

# Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund Evaluation Report

**June 2019**

**Prepared for:**

Evaluation Division  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
United States Department of State

**Prepared by:**

General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)  
2600 Tower Oaks Blvd., Suite 600  
Rockville, MD 20852

**GENERAL DYNAMICS**  
Information Technology



Evaluation Division  
BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

## CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>I</b>
Evaluation Overview .....	i
Key Findings .....	i
Alumni Perspectives on the Application .....	i
Project Implementation.....	ii
Individual Alumni Outcomes.....	ii
Alumni Community Outcomes.....	iii
Project Outcomes and Sustainability .....	iii
Support for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy Goals .....	iv
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	iv
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Program Description .....	1
1.2 Evaluation Overview, Design, and Methods.....	2
Study Limitations.....	4
Organization of the Report .....	4
<b>2. THE AEIF APPLICATION PROCESS AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Alumni Perspectives on the Application.....	6
Learning About the Opportunity.....	6
Source of the Project Idea.....	6
Writing the Proposal .....	6
Challenges in the Proposal Process .....	7
Semi-Finalist Application Feedback.....	9
2.2 Project Implementation .....	10
Team Dynamic.....	10
Team Composition.....	10
U.S. Embassy Support During Implementation.....	11
Team Members Used Their Skills to Implement AEIF Grant Projects .....	12
Stakeholder and Other Alumni Engagement in Implementation .....	12
Challenges to Implementation .....	13
<b>3. ALUMNI OUTCOMES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Individual Alumni Outcomes .....	17
Personal Satisfaction.....	18
Changes in Attitude and Vision .....	18
New and Enhanced Skills .....	19
Professional Development .....	19
Increased Visibility .....	21
Enhanced Networks .....	21
3.2 Alumni Community Outcomes.....	22
<b>4. PROJECT OUTCOMES AND SUSTAINABILITY .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Project Reach.....	24

4.2 Impacts on the Target Audience.....	25
Beneficiaries Acquired New Skills.....	25
Networks and Professional Development.....	25
Community Changes in Attitudes and Mindset.....	26
Community Empowerment.....	26
4.3 Multiplier Effect and Sustainability .....	26
Multiplying the Effects During the Projects .....	27
Multiplying the Effects After the Projects .....	27
Extended Benefits to the Stakeholders .....	28
Sustainability .....	28
<b>5. SUPPORT FOR FOREIGN POLICY AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY GOALS.....</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1 AEIF Program Administration .....	31
Thematic Selection .....	31
Selection of Winning Projects .....	32
5.2 Outcomes and Sustainability of AEIF Projects .....	32
5.3 Changing Views of the United States.....	33
<b>6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: THEMATIC AREAS BY YEAR.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants .....	38
Gender Distribution of Fieldwork Interviewees by Type and Country .....	42
<b>APPENDIX C: TEAM MEMBER SURVEY.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS .....</b>	<b>57</b>

## Executive Summary

### Evaluation Overview

In 2011, the Office of Alumni Affairs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) launched the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF), creating a competitive opportunity for teams of alumni of qualifying U.S. government funded or facilitated exchange programs to generate innovative solutions to local, national, or regional problems through public service projects. AEIF promotes shared values and advances U.S. foreign policy priorities by requiring all funded projects to address strategic themes that are determined annually and prioritized throughout the grant competition.

The program seeks to fulfill three main public diplomacy goals:

- 1) Engendering sustainable change and innovations in local communities through the application of knowledge, skills, ideas, and inspiration gained by alumni during their exchange experiences;
- 2) Building and strengthening national, regional, and global alumni communities; and
- 3) Fostering relationships between U.S. diplomatic missions and those communities.

Employing a mixed-method evaluation design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected in two stages to evaluate AEIF in its first seven years (2011-2017). Between June and December 2018, in-country fieldwork was conducted in eight countries: **Argentina, Armenia, Colombia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam**. During these visits, in-person interviews were conducted with AEIF winning team members, their AEIF grant project stakeholders, direct and indirect beneficiaries, AEIF semi-finalist team leaders, and stakeholders at U.S. embassies and consulates, including alumni coordinators and other Public Affairs Section (PAS) staff. In total, interviews were conducted with 304 individuals. In stage two, a web-based survey sent to winning team leaders, who were encouraged to share the link with their team members, was fielded from November 14, 2018, to February 6, 2019. The survey yielded a final sample size of 246, with an overall response rate at the AEIF award level of 46%.

### Key Findings

#### *Alumni Perspectives on the Application*

- ❖ The exponential growth in the number of applications (and the increasing competition) speaks to the prestige and value alumni attribute to the opportunity afforded by the grant program.
- ❖ This high regard is also evidenced in the survey results. More than 30% of the alumni who responded to the survey had served as a team member on two to four AEIF grant proposals, and almost 75% indicated that they intended to apply for another AEIF grant in the future.
- ❖ The most common source of the idea or inspiration for AEIF projects comes immediately out of the alumni's own exchange program experiences.
- ❖ Alumni identified several challenges with the application process. Many of these – issues with the application platform, team size requirements, and generating proposal support

through voting – have already been successfully resolved by the Office of Alumni Affairs. Continuing challenges include writing in English (as required by grant policy), fully developing project ideas in limited space, developing budgets, and identifying appropriate and strategic target audiences.

- ❖ Semi-finalists uniformly voiced that they wished they had received feedback on their applications. Several had actually applied multiple times, had not received an award, and wanted to know what they needed to do differently in order to win.

### **Project Implementation**

- ❖ AEIF project team members used the skills they gained during their exchanges to the United States to implement their projects, most frequently leadership (70%) and networking (66%) skills.
- ❖ AEIF project teams established relationships and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including the embassies (70%), NGOs and associations (67%), local government agencies (52%), universities and academic institutions (48%), federal government agencies (28%), and other organizations such as media organizations, community organizations, and private enterprises (22%). The most common support from stakeholders was volunteer labor (75%) and in-kind contributions (62%).
- ❖ AEIF project teams faced a variety of challenges in implementing their projects, falling into the following broad categories: ability of team members to prioritize the project over other obligations, project design (budgeting and cost, definition and recruitment of the target audience, and timelines), project and team location, partners, community resistance to change, and external factors.

### **Individual Alumni Outcomes**

- ❖ **Personal satisfaction.** Team members derived intense personal satisfaction from winning the grant – being recognized within alumni community – and perhaps more importantly, from being able to give back to and make changes in their communities.
- ❖ **Changed attitudes and vision.** Participating in AEIF also broadened the vision of team members and transformed how they understand social change and how they see the world. It also increased their self-confidence, specifically in their efficacy in being able to accomplish change.
- ❖ **New and enhanced skills.** Survey respondents reported the most significant gains in leadership skills (89%), followed by networking (88%), event planning (86%), and budgeting and finances (86%). During interviews, team members also mentioned gaining skills related to time management, managing multi-tasking and setting priorities, human resource management (finding and negotiating with experts), teamwork, problem solving, communication, and fundraising. They also described themselves as being more adept at identifying new possibilities and opportunities.
- ❖ **Professional development.** Seventy-five percent of team members reported that the AEIF experience changed the focus of their career and work. They reported increasing professional focus on NGOs and volunteering, social entrepreneurship, innovation, and a greater social awareness of marginalized groups (women, children, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities).
- ❖ **Increased visibility.** Involvement with AEIF provided team members with more visibility into U.S. embassy programs, information, events, and other exchange

opportunities. Forty-seven percent of survey respondents viewed AEIF as an asset in this regard, and 21% indicated that the AEIF experience helped them in applying for additional exchange opportunities. In interviews, team members explained how they became recognized as subject matter experts, were invited to embassy events to lead workshops and give presentations, and became key contacts.

- ❖ **Increased networks.** Almost every team member who participated in the interviews spoke about how the project expanded their professional networks. Survey respondents attested to the same, with 97% reporting that they had gained professional contacts as a result of AEIF.

### **Alumni Community Outcomes**

- ❖ **Connectedness between project team members.** The vast majority of survey respondents (97%) reported that they were still connected to their project teams, although only 75% were still involved with their projects. Almost half (49%) were in contact more than 10 times over the past year for both social and professional reasons.
- ❖ **Connectedness with other alumni.** Team members were also connected to other alumni outside their project teams (79%) but to a lesser extent than to their AEIF project teammates (97%).
- ❖ **Connectedness to posts.** The relationships that developed between AEIF project team members and posts endured past the lifespan of the AEIF projects; 88% of survey respondents reported that they were still in contact with posts.
- ❖ **Empowerment for change through AEIF.** Team members viewed AEIF as an important tool for empowering the alumni community to make change: 90% of survey respondents felt that way. The vast majority of the survey respondents (95%) believed that their countries benefitted from AEIF.

### **Project Outcomes and Sustainability**

- ❖ AEIF projects reached large numbers of participants and beneficiaries. Sixty-two percent of the team members who responded to the survey reported that their projects touched more than 100 direct beneficiaries; another 20% said that their projects reached more than 50.
- ❖ Virtually all survey respondents (99%) reported that the AEIF projects had a positive impact on their target audiences. They described how beneficiaries acquired new skills, how they profited from the development and growth of professional networks, how project activities changed perceptions and helped reduce prejudices, and how entire communities were empowered through the projects.
- ❖ The reach of AEIF projects was “multiplied” by participants and beneficiaries during the projects, as they shared what they learned with their communities; 84% of survey respondents reported such sharing and, during interviews, team members gave similar accounts of how AEIF ideas were disseminated to the wider community.
- ❖ After the projects, beneficiaries continued project momentum in various ways. More than half of the survey respondents (56%) reported that project participants and beneficiaries had themselves started new projects, multiplying the effect of initial project activity in the community.

- ❖ More than 56% of the survey respondents said that their projects were sustainable – 25% completely, and another 31% partially. Team members identified securing additional funds as the biggest impediment to sustainability.

### **Support for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy Goals**

- ❖ AEIF supports foreign policy and public diplomacy goals at various levels. Support is evidenced by the way AEIF as a whole is administered, by the investments posts make in the projects during implementation by alumni, by the ideas and innovative solutions to local problems that the projects bring to individuals and communities, and by more favorable perceptions of the United States.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The data show that AEIF is meeting its intended goals of engendering sustainable change and innovations in local communities through the application of knowledge, skills, ideas, and inspiration gained by alumni during their exchange experiences, and is building alumni communities and fostering relationships between U.S. embassies and those communities. The data further show that AEIF supports U.S. foreign policy goals as specific projects “trickle down” new ideas and solutions to participants, who are in turn aware that these projects are supported by the U.S. Department of State. Based on the survey data, alumni comments, and direct field observations, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations:

- ❖ **Promote a peer-to-peer mentorship model**, connecting prospective applicants with former AEIF winners.
- ❖ **Provide access to an archive (database) of proposals and project reports** so that alumni can leverage good ideas (rather than reinventing concepts/programs from the beginning) or continue to build upon existing projects.
- ❖ **Expand multi-mode training offerings**, especially around budgeting.
- ❖ **Explore the possibility of awarding mid-sized grants**, to alleviate implicit pressure on team members to apply for the maximum \$25,000 limit allowed under AEIF. A smaller grant program would allow team members to implement smaller, but worthy projects, or to pilot larger projects before full roll-out.
- ❖ **Provide better feedback to semi-finalists** so that they can improve their projects and increase their opportunity for success with future grants.
- ❖ **Require a mandatory post-award in-person meeting** to review the grant requirements to avoid scope creep and non-compliance with grant terms.
- ❖ **Provide rigorous training on project design** to mitigate challenges in defining project scope and project reach, matching the target audience to planned activities, managing budgets, adhering to the timeline, and incorporating sustainability into their projects.
- ❖ **Require a sustainability plan** to ensure that project sustainability is not merely an afterthought.
- ❖ **Require a commitment letter as part of the application** to ensure that team members have a shared view of their time commitments, roles, and responsibilities in the project.
- ❖ **Encourage the use of standardized interim and final report formats** to make the review process easier for the Office of Alumni Affairs and embassies and consulates.

- ❖ ***Foster relationships between AEIF awardees***, leaders, innovators, and disseminators of new ideas who serve as valuable resources to their countries, and also as resources to each other.



## 1. Introduction

*“The project is very important for me. I feel I am helping my country. It is something that makes me very happy. I want to continue supporting and changing realities.”*

AEIF Team Member, Colombia, 2014 Award

### 1.1 Program Description

In 2011, the Office of Alumni Affairs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) launched the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF), creating a competitive opportunity for teams of alumni of qualifying U.S. government funded or facilitated exchange programs to generate innovative solutions to local, national, or regional problems through public service projects. AEIF promotes shared values and advances U.S. foreign policy priorities by requiring all funded projects to address strategic themes that are determined annually<sup>1</sup> and prioritized throughout the competition.

The program seeks to fulfill three main public diplomacy goals:

- 1) Engendering sustainable change and innovations in local communities through the application of knowledge, skills, ideas, and inspiration gained by alumni during their exchange experiences;
- 2) Building and strengthening national, regional, and global alumni communities; and
- 3) Fostering relationships between U.S. diplomatic missions and those communities.

Although the exact requirements have evolved slightly since the program’s inception, there are core requirements that proposals must meet in order to be eligible for a grant:

- ❖ Alumni team members must be members of the International Exchange Alumni (IEA) online community;
- ❖ Teams must be comprised of a minimum of three IEA members (a team lead, plus two others);
- ❖ The team lead cannot be a U.S. citizen, although U.S. citizens can be team members;
- ❖ Grant project activities cannot take place in the United States; and
- ❖ Proposed projects must fall under one of the identified thematic areas and must not exceed the \$25,000 ceiling, with an expected 12-month implementation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The full list of thematic areas covered in each year is available Appendix A. The list includes such themes as access to education, women’s and girls’ empowerment, civic education, civil society, environmental protection, social inclusion, governmental transparency, etc. The broad nature of the themes supports foreign policy goals and objectives pursued through coordination among the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the U.S. Department of State’s Regional Bureaus, the Office of Alumni Affairs, and U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide.

The Office of Alumni Affairs provided funding to 376 winning alumni teams comprised of alumni from 115 different countries between 2011 and 2017. These projects are the subject of this evaluation. The distribution of grant awards by region and year is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of AEIF Grant Awards by Region and Year**

Region	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Africa	6	10	8	9	7	9	15	64
East Asia and Pacific	5	8	11	13	9	11	11	68
Europe	10	9	9	11	9	12	10	70
Near East	6	7	6	9	7	9	11	55
South and Central Asia	6	8	9	6	8	9	10	56
Western Hemisphere	6	8	9	11	8	10	11	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>376</b>

## 1.2 Evaluation Overview, Design, and Methods

In October 2017, GDIT was awarded a contract by ECA's Evaluation Division to conduct an evaluation of AEIF. The evaluation was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How can the Alumni Office improve the AEIF application and administration process?
- 2) What individual-level impacts has the AEIF program had on the alumni awardees?
- 3) To what extent has the AEIF program helped increase connections between team members and establish more active membership of alumni networks on national, regional, and global levels?
- 4) Did alumni AEIF projects help address or solve issues in the community or country?
- 5) How do AEIF grants help support U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy goals?

Following a mixed-method evaluation design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected in two stages.

- ❖ **Stage 1: Qualitative Data Collection.** Between June and December 2018, the GDIT Evaluation Team carried out in-country fieldwork in eight countries: **Argentina, Armenia, Colombia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam.**<sup>2</sup> During these visits, the GDIT Evaluation Team carried out in-depth in-person interviews with AEIF winning team members, their AEIF grant project stakeholders, direct and indirect beneficiaries, AEIF semi-finalist team leaders, and stakeholders at U.S. embassies and consulates, including alumni coordinators and other Public Affairs Section (PAS) staff.<sup>3</sup> While the vast majority of interviews were conducted in English, in those few instances where the stakeholders and/or beneficiaries did not speak English, the GDIT Evaluation Team either procured the services of an interpreter or carried out the interview themselves in the local language (Spanish). All interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondent(s) to allow for the generation of verbatim transcripts.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork countries were selected based on the number of AEIF awards and to ensure regional representation across four of the six U.S. Department of State regions. Fieldwork dates in 2018 were as follows: Argentina (June 25-29), Mongolia (July 23-July 27), Vietnam (July 30-August 3), Colombia (August 20-August 24), Nepal (October 8- October 12), Sri Lanka (October 15-October 19), Macedonia (November 12-November 16), and Armenia (November 26- November 30).

<sup>3</sup> Semi-finalists are alumni team leaders whose AEIF applications went to panel and were reviewed in Washington, D.C., but were ultimately not selected for award.

❖ **Stage 2: Quantitative Data Collection.** A web-based survey of AEIF winners was fielded between mid-November 2018 and the beginning of February 2019.<sup>4</sup> To launch the survey, the GDIT Evaluation Team sent the link to all team leaders, whose email addresses had been provided by the Office of Alumni Affairs. The email introduced the evaluation and asked team leaders both to complete the survey themselves and to forward the link to their other team members, as the administrative data provided by ECA only contained contact information for the team leaders. During the survey period, the GDIT Evaluation Team sent periodic reminders and the Office of Alumni Affairs also reached out to team leaders through their International Exchange Alumni (IEA) newsletter to encourage participation.

