



USAID Alumni Association

## **March 2026 Newsletter**

### **Note from the UAA Board**

Thank you to the thousands who joined us for the Rally for USAID on February 27. Together with our sister organizations—AFSA, AFGE, OneAID, Our USAID Community, and Aid on the Hill—the UAA was proud to honor the service of all those who have advanced human progress through USAID programs around the world. Standing with former FSNs, Direct Hires and PSCs, Chris Milligan spoke on behalf of the UAA. He noted that the anniversary of USAID’s dismantling should not be one of mourning, but of resolve; resolve to restore America’s role as a force for good; resolve to honor those who served by continuing their mission; resolve to show the world that the United States still believes in building, not abandoning, in leading, not retreating and in hope, not fear. The rally was a powerful reminder of who we are: a community rooted in service, solidarity, and hope.



As we look ahead, we know that the UAA must continue to adapt to meet the needs of our members and the moment before us. We would like to share several important updates about initiatives that will shape our future.

Later this month, we will launch a survey to help guide the next chapter of the organization. This pivotal effort will inform UAA's future strategy, priorities, and membership composition, ensuring that our mission remains relevant and responsive to both new and long-standing members. Your voice will be essential in determining our spending priorities and geographic focus. We strongly encourage all members and those on our mailing list to participate.

At our last Annual General Meeting, many of you called for expanding UAA membership to individuals who served at USAID as institutional support contractors (ISCs). We heard you—and we are pleased to share that this change has been approved. Additional guidance will be provided shortly.

One of our greatest strengths is coming together in times of need. We are deeply grateful to the donors who contributed more than \$500,000 in emergency grant funding through the USAID Staff Financial Support Fund to assist former USAID colleagues in their time of need. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the UAA volunteers who designed and managed this effort with care and dedication, and to the Greater Washington Community Fund for its partnership in collecting donations and disbursing grants.

As the grant fund concludes its work in March, we want to close by sharing a message that reflects the spirit of what this community has made possible:

***Dear USAID Colleagues, UAA Members and GWCF,***

***I want to express my appreciation for the compassion and kindness you've shown to me through this gift. In a time when***

***things felt so unfair and so many of us former USAID Staff felt under attack and were met with unkindness and pain often, your generosity has been a reminder that kindness and humanity prevail. These funds have been so helpful. As I work to determine what is next, your support helped ensure stability in my life. Thank you so much.***

This is who we are. This is what community looks like. Together, we will continue to honor the legacy of service, lift one another up, and carry forward the values that unite us.

## **Calendar of Upcoming UAA Events**

**New!** Wednesday, August 5, 2026, the annual Vermont UAA picnic will be held in Rochester VT. All alums and friends of USAID who will be in New England in early August are most welcome to attend. For further details, please get in touch with Ann Van Dusen ([avandusen4@gmail.com](mailto:avandusen4@gmail.com)), Anne Aarnes ([ahaarnes@hotmail.com](mailto:ahaarnes@hotmail.com)) or Connie Carrino ([cacarrino@gmail.com](mailto:cacarrino@gmail.com))

## **What is New on the Website**

### **In Memoriam:**

Todd Amani, Nabil Balamon Tawfik, Joyce Mabel Holfeld, Yolanda Morris, Lois Mae Hobson, John Thomas Rigby, Philip Birnbaum, Leslie Black Cordes, Charles William Torquill Stephenson

### **Bulletin Board**

- Thursday, March 5, 9:30 am – 12 pm, DACOR Career Series: A Conversation on the Future of U.S. Diplomacy. [Click here](#) for more information and registration.
- Thursday, March 5, 2026, 9:00 AM EST, the KonTerra Group is partnering with Aid Transition Alliance and Forums @ Work to launch peer development groups for national staff in transition. [Click here](#) for more information and registration.
- Three former USAID staff have launched campaigns for elected office at all levels of government in Maryland. [Click here](#) for the report.
- USAID News Story Tracker, [USAID Media](#)

