



USAID Alumni Association
2020 Membership Survey Report
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SUMMARY

We are pleased to share with you the results of the March 2020 UAA Membership Survey which had two main purposes: (1) For leadership to learn what is working or not working for the membership; and (2) for membership to express interest in UAA committees and other volunteer activities. This information has been shared with the Board and respective UAA committee chairs.

The 2020 Membership Survey saw more than a doubling of the participation rate over last year's survey, yet the number of respondents represented less than one-fifth of the over 1,100 registered UAA alumni. The survey confirmed that the UAA membership is diverse in terms of past USAID service, with all employment categories, such as FSO, GS, PSC, et. al., represented in the UAA. The Association's diversity is also demonstrated by the number of years of USAID employment and years since retirement or separation, with all periods represented although skewed toward the longest period of over 20 years of USAID service or separation by the highest percentage of respondents.

The survey asked several questions, including: (1) Ideas for specific UAA events in areas outside the District, Maryland and Virginia; (2) What the UAA should do that is not now being done; and (3) What would better inform and attract more eligible USAID alumni to join the UAA. The respondents offered approximately 150 comments in response to the questions, many of which were thoughtful, innovative, and interesting and others were already being implemented or were not feasible.

Finally, 96 respondents expressed interest in participating in the UAA strategic goals implemented by the six committees, as well as other volunteer opportunities through the UAA. Their names have been provided to the relevant committee chairs.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who responded to the 2020 Membership Survey.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Participation rates in the UAA annual membership survey have fluctuated over the years. Participation rates more than doubled this year over 2019, with 187 individuals, or 17% of the membership responding in 2020 compared to 80 individuals, or 8% last year. While the response is a substantial improvement, it still represents a small proportion of the over 1,100 UAA registrants.

UAA Membership Survey Participation by Year

| Year | # responses | % responding | % change, year over year |
|------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 2014 | 124 | | |
| 2015 | 45 | | -64% |
| 2016 | 94 | | 109% |
| 2017 | 88 | | -6% |
| 2018 | 134 | | 52% |
| 2019 | 80 | 8.0 | -40% |
| 2020 | 187 | 16.9 | 134% |

Survey Procedure: As in past years, the survey was sent early in the year, on February 23, 2020, to all registered UAA members (1,101). It was followed up twice on February 28 and in the March newsletter, noting a deadline for response by March 2. This is later in the calendar year than most previous surveys, and may account for the higher response rate.

Demographic Characteristics: As in past surveys, over half of the respondents (96, or 51.3%) were from the District, Maryland and Virginia (DMV) area and slightly less than half (89, or 47.5%) were from outside the DMV region. Two people (1%) did not note their locations. The 2020 survey response is similar to the 2019 survey in which half of the respondents were from the DMV area and half from outside the region.

Employment Mechanisms: The survey confirmed that the UAA membership is diverse in terms of USAID employment categories. The UAA survey respondents were predominantly Foreign Service, 151 (81.1%). The second largest segment

was made up of 44 (23.6%) Personal Services Contractors, followed by 38 (20.4%) General Schedule (Civil Servants). Other employment categories were represented by the survey respondents as follows: eight (4.3%) Resources Support Services Agreement (RSSA); six (3.2%) Administratively Determined (AD); five (2.6%) Participating Agency Service Agreement (PASA); three (1.6%) Schedule C; two (1.0%) Fellowship Programs; and 14 (7.5%) in other unspecified employment categories. No respondents identified themselves as Foreign Service National (FSN) or Third-Country National (TCN). The percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to check all employment mechanisms that apply.

Years of Employment and Since Separation: This year, the survey included two separate questions about the years of USAID employment and the years since retirement or separation. Both questions apply to the above employment categories eligible for UAA membership.

The first question asked the responder for the **total years of employment** by USAID under the employment categories listed above. While the largest number of respondents, 137 (73.2%), were employed over 20 years, there were some who served for each of the other periods.

| Years of USAID Employment | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Number of Years | Number of Responses | % of total |
| Up to 5 | 8 | 4.2 |
| 6 to 10 | 10 | 5.3 |
| 11 to 15 | 16 | 8.5 |
| 15 to 20 | 15 | 8.0 |
| Beyond 20 | 137 | 73.2 |
| No response | 1 | 0.5 |
| Total | 187 | 100% |

The second question inquired **how many years it has been since last retirement/separation** in one of the employment categories. The results show a relatively even distribution with two exceptions: the largest percentage (28.3%)

indicated over 20 years of separation from USAID and the lowest percentage (10.6%) was the 11-15-year category, which was under-represented.

| Years since Separation | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Number of Years | Number of Responses | % of total |
| Up to 5 | 38 | 20.3 |
| 6 to 10 | 36 | 19.2 |
| 11 to 15 | 20 | 10.6 |
| 15 to 20 | 37 | 19.7 |
| Beyond 20 | 53 | 28.3 |
| No response | 3 | 1.6 |
| Total | 187 | 100% |

