

Story of OneAID's formation and what it has done in this year. By Catherine Baker, Managing Director for Strategic Partnerships and Communications at OneAID, on service, community, and one year after USAID, 24 Jan 2026

As we mark the one year anniversary of the assault on USAID and the federal workforce writ large, friends consistently express to me the same sentiment: "The ship has sailed on foreign assistance. We have bigger issues to address as a nation." Reading headlines about regime change in Venezuela, threats against NATO and the European Union, and the federal occupation and violence taking place in Minneapolis, I get that it's difficult to refute the argument. If I'm honest with myself, I don't disagree. But giving up on U.S. foreign assistance means giving up on the people behind it.

### **The OneAID community**

Cate Klepacki and Julia Hurley, both former USAID policy advisors, started OneAID on February 1, 2025 as an emergency response to help those same people during a period of monumental change. Volunteers coalesced around the urgent need to quickly disseminate trusted information, inform press coverage of events, harmonize congressional outreach efforts, and provide a social safety net to a workforce confronted with uncertainty, a targeted disinformation campaign, and often, immediate job loss.

For many of us, Signal became a lifeline - an immediate way to share developments and breaking news that helped us understand the impacts of the administration's actions on our ongoing work, our foreign national colleagues and partners, and our own livelihoods. We felt a sense of obligation to one another to get information out as quickly as possible, including immediate mental health and financial support resources.

Strangers known by initials only became newfound colleagues, friends, and confidantes - real people. OneAID recently hosted a get-together in southern Florida where 14 strangers in USAID swag came together and, within a few minutes, identified several shared experiences and mutual professional connections. One attendee summed it up perfectly: "it doesn't matter where you are in the world, when USAIDers get together, it's instant camaraderie and understanding."

### **The OneAID commitment**

USAID proved to be the canary in the coal mine, signaling not only what would happen to other federal agencies, but how constitutional boundaries would be disregarded - and how large groups of people would be treated with impunity. Time and time again,

we were on the losing side of those battles – or, victories came too late and irreversible damage had already occurred.

After such emotional duress, financial hardship, and few opportunities for hope, what's next? How do we as foreign assistance professionals carry forth? Is there even space in the United States for this profession to exist, now or in the future?

Over the past year, OneAID has served many purposes, but community has always been at its core. We know that our work isn't possible without our people. USAIDers, and the larger foreign assistance community, bring essential knowledge and expertise, invaluable host country connections, and indelible passion wherever they go. They are the personification of a truly radical notion, "that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." For our community, America's founding principles articulate human rights that apply not only to those living within our borders, but should be available to people living anywhere.

In 2026, our community's ethos remains an everlasting commitment to service.

"Service" is not bound to any specific agency, cause, or geographic location. For our people, it can take many forms, all at once or at varying times. As a profession, we continue to experience trauma, hardship, and financial ramifications of the past year. Some of us have or will find professional positions with other foreign assistance entities. Others may pivot more permanently to other industries. I expect for many, the hurt will be too deep to try and return to this vocation, in whatever form it takes in the future.

### **The OneAID mission**

Ultimately, the spirit of the American people is not defined by politicians in power, but by ordinary and extraordinary acts of selflessness and generosity demonstrated by its citizens toward those most in need. No professional group exemplified that more clearly than USAID.

To those who have carried USAID's work:

Regardless of your current engagement with this sector, you have rich and unparalleled expertise that can be transferred into new forms of service. Perhaps this takes the shape of getting more involved in your faith group or community, engaging with local or state-level government, or simply offering small acts of kindness toward neighbors and strangers alike.

Your community, country, and the world still need you to speak out and show up for those that cannot do so themselves. Pace yourselves. Practice self-care. Do not let feelings of powerlessness or despair overcome you. If USAID was the canary in the coal mine, let us also show the world how we banded together to support one another. Let us draw strength from the resilience demonstrated by our foreign service national staff and local partners in the face of adversity, fear, and oppression. Let the embers from USAID's destruction spark new fires that ignite hope and a better future - wherever we find ourselves one year on.

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**Catherine Baker** worked with USAID-funded implementing partners for 13 years, managing business development and recruitment efforts for conflict mitigation and democracy promotion programs. She currently serves as the Managing Director for Strategic Partnerships and Communications at OneAID, an organized community and network which began in the midst of mass layoffs following Executive Order 14169 and the dissolution of USAID. OneAID's mission is to sustain and empower the U.S. foreign assistance community, serving as a connector and information hub to carry forward the knowledge, expertise, and dedication of a community that transcends borders and advances global peace and prosperity.