### **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.)

- **State Dept sets up new Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response.** By Helen Murphy, Devex Newswire, 20 Feb 2026
- **AID cuts impact Malawi.** By Helen Murphy, Devex Newswire, 11 Feb 2026
- **US aid cuts hit professionals far beyond the US.** By Anna Gawel, Devex Newswire, 10 Feb 2026
- **The Aftermath of Feeding America's Credibility Into the Woodchipper.** By Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International, The New York Times, 8 Feb 2026
- **The Aid Report: US Aid Cut Impacts, One Year Later.** Devex, Feb. 2026
- **Abandoned Leadership, The End of U.S. Foreign Aid for Family Planning, and What Could Come Next.**

## Latest UAA Letter to Secretary of State Rubio on Behalf of Former FSNs

UAA is aware of a number of restrictions, issued in the past year, on foreign nationals' entry into, or ability to remain in, the United States. We are deeply concerned about the potential impact of these travel and immigration restrictions on our former FSN colleagues. On February 24 UAA delivered? Sent? a letter to Secretary of State Rubio strongly urging that exceptions for former locally-employed staff (LES) employed by the U.S. Government (USG) be expressly included all current and future immigrant and non-immigrant visitor-related issuances. We urge that all implementing guidance and practice recognize and provide special consideration for locally employed staff (LES) formerly employed by the US Government.

Click [HERE](#) for a copy of the letter.

UAA has shared copies of this letter with contacts in Congress as well as others having an interest in this issue. UAA encourages all of you to share the letter with local legislators, the press and any organizations you believe would be interested in these developments. It is critical that they understand the extraordinary contributions of our former FSN colleagues and their decades of service to USAID to achieve development results.

## USAID Staff Financial Support Fund

With our objective accomplished, the fund is closing. The numbers: Over \$500,000 in donations and 244 former employees plus families assisted.

In June 2025 the UAA board approved the establishment of the USAID Staff Financial Support Fund, as proposed by a fund development design team that began working on the project in February 2025. The primary objective of the fund was to provide emergency \$2000 grants to eligible USAID employees whose employment had been terminated as a result of the administration's dismantling of USAID and who consequently faced unexpected financial difficulties. More about the fund's purpose and operation can be found [HERE](#).

As of February 27, 2026, donations to the fund exceeded the \$500,000 target, now totaling \$507,988 provided through 348 donations. Click [HERE](#) to see a list of donors. While we received 207 grant applications during the first seven weeks of the fund's existence, that number fell to 77 applications during the second seven weeks, and then to 17 during the third seven-week period. As a result, we closed the application window December 31, 2025, and now have closed the donation window having raised sufficient funds to cover all eligible grant applications received, 244 in total. The fund itself will close by the end of March 2026.

The fund was managed by a seven-member core team (Tony Chan, Cindy Clapp-Wincek, Carol Dabbs, David McCloud, Jim Redder, Rob Sonenthal, Barbara Turner) with essential assistance from the UAA communications team (Stu Callihan, Nancy Tumavick, and the UAA Systems Manager). Twenty-three other volunteers assisted with its design and operations – click [HERE](#) for a complete list of those involved. In addition, a partner nonprofit organization, the Greater Washington Community Foundation, collected and managed the accounting of all donations and managed the disbursement of all grants, thus significantly reducing the UAA burden of the fund's financial management while maintaining accountability.

We received over 100 messages of thanks from grant recipients and will make those accessible on the UAA website. One of the most poignant thank you messages we received concludes the Note from the Board above– please read it.

Thanks to all in the UAA who supported this worthy effort.

## **UAA Committee on Regional Activities**

### **Pennsylvania Alumni Hosted Two Recent Gatherings**

USAID PA Alum Christine Djondo (DMD/DRC 2023-2025) hosted a Cumberland County gathering on January 11th for former USAID employees and partners living in Carlisle and Mechanicsburg, PA. All agreed that continuing to provide community and support for each other is very important as many have had a hard time forgetting what happened to all of USAID in 2025. Alumni in attendance were Diana Putman and spouse Adam Messer, Kathy Goss, Ward Miller, Stephanie

Riddell and spouse Adam Riddell, and Stephen Gudz. Freddy Tsimba, a famous sculptor from DRC, made a special guest appearance!

