

"We screwed up, we were wrong, badly wrong." Mark Green, former USAID Administrator, by Helen Murphy, *Devex Newswire*, 29 Oct 2025

A question of communication

"We screwed up," said Mark Green, the former USAID administrator. "We were wrong. We were badly wrong, and we failed to engage and make the case over and over again, and now we have to make a new case and make it over and over again."

That self-criticism came [during a panel](#) at a Devex Impact House event held on the sidelines of the [United Nations General Assembly](#) — but some in the global development sector point out that the dismantling of [USAID](#) might not have been stopped by a better communication strategy.

Still, public opinion matters — and while aid isn't unpopular with the public, it's slid way down the agenda, writes Devex Business Editor David Ainsworth. Once a headline issue — [remember Make Poverty History](#) and Bono rallying stadiums? — it's **now buried in policy jargon and fundraising clichés**. Consultant Matt Watkins calls it out bluntly: "The nonprofit sector's language has become increasingly coded, more abstract, and — ironically — less meaningful."

[That loss of connection has consequences.](#) In the U.S., USAID's dismantling was fueled by "rash demands, shock and confusion," according to The New York Times. In Europe, leaders facing economic strain [have slashed budgets](#), with **aid an easy target when public support is weak**. A July survey by Focalddata found opinions polarized: While some groups back aid more strongly, others dismiss it entirely, and overall, aid just ranks lower on people's list of priorities.

Still, there's a path forward. Norway's foreign aid chief, Gunn Jorid Roset, points out that Norwegians support the country's generous aid budget because Norad [keeps the public informed](#) about results and dilemmas. Focalddata's research shows that when aid is explained simply and clearly, there's a "bedrock of goodwill" that politicians can't ignore.