



USAID Alumni Association

February 2026 Newsletter

UAA Board Statement on the One-Year Anniversary of the Dismantling of USAID

One year ago, the United States began dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development, an institution born of President John F. Kennedy's conviction that America's leadership should be measured not only by its military or economic power, but by its commitment to human dignity, partnership, and hope. When President Kennedy created USAID in 1961, he articulated a simple but ambitious vision: that helping nations build their own capacity for growth and stability was both a moral responsibility and a strategic imperative for the United States.

For more than six decades, our Presidents and Congresses were united in their support of this vision. And it was carried forward by thousands of dedicated American public servants and countless individuals and partners around the world. They worked in some of the most difficult and dangerous environments on earth—rebuilding societies after war, responding to humanitarian crises, combating disease, expanding education, strengthening democratic institutions, and creating pathways for economic opportunity. Their service reflected enduring American values: compassion matched with competence, generosity guided by accountability, and leadership rooted in partnership and respect.

Those values did not disappear with the dismantling of USAID. They live on in the people who served, in the communities whose lives were improved, and in the idea that America is stronger when it engages the world with purpose and humility. The legacy of USAID is not defined by today's politics, but by the healthier children, educated girls, functioning institutions, and societies given a chance to recover and thrive.

At the same time, the loss to America is real. By dismantling USAID, the United States forfeited a unique reservoir of expertise, institutional memory, and global trust that no other nation has replicated. The absence of that capacity has narrowed America's options, weakened its influence, and diminished its ability to respond effectively to global crises that inevitably affect us back home.

On this anniversary, we honor those who served, particularly those who gave their lives in that service, and reaffirm the enduring truth at the heart of President Kennedy's vision: that American leadership is strongest when it invests not only in power, but in people.

What's New

In Memoriam:

Michael C. Niebling, John "Jack" Robert Eyre, Selig A. "Sy" Taubenblatt, Gordon Bertolin, Elliott J. Weiss

Bulletin Board

- **Open letter dated 27 Jan 2026 on the Future of U.S. Foreign Assistance signed by 72 senior career leaders of USAID before its closure.** [Click here](#) to see the letter and [click here](#) to see an executive summary.
- **Feb. 10, 2026, at DACOR: Launch of ADST Anthology of Oral History Highlights, "Representing America: Firsthand Accounts from a Century of U.S. Diplomacy."** [Click here for more information and registration.](#)
- **UAA Legislative Update, 16 Jan 2026**
- **Shawn Dorman, editor in chief of the *Foreign Service Journal*, invites former USAID staff to submit articles regarding programs developed and implemented by USAID staff, PSCs, NGOs and our contractors.** The most compelling submissions would probably emphasize the value to U.S. security (military and health) and economic development. If you worked on a project that deserves the attention of a broader audience, please send a brief concept of your proposed article to Shawn Dorman <dorman@afsa.org> (posted 9 Jan 2026)
- **Global Rhythms: Celebrating Global Partnerships to Build a Better World**
- **February 22- March 10, 2026** See details [HERE](#).

Glenview Mansion Art Gallery, 603 Edmonston Drive, Rockville Civic Center, Rockville, MD. A Partnership between former USAID employees, City of Rockville and AQUITY Global Inc.

Key Dates:

- Exhibition Dates: February 22 – March 20, 2026
- Submit digital images of your artwork: January 31, 2026

- Delivery of Artwork at Glenview Mansion: February 17, 2026, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
- “Meet the Artists” Opening Reception: February 22, 2026, 1:30-3:30pm
- Pick Up of Artwork: March 23, 2026, 10:00am-1:00pm

[Articles](#)

(Click on the “Articles” link above for more articles posted on our website. Click on the boldface item headings there and below for a hyperlink to the full articles.)

- **Out of government, former USAID employees continue to offer their expertise.** By Sean Michael Newhouse, *Government Executive*, 23 Jan 2026
- **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
- **Foreign aid represented the best Americans can be.** Alex Natsios on the dismantling of USAID and what we lost, *Global Development Interrupted*, Jan 22, 2026
- **Into the Wood-Chipper, A Whistleblower’s Account of How the Trump Administration Shredded USAID.** By Nicholas Enrich Foreword by Atul Gawande *Simon & Schuster*, 21 Jan 2026
- **OCHA Data Confirms Scale of US Aid Cuts: 79 Million Affected, Local NGOs Hit Hardest.** By Thomas Byrnes, *Linkedin*, 29 Apr 2025
- **From USAID layoffs to the campaign trail.** By Helen Murphy, *Devex Newswire*, 21 Jan 2026
- **‘Wanted to contribute’: Fired USAID workers start new group to help HIV programs.** By Aimee Cho, *NBC Washington*, 7 Jan 2026
- **The Road to 2026, USAID VP Voice,** by Randy Chester, *The Foreign Service Journal*, Jan-Feb 2026
- **What Americans lost in the dismantling of USAID.** By J. Brian Atwood and Andrew S. Natsios, opinion contributors, *The Hill*, 8 Jan 2026

