

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2017

Mr. Wade Warren
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Acting Administrator Warren:

We are writing to encourage you to preserve a successful USAID initiative that provides field missions with an adaptable, effective funding mechanism to spur economic growth in developing countries through the use of skilled volunteers.

As you know, nearly 13 years ago, USAID prioritized incorporating skilled American volunteers into economic growth programs designed by USAID field missions to be both responsive to local needs and connected to broader U.S. foreign assistance goals. The Agency expressly called for consortia of volunteer-sending NGOs to respond to the issuance of a Leader with Associate Award (LWA). In response, a small group of NGOs formed the Volunteer for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA), the only such consortium to emerge.

This LWA mechanism has allowed USAID to quickly and cost-effectively implement 58 programs in 46 countries. These programs have made a lasting impact through peer-to-peer partnerships with people around the world seeking self-reliance and opportunities to improve their lives. The network of more than 100,000 American volunteers and NGOs are among the best partners for individuals and organizations in developing countries to build local capacity and achieve sustainable results. Through this mechanism, VEGA estimates that it has saved more than \$31 million taxpayer dollars and has nearly doubled the program value through cost share and leverage, including at least 39,000 days of volunteer service.¹

We are concerned that the authorization for this initiative will expire on June 10, 2017, unless it is extended under the authority of the Administrator. The rationale that USAID Administrator Raj Shah used to extend this LWA three years ago is still compelling today:²

- “... the need for the VEGA program is strategically necessary.”
- “It is in the best interest of USAID because the volunteer consortium is unique to the Agency, supports many small US businesses, and provides a nimble response

¹ Written Testimony before House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs for FY 2018, “Prioritizing Highly Skilled Volunteers for Economic Growth in Effective Foreign Assistance,” presented by Michael Deal, President and CEO, Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance, April 3, 2017.

² Justification for Exception to Competition – Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance Leader with Associates Approved June 20, 2014 by UDAID Administrator Raj Shah

to global development needs. The incumbent organization was established specifically to meet USAID's objectives for this initiative. The proposed extension is logically based on previous activities and performance.”

- “In addition, extending the agreement minimizes performance risk. VEGA’s approach to implementation has evolved with significant input of the consortium members, making it uniquely responsive to both USAID and the organizations using volunteers that we are targeting as partners.”
- “The current Program Description continues to meet the needs of economic growth programs around the world.”
- “VEGA can add alliance partners...allowing for new entrants to compete for each Associate Award.”
- “Mission demands for this procurement vehicle is higher than normal”

We believe this mechanism is valuable to the U.S. taxpayer, to USAID field missions, and to meeting our foreign assistance objectives. There also is urgency because the high demand for VEGA from field missions can no longer be met within the time and ceiling available. Without an immediate extension of this volunteer LWA mechanism, field missions will be left without this flexible, efficient and effective funding mechanism.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you grant at least a two-year extension and consider the need for an increase in the ceiling, which is not an appropriation, but rather the total estimated cost USAID field missions and other entities are allowed to spend on this initiative.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



JOHN BOOZMAN
United States Senator

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



JOHNNY ISAKSON
United States Senator