Table 2 provides the distribution of the fieldwork sample by country and by respondent type. In total, 304 individuals participated in in-depth interviews.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2. Distribution of Final Fieldwork Sample by Country and Respondent Type**

Country	Team Members	Key Informants	Beneficiaries	Semi-Finalists	Post Staff	Total
Argentina	10	6	0	3	2	21
Armenia	8	0	0	6	3	17
Colombia	7	5	73	3	1	89
Macedonia	8	6	3	0	3	20
Mongolia	16	1	3	2	3	25
Nepal	10	15	13	2	1	41
Sri Lanka	9	7	28	0	2	46
Vietnam	14	12	5	6	8	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>304</b>

Note: The variation in the number of interviews between countries is due to the scope, location, and sustainability of the particular projects.

The survey yielded a final sample size of 246, of which the majority of respondents (169 or 69%) were identified as team leaders.<sup>6</sup> For those who started the survey, 85% completed all the questions, and the overall response rate at the AEIF award-level (that is, at least one response for any given AEIF project) was 46%.

The most important takeaways from the survey for the profile of AEIF award winners is that they are young professionals – 68% are between the ages of 25 and 44 – and almost one-third participated in either the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) or some type of Fulbright exchange program. The alumni who completed the survey hailed from 86 different countries. Regionally, AEIF winners from North Africa and the Middle East were under-represented in the survey sample, while Sub-Saharan African and Western Hemisphere alumni were over-represented. Additional demographic information on the survey respondents and the fieldwork interviewees is located in Appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> Exact survey window was November 14, 2018-February 6, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Team members interviewed during the fieldwork were primarily female, as were the semi-finalist team leaders. Women outnumbered men by a ratio of two to one. Project key informants, that is, representatives from partnering organizations and other stakeholders in the community, were evenly split.

<sup>6</sup> The survey was sent only to team leaders. There were four cases where it was not possible to distinguish whether the respondent was a team leader since there were either multiple projects per country in a given year and/or team members participated in the same exchange program as the team members. Therefore, the 169 may be a slight undercount of team leaders.

## Study Limitations

As with any program evaluation, time and cost constraints influenced the final design and data collection strategy. These limitations should be noted, but in the opinion of the GDIT Evaluation Team, the constraints on sampling do not seriously impact the generalizability of the findings to the wider AEIF alumni community.

- 1) Due to time and cost limitations, fieldwork was conducted in two countries in each of four (rather than six) of the U.S. Department of State regions.<sup>7</sup> Given the competitive selection process and the even distribution of awards across countries, there is no reason to believe that the country or regional selection introduces any potential bias into the results. In some countries, for logistical reasons, it was not possible to travel to the project sites and meet directly with beneficiaries.
- 2) The survey link was initially sent only to the team leaders. The contact information for the team leaders was easy to procure, but getting up-to-date contact information for all team members for all 376 projects was deemed too great a lift.<sup>8</sup> Team leaders were asked to pass the survey along to their team members and encourage them to participate. As expected, more team leaders responded than team members, with only about half of the AEIF projects represented overall. The results should be interpreted through this lens; the findings represent the opinions of the more vested team leaders and team members and may be more positive than if all team members had been included.
- 3) With retrospective data collection, respondents whose projects were awarded during the first years of the program may be less likely to recall project details (and negative facts) than those who participated more recently.

## Organization of the Report

The organization of the report follows the order of the evaluation's research questions. It begins with a discussion of findings related to the application process and project implementation. It then describes the impacts on the alumni team members who implemented the AEIF projects – their skills, their professional opportunities and aspirations, and their networks – and then turns to the impacts on the alumni community as a whole. It is followed by a discussion of project outcomes and impacts in the communities (including long-term project sustainability). It ends by tying AEIF project activities in local communities to larger foreign policy goals. The report concludes with a series of recommendations, some based on feedback directly from team members, and others derived from the observations of the GDIT Evaluation Team.

## 2. The AEIF Application Process and Project Implementation

AEIF is administered by the Office of Alumni Affairs in Washington, D.C. Alumni apply online for the grant. The proposal submission period begins in late winter and is open for one month. During the following two months, applications are reviewed for completion and then evaluated by the Office of Alumni Affairs and by staff at U.S. embassies and consulates in applicants' home countries. In early fall, final winners are announced and grants are awarded.

---

<sup>7</sup> The evaluation fieldwork covered the following regions: East Asia and Pacific (Mongolia and Vietnam), Europe (Armenia and Macedonia), South Asia (Nepal and Sri Lanka), and Western Hemisphere (Argentina and Colombia). The Near East and Africa regions were not represented in the fieldwork, but were covered by the survey.

<sup>8</sup> The final reminder to complete the survey was sent to all team leaders and team members from the 2017 cohort.

The application requirements (for example, specificity around project design, budget details, and the minimum number of team members) have changed over time, as has the technology platforms hosting the AEIF application. The Office of Alumni Affairs has also developed a wider range of online resources to assist alumni in preparing their applications.

- ❖ For the first three years (2011-2013), the application process was managed by staff and the application form was embedded on the <https://alumni.state.gov/> platform, formerly named “State Alumni.” The application was quite simple (initially, budget documents were not even required with the submission of the idea) and members of the online alumni community across the world had visibility into other alumni AEIF proposals and could cast votes for proposals they supported.
- ❖ In 2014, the process moved to the newly designed IEA website (still at the same URL, <https://alumni.state.gov/>). Concurrent with the change in platform, the Office of Alumni Affairs reduced the number of required team members from ten to five, and then to four, required a budget, and phased out voting in an attempt to be more transparent about the process. In 2015, “Help Desk” online resources were made available for the first time – including sample proposals and sample budgets – to help improve the quality of alumni proposal submissions. The Office of Alumni Affairs also introduced Facebook Q&As.
- ❖ In 2017, the application was moved to a platform specifically designed for document review and approval. Since then, the Office of Alumni Affairs has continued to enhance online resources and the application itself. In addition, the number of required team members was further reduced to three.

Since AEIF’s inception, the number of applications submitted has grown significantly, from 696 in the first year to 1,020 in 2017. The number of winning projects also has increased, from 39 awarded in 2011 to an average of 56 projects awarded annually between 2012 and 2017.

**Table 3. Distribution of AEIF Proposal Submissions and Awards by Year**

Year	Total submissions	Eligible Proposals	Semi-Finalists (i.e. taken to D.C. for the selection panel)	Awards
2011	696	506	141	39
2012	685	602	154	50
2013	681	644	135	52
2014	939	571	187	59
2015	828	503	211	48
2016	804	595	157	60
2017	1,020	1,014	202	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,653</b>	<b>4,435</b>	<b>1,187</b>	<b>376</b>

The exponential growth in the number of applications (and the increasing competition) speaks to the prestige and value alumni attribute to the opportunity afforded by the grant. This high regard is also evident in the survey data, by the number of “repeat” team members applying for the grant and by the number of team members who reported they would apply for another AEIF grant in the future.

- ❖ More than 30% of the alumni who responded had served as a team member on two to four AEIF grant proposals, and another 6% reported that they had served as a team member on five or more proposals.
- ❖ Almost three-quarters indicated that they intended to apply for another grant in the future.

## 2.1 Alumni Perspectives on the Application

### *Learning About the Opportunity*

The increase in the number of submissions suggests that the AEIF grant opportunity is well-advertised among alumni. AEIF winners and semi-finalists reported learning about the opportunity through a variety of means: the IEA website, U.S. embassy mailing lists and announcements, social media (Facebook), conversations with the U.S. embassy alumni coordinators, and local alumni association announcements and contacts. Some (predominantly those who participated in IVLP) reported learning about the opportunity for AEIF grants at the conclusion of their exchange program.

### *Source of the Project Idea*

The most common source of the idea or inspiration for AEIF projects comes immediately out of the alumni's own exchange program experiences. The exchange experience provides both knowledge and connections with like-minded people during the exchange. As a team member from Colombia (2015) explained, the three team members met during their arts exchange program and at the end of the program they decided to continue to collaborate and apply for the AEIF grant.<sup>9</sup> A team member from Argentina (2016) said of their project idea, "It was part of what I saw in California when I was at Fulbright." Semi-finalists echoed the role of the exchange experience in providing them with new materials, modes of thinking, and models for their proposed AEIF projects. For example, one semi-finalist from Armenia (2011) spent her Junior Faculty Development Program studying educational administration and mentorship; her proposed project was to introduce mentorship to future teachers doing their in-service training.

In other instances, needs are identified and ideas percolate when the alumni return home and are back in their local communities. In the words of a team member from Vietnam (2015), "Of course, I got the idea from U.S. studies...." In rare cases, the inspiration comes from individuals outside the alumni community, as in the case of AEIF grant projects in Nepal (2015) and Sri Lanka (2017), both having to do with women's empowerment. In the first example, a U.S. Fulbrighter was the initiator and in the second, a local businessman approached alumni with the idea.

### *Writing the Proposal*

The team members who responded to the survey were involved in all aspects of the proposal development process: 90% were highly engaged in developing the budget, 88% were highly engaged in designing the project, and 85% were highly engaged in writing the text of the proposal. These percentages are even higher (95%, 92%, and 95%) when only the responses of the team leaders are considered. During the interviews, team leaders frequently mentioned that work was distributed among the team, based on individual team members' strengths and

---

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the report, projects are identified by country, with the year of award/application provided in parentheses.

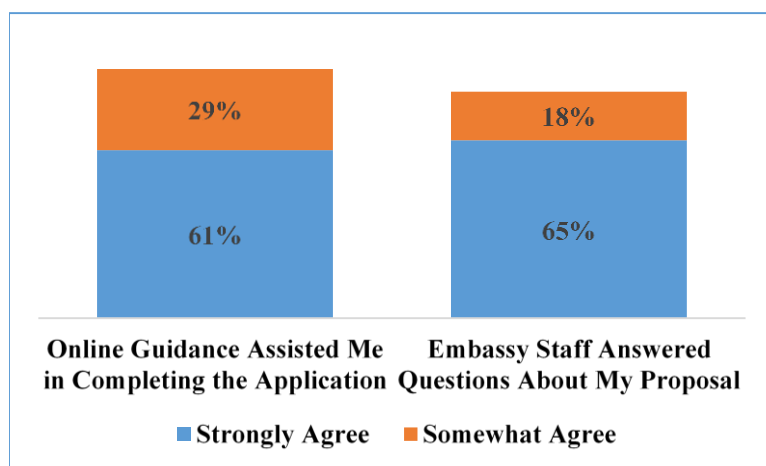


weaknesses, particularly around budgeting and facility in writing English. Most frequently, the team leader was responsible for generating the text and actually submitting the proposal.

Team members felt that the AEIF grant proposal process itself was easy to understand; almost three-quarters (73%) of the survey respondents strongly agreed and another 23% somewhat agreed that this was the case. This sentiment was echoed by a team member from Macedonia (2011): “For me ... the application form and this web approach to the application, it was very good.”

Team members were also positive about the support they received from embassies and from the Office of Alumni Affairs during the proposal process. As Figure 1 shows, they were most positive about the one-on-one support they received from embassy staff answering specific questions about their proposals. Slightly fewer (61%) also strongly agreed that online guidance and resources were a valuable asset in completing the application.

**Figure 1. Assistance and Resources Available During the Proposal Phase**



These same themes emerged during the interviews. Team members mentioned receiving assistance and support from embassy staff, most frequently the at-post alumni coordinator, in a variety of ways: during “brainstorming” sessions to exchange ideas, via email, and by phone. As one team member from Colombia (2015) said about the online resources provided by the Office of Alumni Affairs, “The guidelines on the page are amazing. It was great because we did not need any external help.” Team members also mentioned enlisting the support of prior AEIF winners to assist in developing their proposals.

### ***Challenges in the Proposal Process***

Although team members from both AEIF winning and semi-finalist projects were generally very positive about the proposal and application process, they nonetheless identified several challenges worth noting. The challenges fall into two categories: challenges that have already been addressed and ongoing challenges that applicants face.

#### ***Challenges That Have Already Been Addressed***

- ❖ **The Application Platform.** Team members from earlier cohorts mentioned encountering issues with the application platform, including: having trouble generating login credentials, being uncertain as to whether content had actually saved when the internet connection was interrupted, and having the application time out while they were working on it.
- ❖ **Team Size Requirements.** Several team members (also from the earlier cohorts) explained having difficulty finding sufficient numbers of team members with the right

expertise who were willing and able to engage in the proposal in more than name only. They also reported having difficulty coordinating among a large number of people to accomplish the proposal work. As a team leader from Argentina (2015) said, “The difficult thing for me was to get people to participate in the project besides the endorsement.”

- ❖ **Generating Proposal Support Through Voting.** While team members appreciated the visibility into other proposals in the early years of the program, many felt that developing a good project was secondary to marketing skills – as voting made the process feel like a popularity contest. A semi-finalist from Armenia (2011) said, “I would get tons of links every day from other alumni all over the world saying ‘Please vote for our project. Please vote for our project.’ So that was sort of weird.” Some teams were not prepared or positioned well in the alumni community to sell and market their projects.

As described above in the summary of the application process, the Office of Alumni Affairs has addressed the technology issues by moving to an alternative platform and has reduced the team size requirements. Further, it has eliminated the voting; with this change, alumni understand that the decision-making about awards is clearly in the hands of the Office of Alumni Affairs and other relevant offices in the U.S. Department of State. The fact that so many alumni from the earlier years mentioned these topics as challenges supports the Office of Alumni Affairs’ decisions.

### *Ongoing Challenges*

There were three areas where team members articulated challenges with project proposal content:

- ❖ **Writing in English and Space Limitations.** Team members indicated that as non-native English speakers, developing their ideas concisely in English was not an easy task. For example, one semifinalist from Armenia (2015) said that she had to cut out words in order to finish the idea in the allotted space, and as a result, “the idea, it became a little bit smashed, maybe.”
- ❖ **Budgets.** Team members expressed facing the most challenges in developing their budgets. Some simply did not understand the concept of cost share (or how to find cost share). Others did not know how to correctly estimate and allocate costs. In one case, a team leader from Colombia (2016) reflected that he had underestimated the budget because he had not taken possible currency fluctuations into account, nor had he thought about how seasonality could affect costs (i.e., transportation and lodging costs).
- ❖ **Identifying the Target Audience.** It was not always easy for teams to define project target audiences. Sometimes the targets were too broad, other times they were mismatched with project goals or the embassy felt that a slightly different audience would be strategically more useful. Some team members from Sri Lanka (2016), for example, recounted going back and forth with the embassy over the appropriate project target, and changing the idea to focus on youth: “... In our discussion process with the embassy, they found, okay, it has to be some catchy audience like youth ... so major changes occurred due to the consultation with the embassy.”



Perhaps the summary of the alumni efforts in the application process is best captured in the words of one team member:

*“...You have to stand out among other competitors. It is a worldwide program, so innovation, creativity, and originality [have] to be there. So that part is challenging, but it is a good challenge, right? We have to think outside the box to win the proposal. So that part was fun and challenging at the same time.”*

AEIF Team Member, Argentina, 2014 Award

### ***Semi-Finalist Application Feedback***

The semi-finalists interviewed during the fieldwork uniformly voiced that they wished they had received feedback on their applications. Several had actually applied multiple times, had not received an award, and wanted to know what they needed to do differently in order to win. As one semi-finalist from Colombia (2016) said, “I know you don’t give feedback because it’s a lot of projects. It’s like 1,300 projects, so they can’t give you feedback personally, but what I wanted to know is what did I miss, to see if I could participate next year....” In the words of another semifinalist from Vietnam (2016) who did not know that they had been a semi-finalist and that their project was under consideration: “I really wish I had some feedback.... Now I know that I was a semifinalist, I really wish I knew it. I never knew that it was a potential proposal.... I read it again, it still makes so much sense, I’m like ‘Oh I want to do it now. I want to submit it now.’”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> The dedication of the semi-finalists to their projects is evidenced by their multiple applications, but also by the fact that some semi-finalists were able to implement their project (or some facet of their project) even without the AEIIF grant. Alternative sources of funding included: small grants from the embassies, applicants’ own labor and funds, resources from local stakeholders, and even grants from other U.S. institutions. For example, a semi-finalist team from Argentina (2015) received funds directly from the Government of Argentina to implement their project; this project is still ongoing today. Another semi-finalist from Mongolia (2017) received funds from the University of California at Berkeley.

## 2.2 Project Implementation

This section of the report covers AEIF project implementation. It addresses not the ideas as presented in the proposals, but the realities on the ground.

