



June 6, 2018

Dear Administrator Green:

On behalf of our undersigned organizations, representing millions of Americans, we write to express our support for U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs and policies that leverage American generosity and private-sector expertise and our concern that the Agency's current approach is failing to meet the ambitious objectives you have established. As you evaluate how USAID can more effectively partner and procure, we urge you to act quickly to ensure that USAID field missions have flexible, efficient and practical tools to mobilize skilled volunteers for more effective global development.

Before your confirmation last year, our organizations and several bipartisan members of Congress sent letters to then-Acting Administrator Wade Warren urging him to continue one of USAID's best models for mobilizing pro-bono technical assistance, the Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance Leader with Associate Award (VEGA LWA), stating, "VEGA is valuable to the U.S. taxpayer, to USAID field missions, and to meeting U.S. foreign assistance objectives."¹

However, instead of extending the highly successful VEGA LWA, it was replaced by a very different mechanism, the Volunteers for International Security and Prosperity Annual Program Statement (VISP APS), released on August 30, 2017. We are alarmed that more than nine months later, *zero volunteers have been mobilized under the VISP APS and no USAID field missions have used it*. By comparison, the VEGA LWA was utilized by 41 field missions to provide nearly 40,000 volunteer days over the 13 years—an average of 3,076 volunteer days per year.²

Many Americans have served as pro-bono citizen diplomats who have given a hand up instead of a hand out to people in the developing world seeking the skills for a brighter future, and we believe that many more are willing to serve. Not only have these volunteer experts filled critical gaps in technical assistance while saving taxpayer dollars, they and their communities

¹ VEGA Member Support Letter: <http://vegaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/VEGA-Members-Support-Letter-to-USAID-Acting-Administrator-Wade-Warren-3.14.2017-1.pdf>; VEGA Support Letter from Senators: <http://vegaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/4-13-17-Letter-to-USAID-re-VEGA.pdf>; VEGA Support Letter from Representatives: <http://vegaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-05-USAID-Ltr-re-VEGA-Support.pdf>

² VEGA LWA Final Report: <http://vegaalliance.org/hot-off-the-presses-the-vega-lwa-final-report/>

also have benefitted from more cultural understanding, more engagement with U.S. foreign assistance and sometimes even more business opportunities.³

During your confirmation, you were asked by Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) whether you “intend to coordinate closely with Congress to ensure that our development efforts continue to draw on skilled volunteers and seek new, innovative ways to expand their involvement,” to which you replied, “Yes, I support drawing on volunteers, where practical and cost-effective, to better leverage our resources.” We believe that the VEGA LWA was exactly that—a practical and cost-effective way to draw upon volunteers to better leverage our resources.

We appreciate your commitment to consult with Congress on how best to leverage volunteers, and also note that in doing so, you will be responsive to the committee report that accompanied H.R. 1625, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, which directs you to develop a policy to incentivize incorporating volunteers into agency-wide programming and to consult with the Senate Appropriations Committee “on such policy not later than 120 days after enactment of the act” or by July 21, 2018.⁴

Not only has there been an unacceptably large gap in programs that leverage volunteers, there is an additional sense of urgency in that VEGA, the consortium with the most institutional knowledge and experience successfully mobilizing volunteers in partnership with USAID, will very soon disband. VEGA was formed to eliminate the inefficiencies of dealing with many individual NGOs by providing field missions with a one-stop-shop to access a wide range of pro-bono technical expertise with diverse implementing partners. In these times of budget uncertainty, field missions need faster and more flexible procurement tools to be responsive. The VEGA LWA was in high demand because it was fast, flexible and reliable, featuring an internal competition while cutting procurement lead times to less than 90 days.

Since the VEGA consortium and the field missions have not been able to utilize the VISIP mechanism after nearly a year, a course correction is clearly needed. Without VEGA, which cannot remain viable under current circumstances and will be forced to close shop by year end, USAID will lose a valuable resource and partner for efficiently and effectively mobilizing volunteers, accelerating development impact and leveraging taxpayer dollars.

We respectfully ask that you urgently use your authority to issue a new mechanism modeled upon the successful VEGA LWA. Importantly, doing so will meet USAID’s obligations under the FY18 appropriations report language and the Volunteers for Prosperity Executive Order.⁵ Issuing a new volunteer-centered LWA also will help USAID to meet its own objectives as outlined in the VISIP APS and “take further advantage of its flexible procurement authorities to expand its partner base, engage more local implementers, and employ co-creation to yield better, measured results with less burdensome procurement timelines,” as outlined in USAID’s FY19 Budget Justification.

³ See the VEGA LWA Final Report for several examples of volunteer impact.

⁴ Congress Directs USAID to Prioritize Skilled Volunteers: <http://vegaalliance.org/congress-directs-usaid-to-prioritize-skilled-volunteers/>

⁵ E.O. 13317: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2003-09-30/pdf/03-24919.pdf>

While we appreciate the consultation we have had with the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment and the Effective Partnerships and Procurement Reform team, we request a chance to meet with you to discuss this in more detail. Thank you for your consideration of our request. We may be reached by contacting VEGA President & CEO Michael Deal at mdeal@vegaalliance.org or 202-223-7012.

Sincerely,

Aquaculture without Frontiers (AWF)
Australian Volunteers International (AVI)
Coffee Quality Institute (CQI)
Conservation Council of Nations (CCN)
Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA)
Engineers Without Borders – USA (EWB-USA)
The Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA)
Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC)
Global Business School Network (GBSN)
Global Communities
International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
Institute of International Education (IIE)
International Executive Service Corps (IESC)
International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP)
Land O'Lakes International Development
Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)
PUM Netherlands senior experts
Purdue University
Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO)
Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA)
Winrock International
World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU)
World University Service of Canada – EUMC (WUSC-EUMC)

cc: Senators John Boozman, Patrick Leahy and Johnny Isakson
Representatives French Hill, Don Beyer, David Cicilline, Gerald Connolly, Dan
Donovan, Brad Sherman, Carol Shea-Porter and Chris Stewart
Senate Committee on Appropriations State, Foreign Operations and Related
Programs Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs Subcommittee
House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs