USAID Alumni Association

September 2026 Newsletter

Note from the UAA Board

We hope you have had a fantastic summer and are looking forward to an engaging fall with the UAA as we roll out our new strategy.

We had a terrific turnout of around 300 members for the End of Summer Picnic. These events are an important part of what makes UAA special: the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, make new ones, and enjoy the community we built together. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Social Committee and to everyone who came early to set up and stayed late to help clean up.

As we look ahead, please join us for two important September events.

- On September 9, we will host a member-only discussion of the report, "What Does America Want from Its Foreign Assistance Program? Strategic Options and Policy-Leader Priorities in a Time of Peer Competition and Partisan Discord," by our own Jim Kunder, Laura Pavlovic, and Ramsey Day.

- On September 15 at noon, please join us to meet the 10 candidates for the UAA Board. Candidates will address two key questions: Why do you want to serve on the UAA Board, and how would you use your position to better serve members—including those outside the DMV, former GS and FSN employees, and former Institutional Support Contractors?

We hope you had a chance to read our recent email about UAA's new strategic framework. The new strategic framework was shaped by your input and centers on three priorities: building a stronger UAA; preserving and applying our professional knowledge; and strengthening member value. It represents an important evolution in UAA's role—from primarily supporting our members to also preserving the legacy of U.S. development and humanitarian assistance and helping shape its future.

We need your experience, ideas, and engagement to help UAA meet this moment and build for the future. Please visit the UAA website for more details and help us put the new strategy into action.

And please don't forget to nominate a colleague or friend for the UAA Alumni of the Year Award. Think about the alumni you know who continue to make a difference through their professional work, volunteer service, community leadership, advocacy, scholarship, mentoring, entrepreneurship, or other contributions. Please submit nominations electronically to office@usaidalumni.org by September 30, 2026.

We look forward to seeing everyone at the Annual General Meeting at the end of October!

Calendar of Upcoming UAA Events

New! September 9, 7:00-8:30 pm ET | Virtual | Aid on the Hill (AOTH) and the USAID Alumni Association (UAA) members only. ""What Does America Want from its Foreign Assistance Program? Strategic Options and Policy-Leader Priorities in a Time of Peer Competition and Partisan Discord," " by Laura Pavlovic, Ramsey Day, and Jim Kunder. Click here to Register.

New! September 15 Board Candidates Forum 12 noon to 1:15 pm (see below for more information)

New! September 26 Meet-up event for Firebird (National Theater)

New! October 29 (Possible) O Street Dinner, Washington, DC

New! October 30 UAA Annual General Meeting, Washington, DC. Click here for more information.

New! December 6 UAA Friendsgiving (Alexandria, VA)

New! December 16 Meet-up event for Hamilton (National Theater)

UAA Inaugural Front Line Conversation Series

On September 2, the UAA FSN Working Group hosted the first sessions of the Front Line Conversation Series. This series focuses on engaging with the USAID FSN community and serving as a vehicle for FSN voices to be heard. About 80 people took part in the sessions to discuss the future of foreign assistance.

These first two sessions took place in the morning and evening of September 2. Mary Alice Kleinjan, head of the FSN Working Group, facilitated both sessions. In each session, Chris Milligan, UAA Board Co-Chair, outlined the ongoing policy debates and multiple initiatives rethinking foreign aid, emphasizing the need for FSN voices. Dottie Rayburn, legislative expert, detailed the congressional landscape, noting bipartisan support for aid but political challenges. Noreen Sargsyan and Ani Manukyan described the impact of USAID's closure in Armenia, highlighting lost programs, gaps in civil society support, and the enduring value of local expertise and relationships.

In the morning session, following these introductory remarks, participants from India, DRC, and El Salvador shared country-specific experiences, discussing the loss of trilateral cooperation opportunities, weakened institutional relationships, and China's growing influence. The discussion stressed the importance of protecting human capital, strengthening local institutions, and moving beyond transactional approaches.

In the evening session, former FSNs from several countries, including Laos, Liberia, Cambodia, and Guatemala, shared personal experiences about job losses, challenges finding new employment, and the ongoing impact of USAID's closure in their countries. The discussion emphasized the importance of preserving institutional knowledge, protecting human capital, and ensuring FSNs have a meaningful role in shaping the future of foreign assistance.
Future sessions of the Front Line Conversations will be scheduled in the coming months. If you have suggestions for topics or speakers, or if you are interested in engaging with the UAA FSN Working Group, please email uaafsnwg@gmail.com.