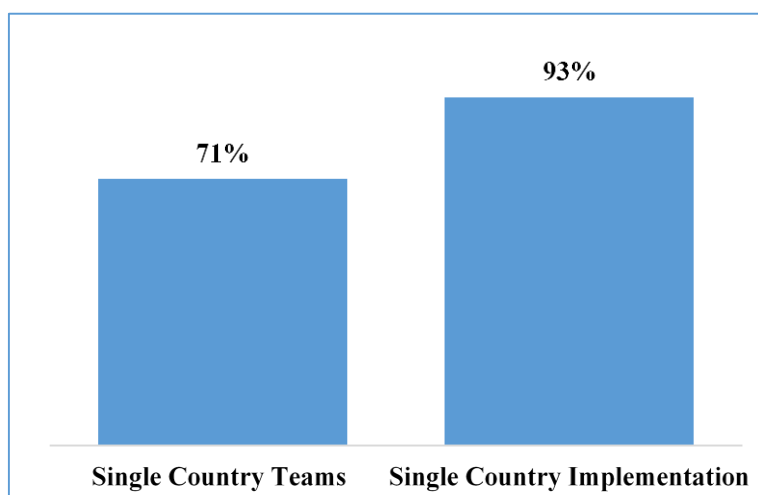
### Team Dynamic

AEIF project team members felt positively about how well their respective teams worked together once they had won the grant. Sixty-seven percent of the survey respondents strongly agreed that their AEIF project team worked well together, and another 23% somewhat agreed. During the interviews, team unity and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities came through as components of success, both for the grant project itself and for project sustainability. In the words of one team member from Mongolia (2014), “...Our team spirit was great. Usually when you actually implement a project, people ignore each other trying to escape. But in our case, we were actually finding time to discuss things. Obviously, there are ups and downs, but overall we had a really good team spirit to deliver this project.” In Argentina (2014), the success of a networking convention was related to the team dynamic. The eight alumni worked closely with each other, with each one having a prescribed role in creating a network of young people all over Argentina that work in public service. Roles were very clear and each one did what they were able to do best. They were motivated to work together and make the event a success. Both of these projects are ongoing to this day.

### Team Composition

For the most part, AEIF project teams were comprised of alumni coming from a single country. Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents (71%) reported that their grant team did not include alumni from countries other than their own (i.e. reporting that they were single country teams). In terms of participation of American alumni, of the projects with international teams, less than half (38%) included members from the United States.

**Figure 2. Country Composition and Implementation Strategy**



Even having international project teams did not mean that project implementation was international. As Figure 2 shows, 93% of all survey respondents reported that their projects were implemented in a single country. (Conversely, 29% of the projects had international team members, but only 7% had international implementation.) In the majority of instances with international team members, the plan outlined in the grant proposals was to implement in a single country all along. Non-local alumni were included because they had participated in the same exchange program as the other team members, or because they had specific expertise or knowledge that could enhance the grant project. Even when the intent was international implementation, it did not always work out that way. In one project from Colombia (2012), the

proposed plan was to implement in three countries; however, challenges in fully integrating the international team members into the planning necessitated implementation of the project in only one country.<sup>11</sup>

### ***U.S. Embassy Support During Implementation***

U.S. embassies and consulates played an important role for AEIF project teams during their project implementation. Seventy percent of survey respondents reported that they collaborated with the embassy during their projects. Respondents were more likely to have collaborated with the embassy than any other type of stakeholder, with NGOs and associations coming in a close second (67%).<sup>12</sup>

Team members noted how embassy staff helped them problem-solve, encouraged flexibility and creativity (within the guidelines), and provided them with access to space, either at the embassy itself or in American Spaces, and by connecting them with other alumni who could provide a venue.

- ❖ In Sri Lanka (2016), a team member recounted how the project was experiencing delays at the beginning. They had a meeting with the embassy to figure out what to do, and embassy staff gave them flexibility to adjust the scope of the project: “They always gave us that flexibility.”
- ❖ One team member from a social inclusion project in Armenia (2016) noted how the at-post alumni coordinator was instrumental in connecting them with another alumnus who was able to provide them with performance space for their inclusive performances for free. The embassy also provided the team with an inclusive meeting space for planning.
- ❖ A team member from Mongolia (2017) recalled, “The U.S. Embassy provided space. The embassy operates an American Corner at a library. I remember they were providing the space free of charge....”

---

<sup>11</sup> However, after the grant ended, those team members took the project content to another country and implemented it there, albeit in modified form.

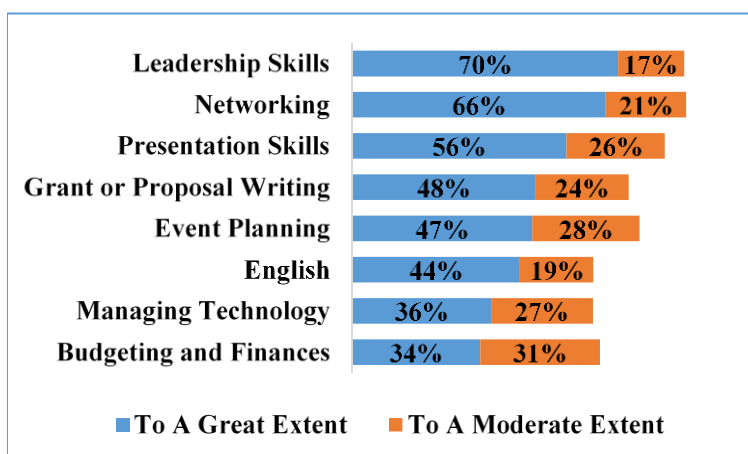
<sup>12</sup> “Associations” refers to any type of associations, not just alumni associations.

### Team Members Used Their Skills to Implement AEIF Grant Projects

Team members put the skills they gained during their exchange experience in the United States towards developing and implementing their AEIF projects. Of the eight different skills listed, survey respondents most frequently reported using their leadership and networking skills (70% and 66%, respectively).

Many team members described how what they learned during their exchange programs directly contributed to their AEIF grant project idea and motivated them to apply. (See [Source of the Project Idea](#).) They also credited what they learned during exchange programs for inspiring them to get involved in AEIF projects. For example, a scientist from Vietnam (2014) was inspired to participate in the AEIF project: “[My exchange program] experience was not related to teaching science to children [the focus of the AEIF project], but I think the best thing that I learned from my time there [in the United States] was doing community work.... I was really enthusiastic about that. Maybe if I didn’t go to the United States, I would not have been that enthusiastic about the idea....”

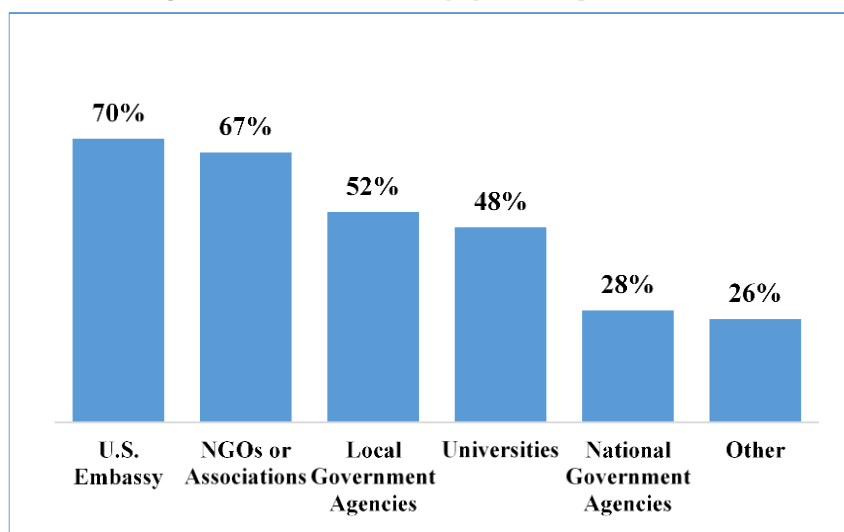
Figure 3. Skills Gained From Alumni Exchange Experiences Used During AEIF Projects



### Stakeholder and Other Alumni Engagement in Implementation

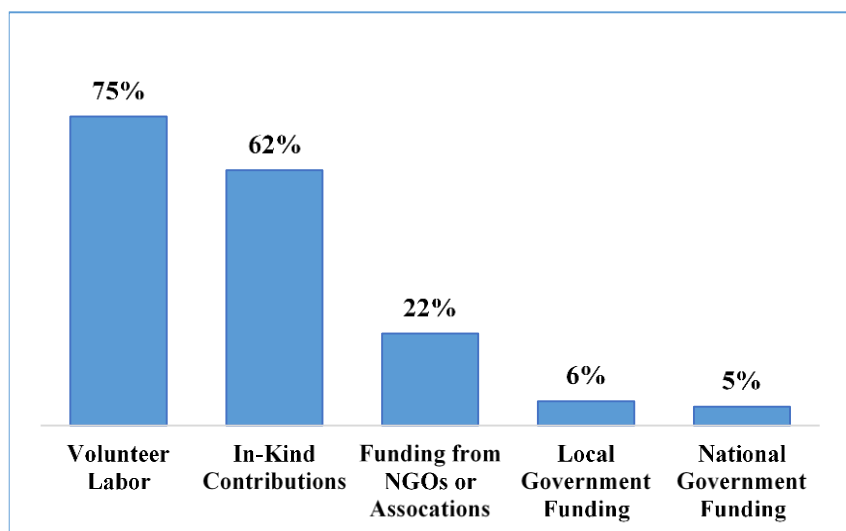
Team members do not implement their projects in isolation. As shown in Figure 4, AEIF project teams collaborate with and receive resources from a variety of stakeholders beyond the U.S. embassies and the NGO community. The survey results show that AEIF team members are effective at building collaborative relationships with local government agencies, academia (universities), federal government agencies, media organizations, community organizations, and private enterprises.

Figure 4. Stakeholders Engaged in Implementation



According to survey respondents, the most common types of support received from stakeholders was volunteer labor (75%) and in-kind contributions (62%). Team members listed a variety of in-kind contributions from stakeholders, including the provision of free venues/space, consulting services, administrative assistance, free press and advertising, accommodations,

**Figure 5. Kinds of Support from Stakeholders**



equipment, sponsorship, and speakers. The most common source of actual funds for project implementation were funds from NGOs or associations (22%); national government funding was the least common type (5%). A few also described receiving funds from private enterprises and from the diaspora.

### **Challenges to Implementation**

AEIF project team members encountered a variety of challenges implementing their projects. These challenges fall into six broad categories:

- ❖ Team Engagement, Focus, and Continuity
- ❖ Project Design
- ❖ Implementation Strategy
- ❖ Implementing Partners
- ❖ Community Resistance to Change
- ❖ External Factors

#### *Team Engagement, Focus, and Continuity Throughout the Project*

Lack of team member support for the project during implementation was a “non-issue” for almost three-quarters of the survey respondents. Of those who perceived the lack of team member support as a challenge to successful implementation, only 5% thought so “to a great extent.” For example, a team leader from South Africa (2013), highlights how not having a solid team affected project implementation and sustainability: “The implementation phase of my project was an ultimately solitary journey. While I coped, I feel the scope of what was possible was minimized by the lack of collaboration. It made it rather stressful to balance work and the commitments of the project. It also meant the project could not have the sustainability we had initially hoped for.”

Team members were more likely to recognize their team’s difficulty in prioritizing the project in the face of competing demands such as home life, school, or work as a challenge, rather than due to lack of support: 12% reported that priorities were a challenge to “a great extent”, compared to

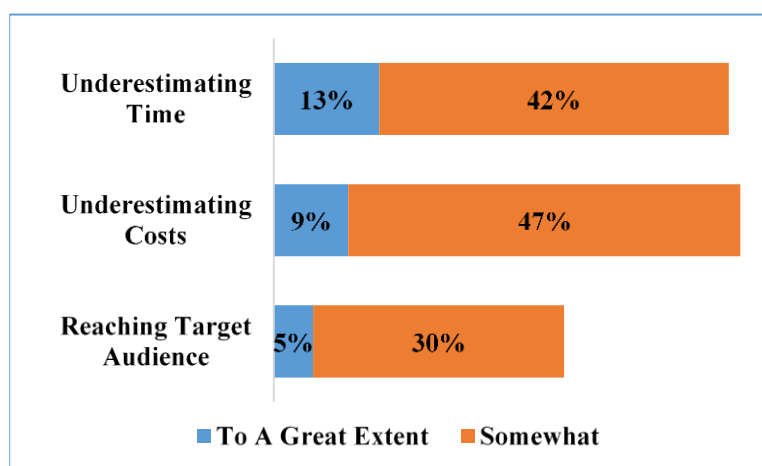
the 5% that reported team member support was a challenge.<sup>13</sup> One team member from El Salvador (2017) explained, “One of the hardest parts when implementing the project was the amount of time that the team members should dedicate to the program. Sometimes it was really hard to find the time to work on our daily activities and to get some time to work on the grant’s activities.” Or, as another team member from Mongolia (2014) recounted with respect to team engagement, “The biggest challenge was that everybody had their full-time job and time is precious.” It is important to remember that AEIF team members are principally volunteers, with professional commitments. Active engagement with the project required concerted effort by team members.<sup>14</sup>

### Project Design

Survey respondents reported facing challenges with (1) underestimating the time required to implement their projects; (2) underestimating costs; and (3) reaching their intended target audiences. As seen in Figure 6, more than half of the survey respondents underestimated time and costs, and 35% experienced difficulty reaching their intended audiences. However, the percentage that experienced any of these challenges “to a great extent” was quite small (13%, 9%, and 5%, respectively for time, costs, and target audience), compared to those who faced the challenge “somewhat.”

During the interviews, team members provided additional details about these challenges (cost, time, and audience). From these discussions, it is clear that these three issues are interrelated. Finances affected timing and recruitment; difficulties in recruitment affected the timing.

Figure 6. Most Frequent Challenges Faced in Implementation



### Budgets and Costs

- ❖ Teams often ***underestimated project costs***, especially logistical costs (transportation and accommodations). Teams worked hard to circumvent and solve “shortfalls” by asking for in-kind contributions from other stakeholders.
- ❖ ***Actually getting access to the grant funds*** (setting up a bank account) required a lot of work. A team member from Macedonia (2013) expressed the financial set-up process as follows: “...It was like starting a start-up ... it was a tiring process....” Difficulty with

<sup>13</sup> More than half (52%) of team members reported that priorities were an impediment to implementation to some extent or a great extent, compared to 28% who reported that lack of support was the impediment.

<sup>14</sup> Especially in the early years, when the required team size was 10 members for the application, some individuals ended up being team members in name only (during the application process and project implementation).

getting funds transferred into their account was also reported by teams from Mongolia (2014) and Nepal (2018).<sup>15</sup>

- ❖ In the case of one project in Sri Lanka (2014), the ***delay between the application, notification of award, and the release of funds*** (more than six months) had an impact on the relevance of the project. By the time the project was implemented, external factors had changed and the platform designed to promote transparency and free speech was basically obsolete (since the regime was defeated).

### Recruiting the Target Audience (and Defining the Target Audience)

- ❖ Team members often underestimated the difficulty in ***gaining access to their target audiences***. For example, in Armenia (2016) for a project on social inclusion, before the team could even begin the recruitment of individuals with disabilities to participate in the project activities, they had to first construct a directory of organizations from which they could then recruit.
- ❖ Another common issue was ***not being able to reach the proposed target numbers***. Numerous projects were overly optimistic in the proposal phase in setting target numbers, even once the audience access issue was solved. A multifaceted project in Sri Lanka (2016) involving women and their families had an initial goal of training 100 women. In the initial recruitment phase, the project team was able to interview only 67 women, of which only 25 were deemed suitable and selected for training. None of these 25 women showed up for the training event. The project team subsequently decided to engage women who were already employed at the site. Similarly (also in Sri Lanka) the number of journalists trained by the project fell far short of what the alumni team had originally proposed.
- ❖ Sometimes, there was a ***mismatch between the target audience and the proposed project activities***. During implementation, the teams noted changing certain criteria around the target audience in order to continue with the project. For example, in one project from Romania (2017): “...The entire program was targeted to teenage Roma girls. Since the biggest challenge was getting the girls to talk to us alone, we ended up allowing cousins to come along regardless of gender.” For one project in Armenia (2017), the original target audience was students, but the activities were more appropriate for persons with some business experience; the change in the target audience and subsequent change in project scope was so significant that the embassy asked for the funds to be returned.<sup>16</sup>

### Timelines

- ❖ Projects were designed for one year. However, ambitious project scope in combination with a myriad of other challenges – natural disasters, political change, community resistance, and lack of resources and infrastructure – sometimes necessitated teams to ask for no cost extensions. In only a few cases was the delay of dispersal of funds the major challenge. Teams were able to complete the projects within the extended time. In the

<sup>15</sup> In Nepal, funds were dispersed to a third-party stakeholder, which then in turn dispersed the funds to the grantees. This financial oversight strategy caused delays in accessing funds, which then affected timing. The individual who highlighted this issue was interviewed as a semi-finalist, but had just been awarded a grant in 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Even though the project funds were officially returned, the team members successfully completed the project using their own funds.



words of one team member from Armenia (2016), “We needed more time to prolong the grant. We didn’t ask for more money, but we needed to ask for more time because we couldn’t manage ... because we were facing a lot of challenges.”