Source of First Learning About UAA: Close to half of the respondents, 85 (45.4%) learned about UAA from USAID colleagues; 40 (21.3%) learned from other USAID retirees or separated employees; 38 (20.3%) learned from the USAID retirement website or staff; 12 (6.4%) from the Foreign Service Institute’s Jobs Search Program; and five (2.6%) from the LinkedIn USAID Alumni Association group. One respondent said he learned about the UAA through DACOR. Seven people did not respond.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Participation in UAA Events: In response to the query about having participated in any 2019 UAA-sponsored events, less than half of the respondents (82, or 43.8%) had attended a UAA event in person during the past year, and over half (104, or 55.6%) did not participate. One person did not respond. These numbers are unexpected given that over half of the respondents (96, or 51.3%) reported that they live in the DMV region and can attend events more easily compared to less than half of respondents (89, or 45.5%) who live outside the area. Two people did not respond to the question of where they were located.

For those 89 respondents living **outside the DMV region**, a large majority (84, or 94%) indicated an interest in participating in a UAA event in their area. Of these 89 people, almost half (44, or 49.3%) answered “yes” and another 40 (44.9%) said “maybe” they would be interested. Eight others said “no” to the question and 95 did not respond; these respondents were presumably among the 96 who reported living in the DMV area.

Seven respondents said that they would attend UAA events except for living outside the DMV area, living in the region but a distance from DC, or living overseas. Other reasons given for non-attendance included their travel, other scheduling conflicts, limited mobility due to age, the timing and location of the event, and lack of clarity about who could attend.

Those living outside the DMV, however, said that, while they do not attend because they infrequently or rarely visit the area, they would attend events in their local area. Some respondents noted they live in isolated places both in the United States and overseas without any nearby alumni. Several expressed interest in learning about other alumni in their local areas.

There were many and varied ideas presented for potential local area events and for possible topics of discussion. The following **events** were suggested: luncheons with USAID and State alumni; a forum on international development, writ large; lectures or discussion groups; university panel discussions; talks to local clubs about USAID development contributions; written op-eds; advocacy efforts for development assistance and foreign policy; and social gatherings. **Topics** recommended included the following: How to maintain the relevance of international development assistance in these times of change; issues such as India/Pakistan/Kashmir; China’s hegemonic ambitions; Putin’s ambition to be 21st century czar; climate change; world hunger and poverty; latest U.S. policies relating to refugees; large numbers of people impacted by poverty and continuing warfare in countries, especially Latin America and Middle East; USAID contributions to world development; and statistics on foreign aid accomplishments.

There were many statements expressing interest in meeting with other alumni at social and other events and the need for information on other UAA members in the area. Two specific statements provide examples of the range of comments by

respondents on the survey. One unfavorable comment was: “Would happily pay a fee to attend events when in the DC area, but do not want to join UAA for a hefty membership fee.” An offsetting positive comment was: “Would annually travel 100-150 miles for a picnic (best) or restaurant-sited dinner (winter).”

Listening to Recordings of UAA Events: Thirty-one (16.5%) respondents indicated they have listened to the recorded events on the website, but others (131, or 82.8%) reported that they had not listened or hadn’t been aware of that function. Two respondents said that when they learned about the recordings, they enjoyed listening to the DACOR presentations, and another said he would have liked to listen had he known they were available. Most of the 20 comments received were favorable, stating that the recordings were very good and informative, always interesting, and a good resource for missed presentations and those of special interest. Three suggestions were offered: (1) Quality of some of the videos could be improved; (2) Transcripts of the audio recordings could be made with free software; and (3) Given the lack of awareness, clearly make known the availability of the recordings to both members and non-members. There was also one personal view explaining that the respondent “don’t/won’t watch or listen to recordings that are too passive for a daytime activity, and too serious for an evening activity.”

VOLUNTEERING FOR UAA

As in prior years, the questionnaire focused in large part on the willingness of respondents to get involved, or more involved, in achieving UAA goals through committees and their activities. Ninety-six respondents volunteered to participate on multiple committees and programs, some for as many as eight activities each, or a total of 288 activities. Volunteer names and contact information were provided to the respective committee chairs for follow up.

Strategic Goals/Committees: In response to the question about interest in participating in the committees that carry out the six goals of the UAA strategic

plan, a number of respondents indicated their interest in each of the following committees:

- 6 (5%) volunteered for the Membership Committee, Goal 1;
- 21 (16%) for the Strengthening USAID Committee, Goal 2;
- 46 (33%) for the Development Issues Committee, Goal 3;
- 40 (29%) for the USAID History Project, Goal 4;
- 33 (25%) for the Public Outreach Committee, Goal 5; and
- 5 (4%) for the Finance and Administration Committee, Goal 6.

