the U.S. economy won't be far behind.
- In addition to USAID staff, whose jobs are currently threatened, universities, non-profit organizations, and businesses across the country have contracts with USAID that pay for staff as well as activities.
  - In **Alabama**, a \$5 million grant to Tuskegee University is now on hold - threatening jobs and the local economy.
  - **Colorado** stands to lose \$34 million in frozen USAID contracts and grants. Everyone who implements those activities now faces a risk of unemployment.
  - Last year, USAID partnerships in **Louisiana and Nebraska** contributed \$6 million to each state's economy.
  - The University of **Utah** is facing the loss of a \$19 million grant to improve Pakistan's education system.

*More information on state-level impacts can be found [here](#).*

## Upholding the Will of the American People

- **USAID's budget last year was \$40 billion. This is less than 1% of the federal budget. It's approximately the same amount of money that Americans spend on pet food each year. Eliminating USAID will *not* balance the Federal budget. But it will threaten the American economy. And it goes against the will of the American people.**
  - [Polling](#) indicates that most Americans (68%) believe that the U.S. foreign assistance budget should, at least be maintained at its current levels, if not increased.
  - Moreover, recent [polling](#) found that 89% of Americans - Democrats, Republicans and Independents - believe that the United States should spend at least 1% of its budget on foreign aid.
  - Kansas State University found that USAID's partnerships with American farmers, agriculture businesses, and universities returns \$8.52 for every one dollar of foreign aid invested.

