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COMMENTARY: EMERGING CIVIC RESPONSES IN THE U.S.

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The rapid coalescence of a network of international development professionals in Colorado impacted by the closure of USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), informally called the “Tuesday Group,” shows how new voices and political action are emerging in the US in response to massive government cuts.

On 20 January 2025, an executive order placed a 90-day pause on all USAID programs¹ that led to the eventual closure of the agency and a Senate-passed bill to claw back about \$8 billion of congressionally mandated foreign aid. The total withdrawal of more than \$100 billion dollars in aid contracts² will result in more than 95 million people losing basic health care, 23 million children losing access to education and more than 3 million preventable deaths.³

In Colorado federal cuts to USAID and other programs starved the state of over a quarter billion dollars for programs already in progress, spread across cities and rural areas of the state alike.⁴

Colorado is home to about 670 international and foreign affairs organizations earning more than a billion dollars in revenue for the state and employing more than 2300 people working on water, technology, development, and social programs around the world.⁵ In addition, international trade supports over 820,000 jobs or about a fifth of all jobs in the state. The state’s major universities boost its international footprint through international training in fields such as development, mining, agriculture, public health, and anthropology.

As a response to the sudden federal cuts, laid-off USAID staff and contractors held a “Sad Hour” in February to reflect on the consequences of the cuts. This gathering led to the formation of a Signal group to share information about the rapidly changing landscape and available resources related to unemployment insurance, mortgage and rent assistance and potential jobs. The network began to meet regularly in “Tuesday Group” events held at the Posner Center for International Development (Posner) in Denver.

The first Tuesday Group on 4 March 2025 provided career development assistance, and the sessions have continued every week since for as many as 50 people at a time. The more than 300 members have reached out to state policy makers obtaining help from Senator Michael Bennet’s office and other officials. To raise awareness of the international development sector in the state, they launched ongoing advocacy and communication efforts, including meetings with state lawmakers, a demonstration at the Capitol and outreach to journalists. A Posner symposium entitled “A Critical Gathering in a Time of Change” on 13 March further supported this community by bringing together over 100 professionals to learn about the impacts of the government cuts and share reflections about the future.⁶

Colorado’s international development professionals largely did not know each other. Many worked for organizations based in Washington, DC or elsewhere and the nature of their work prioritized relationships with people in the countries where they work. Their international development experience, however, has provided them with some shared values and commitment to global action that have

helped them come together.

While an important characteristic of the network formed in March has been its informal organization, enabling leadership to emerge as needed, it has also developed rudimentary structure. Several people have taken on temporary roles: such as organizing the Tuesday Group meetings, coordinating media outreach and chairing the advocacy committee.

This escalation in a few months from a loose community to an active network that provides mutual assistance was supported by three key factors: a physical convening space, the existence of a few already established relationships, and knowledge of the importance of organizing often gained working in closed societies.

The initial network of those impacted by international development cuts is growing in size and linkages as the US government sheds more jobs in education, parks, energy, welfare, universities and other domestic programs. Many new network members are coming from a variety of impacted US agencies, including the US Department of Agriculture, National Renewable Energy Labs (NREL) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as well as from USAID and State Department affected professionals returning to the state.⁷

At the same time, as the initial cadre of network members are beginning to “pivot” to new jobs, the network is continually being refreshed by new members looking for support and positive action in the face of the cuts. It has also linked loosely with several national groups and other state groups that are advocating on behalf of a decimated civil service sector.

The Tuesday Group is one type of emerging network for mutual support and activism in the US that has formed organically in response to cuts in valuable federal programs and staff. The Tuesday Group’s rapid emergence shows that grassroots organizing of networks is leading to new action to protect democratic governance across the country.

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Notes

¹White House: *Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid*, accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/> on July 21 2025.

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²Center for Global Development estimates \$113.9 billion in cuts but notes that the actual number could be very different. CGDev website <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/new-estimates-usaid-cuts> accessed on July 21, 2025.

³OXFAM America, *What USAID Does, and the Impact of Trump's Cuts on Foreign Aid*, 23 May 2025 accessed at <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/issues/making-foreign-aid-work/what-do-trumps-proposed-foreign-aid-cuts-mean/> on July 21, 2025.

⁴Aid on the Hill infographic, Tuesday Group advocacy committee, 5 May 2025.

⁵Causeiq website accessed at <https://www.causeiq.com/directory/international-focused-organizations-list/colorado-state/> on July 10, 2025.

⁶Posner Center for International Development, *2025 Symposium, A Critical Gathering in a Time of Change*, webpage accessed at <https://posnercenter.org/symposium-2025/> on 21 July 2025.

⁷See for example, Boulder Reporting Lab, dozens of Boulder federal workers were fired under Trump. Now they're struggling to get unemployment, 20 Jul 2025.