It is noteworthy that the volunteers for UAA strategic goals/committees are in addition to those indicated below who volunteered for other UAA activities, including:

- Speaking publicly about international development (85, or 45%);
- USAID/LPA public speaker's training (75, or 88%);
- UAA-USAID Mentoring Program (65, or 35%);
- Payne Fellows Mentoring Program (37, or 20%);
- Annual General Meeting Committee (35, or 19%); and
- UAA Board (14, or 7%).

Public Speaking: As in previous years, respondents were asked if they would be willing to speak publicly on behalf of international development (e.g., at adult education centers, Rotary clubs, or church groups) regardless of where they live. Less than half (85, or 45.4%) of the respondents to that question said they would be willing to speak, while a little more than half (98, or 52.4%) said they were not interested. Four people did not respond. This level of willingness to participate in speaking has varied little over the past two years: 45.4% recorded in 2019 and 40% recorded in 2018. One respondent provided examples of his public speaking efforts that include a talk each Fall and Spring with another retired Foreign Service officers in town at the local library on issues suggested by the Foreign Policy Association of New York, during which he talks about USAID and the benefits of foreign aid; and a presentation to Indiana university about the USAID organization and development assistance as a public program.

Public Speaker's Training: Of the 85 people willing to speak on behalf of international development, 75 (88%) are willing to take the training from USAID/LPA, virtually the same as the 2019 rate of 87% and the 2018 rate of 88%. UAA will follow up with USAID/LPA on the next steps for those who have

expressed their interest. Twenty-seven responded negatively and 85 people did not respond at all to this question.

Participation in Mentoring Program: Of those who responded to this question, less than half (65, or 35%) were willing to mentor USAID employees. This compares to the 40% of those answering this question in 2019 and the 39% of those who answered this question positively in 2018; however, it is less than the 54% of those in 2017 who indicated that they were interested in mentoring. There were 115 (61%) respondents who were not interested in participating in the Mentoring Program this year. Seven respondents did not reply to this question.

Payne Fellowship Mentoring Program: For the first time, respondents were queried as to their interest in participating specifically in the Donald M. Payne Fellowship mentoring program. One-fifth of respondents (37, or 20%) were interested in participating, while almost three-fourths (136, or 73%) were not interested. Fourteen people (7%) did not answer this question.

Annual General Meeting Committee: First asked in 2019, a question again was posed about participating on the Annual General Meeting (AGM) Committee. Thirty-five alumni (19%) responded favorably and 146 (78%) replied negatively, consistent with the answers in 2019, when 22% of respondents expressed such interest. Six people did not reply to the question.

Consideration for UAA Board: Fourteen respondents (7%) indicated an interest in being considered for election to the Board of the UAA, which is consistent with the 7.5% of respondents so responding in the 2019 survey. Another 169 respondents (90%) were not interested. Four people did not respond to the question.

OTHER INPUTS

What else should the UAA do? The open-ended question about what the UAA should be doing that it does not now do elicited a wide variety of responses from 47 people, with many providing more than one comment. Several people said they were pleased with what UAA is doing and some noted specific activities and

events that were well received. A few people reported how they were already participating in UAA activities and wanted to do more, while others gave their personal reasons for not being able to participate. While the survey did not include questions about the UAA newsletter or website, there were some comments provided on these subjects as well.

Mostly, however, the respondents provided ideas on several subjects for UAA's consideration, including the following suggestions:

- **UAA events.** Hold strategy and discussion sessions on expanding UAA influence and on specific USAID programs;
- **UAA outreach activities.** Broaden UAA relationships through representation in other foreign affairs forums, connect with other countries to learn from them, facilitate researchers' access to publications and oral histories by USAID members, videotape each UAA activity and make it available to all, and create and maintain USAID-relevant Wikipedia pages;
- **University/Student outreach.** Provide UAA speakers for a graduate program in international development, speak to university/college/high school students on USAID programs and potential career opportunities, and recruit college interns to work on UAA programs;
- **USAID support.** Do more education and advocacy with the American people on USAID programs and funding, engage the private sector to complement USAID-financed programs, stress in speeches the importance and value of hands-on field experience, and include current USAID officials in UAA events; and
- **UAA alumni.** Mentor new members in post-USAID employment strategies and retirement activities, continue and raise funds for USAID oral histories, and defend the Foreign Service and its employees.

A recurrent theme among the comments was the need to do more to develop the UAA network and support for UAA members **living outside the DMV area**. For example, suggestions included:

- Creating regional UAA affiliates where retirees are clustered;
- Visiting and meeting with these groups;
- Hosting get-togethers; and
- Making available video tapes of UAA speakers and events.