What's New on the Website

In Memoriam:

James Roche Phippard, Gary Wayne Bricker, Nancy Lee Estes, Leveo Victor Sanchez, Denis Michael Neill, Floyd Rudolph Spears, Gary L. Bayer, Catherine “Cathy” Anne Wright Norris

News About USAID

Unless otherwise stated, the links below are for information purposes only and do not convey the endorsement of the UAA, its members, or its Board. See:
1) **Bulletin Board**, **including Statements from UAA about Current Events**
2) **Articles**
3) **Podcasts & Recorded Media**

Bulletin Board

- **SPIES AMONG US: Cuba's Spies Inside the U.S. Government. Friday, September 11 | 12:00–2:00 p.m. at DACOR Bacon House**. A DACOR Lunch with Award-Winning Investigative Journalist Jim Popkin. | In Person & Virtual. Click here for details and a registration link.

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.)

USAID News Story Tracker: USAID Media

- American Foreign Service Association remembers USAID. Randy Chester, AFSA USAID Vice President, 2 Sep 2026
- Where Is 60 Years of Data, Information, and Knowledge One Year After USAID Was Fed "Into the Wood Chipper"? By Tanya Torres (University of Maryland) & Zachary Baquet, *The Political Librarian,* 2026*,* 9(1), pp. 15-29
- Removing Maduro was easy. Now comes the hard part. Opinion by Lynn Northcutt Vega, retired USAID FSO, *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, 19 Aug 2026
- What to know from AP's report about pregnant women and babies dying in Nepal amid USAID cuts. By Kristen Gelineau, *Associated Press,* 13 Aug 2026
- USAID fallout: In Nepal, when the aid workers stopped coming, the women and babies started dying. By Kristen Gelineau, *Associated Press*, 13 Aug 2026
- Blame Elon Musk and Donald Trump for the Out-of-Control Ebola Crisis. By Jeremy Konyndyk, *Zeteo,* 30 July 2026

- House FY27 Foreign Assistance Bill Includes MFAN Effectiveness Proposals, Rejects Administration's Steep Funding Cuts. *MFAN*, 30 July 2026

- A new path to leadership for US foreign aid. By David Beasley and Ben Cardin, opinion contributors, *The Hill,* 29 July 2026

- State Department will dispense $600M for vaccines RFK Jr. held up, Collins says. By Carmen Paun, *Politic*o, 28 July 2026

- Cuts to anti-AIDS foreign aid take a toll in Africa. Editorial Board, *The Washington Post*, 25 July 2026

- What Does America Want from its Foreign Assistance Program? By James Kunder, Laura Pavlovic and Ramsey Day, Institute for Indo-Pacific Security, July 2026

- New State Department Africa Bureau "development strategy" By Yinka Adegoke, Editor, *Semafor Africa*, 27 July 2026

- The dismantling of USAID and the firing of its staff was illegal. By J. Brian Atwood and Kevin E. Byrnes, *The Hill,* 22 July 2026

Podcast & Recorded Media

- The Hidden Cost of Trump's USAID Cuts, Bloomberg Investigates

UAA Annual Picnic

SEE YOU AT THE PARK! On Sunday, August 30, the USAID family came together on a beautiful hot late summer day for the Annual Picnic at Fort Hunt Park in Alexandria Virginia. Over 300 former employees (civil service, foreign service, FSNs and contractors) enjoyed an afternoon of camaraderie, delicious food from around the world, and friendship.





Our community continues to connect and support each other. Interest was high on the next phase of international development and retaining our legacy.



Pam Foster, Alicia Musah, Ghytana Butler, Susan Foster Rear: Diane Ray and Kerry Pelzman



Stephen Butler and Ryan Washburn

In welcoming remarks, Chris Milligan outlined the UAA's ongoing effort to redefine its mission and priorities, encouraging members to help shape the organization's future and join the conversation.



Irene Koek, Margot Ellis, Carol Dabbs

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We are grateful to all who attended and to the expanded Social Committee. for creating a festive environment, organizing food and drinks, and returning the shelter to order – which has earned us an invitation to return from the Park Rangers!

Upcoming UAA activities in September, November and December are listed in the Newsletter. We hope you will join us! **Click here** to see

more photographs of this event.



Incidentally, someone left behind 2 lovely red Coleman camp chairs, one pictured here. To claim them please contact Karen Freeman at ugandakaren@hotmail.com.