### *Implementation Strategy (Same Location versus Remote)*

Projects where the core team members did not reside in the same location as the proposed project activities encountered additional challenges to implementation. Distance made both organization and oversight difficult. The impact of this “dispersed” design feature was noted by team members across different countries and project types.

- ❖ One survey respondent from Bangladesh (2014) wrote, “The project was designed for one year, but we required two extensions to complete the activities of the project. As most of the project activities were in village areas ... it required more time to ensure frequent visits in those remote areas.”
- ❖ In a project in Nepal (2015), team members were located in the capital, but the project was implemented in another city. Because of the remoteness of the project site, team members were able to visit only once during the project, and, as a team member noted, “a lot of time was spent coordinating with the ... point person for the program.” It is worth noting that while the implementing partner is now replicating the model introduced by the project, the project itself has not been sustainable.
- ❖ For one of the projects in Argentina (2011), the project was made up of international team members from across the Western Hemisphere region, but in the words of the team leader, “The biggest challenge was to have the team [operate as a team] ... because people were in other countries, and this was a very hands-on project [in Argentina].”
- ❖ For yet a different international project, the team leader from Colombia (2012) was unable to successfully engage the international team members past the proposal phase and, as a result, the project morphed into a single country project during implementation: “Unfortunately, it was difficult to keep a fluid dialogue and the enthusiasm [with the team members from the other countries]. By that time, the enthusiasm was only ours.”

### *Implementing Partners and Stakeholders*

The quality and engagement of the implementing partners and stakeholders affected the ability of the project teams to implement their projects. A survey respondent from Suriname (2017) explained the importance of focusing on strategic partnerships and not expending energy on partners who were not fully vested in the project and did not demonstrate a “willingness to continue until the end.” Others described reluctant support among government agencies. For example, in Vietnam (2013) and Afghanistan (2016), team members explained how much effort it took to convince various educational institutions to allow training to be implemented in the first place. While in Sri Lanka (2017), a team returned the funds to the embassy when they found it too difficult to work with their implementing partner.

### *Community Resistance to Change*

Team members often found it was difficult to implement their projects because the communities in which they were working were resistant to change (or were not yet “ready” for the project). Forty-three percent of all survey respondents indicated that lack of community support was a challenge for implementation, with 10% reporting it was a challenge “to a great extent,” and



33% reporting that it posed “somewhat” of a challenge. Perceived resistance to change was also related to difficulty in recruiting the target audience. For instance, in both Macedonia (2015) and Armenia (2016), projects dealing with social inclusion faced resistance among the parents of children with disabilities, and in the case of Armenia, also among the wider public. A team member from Macedonia (2015) explained, “That was the most challenging part, convincing the parents. The kids themselves loved it.” The team in Armenia explained how difficult it was to recruit participants from the wider public to join in project activities to demonstrate social inclusion.

### External Factors

Among survey respondents, external factors were those most frequently cited as causing problems, with more than half reporting “to a great extent” (15%) or “somewhat” (40%). Team members identified a variety of external factors in the interviews:

- ❖ Natural disasters (Nepal, 2015: the earthquake required an extension of six months; the project was essentially implemented in two phases, before and after the earthquake)
- ❖ Economic crises (Venezuela, 2015)<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ Political context (Vietnam, 2013: government control/oversight, and Sri Lanka, 2014: regime change)

While this discussion has focused on the challenges teams faced in implementing their projects, it is important to keep these challenges in perspective. With persistence, ingenuity, and resolve, the vast majority of project teams were able to complete their planned activities, even when the final project timelines exceeded original plans.<sup>18</sup>

## 3. Alumni Outcomes

### 3.1 Individual Alumni Outcomes

Team members benefitted significantly at an individual level from participating in AEIF. They derived intense personal satisfaction from winning the grant – being recognized within the alumni community – and perhaps more importantly, from being able to give back to and make changes in their communities. Through project development and implementation, they gained important new skills and enhanced others, improved their professional trajectories, and grew both their social and professional networks. Such outcomes at the personal level directly support U.S. foreign policy, as alumni satisfaction and growth stemmed from implementing projects introducing change in line with the posts’ strategic priorities in their respective countries. In addition, embassies developed stronger and closer relationships with alumni who were committed to common shared values, and who were eager to serve as conduits for change in their local communities.

<sup>17</sup> The team leader for this project was from Venezuela, but the project was awarded through the U.S. Embassy in Colombia because of the economic and political crisis in Venezuela.

<sup>18</sup> In the interviews, the GDIT Evaluation Team learned of only three projects that were terminated early.

### **Personal Satisfaction**

In describing the personal satisfaction engagement with AEIF brought, alumni respondents said, for example:

- ❖ “I would say the personal gratification, contributing to society and giving back. This idea ... we had this idea for a long time, so it was very nice to see it, implement it, and [see] the results....” (Mongolia, 2016)
- ❖ “Sometimes we joked that we want to change lives of children and actually it changed our lives as well.” (Vietnam, 2014)
- ❖ “I can seed the knowledge and awareness to the youths for their futures.” (Burma, 2017)

### **Changes in Attitude and Vision**

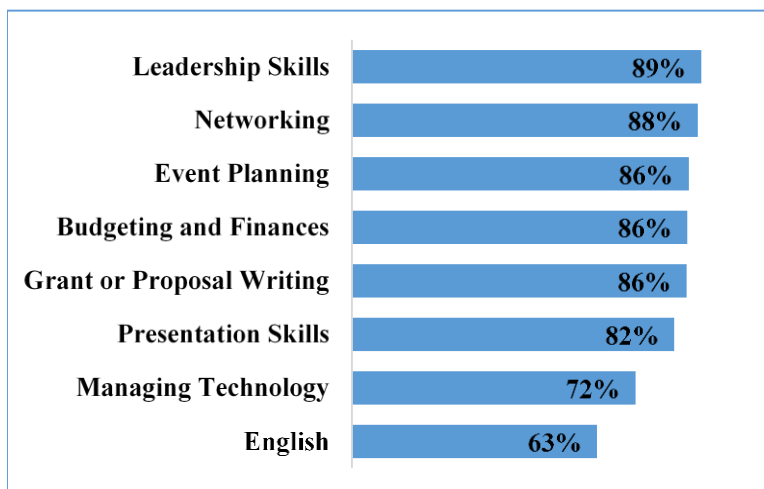
Participating in AEIF also broadened the vision of team members and transformed how they understand social change and how they see the world. A survey respondent from Nicaragua (2015) summed it up succinctly: “Before, I was full of good intentions and a big heart ... I thought that the government or international agencies were the only ones that could create projects. Now, I know that small local projects play a big role in community development and that it is possible to start relevant programs for the community with efforts such as networking and writing grants.” A team leader from South Korea (2017) described being more focused on making a social contribution, more specifically advocating for human rights for marginalized groups, especially North Korean refugees. Another survey respondent from Afghanistan (2016) reflected on what had changed as a result of AEIF: “My planning. My vision. My attitude. My relationship.” A survey respondent from Côte d’Ivoire (2011) wrote, “Today, I have a greater awareness of what community service and volunteering are like, so much so that money is never the prime objective of any work or activity I undertake. My whole career has taken another direction in terms of involvement of humanness.”

Team members also described increased self-confidence in their own efficacy in being able to accomplish change: “I identified that it is possible to generate positive change in my country applying my experience and all the knowledge acquired during my studies in the U.S.A.” (Mexico, 2017). Another respondent wrote about the impact somewhat differently: “I have no fear anymore to write new projects, and nowadays I am a team member of [an] other multi-country project funded by Erasmus and grants from the European Union” (Poland, 2016). Others also talked about having a better sense of their own capabilities and sense of self: “I know which job I can do best” (Vietnam, 2016), and “Winning the funds made me realize that my work is valuable internationally” (Chile, 2016).

### New and Enhanced Skills

The survey shows team members experience improvement across all dimensions of their portfolio of skills during their participation in their AEIF projects. Team members reported the most significant gains in leadership skills (89%), followed by networking (88%), event planning (86%), and budgeting and finances (86%).<sup>19</sup> Team members also reported improved grant or proposal writing skills (86%) and presentation skills (82%) and managing technology (72%) and English (63%).

Figure 7. Skills Gained from Implementing AEIF Projects



Team members mentioned acquiring other types of skills during the interviews as well. Common skills mentioned included: time management, managing multi-tasking and setting priorities, human resource management (finding and negotiating with experts), teamwork, problem solving, communication, and fundraising skills. They also described themselves as being more adept at identifying new possibilities and opportunities. As a team member from Mongolia (2015) explained, “The main benefit for this actually gave me lots of leadership skills and how to deal with problems, how to see opportunities even though we were not planning lots of things....”

#### New Skills Acquired During AEIF

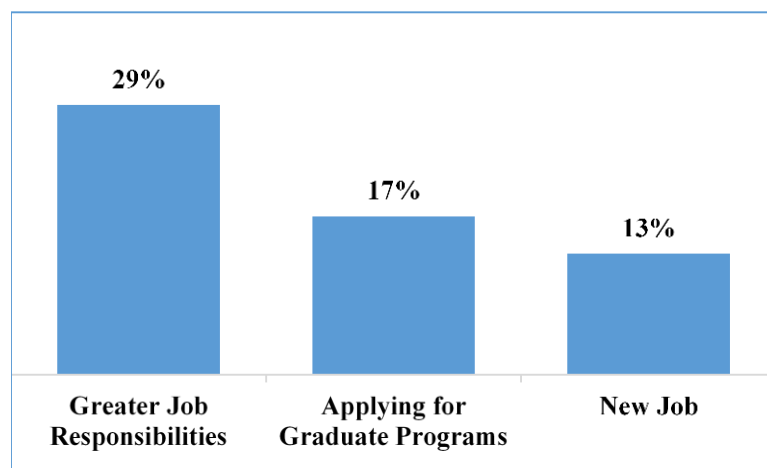
- time management
- multi-tasking
- setting priorities
- human resource management
- teamwork
- problem solving
- communication
- fundraising

### Professional Development

Participating in AEIF grant projects afforded team members an opportunity to develop professionally. According to the survey, team members recognized that participating in AEIF projects was an asset for their professional growth, specifically obtaining greater responsibility within their current jobs (29%), applying for further educational opportunities (17%), and obtaining a new job (13%).

<sup>19</sup> The proportion of team members who believed the AEIF experience contributed to “a great extent” to the growth in skills far outweighed those who reported to “a moderate extent.” For example, 75% of the team members reported their leadership skills improved “a great extent” during the grant, compared to only 14% who said they improved “a moderate extent.”

**Figure 8. Professional Development Opportunities from Participating in AEIF Projects**



One team member from the Dominican Republic (2012), for example, credited the project with getting better jobs, winning two scholarships (for a Master's degree and a Ph.D.), and winning a presidential prize. Another respondent from the Philippines (2016), whose project aimed to introduce reforms through a network of young teachers, was able to secure a permanent position at the national office of the Department of Education, in part as a result of participating in AEIF.

*"It made me make a life changing decision! [I am now] doing my Master's in one of the top-ranked universities in London."*  
AEIF Team Member, Iraq, 2017 Award

In addition to assuming positions of leadership within their own organizations and becoming recognized as subject matter experts within their fields, some team members exhibited entrepreneurial spirit: they applied for grant funds and spearheaded new development projects, established NGOs, and opened for-profit businesses. Take for instance the example of a team member from Bangladesh (2014): "I was willing to work in an international NGO. But now I own my own local NGO named ASGD (Action for Sustainable Green Development) and work with the local community people."

To a far greater extent, team members reported that the AEIF experience changed the focus of their career and work: 75% reported AEIF changed their focus in some way. Survey respondents' explanations of how their projects changed their careers included an increased focus on NGOs and volunteering, social entrepreneurship, innovation, and greater social awareness of marginalized groups (women, children, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities). Looking back at their AEIF project experience, a team member from Mongolia (2011) recollected: "...That's where I got my passion. Before I didn't have any experience working with people with disabilities in my life. It really opened my eyes and I realized how those people lived." With respect to how to tackle social problems, a survey respondent from Nepal (2012) wrote: "AEIF drastically changed the way I worked. I started focusing more on innovation and within few years I was trying to bring in innovation in everything I was doing ... so much so that my new employer – United Nations Development Program – recommended me to become a focal point for innovation."

**Increased Career Focus on:**

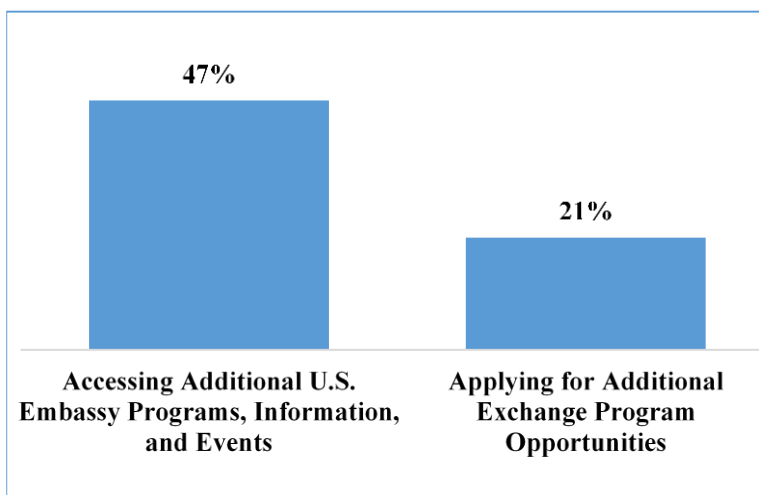
- NGOs and volunteering
- Social entrepreneurship
- Innovation
- Greater social awareness of marginalized groups (women, children, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities)

## Increased Visibility

Involvement with AEIF provided team members with more visibility into U.S. embassy programs, information, events, and other exchange opportunities. Forty-seven percent of survey respondents viewed AEIF as an asset in this regard, and 21% indicated it was helpful for getting exchange opportunities.

In the interviews, team members explained how they became recognized as subject matter experts and were invited to embassy events to lead workshops and give presentations. One team member from Armenia (2012) emerged as a key contact for the embassy in the current social and political transformation. As a result of the experiences and exposure, some younger team members were successfully able to apply for educational exchange programs (Fulbright and the Community College Initiative). Almost 88% of survey respondents were connected with the alumni coordinator or other embassy staff. A team member from Morocco (2017) explained how these connections were important for accessing resources: “This project enabled me to have a strong network with the embassy staff and access to many grants and programs the embassy offers that will help improve my community more than in the past.”

Figure 9. Increased Visibility from Participating in AEIF

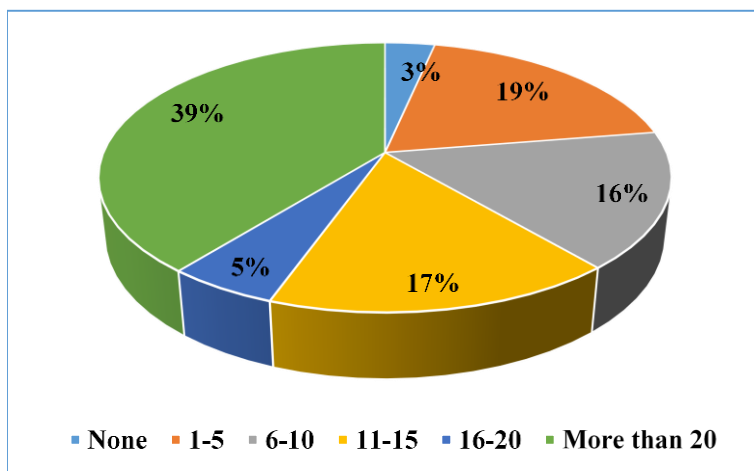


## Enhanced Networks

Almost every team member who participated in the interviews spoke about how the project expanded their professional networks. Survey respondents attested to the same, with 97% reporting that they had gained professional contacts as a result of AEIF. The largest percentage of respondents (39%) gained more than 20 contacts, and another 22% gained between 11 and 20.

While he did not explicitly mention the size of his network, a team member from Morocco (2014) characterized his role on the team as follows: “I had the responsibilities of coordinating between my team members and contacting the authorities, local officials, politicians, local associations and university professors, the thing that gave me the opportunity to widen my network.”