[Podcasts & Recorded Media](#)

- **“It Was Never a Job.”** USAID Podcast by Chris Saenger, a former AFSA board member, 16 Jan 2026. The podcast captures the incredible, joyful, and sometimes heartbreaking stories and experiences of USAID staff. As Chris writes, “USAID staff gave a lot to the Agency, and it gave so much back to us. USAID service was never a job. It was our life.”
- **Hour-long Session on State and USAID – inc. Andrew Natsios.** National Public Radio, 14 Jan 2026
- **The Shutdown of U.S.A.I.D. Has Already Killed Hundreds of Thousands.** The short documentary “Rovina’s Choice” tells the

story of what goes when aid goes. Film by Thomas Jennings and Annie Wong, Text by Atul Gawande, *The New Yorker Documentary*, November 5, 2025

- In November 2025, a group of former USAID employees from the Global Health Bureau organized a virtual meeting to recognize former USAID Foreign Service Nationals for their many contributions. Drawing on the meeting, the organizers have created a brief FSN Recognition video: <https://lnkd.in/eJUKryYi>

Jobs & Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer Board Position [Congo Education Partners](#) is a US-based 501C3 organization that supports Djolu Technical College (DTC), a rural development college located deep in the rainforest in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are seeking one or more additional board members, especially individuals with experience or an interest in fundraising. This position is an opportunity to get involved in a unique collaborative project which teaches environmental, agricultural and nursing sciences. DTC is a Congolese founded and led institution that has graduated hundreds of students with the aim of developing a new generation of local rainforest stewards and leaders. Please contact us at hello@congoeducationpartners.org for more information or to volunteer and include a short description of your background and interests.

What's New with UAA outside DMV!!

To increase UAA's relevance, expand its reach, boost membership, and address the impact of the unplanned dismantling of USAID, UAA is strongly supporting and encouraging the gatherings of USAID Alumni nationwide and abroad. Currently, Florida and California are the most active and have met with several groups. New England and Pennsylvania groups are active, and Oregon and Washington State are growing.

Multiple UAA Gatherings in California

SOCAL SOCIAL (San Diego-Orange County-LA-Palm Springs):

Twenty-five USAID SoCal Alumni gathered on Saturday, 24 January 2026 to build community, share stories, and discuss February activities, including "Celebrating USAID" Month of February. We welcomed several State Department, Forestry Department, and Army colleagues – building a pro-foreign assistance alliance. We even hosted an out-of-towner (Cal-Nevada border) keynote speaker, AFSA's USAID VP, Randy Chester, and his wife, Sherry, who updated us on AFSA-led initiatives. Thank you to Robert Gerstein and his wife, Lisa, for sharing their beautiful condo venue



and all the other support! [Click here](#) to see the video of Randy Chester's presentation.



Bay Area:

Our California Bay Area USAID Alumni gathered in San Francisco on Friday evening, 23 January 2026, for a storytelling event, sharing a lifetime of stories from our USAID experiences. This was a special event in addition to their scheduled monthly gatherings.



Sacramento/Sierra Nevada (Sac/Sierra):

The SAC/Sierra Alumni & Amigos group got together once again in Sacramento, this time at the SacYard Community Tap Room, in honor of visiting USAID alumni Steve and Cristina Olive. Steve and Christina came up from Southern California to see their son, who is a student at UC-Davis. They recently returned to Southern California from New Delhi, where Steve was in his first year as the USAID/India Mission Director. We were also pleased to have a visiting USAID alumna from the East Coast,

Katie Frank, who has been on a road trip all the way from Maine, visiting USAID colleagues and other friends along the way. This exemplifies USAID California Alumni's effort to be both a state-wide, local initiative and part of our national network. Jim Stein hosted this gathering – thank you, Jim!



Left front around the table to front right: Erin Wroblewski, Steve Olive, Jim Stein, Whitney Jensen Rodriguez, Cristina Olive, and Katie Frank

Florida's USAID Alumni Caucus

Over 60 members of Florida's Foreign Service Alumni Association (FSAA) met for their Annual General Meeting on January 16 at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club. The FSAA, which is newly renamed, includes alumni from USAID as well as alumni from other foreign affairs agencies. Guest speaker John Dinkelman, the president of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), shared his observations on the current U.S. administration's treatment of development and diplomacy and of the federal workforce. In the second part of the meeting, USAID alumni in FSAA joined alumni in California, the DMV and elsewhere in a Zoom discussion that focused on Congressional actions related to development, and on progress in organizing regional chapters of UAA. The full report of Florida's USAID Alumni Caucus meeting is available [HERE](#).



UAA Florida Alumni Social, discussing topical USAID-related, global, and foreign assistance priorities. UAA Florida leads: Miles Toder and Alan Van Egmond.



UAA Florida Alumni Social with onliners, including from Washington, D.C. (Jim Bever) and California (Christine Sheckler)

Navigating Anniversary Stress

On January 21, the [Aid Transition Alliance](#) (AidTA) together with partner [The KonTerra Group](#) hosted a webinar for the international development and humanitarian community on navigating anniversary stress. The session, "When a Difficult Year Echoes: Navigating Anniversary Stress Related to the Foreign Aid Freeze," created a space for everyone impacted by last year's events to connect, share, and access resources for support.

If you weren't able to attend the webinar, please take a moment to review the resources that KonTerra has compiled for us:

[Resources for Coping with the USG Foreign Assistance Freeze](#)

[Guide to Coping with Anniversary Reactions](#)

[Helping Children Coping with Traumatic Events](#)

Additionally, AidTA and KonTerra are developing a career and wellness program for humanitarian and development professionals who have been unemployed or underemployed for six months or more. If this describes you, we invite you to share your perspective through a [short survey](#). Your input will help guide how this program is designed, including what kinds of support feel most useful and feasible.

If you're not already signed up for the AidTA listserv and would like to receive information about future events and resources, please fill out this [brief form](#).

Additions to Bibliography of USAID Authors

The UAA will continue to collect and publicize information about books written by USAID FSOs, FSNs, and family members adding to our on-line collection. Two new ones have been added to the **Bibliography of USAID Authors**, both in the photography category.

William (Bill) Frej has published two award-winning books of outstanding photographs: one of rock art and the other of ancient cities, with the black and white photos supplemented by explanations written by his wife, Anne, and other experts.

Blurred Boundaries: Perspectives on Rock Art of the Greater Southwest explores the enigmatic art work of the greater southwest: who created them and what do they mean. In *Unforgotten: Ancient Cities from a Distant Past*, Frej presents 200 duotone photographs of ancient cities that are simply unforgettable, capturing the cities' allure, beauty, spirit and resonating sense of space. Anne Frej, in her elegant introduction, sets the table for the personal journey that awaits every reader—a journey into deep history and magical architecture and geographical splendor. Please send notices of newly published or discovered books to Jpielemeie@aol.com.

Profile: Howard Sumka



Howard Sumka's career interests turned from engineering to social justice issues after he and his wife Michele experienced Chicago in the late '60s. At UNC-Chapel Hill he studied City and Regional Planning, and then came to DC and worked for eight years at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Howard's 25-year USAID career began in 1985, when a

former HUD colleague introduced him to USAID's Office of Housing and Urban Programs. He joined USAID under a HUD interagency detail (RSSA), converted to the Foreign Service in 1989, and headed to Nairobi as Deputy Director of the Regional Housing and Urban Development Office (RHUDO) to focus on developing market towns, upgrading informal settlements, and creating financing mechanisms for formal housing throughout East Africa. In 1995, Howard joined USAID's Bureau for Europe and the Newly Independent States. In his first field assignment,

he co-led a team who spent five winter weeks in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) developing programs to implement the Dayton Accords. He would later devote eight years to the Balkans as, successively, Mission Director in Albania and BiH. In 1999, USAID/Albania kept programs in motion as a half million Kosovar refugees arrived. Howard returned to Sarajevo in 2002 navigating BiH's multi-layered governance structure, the multinational military stabilization force, and the oversight of the EU High Commissioner. In 2006, USAID tapped Howard to lead the West Bank-Gaza Mission, which operated in a unique political and economic environment. The exceptionally skilled local staff was a vibrant mix of Israelis and Palestinians, unusual in Israel and personally enriching for Howard.

He retired in 2010 as a Minister Counselor. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a major focus. In retirement, he was Executive Director of OneVoice, a US NGO that supported collaboration among young people from both sides. He is on the board of the American Friends of the Parents Circle, bereaved Israelis and Palestinians committed to reconciliation. Howard now focuses on U.S. politics through J Street, lobbying Congress and supporting Congressional candidates who press for policies to peacefully resolve the conflict. He is active in the informal group of retired USAID/WBG Directors who regularly gather to cogitate over policy and programs.

Very importantly, Howard continues his lifetime focus on fitness and is pleased (and amused) to report that he recently won his age group in a charity 5K race. Howard and Michele are based in Maryland and have two daughters and two grandchildren.

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USAID Alumni Association

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