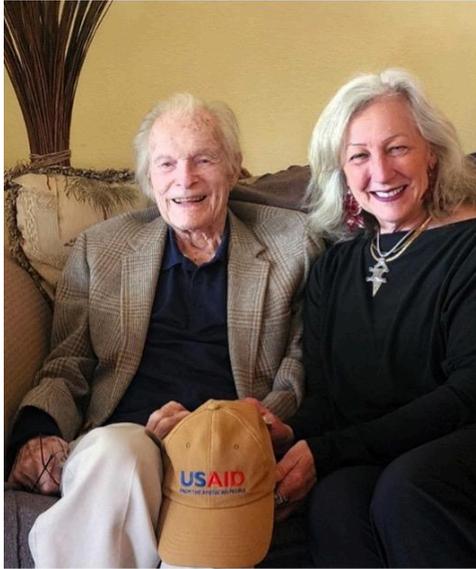
On February 1, Maura O'Brien hosted a small event in Ardmore attended by some of the most active members of the Signal Group, to celebrate working together for a year. In attendance were Kathy Goss, Jami Willard, Christine Djondo, Diana Putman, Mary Zell and Stephanie Hess. The group discussed their successes last year as well as 2026 priorities, in addition to enjoying each other's company.



*Left to right: Stephanie, Christine, Mary, Jami, Kathy and Diana. Maura had to run an errand so missed the photo op.*

## **Arizona**

Ambassador Irving Tragen. During her trip to Arizona Board Member Christine Sheckler met with Ambassador Irving Tragen who turns 104 on May 18. He spent half his career with USAID and the other half with the Department of State. He plans to release the third novel in his El Salvador-based trilogy at that time.



## California

12 February 2026: The USAID Sacramento/Sierra Alumni group met and welcomed the visit of USAID Bay Area alumna, Melissa Hooper. The Sac/Sierra group is very active, meets often, and welcomes other USAID Alumni nomads!



## 4th Anniversary of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine

24 February 2026: University of California San Diego ArtPower hosted the Ukrainian musical/theatrical group DakhaBrakha. USAID alumna Christine Sheckler won the highest bid for a Ukrainian painting of DakhaBrakha. All proceeds went to the Ukraine Defenders.



## 25 February 2026: Steve Olive, Ph.D., former USAID/India Mission Director spoke at the University of California San Diego, School of Global Policy and Development's India Center.



Dr. Olive discussed US-India relations historically, the impact of last year's withdrawal of the USAID Mission, the prospects and challenges for India going forward, and the impact on the US and our relations with India and other allies and adversaries without USAID's critical in-country global presence. His wife, USAID FSO Cristina Olive, & Ambassador Leslie Reed and her husband, USAID FSO Martin Fischer, and USAID FSO Christine Sheckler. UAA is proud that former USAID FSO officer Lisa Patel is now the India Center Deputy Director and was pivotal in setting up this talk. She will

continue to be a key partner in supporting UAA's citizen outreach and education strategy to better inform the American people about the value to America of global soft power engagement.

## **UAA Announcements of Interest to UAA Membership**

### **Am I a 2026 UAA MEMBER?**

Membership in UAA is on a calendar year basis. So if you last paid membership dues prior to December 1, 2025, when we started attributing dues payments to membership for 2026, you'll need to pay dues for 2026.[1] You may look up your membership status at any time

at: <https://usaidalumni.org/alumni/uaa-contributing-members/>. It is updated approximately monthly. Lists of prior year members are linked at the bottom of this year's list.