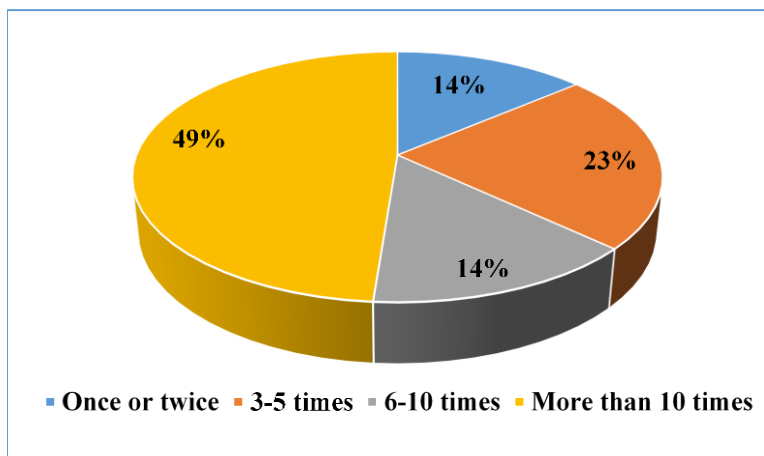
Figure 10. Professional Contacts Gained as a Result of AEIF



### 3.2 Alumni Community Outcomes

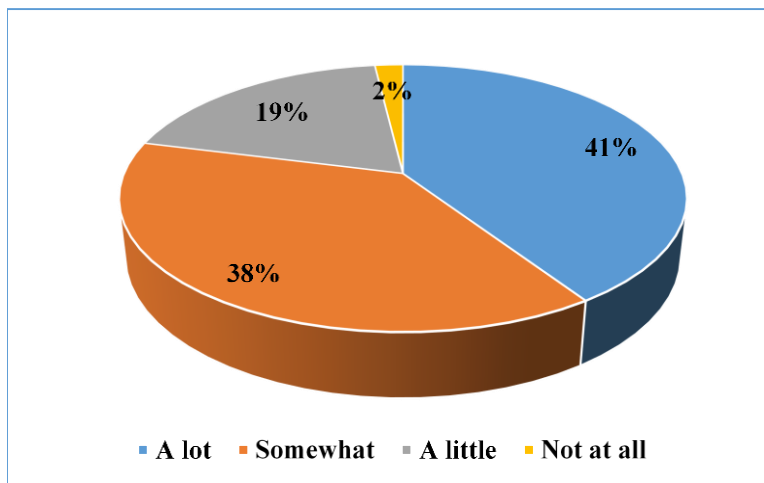
AEIF has contributed to strengthening connections between alumni. AEIF team members maintained their alumni connections through social media: Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and local social media platforms. Ninety-seven percent of all survey respondents said they were still in contact with their project teams. Seventy-five percent of the team members whose projects were still active and had continued past the initial grant period were still involved with their projects. In other words, while individuals may have transitioned away from the AEIF projects, they were still active in the project network. Almost half (49%) were in contact with other project team members more than 10 times over the past year for both social and professional reasons.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 11. Frequency of Contact with AEIF Project Team Members over the Past Year**



Although AEIF alumni were very connected with their project teams, they were less connected to other alumni in their respective countries. Compared to the 97% who cited ongoing connections to their project teams, 79% reported that they were connected to other alumni either “a lot” or “somewhat.” Nineteen percent were only connected “a little” despite participation in their AEIF projects.<sup>21</sup> A team member from Sri Lanka (2016) described why the alumni network was active:

**Figure 12. Connectedness with Other Alumni**



“[It] is because we have a set of common values. Say, if I have two people that I would like to get some expertise or support from, I would always prefer alumni....” AEIF team members are an especially skilled and motivated subset of alumni, and when they are connected to each other, they can make even more of a difference. An example of serendipitous synergy is the case of two team members from different AEIF teams in Nepal (both 2017) who subsequently started to work together because they met at an embassy event.

<sup>20</sup> As expected, the frequency of contact is associated with the “age” of the projects. For older projects, the frequency of contact is less.

<sup>21</sup> Some of this difference may be attributed to both cohort and interest of the participants.



Team members were more connected to the alumni coordinators and staff at U.S. embassies than they were to other alumni (88% versus 79%). As discussed in Section 2 ([The AEIF Application Process and Project Implementation](#)), embassy staff provided critical support to AEIF project teams in spreading information about the AEIF grant opportunity, providing individualized guidance during the proposal process, and helping problem-solve during project implementation. These relationships endured past the lifespan of the AEIF projects. A team member from Macedonia (2013) underscored the unique role of local embassy staff in building lasting relationships because while most Americans assigned to an embassy rotate every three years or so, the alumni coordinators and other local staff are a constant presence. In response to the question about whether there was continued contact with the alumni coordinator, the team member answered: “Constantly. It is something that they have to do ... otherwise there is no success in what we do. It’s like I always [tell] people when they ask me about our relations with the U.S. embassy, I see the majority of those people as my mentors.”

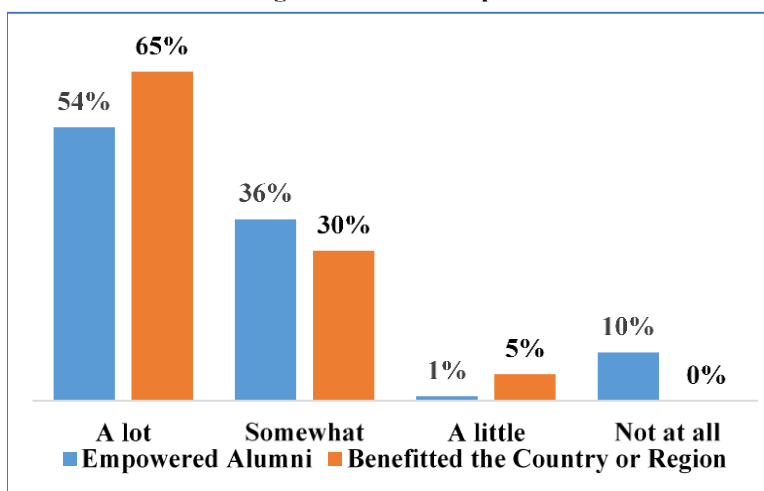
Team members viewed AEIF as an important tool for empowering alumni communities. Ninety percent of the survey respondents reported that AEIF empowered alumni communities (54% “a lot” and 36% “somewhat”). This perspective was also supported by alumni testimony about their personal feelings of empowerment and their ability/responsibility to make changes as a result of the program. There is immense benefit to U.S. foreign policy accruing from engaging with a

community of alumni who share the common bond of having been U.S. exchange participants and who feel empowered to use what they learned to make changes in their countries – for example in human rights, social inclusion, freedom of expression, conflict resolution, and women’s empowerment – themes which map directly to larger U.S. strategic priorities. An Armenian (2016) team member from a social inclusion project, explaining how the feeling of empowerment and responsibility developed over the course of implementing the project, put it succinctly:

*“We started having this sense of ownership towards our project, and then towards our country.”*

AEIF Team Member, Armenia, 2016 Award

Figure 13. AEIF Impact



The vast majority of the surveyed team members (95%) believe that their countries benefitted from the AEIF program. Over the course of the seven years covered by the evaluation, alumni implemented projects in 27 thematic areas, ranging from education, global health, social media, entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and community service, to governmental transparency and civic participation. These projects, inspired by the alumni’s exchange experiences, engaged diverse

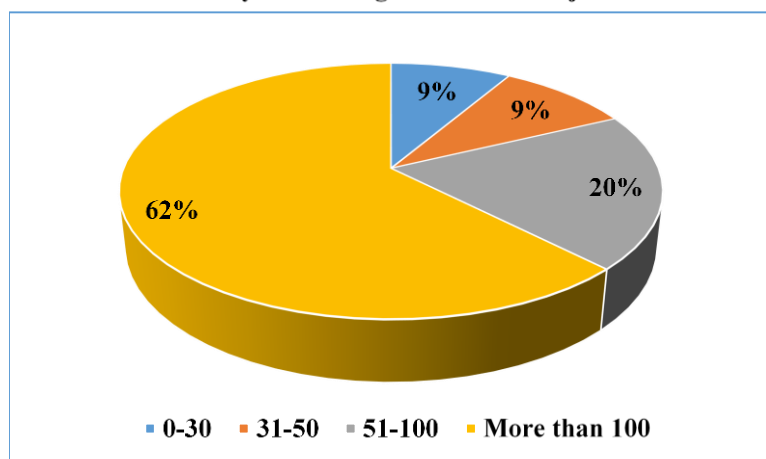
audiences in concerted, innovative efforts for change. As described elsewhere in the report, team members saw that the benefits of AEIF projects touched their communities at many levels. They described benefits accruing to project participants in terms of newly acquired knowledge and skills, changes in attitudes and perceptions, feelings of empowerment and self-confidence, enhanced networks, and educational/professional opportunities. They saw marginalized groups (ethnic minorities, LGBTI individuals, and people with disabilities) become more visible, gain a voice, and in some instances, a means of economic self-sufficiency. Many also reported longer-term impact, with all or some project activities continuing and the project metaphorical “footprint” expanding or multiplying. Finally, team members recognized that AEIF touched their communities by enhancing their capacities, networks, and visibility, and by developing them into leaders motivated to give back, share, and make a difference.

## 4. Project Outcomes and Sustainability

### 4.1 Project Reach

The first measure of project outcome is the number of people directly benefitting from project activities. Sixty-two percent of the team members who responded to the survey reported that their projects touched more than 100 direct beneficiaries; another 20% said that their projects reached more than 50. The fieldwork interviews confirmed this wide reach, and gave insight into how projects touched more than just those who directly participated in the program activities, with some reaching significantly more – well into the thousands. More than 6,000 young people were exposed to the power of self-expression through writing and poetry readings in Nepal (2016). In Colombia (2016) and Sri Lanka (2017) journalism projects, the number of people who viewed content through respective online project platforms exceeded 50,000.

**Figure 14. Estimated Number of People Directly Benefitting from AEIF Projects**

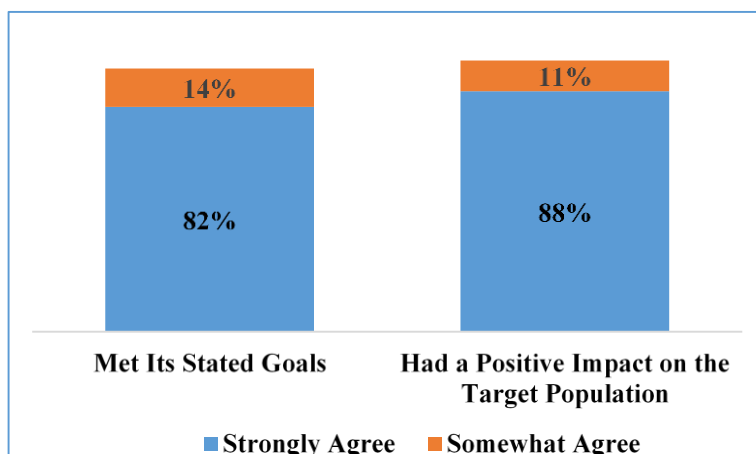




## 4.2 Impacts on the Target Audience

AEIF project team members felt very positive about the impacts of their projects in their communities. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents agreed (82% “strongly” and 14% “somewhat”) that their AEIF projects met their stated goals, and 99% agreed that their projects had had a positive impact on the target population (88% “strongly” and 11% “somewhat”).

**Figure 15. Percentage of AEIF Team Members Reporting That Their AEIF Project ...**



They described a wide range of positive impacts on the target population, including how beneficiaries acquired new skills, how beneficiaries profited from the development and growth of professional networks, how project activities changed perceptions and helped reduce prejudices, and how entire communities were empowered as a result of their projects. Just as an energized alumni community pursuing community change and experiencing personal development supports broader foreign policy and post-specific priorities, so do communities of project participants and beneficiaries who are exposed to and then embrace these new ideas – about democracy, social responsibility, entrepreneurship, and new methods of teaching, to name a few examples. They also become conduits for innovation and change at the local level.

For each type of impact, we provide illustrative examples.

### ***Beneficiaries Acquired New Skills***

Objectives in ECA’s Functional Bureau Strategy focus on the importance of building the job skills of foreign exchange participants and enhancing their understanding of American values. Through AEIF, alumni continue to build upon what they learned in their exchange programs and apply these skills to make a difference in their communities, thereby transferring them to the communities and building the skills of others. Team members most frequently described how their project beneficiaries acquired real skills that could change the trajectory of their lives. The range of new skills included basic English language for disadvantaged youth (Colombia, 2014), STEM for girls (Nepal, 2015), technology (Argentina, 2017), civic roles and responsibilities in a culture of peace (Colombia, 2012; Nepal, 2012), income generation (Armenia, 2011, 2014; Mongolia, 2015; Macedonia, 2014), family budgeting (Armenia, 2014; Sri Lanka, 2016), and journalism and ethics (Vietnam, 2011; Sri Lanka, 2017).

### ***Networks and Professional Development***

According to project beneficiaries themselves (and reiterated by the team members), many of the projects were important for beneficiaries because they expanded their networks and personal connections. In Sri Lanka (2016), as a direct result of the project, a very strong network of youth

interested in environmental sustainability developed. In Argentina (2014), a network of public service minded youth were connected to each other, but also to important actors within the public sector. On a personal level, in Nepal (2017), a social inclusion project created friendships and a support network for individuals with various disabilities. Similarly, in another case from Nepal, a group of beneficiaries from a democracy project explained the role of the program in introducing them to a diverse set of people, many of whom became friends.

### ***Community Changes in Attitudes and Mindset***

Team members conveyed how the projects changed project beneficiaries' self-perceptions as well as perceptions of others in their communities. In Armenia (2012), for example, the activities undertaken by the project to promote leadership among Armenian youth outside the capital "changed the mindset of even their parents, because in the regions you know that a lot of parents do not allow their children to be involved in such initiatives ... especially girls...." The team leader reflected, "I think that we succeeded in breaking some stereotypes. I love it that we managed to break not only their stereotypes, but even changed something in the relationship between their parents and these youngsters...." Other examples include changing stereotypes about people with disabilities, dancing in public (Armenia, 2016), participating in sports (Nepal, 2017), and integrating into educational institutions (Macedonia, 2011; Mongolia, 2014).

### ***Community Empowerment***

Community empowerment was a focus of several projects, but it was also an important by-product of many others. For example, empowering ethnic minority women was a focus of a project in Vietnam (2012), which, through economic opportunity, gave beneficiaries a voice. A team member verbalized "The women ... do not have voice ... they do not have the role in the house to raise their voice, so that's why the husbands ... ignore [that] they exist.... We teach them how to raise their voice. You can raise your voice when you [are] working as a group." In Nepal (2016), beneficiaries recounted how they felt empowered to speak and express themselves about social relationships through poetry. Also in Nepal, girls involved in a STEM education project expressed enthusiasm about their futures. They described how the project empowered them to pursue their dreams, "... to be forward and to imagine, to think like a mathematician or as a scientist...." And finally, the visibility and forum provided by a journalism for diversity project in Colombia (2016) empowered LGBTI participants to share their personal stories with the wider community.

## **4.3 Multiplier Effect and Sustainability**

Besides having an impact directly on project participants and beneficiaries, the projects had an effect in their wider communities. Impacts in the wider community were evident both during the life of the grant project and afterwards. During the projects, participants shared what they learned with others. After the projects, participants "paid it forward" by sharing information and taking initiative to start new projects or activities using what they learned, while team members distributed materials/artifacts and models developed during the project. The effects of the projects were further amplified as project stakeholders – NGOs, local businesses, universities, and local governments – reaped the benefits of the ideas, products, and activities implemented in the projects.

There is an important conceptual difference between projects having a multiplier effect and being sustainable after the end of the grant. For the purposes of this evaluation, projects were defined as sustainable if at least some of the activities carried out during the grant period were still continuing at the time of the evaluation. Not all projects that have multiplier effects are sustainable. But all sustainable projects have multiplier effects (as they continue to have a direct impact).

**Table 4. Multiplier Effect and Sustainability**

During the Project	After the Project
<i>Multiplier Effect:</i> project participants share what they learned	<i>Multiplier Effect:</i> project participants continued to share, undertook new activities based on what they learned; <u>team members</u> continued to share artifacts or models from their projects after the grant funding ended; <u>stakeholders</u> increased their capacity to do work
	<i>Project Sustainability:</i> the project itself continued past the end of the grant funding, taking on a life of its own

### ***Multiplying the Effects During the Projects***

Sharing by participants during the project implementation is a common occurrence. Eighty-four percent of team members who responded to the survey affirmed that project participants or beneficiaries are sharing the information they learned with their community. The fieldwork validates this finding. One example of how project participants share with their communities is a project on basic English learning for disadvantaged youth in Colombia (2014). English classes are implemented in a variety of locations across the country. At a foundation in Bogotá for children who are wards of the state, participants shared their newly acquired English with other residents. In a small village near Medellín, children taught their family members English, and now their younger siblings are starting to participate in the program. In Vietnam (2015), youth participants in a journalism project engaged their parents in conversations about online communication. One beneficiary from a project on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in Mongolia (2015) reflected on how the project impacted multiple generations in her family: "The impact of this project did not yield only for us, but also our whole family, our children and even our grandchildren. My grandson, for example, now plans his day. In the morning, he would get up and he would draw a bed and something like that, in the planner. So those step-by-step planning also really helped the whole family." In Colombia (2015), a music project that empowered youth to pursue their dreams also affected their families, neighbors, and friends who saw them perform in public venues.