Two additional suggestions on which **actions have already been taken** were to: formalize a UAA-USAID relationship so UAA volunteers could use their knowledge and perspective to enhance agency activities; and publish a membership directory, preferably online, to enable members to contact each other and learn of members who reside nearby.

The 2020 survey did not ask about the UAA **newsletter** or **website** because of the consistently positive responses in all previous annual surveys. Some comments this year, however, addressed both. Concerning the newsletter, two people suggested that it be shared with USAID officers and include columnist and op-ed articles. For the website, two others suggested that the calendar date of posting on “new” items be added and a list of USAID oral histories, again with the date of posting of each, be maintained.

In commenting about their **participation or non-participation** in UAA activities one respondent said he gives back while living abroad by conducting USAID training around the world throughout the year. A second person explained that he served four years as UAA public outreach coordinator and also gave classes on the role of USAID for several years at a learning institute. A number of other respondents provided apologies for not being able to participate in UAA. Their non-participation was generally due to understandable reasons such as living overseas, currently under USAID contract overseas, already serving on UAA committees, other community volunteer commitments, lack of time, experience too far removed from current realities to be relevant, family caregiver, and health or age issues.

Eleven people expressed their **appreciation** and often **praise** for what UAA has done and continues to do.

Attracting New Members: In the final group of questions, UAA members were asked to suggest ways to better inform and attract new members to join the association. In this open-ended question, 48 people commented. There were many new ideas, some of which had been given in response to other questions. Some suggestions were already being carried out by UAA while others were not easily implemented if feasible at all.

Most respondents discussed the importance of **formal and informal networking** to maintain access to development activities and post-retirement opportunities. Among the networking suggestions were the following actions relating to enhanced UAA-USAID networking and to UAA alumni opportunities:

- **UAA-USAID Networking.** Provide more bridges between retirement and active service such as UAA members working as USAID course instructors and other activities at home and abroad, hold discussion sessions with former USAID officers who became ambassadors about their career paths, share information on UAA programs and services with current USAID mission directors and deputies, arrange get-togethers among technical clusters of retired and active USAID employees on their successes and failures, establish a link with USAID PSC groups, and offer current USAID employees the opportunity to receive UAA news and notices; and
- **UAA Alumni Opportunities.** Create closer links for UAA alumni to post-USAID employment opportunities, have current UAA members recruit new members, provide pre-retirement lectures/interviews with USAID employees on managing the post-retirement transition and opportunities, and hold annual workshops with discussion leaders and firms/organizations on development and contracting and pro bono opportunities.

Other respondents offered comments centered around strengthening the inclusion and participation of the UAA in a **retirement seminar** through the following actions: Offer one- to two-hour presentations or a panel discussion on post-retirement activities and the value of the UAA network; include UAA information in the USAID retirement packets; provide honorary status or one-year free UAA membership to USAID retirees attending the seminar; and develop a system to identify imminent retirees and contact them directly.

Some respondents, after noting the association's focus largely in the Washington area, offered additional suggestions to those given in response to earlier survey questions calling for more efforts in support of **retirees clustered in areas outside the DMV**. For example, suggestions were to: initiate a more vigorous effort to make activities available outside the DMV area, including participation options through local universities and other learning centers; help establish a resource for retirees to learn about retirement options in different locations in the United States or overseas, possibly through UAA website information and personal

contacts with retirees in a particular area; hold more online events; and provide continued access to changes within USAID and the broader development field.

Other ideas mentioned in response to previous survey questions indicated a doubling down by several respondents on suggestions to **educate** the American people on U.S. foreign assistance **and to advocate** for a constructive UAA-USAID relationship.

A respondent stated that, in his view, the key to successful and lasting sustainable development is with **Foreign Service Nationals** (FSNs). One person was surprised to learn that FSN and PSC colleagues were eligible to join UAA, and another was pleased that it provided an opportunity to reconnect with former colleagues. Two suggestions were offered: one to focus on mentoring in the field with FSNs and new-hire FSN/GS/PSC staff, and the other to allow FSNs who served in Afghanistan, including those employed by contractors, to join UAA.

A number of the respondents' recommended actions were, in fact, **already being addressed**, but as agreed by the association, perhaps more could be done with additional volunteer assistance. These suggestions were to: speak about UAA to USAID employees at retirement seminars; reach out to USAID employees while still active; continue the UAA-USAID mentoring program; welcome PSCs and other contactors, FSNs, and non-executive-ranked employees to the organization; engage retirees in UAA activities by drawing on their experience and expertise; share retiree experiences with other retirees on consulting work and hobbies; seek more supportive relationship with AFSA to publicize UAA activities; develop a pamphlet or brochure explaining what UAA does; and send important news of interest to USAID retirees.

Finally, four people **commented favorably** on the UAA's ongoing work and support of USAID programs and staff and encouraged continuation of the activities. One person expressed the view that the UAA has a broad array of efforts underway to attract eligible USAID employees to the organization.