## **Calling All Members – Seeking new Committee Co-Chairs & Members**

During this time of change in and reinvention of international cooperation, the USAID Alumni Association (UAA) is more active than ever. UAA's responsiveness, accomplishments, and productivity rely on the active participation of our members on the committees. The UAA Board is actively seeking new co-chairs and members for our UAA committees (see descriptions below):

Annual General Meeting (AGM)	Awards
Development Issues	Finance and Administration
Membership	Peer Support
Public Outreach	Regional Activities
Social Events	USAID History/ADST

We hope you will consider joining and working on one or more of these committees. Please let us know of your interest by sending an email to [office@usaidalumni.org](mailto:office@usaidalumni.org). [Click here](#) to see committee descriptions.

An explanation of paying dues to UAA is on our website at: <https://usaidalumni.org/dues-payment/>. Specifics about paying online by credit card or by mail by check, including 2026 dues levels, are on the left-hand side of the opening page of our website <https://usaidalumni.org/>.

For questions, please email us at [office@usaidalumni.org](mailto:office@usaidalumni.org).  
-- Carol Dabbs, Treasurer

## **Update on Found Awards**

UAA members found a second tranche of awards in the materials rescued from the RRB last year. In total, we have rescued some 500 awards, certificates, and plaques. While most are Length of Service Awards, they also include Appointments into and within the Senior Foreign Service, Distinguished Career Service Awards, and Presidential Rank Awards. We returned the awards to the two USAID officers who have responsibility, and resources, to forward the documents to the awardees. Please check the list — in alphabetical order on the UAA Bulletin Board under '[Found Awards](#)' — to see if you see your name or if you can provide any contact information for the awardees. Thank you.

## **Profile: Amita Kulkarni and David Hoffman**

Amita Kulkarni and David Hoffman were a USAID tandem foreign service couple until both were RIF'd during the summer/fall of 2025. The two



served in a variety of posts, Amita as a program officer and David in the Democracy, Rights and Governance backstop: Central Asia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, as well as in the Caucasus (Georgia and Armenia). Both were overseas when RIF'd, David as the Mission Director for the

USAID/Uzbekistan Mission, and Amita as a remote member of the DIV (Development Innovation Ventures) team.

Upon separating from the Agency, Amita and David, along with their two daughters, Kaya and Karina (12 and 8 years old, respectively, at the time) repatriated back to San Diego, California - their home of record and where David grew up. The family immediately jumped into the local "rhythm," becoming active in the school communities and looking up old friends. Teaching the kids to (re)connect with their California heritage (which, contrary to popular belief, does not exclusively consist of surfing although, yes, surfing is a part of it) was also a high priority.

Amita and David's reentry to life in America was eased considerably by the warm welcome of the local USAID alumni community in San Diego. Amita in particular (while David was still in Uzbekistan, closing the Mission) participated in a number of UAA-organized social events, and enjoyed meeting both new and old USAID friends.

In September, David received a job offer to return to Uzbekistan as the Central Asia Regional Director for the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (or TBI for short). After discussing the pros and cons, the family decided it was too good an opportunity to pass up, and David "re-relocated" back to Tashkent, Uzbekistan in October. With the girls already attending local San Diego schools, Amita and the kids stayed in California, giving David time to "kick the tires" at the new job.

Jumping into a different organizational culture - a British one, no less! - after a career in the USAID foreign service has not been without the occasional hiccup. Particularly hard on David has been the requirement to use British spelling in internal documents and deliverables. Nevertheless, he has settled in with TBI, helping to expand the organization's strategic advisory services work with governments across Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Most importantly, in January 2026, Amita and their two daughters joined David in Tashkent, reuniting the family. The girls have returned to Tashkent International School after their "semester abroad in America,"

and snapped back into their friend circles, proving once again the resilience of “Third Culture Kids.” Amita is exploring new professional opportunities.

Given the chaos, stress, and disruption of 2025, Amita and David feel fortunate and blessed that they have landed, for the time being, on their feet. They eagerly look forward to welcoming any and all USAID friends to Uzbekistan, where the Silk Road, if anything, can remind us how long, unpredictable, and yet full of wonderment our individual experiences are.

**Make Your 2026 UAA Membership Contribution**  
**USAID Alumni Association**

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