### ***Multiplying the Effects After the Projects***

Post-project, beneficiaries continued project momentum in various ways. More than half of the survey respondents (56%) reported that project participants and beneficiaries had started new projects, multiplying the effect of initial project activity in the community. Examples from the survey include students from Zambia (2017) starting saving groups and participating in a competitive sports league, the establishment of new agribusinesses by women (for example, beekeeping in Ghana, 2017), or creating Facebook fan pages to provide knowledge and skills to young people (Vietnam, 2017). Using the knowledge they gained from a project in Nigeria

(2015), one project participant started a new initiative to empower and rehabilitate street kids. Another started a campaign to establish libraries in community schools.

The fieldwork also highlights how the effect continues once the projects have concluded. Teachers incorporated what they learned into their classroom activities, sharing information with their students (Colombia, 2012; Vietnam, 2013; Nepal, 2015). Written materials were distributed and served as important resources for others. In Mongolia (2014), materials from a project on career training for high school counselors were subsequently adopted by the Ministry of Education. One team member explained how, because the project has been endorsed by the Ministry of Education, there is an ongoing stream of requests for their training materials: “The beauty of this project is people keep sending emails to me, ‘Can we use these training materials?’” Or as the team members from a social inclusion project in Armenia explained about the dances and films that were made during the project: “We keep these performances as a part of our repertoire.... [As for] the movie, we gave it to the center ... they are using it a lot. The director will show ... [the film] at a couple of the festivals. And we have shown [it] in the American Corners.”

A cross-border example of a multiplier effect is the adoption of the project model on English learning through structured, fun play from Colombia (2014) in Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup> The impact of a demonstration project in Armenia (2011) was multiplied when the project’s design for a solar fruit dryer was built in Djibouti and in Georgia.

### ***Extended Benefits to the Stakeholders***

As noted earlier, stakeholders contributed vital resources for project implementation, most commonly in the form of volunteer labor. But in the cases where organizational stakeholders actively participated in project implementation, project benefits were parlayed to them as well. Project involvement provided direct economic benefit (Sri Lanka, 2016; Armenia 2011, 2014) and allowed the involved stakeholders to increase their own capacity in various areas: networks (Sri Lanka, 2016, 2017; Nepal, 2016), organizational growth (Armenia, 2014), better access to target audiences (Nepal, 2016; Sri Lanka 2016), and even achieving organizational goals (Vietnam, 2013).

### ***Sustainability***

Even though projects may be successful – in terms of reach, immediate outputs, outcomes, achievement of goals, and intended and unintended multiplier effects – perhaps a more exacting measure of success is project sustainability. For the purposes of this evaluation, sustainability refers to the project itself having continued past the end of the grant funding. This is different from the impact of the projects. Because AEIF projects work with local stakeholders in alumni communities, the outcomes of these projects can be long-lasting, creating a real change in those communities through a multiplier effect. Project sustainability is defined as the AEIF project continuing in some form after the AEIF project funding has been spent. While AEIF grants are meant to address issues in a community and solidify and establish local networks (impact), sustainability is not required in every case. However, when projects are sustainable, the

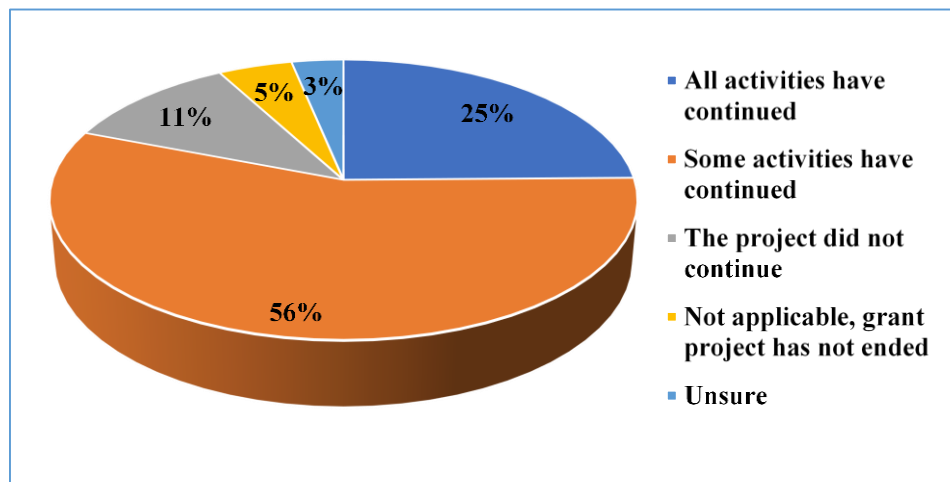
---

<sup>22</sup> The Colombian AEIF team leader participated in a Youth Ambassador alumni event in Bangladesh. The idea was then adopted by a Bangladeshi Youth Ambassador alumna.

community impacts are even greater, as new activities and initiatives continue to amplify the effects of the original ones.

While the vast majority of AEIF projects were successfully completed, with documented impacts in the target communities, fewer have been able to sustain their activities past the end of the AEIF grant. As Figure 16 demonstrates, 25% of the team members who responded to the survey reported that the project was completely sustainable. More than half (56%) said that at least some of the project activities had continued.

**Figure 16. Team Member Reports of AEIF Project Sustainability**



The sustainability of the fieldwork projects, as determined by the GDIT Evaluation Team, differs slightly: of the 44 projects visited during the fieldwork, 13 (30%) were deemed sustainable, 15 (34%) were continuing at least some of the project activities, and 14 (32%) have not continued after the period of performance. Two additional projects (5%) were operating within the grant period at the time of the visit. The discrepancy between the evaluators' assessments and the results of the survey most likely reflects the enthusiasm and optimism of the project team members for their projects versus the evaluation team's more cautious interpretation.

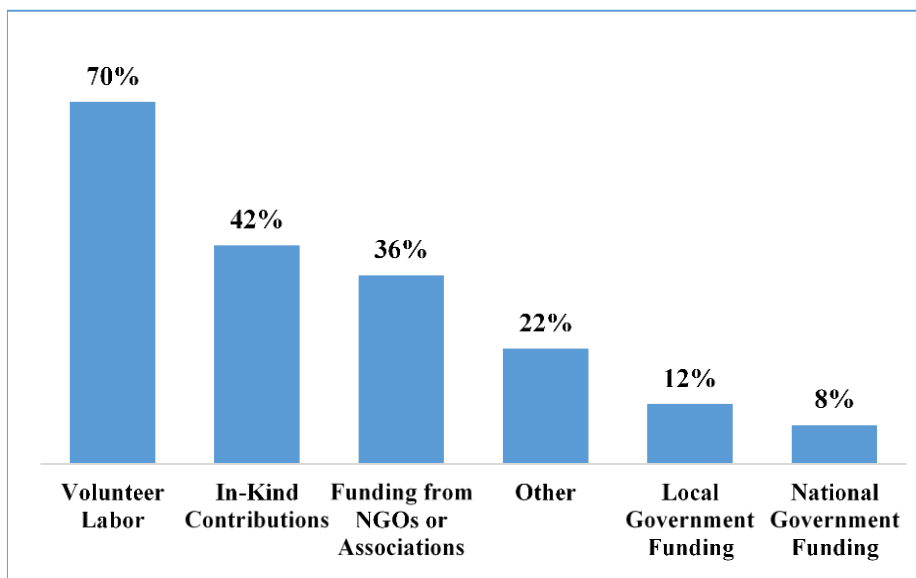
#### **An Example of Project Sustainability and Growth**

The solar dryer project in Armenia was supported by one of the first AEIF grants awarded in 2011. It was intended as a demonstration project – i.e. to show others how to harness solar energy to dry fruit and produce income for poor communities – and to produce real income for a particular community. Seven years later, the dryer is still in use and the maintenance has been turned over to the community. The project leader continues to be actively vested in the project, but focuses on exploring new ways of expanding usage. In addition to fruit, the community now produces dried herbs and tea for sale. The design of the solar dryer also has been shared with other countries and similar dryers have been established there.

### How Projects Were Sustained

Access to resources is the critical factor for sustainability. Survey results show that among the team members who reported that their full project had been sustained or at least some of the activities had been sustained, the most important resource that allowed for growth and continued activity was volunteer labor (70%). In-kind contributions and funding from

**Figure 17. Resources Sustaining AEIF Projects Once the Grants End**



NGOs and associations were also important resources for sustainability (42% and 36%, respectively). Projects were least able to secure funding from local and central governments. Team members mentioned getting external corporate and private sector donations, sponsorship, and winning grants as a way of getting funds.<sup>23</sup> A few reported employing more innovative strategies, such as charging fees or tuition and/or selling a service or product to offset costs.

### Challenges to Sustainability

The survey results show that the single biggest impediment to AEIF project sustainability was lack of funding. As Table 5 shows, 86% of team members perceived lack of funding as a challenge to sustainability, while only half cited a lack of technical support or resources, and almost as many (46%) cited lack of community support and resistance to change. Team members also acknowledged their own limitations (and those of their team members): 57% reported that difficulty prioritizing the project was a challenge, and 37% indicated a lack of team member support.

**Table 5. Challenges to Sustainability**

Challenge	Percent Reporting “To a Great Extent” and “Somewhat”
Lack of Funding	86%
Difficulty Prioritizing the Project	57%
Lack of Technical Support/Resources	50%
Lack of Community Support/Resistance to Change	46%
Lack of Team Member Support	37%

<sup>23</sup> Survey respondents did not identify the specific organizations, but they did mention the following types of organizations from which they received grants: international organizations, universities, and NGOs.



In the interviews, team members reiterated that the lack of resources, not lack of will, was the principal reason for not continuing with projects. From the interviews, it was apparent that project teams were more focused on successfully implementing their projects, rather than on thinking ahead about how to sustain them after the grant. A team member from a project in Nepal (2012) summed up the issue of sustainability simply: “We wanted to ensure sustainability of the program, and we also sought alternative funding, but that was not possible.”

## 5. Support for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy Goals

AEIF supports U.S. foreign policy goals by championing the American value of promoting civic engagement, as the program makes critical funds available to alumni of exchange programs to implement projects and give back to their communities. Support for these goals is evidenced by the way the program as a whole is administered, by the investments posts make in the projects during implementation by alumni, by the ideas and innovative solutions to local problems that the projects bring to individuals and communities, and by more favorable perceptions of the United States.

### 5.1 AEIF Program Administration

#### Thematic Selection

Every year, the Office of Alumni Affairs and the U.S. Department of State’s regional bureaus negotiate and agree upon the AEIF strategic themes for the coming competition cycle, ensuring that selected themes are clearly linked to foreign policy priorities. As Table 6 shows, the number and content of AEIF project themes has shifted over time. In 2011, the first year of AEIF, projects were solicited under two themes only – mentoring and innovative alumni engagement; in 2013 and 2014, the same nine project themes were selected; and in 2017, four thematic areas were identified.

**Table 6. AEIF Project Themes by Year**

Year	# of Themes	Project Themes
2011	2	Mentoring, Innovative Alumni Engagement
2012	7	Women and Youth in the Democratic Process; Volunteerism and Community Service; Innovative Use of Social Media; Community Action for the Environment; Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth and Development; Advocacy, Civil Society, Volunteerism and Community Service; Promoting Civic Engagement among Women and Youth
2013	9	Outreach to Underserved Communities; Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment; Expanded Access to Education; Environmental Protection; Government Transparency; Freedom of Expression; Conflict Resolution; Citizen Security; Promoting Civil Society
2014	9	Outreach to Underserved Communities; Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment; Expanded Access to Education; Environmental Protection; Government Transparency; Freedom of Expression; Conflict Resolution; Citizen Security; Promoting Civil Society
2015	7	Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment; Expanded Access to Education; Conflict Resolution; Social Inclusion/Alternatives for Vulnerable Populations; Climate Change and Environmental Protection; Global Health Awareness; Civic Participation
2016	5	Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment; Expanded Access to Education; Climate Change and Environmental Protection; Civic Participation; Human Rights and Social Inclusion for Vulnerable Populations

2017	4	Civic Participation: Building Resilient Communities; Cooperation in Science, Technology, Health and Energy; Education and Inclusion: Pathways to Success; Empowerment of Women and Girls
------	---	--

### Selection of Winning Projects

U.S. embassy perspectives and alignment of the proposed projects with foreign policy goals are an integral part of the AEIF proposal selection process. Each embassy is responsible for implementing its Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), a multi-year strategic plan that articulates whole-of-government priorities in a given country and incorporates higher-level foreign policy priorities identified in the Joint Strategic Plan. All programs and projects that are implemented in a country are in alignment with the embassy's goals, including AEIF.

When the AEIF proposal period opens, U.S. embassies (mostly through local alumni coordinators) work with prospective applicants to develop their proposals, offering assistance in shaping program ideas and specifying target audiences that correspond to embassy priorities. Then, once applications have been submitted, U.S. embassies are required to provide evaluation forms for the proposals they support (or all proposals for their country, should they so choose). The first criteria upon which proposals are evaluated is “support for Mission or ICS goals.” These evaluations are taken into account by the Office of Alumni Affairs when the proposals are paneled for final selection. This ensures alignment with U.S. foreign policy goals in each country when AEIF projects are evaluated.

## 5.2 Outcomes and Sustainability of AEIF Projects

The vast majority of AEIF alumni teams successfully completed their projects. As discussed in [Project Implementation](#), U.S. embassies provided important guidance, support, and access to resources throughout implementation to ensure project success. In particular, conversations with the alumni teams about the active role U.S. embassy staff played in defining/refining target audience and project scope (number of participants) attest to how much U.S. embassies value the projects in furthering *their* goals. Further, as the alumni coordinator from Armenia noted, the proposal process generates ideas for other work and activity outside of AEIF: “And sometimes if we like the idea very, very much, probably in the future we can think of using other funding from the embassy to implement that project.”

The AEIF projects were low cost to the embassies but high yield, in that alumni gain skills and felt empowered to make changes in their local communities in the domains that the embassies selected. Alumni did not just feel empowered, they actually did make changes, as evidenced by the participants who said that they gained skills, changed attitudes, and undertook activities themselves that they could not have done without the existence of the AEIF projects, and by the sustainability of the projects well past the end of grant funding.

AEIF projects afforded embassies the opportunity to strengthen their relationships with alumni through partnership on projects that introduced meaningful changes that were important locally and to embassies, but also helped engage broader and more diverse audiences that embassies would not have been able to engage without AEIF.



For those projects deemed sustainable, in-kind contributions and funding from local NGOs and associations were utilized to continue project activities, while some alumni were even able to secure external corporate and private sector donations as well. These projects can be seen as advancing public diplomacy goals through catalyzing opportunities for cooperation and enhancing the networks of both individual and institutional partners.

### 5.3 Changing Views of the United States

Surveys and fieldwork confirm that AEIF increased participants' awareness of U.S. foreign policy priorities and U.S. values, even though AEIF does not brand itself as a U.S. foreign policy initiative.

Almost all (98%) surveyed team members reported that their project participants were aware that the project was funded by the U.S. Department of State. For the majority of the fieldwork projects, team members informed participants, beneficiaries, and wider communities that their AEIF projects were funded by the U.S. Department of State. They did so through advertising/media coverage, the U.S. Department of State seal on project materials, and acknowledgements at the beginning of project activity sessions. Two notable exceptions among the fieldwork projects were both from Colombia (2012, 2014), where team members were reluctant to mention the U.S. government involvement in conflict areas.

Team members indicated that knowledge of U.S. support may have changed the views of project participants and beneficiaries (and their wider communities). Eighty-seven percent believed that participants' views changed positively towards the United States because of the funding. One stakeholder from Colombia (2016), for example, shared the following: "Yes ... we knew [about the funding] with the first project. We believe that the way in which this and other projects were developed in Colombia with the sponsorship of American funds is a good sign of how this kind of cooperation has a direct impact." Beneficiaries of a project empowering women and girls through entrepreneurship in Mongolia (2015) described how they learned the project was funded by the U.S. government, and how it changed their perception:

*"Before we were in the dark, in our dark room, not knowing what to do, but as a result of this training, we were in a bright room. So we really see things quite vividly in that bright room.*

*So that is how we also see the U.S...."*

AEIF Project Beneficiary, Mongolia, 2015 Award

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The data show that AEIF is meeting its intended goals. Projects are engendering sustainable change and innovations in local communities through the application of knowledge, skills, ideas, and inspiration gained by alumni during their exchange experiences, they are building alumni communities, and are fostering relationships between U.S. embassies and those communities. The data further show that AEIF supports U.S. foreign policy goals as specific projects "trickle down" new ideas and solutions to participants, who are in turn aware that these projects are supported by the U.S. Department of State.