UAA Annual General Meeting on October 30

Mark your calendars and get ready to register! The UAA Annual General Meeting will be held on October 30, 2026, at the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C., with a virtual option for those who cannot attend in person. This is a pivotal year for the UAA as we develop a new strategy shaped by the crucial input you provided through this summer's survey. The meeting will focus on finalizing our new strategy and newly formed working groups, giving members the chance to help shape the next chapter of the UAA. Look for registration notices in September and early October.

The agenda this year will include a keynote session – details to be announced soon! The UAA Board will lead a discussion of UAA's draft new strategy, with time for Q&A. This session will be followed by a leisurely lunch for those attending in-person to reconnect with friends and welcome new members.

The afternoon will open with a panel of emerging Regional UAA Chapters, featuring both in-person and virtual members, who will discuss their work over the past year and share perspectives from outside the DMV on the draft UAA strategy and future directions. This will be followed by a moderated panel of "sister" organizations — those invited include AID On The Hill, AID Transition Alliance, One USAID Community, Our USAID Community, and the Alliance for American Leadership — who will discuss complementarity, gaps, challenges, and areas of mutual support in our work.

Throughout the day, there will be time for comments and questions from both in-person and virtual participants on each session's topics. Finally, we will present the "Alumni of the Year" award(s) at the close of the AGM. Nominations are now open for this award, so please start thinking of candidates you would like to put forward!

Look for registration notices in September and early October. Also, please remember to renew your membership, invite new members

(please see new, wider eligibility requirements for membership **here**), and sign up early to ensure your seat!

UAA Alumni of the Year Awards

Call for Nominations

The USAID Alumni Association's Alumni of the Year Awards recognize outstanding UAA members whose contributions since leaving USAID have made a meaningful difference to their communities and to others at home and/or abroad.

Established in 2014, the Alumni of the Year Awards have honored 19 exceptional alumni whose accomplishments and service exemplify the values, commitment, and spirit of the USAID community. Many other alumni also deserve recognition, and the UAA Board Awards Committee needs your help identifying them.

Nominees may be based in the United States or abroad. Past recipients have included former Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). We continue to encourage you to consider all UAA members whether former FSNs, political appointees, institutional service contractors, direct hires, USPSCs, and others. To receive the award, nominees must be, or become, members of UAA.

How and When to Submit

Please submit nominations electronically to office@usaidalumni.org by September 30, 2026. Nominations received after the deadline cannot be considered. The 2026 award recipient(s) will be notified in advance and recognized at the UAA Annual General Meeting in October 2026.

Further details are available here

Meet the UAA Board Candidates

Dear UAA Member,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the USAID Alumni association, I pleased to announce that we have a rich field of strong and talented candidates for the upcoming election for new Board members. Since there are nine candidates, (see below) running for two positions, we plan to hold a virtual candidates forum at 12:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time (GMT - 4) on September 15. This will allow UAA members to have more information about candidates to inform their choices. Each candidate will be given approximately five minutes for self-introduction and to respond to prepared questions.

Elections will take place by an online ballot from September 14 through October 16. Results will be announced at the Annual General Meeting on October 30.

Please click here to register for the September 15 session by September 11.

UAA Board Candidates (2026) [link to candidate statements]

- Alexious Butler
- Margaret Ennis Spears
- Lela Kerashvili
- Cheryl "Cherie" Klein
- Nitin Madhav
- Andrew Plitt
- Jeanne Pryor
- William (Bill) Schaedla
- Curt Wolters

Questions and comments may be directed to Nominating Committee Members Jeanne Briggs, Christine Sheckler and Stephen Haykin.

Regional Gatherings

Vermont

On a warm summer day on August 5, 2026, more than 40 USAID alumni and friends gathered for the 20th annual "Development Wallah" picnic in Rochester, Vermont. This gathering drew USAID alums from Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Massachusetts as well as Vermont, and several from the Washington, DC area (Carol Peasley, Scott and Gwyneth Radloff, Kelly and Nancy Kammerer) who were visiting New England at the time. In addition to plenty of time to catch up with friends, a highlight of the day was an update from Scott Radloff on ongoing efforts to keep USAID in the news and revive US foreign assistance. One participant, David Hess, stayed over to address a gathering of residents of the town of Rochester about the work of USAID and about its disastrous destruction. His address was highlighted on the front page of the local White River Valley Herald newspaper. If you would like to be on a mailing list to be informed of next year's gathering, please be in touch with Ann Van Dusen (avandusen4@gmail.com).



Minnesota

Kate Somvongsiri reports:

Dear fellow USAID alums,

Thank you for these newsletters and updates - it’s a nice way to stay connected from beyond the DMV. We had a great gathering here in Minnesota on July 7 when Nick Enrich came through for his book tour. I’m attaching a photo here that includes USAID alums and partners.