Key takeaways from the evaluation are:

- ❖ Alumni find the application process intellectually challenging, but the mechanics of the application process are straightforward.
- ❖ Alumni are able to complete their projects despite challenges such as budgeting, timing, target audience recruitment, and circumstances beyond their control (i.e. natural disasters and political changes).
- ❖ Alumni, project participants, beneficiaries, and stakeholders in the community benefit in a myriad of ways: new knowledge and skills, changed attitudes, improved self-confidence and sense of leadership, better networks, and more professional and educational opportunities.
- ❖ Alumni are more connected with each other and have closer relationships with U.S. embassies than they might otherwise have had. They felt supported by the embassies throughout the AEIF process.
- ❖ U.S. support of local community projects is known by beneficiaries and positively affects perceptions of the United States.

AEIF project team members and semi-finalists had thoughtful recommendations for improving the program:

- ❖ ***Promote a peer-to-peer mentorship model, teaming former AEIF winners with applicants.*** Team members who solicited the advice of former AEIF winners in developing their proposals and project ideas felt that this peer-to-peer advising/mentorship model was very useful for inspiring them, encouraging them, and avoiding pitfalls in designing their projects.
- ❖ ***Provide access to an archive (database) of proposals and project reports.*** Team members suggested that access to previous proposals would allow them to leverage good ideas (rather than reinventing concepts/programs from the beginning) or continue to build upon existing projects. Indeed, the only element of the voting that team members from the earlier years liked was that they had visibility into other projects and ideas. Access to thorough project reports would also be an asset, as it would show applicants how other projects were able to circumvent or overcome challenges.
- ❖ ***Expand multi-mode training offerings.*** Team members expressed a desire for additional training, such as in-person training at the embassies, webinars, more online materials, and live chats. They most frequently mentioned training around budgeting; for example, how to estimate reasonable costs and cost share, how to avoid currency conversion issues, and how to determine what are allowable expenses.
- ❖ ***Explore the possibility of awarding mid-sized grants.*** Although it is certainly allowable to apply for less than the maximum \$25,000 grant limit, team members felt implicit pressure to take full advantage of the available funds. A grant program (smaller than the current \$25,000 AEIF grant) would allow team members to implement smaller, but worthy projects, or to pilot larger projects before full roll-out.
- ❖ ***Provide better feedback for semi-finalists.*** Semi-finalists in particular expressed a need for better feedback, either from the Office of Alumni Affairs or from the embassy. Some semi-finalists did not even know that they were in this category until the evaluation. More importantly, those who did know wanted feedback about why they had not won. This is very important for the alumni who applied multiple times, using variations of the

same project. They did not understand why they were not successful and what they needed to do differently, and were quite frustrated.

- ❖ **Require a mandatory post-award in-person meeting.** In some of the fieldwork countries, it was standard operating procedure to have an in-person kick-off meeting. In other countries, this was not the case. A team member (whose project was ultimately terminated early) strongly felt that having an in-person discussion of the post-award requirements (e.g., implications of changes in scope, documenting expenditures, and reporting requirements) would have helped prevent the early termination.

The following recommendations stem from the challenges team members faced in implementing their projects:

- ❖ **Provide rigorous training on project design.** Team members encountered a myriad of challenges with respect to project scope, project reach, matching the target audience to planned activities, managing budgets, adhering to the timeline, and incorporating sustainability into their projects. Pre-proposal design training (through videos or webinar presentations) would help applicants to avoid or minimize challenges that typically emerge later on. Many of the projects requested extensions because of difficulties in accessing target audience and/or meeting target numbers within too aggressive timeframes. More realistic project designs would reduce the probability of requesting extensions, assuming no intervening external circumstances. Additionally, including country-specific grant requirements as part of the training or making sure they are posted ahead of time will ensure that alumni are aware of things like needing to have a bank account or partner NGO through which grant funds can be dispersed.
- ❖ **Require a sustainability plan.** Requiring a sustainability plan in the proposal and then an updated plan (or at a minimum, a sustainability section) in the final report will ensure that project sustainability is not merely an afterthought.
- ❖ **Require a commitment letter as part of the application.** Because all of the AEIF winners are volunteers, difficulty prioritizing their AEIF project was a common challenge for team members. As a result, some teams were affected by inconsistent team member engagement during project implementation. The Office of Alumni Affairs and embassies should include a statement about the significant time commitment required for successful implementation in AEIF announcement and outreach materials. An additional way to circumvent the prioritization issue might be to require a commitment letter from all team members during the proposal phase, with an estimated level of effort (i.e. number of hours) included. Such a letter would ensure that team members had a shared view of their time commitments, roles, and responsibilities in the project. It would also help the team in project design, especially in establishing realistic timelines.
- ❖ **Encourage the use of standardized interim and final report formats.** Standardizing the interim and final report formats will make the review process easier for the Office of Alumni Affairs and embassies. If the Office Alumni Affairs decides to share reports as part of a database of projects available to potential AEIF applicants and winners (see recommendation from AEIF team members above), a standardized format that includes sections for detailed challenges and sustainability plans will make these reports a more valuable resource.
- ❖ **Foster relationships between AEIF awardees.** As this evaluation has shown, AEIF team members are leaders, innovators, and disseminators of new ideas who serve as

valuable resources in their countries. They can also serve as resources to each other. However, AEIF team members in the fieldwork countries did not always know their fellow winners – what their projects were, or whether they were sustainable. Synergy between AEIF team members and projects should be encouraged. The embassies should make concerted efforts to introduce AEIF winners to each other.

In conclusion, AEIF supports U.S. foreign policy goals through the alignment of annual competition project themes with foreign policy priorities, the coordination between U.S. embassies and the Office of Alumni Affairs in selecting particular projects, and by the investments that embassy staff make in working with alumni teams to implement diverse projects that bring innovative solutions into local communities. AEIF harnesses the U.S.-based experiences, talents, skills, and passion of alumni for the service of others.

*“[AEIF] reaffirmed my belief in what I was doing. [It] allowed me to focus on my larger goals and gave me a sense that my passion and profession can be the one and the same.”*

AEIF Team Member, Nepal, 2012 Award

## Appendix A: Thematic Areas by Year

AEIF project themes have varied over time. Below is the full list of themes by year.

- Mentoring (2011)
- Innovative Alumni Engagement (2011)
- Women and Youth in the Democratic Process (2012)
- Volunteerism and Community Service (2012)
- Innovative Use of Social Media (2012)
- Community Action for the Environment (2012)
- Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth and Development (2012)
- Advocacy, Civil Society, Volunteerism and Community Service (2012)
- Promoting Civic Engagement among Women and Youth (2012)
- Outreach to Underserved Communities (2013, 2014)
- Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016)
- Expanded Access to Education (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016)
- Environmental Protection (2013, 2014)
- Government Transparency (2013, 2014)
- Freedom of Expression (2013, 2014)
- Conflict Resolution (2013, 2014, 2015)
- Citizen Security (2013, 2014)
- Promoting Civil Society (2013, 2014)
- Social Inclusion/Alternatives for Vulnerable Populations (2015)
- Climate Change and Environmental Protection (2015, 2016)
- Global Health Awareness (2015)
- Civic Participation (2015, 2016)
- Human Rights and Social Inclusion for Vulnerable Populations (2016)
- Civic Participation: Building Resilient Communities (2017)
- Cooperation in Science, Technology, Health and Energy (2017)
- Education and Inclusion: Pathways to Success (2017)
- Empowerment of Women and Girls (2017)

## Appendix B: Additional Demographics

### Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

What is your gender?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	136	55.3	55.3	55.3
	Male	110	44.7	44.7	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

What is your age?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 18	1	0.4	0.4	0.4
	18-24	24	9.8	9.8	10.2
	25-34	85	34.6	34.6	44.7
	35-44	82	33.3	33.3	78.0
	45-54	41	16.7	16.7	94.7
	55-64	13	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

In which State Department exchange program did you participate? If you have participated in more than one program, please select the most recent.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other (please specify)	49	19.9	19.9	19.9
	ACCESS	2	0.8	0.8	20.7
	African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP-IVLP)	2	0.8	0.8	21.5
	Community College Initiative	3	1.2	1.2	22.8
	Community Solutions Program	4	1.6	1.6	24.4
	Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching	1	0.4	0.4	24.8
	Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching	2	0.8	0.8	25.6



	Assistance Program				
	Fulbright Foreign Student or Scholar Program	43	17.5	17.5	43.1
	Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX)	1	0.4	0.4	43.5
	Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD)	8	3.3	3.3	46.7
	Humphrey Fellowship Program	7	2.8	2.8	49.6
	International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)	31	12.6	12.6	62.2
	International Writing Program	1	0.4	0.4	62.6
	Junior Faculty Development Program	3	1.2	1.2	63.8
	Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES)	3	1.2	1.2	65.0
	Mandela Washington Fellowship	19	7.7	7.7	72.8
	MEPI	1	0.4	0.4	73.2
	Muskie	2	0.8	0.8	74.0
	Professional Fellows Program (PFP)	14	5.7	5.7	79.7
	Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI)	13	5.3	5.3	85.0
	Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program	2	0.8	0.8	85.8
	TechGirls	1	0.4	0.4	86.2
	TechWomen	5	2.0	2.0	88.2
	The American English E-Teacher Scholarship Program	3	1.2	1.2	89.4

	Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI)	1	0.4	0.4	89.8
	Youth Ambassadors Program	4	1.6	1.6	91.5
	Youth Leadership Program (YLP)	6	2.4	2.4	93.9
	YSEALI Academic Fellows	6	2.4	2.4	96.3
	YSEALI Professional Fellows	4	1.6	1.6	98.0
	YSEALI Regional Workshop	5	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

When did you participate in your exchange program?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2017	13	5.3	5.3	5.3
	2016	26	10.6	10.6	15.9
	2015	39	15.9	15.9	31.7
	2014	28	11.4	11.4	43.1
	2013	23	9.3	9.3	52.4
	2012	25	10.2	10.2	62.6
	2011	17	6.9	6.9	69.5
	2010	23	9.3	9.3	78.9
	2009	18	7.3	7.3	86.2
	2008	6	2.4	2.4	88.6
	2007	8	3.3	3.3	91.9
	2006	4	1.6	1.6	93.5
	2005	3	1.2	1.2	94.7
	2004	3	1.2	1.2	95.9
	2003	2	0.8	0.8	96.7
	2002	3	1.2	1.2	98.0
	2000	1	0.4	0.4	98.4
	1999	1	0.4	0.4	98.8
	1997	1	0.4	0.4	99.2
	1993	1	0.4	0.4	99.6
	1990	1	0.4	0.4	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Have you participated in more than one exchange program?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	41	16.7	16.7	16.7
	No	205	83.3	83.3	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Home Country Region					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		8	3.3	3.3	3.3
	AF	54	22.0	22.0	25.2
	EAP	42	17.1	17.1	42.3
	EUR	41	16.7	16.7	58.9
	NEA	15	6.1	6.1	65.0
	SCA	33	13.4	13.4	78.5
	WHA	53	21.5	21.5	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

When did you apply for your winning AEIF project? If you were awarded more than one grant, please choose the grant you were most involved in.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2018	6	2.5	2.5	2.5
	2017	76	31.9	31.9	34.5
	2016	47	19.7	19.7	54.2
	2015	33	13.9	13.9	68.1
	2014	26	10.9	10.9	79.0
	2013	19	8.0	8.0	87.0
	2012	18	7.6	7.6	94.5
	2011	13	5.5	5.5	100.0
	Total	238	100.0	100.0	

AEIF Team Leader (coded)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Team member	65	26.4	27.3	27.3
	Team Leader	169	68.7	71.0	98.3
	Unclear	4	1.6	1.7	100.0
	Total	238	96.7	100.0	
Missing	System	8	3.3		
Total		246	100.0		

## Gender Distribution of Fieldwork Interviewees by Type and Country

Country	Total Number of Fieldwork Interviewees									Totals
	Team Members		Key Informants		Beneficiaries		Semi-Finalists		Post Staff	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Argentina	5	5	2	4	0	0	0	3	2	21
Armenia	1	7	0	0	0	0	2	4	3	17
Colombia	3	4	4	1	15	58	2	1	1	91
Macedonia	3	5	3	3	0	3	0	0	3	20
Mongolia	2	14	0	1	0	3	0	2	3	25
Nepal	5	5	10	5	3	10	2	0	1	41
Sri Lanka	6	3	4	3	8	20	0	0	2	46
Vietnam	0	14	5	7	2	3	2	4	8	45
Total	25	57	28	24	28	97	8	14	23	306

## Appendix C: Team Member Survey

AEIF Survey

AEIF Program Evaluation Survey

**Welcome! Thank you for agreeing to take this survey. Your participation will help in making the evaluation of this important program a success. The survey will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete, and your answers will be kept confidential.**

**If you have any technical issues during the survey, please contact GDIT support at [AEIF.Survey@gdit.com](mailto:AEIF.Survey@gdit.com).**

AEIF Survey

Starter Questions

**Please share some basic information about yourself.**

\* 1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

\* 2. What is your age?

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Under 18 | <input type="radio"/> 45-54 |
| <input type="radio"/> 18-24    | <input type="radio"/> 55-64 |
| <input type="radio"/> 25-34    | <input type="radio"/> 65+   |
| <input type="radio"/> 35-44    |                             |

\* 3. In which State Department exchange program did you participate? If you have participated in more than one program, please select the most recent.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> ACCESS   | <input type="radio"/> Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES)       |
| <input type="radio"/> African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP-IVLP)   | <input type="radio"/> Mandela Washington Fellowship                      |
| <input type="radio"/> American Arts Incubator                                | <input type="radio"/> MEPI   |
| <input type="radio"/> Center Stage   | <input type="radio"/> Muskie   |
| <input type="radio"/> Community College Administrator Program                | <input type="radio"/> OneBeat  |
| <input type="radio"/> Community College Initiative                           | <input type="radio"/> Professional Fellows Program (PFP)                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Community Solutions Program                            | <input type="radio"/> Sport for Community                                |
| <input type="radio"/> Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX)               | <input type="radio"/> Sports Visitor Program                             |
| <input type="radio"/> EducationUSA Academy                                   | <input type="radio"/> Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI)                 |
| <input type="radio"/> ESPN: GSMP   | <input type="radio"/> Summer Work and Travel                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Fortune Global Women's Mentoring Partnership           | <input type="radio"/> Teachers for Global Classrooms                     |
| <input type="radio"/> Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching             | <input type="radio"/> Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program        |
| <input type="radio"/> Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistance Program | <input type="radio"/> TechGirls  |
| <input type="radio"/> Fulbright Foreign Student or Scholar Program           | <input type="radio"/> TechWomen  |
| <input type="radio"/> Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX)                         | <input type="radio"/> The American English E-Teacher Scholarship Program |
| <input type="radio"/> Global Media Makers                                    | <input type="radio"/> Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLA)     |
| <input type="radio"/> Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD)          | <input type="radio"/> Youth Ambassadors Program                          |
| <input type="radio"/> Humphrey Fellowship Program                            | <input type="radio"/> Youth Leadership Program (YLP)                     |
| <input type="radio"/> International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI)     | <input type="radio"/> YSEALI Academic Fellows                            |
| <input type="radio"/> International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)        | <input type="radio"/> YSEALI Professional Fellows                        |
| <input type="radio"/> International Writing Program                          | <input type="radio"/> YSEALI Regional Workshop                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Junior Faculty Development Program                     | <input type="radio"/> N/A  |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)                                 |  |

\* 4. When did you participate in your exchange program?



\* 5. Have you participated in more than one exchange program?

☐ Yes

☐ No

#### AEIF Survey

\* 6. In which other State Department exchange program did you participate?

☐ African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP-IVLP)

☐ ACCESS

☐ American Arts Incubator

☐ Center Stage

☐ Community College Administrator Program

☐ Community College Initiative

☐ Community Solutions Program

☐ Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX)

☐ EducationUSA Academy

☐ espn: GSMP

☐ Fortune Global Women's Mentoring Partnership

☐ Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching

☐ Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistance Program

☐ Fulbright Foreign Student or Scholar Program

☐ Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX)

☐ Global Media Makers

☐ Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD)

☐ Humphrey Fellowship Program

☐ International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI)

☐ International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)

☐ International Writing Program

☐ Junior Faculty Development Program

☐ Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES)

- ☐ Mandela Washington Fellowship
- ☐ MEPI
- ☐ Muskie
- ☐ OneBeat
- ☐ Professional Fellows Program (PFP)
- ☐ Sport for Community
- ☐ Sports Visitor Program
- ☐ Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI)
- ☐ Summer Work and Travel
- ☐ Teachers for Global Classrooms
- ☐ Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program
- ☐ TechGirls
- ☐ TechWomen
- ☐ The American English E-Teacher Scholarship Program
- ☐ Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLA)
- ☐ Youth Ambassadors Program
- ☐ Youth Leadership Program (YLP)
- ☐ YSEALI Academic Fellows
- ☐ YSEALI Professional Fellows
- ☐ YSEALI Regional Workshop
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 7. When did you participate in this other exchange program?

\* 8. When did you apply for your winning AEIF project? If you were awarded more than one grant, please choose the grant you were most involved in.

\* 9. What is your home country?

AEIF Survey

Project Design and Implementation

**For questions related to design and implementation, if you participated on more than one AEIF project, please answer based on the project in which you had the bigger role.**

\* 10. Was your AEIF grant project implemented in a single country, or were activities conducted in multiple countries?

- ☐ Single country
- ☐ Multiple countries

\* 11. Did your AEIF grant team include alumni from countries other than your own?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

AEIF Survey

\* 12. Did this include team members from the United States?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

\* 13. How many times have you served as a team member on an AEIF grant proposal?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-4
- ☐ 5 or more

\* 14. How would you describe your level of engagement in:

	Highly engaged	Somewhat engaged	Not very engaged	Not at all engaged
Designing the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing the proposal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 15. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the AEIF grant proposal process?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The AEIF grant proposal process was easy to understand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online guidance provided by the State Department assisted me in completing the application.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Embassy staff answered my questions about my proposal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Embassy training, either in-person or online, helped me improve my proposal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 16. What additional support (including online tools and resources) would have been helpful during the proposal process?

AEIF Survey

Implementation

The following questions refer to the implementation phase of the AEIF project itself.

\* 17. To what extent do you agree with the following?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My AEIF project team worked well together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My AEIF project met its stated goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My AEIF project had a positive impact on the target population.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. How many people, in your estimation, directly benefited from your AEIF grant project?

- ☐ 0-30
- ☐ 31-50
- ☐ 51-100
- ☐ More than 100

\* 19. To what extent did the following challenges affect your AEIF project during implementation?

	Not at all	Somewhat	To a great extent
Underestimating costs required	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Underestimating time required to implement your project successfully	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of community support/resistance to change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of support from team members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of technical support/resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty prioritizing your project amid competing priorities (home life, work, school, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty in reaching the intended target audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External factors (political unrest, economic environment, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 20. If you've identified any of the challenges above, please describe how you have addressed those problems to continue your project.

\* 21. To what extent did the skills you gained **from your exchange program** help you implement your AEIF project?

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	Skill not acquired
Managing technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presentation skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grant or proposal writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Event planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budgeting and finances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 22. To what extent did participating in your AEIF project help you **further develop** the following skills?

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	Skill not acquired
Managing technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presentation skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grant or proposal writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Event planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budgeting and finances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 23. Did any of the following groups collaborate with your team on your AEIF project? Select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Local government agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> Universities
<input type="checkbox"/> National government agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Embassy
<input type="checkbox"/> NGOs or associations	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	
<input type="text"/>	



\* 24. What type of assistance or support did you receive during the grant project? Select all that apply.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local government funding          | <input type="checkbox"/> In kind contributions (food, supplies, space, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National government funding       | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer labor (outside of team members)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Funding from NGOs or associations |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)            |  |

\* 25. Did you submit a final report to the Embassy once your project finished?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

#### AEIF Survey

#### Follow-on Activities

**The following questions refer to any activities that occurred once the grant officially ended.**

\* 26. Did the project activities continue once your AEIF grant officially ended?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Yes, all activities have continued  | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable, my grant project has not ended yet. |
| <input type="radio"/> Yes, some activities have continued | <input type="radio"/> Unsure  |
| <input type="radio"/> No, the project did not continue    |   |

#### AEIF Survey

\* 27. If the project has continued, are you currently involved?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

\* 28. Please describe the activities currently being undertaken.

\* 29. How have you been able to sustain the project once the grant ended? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Local government funding ☐ In kind contributions (food, supplies, space, etc.)
- ☐ National government funding ☐ Volunteer labor
- ☐ Funding from NGOs or associations
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 30. To what extent did the following challenges affect the sustainability of your project after the grant itself ended?

	Not at all	Somewhat	To a great extent
Lack of funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of community support/resistance to change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of support from team members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of technical support/resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty prioritizing your project amid competing priorities (home life, work, school, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 31. Did **your AEIF grant** inspire you to undertake new projects or initiatives?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

\* 32. Are there any project participants or beneficiaries sharing the information they learned with their community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

\* 33. Have any project participants or beneficiaries started new projects as the result of their participation in the AEIF grant project?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

\* 34. Please describe the activities, if applicable.

\* 35. Did the AEIF grant project lead to any new associations or organizations being formed?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

AEIF Survey

\* 36. Are you involved in this association or organization?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

AEIF Survey

\* 37. Are you still in contact with members of your AEIF project team?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

AEIF Survey

\* 38. How often have you been in contact with members of your AEIF team over the past year?

- ☐ Once or twice
- ☐ 3-5 times
- ☐ 6-10 times
- ☐ More than 10 times

AEIF Survey

\* 39. For which of the following has your participation in the AEIF program been an asset? Select all that apply.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining a new job   | <input type="checkbox"/> Applying for additional exchange program opportunities              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining greater job responsibilities in your current position | <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing additional U.S. Embassy programs, information, and events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applying for graduate education programs                        | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A   |

\* 40. To what extent did your participation in the AEIF grant project change the focus of your career or work?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

AEIF Survey

\* 41. How did the project change the focus of your career? What are you doing differently than before?

AEIF Survey

\* 42. How many professional contacts have you gained as a result of your AEIF experience?

- |                            |                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> None | <input type="radio"/> 11-15        |
| <input type="radio"/> 1-5  | <input type="radio"/> 16-20        |
| <input type="radio"/> 6-10 | <input type="radio"/> More than 20 |

\* 43. Are you in contact with the alumni coordinator or any other staff at the U.S. Embassy in your country?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

\* 44. How connected are you with other alumni in your country?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

\* 45. To what extent do you think the AEIF program has helped empower the alumni community in your country or region?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

\* 46. How connected are you with Americans you worked with as part of your AEIF project team?

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> A lot    | <input type="radio"/> Not at all   |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat | <input type="radio"/> I did not work with any Americans on my AEIF grant project |
| <input type="radio"/> A little |  |

\* 47. To what extent do you think the AEIF program, as a whole, has benefited your country/region?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

\* 48. To your knowledge, were the participants of your project aware that the project was funded by the U.S. State Department?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

AEIF Survey

\* 49. If so, how did their views of the United States change?

- ☐ Very positively  
☐ Somewhat positively  
☐ No change  
☐ Somewhat negatively  
☐ Very negatively  
☐ Unsure

AEIF Survey

\* 50. Do you intend to apply for another AEIF grant in the future?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

AEIF Survey

Thank you for your time and participation in this survey.

Please keep the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your country updated about your AEIF project. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs is also interested in learning about your achievements. We invite you to send stories, pictures or videos from your AEIF project to [alumni@state.gov](mailto:alumni@state.gov) (please include your full name, project title, and country). You can also tag #ExchangeAlumni on your social media posts to share your AEIF successes with the global alumni community!

Also, please be sure to forward the invitation email to your AEIF team members. Thank you!



## Appendix D: In-Depth Interview Protocols

### AEIF Evaluation: Project Team Member Interview Protocol

#### INTRODUCTION

Good morning! Good afternoon! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are here to learn more about your AEIF grant.

Please know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and we value your honest opinion. Your comments will be anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. We will never use your name in any written reports or give out any of your personal identification to anyone. If don't mind, we would like to record this conversation for research purposes only. We want to concentrate on the conversation, rather than on taking notes. Do we have your consent?

#### Introduction/Warm-up

To start off, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

- What are you currently doing?
- Which U.S. State Department exchange program did you participate in? In which year?

#### AEIF Grant Process

1. How did you hear about the AEIF grant program?
2. How many people were on your team for the proposal? How did the team get together? Who connect you with them? (*probe: were your team members alumni of your same exchange program? Were they all alumni?*)
3. How did your team come up with the project? Whose idea was it?
4. Once you/the team had a project in mind, how did you divide the roles and responsibilities for the **application**? What was your role? What about the roles of your other team members?
5. Overall, what was your impression of the application process? Were there any challenges?
6. How would you improve the application process?
7. Did you receive any training on how to design a grant project or complete the application? If not, do you believe that having some sort of training would have made the project more successful? (*probe: funding sources, building a team, step-by-step process on completing application*)
8. Did the Embassy provide assistance during the application process? If so, in what way? (*probe: Q&A sessions, review draft proposals, help identify beneficiaries, team members, etc.*)

#### Project Implementation

9. Can you tell us about the project? What was your role **in the project**? What were the roles of your team members?
10. Did you work with any outside stakeholders apart from your team (*probe for disaggregation between Americans and other stakeholders*)? Who were they?
11. What was the target population for your project?
12. Did the project achieve its goals? If not, why not?

13. Did you encounter any challenges implementing the project?

### **Project Sustainability**

- 14. Is the project still happening, in some form? If so, what activities are taking place? If not, why did it end?
- 15. Are you still involved? If so, what is your current role?
- 16. If the project is ongoing, how do you see the project in the next 3 years?
- 17. What steps did you take to make the project sustainable? (*probe: focus on sustainability in grant application, teach community how to continue project, set up systems to ensure project continues, etc.*)

### **Project Outcomes/Professional Development**

- 18. What was the most important benefit of the project? For you personally? For your team members? For program participants and beneficiaries? For the community? (*probe: identify how many beneficiaries/groups were impacted by the project, multiple communities, etc.*)
- 19. Did participating in the grant program help you to develop new skills? (*probe: leadership skills, communication skills, grant writing ability, technological skills, project management, etc.*)
- 20. How has your experience with the AEIF grant program impacted your career? (*probe: new job/promotion, change in career focus*)
- 21. Did anything from your exchange experience (skills and knowledge, cultural understanding, etc gained) help you during project design and implementation?
- 22. Is the community/program participants aware that this project is funded by the U.S.?
- 23. Do you think that your AEIF grant project has fostered more positive attitudes towards the United States among the project participants/beneficiaries? If so, how?

### **Alumni Networks**

- 24. Do you think the AEIF grant program has helped build the alumni community in your country/region? How?
- 25. Because of participating in the AEIF grant program, are you more connected to alumni in your country/region? Why or why not?
- 26. Are you in contact with the alumni coordinator or with anyone else at the embassy? If so, how often? If not, why not?

### **Conclusion**

If you had the opportunity to do this again (apply for the grant and implement the project), what would you do differently?

Thank you so much for your time!

## **AEIF Evaluation: Project Key Stakeholder Interview Protocol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning! Good afternoon! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are here to learn more about the project you worked on/participated in with [alumni].

Please know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and we value your honest opinion. Your comments will be anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. We will never use your name in any written reports or give out any of your personal identification to anyone. If you don't mind, we would like to record this conversation for research purposes only. We want to concentrate on the conversation, rather than on taking notes. Do we have your consent?

#### **Introduction/Warm-up**

To start off, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

- What is your current job title? What do you do?
- What is your connection to the AEIF team?
- How did you first hear about the project? (probe: grantee sought them out, beneficiary sought out grantee, etc.)
- How were you involved in the AEIF grantee's project?

#### **AEIF Grant Process**

**(Note: If involved in the application process, ask this question, otherwise, start with question 2)**

1. Did you assist in designing the proposal or identifying a need in the community? If so, can you describe your impression of the AEIF funding opportunity application process?

#### **Project Outcomes**

2. Can you please describe the project in your own words?
3. How did your community benefit from this project? From your point of view, about how many people took part in the project? How many people do you think you have reached with this project? (probe: active vs/ indirect)
4. How did you benefit from this project? (probe: learn new skills, develop better relationship with the community, etc.)
5. Have you continued with any of the project activities since the project ended? If so, how have you been involved? If not, why?
6. Did the project motivate you or the community to propose a new project or activity to benefit the community?

#### **Alumni/U.S. Relationships**

7. Are you still in touch with the AEIF team? If so, how often? If not, why not?

8. Are you aware that this project is funded by the Department of State/U.S. government? If so, when did you become aware of this fact?
9. Has your opinion of the United States changed because of the project? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
10. Do you feel that your community's opinion of the United States has changed? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

## **CONCLUSION**

Is there anything else you would like to share that we didn't discuss?

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us today.

## **AEIF Evaluation: Project Beneficiary Interview Protocol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning! Good afternoon! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are here to learn more about the project you participated in with [alumni].

Please know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and we value your honest opinion. Your comments will be anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. We will never use your name in any written reports or give out any of your personal identification to anyone. If you don't mind, we would like to record this conversation for research purposes only. We want to concentrate on the conversation, rather than on taking notes. Do we have your consent?

#### **Introduction/Warm-up**

To start off, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

- Can you tell us a little bit about you?
- How did you first hear about the project? (probe: grantee sought them out, beneficiary sought out grantee, etc.)

#### **Project Outcomes**

1. Can you tell me about the project?
2. What did you do/ learn? How has it helped you? (probe: learn new skills, develop better relationship with the community, etc.)
3. How have you applied what you learned during the project?
4. Have you shared what you learned with others? What did you share? (*Tailor to project; for example: ask about passing on English skills, mentoring other people*)
5. Did your participation in this project benefit your community/school/family/organization? )
6. Because you participated in this project, have you volunteered more in your community/school/organization?
- 7. Alumni/U.S. Relationships**
8. Are you still in touch with the AEIF team? If so, how often? If not, why not?
9. Are you aware that this project is funded by the Department of State/U.S. government? If so, when did you become aware of this fact?
10. (*If they are aware that the project is DOS/USG funded*) Has your perception of the United States changed since learning the Department of State funded this project? In what way?

### **CONCLUSION**

Is there anything else you would like to share that we didn't discuss?

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us today. We appreciate your time.

## **AEIF Evaluation: Semi-Finalist Interview Protocol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning! Good afternoon! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are here to learn more about your experience with the AEIF grant program.

Please know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and we value your honest opinion. Your comments will be anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. We will never use your name in any written reports or give out any of your personal identification to anyone. If you don't mind, we would like to record this conversation for research purposes only. We want to concentrate on the conversation, rather than on taking notes. Do we have your consent?

### **Introduction/Warm-up**

To start off, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

- Which U.S. State Department exchange program did you participate in? In which year?
- What are you currently doing?

### **AEIF Grant Process**

1. How did you hear about the AEIF grant program?
2. How many people were on your team? How did you connect with your team?
3. How did your team come up with the project? Whose idea was it? (*probe: were your team*)
4. Overall, what was your impression of the application process? Were there any challenges?
5. How would you improve the application process?
6. Did the Embassy provide assistance during the application process? If so, in what way? (*probe: Q&A sessions, review draft proposals, help identify beneficiaries, team members, etc.*)
7. **Project Goals**
8. Can you briefly describe your intended project goals? What was the target population for your project?
9. Did you intend to work with any outside stakeholders apart from your team? Who were they?
10. Did you get funds from other stakeholders to continue with the project? What is the status of the project right now?

### **Professional Development**

11. Did anything from your exchange experience (skills and knowledge, cultural understanding, etc.) help you during project/application design?
12. Did your experience with the AEIF grant process help you apply for other grants? (understanding of applications, building a team, etc.)

### **Alumni Networks**

13. Are you still in contact with the other alumni on your team? If so, how likely is it that you will try to work with the team on another project or apply again to a AEIF grant?

14. Are you in contact with the alumni coordinator or with anyone else at the embassy? If so, how often? If not, why not?

### **Conclusion**

Lastly, is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today. We appreciate your time.



## **AEIF Evaluation: Post Interview Protocol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning! Good afternoon! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are here to learn about your experience with the AEIF grant program.

Please know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and we value your honest opinion. Your comments will be anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. We will never use your name in any written reports or give out any of your personal identification to anyone.

### **BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM EXPERIENCE**

We would like to start by learning a bit about your role here at the Post and your involvement with the AEIF Grant Program.

1. What is your role at the Embassy? What is your relationship with the AEIF grant program?
2. How long have you been involved in the AEIF Program, and what are your responsibilities?
3. Approximately how many AEIF grants have you overseen? (*probe: review/approve proposals, monitor small grants, maintain contact with past applicants and grant recipients, etc.*)

### **AEIF Grant Process**

1. Could you explain the Embassy's role in the overall application and selection process? How involved has the Embassy been?
2. How the application process has changed in the last years?
3. How is the AEIF grant program advertised to alumni?
4. To what extent do you encourage alumni to work with alumni from their region and not just their own country?

### **Project Outcomes**

5. In your experience, what makes projects successful or unsuccessful? How do you assess if a project is successful or unsuccessful?
6. What are the most common challenges encountered during AEIF project proposal, design and implementation? How can you try to mitigate these challenges?
7. How does the Embassy support the teams during the proposal and implementation process?

### **Alumni Networks**

8. How often do alumni stay in contact with Post once their grant project is complete? If alumni do not stay connected to Post, why?
9. Do you feel that the AEIF program helps to make connections between alumni in both your country and in your region? If not, why?
10. Does Post play a role in keeping alumni connected? If so, how?

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

11. Are there any lessons learned from your experience of AEIF proposal process and grant activity that you think would be applicable to other Posts or that you would like to share?

**CONCLUSION**

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. We really appreciate your time.