Hope you’re well,
Kate Somvongsiri



California

In Sacramento: UAA Board Secretary Christine Sheckler met with former USAIDers and implementing partners at the USAID Sacramento-Sierra Alumni meetup in Sacramento on August 18, 2026. This gathering is part of her statewide trip to listen to alumni perspectives, discuss the new draft UAA Strategic Plan, and connect with the broader community.



front row: Jon Clark & son, Rene's spouse, Jose. Back row: Rene Van Slate, Allyson Z, Cindy Rogers, Christine Sheckler, David, Tamara Sartania, Zachary B, Jim Stein, Tom Rogers

USAID Sacramento-Sierra Alumni breakfast meetup in Auburn, CA. One-on-one discussions regarding the impact of "2025" on individuals who lost their USAID jobs and careers last year, and whether UAA and the new draft Strategic Plan address their unique needs.

[L to R: Rasa Kent, Christine Sheckler, Cindy Rogers, host]



Development Dialogues

Congress' Role in Fostering a U.S. Foreign Assistance Program that Serves the National Interest



On Wednesday, July 29, **Virginia Congressman James Walkinshaw (D) spoke to a full DACOR/Bacon House UAA/DACOR lunch** (and virtual) session. He made clear the importance of Congressional oversight of the Executive Branch's execution of and accountability for U.S. foreign policy, national security, diplomacy, and foreign assistance. He strongly asserted that U.S. foreign assistance is vital for our national security, that many more experienced aid professionals need to be restored into the US Government, and that grievances of the thousands of foreign aid personnel RIF'd last year need to be corrected and adjudicated. He left UAA Members feeling honored, respected, and encouraged. To watch his presentation and the Q&A, please **click here**.

Profile: Lela Kerashvili

Lela Kerashvili, a Georgian development and humanitarian professional with more than 20 years of experience at USAID/Georgia, served as Senior Development Assistance and



Project Management Lead in the Strategy and Program Office, supporting Democracy, Rights, and Governance (DRG) activities.

In 1988–1989, while still a student in the Soviet Union, Lela was selected to participate in the first student cultural exchange programs between the Consortium of Colleges in the United States and the Soviet Union. She spent a year at Amherst College. For a young student coming from the Soviet Union, the experience was extraordinary and she often describes it as almost like going to Mars.

Lela entered the development and humanitarian field as Georgia navigated the difficult transition to independence, amid severe economic hardship and growing security threats. She joined USAID/Georgia in 1996, working on humanitarian assistance and transitional programs. Lela recalls climbing onto mazout (fuel oil) containers to measure deliveries of U.S. Government assistance, helping ensure that fuel reached communities so they could have electricity for at least several hours daily.

Lela later received a second U.S. Government (USG) fellowship and completed a master's degree in public administration at New York University. Following her return to Georgia, she worked with international NGOs, including serving as Deputy Country Director for World Vision and Director of Grants and Compliance for a USAID-funded Community Mobilization Initiative implemented by Mercy Corps. These positions gave her valuable hands-on experience in program implementation and perspective on development from the implementing-partner side.

Lela returned to USAID in 2006. Although primarily based in Georgia, she completed temporary USAID assignments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Burma, broadening her understanding of challenging operating environments and contributing to USG national security objectives.

Lela was also an active member of the USAID FSN Committee, the joint USAID–State Department FSN Committee, and the Global FSN Advocacy Council, where she served from 2019 to 2021. Lela contributed to improvements in Georgia's Local Compensation Plan and advocated for stronger recognition and support of Foreign

Service Nationals globally. Since 2025 she has been active in UAA's FSN Working Group.

When USAID/Georgia closed, Lela faced a moment of uncertainty after more than two decades with USAID. But she never really considered leaving the field. She completed several short-term consultancies in Georgia and now works with an international NGO in Kyiv on lifesaving humanitarian programs. For her, it is a continuation of the path she started decades ago: staying close to people and helping where help is needed. During the difficult transition after USAID's closure, Lela also turned to something more personal—applied arts classes. Creativity became a way to cope, stay grounded, and move forward.

Lela is a mother of three adult children: Erekle, an artist and PhD student in Art Research in Budapest; Nutsa, a development professional who recently completed an MPP in Boston; and Liza, a master's student in Clinical Social Work in Boston.

Make Your 2026 UAA Membership Contribution

USAID Alumni Association

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